
“I Preferred to Take Another Activity From the Textbook”: An Activity–Theoretical Study of Learning to Design Language Teaching Materials

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Using activity theory, an offshoot of sociocultural theory, we examined how a group of preservice teachers (PSTs) of English in Chile learnt to design language teaching materials. Data from PSTs, teacher educators, and mentoring teachers shows how the conceptual tool of “teaching English as teaching the textbook” is appropriated by a group of PSTs and how their development of teacher agency is undermined by textbooks during their practicum—as well as showing the influential role of mentoring teachers and teacher educators in the appropriation of this conceptual tool. The study discusses the implications of how textbooks are used for English-as-a-foreign-language teacher education.

Keywords: language teaching materials; language teacher education; activity theory; sociocultural theory; English as a Foreign Language textbooks

WITH THE EMERGENCE OF THE sociocultural turn in applied linguistics and language teacher education, learning to teach has come to be seen as a “dynamic social activity that is situated in physical and social contexts, and distributed across persons, *tools*, and activities” (Johnson, 2006, p. 237, emphasis added). However, notwithstanding the recognition in

sociocultural theory and in language teacher education of the importance of tools in the mediation of learning to teach, the relationship between language teachers and the tools of their profession—language learning materials—has remained underresearched, and few publications address the intersection of materials design and teacher education explicitly (notable exceptions are Garton & Graves, 2014; McGrath, 2013; Tomlinson, 2003). With teachers (and learners) as the end-users of materials, this is a clear gap, especially considering the rise of research into language teaching materials since the 1990s (Dendrinos, 1992; Hidalgo et al., 1995; Tomlinson, 1998).

One way of bringing the fields of teacher education and materials development into dialogue is researching places where knowledge and skills about materials design are required for the practice of English language teaching (ELT). Such is the case in Chile, where our study is located and where current teacher education standards

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(Ministry of Education [Mineduc], 2014, 2021) require that student–teachers in the public-school sector should be able, upon graduation, to exercise pedagogical agency through selecting, adapting, and designing physical and/or virtual materials. The study reported here is part of a larger study that focuses on how a group of preservice teachers (PSTs) of English in Chile experience the learning of language teaching materials design. Using an offshoot of sociocultural theory known as activity theory (Engeström, 1987), this article focuses on the influential role of ELT textbooks in the process of learning to design materials by these PSTs.

LANGUAGE TEACHER EDUCATION AND LANGUAGE TEACHING MATERIALS

The Sociocultural Turn in Language Teacher Education

Largely drawing on the work of Vygotsky (1978), the epistemological shift in education known as the sociocultural turn sees teacher learning as “normative and lifelong, emerging out of and through experiences in social contexts: as learners in classrooms, as participants in professional teacher education programs and later as teachers in institutions where teachers work” (Johnson & Golombek, 2003, pp. 729–730). The social, cultural, and historical dimensions of the settings where teachers learn and teach are seen as having a pivotal role (Grossman et al., 1999; Johnson, 2006, 2009), validating classrooms as important settings for learning to teach.

The influence of the sociocultural turn in language teacher education (Borg, 2003, 2006; Johnson, 2006, 2009; Lantolf, 2000) is reflected in current understandings of teacher cognitions and the knowledge base for language teaching. An important notion here is Lortie’s (1975) concept of the apprenticeship of observation, that is, the student–teachers’ accumulated experiences as learners throughout their schooling, now acknowledged as a major obstacle for student–teachers to develop pedagogies departing from traditional or transmissive ones (Wright, 2010). Likewise, the study of teacher beliefs has contributed to recognizing the influential role of beliefs in the decisions that teachers make in their daily exercise of the profession (see Basturkmen, 2012; Borg, 2003, 2006; Clark, 1988; Richardson, 1996, 2003). Further, the sociocultural turn has facilitated a reconceptualization of the knowledge base for language teaching. A major contribution here is by Freeman and Johnson (1998), who, in addition to stressing the traditional pedagogical

processes of language teaching and learning (see Richards, 2008), notably emphasized the micro- and macrosociocultural settings where teaching and learning take place as essential components of what language teachers need to know.

The sociocultural turn also meshes with the reflective model of language teacher education (Wright, 2010). Initially based on Schön’s (1983) concept of the reflective practitioner, this model views teacher education as a process in which received knowledge, provided by the discipline itself (English linguistics, teaching methods, etc.), and experiential knowledge, gained in the practice of teaching, interact in a symbiotic cycle of practice and reflection (Farrell, 2019; Pachler & Paran, 2013; Wallace, 1991). The importance accorded to experiential knowledge and its context-specific value chimes with a sociocultural view—particularly in the work on teacher beliefs—and has rendered the reflective model widely accepted as an approach to develop pedagogic expertise. Thus, from a sociocultural viewpoint, as Golombek and Johnson (2019) argued, student–teachers should be encouraged to analyze language teaching and learning through critically reflecting on their beliefs, identities, reasoning, and teaching practices.

Language Teaching Materials

The burgeoning literature in language teaching materials since the mid-1990s can be grouped in different clusters. Gray (2016) highlights two of these, identifying one group of scholars concerned with the nature of language learning and teaching, seeing materials as curricular artifacts (Harwood, 2010; Hidalgo et al., 1995; Tomlinson, 1998), and another group concerned with unpacking the representations of the actual content in materials, seeing them as cultural and ideological artifacts (Dendrinos, 1992; Gray, 2010, 2012; Risager, 2018). An element common to both groups—though particularly associated with the cultural artifact view—is a focus on textbooks, perhaps unsurprisingly so given the prominent role of coursebooks in the ELT classrooms internationally (Richards, 2014).

Recently, scholars have also called for the development of research into the way materials figure in the language classroom ecology, termed materials-in-action (Guerrettaz, 2021) or materials-in-use (Graves, 2019). Whilst these calls for research reflect a real gap in the literature, some previous scholarship does in fact shed light on how materials are used. For example, Harwood (2014) noted that teachers might “understand a curriculum to mean the content of

a policy document or *textbook*” (p. 11, emphasis added). This use of the textbook as the syllabus has been widely discussed in education generally (Ball & Feiman–Nemser, 1988; Collopy, 2003) and in language teaching specifically (Guerrettaz & Johnston, 2013; Harwood, 2017; Richards, 2014). In ELT, Santos (2013) found how teachers interpreted activities in textbooks differently from the authors’ intentions, reorienting activities designed to stimulate critical thinking to elicit the use of descriptive language by learners. Conversely, Rathert and Cabaroğlu (2021) highlighted how in some contexts, teaching is very much coursebook bound.

This leads us to an important concept when discussing how textbooks are used—namely, reification, that is, the treatment of an abstraction as a concrete and immutable procedure (Feenberg, 2015; Shannon, 1987). Richards (1993) argued that textbook reification arises from how publishers present textbooks as reflecting the views and theories of experts and cutting-edge research, and also from the corresponding belief of teachers that coursebooks have emerged from the wisdom of seasoned teachers and specialists and the belief that learning objectives in textbooks can be easily achieved through carefully selected and designed tasks and activities. He also suggested that in play here may be uncritical curricular and cultural assumptions about the textbook’s linguistic content, methods, and cultural representations, further suggesting that reification is typically attributed to novice teachers or those lacking experience and/or training.

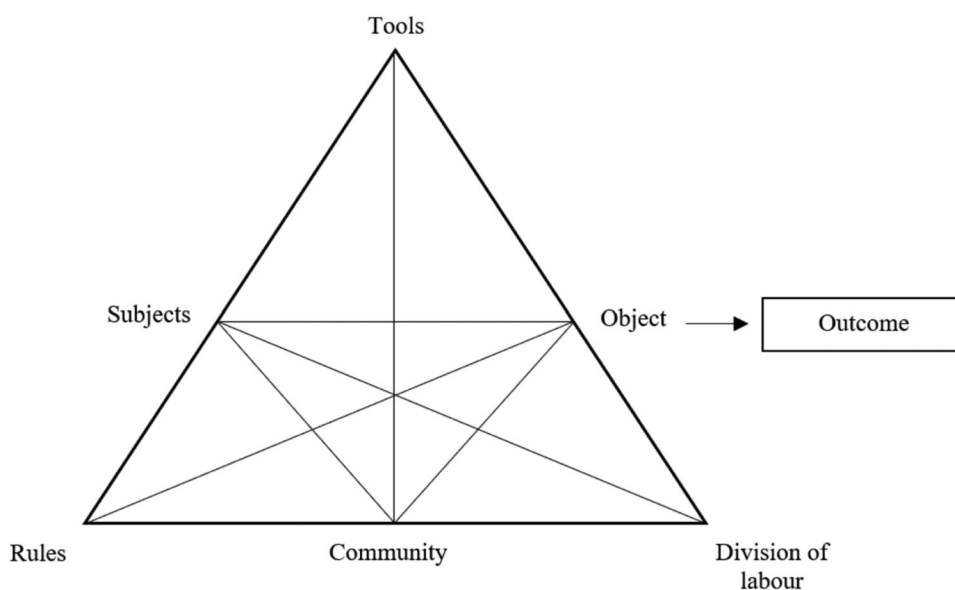
Textbook reification is particularly problematic in light of different critiques grounded in curricular and cultural–ideological scholarship. From a curricular-artifact viewpoint, Tomlinson and Masuhara (2013), for example, found that the six popular global coursebooks they analyzed reflected traditional language teaching views, with a strong emphasis on controlled practice and a weak communicative orientation. Likewise, scholars seeing textbooks as cultural artifacts have raised important concerns about the increasing presence of neoliberal discourses and values (Copley, 2018; Gray, 2012); the erasure of the working class (Gray & Block, 2014), different sexualities (Gray, 2013), and ethnic minorities (Toledo–Sandoval, 2020); and the overrepresentation of the white middle class (Dendrinos, 1992) and of inner circle cultures (Keles & Yazan, 2020)—all of which raise questions about the educational value of the content of these materials.

With these critiques as a backdrop, we see textbook reification as standing in contrast to current understandings of teaching that come with the sociocultural turn and views of teachers as reflective practitioners. One response to textbook reification is therefore educating teachers to select and adapt materials, as well as empowering teachers to create their own materials thought to be more appropriate for teachers’ everyday contexts and ecologies (Bouckaert, 2018). In contexts where teacher education has taken this on board, materials design is viewed as an important part of teachers’ professional knowledge. This is the case in Chile, where a series of standards outlined by the Mineduc for the education of future teachers of English (Mineduc, 2014, 2021) include selecting, adapting, and designing materials. However, in a survey of 25 English language teacher education programs in Chile, Carabantes (2019) showed that only three programs provided an explicit module covering this standard, which thus seems underrepresented in the Chilean ELT teacher education landscape. This raises the question of how future teachers of English actually learn to select, adapt, and design language teaching materials.

LOOKING AT MATERIALS DESIGN THROUGH ACTIVITY THEORY

To address our overall aim of understanding how future English teachers learn to design language teaching materials, we framed our research questions (see the next section) using activity theory, which, in line with the sociocultural turn (Johnson, 2006, 2009), helped us trace the social influences mediating the PSTs’ learning of materials design. Activity theory postulates that individuals act collectively in communities and institutions and that their actions need to be researched and theorized together (Engeström, 1987, 1999). At its heart is the activity system, an object-oriented, collective, and culturally mediated human activity (Engeström & Miettinen, 1999). As Figure 1 shows, the activity system is formed of (a) the subject(s), that is, the individual or group of individuals participating in the activity; (b) the tools, defined as the social others and physical and/or symbolic artifacts being used as resources by the subject(s) to mediate the activity; (c) the object or motive of the activity; (d) the rules, understood as the formal or informal procedures affecting in varying degrees how the activity takes place; (e) the community or the social group that the subject is part of during an activity; (f) the division of labor, which is the

FIGURE 1
Activity System



Note. Adapted from Engeström (1987).

distribution of responsibilities or tasks amongst the community; and (g) the outcome of the activity (Yamagata-Lynch, 2010). Focusing on the activity system allows us to study how individuals function collectively, to observe goal-oriented activity as mediated by physical and symbolic tools, and to understand how people's actions are mediated by their social relationships (Johnson, 2009). Importantly, in this study we use activity theory as an exploratory heuristic rather than as an interventionist framework (see Bakhurst, 2009).

The existence of different elements in an activity system creates tensions within and between them, known in activity theory as systemic contradictions. Studying these contradictions is thus key to understanding how an activity occurs. These contradictions can be experienced on four levels (Engeström, 1987). A primary contradiction is the inner unrest within one of the corners of the activity system (e.g., a teacher's holding contradictory beliefs about the applicability of a given teaching method). A secondary contradiction is a tension between two corners of the activity system (e.g., a tension between a teacher's negative beliefs about international exams and the school's application of international exams). A tertiary contradiction is the clash between the object of a dominant activity and the object of a more advanced form of the activity introduced by its representatives (e.g., a school's traditional approach to teaching languages and policy stress-

ing the need to move to communicative forms of language teaching). Finally, a quaternary contradiction may arise between the central activity and other neighboring activities whose objects are embedded within the central activity (e.g., a teacher education program where one module stresses the student-teachers' designing of materials and another module discourages it). These contradictions are historically accumulated (Roth & Lee, 2007) and, for Engeström and Sanino (2017), they can become the actual force of transformation.

Another important notion in activity theory is *tools*, defined as the artifacts assisting the accomplishment of actions (Vygotsky, 1978). Tools can be material or symbolic, and are correspondingly referred to as either physical or psychological (Wertsch, 1985). Whilst physical tools are used by individuals externally to act upon their environment (Vygotsky, 1978), psychological tools are internally oriented, influencing one's behavior and acting as "an instrument of psychological activity" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 52). The development of psychological tools is usually termed appropriation or internalization in sociocultural theory parlance (Bazerman, 2012; Engeström, 1999; Martin & Ewaldsson, 2012). For Vygotsky, appropriation was a distinguishing feature of the human mind, a process he saw as transformative, entailing the move of psychological tools from having an interpersonal function to having an intrapersonal one.

In teacher education, Grossman et al. (1999) offered the notion of conceptual tool to allude to the “principles, frameworks, and ideas about teaching, learning, and English/language arts acquisition” (p. 14) mediating a teacher’s pedagogical decision-making. This category includes broad theories of teaching and learning, such as constructivism or behaviorism, as well as more specific ones such as scaffolding. In this article, we extend Grossman et al.’s definition of conceptual tool to include notions of teaching and learning that are not explicitly taught in teacher education programs but that are nonetheless appropriated by student–teachers in their educational milieus. An example of this is “teaching as knowledge transmission” (Johnson, 2009, p. 18), which in the past was a common way of viewing teaching principles, frameworks, and patterns of teaching and learning. Although this conceptual tool probably no longer underpins the majority of teacher education courses, research has documented how it is still appropriated by student–teachers (Blázquez & Tagle, 2010). These tools are thus socially and historically embedded in educational settings and available for appropriation through interactions with schoolteachers, learners, colleagues, fellow learners of teaching, teacher educators, materials, documents, and so on (see Johnson, 2009).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The low presence of materials development components in Chilean ELT teacher education compared with the official recommendations of Mineduc, raises the question of how this teacherly know-how is learnt by future teachers of English. Using activity theory as a conceptual framework, this study seeks to answer the following research questions:

- RQ1. What conceptual tools mediate the PSTs’ design of language teaching materials?
- RQ2. What systemic contradictions emerge in the process of materials design?
- RQ3. What elements of the school and university settings influence the appropriation of conceptual tools by the PSTs?

METHOD

Research Context and Participants

In this study, we view the activity system of materials design as happening in two separate yet interconnected activity settings: the school, where the

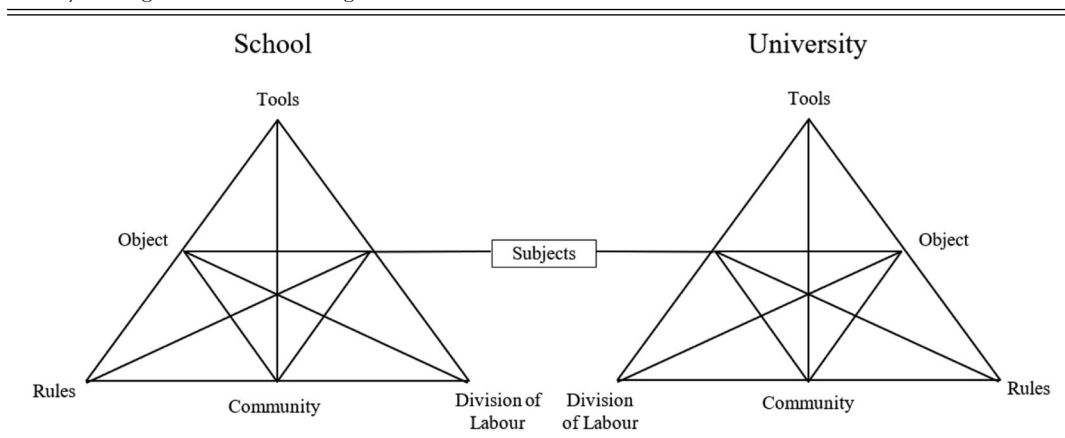
PSTs were doing their practicum, and the university, where they were finishing their teacher education course. As Figure 2 shows, each of these two activity settings can be understood as an activity system of its own and is formed of its corresponding constitutive elements (e.g., tools, community, division of labor), which mediated how the PSTs designed their own materials. Because our focus is on the PSTs, we see them as the subjects in both settings.

The university is located in a medium size city in Chile and has offered teacher education courses since the 1950s. The English language teacher education program is a 5-year competency-based course covering a range of subjects relevant to general education (e.g., sociology and psychology of education) and to language teaching (e.g., English linguistics, discourse studies, literature). The subject-specific and education modules are connected by a series of modules called Practicum I–V and Didactics I–IV, in which the PSTs experience the theory and practice of ELT through classroom observation of schoolteachers and are required to design lessons and materials. The program culminates in a one-semester school placement, in which each PST spends about 20 hours per week in the school, taking on the role of English teacher in one class and assisting their teacher mentor in their duties with other classes, such as designing lessons and materials, preparing tests, covering for other teachers, and serving as form teachers. In terms of materials instruction, at the time this research was conducted, according to the program leader Inez, the course did not offer an explicit module on materials design. This was addressed incidentally through the PSTs’ language learning at the university and through activities such as school-placement tutorials, where the PSTs and teacher educators reviewed the PSTs’ own lesson plans and accompanying materials designed by themselves.

The four schools where the PSTs did their practicum were all publicly funded. Three were *particular subvencionado* schools—a category referring to Chilean schools that are publicly funded but privately run—and the fourth was completely public. All four served middle- and low-socioeconomic-sector populations.

The study included three groups of participants. The main group was eight PSTs in the final year of the program. They had had five semesters of classroom observation and practice through five modules (Practicum I–V), and the study took place during their final placement and practicum; we refer to them using pseudonyms. The other participants were seven teacher

FIGURE 2
Activity Settings in Which the Design of Materials Took Place



educators (pseudonymized) in charge of teaching English and/or ELT methods at the university and four schoolteachers (pseudonymized) who were mentoring the PSTs in the schools where they were doing their practicum.

Data Collection

The main data collection instrument was stimulated recall interviews (SRIs) with the PSTs. SRIs are a type of mediated verbalization where the participants transform covert mental processes into explicit ones (Gass & Mackey, 2000), retrieving their thoughts through the use of a stimulus, “a sort of memory prosthesis” (Dempsey, 2010, p. 352). In this study, we used the materials that the PSTs themselves had produced to stimulate the recall of the mental processes occurring during the design of these materials.

Each PST participated in two SRIs (SRI 1–2). They emailed materials as soon as they had designed them to the first author, and the SRI was normally conducted within 48 hours—though due to the participants’ busy schedules, some interviews were conducted later than that (up to 5 days). Each meeting started with a semistructured interview to establish who the materials were intended for, how they were to be used (e.g., on paper or digital), what their goals were, and so on. This was followed by the actual SRI, where the PSTs were shown extracts from their materials and were asked what they were thinking when they had, for example, designed a specific exercise or task or included a certain text.

In addition, semistructured interviews were used with all PSTs, teacher educators, and schoolteachers. Each PST participated in one semistructured interview prior to the SRIs. In

these interviews, we gathered data about their teaching and learning histories, their experience learning English at school and at university, and their views about teaching materials. The semistructured interviews with the teacher educators focused on the role of teaching materials in the teacher education program. The semistructured interviews with the schoolteachers mentoring the PSTs focused on the role of materials in their own practice. All the interviews were conducted, transcribed, and analyzed in Spanish (except for one interview with a teacher educator who was an English L1 speaker)—extracts were only translated for this article.

To provide an official context for the participants’ data, different institutional documents were analyzed (see Flick, 2006). These were documents relevant to teacher education in Chile (Mineduc, 2001, 2014), the national curriculum (Mineduc, 2012, 2015, 2018), and the teacher education program.¹ See Table 1 for a summary of the participants and methods.

Data Analysis

To scrutinize the data, we used thematic analysis, defined by Braun and Clarke (2006) as “a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes)” (p. 79). Because this study focuses on the learning of materials design by the PSTs, the basis for the codes and themes was the data collected from them in the SRIs and interviews. These initial codes and themes were complemented with data from teacher educators, schoolteachers, and documents. The themes were then mapped onto the activity system of materials design and identified as elements of the system(s) such as rules, division of labor, and so on.

TABLE 1
Summary of Participants' Data

Participants	Total number	Included in this article	Pseudonyms	Data collection method
Year 5 PSTs	8	6	Carlos, Marcos, Miguel, Francisco, Fernanda, Gabriel	Initial semistructured interview; two simulated recall interviews per participant
Year 4 PSTs	6	0	N/A	N/A
Teacher educators	7	4	Gemma, Linda, Marta, Mike	Individual interviews
Program leader	1	1	Inez	Individual interviews
Schoolteachers	4	1	Carolina	Individual interview

Note. PSTs = preservice teachers. Data from Year 4 PSTs are not included in this article.

FINDINGS

The study revealed a number of conceptual tools as mediators of the PSTs' materials design, and different tensions were observed in the overall process. In this article, we focus on one of these conceptual tools, which emerged as a powerful mediator of the PSTs' design, and which we call "teaching English as teaching the textbook." After illustrating how this tool appeared in the data, we demonstrate how it was heightened through the existence of a secondary contradiction between the subjects and the motive or object of the school settings, a contradiction that undermined the PSTs' pedagogical agency. We then illustrate how the use of this conceptual tool was intensified by elements of both the school and university settings.

The Conceptual Tool: Teaching English as Teaching the Textbook

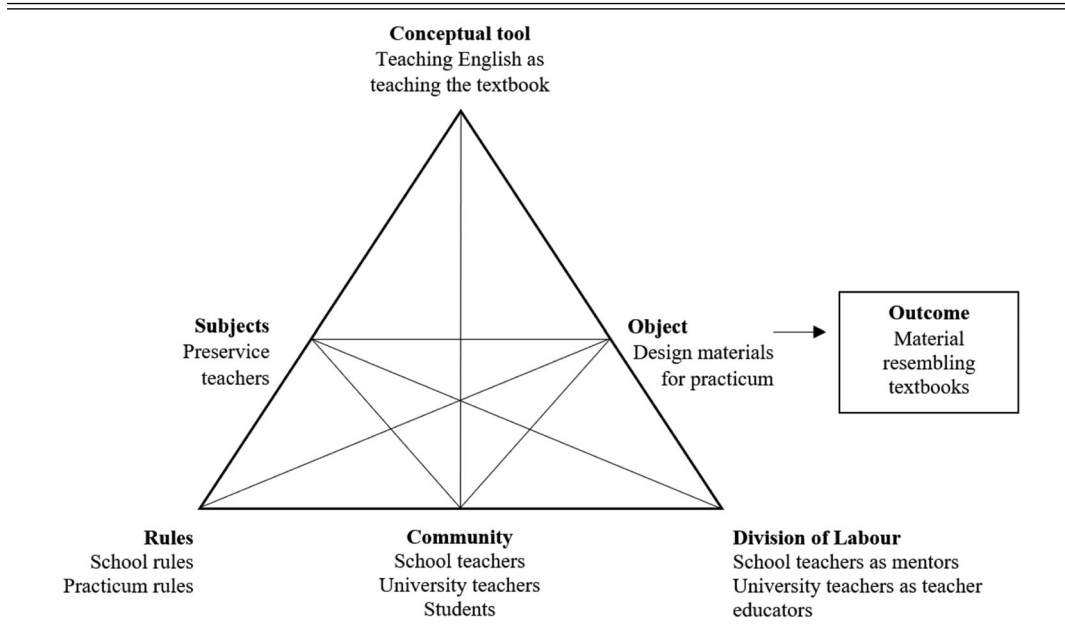
As mentioned before, our analysis showed that some PSTs' designing of materials was mediated by the conceptual tool of teaching English as teaching the textbook (see Figure 3). This means that, in different degrees and forms, the PSTs believed that the object of the activity (i.e., designing materials) could be achieved through reflecting published materials, rather than through an in-depth consideration of language teaching and learning, which the PSTs had been studying for 5 years in the teacher education program. An illustrative case is Carlos, whose materials were taken verbatim from the school coursebook. Already during Interview 1 (in the first week of his final practicum), he expressed a predisposition for using the school textbook as a source of designing materials:

I'm going to do an activity from the textbook. It's a listening [activity], as it comes with all the material, with the CD, and the list of questions for general and specific information; it even has after-listening work. (Carlos, Interview 1)

Carlos thus shows his intention to rely on the textbook for the whole of the activity. Later, during SRI 1, it was clear that he was still following this line of thought, and that the materials that he had designed consisted of a lesson lifted from the school textbook. This was revealed incrementally through comments such as "I think there is one item that's in the student's book" and "I also took that one from the [textbook]" and was later expressed in full when he said, "I took the text from the textbook, the student's textbook," adding that

FIGURE 3

Teaching English as Teaching the Textbook in the Activity System of Materials Design



he “didn’t even want to play with changes [to the text] as it could end up being messed up.” Thus, Carlos’s material design consisted of transferring a lesson from the textbook to a worksheet, without adaptations.

Other PSTs’ design was significantly mediated by this conceptual tool. During SRI 1, Marcos verbalized a similar procedure, revealing the low level of intellectual activity invested in his design. When asked “how the activities had come to [his] mind,” he answered,

The activities? Not much, as I said, the activities are in the ‘while’ that is in the textbook (Marcos, SRI1).

Later in the study, Marcos partly revealed the seeds of the conceptual tool, and how he viewed a departure from the textbook as a negative pedagogical strategy, conceptualizing what he called “meaningful” ELT and materials design as taking activities from the coursebook:

Yes, it’s copied exactly from the textbook (. . .) First, I believe it was the most meaningful way, a suggestion from the schoolteacher, right? She advised me that because what we had to cover was “going to” and “will,” I could use [the textbook activity] in order not to have to create material. (Marcos, SRI 2)

He then clarified that even when he had the possibility of designing activities, he was unable to conceive of himself as doing this and again chose to rely on the textbook:

But ME creating an activity based on the reading? I basically preferred to take another activity from the textbook. (Marcos, SRI2)

These viewpoints did not surprise some of the teacher educators. For example, Gemma, who taught the module Didactics I in the program, and who was also a schoolteacher herself, said that some PSTs “quite defiantly transform[ed] the text from the textbook into a worksheet,” which she described as “doing nothing” (Interview 1). She recalled how, instead of writing their own material as required in school placements by the teacher education program, two third-year PSTs in her module had transferred a lesson from the school textbook into a worksheet in a similar way to Carlos and Marcos. Because of her dual role as a teacher educator and a schoolteacher, she recognized the origin of the materials:

There are two girls of Didactics I who work with *English in Motion*, a textbook by Richmond. The girls came once with a lesson that had been put together really well. The activities were well sequenced in relation to one another, and I said “oh this doesn’t smell good,” and I opened the textbook and everything was there, “pre,” “while,” “post” . . . so they only stated the objectives and [completed] the lesson plan [format], but the worksheet came all done, I mean, the lesson was all done. (Gemma, Interview 1)

The data presented in this section, then, shows different PSTs’ use of the conceptual tool of

teaching English as teaching the textbook. The reliance on this conceptual tool was heightened by a secondary contradiction experienced by the PSTs in the school setting, to which we now turn.

The Secondary Contradiction: The Preservice Teachers' Agency and the School Textbook

Of the different contradictions that emerged in this study, the one most relevant to the conceptual tool under discussion is the secondary contradiction between the PSTs and the use of the textbook as the de facto syllabus. As explained earlier, a secondary contradiction is a tension between two corners of the activity system (Yamagata–Lynch, 2010). This secondary contradiction means that whilst the textbook used in the schools is a tool of the activity of teaching English, its use as a de facto syllabus renders this teaching tool the object of the activity of teaching. As such, the textbook then becomes a normative element (as opposed to a mediating one), determining the actions that the subjects and members of the community carry out or not. This was seen when some schoolteachers showed a tendency to “cover” the textbook, undermining the PSTs’ possibility of making their own pedagogical decisions.

Illustrating this use of the textbook by his schoolteacher, Miguel said that what got taught and when it would be taught was the result of an arithmetical operation by the schoolteacher, a division of the total number of pages of the textbook by the number of lessons to be taught:

The year starts, one takes the textbook, it's 90 pages, I have 40 days of classes, 90 divided by 40. . . “ok, I have to cover two pages per day” (. . .) my schoolteacher is now working at the pace of the textbook. He said it at the beginning, that he planned based on the textbook. (Miguel, Interview 1)

This was confirmed by some schoolteachers who mentioned using the textbook to design the syllabus instead of the national curriculum. This was particularly salient for teachers working in Years 11 and 12, who relied exclusively on the public textbooks, and used them as the de facto syllabus, as they perceived a mismatch between the coursebooks and the curriculum:

Now, in MY school I have the freedom of doing it in Years 11 and 12 because I spoke to the headmaster and showed her the mess between the [national] curriculum and the textbook in order to take advantage of the coursebooks. (Carolina, Interview 1)

Clearly this “freedom” to use the textbook undermined the PSTs’ pedagogical agency, exacerbating

the constraints they experienced while designing materials in deciding what got taught, when, and how. When Miguel was asked why he had decided to make the students read a dialogue about a job interview, he explained how this issue affected him:

To be honest, this is what I was requested to do. It's part of the national curriculum, it's in the students' book. My teacher grabbed the textbook and is using it as the syllabus, the textbook as the syllabus (. . .) He planned [the lessons] based on the textbook, and his organisation is based on covering the totality of the textbook, with the topics and skills that are worked in it. Therefore, in a way, I am obliged to work with this. (Miguel, SRI 1)

Marcos was likewise affected by this issue. When describing an activity in his reading materials during SRI 1, he alluded to a similar distribution of the contents of the school textbook:

The ‘while’ (reading) is in the book, and in the book, what has to be taught that day, in that unit, is complaints, I didn't decide it (Marcos, SRI 1).

The use of the coursebook as the de facto syllabus emerged as a powerful element in the PSTs’ experience in the school setting, undermining their pedagogical agency. Other elements from both school and university settings, however, also influenced the appropriation of the conceptual tool of teaching English as teaching the textbook. We now turn to discussing these elements.

Activity Setting 1: The School

The school setting was extremely influential in how the PSTs appropriated the conceptual tool. This influence was exerted by the schoolteachers through two different forms of their division of labor. One was by giving the PSTs models of ELT that closely adhered to the coursebook; the other was through actively promoting the use of the textbook while discouraging the PSTs’ design.

An example of the former is an interaction observed between Marcos and his schoolteacher. After Marcos’s school mentor debriefed him about a lesson he had just taught, she began guiding his future lesson planning, pointing out the textbook content and activities that were going to be taught and assessed. Her guidance exemplifies her use of the textbook as the de facto syllabus, and also highlights how Marcos was being exposed to a model of textbook use in which it is preferable to take and organize activities from the textbook rather than from the syllabus. As we have seen,

he later adopted this model for his own materials design.

In fact, Marcos' schoolteacher not only provided models of lesson planning based on the textbook, but actively promoted textbook use at the expense of Marcos' own design. According to Marcos, she insisted that he adhere systematically to the textbook, questioning his use of other materials, including his own:

I designed [an activity] to reinforce [the topic of the environment], and also the future tense, and the teacher at the school said, "but why this? Where is this in the textbook?" And I said, "no, I did that to reinforce the lesson, a reinforcement," and she said, "right, but you have to teach the contents" (. . .) If I depart too much from the textbook, it's like, I perceive a bit of criticism, that's why I can't move away from the topic of the environment. (Marcos, SRI 2)

Other participants experienced similar issues. Francisco talked about how some schoolteachers stopped the PSTs from designing their materials and how some PSTs were pushed into using the coursebook:

There are teachers who [say], 'no, if it doesn't belong to the textbook, it can't be used.' And there are schools that tell you 'we only work with the textbook,' and it shouldn't be like that (Interview 1).

As can be seen, the schoolteachers had a pervasive influence on the PST's abandoning their attempts at designing materials. This is possibly best summed up by Fernanda's comment that "at the beginning I started using worksheets and then the teacher asked me to use the textbook more" (SRI 2).

Activity Setting 2: The University

The promotion of teaching English as teaching the textbook was further reinforced in the university setting by some teacher educators' beliefs about textbooks in ELT and English language teacher education. A clear example is how Linda positioned the design of teaching materials—and by extension, the pedagogical considerations involved in it—outside the practice of novice teachers, suggesting that the PSTs would unavoidably have to depend on textbooks upon graduation:

The textbook is your lifesaver, you see. Now, I believe that, maybe, after about 5 years one stands well in their shoes and says "right, I now know that here is the textbook, and it helps me, it's really useful, but I can use anything around me in the classroom as a resource." (Linda, Interview 1)

Other teacher educators highlighted the value of the textbook during the PSTs' learning of ELT even more explicitly. Marta, for example, praised *New Headway* (Soars & Soars, 2012a, 2012b, 2014; Soars et al., 2015), the coursebook used at the university to develop the PSTs' communicative competence in English: "I like *Headway* because it's based on the communicative approach and there is no doubt about that" (Interview 1). This salient role of *New Headway* in determining the language teaching methods used to teach the PSTs English also emerged in the interview with Mike, who taught linguistic competence (formerly known in the program as English language; see the next section for a discussion of this module). When asked about the language teaching methods used in the module, he said that "methodologically, we follow a textbook, we have the *Headway* textbook" (Mike, Interview 1). This was confirmed by Fernanda, who said that some teacher educators "follow[ed] the textbook dynamics a lot," conceptualizing it as a negative practice when she said that "in the end, the class was monotonous, and we had to follow the pace of the textbook" (Interview 1).

Unsurprisingly, some PSTs expressed similar beliefs. For example, Miguel argued that *New Headway* was undoubtedly effective, alluding to its long-standing presence (in the market or the programme) and its "proved" effectiveness in helping its users learn English:

I daresay that textbooks like *Headway* are many years old and that it's been proven that they work, so to speak (Interview 1).

The role of *New Headway* in perpetuating ELT practices in the program was highly salient for some PSTs. Gabriel, who referred to the renaming of some of the modules on the program during its transformation to a competency-based course, mentioned that the name change from "English language" to "linguistic competence" was merely superficial, since the language teaching methods used in the module remained the same:

The 2011 cohort is the first one to be in a competency-based course structure. That meant changes for the modules. For example, the English language modules were no longer called like that, but "linguistic competence," although the way of working was the same. (Gabriel, Interview 1)

When probed further about what he meant by "the same," Gabriel answered that "the material was the same, the textbooks were the same (. . .) the only difference was that one had to achieve a certain level" (Interview 1).

In sum, the university setting exerted an important influence on the PSTs' views about textbooks as artifacts of unquestionable language teaching authority. This is not only evident in the teacher educators' discourses about textbooks—particularly, *New Headway*—but also in the continuing use of the same coursebooks and their methodology over the years in the program.

DISCUSSION

In the previous section, we focused on a constellation of four main findings: the use of the conceptual tool of teaching English as teaching the textbook (referring to RQ1), the secondary contradiction between the textbook as the goal of instruction and the PSTs' agency (referring to RQ2), the role of the schoolteachers in strengthening the conceptual tool in question (referring to RQ3), and the role of the teacher educators' beliefs about materials—particularly, the textbook used to develop the PSTs' communicative competence in English—beliefs which acted as tools mediating the PSTs' language learning and teaching experience at the university (likewise referring to RQ3). We showed how the secondary contradiction and the school and university factors discussed push some PSTs to appropriate this conceptual tool, resulting in their imitating existing coursebooks instead of designing materials based on the knowledge of ELT gained during their teacher education program or knowledge about their learners.

This chimes with studies on teacher education in other areas. Horsley (2007), for example, suggested that “between 75% and 85% of student teachers use textbooks to develop units of work and plan lessons” (p. 256). In our study, this was best exemplified by Marcos' inclusion of activities from the textbook in his materials based on what the textbook determined “that day in that unit” (Marcos, SRI 1)—rather than on his own pedagogical rationale. This is perhaps unsurprising given what we know about how novice teachers tend to develop dependency on textbooks (Hutchinson, 1996; Mishan & Timmis, 2015; Richards, 1993). Some of the reasons for this are that inexperienced teachers can find linguistic and methodological support in textbooks (Hutchinson, 1996; McGrath, 2013).

While we acknowledge these reasons to rely on the textbook as valid, the PSTs' reliance on the coursebook reflected a secondary contradiction between the use of this material as the de facto syllabus and the PSTs' agency. While the use of the

textbook as the de facto syllabus (as we saw with Miguel, Marcos, and schoolteacher Carolina) has been widely discussed in education in general (Ball & Feiman–Nemser, 1988; Collopy, 2003; Guerrettaz & Johnston, 2013) and in ELT specifically (Harwood, 2017; Richards, 2014), what we have shown here is that such use transforms the textbook from being a mediating tool of the activity of ELT into the motive or object of this activity, becoming the determinant of the behaviors of the subjects and community members of the activity system (Wertsch, 1985). We have shown, too, how this contradiction undermines the PSTs' agency, which is at odds with the type of reflective practice expected of the PSTs by the program and the broader conceptualization of teaching stated in the national policy through the English language teacher education standards (Mineduc, 2014, 2021). Consequently, it is unsurprising that the PSTs' selection of content, its organization, and the methods of delivery of their materials were largely mediated by the conceptual tool under discussion rather than other conceptual tools they might have appropriated along their 5-year teacher education course.

Our findings also reveal the pivotal role of the schoolteachers in the appropriation of the conceptual tool. From exposing the PSTs to models of ELT based on the school textbook, to explicitly pushing the PSTs into using it at the expense of the PST's own design, the schoolteachers constantly made the PSTs conform to the contents, organization, and methods of the school coursebook. This occurred through two forms of the schoolteachers' division of labor: modeling forms of language teaching based on the textbook and instructing the PSTs to use the coursebook and abandon their design of materials. These findings reflect the fundamental role of the practicum—particularly mentoring teachers—in the development of student–teachers' conceptions about the nature of teaching and learning (Calderhead, 1988; Farrell, 2008; Richards, 2008).

Thus, Marcos' textbook-based materials design emerged at least in part from his exposure to his schoolteacher's model of lesson planning based on the school textbook. Through this exposure, as Fairbanks et al. (2000) argued, student–teachers access their mentors' craft knowledge—that is, the knowledge gained with experience—which they adopt as their own (in this case, knowledge about how to use textbooks as the de facto syllabus), possibly because they see it as a source of “principled professional knowledge” to emulate (Fairbanks et al., 2000, p. 107). From a

sociocultural viewpoint, these models are historically embedded in school communities and presented to the PSTs as “normative ways of thinking, talking, and acting” (Johnson, 2009, p. 17). It is therefore unsurprising that Marcos saw this teaching model as a source of guidance (see Richards, 2008) and described basing his design on the textbook as the “most meaningful way” to develop materials. His schoolteacher, however, went beyond modeling and explicitly pushed him to abandon his design and follow the textbook—as did other schoolteachers with other PSTs. Arnold (2006) has documented that one concern of mentors in their interactions with student–teachers is indeed covering the textbook, and that they often believe that student–teachers learn through mimicking their practice, using their power to make student–teachers gravitate toward their educational ethos (Farrell, 2008; Valencia et al., 2009)—in this case, teaching the coursebook. This reliance on the textbooks by the mentors may be explained by the fact that in Chile, with some of the most crowded classrooms in the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) and with teachers averaging 27 hours of teaching a week (OECD, 2017), English-as-a-foreign-language teachers have little time left to plan lessons, mark student coursework, or indeed design materials. Thus, the forms of organizing teaching and learning that the PSTs were exposed to or asked to embrace reflect the obstacles and limitations experienced by schoolteachers in their daily labor in the Chilean public school system.

In the university setting, another factor intensifying the appropriation of the conceptual tool of teaching English as teaching the textbook was the teacher educators’ beliefs about textbooks—particularly about the *New Headway* series (Soars & Soars, 2012a, 2012b, 2014; Soars et al., 2015). These beliefs were manifested in the reification of the textbook, evident in how some teacher educators referred to it. The best example of this was Marta’s comments about its unquestionable communicative orientation. In doing this, the supposed underpinnings of the coursebook were treated as a “concrete object or immutable procedure” (Shannon, 1987, p. 313), true and not to be questioned (Richards, 1993).

The reification of *New Headway* was also reflected in the type of language learning the PSTs experienced, as recalled by some teacher educators and PSTs (e.g., Fernanda’s description of the language teaching she was exposed to at the university and Gabriel’s perception that the use of *New Headway* in the program had inhibited

the implementation of a new curricular model of teacher education). This should perhaps be expected, inasmuch as reified elements provide a “structure through determining a specific type of practice that reproduces institutions” (Feenberg, 2015, p. 490). From an apprenticeship of observation viewpoint (Lortie, 1975), however, the reification of *New Headway* raises cause for concern as it contributes to the PSTs’ accumulation of language learning experiences, in turn influencing their pedagogical decision-making involved in designing materials and practicing ELT in general. For example, the associations made by Fernanda between some of her teacher educators’ use of *New Headway* and concepts such as monotony and following “the pace of the textbook” can be said to be an effect of its reification on how she learnt English in the teacher education program (see Shaver (2010) for the negative effects of textbook dependency on teaching). It is also important to remember that in contrast to the positive view of *New Headway* as a curricular artifact by the PSTs and the teacher educators, in the literature it is seen as lacking communicative orientation due to its strong focus on accuracy and its structuring of activities (Tomlinson & Masuhara, 2013), which—at least in theory—contradicts the approach to ELT embraced by Mineduc (2014, 2021) and the program. The teacher educators’ assumption that *New Headway* is by definition communicative and its use as described by the PSTs further reflect the lack of study of materials development in the Chilean ELT landscape.

CONCLUSION

In this article we have described the activity of materials design by a group of PSTs of English. Framing the study within activity theory allowed us to identify the presence of the conceptual tool of teaching English as teaching the textbook, which was influenced by a secondary contradiction between the PSTs’ agency and the school textbook when used as the de facto syllabus. We also showed how the PSTs’ appropriation of this tool was encouraged by the schoolteachers and the teacher educators, promoting the reliance on coursebooks while undermining their pedagogical agency.

This is intrinsically problematic for two reasons. First, the fact that the pedagogical and curricular decisions imprinted on the PSTs’ materials come directly from textbooks risks throwing overboard the language teaching and learning views developed in the PSTs’ 5-year teacher education course. The underlying issue here is that the skills

and knowledge that were previously viewed as essential for teaching, such as designing teaching and learning tasks for specific groups based on a close understanding and knowledge of these groups, become no longer necessary (see Apple, 1981, cited in Ozga & Lawn, 1981). This issue also affects the schoolteachers and teacher educators involved in the PSTs' practicum: The textbook not only undermines the PSTs' exercise of pedagogical agency but also constrains the labor of mentoring teachers and university supervisors, making the school and practicum lose value as a site of teacher learning in terms of pedagogical agency through materials design. Second, the conceptual tool of teaching English as teaching the textbook is particularly problematic in light of critiques of textbooks as being methodologically flawed (Gray, 2016; Tomlinson & Masuhara, 2013), or as representing content in inappropriate ways (Gray, 2010, 2012; Gray & Block, 2014; Risager, 2018), including in the Chilean context (Toledo-Sandoval, 2020).

Whilst this study focused primarily on the PSTs' learning of materials design, it also revealed issues with the teacher educators' beliefs about the use of textbooks. Evidence suggests that teaching English as teaching the textbook may be one of the conceptual tools used by at least some teacher educators to mediate the PSTs' learning of English in the initial stages of the program. That a coursebook such as *New Headway* should be seen as unquestionably communicative raises issues about how communicative language teaching is understood by the teacher educators, and about how they evaluate the tools of their profession. This suggests that neglecting the study of teaching materials in teacher education affects not only PSTs but also teacher educators.

This study has various implications for language teacher education. With current ELT views deeming the labor of teachers as a reflective practice responding to specific teaching contexts, teacher educators could design reflective frameworks for student-teachers to examine the influence of coursebooks in their learning of English as well as their design of lessons and materials. Likewise, teacher education programs and schools could promote the development of the PSTs' pedagogical agency through explicitly allowing them to depart from coursebooks to tailor their outputs to the needs of their learners with the help of both school mentors and teacher educators. In places where student-teachers learn English as a foreign, second, or additional language, teacher educators should carefully select, adapt, and design the materials they use to teach English, high-

lighting to the student-teachers the elements that reflect what is known today as best practices in language teaching and questioning those elements that contradict them. Not doing this risks educating language teachers likely to reify the materials designed by others.

NOTE

¹ We do not provide references for these documents in order to preserve the anonymity of the university and our participants.

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