

TEACHING CZECH AS A HERITAGE LANGUAGE AT A COMPLEMENTARY SCHOOL IN THE UK: PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE AND IDENTITY

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Abstract

Investigating the experience of teachers at a community run heritage language (HL) school in the UK, this case study draws on research of HL education, complementary education and communities of practice. The close study of one small week-end school teacher cohort identified three key areas of interest for this type of setting: teachers' need for pedagogical solutions in HL teaching practice, their professional identity creation and development, and the role of cooperation and communities of practice as a potential way forward for these educationally specific institutions.

Keywords: *heritage, languages, complementary schools, teacher identity, heritage language teaching, communities of practice*

1 INTRODUCTION

The field of HL education, particularly community run HL provision is still relatively unexplored. One reason for this is the large diversity of elements as well as educational settings involved, and the organic nature of HL education provision. This study hopes to contribute to the mapping and understanding of this fringe area of education with fast growing significance in the globalised world.

2 THEORY

The theory of HL, their speakers, acquisition, attrition and grammars (Montrul, 2016; Polinsky 2018) is central to understanding the basis of HL education (Valdes,

2017) and the HL maintenance and literacy issues which emerge as fundamental for HL pedagogy and curricula (Carreira and Kagan, 2017). The studies of identities of learners and teachers in complementary schools (Creese, 2009; Creese et al., 2006; Creese et al., 2014), provide a framework for the investigation of professional identity of HL teachers, while the theory of communities of practice (Wenger, 1998; Choi, 2006) seems to offer a viable alternative model for complementary school teachers' professional development.

3 METHODOLOGY

The presented research results from a single case study, exploratory in nature, given the largely unmapped field of complementary education as such, and teaching HL, especially Czech as HL in particular. One particular setting was selected (CS – a small Czech school in the South of England) to focus in detail on teachers' personal motivations, experiences and challenges. Data were collected through a mixed-method approach of semi-structured interviews (5 teachers, head and chair of board of trustees), lesson observations and school documentation. Some interviews were conducted via MS Teams, and some observed lessons also took place online. Thematic analysis was applied to the collected data through comparative coding to arrive at the final theme clusters via a theme mapping process.

4 RESULTS

Three major themes emerged as pertinent to the experience of HL teachers at CS.

4.1 HL teaching practice

Various elements of HL pedagogy constitute this cluster: divergent HL proficiencies of pupils leading to issues of class organisation; HL maintenance as an accepted pedagogical aim with HL literacy as its central pillar, and the specific issues of HL literacy teaching; the overall feeling of lack of direction and support prompting the desire for an explicit curriculum.

4.2 Professional identity

The teachers express very low professional self-confidence, mainly due to the setting type. Two attributes are perceived as crucial for a CS HL teacher: being

a parent of a bilingual child, and familiarity with the English education system and methods. There is a wish for further professional development.

4.3 Collaboration and contact

The teachers value professional interaction within CS. They wish for more of it in the absence of a curriculum and teaching guidelines. Lack of available time is cited as problematic. Professional cooperation with Czech institutions was desired more than with HL ones.

5 CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study show that regardless of their everyday career or qualification, CS teachers express consonant views of their experience. The theme clusters identified seem to relate three facets of the teachers' professional situation: relationship with one's work (1), relation to oneself as a member of a professional group (2), relationship with others in that group (3). Bringing together the other elements, the theme of collaboration seems crucial for the complementary school setting, suggesting that fostering of communities of practice in/of HL community schools represents one particularly promising route for teachers' professional development in this type of institution.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This study was conducted with the help of the Oxford Brookes University MA Education programme.

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