

## Editorial Policy

The MEXTESOL Journal is dedicated to the classroom teacher in Mexico. Previously unpublished articles and book reviews relevant to EFL teaching and research in Mexico are accepted for publication. Articles may be of a practical or theoretical nature and be written in English or Spanish. The Journal reserves the right to edit an accepted manuscript in order to enhance clarity or style. The author will be consulted only if the editing has been substantial.

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Any correspondence to the Journal concerning manuscripts should be faxed or e-mailed to the Editors at the address below. Information concerning advertising in the Journal or MEXTESOL membership should be sent to the National MEXTESOL Office at the addresses also listed below.

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## Política Editorial

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Articles must be typed, double-spaced and preferably no more than twenty pages long. The format should conform to the Publication Manual for the American Psychological Association (A.P.A.) guideline format.

### **In-Text Citations:**

References within the text should be cited in parentheses using the author's last name, year of publication and page numbers (shown below):

*Rodgers (1994) compared performance on two test instruments.  
or In a recent study of EFL writing (Rodgers, 1994) .....*

### **Or for Direct Quotes:**

*Rodgers (1994) argued that, "most existing standardized tests do not accurately assess EFL writing performance" (p. 245).*

### **Reference Page:**

The list of references found in an article must appear at the end of the text on a separate page entitled "References". The data must be complete and accurate. Authors are fully responsible for the accuracy of their references. The APA format for reference page entries is shown below.

#### Books:

Brown, J. (1991). *Nelson-Denny Reading Test*. Chicago: Riverside Press

#### Journal Articles:

Ganschow, L. (1992). A screening instrument for the identification of foreign language learning problems. *Foreign Language Annals*. 24, 383-398.

## From the Editor

Welcome to the Special Issue of MEXTESOL, dedicated to the theme of teacher education. It consists of 7 articles from people currently working in Mexico, the United Kingdom, the United States and Qatar.

Writing a manuscript for publication is not easy and I wish to acknowledge the hard work of all the people who sent in their articles. We had an overflow of articles and plan to use the other articles in another issue on methodology. Furthermore, I would like to personally thank all of the people who were part of the process of reviewing and editing the articles for this issue. Also included to this list of people is the Style Editor, Ezmerelda Kornmeyer. This was a group effort. Without their help I would not have been able to get to the end product, this issue. I would also like to thank JoAnn Miller and Uli Schrader for their guidance and patience. All of the above support is well appreciated.

The first article, *Protecting Teachers' Spouses*, by Mario Rinvolucris takes a humanistic look at a technique to help teachers ward off boredom and burn-out using mutual supervision, which is frequently used in neighboring professions.

More than concentrating on teaching skills, M.A. Clemente poses questions as to how teachers arrive at knowing when, how and to whom to make use of many of the teaching skills they have developed in order to view possible changes in teacher education programs in Mexico to increase awareness of teaching and what it involves.

G. St. John Scott discusses orienting lessons to the purpose of the learning instead of on discrete components of language in order that students can recall and use the skills learned at an appropriate time outside of their language-learning classroom.

Nancy Susan Keranen and Fatima Encinas Prudencio, both working in Puebla, investigate factors affecting professional development with regard to in-service teachers in a public university in Mexico. A focus on teacher opinions as well as stages and cycles in their professional lives lead to a discussion of communities of practice and their place in the teaching environment.

Nigel Cundale discusses the need to develop trainees' ability to analyze and understand the English language instead of focusing them on discrete aspects of the language when designing a teacher training course. He also uses his experiences as a teacher trainer with this case study.

Carol Lethaby looks at the rationale and problems of attempting to create a coherent teacher education course and suggests ways of using the syllabus document to create a course that displays an overall relationship between the objectives, content, and methodology used.

Last but not least, we have an article by Mariza G. Mendez Lopez from Quintana Roo. She explores the aspects of in-service teacher education with reference to the relevant literature in order to draw a proposal for the aspects to take into account when designing a course.

I hope you enjoy the articles in this special issue on teacher education. I would also like to invite the readers of MEXTESOL to send in possible manuscripts for publication in English or Spanish. If you have been a reader of the MEXTESOL, think of something that you can give back to your profession - a contribution of your ideas in a possible article. Also imagine how you would feel to see your name in print with your article.

## Protecting Teachers' Spouses

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In this article I intend to share with you a technique which may help you ward off boredom, de-motivation and burn-out, all quite frequent plagues of our profession. The use of *Mutual Supervision* is unusual among language teachers but perfectly normal among social workers and people specialised in therapy. It seems to make sense to borrow useful ideas from neighbouring professions in the 'helping' world.

To get you into the swing of this article may I ask you to answer this short questionnaire?

1. Are there any Monday mornings, say in January or February, when you just don't want to go to school? When did this feeling grip you last?
2. Are there times when you come back in the evening and can think of nicer things to do than correct students' homework?
3. Have you ever felt that a student was more than you could cope with?
4. Do you occasionally leave class feeling you are carrying a sort of weight the students have loaded on your back?
5. Have you ever despaired of really mastering English with its slippery exceptions and vast vocabulary?
6. Are there times when that monthly salary you get seems a paltry amount to live on, or maybe, survive on?
7. Do you have the need to open your heart to someone about all the challenges and problems that absorb you at work?

If you have answered all the above questions with a resolute NO, then please turn to another article in the MEXTESOL Journal. If you have answered some of the questions in the affirmative then this article is for you.

If you said YES to question 7, then I wonder who you open your heart to, who you unload on? I remember once asking a colleague about this and she said, "Well, I suppose I just go home and tell my husband everything that has happened at school during the day...used to be OK,... but now he's fed-up with me.... He switches off... but who can I tell if I don't tell him?"

The rest of this article is about protecting the spouses of Mexican English teachers from their partner's imperious need to "tell all" about the awful caretaker, the bossy head, the grotty colleagues and the difficult kids!

## How to Set up a Mutual Supervision

1. Review the people of your acquaintance who you could choose as a "supervisor". The person you are looking for needs to be in the area of teaching and someone you can respect and get on with adequately. They do not need to be a "best friend" and they should not be a chirpy gossip-partner. They should be a person who is able to listen effectively.
2. Approach the person you have chosen and explain that you'd like a private 40 minute professional meeting with them once a week. For 20 minutes of the meeting time you would like to tell them about what is uppermost in your mind about the last few days at school. This might be in any of the following areas:
  - problems with students
  - a success with a colleague
  - worries about language
  - some achievement in balancing home and work life
  - worries about in-service training
  - the pressure of so many things on top of one
  - over-tiredness, etc...

There could be and are many other things I haven't dreamt of.

Explain to the person you have chosen that what you are proposing is an exercise in trust as they must guarantee you 100% confidentiality. No way can they go gossiping off to other people about what you have told them.

This will be the person you can unload onto each week, freeing yourself of any frustration, anger or fear you hold inside you. If you tend to have an unrealistically good self-image, talking to your supervisor about your successes may help you cut them down to size and be more realistic about them. If you tend to be an insecure person, talking about your failures may set them in a new and better light for you. For those first twenty minutes the supervisor's role will be to listen, ask the odd question and offer a brief comment here and there.

In the second half of the meeting you swap roles. Now it is their turn to speak, to open up and to get the relief that comes from sharing. You are now the supervisor, the receiver of the text, the empathetic listener. If you have never done this before you need to really think about it.

Maybe the best model for such listening is the mother who really wants her four year old to tell her what he experienced at kindergarten today. She delights (if it's a good day!) in the details he picks on, in the form of his expression, in the way he gets animated here and tails off there. She really wants to be taken into the child's world, into his mapping of it, into his feelings about it. She has no need to try and distort what he is

saying by thinking, "If I were you, I'd..." because a full, empathetic entry into her child's world is what she wants.

In your role as supervisor all you need is the genuine wish to be carried into your colleague's world, into their mapping of it, into their feelings about it. If you manage to partially enter their world, if you can see it a bit from their perspective, you will powerfully influence their ability to express themselves, to maybe discover new things by talking to themselves in front of you. If they have a problem, it is NOT your task to panic about how you can solve it. If a supervisor uses this sort of language it mostly means that they are pretty poor at the job, language like:

- In my view...
- The way I see it...
- If I were you,... (The fact is I'm not you.)
- Why don't you...
- I suggest...
- I strongly advise you to...

All the above phrases indicate that the supervisor is in the wrong world, their own world, where they need to be is in their colleague's world. Easier said than done.

One of the positive spin-offs from taking on the supervisor role once a week is that a person sometimes learns to listen better in other situations too and becomes a better listener as a teacher and as a colleague, at parent-teacher evenings, and even in the deepest situations, such as those at home. Once you have explained some of the above to your colleague, they may run a mile! If they don't, then all you have to do is fix an acceptable time for both of you for your first mutual supervision.

### **Odd Things about Mutual Supervision**

1. It is not ordinary, natural discourse between two people. It does not have the ordinary give-and-take of conversation in which A's idea sets B thinking about something completely different. It does not jump from subject to subject as we do when chatting. In a supervision one person provides the main flow of words and thoughts and the other immerses themselves in this flow.
2. While the term "supervision" sounds strongly hierarchical (looking down from above), MUTUAL supervision is a very democratic procedure as both people take the powerful listening role. Schools can be quite hierarchical places and very democratic procedures may leave bosses feeling vaguely uneasy.
3. Given the strict rule of confidentiality, the stuff talked about in the supervision is like an island isolated from the flow of other conversations at home and at work. It is almost like a piece of interior dialogue that has only taken place in one person's head. It is in the private, not the public domain.

4. If the supervision goes well, it is a contemplative oasis in the hurly-burly of the school week, a time when you feel, move, sit and breathe differently. You enter a different state of attention, a different trance, in a good supervision.

### **What Have I Gained from Mutual Supervision?**

Maybe it is too early to say as I have only been involved with it for the last 8 years in a teaching career of 36 years. I am still a new boy. What gains are apparent to me at 11:40 on June 4th, 2003?

1. In the presence of my supervisor, I really sometimes get a striking new angle on a problem that is bugging me. Sometimes a solution will occur to me in the course of the supervision that solves or mitigates the problem. Sometimes a solution will pop into my mind some time after.
2. The feeling and tenor of the supervision colours and guides my thinking processes between meetings. The supervision situation is somehow there in my head as I plan lessons and weigh them up after coming out of them.
3. When my supervisor is female, I am often made aware, just by her presence, of how absurdly male some of my thoughts, feelings and actions are. This is particularly the case if I am dealing with a problematic relationship with a younger male.
4. I think I have less need to take stuff from my work home to my wife and children. After all, she married ME, not my current language class or training group!

I now do not teach a language group or run a training course without going into supervision for the duration of that course. To do so would feel uneasy and a bit irresponsible. Most teachers go to school bathed or showered. I now feel this way about supervision.

### **A Cheeky Request**

Can I ask you to get in touch with me if you do try the ideas outlined above? I am, of course, interested in successes but mutual supervisions that did NOT work out are even more interesting.

Which language will you have worked in? Trabajar en castellano parece lo más natural, but could English have a psychologically liberating effect, a stronger island/oasis effect? Maybe you will have constantly code-switched? I would be very interested to hear which language you used and how it went. I live in hope that I will hear from you.

## Teacher Awareness: an Essential Element of ELT Education

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Most of the time when we say that a teacher is *dynamic* (which is the most frequent adjective students use to refer to good teachers), we seem to be talking about a teacher with well developed teaching skills. In fact, there is a wide variety of titles on description and instruction on teaching skills. However, more than concentrating on teaching skills, I prefer to pose questions about how these teachers arrive at knowing when, how and to whom to make use of the many teaching skills that they have developed. In my view, a possible answer may be found in the teacher education literature. In an article published more than a decade ago, Freeman (1989) stated that, apart from skills, there were three other components that should be part of teacher education. These are knowledge, attitudes and awareness.

With regard to knowledge, I contend that the theoretical principles of the subject to be taught are an essential part of the core of teacher education. Elsewhere (Clemente, 2001b), I have discussed this issue, arguing that "the reason for practitioners being (or becoming) knowledgeable in an academic area is...(to) make sense of theory as reflective practitioners in the teaching/learning process in which they take part" (p. 198-9).

I have also delved into the attitudinal factor. In a study carried out at the State University of Oaxaca with foreign language teachers, it became obvious that "teacher's attitudes are the consequence of a complex web of contextual elements and circumstances" (Clemente, 2001a). Moreover, I found that most of these elements were out of the teachers' control; they were contextual factors teachers have to deal with. They had no choice (ibid).

Having reflected on teachers' knowledge and having carried out research on teachers' attitudes, I decided to start a longitudinal study on the fourth constituent that Freeman (1989) mentions: *awareness*. Due to lack of space, in this paper I will introduce the theoretical framework and leave the empirical data and its interpretation for later publication.

In general terms, awareness has been defined as "a particular state of mind in which an individual has undergone a specific subjective experience of some cognitive content of external stimulus" (Tomlin & Villa, 1994, p.193). Emphasizing the importance of learning awareness, van Lier states that awareness is a perceptual component of consciousness, without which "it is simply not possible to realize the conditions....that make progress towards proficiency possible" (1996, p.74).

Focused on teacher education, Freeman defines awareness as “the capacity to recognize and monitor the attention one is giving or has given to something. Thus, one acts on or responds to the aspects of a situation of which one is aware” (1989, p.33). In addition, according to Thomas, teacher awareness is an explicit capacity that “facilitates reasoning and intellectual understanding of the phenomenon and contributes to the ability to impart it” (1987, p.34).

In sum, to be aware means: (a) to be explicitly conscious about all the different elements of the actual phenomenon of teaching/learning and (b) to be able to analyze such phenomenon and react according to it. In this sense, teachers’ awareness allows them to make decisions about the amount, depth and quality of their knowledge, the practicality of their skills and the appropriateness of their attitudes. In other words, awareness “account(s) for the appropriate mobilization, interaction and integration of...[knowledge, skills and attitudes]... as a person teaches” (Freeman, 1989, p.33).

Moreover, awareness does not belong to the same category of the other constituents. It is a level above. It “functions as the unifying superordinate” (Freeman, 1989, p.33) that enables the teacher to make decisions about the other three components. Perhaps, for some people, to talk about awareness is to focus on the attention teachers pay to their teaching. It is true that these two concepts are closely related but they still refer to very different things. Awareness differs from attention in the sense that the former has a more “holistic function” (Freeman, 1989, p.33). It is not a matter of degrees: You are or you are not aware. There is no other possibility. There are no awareness clines. When you are not aware of something, you completely ignore it. On the contrary, attention implies degrees and this fact allows us to focus on specific situations. Awareness and attention belong to different levels and, in this sense, the former encompasses the latter.

Referring again to Freeman’s (1989) scheme, knowledge, skills and attitudes could be a way to designate the areas teachers should be aware of. With regards to knowledge, the question would be: Are the teachers aware of their knowledge and the knowledge their students are acquiring? In regard to ELT programs like the ones implemented in Mexico, it is important to delve into the extent to which the Spanish-speaking pre-service teachers are aware of their strengths and weaknesses in terms of the content to teach and specifics of the phonological, lexical, semantic, discursive and pragmatic aspects of English.

Skillwise, this area of awareness is at the very core of teaching. In order to be able to teach, a teacher needs to become aware of his/her procedural knowledge, that is, his/her language skills, in order to make them explicit and declarative. In the case of language, these skills refer to the four main linguistic abilities (reading, listening, writing and speaking) plus all the other skills developed to gain different competences (linguistic, communicative, pragmatic, etc) to become a competent user of a language.

However, these are not the only skills the teacher has to become aware of. The teacher also has to pay attention to and reflect on his/her teaching skills in order to improve his/her teaching practice (see Lockhart & Richards, 1994; Richards, 1990).

In terms of attitudes, the teacher needs to reflect on the attitudes (his/hers and his/her students') around the different aspects involved in his/her teaching. According to Freeman (1989), this is one of the least studied elements of teacher education in spite of the fact that we all know how important they are for the success (and for the failure) in education.

## **Discussion**

I contend that it is necessary that we in Mexico start reflecting on the approach to our teaching education programs. The experience of programs in other parts of the world has been that a technology-oriented approach (focused on knowledge and skills) has been only partially successful. The problem is that it completely overlooks the human aspect of teacher education (Hargreaves, 1994). It is essential, from my point of view, to reverse the approach and, having in mind a holistic view, focus on the four components mentioned above.

Different authors have defined the terms training and education in different ways (Freeman, 1989, p. 40; Wallace, 1991, p. 3; Winer, 1992, p. 57; Woodward, 1991, p.141). Although I have used them as synonyms so far, it is time to make explicit the difference between them.

According to Widdowson (1990), *training* can be defined as

a process of preparation towards the achievement of a range of outcomes which are specified in advance...(It) is directed at providing solutions to a set of predictable problems and sets a premium on reflecting expertise (p.62).

On the other hand, *education*, as he sees it,

provides for situations which cannot be accommodated into preconceived patterns of response but which require a reformulation of ideas and the modification of established formulae. It focuses...on...the critical appraisal of the relationship between problem and solution as a matter of continuing enquiry and of adaptable practice (ibid).

Widdowson's (1990) dichotomy could be the explanation for the problems of most technology-oriented EFL teacher education programs. They are not complete because they are training but not educating. The pre-service teachers develop what Wallace calls "initial competence" (1991, p.58). In other words, they can deal with that "set of predictable problems" but they are not prepared to face problems "which require a reformulation of ideas" (ibid). They cannot make decisions about when, how and with

whom to use the set of skills they have been trained in, first of all because they are not aware of those skills nor of their efficacy. They have not gotten that "expertise" (ibid) yet. One way to acquire this expertise is to articulate our own tacit knowledge to make it explicit. There are several schemes and concepts that have been proposed for making knowledge explicit: action research, reflective practitioner, teacher's thinking, etc. Among those, I have found that the tools explored by sociocultural theories (reflection, self-assessment, and narratives) are especially useful (Verity, 2000). Within the sociocultural framework, Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (1978) stands out as a relevant construct for this discussion.

The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) has been very widely used in educational settings where teachers try to define it in terms of their own students and the way they help them to achieve their potential (Clemente & Higgins, 2003). However, the ZPD can also be applied to pre-service teachers and their educators. As I see it, the ZPD develops the potential of the novice teacher to make the best decisions (in terms of knowledge, skills and attitudes) when teaching. In a teacher education program, the main role of the educator, with the help of his/her own expertise as a teacher, is to help the novice teacher become aware of his/her teaching. One of the most important roles of educators, to paraphrase Verity (2000), is not to make the student-teacher know *more* but to know *differently* (p. 192), and re-conceptualize the ZPD as an:

arena of transformation [which] functions not only as a mediational space for the completion of particular tasks, but also as a place for the learner to confront, practice, and internalize strategies for the completion of other similar tasks (p. 184).

Through various curriculum decisions, ELT educational programs could help novice teachers become aware, always taking into account the very local sociocultural circumstances of each program in the Mexican educational context. Above all, there has to be a general consensus that the philosophy of the program, and the educators taking part in it, should encourage the formation of teachers with critical reflective minds and flexible criteria for using different approaches and materials according to their specific teaching situations. Thus, every syllabus within the program should contain a reflective aspect which provides the students with the opportunity and space to develop her/his awareness skills as a student with her/his own teachers. Furthermore, there has to be a change in the way we organize the different contents and courses in the ELT programs. We are very used to starting an educational program with theoretical aspects and finishing it with the practical side of education. For developing reflective minds, the proposal is to take a more balanced approach where theory and practice could work together. As a part of the *Programa Flexibilizado para la Enseñanza de Idiomas*, (*Flexible BA Program in Language Teaching*, Universidad Autónoma Benito Juárez de Oaxaca) that was implemented in 2002, we are working with this kind of approach, dealing with courses such as *Observation* and *ELT Methods and Approaches* from the very beginning.

In both courses, I have observed that the students, in spite of their basic knowledge and experience, are responding very well to analyzing their own and other's teaching. These and other later courses (such as *Microteaching* and *Teaching Practicum*) increase the amount of teaching practice and, hence, the opportunities for reflection.

To use Freeman's (1989) and Widdowson's (1983) terms discussed above, these changes in our education programs would mean setting the appropriate conditions for novice teachers *to become aware* of their own teaching and what it involves (knowledge, teaching skills and underlying values that generate their attitudes). Furthermore, these changes will also provide the best conditions for our teacher education programs to gain a position within the realms of education.

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# Focusing on the Task in the ESOL Classroom

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## Introduction

I am writing this in Doha, where I manage the ESOL program for Qatar's national utility company. English is the language of business communication in Qatar (indeed, this is the case generally in the Arabian Gulf), and as many of my company's employees have poor English skills my responsibilities include the provision of suitable language training. In theory, that responsibility is easily met. A phone call to one of the local language schools, and we are in business—safe in the hands of experts who will determine our needs and provide the training required. Unfortunately, such optimism is premature. Sourcing effective English classes can be more difficult than it might be thought, at least here in the Middle East where, despite the enthusiasm and professionalism of language teachers, TESOL programs often fail to achieve their targets, and there is a widespread feeling on the part of managers that time spent by their employees in the language classroom is wasted.

There is no single cause for this failure. Learning is not just a product of classroom activity, and workplace performance is not just a matter of knowledge and skill; in the Middle East, as elsewhere, the programs that do not meet expectations fail for multiple reasons. However, in addition to whatever problems we might find in the classroom or workplace, there are those that result from miscommunication between the parties involved—that follow from the differing expectations of competence engendered by the languages of TESOL and business.

## Definitions of Competence

Student goals as language-learners are typically unformulated. They know that they want to learn English, but they have not usually given much thought to what they mean by this. Both employers and teachers have given thought to the goals of language learning, however, and both are likely to talk of competence—and it is with this apparent agreement that our problems begin. When TESOL professionals talk of competence they mean a mastery of the “systems of knowledge and skill required for communication” (Canale, 1983, p. 5), and they usually think holistically of “competent users” able to interact successfully with other users of English in a wide range of social and professional relationships. When employers talk of competence, they have in mind the knowledge, skill or ability needed for the performance of a specified, work-related task.

There is clearly room for misunderstanding here. For the one party, communicative competence is a goal in itself; for the other party, it is a means to an end. As a result, while teachers might judge a course a success if students can use the structures and lexis taught, employers will only do

so if the students can work more efficiently or effectively. From their perspective, as Rosenberg notes, “every [training] intervention ought to change the organization in some way...” (1990, p. 48).

This concern by employers for on-the-job performance should not be interpreted as a concern to restrict language input or predetermine classroom technique. Though employers need those learning English to return to their workplace able to accurately relay phone messages, or write up notes on equipment malfunction, and are usually not at all interested in whether their employee can discuss his fears of spiders, or whether she has mastered the schema for ordering wine with a meal. This is because of their concern with output (use) not input (training). One should not conclude from this that fears and phobias should not be discussed in the language classroom, or that none of our employees need to learn how respond to the questions of a sommelier (though the fact that most are Muslim does raise some questions of the cultural appropriateness of the activity). If discussions of arachnophobia enhance an employee’s ability to communicate clearly and think critically, managers would have no problem with the activity. If the subject of dining out proves to be interesting and the employee consequently masters the use of such structures as “What do you suggest/recommend/think...?” (and can then adapt the “ordering wine” script for use at work), managers would be delighted.

Situated as I am, I can report that such adaptations of what is learned in the classroom do not occur as often as either teachers or employers would like, and thought needs be given to using more salient activities, so that learners can more readily draw on what they have learned when given opportunities to use their English at work. However, just pulling an ESP (English for Specific Purposes) course book off the shelf and substituting “ordering stationary” for “ordering wine” is not the answer (or at least not all of it); on the one hand, the idea of ordering stationary is probably going to be far less interesting for students than that of ordering wine, and, on the other, the change in activity is not in itself going to solve the basic problem—the misalignment of the expectations of teacher and employer. For alignment to be possible, teachers need to start their preparation with a focus on outcomes, rather than on input.

Focusing on outcomes in the initial stages of lesson planning is of course logical, as R. C. MacGregor’s analysis (1993) of the instructional design has shown. (MacGregor was specifically thinking of the courseware development process, but his point is more widely applicable.) In a learning task (T) the learner’s initial state (I) will ideally be transformed to a new state (O), as follows:

**[1] T (I)→(O).**

Of course, as MacGregor himself acknowledged, this model is only useful if the task is fully determined, we know the initial state of the learner, and the outcomes are measurable. If the training is designed without any awareness of the trainee’s actual knowledge or skills level, then

the model becomes:

**[2] T (?)→(O).**

While if the outcomes desired are unknown, because there has insufficient task specification (or none at all), the model then becomes:

**[3] T (?)→(?).**

At this point, MacGregor noted, his model is about to self-destruct. With insufficient information about the learner, there is little guarantee that the learning task is appropriate and the model degenerates to:

**[4] ? (?)→(?).**

However, though logic suggests the need to work back from the outcomes required to the skills-gap to be addressed (and the learning tasks to be used), nothing in MacGregor's model prevents us using structural or lexical targets ("use the present simple with future reference"), or non-specific aspirations ("become effective readers"). To align goals with workplace reality we need to go a step further and identify the real-world task to be performed, the conditions under which performance takes place, and the standards to be met. As an example of what is possible in the way of specification, we might consider the UK's National Language Standards (2000), which define the task of "Obtain[ing] information about complex work tasks by reading" (Unit 4R1) by specifying a range of source materials—"articles; reports; discussion papers and correspondence; technical manuals and training materials"—and a minimum length for texts of 800 words. Such specifications would ideally be refined by needs analysis, but even unmodified they provide a useful starting point for the construction of a task.

### **Task-Based Learning**

In talking of tasks in this way, I am skirting the fringes of task-based learning. Although teachers are usually thinking of a pedagogic task, not one undertaken in the workplace when they talk about "a task" (see Hedge, 2000, p. 359 for a useful summary of the components of a pedagogic task), their reflections on the workings of task-based instruction are nevertheless likely to address issues similar to those that concern us here. An emphasis on meaning rather than form in task-performance (Nunan, 1989, p. 10; Skehan, 1996, p. 20) leads naturally to Willis' definition of a task as "a goal-oriented activity in which learners use language to achieve a real outcome" (1996, p. 53) and working with that definition, all that is needed for salience is for these outcomes to correspond to those actually required on the job.

That said, it would be naive not to recognize that thinking of tasks as real-world performances goes against the grain: there is a tradition of seeing them as elements within a work plan, and not as real-world

interactions; as language tasks, rather than non-linguistic problems whose solution would depend upon effective language use. However, though this redefinition of the task would take effort, it is possible and it can be effective, as N. S. Prabhu showed with the Madras/Bangalore Communicative Teaching Project (usually referred to as “The Bangalore Project”, 1987 for short).

As it happens Prabhu was uninterested in directly preparing students for the linguistic demands of life outside the classroom. Corporate training is primarily interested in closing current skills gaps, not in discovering unsuspected potential; in Prabhu’s terms, that is to say, it is concerned with equipping rather than enabling. Prabhu, however, was interested in the enabling process, and developing the potential of students in the language classroom. (As quoted in Foley, 1990, p. 93, Prabhu defined *equipping* as providing students “the knowledge and skill necessary for functioning in later years as useful and productive members of the society,” and *enabling* as providing “opportunity and support in realising their potential, in the form of understanding or ability.”) In the present context this is done. What is important for us about The Bangalore Project is not the kind of task undertaken, but the unrelenting concentration on the task itself. Prabhu believed that grammatical competence is best developed as learners attempt on the one hand to “make sense of the language encountered” in task fulfillment, and on the other to “get meaning across” in the context of task performance (Prabu, 1987, p. 15). As a result, lessons focused on task completion rather than building a representation of the language system; they involved doing something, not learning how to do something, or learning what you need to know in order to do something, but actually doing something.

Prabhu’s exclusive use of meaning-focused activities has been criticized (McLaughlin, 1990), and I grant that other approaches also need to be used. Although people can effectively respond to a rule-based system without becoming aware of all the rules (Nokes and Ohlsson, 2000, p. 833; cf. Reber, 1967; Whittlesea and Wright, 1997), and that being the case not all aspects of a language system need to be explicitly defined for learners (Krashen, 1985), it is perhaps a step too far to remove all explicit support from the classroom (see the discussion in Berry, 1994). However, how that support is provided is not important in itself: though I suspect that practice of leaving formal language work until after the completion of the task cycle would be more effective than other methods (Willis, 1996, p. 53), different learner groups and different tasks might well require other approaches. What is important is the linking of task and real world needs. What is needed, that is to say, is not a new instructional methodology or classroom technique, but a new way of looking at the activities undertaken.

### **An Example**

Consider the writing of a business letter. Most courses teach this by illustrating the typical organization of such a letter, and having learners follow the model. There is no reason for their doing so except that business

letters form part of the syllabus being followed. An alternative approach, which sees such a letter as a means to an end rather than the end itself, would place learners in the situation where writing was instrumental in attaining some larger goal. For example, they might be constituted as a company that sells widgets, and challenged to reply to the letters they receive. The first might be a request for a quotation. In order to provide a competitive price the company has to know how much widgets cost, and this they find out by writing to a widget manufacturer (using the request they received as a model), then using the manufacturer's reply as a model for their own. The scenario could, of course, embrace a wide range of tasks and a whole scheme of work. The benefits of such an approach should be obvious and follow:

1. Situating the task in a (simulated) business environment concentrates the learner's mind. In such an environment, tardiness would lead to reminders from the customer; poor structural command could be flagged by requests for clarification, or by customers taking their business elsewhere. Language would be seen to have consequences. Words would build into sentences; sentences into social acts.

2. Because of their interaction with customers and suppliers (real or simulated), learners would be using language outside of a controlled TESOL environment and dealing with something approaching the unpredictability of the real world (for the importance of this, see Schön, 1983, p. 19). As learning typically stops when learners achieve communicative success, maintaining fluidity in their interactions with their linguistic and social environment would inhibit fossilization.

3. Such a task-based approach shifts the focus from *learning about* to *doing*. There is a change from "let us learn how to write a quotation" (a directive), to "I must prepare a competitive quotation or I will lose the business" (a need), and with the change comes the probability of fuller integration of what makes for a good letter into the learner's procedural repertoire. After all, in casting around for a solution to a problem we are more likely to recall what we have done rather than what we know.

This last point is not, as it might seem, behaviorism in a new form. It simply follows from the belief that a tool (or a skill) needs to be used for its use to be learned. Consider, for example, a simple mechanical skill such as switching on the light. In one sense, learning to do this is simply a matter of learning to flip a switch; however, just learning how to do this is meaningless if there is no reason for doing so. The act needs definition (as a means to being able to read in a dark room, say) and its ability to bring light in darkness demonstrated if the skill is going to be recalled at a time when its use is appropriate, and not be simply stored in memory as an exercise in hand-eye coordination. Inasmuch as language use (like switch-flipping) is primarily defined by real world situations, if divorced from such situations it is likely to be remembered as a sequence of phonemes/graphemes, not a solution to a communicative need.

## Conclusion

As I reflect on the current situation here in the Middle East, I am reminded of Michael Cole's use of a garden metaphor to describe the work of systems developers. Gardeners, he notes, "must attend simultaneously to two classes of concerns: what transpires inside the system ('garden') . . . and what transpires around it" (1995, p. 196). So must developers, he argues. And so, I would add, must language teachers, for it seems to me that (in Cole's terms) most are working as though they were in a biodome and that is too limiting for their learners. Language use involves not just knowing the scripts (the schemata) that govern interaction; it also involves responding to using them and, in doing so, responding to an interlocutor's competing needs, assumptions and objectives. Ultimately, it can only be mastered through free interaction, in an environment where communication is necessary and retreating into silence is not an option; in short, it can only be mastered in the performance of (real-world) tasks.

Changing the way one teaches to allow for such tasks in the classroom would involve effort. But it would be a mental effort, a matter of focus, not a matter of new teaching skills. The crucial change required is one of orientation in lesson planning/syllabus design, of being oriented to the *purposes* for linguistic performance, not to its components (structure, lexis, register, discourse pattern, etc.). Working back from those purposes, and tasks that embody them, would help learners by providing definition and salience—and opportunities to gain greater workplace competence. Here in Doha, that would be no small gain.

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# Factors Influencing Professional Development of In-Service EFL Teachers at a Public University in Mexico

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*In this paper, the authors present their quest for some possible factors that either promote or inhibit professional development in in-service teachers in a public university setting. The results of oral interviews and the collaboration of the authors revealed four main themes associated with the topic: 1. career stages or cycles, 2. a sense of helplessness indicated by some teachers, 3. the perception of the profession being interpreted through a lens relative to the individual's position in the career stage/cycle, 4. the effects of a community of practice on professional development.*

## Background

This study is the product of talk. From working together in an in-service teacher education program, we frequently got together to talk about various aspects of the program and about the participants. This talk led from the wondering about the eventual overall effectiveness of the program on the professional lives of the participants to the question of why some people progress and mature in the profession while others seem to, as Myers says get embalmed at a particular developmental level that is almost the same as their first months in the classroom (1993).

We wanted to understand what factors inspire professional development or impede it. Obviously, this is a multidimensional issue with many contributing factors. One of the main ideas that emerged from the talk is the concept of career cycles or stages. We observed in our own practice and our lives that as we grow, we also enter different cycles. We began to wonder: is there a time in people's lives when they are more receptive to or are seeking change? And, conversely, a time when expecting change is unrealistic? We looked to the literature for answers.

## Research on Teacher Development and Career Cycles

In the last 30 years, the focus of teacher research has been shifting from teaching processes and their outcomes to teachers' perceptions and knowledge (Freeman, 1996). In other words, it has shifted from an external "objective" perspective to a more internal personal perspective. This interest in the teacher as a person has led to increasingly popular research on teachers' narratives, stories and teachers' lives. These studies approach

the personal, concentrating on various aspects such as: professional lives (Fessler, 1995; Goodson, 1994; Huberman, 1989; 1993; 1995), professionalization and learning processes (Freeman, 1993; Guskey, 1995), decision making processes (Wood, 1996); teaching practice and institutions (Clandini & Connely, 1987) and how teachers cope with innovation in their teaching environment (Guskey & Huberman, 1995; Hargreaves & Fullan, 1992).

An important dimension of this teacher development research is that of life cycles. The literature on teacher career cycle research demonstrates that there are differences in the way teachers perceive their work at different stages of their professional development. Their perceptions and beliefs about their work as well as commitments change throughout their careers.

The causes of these changes are difficult to establish. The earlier research on this issue viewed teachers' careers as a relatively linear three or four stage process (Burden, 1982) where age played a significant role.

This assumption of lineal age related life cycles has been questioned (Fessler, 1995; Huberman, 1993). Development is viewed as a process that is multidimensional, dynamic and flexible and "sometimes downright random" rather than linear (Huberman, 1995, p. 195). Huberman in his study of female middle school teachers with 11-19 years of teaching experience at the *Cycle d'Orientation* (a middle school) paints a very complicated picture of development and stages. He identified five "phases" that these particular teachers experienced.

Phase One is the beginning or entry point which can be from anywhere to one to seven years long. Huberman identified three points of entry for this group of people: the "classic stream," directly from the university or teacher certification programs, the "progressive stream," entering the profession from substitute teaching positions and teaching pool positions, and "entry from exterior," which is entry from neither of the two previous entry points. He states that these beginnings can be either "easy" or "painful."

Phase Two, lasting from four to 16 years long, is a phase where the teachers experienced difficulties and problems. Some even left the profession temporarily. The overall theme of "demands of private life" are strong in this phase.

Phases Three and Four, lasting from four to 14 years in service, is a period characterized by "stabilization" or "self-doubt." The stabilization involves "making a commitment," becoming part of a group of peers, having a good relationship with students, perhaps a "resolution of previous problems," or the beginning of "routine" action. Huberman notes that some may not experience the stabilization period but may go directly into an area of self-doubt which involves feelings of "dissatisfaction" and "weariness"

(1993, p. 40-1). It is visible that the years in the profession are not exactly linear but rather overlap.

The final phase, which encompasses anywhere from 8 to eleven years in service, is characterized by "new challenges" and "new worries." These teachers may be given new positions which involve more responsibility. They may be involved in more experimentation in their practice; they may experience "overload." The characteristics of this phase are similar to the previous with the exception of something Huberman calls a "second wind." The teachers in this phase experience this second wind which involves "real accomplishment of the requisite conditions for professional satisfaction" or as he says, "a rebirth of energy and perspective" (1993, p. 41). He also notes that in some individuals this might be a "search for new challenges" that emerges from "a [growing] fear of tedium" with the profession (1993, p. 8).

The above description is a gross over-simplification of the findings of Huberman's study. We include it only to give the reader a glimpse of the complexity of the issue. It is also worth noting that these experiences are only valid for this group of teachers at that particular time (1961-1971). However, Huberman acknowledges that although his sample is small and cannot be regarded as "representative," he does say that some of his findings "show clear trends" that can be used to make general inferences into this process (1993, p. 26).

Corroborating Huberman's picture of development, Fessler (1995) proposes that teachers move in and out of periods of development and frustration depending on their personal and organizational environments. He depicts these periods as three areas each interacting with each other in various ways. The first area is the individual's personal environment. This includes elements such as life stage, personal crises, family, and personality, among other things. The second area is related to organizational factors that influence a teacher's career: school regulations, management style, public trust, societal expectations, professional organizations and unions among others. The final area has to do with career cycle, whether just entering the career, building competency, feeling frustration, or ending the career. These areas do not function independently. Rather they all influence each other at different times in different ways. It makes a complicated picture of development, both personal and professional.

Thus, current life-cycle literature shows that both personal and organizational environmental factors influence teachers' professional development. The picture that emerges from this research is much more complex than it was once considered to be. Both external factors such as the historical period, educational system and institutional context as well as internal ones, commitment, experience, gender, and age among other factors have an impact on how teachers develop and view their profession.

In English language teaching (ELT), teacher research that is focused either on professional development or education is relatively new. It was mainly developed during the nineties (Edge & Richards, 1993; Freeman, 1991; 1996; Johnson, 1992; Nunan, 1992; Richards, 1997; Wood, 1996) and there has been both a growing number of publications as well as activity at conferences and meetings.

### **Significance of the Study**

Most of this trend in research on teacher development in ELT, however, has been focused on native English speaking teachers (Richards, 1993; Wood, 1996). There is significantly less published on non-native English teachers and even less on ELT higher education teachers in Mexico. Thus, in this study we will focus on 16 Mexican English teachers' perceptions of their professional development and career life cycles. Four of the subjects hold master's degrees in fields related to language teaching. The rest hold *licenciaturas* (bachelor's degrees) in several different fields. Only one of the subjects did not have a degree. The years in service ranged from 27 years to 3 years (see Appendix One).

### **Methodology**

As mentioned above, through this work, we discovered the meaning and significance of a community of practice. Through voluntarily working together on a shared project of mutual interest, we found this experience an invaluable vehicle for personal and professional development. The opportunity to work with someone towards a shared goal has brought us to a new understanding of *relationship* and *collegiality*. It also confirmed our next stage of this work, which is the importance of *collaboration* for the development of the person and the professional.

Another of the multitude of things that sprouted from this work was our introduction to the research methodology referred to as *grounded theory*. This methodology seemed to resemble the particular research methods of this study.

Grounded theory has been defined as "an emergent research process with some similarities to action research" (Dick, 2002, Abstract section, para. 2). It has to do with the way participants see, view, and construct their social realities. Grounded theory tries to discover theories or propositions from the collected and analyzed data (Rodriguez, Gil, & García, 1999). Richards (2003, p. 13) identifies grounded theory as one of the "seven core traditions" in qualitative research that are used in language research. In this tradition, data is gathered by means of observations, interviews, recordings and documents. Rather than starting with a theory, researchers discover a theory through analysis of the collected data (Richards, 2003, p. 16-17).

With this research methodology, the researcher has a "research situation" (Dick, 2002, Overview section, para. 1). Our situation involved a

group of in-service EFL teachers from public (government) institutions. As mentioned above, there were sixteen subjects, eight women and eight men. Eight of the sixteen were English language teachers from *Preparatorias* (*Prepas*-high schools) associated with a state university, and eight were English language teachers from the various language schools at university level (see Appendix One).

This research situation emerged from two other sources. One, as mentioned in the first paragraph, was a group of in-service teachers studying their BA in English language teaching. The other was a study which used questionnaires to collect information from university English language teachers about their professional development (Brenes & Encinas, 2003). From these two sources, we began to wonder about the relationship between training and professional development of these teachers in relation to our observation that some teachers seem to move into active participation in the profession and others don't.

Dick (2002) says that in grounded theory the data collected would illuminate a theory. Garcia et. al. (1999) identify four stages to grounded theory: 1) comparison of data, 2) placing data in categories, 3) identification of the theory that emerges, and 4) producing the theory. The data collected from the Brenes and Encinas study coupled with our ideas and questions associated with the in-service teachers, brought up the idea of career cycles.

Interestingly, some of the results of the questionnaires led to two further research issues. Seventy EFL teachers in the Brenes and Encinas study were sent questionnaires. Approximately 25% of the teachers responded, and surprisingly 70% of the respondents were men, while about 70% of the faculty are women.

The low percentage of respondents and the responses to the initial questionnaire led to oral interviews with some of the teachers from the study, teachers from various high schools associated with a university, and teachers from other language schools within the university system. We did the interviews together alternating between being the interviewer and the observer. The interviews were tape recorded and later transcribed by 8<sup>th</sup> semester English language pre-service teacher trainees.

The interviews consisted of four open-ended questions:

- 1) What do you need to do to become a better teacher?
- 2) What kind of support for your professional development do you have at the university?
- 3) What effect has training had in your life?
- 4) Can you detect stages or cycles in your professional development? Describe.

"Constant comparison is the heart of the process" of grounded theory data analysis (Dick, 2002, Overview section, para. 2). The comparison of

questionnaires and observations of the BA teachers led to the formulation of the above questions. We listened to the interviews over and over, and compared them to the questionnaires. As we listened, we identified emergent themes or categories related to the “research situation.” This process of categorizing is also a feature of grounded theory. This process allows the researcher to decide “what data to collect next and where to find them, in order to develop [the] theory as it emerges” (Glaser and Strauss, in Richards, 2003, p. 277). So the collection of the data is controlled by the emerging theory.

## Results

What was noticed at the end of our data collection were three main areas associated with the situation:

1. Career stages/cycles
2. Helplessness which builds a kind of *ceiling* beyond which people cannot or think they cannot move for the following reasons:
  - a. A lack of confidence in their English language ability
  - b. Political reasons
  - c. Organizational/institutional reasons
  - d. Economic reasons
  - e. Family obligations
3. The construction of reality being based on the individual’s development stage/cycle.

Each one of these areas needs more study to form it into a theory.

### 1. Career Stages/Cycles

Eight of the sixteen teachers interviewed identified some kind of stages/cycles in their professions:

1. Less flexible – more flexible (one respondent)
2. Before COTE – after COTE (*Certificate for Overseas Teachers of English*) (two respondents)
3. More tolerant –less tolerant (two respondents)
4. Working at the ANGLO (*Anglo-Mexicano de Cultura*) – working at the CELE (*Centro de Lenguas Extranjeras*) (one respondent)

Two teachers articulated their distinct stages/cycles in detail. One (No. 3 see Appendix One) of the teachers identified the following stages:

1. I taught how I was taught
2. Small changes
3. More security and confidence in teaching
4. Exposure to other teaching situations
5. Period of working as the director of the university language school

One teacher (No. 9, see Appendix One) identified four developmental stages (see Appendix Two for full transcript):

1. The first stage was survival...you are worried about the lessons... you are so focused into teaching.
2. ...you attend congresses just to find some little formula, some kind of recipe to bring into your classroom on Monday morning....You share ideas, you go together to the congresses and you start to get a real feel and a good love for the profession.
3. Then there is the third stage when you decide that whatever you are doing doesn't seem to be enough and then you attend the congresses and then you see that this is the same thing, like I've been there before....you start presenting at national congresses....
4. The fourth stage is when you become much more "famous" and much more professional and you start publishing things...because publishing is a big thing.

## **2. Helplessness**

Twelve of the sixteen teachers expressed some kind of helplessness and frustration in their professional development. They were related to the five stages above. One typical response was (No. 8, see Appendix One):

I feel that this is a profession is badly paid (has a low salary compared with the amount of work) ... We work very hard to make the students acquire the language...for us it's difficult to make activities that make the students use the language.

First of all, I have a lot of work and long work hours. This doesn't allow me to study a master's or to take other courses. I would like to participate in an exchange program. I'm always looking for opportunities for this.

In the first place it's necessary to improve our language ability [*in English*]. I feel like we lack in that area. In addition to this, I've ever had the chance to go abroad (even though I've worked hard and made sacrifices at studying English, I still feel that I lack ability in this area).

## **3. The Construction of Reality**

We believe, based on our interviews, that the way teachers talk about their professional lives reflects where they are in their development (what stage/cycle). Their reality or conception of the profession is seen through a special *stage/cycle lens*. For example, two of the teachers had three years experience teaching (Nos. 15 and 16). Their major concern was their own proficiency in the target language, getting through a lesson, and managing

their classes, to name a few things. Professional development wasn't an immediate issue or concern to them.

Two other teachers (Nos. 2 and 3) had very similar work histories, social/economic backgrounds, and personal lives. However their perceptions of the profession were very different. Number 3, as cited above in the "career stages/cycles" section, was able to identify stages/cycles where there was growth and change. The respondent was able to project into the future, predicting that a move into research and publishing. The overall attitude was more reflective and positive than teacher Number 2.

Teacher Number 2 spent a lot of time talking about immediate concerns. This included certain immediate elements of the profession like the textbook selection. This teacher wasn't able to identify any stages although it was noted that there was a difference between teaching practice now and teaching practice at the beginning of the career, the differences mainly having to do with the increase of knowledge. The teacher didn't articulate anything about the future as a teacher or a professional.

While these two teachers' comments and attitudes are not statistically significant, we think that the differences between them have to do with the stage/cycle that they are in. For a variety of reasons, teacher Number 2 has not moved past an earlier developmental stage/cycle.

Early accounts of career stages/cycles were regarded as products of years in service. However, we believe the results may indicate that actual years are only roughly associated with developmental stages/cycles. The interviews of the present study, while limited, seem to indicate that teachers do not progress beyond a certain stage/cycle because of the internal and external, personal and professional influences identified in item No. 2 above (Helplessness). This is also corroborated in the research done by Goodson and Cole (1994) among others.

## **Conclusions**

In summary, the data seem to show a very complex picture in which teachers personal development cycles are influenced by their personal and organizational environments even more than by their age and years of experience (Fessler, 1995). It also might show that a possibly significant number of these teachers have or have had feelings of helplessness and frustration. The data in this study seem to indicate that teachers construct their conception of the profession and their professional development depending on their development cycle (Freeman, 1993).

We feel that we have come to a better understanding which leads to better practice. This also leads to the following emergent themes for further research.

One of the most surprising things that has emerged from this small

work is the number of areas of further study. Rather than answer questions, the work has raised more. Below are the areas that we consider as emerging from the initial questions of teacher development:

- The differences in career cycles between women and men
- Written versus oral data collection in Mexican contexts
- The effects of *mentoring* people to develop themselves
- What happens to people who are left out of development opportunities
- The personal effects on development, reflection or self-awareness from participating in *teachers' lives* interviews
- Collaborative research
- The impact that teachers feeling helplessness has on their institution's development and vice versa

Most importantly through the literature research, we came across the concept of communities of practice. What is happening in teacher development now is this concept of working together, voluntarily, on a project that has some kind of product, but also that builds collaboration and community between people and fosters talk and communal reflection on one's practice (Freeman, 1996). This concept is one that will be at the center of our future work.

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### Appendix One – Interview Participants

	Sex	Years in teaching	School	Initial training	Professional degree
1.	F	27	University	Teaching	Licenciatura (BA/S)
2.	M	27	University	Unknown	--
3.	M	23	University	Psychology/teaching	Masters-edu mgmt*
4.	M	23	University	Teaching	Masters EYL
5.	M	20	Prepa	Biology	Masters in Education*
6.	M	16	University	Teaching	Licenciatura (BA/S) *
7.	F	15	University	Medicine	Licenciatura (BA/S)
8.	F	15	Prepa	Teaching	Licenciatura (BA/S)
9.	M	10	University	Teaching	Masters TESOL
10.	F	10	Prepa	Teaching	Licenciatura (BA/S)
11.	M	9	Prepa	Political science	Licenciatura (BA/S)
12.	F	7	Prepa	Teaching	Licenciatura (BA/S)
13.	M	7	Prepa	Teaching	Licenciatura (BA/S)
14.	F	6	Prepa	Teaching	Licenciatura (BA/S)
15.	F	3	University	Teaching	Licenciatura (BA/S)
16.	F	3	Prepa	Physics	Licenciatura (BA/S)

BA/S = Bachelor's in Arts or Sciences

EYL= English for Young Learners

\* In progress

## Appendix Two – Four stages full transcript

**[The following is a response given in English to the question: Can you detect stages or cycles in your professional development?]**

1. When I just graduated and I had a lot of theory ...My main concern was to survive...to get students in my classes and if they came they didn't care...there was a very difficult time when I just wanted to quit and become a translator or something. But then at the end I found ways to get along with the students and attract them to my lessons. The first stage was survival...you are worried about the lessons... you are so focused into teaching...
2. ...and you attend congresses just to find some little formula, some kind of recipe to bring into your classroom on Monday morning. So you get into that and then you start knowing other teachers like you and talking with them, you share ideas you go together to the congresses and you start to get a real feel and a good love for the profession.
3. Then there is the third stage when you decide that whatever you are doing doesn't seem to be enough and then you attend the congresses and then you see that this is the same thing, like I've been there before. This is nothing new, oh no, again vocabulary, oh no, again learning styles. And then you decide its time to move on, and I think a lot of teachers remain in this second stage for a long time, but if you don't stay there you will look for ways to move up in the profession, the time when you enter a graduate program a masters or something else. And you start worrying about not only going to the congresses to listen to the speakers but you actually want to say something. So this is the stage when you achieve...you actually, ahhh, and you become a more professional teacher with theory behind you are not only worried about how am I going to do this little activity but you're worried about what are the theoretical implications behind this activity... you know the foundations and things and you start producing.. you start presenting at national congresses..
4. The fourth stage is when you become much more "famous" and much more professional and you start publishing things. Because publishing is a big thing ... you can be presenting a thousand things but there is something I realised just this time when I had to present for my PROMEP thing that I had directed 32 theses and 2 MA theses and I had presented in 18 congresses international and national but they didn't care about that all they asked is How many books have you published? And they looking at academic production and they were looking at academic production and they had yes, you know, presentations at congresses, developing material but the moment you entered that into the online application they didn't count at all. It was as if you were entering nothing... so, what really counts is what

they called a quality product, book, a chapter in a book and a referred article. If it's just an article it doesn't count. So I entered a thousand things and I had a zero. So, right now I'm publishing things. I'm ready to move on.

# Language Awareness Work on an INSET Course: A Case Study

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## Introduction

Anyone who has created a teacher training course, whether pre-service (PRESET) or in-service (INSET), will recognise the challenge of deciding on course content. Only so much can be covered in a 150 or 300 hour course, and overfilling a programme is likely to see less learning occur among trainees, as opposed to more. As the area of language teaching expands and diversifies, there is an increasing number of topics which warrant inclusion, task-based learning and content-based instruction are but two examples. The course designer is left with the dilemma of what to include and what to exclude.

When preparing training programmes for language teachers, I feel strongly that we should not overlook the need to develop trainees' ability to analyse and understand the English language, which is, after all, our subject matter. This has traditionally been done by covering a limited number of key areas of grammar to ensure that trainees can demonstrate reasonable competence in this aspect of teaching. In this paper I demonstrate an alternative approach which is more concerned with helping trainees develop the skill of analysing language rather than seeing them accrue a number of discrete, and diverse, rules. Building on the work of Wright & Bolitho (1993), I shall refer to a language awareness session I conducted with a COTE (Certificate for Overseas Teachers for English) group. I will outline the tasks the trainees worked on and refer to the rationale that underpinned them. I will end by evaluating the session and highlight ways in which it could be modified in the future.

## Subject Knowledge and Teacher Education

Thornbury (1997) states that "it would appear to be axiomatic that knowledge of subject matter is a prerequisite for effective teaching" (p. xi) and indeed it is hard to disagree with this view. While the emergence of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) saw less emphasis placed on questions of language form, and more on issues of meaning, the downgrading of grammar has now been re-evaluated. Language is certainly a tool of communication, but language accuracy can help us refine messages and communicate more effectively. The present orthodoxy is to have students study language in context (see Willis 1996 for her outline of task-based learning as an example) and in all its complexity. Clearly, English teachers still require a sound understanding of the language we teach in order to achieve this.

## A Product Approach to Subject Knowledge

The traditional approach to the treatment of subject knowledge, and one that is by no means discontinued, is to see grammar (and phonology) presented as a body of knowledge to be learnt by novice teachers. Trainees are guided through activities intended to provide them with an understanding of a number of key grammar rules. An example follows:

**Table 1. A Product-Oriented Worksheet**

Look at the sentences below. They all include an *if clause*, but what is the difference in meaning between the two sentences in each pair?

1. If you help me with my homework, I'll buy you a coffee.
2. If she studied more, she'd get better grades.
  
3. If I were you, I'd accept the offer.
4. If we go early, we can get the best seats.

What different tenses/verb forms do these sentences contain?

If trainees are provided with a series of such activities, they will be better armed to teach a number of tenses and verb forms that regularly occur in course books. Whilst this is valuable, we need to be realistic and recognise that we are providing them with the briefest snapshot of English grammar. Given that the time available to dedicate to grammar is limited, there will be extensive areas of English grammar that trainees will not know about, and crucially, they will not have the necessary tools to discover this knowledge for themselves subsequent to their course.

The type of activity above also reflects a view of language that is being increasingly challenged. Kerr (1996, p. 95) outlines these beliefs and comments upon them as follows:

- *Grammar is at the centre of language.* Several contend that it is lexis that truly characterises the nature of a language (for example Lewis, 1993).
- *Grammar is a body of finite rules that needs to be learnt through controlled practice.* Language learning is more widely perceived now as a matter of problem solving. Guiding students through meaning based tasks is more productive than providing decontextualised controlled practice (Skehan, 1996).
- *Grammar operates at sentence-level.* This linguistic description of language is increasingly being abandoned for a discourse view of language (for example McCarthy, 2001). What students need is to see language in texts, not in sentences invented for teaching purposes.

- *The most important element of grammar is the verb phrase.* This reflects the influence linguistic description has had on language teaching, but it fails to recognise the importance of the noun phrase in language use.

So, it is fair to say that the product-oriented approach exemplified in Table One has important shortcomings. I will now outline an alternative process-oriented approach that I believe is of greater benefit to trainees.

### **A Process Approach to Subject Knowledge**

Language Awareness (LA) is an approach to the analysis and study of language that has received increasing attention in the professional literature (see for example Arndt, Harvey & Nuttall, 2000; Bolitho & Tomlinson, 1995; Bolitho & Wright, 1993; Borg, 1994; Thornbury, 1997). Hales (1997) defines language awareness as 'a sensitivity to grammatical, lexical or phonological features, and the effect on meaning brought about by the use of different forms' (p. 217).

In the context of language-oriented work on teacher training courses, LA focuses on "what teachers need to do, not the rules they need to learn" (Kerr, 1996, p. 97). Thus, rather than trying to impart a segment of subject knowledge, trainees are exposed to the processes involved in investigating language. This involves working with language data (texts, etc.) and carrying out such tasks as classifying, comparing, contrasting, judging grammaticality and so on. The knowledge that is acquired is not an end in itself. The concern is to help trainees develop the tools and strategies required for later independent study of language. Teachers with an enhanced sensitivity to language are better armed to solve a range of pedagogical problems such as planning lessons, analysing student language problems, presenting language and the like. Here we have the acquisition of subject knowledge addressed through a *process* approach.

In order to illustrate how language awareness work could be included in a teacher training programme, I will make reference to work I conducted with a group of teachers studying in a COTE course.

### **The Background**

COTE is an early INSET course which forms part of the UCLES (University of Cambridge Local Examination Syndicate) teacher education scheme. The group I was working with was studying at the Anglo Mexican Foundation (Puebla). It consisted of 9 trainees, ranging in age from mid-20's to mid-40's. Whilst one trainee had only 1 year of experience, and another 15 years, the majority of the group had been teaching for between 4 and 6 years. Their teaching contexts varied widely, and included private language institutes, a state secondary school and private company teaching.

This group consisted of non-native speakers with an advanced level of English. At the time of the 4-hour session they had taken 30 hours of their 150 hour course. Relevant recent work included lesson planning and theories of learning and acquisition. The COTE syllabus makes the following specifications regarding knowledge of the language system:

Candidates should demonstrate a familiarity with and an understanding of the relationship between form, meaning and function, the simplest patterns of the noun group, verb group and clause, as set out in any standard modern reference grammar of contemporary English. (UCLES 1994: unnumbered)

### **The Session**

In referring to the language awareness session, I shall provide a breakdown of the various tasks the group performed. Besides outlining procedures, I will also expand on my rationale. I will also comment on how trainees reacted to the tasks.

### **Task 1. Working with Trainees' Constructs**

<i><b>Objective</b></i>	<i><b>Procedure</b></i>
Make trainees' beliefs about the English language more explicit.	Trainees think of an aspect of the English language which is difficult for Mexican Ss.

The intention of this opening activity was to make trainees' tacit beliefs about the nature of the English language more explicit and orientate them towards the goal of the session. Edge (1988) describes how experiences of learning and using the language informs our view as teachers of English, so I was drawing upon rich and diverse personal experience.

The areas the group mentioned included passive voice (mentioned twice) and reported speech, with only one reference to lexis (lend & borrow). When I mentioned that our language awareness work was focused on the definite and indefinite article, there was some, but by no means universal recognition that this too causes difficulties for students. During the session, those who harboured doubts as to its complexities appeared to moderate their view.

### **Task 2. Working with a Text**

<i><b>Objective</b></i>	<i><b>Procedure</b></i>
Prepare for new learning; stimulate schema; focus attentional resources	Introduce text (Appendix 1), elicit ideas from title; pre-teach difficult lexis. Set gist question: Who are 'the Romans'?
Stimulate existing knowledge of target language	In pairs, Ts complete sorting task.

I designed a task based on the definite/indefinite article for several reasons. Firstly, according to *Cobuild* (in Willis, 1996, p. 171) articles are amongst the most commonly occurring words in English, *the* and *a* placed first and third respectively in the 'Top 200 Words of Spoken English'. Rules of usage are also complex; Swan (1995) dedicates 15 pages to articles. Given these complexities, articles appear to be better addressed through an inductive awareness raising approach rather than through teacher-led deductive work.

The text I used with trainees can be found in Appendix 1. I felt that working with a text would contextualise language study and thereby make it more meaningful. In addition, articles operate at the level of discourse rather than at sentence level, and so are best studied by looking at longer stretches of language. My reason for pre-teaching difficult vocabulary was to allow trainees to focus their attentional resources (Skehan, 1996) on the target language, and avoid the unwanted distraction of unfamiliar lexis.

Trainees were asked to complete the sorting task, categorising the articles in the text into 'specific', 'definite/indefinite' and 'generic' reference. The complexity of the task ensured trainees genuinely approached the text as learners of English, as opposed to being required to take on the role of their less proficient students.

As with any learning task, the activity tended to suit particular types of learners (the more analytical) more than others. Some appeared to become a little disheartened when they failed to make rapid progress through the classification. In retrospect, the use of grammatical terminology, such as 'specific', 'definite/indefinite' and 'generic', at the beginning of the task was perhaps unhelpful. These terms could have been paraphrased for trainees. Borg (1998) has researched how teachers' use of terminology impacts upon learners, and trainers need to be equally aware of when, and when not to turn to metalanguage in the training room.

Selecting an example of the noun phrase for LA work helped trainees see that grammar cannot be simply equated with verb forms. Furthermore, having trainees work with language at the discourse level, before moving on to the study of sentences, more closely replicated the nature of language acquisition (Little & Singleton, 1991), a point they recognised themselves.

### Task 3. Moving Towards Understanding

<b>Objective</b>	<b>Procedure</b>
Provide 'closure' on sorting task.	With group, trainer sets out agreed classification.
Consolidate and refine new knowledge. Familiarise trainees with reference material	Trainees consult grammar reference material to check hypotheses developed and note down 'rules of thumb'.

I feel it is very important to be sensitive to trainees' natural desire for closure after the openness that normally accompanies LA work. My interest was in establishing an agreed classification of article use (See Appendix 2 for the key). Not surprisingly given the complexity of the article, there was some disagreement. Some trainees saw the second definite article in the phrase *The might of the Roman legions (line 2)* as generic reference, others as specific and definite. I pointed out that both interpretations were valid and mentioned that when doing LA work we have to accept that language cannot always be easily classified, a view expressed by Swan (2001), who commented that:

All languages have areas that are inherently complex and messy, and which refuse to be described clearly and economically...The reason why teachers think the English tense system, or article systems, for instance, are complicated and difficult to teach is-quite simply-that they are (p. 182).

Having trainees refer to pedagogical data sources, such as grammar reference books, is instructive as they have the opportunity to become familiar with the reference material and the way it is organised. Predictably trainees found the task of designing pedagogic rules challenging, initial attempts being too imprecise (e.g. a noun referred to a second time becomes definite). Thornbury (1999, p. 32) states rules should be clear, simple, truthful, indicate the limits of the rule, and relate to concepts students are familiar with. When considering the complexity of article use, satisfying each criterion is no small task. I believe that it is helpful to expose trainees to this reality rather than suggesting simple explanations can always be found if only we can obtain the correct grammar book.

#### Task 4. Reflection and Transfer

<b>Objective</b>	<b>Procedure</b>
Consider transfer value of LA work.	Trainees reflect on process undergone & discuss applicability to their teaching.

Using oral recall, trainees retraced their steps and began to consider the thinking that lay behind the activities. They talked about the process they passed through, engaged in debate, clarified their perceptions and carried out a deeper evaluation of LA work.

A potential danger of any language work on teacher training courses is that trainees see it as interesting and useful for their own language learning, but fail to see that it represents an innovation that could be introduced in their own teaching. The group raised doubts as to the length of time LA activities take, especially when compared to the apparent directness offered by deductive teaching methods. The suitability of LA work at elementary levels was another concern. Despite these stated reservations, the fact that trainees engaged in such 'articulation' (Freeman,

1996), with conscious introspection of teaching practices was a sign that they were involved in a deep consideration of the issues. By the end of the discussion, all trainees showed a willingness to experiment with LA. Given that I was dealing with very new, and potentially destabilising material, this was a more than satisfying start.

### Task 5. Designing LA Tasks

<b>Objective</b>	<b>Procedure</b>
Facilitate transfer.	Using the dialogue in Appendix 3, trainees work in small groups to design an LA task to raise Ss awareness of embedded Qs.

This final activity required trainees to design an LA task, an activity referred to as 'optional' by Wright and Bolitho (1993, p. 297). I take the view that despite the usual time pressures on INSET courses, we cannot assume that the insights trainees acquire will result in innovations in teaching practice. In addition, asking trainees to produce an LA task should give them a more profound understanding of the principles that underlie the approach. Furthermore, it provides practice in designing tasks that are interesting, relevant and pitched at the right level, all of which engage key teacher competences.

The dialogue was taken from *Interchange 2* (Richards, Hull & Proctor, 1995), a widely used course book which was known to the majority of the group. I hoped that by using this familiar source the design of an LA task would be more meaningful, with the link to everyday teaching being more overt. The dialogue includes a number of embedded questions, another complex area of English grammar apparently suited to inductive treatment.

The worksheets produced by trainees can be seen as the *product* to validate the *process* of awareness raising the group passed through. From a trainer perspective, it was very helpful to see trainees produce tasks, as when, for example, one pair began to prepare traditional direct/indirect question transformations, it was evident they had not grasped the essence of LA and needed reorientation. Lamb (1995) refers to the danger of trainees completely misinterpreting input on INSET courses, and asking trainees to create tasks was a very useful way to detect such problems.

Included in Appendix 3 there is an example of one of the group's work. The questions set help students notice salient aspects of embedded questions, particularly word order, and highlight their use as markers of social distance. Of course, we should not always expect to receive work of such good quality as learning how to use an LA approach is likely to take time. However, receiving this example of a well-designed LA task was personally very satisfying.

## Conclusion

In this paper I have outlined two approaches to the teaching of subject knowledge on both PRESET and INSET courses for English teachers. I have identified a number of limitations associated with a product approach and have described my attempts to incorporate process-oriented language work on a COTE course. This was focused more on developing trainees' ability to investigate language rather than to give them discrete pieces of knowledge to take away. The quality of the LA tasks produced indicates that trainees made important progress in seeing how they could use LA tasks in their own teaching. Whilst the activities focused only on the use of the article system, I feel it empowered trainees to independently investigate the language areas they highlighted in Task One of the session.

### Appendix 1. The Language Awareness Worksheet.

#### 'Romans' lay siege to house by Simon de Bruxelles

Michael Maltin does not need to see the film *Gladiator* to appreciate the might of the Roman legions. He has experienced it at first hand.

Mr Maltin, 80, flew fighters during the Second World War but nothing prepared him for bombardment by a Roman siege machine as he sat in his garden.

(5)

A wooden ball the size of a grapefruit flew more than 150 yards through the air and scored a direct hit on his roof, smashing through to the attic.

The weapon was fired by the Ermine Street Guard who re-enact Roman battles. They were staging a fundraising display in the Gloucestershire village of Woodchester.

(10)

Mr. Martin's wife said the ball was caught by a gust of wind. 'I'm not upset about it at all. In fact, I thought it was a superb display and what happened here was the highlight of the day'.

(taken from the *Times*, 14 June 2000)

#### The Definite and Indefinite Article

Read this newspaper article and focus on how the definite (the) and indefinite (a) article are used.

Classify each use into one of the following categories:

1. Specific and definite reference
2. Specific and indefinite reference
3. Generic reference (to a class of thing)

For example in line 1 the film *Gladiator* should go into category 1.

Then look at the examples of definite reference. Is it definite because:

1. There's only one of the thing referred to (it's unique)?
2. The thing is being referred to for a second time?

## Appendix 2. The Answer Key

### Classification

Line	Use
1	Definite specific reference to a count noun
1	Definite specific reference to a count noun
2	Definite specific reference to a count noun
3	Unique reference/proper noun with phrasal definite article
4	Indefinite specific reference to a count noun
6	Indefinite specific reference to a count noun (ball)
6	Definite specific reference to a count noun
6	Generic reference to a count noun (grapefruit)
7	Definite reference to a non-count noun (ie. definite through shared knowledge)
7	Indefinite specific reference to a count noun
7	Unique reference (i.e. there's only one attic in the house)
8	Definite specific reference to a count noun mentioned initially in line 4 (siege machine-weapon)
8	Unique reference/Premodified proper noun
9	Indefinite specific reference to a count noun
9	Unique reference/Premodified proper noun
11	Definite specific reference to a count noun mentioned initially in line 6 (ball)
11	Indefinite specific reference to a singular count noun
12	Indefinite specific reference to a singular count noun
13	Unique reference (there can only be one highlight in this context)
13	Definite specific reference to a count noun

### The Nature of 'Definiteness'

All the definite nouns fall into the first category, except those on lines 8 & 11, which become definite through second mention.

### Appendix 3. LA Worksheet Produced by Trainees

Read the following conversation.

- A: Excuse me, officer. could you tell me how often the number 6 bus comes?  
B: You just missed it ma'am, but there's another one in half an hour.  
A: Oh no! Then could you tell me where Adam Street is?  
B: Two blocks east and one block north, ma'am.  
A: Thank you. And just one more thing. Do you know where the nearest restroom is?  
B: Right behind you ma'am. See that sign?  
A: Oh! Thanks a lot.

Look carefully at the questions speaker A asks.

- (1) What phrases does she use to introduce her questions?
- (2) After the question word, is the word order affirmative, or interrogative?
- (3) What is a more direct way of asking these questions?
- (4) Why do you think she chose to ask her questions in this less direct way?

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# Syllabus Design in Teacher Education

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This paper reports on the process of designing a teacher education course offered by the British Council Mexico for teachers working in English/Spanish bilingual schools in Mexico. The author looks at the rationale and problems of attempting to create a coherent teacher education course and suggests ways of using the syllabus document to create a course that displays an overall relationship between the objectives, content and methodology used.

## The Original Course

In September 1995 a course for teachers in bilingual schools was offered for the first time in Guadalajara under the auspices of the British Council to be given by three consultants of the British Council Mexico. This course will be discussed in sections, below.

## Rationale and Objectives

"Every course should have a rationale" (Wallace, 1991, p. 141), which Wallace goes on to define as, "a reasoned explanation of what kind of course it is." (ibid). As far as the type of course is concerned, it was planned to be an in-service training course for teachers working in bilingual schools. The target population was teachers who already had teaching experience, but who needed some specialisation in bilingual education, that is, teachers at schools that were planning to, or were already using English as the medium of instruction for some of their content area classes. It was intended to attract both English language teachers in this kind of institution as well as content area teachers who spoke English, but did not necessarily have experience or expertise in giving their subject in a language which was not the learner's first language. The idea for such a course came about in response to the tremendous increase in the number of schools offering subject area in English and the concern expressed by many teachers to the course tutors that they did not feel qualified to be implementing the programmes that their directors were demanding of them.

The objectives of the original course were never overtly stated except in a broad aim written in a pamphlet produced to promote the course which stated the objective thus, "this course offers a specialization for teachers involved in bilingual education". The pamphlet went on to describe the five main content areas of the course:

- I Classroom management
- II Language acquisition
- III Research into bilingual education
- IV Communicative techniques

## V Teaching content in English (1995, The British Council Mexico/Colegio Inglés Hidalgo)

From this it should be clear that the objectives included the acquisition of both theoretical knowledge (II and III in particular) and practical techniques (I, IV, and V in particular) aiming to cater to the English language teacher and the subject teacher as well as administrators interested in knowing more about the reasoning behind educating learners in more than one language.

### *Selection Procedure*

All prospective trainees were interviewed and asked to fill in a form about their education and experience. Apart from providing information about the teacher's experience and motivation, the form also acted as a needs analysis, but unfortunately due to time constraints the information was scarcely referred to when drawing up the syllabus.

### *Assessment Methods*

It was decided that the evaluation procedure for the course should be as far as possible a developmental one with no grades being awarded, but rather feedback being given which was designed to help learners to improve in their areas of weakness. The idea was very much that "assessment can play a positive role in a teacher education course" (Wallace, 1991, p. 126). Basically, assessment was based on completion of these four areas:

1. A portfolio of six pieces of course work which ranged from noticing errors children made in language acquisition to writing lesson plans for teaching specific types of lessons. The participants could choose their own pieces of work for assessment and were free to submit any piece of work as many times as they wished to receive feedback.
2. Four observations, which included a self-observation, a peer observation, a learner observation and an observation carried out by a tutor. They were given guidelines and forms to fill out for all of these tasks.
3. The development of a piece of original teaching material together with the rationale for its use.
4. The design of an evaluation instrument along with the rationale.

### **Syllabus Design**

Before examining and critiquing the first version of the syllabus in some depth I would like to first investigate some of the factors to be taken into consideration when designing a course and, more specifically, a teacher education course. By syllabus here, I am referring to some kind of programme that lays out what is to be taught during a course, but exactly what that programme should contain will be discussed later.

### *Process versus Product-Oriented Syllabuses*

Firstly, there is an important distinction to be made between these two types of syllabus orientation. Based on Nunan (1988), a product approach to syllabus design means that the designer focuses on the end product of the syllabus. That is, s/he has objectives which refer to what the participants should know or should be able to do at the end of the course. The usual method for assessing such a course is a comprehensive test of what has been taught throughout the course at the end of the course, success in the test demonstrating the success of the learner and of the course. This objectives or ends-means model has been much criticised, notably by Stenhouse (1975) and his followers. It is argued that by specifying in advance the required outcomes of the course, the course designer is excluding those who are directly involved in the learning process, namely those who are taking the course and as such the ends-means model is authoritarian and does not take into account the unpredictability of the classroom situation (see also Prabhu, 1992).

Process-oriented approaches to syllabus design challenge this objectives approach and instead place the focus on the learning process. Instead of looking at the outcomes of a course before the course begins, the process-oriented syllabus designer asks her/himself what the processes are that would cause the learner to acquire the knowledge and skills s/he needs and wants from the course. The ensuing syllabus is a series of activities that will cause the learner to go through these processes.

### *The Negotiated Syllabus*

The negotiated syllabus is one particular type of process-oriented syllabus. As the name suggests, this type of syllabus is drawn up after negotiation with the course participants and, the 'instructor' instead of being the one who imposes the course content becomes just one more voice in the decisions about what should be included in the course. This model has the obvious advantage that it takes into consideration the participants' individual needs and tailors the course to meet those needs, but has the disadvantage that it is far more difficult for the course designer in that s/he cannot arrive on the first day of class with her/his pre-packaged 'course', but must first discuss this with the participants and be willing to make changes throughout the duration of the course, perhaps even disagreeing with what it is the participants feel they need from the course.

### *Teacher Training Course Design*

Realistically, it is difficult to develop and promote a teacher education course designed wholly on a negotiated basis when participants are not familiar with this type of approach and, from a syllabus designer's point of view, there are clearly areas of a teacher education course that one is able to predict and specify before the course begins (in the case of the course for

bilingual school teachers, techniques for teaching content area in English, types of bilingual programs and bilingualism, etc). It may be possible and desirable to have at least one section of such a course open to negotiation with the participants or do as Littlejohn (1995) suggests and prepare participants for a negotiated syllabus by at first giving them just one section that they can negotiate leading up to a totally learner-centred curriculum later. Whether such an approach is practical in a short one-off course, like the one I'm describing, must be questioned.

Wallace's 1995 'Teacher Training Descriptor' provides, I feel, a very good starting point for the kinds of issues that need to be taken into consideration when designing a teacher training course (see Figure 1).

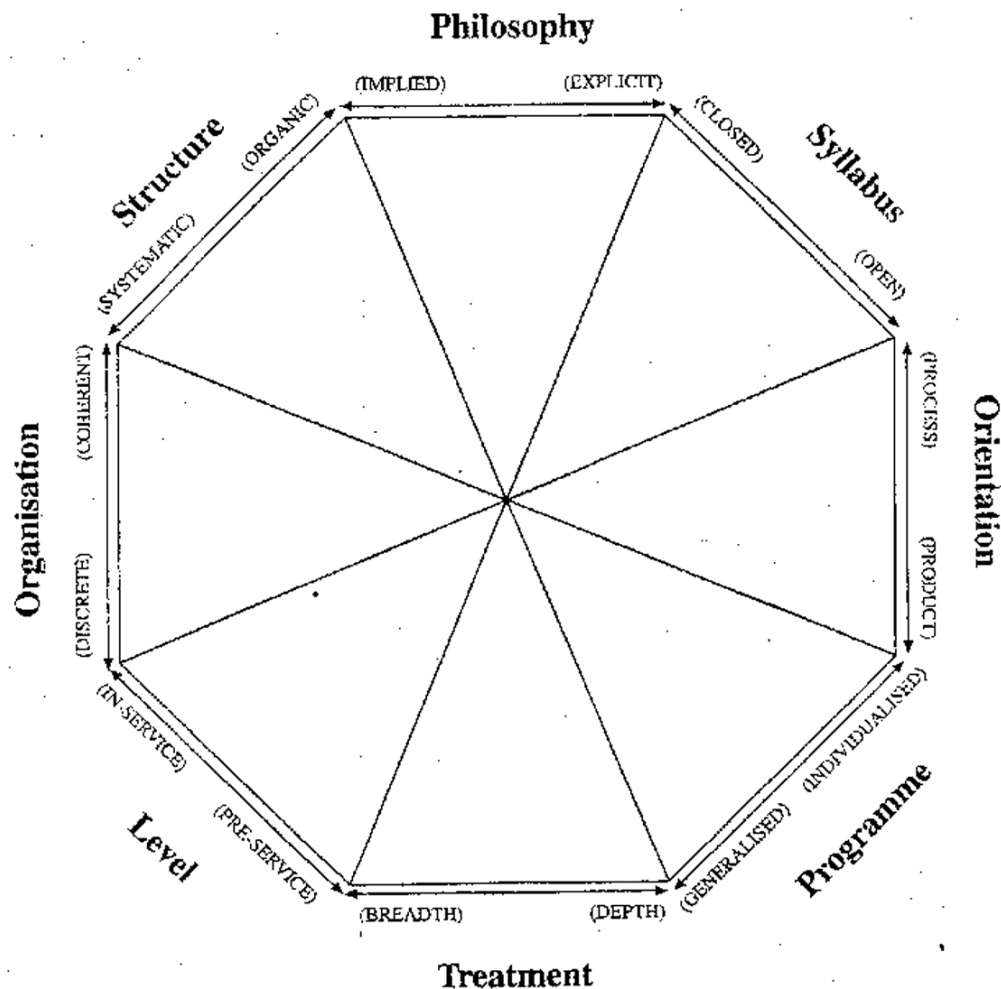


Figure 1. Teacher Training Descriptor (Wallace, 1995)

Firstly, the course designer has to take into consideration the philosophy underlying the course and how explicit s/he is going to state this. Secondly, s/he has to consider how much of the syllabus is decided (closed) and how much is open to negotiation (open). This is obviously closely related to the third aspect which I have already discussed above; is

the orientation of the course towards a product or process-based approach? Another related issue is how generalised the course is to be, for example does the nature of the syllabus mean that it could be given anywhere in the world (such as the Cambridge ESOL COTE/ICELT syllabus, for example) or is it very much tailored to the individual needs of a specific group of participants or is it somewhere in-between, perhaps designed with a specific country in mind? What level of treatment are the content areas specified on the syllabus to receive? Does the course aim to cover a lot of material and ideas quite superficially or is it narrower in scope with more emphasis placed on detail and depth of understanding of fewer topics? On the question of level, Wallace's diagram illustrates a very important point, that all participants will probably be at different levels. Even if the course excludes pre-service teachers, in-service teachers all come to the classroom with varying degrees of experience, both in terms of time and variety. How is the course going to deal with this variation amongst participants? The next aspect Wallace mentions is that of whether the syllabus is to be made up of a series of 'discrete' topics or whether it is to have 'coherence' and to what degree. Wallace divides 'coherence' into 'synchronic coherence', which refers to how the presentation of different subjects complement each other in the sequence in which they are presented, and 'sequential coherence', which is in reference to how the same topic is developed throughout the course. The final point is that of the structure of the course, whether it is to be totally systematic or whether there is room to any degree for the course to grow in its own way as it progresses.

This returns once more to the question of open/closed and product vs. process approaches; there has to be a way to find a balance between creating a rigid course which is prescriptive in nature and contains little or no built-in flexibility and adaptability to the particular context, and starting a course with *no* structure and asking participants to design their own course. These, then, are the kinds of questions that course designers need to ask themselves when designing a teacher education course.

So, is a syllabus merely a list of content items to be taught in the course? Clearly, the answer is no if we look at Wallace's descriptor. A syllabus document will undoubtedly need to include more information than this if it is to have coherence.

### *The Protosyllabus versus the Pedagogical Syllabus*

Yalden (1987) makes an important distinction worth mentioning here. She talks about the "protosyllabus" and the "pedagogical" syllabus (p. 89). The protosyllabus is basically a description of the content to be covered while the pedagogical syllabus is a more detailed specification of the teaching, learning and testing approaches, including the materials to be used and the assessment instruments. This obviously has important implications for the relationship between content and methodology which will be discussed further later.

## Description and Evaluation of the Old Syllabus

I'd now like to look at the original course in terms of the process of designing, writing teaching and evaluating a 120-hour course for teachers teaching in Bilingual English-Spanish schools in Guadalajara.

### *Writing the Course*

Basically, each of the three instructors drew up a 'skeleton' suggested list of topics that we felt needed to be included and presented it to the other two instructors, between us deciding what needed to be added or taken away. We then chose the topics that we would be interested in teaching, based on our particular interests and areas of research and experience. We then put the topics in some kind of order according to the time that we had available on the dates of the course. The syllabus for the first part (approximately one third) of the course looked like this:

23rd September 1995	Introduction to the course Language Acquisition I
30th September 1995	Language Acquisition II Classroom Management
7th October 1995	Lesson Planning Instructions and Feedback
14th October 1995	Communicative Activities Listening Skills
21st October 1995	Error and Correction
28th October 1995	Second Language Acquisition
11th November 1995	Bilingual Program Models Teaching Reading
18th November 1995	Using Video Lesson Planning Workshop

Looking at the old syllabus critically, it was not so much a "statement of content which is used for the planning of a course" (Nunan, 1988, p. 6) as a series of discrete teacher training sessions. There was very little link made between the sessions except for the fact that some sessions had two parts, for example, Language Acquisition I and II. The absence of objectives was also noticeable as was the statement of any kind of explicit rationale or philosophy behind the course. In terms of the other factors mentioned in Wallace's descriptor, they are largely left to the discretion of the individual teacher due to the discrete nature of the syllabus, for example, how individualised and how organic the course could vary from session to session as would the breadth or depth of the material covered.

From the outset there was certainly no plan to have a part of the course open to negotiation, but in practice there were opportunities for the participants to express any particular needs or ideas for input.

### *Teaching the Course*

As already mentioned, the course was taught by three teachers, although a fourth teacher was invited to participate on two occasions, because none of the regular instructors were available on certain dates. This is clearly another problem of coherence as sessions were given by different instructors based primarily on availability.

### *How Did We Evaluate The Course?*

#### *Evaluation of Programmes*

##### *(i) Summative*

Summative evaluation is that kind of evaluation which is given at the end of the course and really looks back over the whole course and asks what the course was like. It is designed to gain either or both qualitative and quantitative data. At the end of the course a questionnaire was administered to participants with seven questions and space for comments in each of the four areas of content, methods, materials, schedule and the results were very positive from the eleven out of twelve participants who answered the questionnaire (they were asked to circle 1 (poor) -5 (excellent) and all circled 4 or 5 for each question). The question of how far this really reflects the opinion of the participants and how far they were saying what they thought we wanted to hear has to be taken into consideration. This is always a problem with participant-respondent questionnaires, which, of course, call for subjective opinions.

As for comments about the course, the factor that was mentioned by four participants was that the section on teaching content area in English should be expanded and improved, but apart from that there were no other comments voiced by more than one participant. The questionnaire and results can be seen in Appendix 1 and Appendix 2.

The instructors were also asked to write their reflections on the course in terms of what was good about the course and what aspects needed improvement. On the positive side it was felt that the group responded very well and there was good rapport among the participants and with the instructors, but on the improvements to be made side, it was felt that there was too much of a bias towards EFL (understandable considering the background of the instructors) and that EFL and ESL/Bilingual education were treated as separate entities rather than looking for ways to integrate the ideas from the two fields.

The instructors agreed that there was a lack of congruency and integration of ideas and reflections amongst us.

*(ii) Formative*

Formative evaluation asks what happens during the course. This was also carried out to some extent, but was of a very informal nature with instructors asking participants about anything they would like to change and making a couple of minor changes.

*(iii) Process*

Formative evaluation comes from the participants, but is basically designed for the implementers, whereas a process evaluation tends to be more participant-centred and asks them to focus more on themselves and what is happening to them as individuals while taking the course. There was really very little of this form of evaluation done on the course and it is something that was incorporated in the new syllabus. The arming of the portfolio was actually designed to act as a process evaluation for teachers. As already mentioned, the participants had the opportunity to repeat homework as many times as they wanted and, in theory, the putting together of their portfolio should have caused them to reflect on their development in the various areas. However, unfortunately, there was no time to actually sit down with participants and discuss their portfolios which really missed one of the vital stages of portfolio assessment.

Wallace has six points that he says should make up assessment and of those six points I feel the most important of these is the area of assessment as an "integrating device" (1991, p. 126). That is, Wallace asserts that assessment should help participants to make links between the different sections of the course.

*Lessons Learnt from the Old Syllabus*

The first problem was really that of defining clearly our objectives and philosophy for the course and arguably something about the methodology to be used, although as Nunan points out "some language specialists believe that syllabus and methodology should be kept separate" (1988, p. 6). A course such as this one needs to be more clearly defined in terms of its philosophy and aims and certainly needs to have been planned to some extent before the prospective participants are interviewed.

The above led to the main problem which was the area Wallace calls coherence. This is to be expected when three different instructors are giving the course, especially taking into consideration that we had little time for discussion of course content and methodology. In effect it turned out to be a series of discrete topics (no synchronic coherence), the only coherence really being that created by each individual instructor (some sequential coherence). We made it a rule to give a copy of our lesson plan and any materials used to the other instructors, but how far we consulted each other's work in the hope of creating links with what was to follow is questionable. This is where the importance of the syllabus itself comes through. The syllabus should be detailed enough to guarantee some degree

of coherence, but at the same time it should not be so rigid that teachers with different ideas and areas of expertise should not be able to follow it and have the freedom to include their own areas of interest. As Widdowson points out, the syllabus "...becomes a threat to learning when it is regarded as absolute rules for determining what is to be learned rather than points of reference from which bearings can be taken" (1984, p. 26 in Nunan, 1988, p. 6).

The new syllabus became then a detailed form of Yalden's (1987) protosyllabus, whereby the syllabus remains mainly a description of content, but includes more detail in terms of the topic areas and what the objectives for participants are.

### **The Newly-Designed Syllabus**

Drawing on the format used for the UCLES CTEFLA (1994) syllabus, which I feel represents a good compromise as regards the question of how far the syllabus should state the methodology, the new syllabus looks like this. The first part consists of the overall objectives of the course, each overall objective having a corresponding topic section in the syllabus overview and finally each topic section is developed to show what skills and knowledge the participants will be expected to develop.

#### *Objectives*

#### **OBJECTIVES**

The Bilingual School Teacher Training Course is designed to enable participants to:

1. Develop an awareness of how people learn languages and particularly a second language.
2. Develop an awareness of how people learn.
3. Develop an awareness of how using English as the medium of instruction in schools can affect language learning and learning content.
4. Develop their skills for effectively managing the English language teaching and content area classroom.
5. Develop familiarity with techniques used in the English language teaching classroom and their application to other subject areas taught in English.
6. Develop techniques for teaching learners academic subjects in a language which is not their first language.
7. Develop skills in designing materials and using and adapting resources that are available in order to teach English through content area.
8. Develop methods of assessment appropriate to the subject matter and techniques that they are using in class.

(The British Council, 2000)

Notice here the use of the term 'develop' for the objectives of the course, conveying the idea of the course as a 'process-oriented' syllabus rather than a 'product-oriented' one.

### *Breakdown of the Topics*

Each objective from the list of objectives above was then broken down into different topic areas. For example, Objective 1 was labelled Topic 1 Language Acquisition as shown below.

Topic 1: Language Acquisition  
 1.1 Theories of first language acquisition  
 1.2. Theories of second language acquisition  
 1.3. Factors that affect language learning  
 1.4. Language learning theories in the classroom  
 (The British Council, 2001)

The other objectives became topics 2-8 with each topic being outlined and divided into sub-sections.

### *Objectives of Each Topic*

Next the objectives are stated for each sub-section of each topic, so, for example, topic 1 looks like this:

#### **TOPIC 1 LANGUAGE ACQUISITION**

<b>CONTENT</b>	<b>OBJECTIVES</b>
1.1 Theories of first language acquisition	At the end of the course participants: are familiar with, and use terminology and ideas from different theories of first language acquisition
1.2 Theories of second language acquisition	are familiar with and use terminology and ideas from research into second language acquisition
1.3 The factors that affect language learning	are familiar with research into learning and some of the results as regards how languages are learnt
1.4 Language learning theories in the classroom  (The British Council, 2001)	are familiar with the ways language learning theories have been used in teaching and can develop their skills in applying some of the ideas in their own classroom

### *How Can Syllabus Design Help with Implementation?*

This created a fairly lengthy, detailed document. The next challenge was the implementation of the course using the syllabus document. Obviously, the simplest way for the syllabus to help with implementation would be to say that it should be followed as it is written in chronological order, but this obviously fails to take into account how many of the topics overlap and may belong in more than one topic area (for example, teaching learning strategies) and would not provide the links and interrelationships that are necessary.

However, by comparing the new syllabus with the original syllabus it is clear how the new syllabus helps with implementation and hopefully overcomes the largest problem, namely coherence, to a large extent. When planning the exact timetable of classes to be given, it is clear to both the instructor and the programmer where each particular session fits into the syllabus. It is even written on the timetable, for example,

Session 1

3.2 Bilingual Education in Mexico

3.1 ESL vs. EFL

4.3 Interaction patterns in the classroom

The numbers to the left refer to the number of the sub-section in the syllabus and allow the instructor and the participant to see clearly which objectives are being worked on, while still allowing for variety in the training room, in terms of the topics covered and methods used.

It is perfectly possible of course for one session to be working on more than one objective, and, by writing explicitly the number of the objective, full coverage of the objectives is ensured. It also allows links between topics to be established.

*The Relationship Between Content and Methodology*

"Failure to provide links between goals, content and learning activities can lead to a situation in which the desired outcomes of a programme are contradicted at the classroom level" (Nunan, 1988, p. 96). In the syllabus there is no actual mention or guidelines as regards methodology or learning activities; it is clearly a protosyllabus in Yalden's terms. However, it is clear that to some extent the objectives and the content must influence methodology. There will be of course some "received knowledge" (Wallace, 1991, p. 14), but this does not mean that the methodology should be one of "training as transmission" (Breen et al, 1989, p. 114). This is an in-service course and includes a fair bit of classroom observation so there will automatically be a lot of reference to "experiential knowledge" (Wallace, 1991, p. 15). The very wording of the general objectives of the course, 'develop an awareness', 'develop familiarity', 'develop skills' and so on, are already making some implications about the methodology to be used. This suggests a process approach whereby the participants will not be expected to 'gain' the knowledge in one go, but rather will be expected to, over time, adjust and refine their ideas through their learning experiences. For example, in section 4.5, Error correction, the objective is that "participants are aware of different techniques for correcting learners errors (both spoken and written) and have criteria for deciding which is the appropriate technique for each activity and classroom event." This implies that they be presented with alternatives (hopefully derived from their own experiences) and, through discussion and experimentation they will be able to make an assessment of these alternatives.

### *Assessment of the Course*

The evaluation section has been developed a little more according to the content of the syllabus. There should be some piece of work in the portfolio which can be seen as developing each one of the general aims as well as the observations which should be considered in light of the aims. However it is important in terms of coherence again, that "the assessment should ... act as an integrating device, serving to strengthen the overall coherence of the course." (Wallace, 1991, p. 126) The pieces of work will obviously vary due to the diverse nature of the content in terms of theoretical knowledge and practical skills to be developed.

### *Developmental Observation*

The observation form used by the tutor observer is a fairly flexible one and offers scope for a developmental approach. For example, teachers are given the opportunity to discuss and request that the observer looks at particular aspects of her/his teaching which also implies a pre-observation meeting. There are now two observations carried out by the instructors per participant to reinforce the idea of observation for developmental rather than assessment purposes.

### *Process Evaluation*

The training course or programme must include evaluation of its outcomes and effects. This will be most informative for trainers if it occurs during the process of training and if there is subsequent evaluation by the teachers in terms of what happens in their classrooms. (Breen et al, 1989, p. 135).

Perhaps the simplest and most effective way to implement process evaluation is to ask participants to keep a diary which the instructor can focus on a specific topic after every session with a few questions. For example, after a session on adapting materials for second language learners, participants are asked to record in their diary for that week how they adapted materials and how this worked. In this way, participants are reflecting on their teaching performance and are creating links between what they are seeing in class and their teaching, hopefully becoming more aware of particular aspects and developing in this area.

The final process evaluation of the course comes from the instructors. We agreed that we would spend more time observing each other and trying to make this course into a "coherent training experience" (Wallace, 1991, p. 153). The existence of a planned syllabus document has certainly helped to this end and the course has been given now seven times.

As a final reflection I should like to add that, not only is syllabus design useful for the general development of a training course, but for the designer(s) it is an excellent way to create awareness and involvement in

the teaching of the course. This is a very strong argument for teachers and teacher trainers to be involved in syllabus design and syllabus modification of courses that they are currently teaching.

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**Appendix 1: The questionnaire given to participants at the end of the course**

**BILINGUAL TEACHERS  
TRAINING COURSE**

**1. CONTENT**

How relevant was the content to you and your teaching?

IRRELEVANT    1    2    3    4    5    RELEVANT

COMMENTS \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**2. TEACHING METHODS**

Do you think the teaching methods were interesting/ appropriate?

NO    1    2    3    4    5    YES

COMMENTS \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**3. MATERIALS**

How useful do you think the materials were?

USELESS    1    2    3    4    5    USEFUL

COMMENTS \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**4. SCHEDULE**

Do you think the schedule was satisfactory?

NO    1    2    3    4    5    YES

COMMENTS \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**5. What sessions/topics did you particularly like or find useful?**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**6. What sessions/topics do you think need improvement or expansion?**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**7. Are there any topics that you feel were missing from the course?**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix 1: The results of the questions on the evaluation questionnaire. (Questions 1-4)**

	Q1 RELEVANT	Q2 METHODS	Q3 MATERIALS	Q4 SCHEDULE
Participant 1	5	5	5	4
Participant 2	5	5	5	4
Participant 3	4	5	5	3
Participant 4	4	5	4	4
Participant 5	5	5	5	4
Participant 6	5	4	4	5
Participant 7	5	5	5	5
Participant 8	5	5	5	5
Participant 9	5	5	5	5
Participant 10	4	4	4	5
Participant 11	4	5	5	5
	4.636363636	4.818181818	4.727272727	4.454545455



# Implications for the Design of Teacher Education Courses

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## Introduction

Teacher education is considered by different authors either as art, science or a combination of both. The following article examines the principles for in-service teacher education (INSET). The purpose of this review is to explore aspects of INSET with reference to the relevant literature in order to draw a proposal for the aspects to take into account when designing an INSET course.

## Teacher Education

Learning is the goal of teaching, but how do teachers *learn* to teach? Teacher education embraces training and development. Both terms refer to the need for improvement in teachers, but the distinction is that training implies that somebody else is going to prepare teachers whereas development is considered to be a personal and individual process.

According to Freeman (1989, p.39), training "is based on an assumption that through mastery of discrete aspects of skills and knowledge, teachers will improve their effectiveness in the classroom". He argues that training is a strategy for teacher education that helps teachers achieve mastery in certain aspects of teaching. However, Freeman states that training has some limitations, the most relevant of which is the fragmented view of teaching it takes. He proposes a more holistic approach to teacher education that includes not only knowledge and mastery of skills, but also a need for teachers to become aware of their attitudes and beliefs about teaching. Head and Taylor (1997, p. 1) argue that teacher development draws on the teacher's inner resources for change; it is focused on personal awareness and is a self-reflective process. Wallace (1991) emphasizes that the distinction is that training is something that can be presented or managed by others, whereas development is something that can be done only by and for oneself. However, Woodward (p. 147-8) argues that the distinction between these two terms has created unnecessary confusion and has tended to label development as good, and training as bad. She emphasizes that both aspects should be seen as interdependent elements for teacher education. Head and Taylor (1997, p. 9) agree and state that,

Teacher development is concerned with the learning atmosphere which is created through the effect of the teacher on the learners, and their effect on the teacher. It has to do with 'presence' and 'people skills', and being aware of how your attitudes and behaviour affect these.

Freeman (2001, p. 76) argues that training and development fit within teacher education as complementary and integrated strategies. He specifies the characteristics of both strategies in the following chart:

	'what' content	↔	'how' process	'to what effect' impact/outcome
Teacher training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>defined externally</li> <li>usually determined beforehand</li> <li>providing access to knowledge base</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>transmitting knowledge and skills</li> <li>organising access to new content</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>externally assessed</li> <li>bounded</li> <li>often drawing on publicly demonstrated evidence</li> </ul>
In common	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>external process of presentation/articulation triggers</li> <li>internal process of incorporation</li> </ul>			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>use leads to usefulness</li> </ul>
Teacher development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>usually generated through experience</li> <li>determined by/in relation to participants</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>sensemaking, using articulated experience to construct new understandings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>self-assessed</li> <li>open-ended</li> <li>often using self-reported evidence</li> </ul>

(Freeman, 2001, p. 77)

It is important to see these two strategies, training and development, as complementary. The priority for some teachers may be the need to master some skills, and awareness can be enhanced during the process. The two are important, and an equilibrium has to be created in order to provide teachers not only with space to practice and experiment with techniques, but also to make them aware of current teaching approaches and ways to improve their teaching practice.

In the teaching profession, the process through which knowledge of how to teach is conveyed has focused on the transmission of information from experienced people in the field to the novice. However, effective teaching is not only conducted through a set of practical techniques that can be mastered in a training course. There is no simple recipe for effective teaching. Due to the complexity of teaching, teachers all around the world engage in numerous courses in order to become better teachers. But there are discrepancies regarding effective teaching. What makes a good teacher is a complex issue and it involves not only being skilled in, and knowledgeable about, the subject. Good teaching qualities involve internal, personal and external factors that interrelate in order for someone to be regarded as an effective teacher.

## **Models of Teacher Education**

Through the years, different models for teacher education have been proposed. However, no consensus on how best to accomplish effective teacher education have been reached. Freeman (1989, p. 27) states that "based on a kaleidoscope of elements from many disciplines, efforts to educate individuals as language teachers often lack a coherent, commonly accepted foundation". He argues that it is compulsory to define language teaching first in order to design ways to educate teachers. Using his definition as a base, he proposes a model for teacher education which includes four constituents: knowledge, skills, attitudes and awareness. The two strategies that are the foundation of his model are: training and development. The first two constituents of his model are well-known elements of any teacher education course: knowledge about language teaching, and skills in how to transmit that knowledge to learners. The other two are attitudes and awareness. Freeman (1989, p.32) defines attitude as "the stance one adopts toward oneself, the activity of teaching, and the learners one engages in the teaching/learning process". He argues that attitude plays an important role in teacher education, since "It can begin to account for the differential successes, strengths, and weaknesses of individual teachers" (Freeman 1989, p. 32). He also states that due to its complexity attitudes are not easy to include in teacher education courses. The fourth constituent is awareness, which he considers as the super-ordinate within the model. Awareness, he argues, will determine how a teacher uses the other three constituents of his model. In other words, when a teacher is aware of a problem either of management, presentation of topics, or knowledge of the subject, they can then decide what to do using the knowledge and skills they possess through a change of attitude. Finally, he considers training and development as the two strategies through which change in teacher practice can be generated.

Now I would like to describe Wallace's (1991) three models of teacher education: the Craft Model, the Applied Science Model and the Reflective Model.

### **The Craft Model**

Wallace (1991, p. 6-7) describes the Craft Model as a process of passing information and expertise from an "expert" in the practice of the "craft" to the novice. The information and skill transferred goes from generation to generation. It is supposed that experts, through the instruction and moulding of the trainee, will transfer all their knowledge and skills to the trainee. In this way, the trainee will acquire this set of knowledge and skills. Then, trainees will apply them to practice and thereby become professional.

### **The Applied Science Model**

This model draws on the results of empirical science as a basis for the foundation of future actions in the teaching profession. Wallace (1991, p. 8-

10) argues that most teacher training courses are designed following this paradigm. It looks for answers to problems in the findings of studies done in the field. Wallace criticises this paradigm for making a distinction between experts and practitioners, which has caused a barrier in the teaching profession. He also argues that the mastery of scientific knowledge is not sufficient to be a competent teacher.

### The Reflective Model

Drawing on the two models described above, Wallace (1991, p.12-14) claims that two kinds of knowledge should be included in teacher education courses: received and experiential knowledge. This model includes a reflective cycle in which trainees should be immersed while on teacher education courses. The cycle draws on trainees' previous experiential knowledge and received knowledge, then leads trainees to the practice of particular aspects of teaching in order to reflect on them. The reflection will make teachers aware of aspects that might not have been perceived until reflecting on them.

Freeman (1989) and Wallace (1991) emphasise the important role that teacher's beliefs and attitudes play in effective teaching. Both models include constituents which address the two main strategies for teacher education courses: training and development. Both are considered equally important and interdependent, which emphasizes the need to include both in teacher education courses.

I believe that the non-linear sequence of practice and reflection in the Reflective Model is the element that can make a difference in a teacher's attitudes towards teaching. In other words, the process of encouraging reflection and the practice of finding different solutions to a problem, discovered by a teacher through observation or awareness, are what can lead teachers to change their way of approaching a particular problem. As Bailey (1990, p. 225) states, in relation to diary studies, "In reworking, rethinking, and interpreting (their reflections), teachers can gain powerful insights into their own classroom behaviour and motivation".

Development can only be achieved through a permanent and personal desire for improvement from teachers and it is necessary for practicing teachers to realize that. Through teacher education courses, which encourage an awareness of language teaching as well as the need to reflect and seek solutions to particular problems, a step towards the development of teachers can be made.

### **Development of INSET Courses**

I shall now explore some of the approaches to INSET design suggested in the literature. Recurrent aspects considered as relevant to INSET design are:

#### Approach INSET as a Process and Not as a Product

Hayes (1995) states that change is a slow process that should be addressed carefully because teachers might reject an innovation on the basis that their previous extensive use of different practices have worked well for them. So teachers' beliefs and attitudes need to be changed through normative-re-educative strategies, that is, teachers should be challenged to analyze their current teaching/learning beliefs and behaviors. The consideration of INSET as a long-term process is supported by many experts in the field (Fullan, 1991; Lamb, 1995; Roberts, 1998; Wallace, 1991).

Lamb (1995) describes the effects that an INSET course had on a particular group of trainees and emphasizes that in order for any INSET course to be really effective it needs to take into account a long-term process before a change in classroom practice can be achieved. Along the same lines, O'Brien (1981, p. 54) states that "the only ultimately valid evaluation of a teacher-training course is in terms of how it affects the teachers' performance in their classrooms and the learning that takes place there". It is necessary to stress the importance of an inner desire to change from teachers. This could be a very difficult issue to approach in any training course because changing attitudes and beliefs in teachers is a very complex task. However, through various activities, teachers can be made aware of the impact which their own beliefs and attitudes towards teaching are having on their students. Thus they may change their attitudes through a process of trial during their practice, but they need to be made aware first in order to reflect on them.

#### INSET Should Be Context-Sensitive

Bax (1997) stresses the importance of centering courses on participants. He argues that the dependence of trainers on ready-made recipes from different books tends to reinforce the prevalent transmission mode on teacher education courses. Bax (1997, p. 233) states that "a more context-sensitive approach would, by contrast, be more trainee-centered, involving trainees in ways which would ensure that the programme has as close a bearing as possible on their teaching concerns and contexts".

This is a feeling shared by Wolter (2000) who emphasizes that teachers are the 'experts' in the teaching/learning environment and they should be treated as such. He suggests that in the early stage of INSET, the transfer of information has to be followed by a two-way exchange of ideas between trainer and trainees, since the trainees are the ones who have to decide which is the best way to address the innovation in their particular contexts. He emphasizes that such an approach has the following advantages:

- It encourages a higher degree of fit as the programme progresses from theoretical toward more practical concerns
- It motivates participants to interpret the innovation as they try to apply theory into their day-to-day practice

- It promotes ownership
- It promotes the innovation through its application in the course methodology and content. (Wolter, 2000, p. 315-316)

Hayes (2000) emphasises that, in order for changes to happen, the people involved should be well-informed. From my experiences, they should also be trained to know what is expected of them under the new policies, and be given the experience of using different ways of attaining that goal. As Hayes (2000, p. 136) emphasises, "teachers are at the heart of any innovation within national education systems and, therefore, they and the contexts in which they work need to be studied to inform the innovation process".

The need to include the experience of the trainees in the design of teacher education courses seems to be a core aspect to consider (Bax, 1997; Hayes, 2000; Lamb, 1995; Nunan, 1989; Wolter, 2000). I believe also that it is an important motivational strategy to draw on teachers' expertise and resources in their environment and their objectives when taking training courses. An analysis should be made in order to discover aspects that need immediate attention in order to include them in the syllabus.

Hayes (1995) suggests that activities should be classroom-centered and that the trainees should be involved in the preparation of the course in order to design it with relevance to them. He also proposes that trainers should be teachers themselves. I consider that this could be motivating for trainees because they will see the trainer as their equal since they are teachers as well. He addresses the aspect of valuing participants' experience in order to make teachers aware of the rationale for the innovation; in this way, an opportunity for analysis will be given to participants. Hayes states that, through the encouragement of analysis and reflection, trainers can enable teachers to form conclusions about the topic. In order for participants to understand and implement the innovation, a space to apply it should be given. Besides having the opportunity to implement new practices, space should also be provided for the exchange of ideas, problems, concerns and suggestions in order for participants to develop collaborative practices.

Lamb (1995) agrees that the participants in teacher education courses are the ones who, through awareness of their own practices, specify the areas they want to explore in order to determine the content of development courses. In this way, practical ideas can find their counterpart in the theory of second language teaching.

Nunan (1989) suggests using a bottom-up approach to the design of teacher education courses. He argues that a 'client-centred approach' to teacher development can bridge the gap between theory and practice, and states that one way of doing this is through the inclusion of data from, and about, the workshop participants in the design of the workshop itself.

I believe that the use of participants' expertise and needs is a very important aspect to keep in mind when designing courses for teachers. Most of the time, teachers do not find any application of theory to their particular contexts because of many factors. By making an analysis of the current constraints and resources, teachers can arrive at a more realistic design. This is of particular relevance for theories developed in a different context which from which a course is taking place. Most of the time, theories are developed in contexts which are different from those in which teachers are actually working. In order to help teachers understand theory, space for practice and adaptation of it should be given during training. Through applicability teachers can understand theory better and adapt it to their particular situations.

### Theory and Practice Should Be Integrated

Widdowson (1984, p. 86) argues that "fostering dependence on technique alone, without at the same time developing awareness of how technique relates to theoretical principles, militates against healthy development in the ELT profession". He suggests a consideration of the effect on teacher motivation from a recognition of the central role of theory in pedagogical practice. This is a central issue in teacher education courses where only knowledge and skills are addressed. I consider that a balance should be made between the two in order to give teachers an integrated course. No undue emphasis should be placed on either theory or practice, but, since both are important elements that need to be interrelated in order for the innovation to take place, the course design should aim for an appropriate balance.

Clarke (1994, p. 9), in relation to the theory/practice distinction, considers it an unhealthy categorization for the profession. He argues that teachers' experience is a valid source of theory that should be borne in mind. He does not imply that experts' theories should not be considered, but instead advocates a more bottom-up approach to theory. He suggests 'experience-based theory building', placing teachers first and 'experts' after them. The need for experience-based building is in tune with the need to be context-sensitive. Theory should be integrated with practice in order for teachers to experience the innovation and act upon implementing it, or not, according to their experience. Along the same lines, Nunan (1989, p. 112) argues that theory should be derived from practice and that teachers should be the ones creating this, rather than being exposed to a set of principles derived from experts. Markee (1997, p. 9) explains in detail the different reasons why an innovation may be rejected. She considers that linguistic and cultural disadvantage plays an important role in the implementation of any innovation. Thus, the task of inducing teachers to adopt new theories is a very complex one that is not always successful, and the need for a link between theory and practice emerges again. One way to encourage teachers to innovate is through the applicability of new practice within the course itself. Only through trial and error can teachers realize the improvements, if any, which any particular innovation might make to their particular contexts.

## Diversity of Methods and Activities

Teachers as learners possess different styles of learning, and, in order to cater to these different styles, a diversity of activities has to be used. Different procedures, methods, tasks and activities have been suggested for teacher education courses:

Hayes (2000, p. 143) proposes a checklist for teacher education courses:

Does the training/development session provide/enable:

- active involvement/participation by the teachers ?
- opportunity for thinking/reflection?
- opportunity to make use of teachers' own experience?
- opportunity to experience ideas/activities first hand?
- opportunity to apply ideas?
- opportunity for practice of skills in a non-threatening environment?
- constructive feedback on practice/application?
- an emphasis on why: the reasons for doing something in a particular way?
- a variety of methods/tasks used on the course?

I consider this to be a helpful checklist since it includes procedures and tasks. The two need to be carefully planned to achieve the expected results, and by making a thorough analysis before putting them into practice, we can see the impact they have on teachers.

Ellis (1986) divides training practices into experiential and awareness raising. Both are important to the development of teachers because they are not just expected to practise a particular technique or strategy, but they are also encouraged to develop an understanding of theoretical principles behind the practical techniques in use.

Roberts (1998, p. 46) suggests activities such as:

- Access to new information (by reading, lectures and models)
- Activities to raise the learners'-teachers' self-awareness of past experiences, and current beliefs, practice and knowledge
- Direct personal experience, in language learning, micro-teaching and teaching-practice
- Indirect experience of teaching, for example by structured observation
- Opportunities to reflect privately on these inputs and experiences, for example by means of reflective writing
- Opportunities for dialogue with fellow teachers and others, addressing one's practice, beliefs and the social pressures affecting one's work
- Development of skills and attitudes, which enable teachers to get the most from the above activities: study skills, observation skills, and team skills

The different and varied ways to develop current knowledge in teachers is vast. Trainers should make use of as many such strategies as possible in order not only to introduce trainees to new theoretical aspects but also to demonstrate techniques and activities that student teachers can adapt to their classes. In this way, teachers will be receiving practical ideas while at the same time being exposed to new theories. Teachers should be encouraged to implement new techniques in their classes, emphasising that only through trial and error can they decide whether the innovation is appropriate for their particular contexts.

### **Participants' Development Through Reflection**

Development through reflection is agreed to be a necessary part of any education course (Freeman, 1989; Hayes, 1995; Roberts, 1998; Wolter, 2000) and reflection has become an important INSET principle. Head and Taylor (1997) present a view of development which is centred on teachers' own awareness of themselves as people as well as teachers. They state that this kind of development involves the teacher in a process of reflection on experience, exploration of the different options available for change and taking the decision of setting goals and finding the best ways to achieve them. Hayes (2000, p. 43) reinforces this by stating that "teachers, whether actively or passively, determine what is appropriate for their own classrooms". Roberts (1998) sees reflection as conscious self-assessment, which can range from using formal criteria of evaluation, to the exploration of teaching practices. He argues that reflection means many things to different people, but what cannot be neglected is the effect which context plays on 'reflective' practices. However, making teachers reflect may be a difficult task. Wallace (1991, p.165) argues that the process of reflection should not be taken for granted and it ought not to be assumed that all teachers are naturally reflective or that they automatically develop in their practice through this process. He advises that the teachers' 'powers of reflection' need to be 'facilitated and developed through the training process' and at all levels of training and development.

### **Observation as a Developmental Tool**

One of the tools considered most effective to develop teacher reflection is observation (Cosh, 1999; Scrivener, 1994; Wajnryb, 1992). Wajnryb believes that observations can develop teachers' ability to observe, interpret and analyse and this will help them to improve. Often observation has been used as a way to evaluate or judge teachers' performance, it can also provide a range of experiences for teachers to grow professionally. Richards (1998, p. 143) points out three aspects to bear in mind when designing observation tasks: observation should have a focus, observers should use specific procedures and the observer should remain as an observer. Observation also enhances collaboration because teachers can agree to observe one another in order to focus on particular concerns and offer, or experiment with, solutions for it. The process of engaging trainees in observing each other is a way to help them to reflect on and consider their classroom practices. This is an essential stage in the development of

teachers because what they may think is successful may not be, and only through analysis, collaboration and reflection can this become clear.

Cosh (1999, p. 24) states that "good teachers need not only knowledge but enthusiasm, confidence, self-value, and a desire to question, experiment, and grow professionally". Trainers can motivate trainees but the emphasis of self-direction must begin with teachers. It is important to make teachers aware of changes that can be effected by them in order to improve results of students on their courses, but it is an aspect that can be initiated and trainees will have to continue it.

## Conclusion

Literature on teacher education emphasises the need to create courses which address the problems and reality of their participants. I consider this to be a relevant factor for the effective design of INSET programs. When a course focuses on the particular concerns of trainees, it can have positive effects on trainees' day-to-day practice. By enabling teachers to reflect on what they are doing, and to experiment with different strategies to improve, or find solutions to their particular concerns, teachers become engaged in an on-going process of reflection. Thus, professional development can be enhanced in teacher training courses through different procedures. However, it is important to note that development is a long and personal process that teachers themselves are responsible for continuing. It is important to give teachers space for the promotion of awareness and self-reflection because the development of teachers will lead to the development of students, which is the goal of teaching.

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