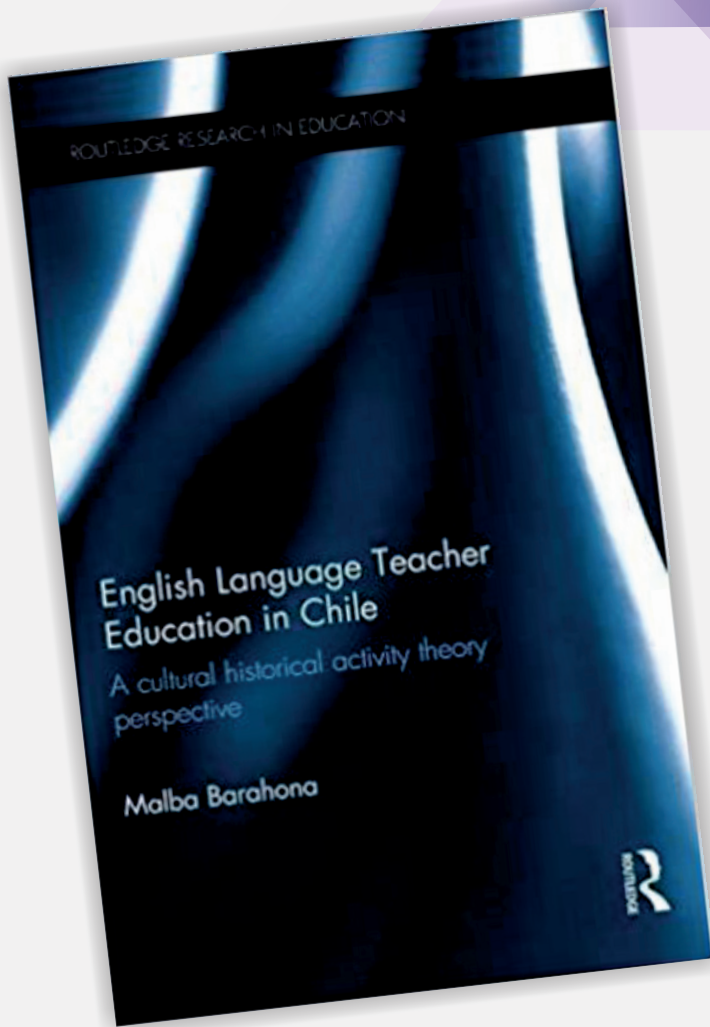


RevistaDigital » PALABRA

Revista Palabra
ISSN 2145- 7980
danielabsolis1@gmail.com.
Universidad Mar del Plata
Argentina

Solis, Daniela B
Barahona, M. (2015). English language teacher education in Chile: A cultural historical activity theory. New York: Routledge.
Revista Palabra, vol 6, Marzo 30 de 2016, p.152-155
Universidad Pontificia Bolivariana
Montería, Colombia

Disponible en: <http://>



»Reseña

The book *English Language Teacher Education in Chile* by educator and researcher Malba Barahona constitutes a noteworthy example of research endeavors in the Southern Cone, where English is widely taught but few investigations reach core publications. Here is a South American voice retrieving the value of the local in the global context of English as an international language (EIL) (Canagarajah, 2005). The author ranks among “researchers... struggling to construct a universe in which our thoughts are more important than... country-related features without disregarding local contexts from which we can derive lessons in the uni-

English Language Teacher Education in Chile: A cultural historical activity theory.

verse of learning and teaching... English...” (Nieto Cruz & Cárdenas, 2015, p. 9)

Barahona’s work explains how, although South America is not an ESL area, English has long been considered a tool to access better jobs and social standing, as is the case of Chile. In this country, the language has held a prestigious role since Irish and Scottish immigrants arrived in the nineteenth century. At the close of the last century, fueled by globalization, Chilean state schools began teaching compulsorily English shortly after the end of the 1973-1990 dictatorship. Pinochet’s rule had promoted unfettered free-market policies and limited the role of the state as social mediator. Thus, public responsibility within the education system was

reduced, while institutionalized stratification and unequal access to quality education were enforced. To overcome the harmful legacies of these policies, the Ministry of Education devised the 'English Opens Doors' volunteer program. It strives to promote students' knowledge of English, supposedly aiming at functional bilingualism by 2018. However, there is gap between central policies and local implementation. Lack of resources and qualified teachers, especially in subsidized and municipal schools, are major complaints against the program, with its underlying assumption that being a (near) native speaker of English is enough to teach the language. In this context, Barahona argues that higher education curricula should help pre-service teachers develop a more holistic understanding of classrooms, learners, and teaching. English teaching should integrate content from other subjects, enabling students to engage with meaningful subject matter. These ideas are not only relevant to Chilean education, but also provide a structure for curricular innovations in other South American milieus (Banegas, 2012).

The author's qualitative research on teacher preparation in Chile adopts the CHAT framework (Cultural Historical Activity Theory, Wells & Claxton, 2002), perceiving culture as key to learning while considering intricate relationships between contexts and teachers. CHAT is partly grounded in Vygotsky's (1986) notion that learning and cognition are sociocultural activities that cannot be separated from other tools and signs being used. Barahona takes a step further claiming that we teach by engaging in social practices. Furthermore, she considers that the formation of teacher identity is crucial to the process of learning how to teach. She

defines identity in terms of a teachers' relationship to the world, their engagement in a social group alongside their gender, class, ethnicity, and race. In other words, teachers' identity construction involves a fundamentally social process within initial education programs and schools where teachers' identity negotiation becomes part of learning to teach. In this sense, Barahona builds locally on the seminal work carried out by Norton (2013) on identity in ESL learning.

The author's study showed how, as its participant pre-service teachers became increasingly active members of their learning community, their preconceptions about teaching changed. After their practicums, most of them reported an inclination towards constructivism and reflective thinking. In addition, they agreed that school-based experiences and university discussion seminars were not only the most meaningful learning experiences of their program, but also crucial for their future as professionals, allowing them to integrate theory with practice (Freire, 1970) to overcome methodological polarities within actual classroom experiences. In turn, their teacher educators reported that such experiences contributed to developing participants' resilience (Day & Sachs, 2009) and a professional (Czeraniawski, 2013) teacher identity. During these first-hand experiences and also during their seminars, pre-service teachers came to understand what it means to become a teacher committed to students' welfare and also a professional whose content focus is EIL, the means of communication and instruction in the classroom.

This situated research casts new insights on teacher education in southernmost South

America. Reconsidering the ways in which future teachers of English are educated suggests that their curricula needs to include richer school-based teaching experiences alongside more meaningful forms of reflection on practice within university classrooms. These instances would narrow the gap between teacher-education programs, practicums and subsequent, actual, teaching. In-service teachers should also undergo experiences that will eventually allow them to become graduates able to mentor other pre-service and novice teachers. It is imperative for higher education programs to aid future to teachers develop much needed strategies to meet the socio-cultural and linguistic needs of living *glocally*. Overall, this book adds significant features to the existing literature (Renart & Banegas, 2013; Taylor, 2015) on EIL teaching in South America and it certainly deserves the attention of students, teachers, teacher educators, and researchers involved in this area.

»References

- Banegas, D. L. (2012). Integrating content and language in English language teaching in secondary education: Models, benefits, and challenges. *Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching*, 2(1), 111-136.
- Barahona, M. (2015). *English language teacher education in Chile: A cultural historical activity theory*. New York: Routledge.
- Canagarajah, A. S. (Ed.). (2005). *Reclaiming the local in language policy and practice*. Mahwah, NJ: Routledge.
- Czerniawski, G. (2013). Professional development for professional learners: Teachers' experiences in Norway, Germany and England. *Journal of education for teaching*, 39(4), 383-399.
- Day, C., & Sachs, J. (2009). *International handbook on the continuing professional development of teachers*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.
- Freire, P. (1970). Cultural action for freedom. *Harvard educational review*, 40(2), 205-225.
- Nieto Cruz, M. C., & Cárdenas, M. L. (2015). Editorial. *Profile Issues in Teachers' Professional Development*, 17(1), 7-9.
- Norton, B. (2013). *Identity and language learning. Extending the conversation*. Second edition. Bristol-Buffalo-Toronto: Multilingual Matters.
- Renart, L. & Banegas, D. L. (eds.). (2013). *Roots & routes in language education. Bi/multi/plutilingualism, interculturality and identity. Selected papers from the 38th FAAPI Conference*. Buenos Aires: FAA-PI-APIBA.
- Taylor, J. (2015). Editorial. *GiST*, 11, 5-8.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1986). *Thought and language*. (A. Kozulin, Ed.). Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.
- Wells, G., & Claxton, G. (Eds.). (2002). *Learning for life in the 21st century: Sociocultural perspectives on the future of education*. Oxford: Blackwell.