Enaction: Language learners and teachers as people-in-situation

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As a teacher educator, with an interest in the psychology of learning, I wonder about how to help teachers become aware of and manage their personal relationship to the kind of knowledge that explains things and to the kind of know-how that gets things done. For many students pursuing degrees in education, developing their theoretical understanding of teaching at university can enter into counterproductive competition with what they perceive as a more pressing need to master the practice of teaching in the classroom. As language education theorists and researchers, we ourselves wrestle with numerous dichotomies and tensions at the heart of the paradoxes that motivate us to inquire into the complex nature of the language learning-teaching process. Such tensions concern the nature of language and its development, the nature of proficient human functioning as well as that of ourselves as (meta)conscious beings. Our epistemological assumptions about people, learning and reality are of the utmost pragmatic importance. In order to further explore the “situated nature of language learner psychology” (Mercer et al., 2012, p. 244), this paper presents a theoretical framework for learning and teaching known as “enaction” (Masciotra et al., 2007). Calling for a radical reframing of old constructs such as situation, competence and representation, enaction “expresses the inextricable and interdependent links between the two opposite poles of [what is referred to as] the situating/situated dialectic” (ibid., p. vii). With deep implications for the theory and practice of language teaching and learning, enaction introduces several novel concepts that can enrich our understanding of what it means to be an active being-in-the-world.


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