

The Importance of Teaching Expertise Research for L2 Teaching Contexts

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Researchers have examined both the nature and development of teaching expertise. However, the implications of these findings for L2 teaching have not been fully explored and discussed. The purpose of this piece is to reveal what the existing studies of expertise suggest for L2 teaching and learning. After a brief review of the literature and an explanation of the key concepts of teacher knowledge, adaptive expertise, and progressive problem solving, there follows a discussion of some important implications that these studies and concepts have for teachers, administrators, and researchers in L2 teaching contexts.

研究者たちは、これまで教育に関する専門知識の特質と発達過程の両方について調査してきた。しかし、これら先行研究の結果が第二言語教育にもたらす意味は、十分には探求・議論されていない。本論の目的は、教育に関する専門知識についての先行研究が第二言語習得の分野にどのような示唆を与えているのかを明らかにすることにある。最初に、先行研究を紹介し、教育に関する専門知識についての研究を理解する上で重要な概念である「教師の知識」「適応的専門知識」「前進的問題解決能力」について説明する。次に、第二言語教育において、先行研究やこれらの概念が第二言語教師、コーディネーター、研究者に与える意味や示唆について具体的に論じる。

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One formidable challenge of the teaching profession is having to juggle the multiple roles of not only teacher, but also mentor, counselor, administrator, and researcher. Thus, it is understandable that some teachers may tend to rely on the same teaching strategies and activities with only minor and infrequent revision as they gain experience and establish routines. Although the rich and varied repertoires of experienced teachers indisputably facilitate rapid selection of familiar activities and consistent delivery of reliable lessons, thus making teaching more efficient, there is disagreement as to what it means to move from being merely an experienced teacher to becoming an expert. On the one hand, expertise is sometimes viewed as a stage that is attained at some point in one's career. On the other hand, it is also sometimes seen as a continuous process of pursuit. Although these two paradigms may seem to contradict each other, they rather reflect different aspects of expertise: one capturing what teachers know and do, the other highlighting how teachers continue to develop such knowledge and skills.

Background

To date, research on expertise in teaching has mainly examined the topic from one of two perspectives. The first views expertise as the state of teachers at a certain point in time, often comparing novices and experts by investigating different aspects of the phenomenon, such as the effect that knowledge has on lesson planning (Richards et al., 1995) or on teaching practices (Farrell & Bennis, 2013; Gatbonton, 2008). Research from this perspective has shed light on the rich knowledge that experts have about different aspects of teaching. However, this between-subjects approach has been criticized for not elucidating the way in which expertise is actually developed (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1993; Johnson, 2005).

In response to this criticism, researchers such as Bullough and Baughman (1995) investigate expertise as a process. In these studies, within-subjects data are collected over an extended period of time, during which multiple class observations and interviews are conducted to note changes as they occur. Additionally, some researchers have examined such areas as characteristics differentiating experts from experienced nonexperts in the process of their development (Tsui, 2003), factors contributing to teacher development (Lee & Yuan, 2021), and expertise as a cyclical process (Asaba, 2019), thus providing insight into how teachers develop expertise throughout their career.

Concepts of Expertise

Researchers have identified three key concepts integral to understanding expertise: teacher knowledge, adaptive expertise, and progressive problem solving. Teacher knowledge facilitates expert teaching (Sternberg & Horvath, 1995; Turner-Bisset, 2012). This knowledge integrates different aspects of teaching, including content, pedagogy, curriculum, and learner population (Shulman, 1986, 1987). An integrated knowledge base of this sort is essential as it allows teachers to convey their content most effectively, such as by creating appropriate tasks (Richards, 2010), presenting information from the students' perspectives (Johnston & Goettch,

2000), and helping students attain instructional goals (Farrell & Bennis, 2013).

The second key concept is that of adaptive expertise. According to Hatano and Inagaki (1984), there are two types of expertise, namely routine and adaptive. Routine expertise refers to the acquired ability to competently and efficiently complete a given task through repeated performance. For example, most experienced teachers can easily choose an activity from their repertoire, present it in a comprehensible manner, and effectively help their learners achieve an instructional objective. However, the utility of routine expertise is limited to the solution of familiar problems. To skillfully overcome new challenges requires adaptive expertise, in which abilities and knowledge are applied in a flexible manner under various and uncertain conditions (Hatano, 1996; Hatano & Inagaki, 1984). Thus, studies of teacher expertise should take into account not only the routine variety but also its adaptive counterpart.

Along these lines, Bereiter and Scardamalia (1993) coined the term “progressive problem solving” (p. 96) to indicate a particular type of problem solving that leads to the development of expertise. This process requires solutions to problems that lie at the edge of one’s current level of competence. Moreover, it involves tackling complex aspects of problems that are not identified until some of the more fundamental aspects of the domain (in this case, teaching) have become automatized. For example, instead of attributing student non-completion of homework to laziness, teachers engaged in progressive problem solving might explore the problem’s underlying cause(s) by reevaluating their lesson content and instruction. It is this process of seeking answers beyond the surface that leads to the development of superior teaching abilities (Bullough & Baughman, 1995) and greater teacher knowledge (Asaba, 2019).

In summary, truly expert teachers must not only possess both rich teacher knowledge and routine expertise, allowing them to readily facilitate effective student learning, but they must also exhibit the necessary adaptive expertise to solve new problems in a flexible manner. Finally, it is progressive problem solving—tackling important issues beyond their competence—that ultimately facilitates teacher development. What follows hereafter is a discussion of the implications that these assertions have for teachers and administrators in L2 contexts as well as for researchers who are interested in investigating expertise in L2 teaching.

Implications for Teachers

Mastery of teaching is not merely a matter of establishing routines; it requires continuous efforts

to expand teacher competence as well. To this end, two suggestions can be made for L2 teachers looking to develop expertise: engaging in reflective teaching and taking on new challenges.

Reflective teaching involves teachers thinking deeply about their teaching and identifying problems in their own practices, such as with regard to their instructional techniques or their relationships with students (Farrell, 2013). One way for teachers to engage in such reflection is by discussing their teaching with other teachers. For example, a regular reflection group focused on sharing issues and teaching techniques with colleagues helps teachers become more aware of their teaching (Farrell, 2013). Another way of promoting teacher reflection is through participation in peer observations. According to Hatano (1996), performing tasks in front of other professionals leads to greater expertise because it encourages reflection on one’s own abilities. Thus, peer observations may prompt teachers not only to notice unfamiliar pedagogical approaches used by others but also to critically reexamine their own teaching.

In addition to engaging in reflective teaching, teachers also need to continue to seek and tackle new challenges. Given the necessity of progressive problem solving in developing expertise, teachers must continue to challenge themselves at every stage of their career. Especially busy teachers may have to limit new initiatives to one or two that they can successfully manage within their own classrooms while relying on routine expertise to complete the bulk of their customary duties. For instance, they might try to devise better ways of presenting empirically difficult learning material. More ambitious options, however, might include creating a new course, performing an active role in a professional community either within an institution or as part of a teachers’ association, or running a workshop to help fellow teachers in their programs learn practical skills, such as integrating educational technology (Skeates et al., 2020).

Another challenge L2 teachers should welcome is the opportunity to teach different types of classes in different programs, as experiencing a variety of teaching contexts helps to broaden teacher abilities and understanding. Throughout their careers, many L2 teachers must deal with changes in teaching assignments, class sizes, student populations, and curricula, each of which presents its own unique set of challenges. Some teachers may respond by relying on routine expertise they have developed in previous teaching roles. However, as complete expertise requires adapting one’s teaching appropriately to each new situation, having to adjust to

multiple and diverse circumstances serves a vital role in furthering teacher development.

Implications for Administrators

Administrators, including program and curriculum coordinators, need to understand that teachers should not have to bear the burden of acquiring expertise all alone, and that institutions can act as either a help or a hindrance in this endeavor (Bullough & Baughman, 1995). Two ways in which administrators can promote teacher expertise are by listening to teachers while eliciting their feedback about programs and by offering them additional opportunities for further professional development.

Taking feedback and ideas from teachers into consideration when developing and starting new classes or building curricula is important because expertise is context specific (Berliner, 2004). In other words, experienced teachers have knowledge about the specific needs and abilities of their students, and they use that knowledge as a guide to best facilitate learning (Johnston & Goettch, 2000). As such, top-down administrative decisions made without consideration of teacher perspectives might not only demotivate teachers but also impede student learning. To create a community in which teachers feel their knowledge and ideas are valued and can be openly shared, administrators and teachers need to build trusting relationships. One suggestion for administrators seeking to gain trust and obtain teacher insights is to hold regular discussions about issues related to classrooms and curricula.

A second recommendation for fostering L2 teacher expertise is for administrators to provide opportunities for institutional professional development (PD) that is contextualized and specifically applicable to them. PD can take on different forms, such as providing and receiving teacher training (Smith & Strahan, 2004), participating in school workshops (Lee & Yuan, 2021), and attending conferences (Bullough & Baughman, 1995). These types of activities can expose teachers to new and different methods and tools as well as highlight connections between theory, research, and practice in order to better inform their teaching decisions (Richards, 2010; Tsui, 2003). For this to occur, however, teachers need to see their PD opportunities as relevant. Lavolette and Koyama (2021) found that L2 teachers are more likely to attend PD events when topics relevant to pedagogy, research, and career are intertwined. Thus, administrators should provide PD that is relevant to teachers in their contexts and based on their needs and interests. To this end, administrators can conduct needs assessments when

choosing topics or ask teachers to take leadership roles in organizing and running PD events.

Implications for Researchers

Further research on teacher expertise would benefit L2 learning communities in two ways. First, a better understanding of expertise helps teachers better develop it, in turn resulting in better learning experiences for students (Tsui, 2005). In addition, as more teachers develop and utilize adaptive expertise, more effective curricula, classroom activities, and teaching approaches are created and shared among teachers and with students. Two areas of study that particularly deserve further investigation are the particulars of expertise in different contexts and the effects of expert mentors on less experienced peers.

Examining the knowledge and skills teachers use to deal with contextual factors in different schools and programs is a promising area of future study because it would allow researchers to explore, for example, how teachers effectively work with less proficient or less motivated students, how they handle large classes, or how they maximize student learning with limited resources. The existing studies of expert L2 teachers to date are limited in number and have mostly been conducted in ESL settings. Expanding the range of target contexts to include a wider variety of educational settings, programs, and curricula would offer additional insights to those teaching in similar situations.

The second area of expertise warranting further investigation is the effect that expert teachers have on nonexperts. According to Hatano and Inagaki (1984), development of expertise is enhanced when people work with mentors who are more experienced and knowledgeable than themselves. In a case study of an expert teacher educator, Asaba (2018) found that one characteristic of the participant's expertise was his guidance of novice researchers by suggesting promising research ideas in his domain and offering support, including advising on methodology and collaborating on publications. However, no other L2 studies to date have examined expertise from this perspective. Understanding how novice teachers benefit from working with and learning from expert teachers has important implications for teacher education, and it is an area worthy of additional exploration.

Conclusion

Understanding exactly what constitutes L2 teaching expertise and how teachers develop it can further promote expertise among teachers in the field. Reliance on routines and the optimization

of teaching efficiency comprise but one type of expertise. The additional need to develop adaptive expertise and to maximize knowledge and skills by taking on new challenges beyond one's current level of competence suggests that expertise is something teachers must continually pursue at every stage of their career. Moreover, rather than put the responsibility of acquiring expertise solely on teachers, institutions need to realize their shared role in facilitating this vital aspect of teacher development. Finally, as researchers continue to elucidate different aspects of expertise in L2 teaching, greater numbers of teachers and institutions will gain insights into how better to ultimately help L2 learners become expert users of an additional language.

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