Second language teachers’ knowledge construction in the paired-placement:  
A sociocultural activity theory perspective

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In the past 40 years, research on second language teacher education (SLTE) has undergone critical changes with growing recognition of teacher learning as “socially negotiated and contingent on knowledge of self, students, subject matter, curricula, and setting” (Johnson, 2009, p. 20). Teacher collaboration has become a key element, increasingly common in language teaching contexts. Nascent research has explored collaborative models in SLTE such as peer mentoring and co-teaching. Although paired-placement, an alternative model in which pre-service teachers (PST) work in pairs under joint supervision to co-plan and co-teach lessons, is gaining popularity in general teacher education this has yet to become the case in SLTE.

This paper explores the potential of the paired-placement in facilitating second language pre-service teachers’ construction of professional knowledge*.* The study asks two specific questions. *First, does teacher learning occur in the paired-placement context? Second, if it does, what types of teacher professional knowledge are identified?* It draws upon case-study research of four pairs of Vietnamese PSTs of English over their 15-week paired-placement. Data include individual interviews with the PSTs; observations of their co-taught lessons; video-recordings of planning meetings and lessons; and relevant artefacts. The study draws on Vygotsky’s (1981) sociocultural theory and third generation activity theory (Engeström, 2008) to conceptualise teacher learning, viewing ‘contradictions’ in the pair-work as sources of change and development.

The findings across the four pairs of PSTs reveal that the paired-placement was conducive to teacher professional learning, as demonstrated in PSTs’ growth in teacher professional knowledge. Their growth was most evident in terms of pedagogical content knowledge (i.e., knowledge about English teaching), general pedagogical knowledge, and knowledge of the learners and their characteristics. The study highlights the paired-placement as a promising model whilst offering a novel approach to conceptualise teacher learning in SLTE in collaborative settings.

**Keywords:** Vygotsky, sociocultural activity theory, second language teacher learning, paired-placement, teacher knowledge

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