TEACHER PRESENCE: A QUALITATIVE COMPARISON OF IRANIAN AND QUEBECER SECOND LANGUAGE STUDENT TEACHERS’ PROFESSIONAL REPRESENTATIONS

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Abstract

In the context of today’s spread of English as a global language (Crystal 1997; Graddol 2006), the professional development of future English as a second or foreign language (ESL/EFL, hereafter identified as ESL) teachers is of utmost importance to ensure excellence in ESL instruction. Commonly and widely taught in teacher training programs (TTP) are the necessary pedagogy, didactics, disciplinary, and technology backgrounds for professional integration. Nonetheless, “good teaching cannot be reduced to technique” (Palmer, 1998, p. 10) and to have educational impact, teachers need to have some sort of ‘total encounter’ with their pupils (Noddings, 2003). In other words, teachers need to have “presence” while teaching. Moreover, even though the expansion of online courses has brought renewed interest in teaching presence, this interest has not translated into research in teacher training or in the regular classroom, where the advent of information and communication technology has conversely induced important changes in terms of class dynamics and teacher role.

At the very heart of the teaching process, teachers play a crucial role in student success in every school and education system, hence the importance of teacher training programs (TTP) which train and help ST develop the professional skills and competencies required to teach. Yet, ST often hold strong sociocultural and school-related reference models (Cadet, 2006) before entering their program. These a priori can interfere with TTP’s objectives and may hinder ST’s efficacy when eventually teaching abroad or in multicultural contexts. While ESL ST’s representations and beliefs have been studied in association with a variety of variables (e.g. language learning, efficacy of L2 teaching, the place of grammar in L2 teaching, the use of technology in the classroom, pedagogical content knowledge, planning, evaluation and assessment, etc.), few studies have investigated ST’s professional representation of teacher presence.

Research has shown that cultural norms about teaching and education vary across nations (Haley & Ferro, 2011; Kissau, Rodgers, & Haudeck, 2014) and that ST from different cultural backgrounds do not espouse the same representations of teacher presence (Gazaille et al., 2012, 2017). This study aims at gaining a better understanding of how ESL ST from Iran and Quebec conceptualize teacher presence. An open-ended questionnaire was administered to ESL ST from Iran (n = 31) and Quebec (n = 88). A qualitative analysis of the units of meaning was performed. Scores were aggregated for the different aspects of the representations that emerged and averages were compared. Results will be presented and implications for research made. Our results should inform teacher training programs as well as pre-service and in-service teachers currently teaching or planning to teach second languages abroad, multicultural groups, and transnational students.

Keywords: Teacher presence, professional training, professional representation, second language.