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SOME CONSIDERATIONS CONCERNING IN-SERVICE TRAINING FOR TEACHERS OF ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

ESTRATTO

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> He tries to give the class a good go, and we get on really well with him. He knows his stuff. He knows your weaknesses and strengths, and he'll sit down and talk to you the whole lesson to explain something. He'll go round and you learn more then. He's a very good teacher.
>
> (Younger and Warrington 1999: 239)

The above comment was made by a young learner in a British secondary school. It provides an interesting perspective on how the 'good teacher' may be defined from the point of view of the learner. However, in reality it is difficult to find a wholly satisfactory definition of the good teacher. In part this is because of the complexity of the teaching process. Adler (1991:145) claims that teaching is "a complex activity, a process that is not highly predictable", that teachers "are called upon to make informed and thoughtful decisions" and lastly develop "the ability to perceive and respond to particular contexts and situations in ways that will facilitate the development of informed judgement and skilled teaching". In the above example we may observe that the teacher gives space to students, is able to manage interpersonal relationships, has a good knowledge of his subject, understands his students needs and is capable of managing the classroom in such a way that the learning process is facilitated. If this is the case, then it would be reasonable to assume that preparing teachers to deal with the real classroom situation will also be a complex process and questions should be raised as to how effective traditional training courses based on formal lectures really are in terms of what practising language teachers need. It often seems that teacher training tends heavily towards the theoretical, while teachers themselves see the problem in an entirely different light. As Eraut (1994: 31) asserts:

> Talking or writing about education is a dominant form of knowledge use in both academic and school contexts; but the classroom context is fundamentally different. Though talk or writing may influence the perception or conceptualization of action, it does not itself constitute that action. A teacher is not so much in a 'knowing' environment as in a 'doing' environment.

Perhaps, training should not be considered a question of simply providing theoretical knowledge, but also of developing practical teaching skills.

The training of teachers takes on many forms. These may be dictated by the requirements of the trainees, constraints of time and money and the necessity, unfortunately in many cases, to conform to strict governmental guidelines. This paper intends to address some of the problematics of setting up teacher training courses for English language teaching and examine how it may be possible to bridge the gap between providing a sound theoretical basis for practising teachers while at the same time furnishing those technical skills necessary to carry out the teaching task effectively.

The first part of this paper deals with some of the more theoretical aspects of organising a teacher training programme, highlighting in particular the problems of deciding whether to simply provide the trainee with a detailed guide to teaching techniques in the classroom, or cater for the fuller development of the teacher as a thinking professional. The types of objectives which are desirable in a training programme are discussed before moving on to the examination of more specific ways of giving trainees the opportunity to analyse and experiment with a variety of teaching techniques.

In the first place such an approach would serve to master the practical aspects of managing the classroom and planning effective lessons, and in the second place to encourage greater independence and confidence in the implementation of new ideas in the classroom.

The training – development continuum

A useful starting point would be to draw a distinction between teacher *training* and teacher *development* as outlined in Freeman (1982: 21). Both may have their place in training programmes, but their application will depend very much on the needs of the trainees.

Training is concerned with the immediate classroom needs of the trainee. In the first place this could concern the less experienced teacher who wishes to develop such fundamentally important skills as classroom management. Alternatively, a training course would provide a basis, in the case of more experienced teachers, for the application of new technology in the classroom or develop ideas for the improvement of his or her teaching practice. Strevens (1974: 23) classifies these types of practical skills in three main categories. They are as follows:

- *Language knowledge*. This entails knowing how to use the language being taught effectively, at least within the classroom environment, leading to a greater ability to provide a reliable model of the target lan-

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guage for his or her learners and inspiring confidence in his or her ability to actually teach the language.
- *Planning*. This is intended as having the ability to organise learning according to whatever activities he or she may wish to use in order to teach the language specific point he of the lesson, and the ability to decide what language points are to be considered to be valid or relevant to the needs of the students.
- *Management*. This may be defined as possessing the ability to manage the language learning process in diverse situations, e.g. a mixed-ability class, where an awareness of each individual student's progress is essential, along with the capacity to organise lessons to suit the needs of both the able and the less able learners.

Such a model of training is intended to provide the trainee with the essential tools for survival in the classroom environment. That is to say the type of skill which allows him or her to carry out the task with an acceptable degree of competence. Even in the case of experienced teachers, innovations in teaching techniques provide ample scope for familiarisation courses in new technology such as multimedia, where, as Dolci (1998:87) claims:

> Allo sviluppo così veloce della tecnologia e alla conseguente disponibilità di potenza e possibilità non è corrisposta una riflessione metodologica.

Furthermore, it is often the case that the content of a generalised training programme is too extensive given the peculiar characteristics of an in-service training course. The trainees involved are working and studying at the same time. It would seem, therefore, necessary to be selective in terms of the course content in order to set realistic objectives in terms of the time available. It is certainly not enough to state that the course is one of two hundred hours if it is not possible to quantify in concrete terms what has been achieved in those hours and, more importantly, how this benefits the trainees. This is especially important where inexperienced teachers are concerned since, as Lee (1974: 37) states:

> Time is particularly short on in-service courses, but on any type or length of training course attended by those with a poor grasp of English and not much teaching skill it seems important to concentrate attention on the teaching materials they are to use, and on very specific teaching tasks.

Considering these points, an outline scheme for possible components of an in-service teacher training course is illustrated in Table 1 below, with a

particular focus on those classroom skills so often neglected in more theoretically based courses:

Language Knowledge	Planning	Management
▪ grammar	▪ setting lesson objectives	▪ discipline
▪ lexis	▪ choice of materials	▪ seating arrangements
▪ phonology	▪ activity types	▪ groupwork
	▪ specific skills development (reading, writing, listening, speaking)	▪ pairwork
		▪ mixed-level classes
	▪ use of technology/teaching aids	
	▪ testing	

Table 1. Components of an EFL in-service training course.

Teacher development, on the other hand, differs fundamentally from this in that such an approach would seek to satisfy the teacher's need to develop his or her own personal teaching style and consider more deeply, for example, the more theoretical aspects of the language acquisition process or the development and classroom application of teaching materials. The value of a theoretical background element in teacher training courses has been open to much debate. Lee (ibid.: 38) suggests that such theoretical issues are too general and wide ranging in their scope for an in-service training programme, and more narrowly tailored aims, suited directly to the immediate needs of the trainees are necessary. Others would argue, however, that such background knowledge enhances the teacher's professional standing, providing not only a sound basis for original thinking in teaching practice, but also more personal and professional satisfaction, the belief being that such knowledge results in increased confidence and competence. For instance, Williams (1974: 111) claims that a degree of theoretical knowledge may be considered essential for the professionally minded teacher. He believes that it is important for the teacher to have a good background in theory in order to diagnose and solve the problems of his or her learners. For instance, on a directly practical level, this is particularly the case when teaching English pronunciation and intonation, where frequently vague and somewhat shot-in-the-dark techniques are employed with predictably unsatisfactory results. Note how often the voiced dental fricative \ð\ is compared, or rather, confused with the voiced labiodental fricative \v\ (Gimson 1994: 138), or the

lower-front vowel \æ\ which is often approximated to the mid-front vowel \e\ (Underhill 1994: 10). A sound knowledge (no pun intended) of the principles of English phonology would be a significant aid in identifying strategies for improving pronunciation and in the production of specifically targeted materials for solving pronunciation problems. Secondly, some knowledge of the theoretical bases of foreign language testing is essential in the preparation of viable and fair evaluative instruments for the assessment of the real language skills acquired by the students. Thirdly, on a more theoretical level, an understanding of the language acquisition process may help in planning syllabuses based on sound scientific principles.

From this perspective, in-service training programmes, from a developmental point of view, may be viewed as an opportunity to stimulate professional motivation by providing the self confidence to make decisions about professional practice and "the opportunity to be creative and take risks by using new methods or procedures" (Noe et al. 1990: 344).

Scarborough (1975: 107) lays down a set of theoretical principles which he considers to be an integral part of teacher development. These principles may be considered a further stage in the 'growth' of the teacher as an independent, thinking professional, rather than the mere 'technician who imparts knowledge'. They are as follows:

- *Linguistic principles*. This comprises from a technical point of view the mechanics of the target language, how it works and how it may be used by the learner to communicate. It may include elements of morphology, syntax and phonology. In practice, however, it often means 'grammar', which often raises the thorny issue of what approaches should be adopted to teach it to the learner. Traditionally grammar was explained to learners by the teacher. Such a deductive approach, however, frequently failed to bridge the gap between knowledge and use. Knowing the rule does not necessarily mean having the ability to apply it. More recently discovery techniques have been encouraged, where learners are required to formulate the rules for themselves and in such a way internalise them more effectively. Such inductive approaches are based largely on the notional and functional syllabuses developed in the nineteen seventies where the aim was to provide the learner with a concept of the "applicability of the knowledge they gain" (Wilkins 1979: 82), or in other words "il convient en particulier de doter l'apprenant des instruments lui permettant de saisir les phénomènes de l'enonciation, qui seuls eclairent des faits grammaticaux traités de manière très inadéquate dans les manuels" (Roulet 1978: 146).

- *Psychological principles*. These are the strategies which the learner employs in the acquisition of a foreign language, the importance of which cannot be underestimated when we consider that much ineffective teaching may be due to approaches and methodologies which do not take into consideration such factors. Learner experimentation, in terms of hypothesis formation and effective manipulation of the target language for communicative purposes, for example, may be hindered by excessive error correction. Therefore, the teacher is required to become more sensitive to his or her classroom task, assuming the role of "tutor/councellor/facilitator" (Jottini 1998: 69) rather than mere fount of knowledge. Such ideas have a long history, being particularly associated with the work of Curran (1976) in the 1970s. Rogers (1951, quoted in Richards and Rodgers 1986: 113) believes that the educator should assume "insofar as he (sic) is able the internal frame of reference [of the client], perceiving the world as that person sees it and communicating something of this empathetic understanding".
- *Sociological principles*, which include the appropriacy of language use and a knowledge of the kinds of principles which underlie the social rules which speakers assume through the use of language, and the ability to be accepted as part of a social group through the correct application of such rules. Students will need to be aided in acquiring what Hymes (1979: 18) defines as "communicative competence", that is to say the "rules of use without which the rules of grammar would be useless" (ibid.: 15).

The problem inevitably arises on an in-service training programme of how much emphasis should be placed on training (skills) and how much on development (theory). It seems that some type of balance needs to found between what appear to be two diametrically opposed positions. I would take the view that *training* and *development* constitute a form of continuum. The organisers of a training course would need to place their emphasis on some point of this continuum in order to find a satisfactory equilibrium between theory and practice according to the needs of the trainees. This is illustrated below in Figure 1.

TRAINING (PRACTICE) ◆———◆———◆———◆———◆▶ **DEVELOPMENT (THEORY)**

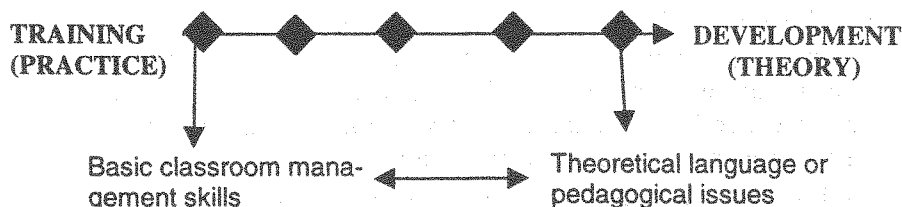Basic classroom management skills ◀————▶ Theoretical language or pedagogical issues

Figure 1 The training-development continuum

Nevertheless, this approach only goes some way to solving the problem of organising a training course in concrete terms. Decisions also need to be made regarding the teaching context of the trainees involved, and therefore the specific objectives of the course. Brumfit and Rossner (1982) attempt to draw up a hierarchy of objectives in teacher training in order to give teacher development in its widest sense a clarity of direction, a linear development one stage feeding into and forming the basis for the next. They consider the starting point to be the classroom and the gaining of practical experience in direct contact with the problems of being in front of the class and teaching. This then leads into the development of teaching materials and the examination of the broader aspects of syllabus design before, in the final stage, moving onto theoretical aspects of different approaches to teaching. To this we may also add the area of academic study, where the teacher could go on to carry out educational research. With the exception of the final stage, perhaps, elements of direct classroom teaching would be carried right through the teacher's development, becoming more specialised at more advanced levels. Brumfit and Rossner's (ibid.) developmental model takes a pyramidal form illustrated in Figure 2

DEVELOPMENT

EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

ACADEMIC COURSES

TEACHING APPROACHES

SYLLABUS DESIGN

IN-SERVICE TRAINING

MATERIALS PRODUCTION

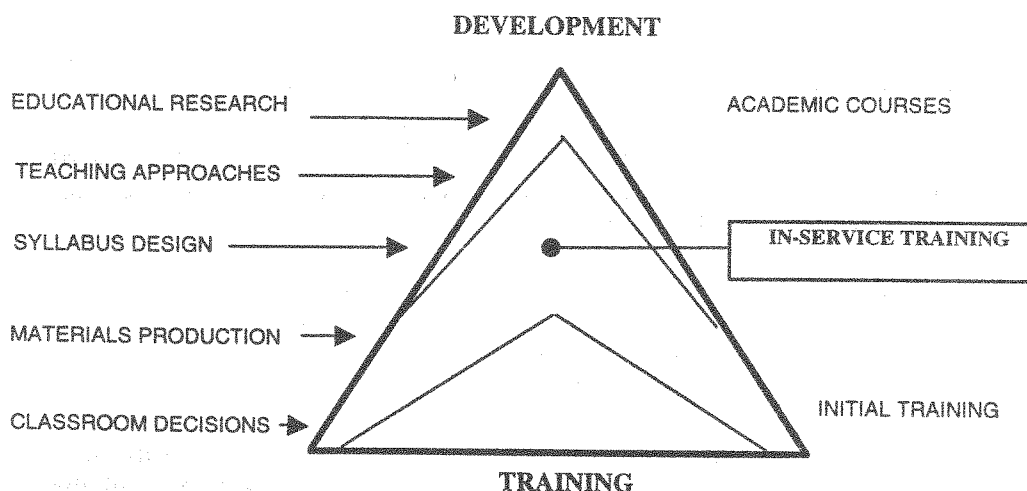CLASSROOM DECISIONS

INITIAL TRAINING

TRAINING

Figure 2 The scope of in-service training (Adapted from Brumfit and Rossner, op.cit.: 230)

This may be viewed as a progression from the training level to a fuller teacher development. To an extent this turns traditional perceptions of teacher training on its head, but since the teacher is principally involved in

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dealing with real, everyday, practical problems, it may not be entirely unrealistic. Learning a skill requires practice. Sloboda (1993: 253-254) amusingly describes his inept efforts at decorating a bedroom as compared with those of a professional decorator. He was able to do the job in the end, but the professional was quicker, more efficient and "completely systematic". I am not suggesting that teaching is the same as decorating, but skills do need to be learned through practice, in this case direct classroom experience. As we see in Figure 2, in-service training embraces most aspects of the training scheme to a greater or lesser degree, and may well be moved up or down the scale according to the precise purposes of the training programme.

In such a way the teacher forms ideas through his or her own teaching experience, even if it is guided to a certain extent in the initial stages, not only of the nature of teaching but also that of learning. Ideally training should lead to the teacher being able to make conscious and clear decisions about his or her teaching approach in given situations in order to facilitate the learning process of his or her students. Brumfit and Rossner (ibid.: 227) state that: "The modification of these ideas in the light of experience is an essential prerequisite for serious assessment of the value of a particular approach".

The setting of the level of an in-service training scheme at the correct hierarchical stage of this developmental model would seem at this point to be of vital importance. Pre-programme preparation in the form of a needs analysis, using questionnaires and interviews for example may be employed in order to find out as much as possible about the trainees and their requirements. As Lee (op. cit.: 35) observes:

> Detailed knowledge – the more detailed the better – must be obtained of their ability to handle specific techniques, otherwise the training programme is unlikely to be well matched to their abilities and needs and will either be below or above their level of competence.

In this way a knowledge of the trainees' background and working environment, rather than a purely abstract notion of 'what the experts think the teacher wants', may provide a useful tool in ensuring the relevance of the course. Such a needs analysis could be based on the following elements illustrated in Table 2, largely based on Hutchinson and Waters (1987: 62-63):

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Motivation	Learning Process	Resources	Background	Timetabling
Compulsory or optional course? Aspects of status or promotion involved? Trainees' expectations? Attitude to course?	Learning background? Trainees' concept of teaching and learning? Choice of appropriate methodology or approach for trainees?	Trainers available? Specialised areas of trainers sufficient for aims of course? Materials? Aids: TV, VCR, OHP? Adequate facilities: classrooms, photocopying? Opportunities for out-of-class activities: observed lessons?	Professional context of trainees? Age/sex/ nationality? Knowledge of English? Specialised knowledge: literature, ESP? General interests? Awareness of teaching styles and approaches? Attitude to English and the teaching of English?	Time of day? Every day, once a week? Full-time, part-time? Compatible with trainees' work commitments?

Table 2. Analysing trainee needs.

In this way, what trainees learn on the course should be directly relevant to their professional interests and perceived needs, raising the probability of such input being applied in the classroom and in professional practice, and not hidden away in the darkest recesses of the mind, never to be used or thought of again. As observed above, a teacher's perception of the validity of a training course may be very different from that of the organiser, since, as Hutchinson and Waters (ibid.: 56) state:

> awareness is a matter of perception, and perception may vary according to one's standpoint. Learners may well have a clear idea of the 'necessities' of the target situation: they will certainly have a view as to their 'lacks'. But it is quite possible that the learners' views will conflict with the perceptions of other interested parties: course designers, sponsors, teachers.

Practical applications

From this general background it is now necessary to move on to some of the practical ways of developing teaching skills. Over the last few years it has become widely acceptable to consider active participation in the teaching and learning process as a highly successful way of improving results. Such active participation encourages the learner to think and then act in a

concrete way in order to put ideas into practice, thereby either validating these ideas or discarding them as impracticable. For the purposes of this paper focus is placed five ways in which teaching and development can, to a certain extent, be married together in activities which are intended to stimulate "creativity, judgement and adaptability" (Britten 1985:113) in a way which purely prescriptive methods, such as the ubiquitous lecture, may not do. These integrative techniques are as follows:

- teaching diaries
- seminars, workshops and lectures
- demonstration lessons
- microteaching
- follow-up sessions

Central to the concept of teacher training would be the development of the teacher's ability to evaluate his or her own performance, by becoming more sensitive to the complexities of the teaching process. Schön (1979: 254, quoted in Block 1999: 135) refers to this process as "problem framing", the ability to observe our surroundings and draw conclusions. As Block (ibid.: 136) states:

> The initial interaction with the environment leads to some form of assimilation of incoming information into existing schemata (the information is altered) and then to the accommodation of these initial schemata to incoming information (the schemata are altered).

Widdowson (1983: 34-35) defines schemata as "kinds of stereotypic images which we map on to actuality in order to make sense of it, and to provide it with a coherent pattern". This is an important point, since we could view the training process as the opportunity to change unproductive behaviours on the part of the trainee, behaviours, as mentioned above, which may be based on a fixed world view or schemata arising from previous experiences or prejudices. A useful tool in attaining a "heightened consciousness" (Nixon 1999: 626) may be provided by the teaching diary (Edge 1984, Jarvis 1992, McDonough 1994 and Halbach 1999), since the process of writing a diary based on experiences during the course can aid the process of constructing a concrete professional identity (Coldron and Smith 1999).

If the move from preparation to the real classroom is viewed as a cycle, with preparation being the first stage of the training process, e.g. in the form of demonstration lessons and microteaching allowing the trainees to experience the real classroom environment, seminars, workshops and lectures

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could be considered the links among these stages of development, providing the opportunity to formulate a clear concept of what teaching entails both from a theoretical and practical point of view. This cycle is illustrated in Figure 3 below:
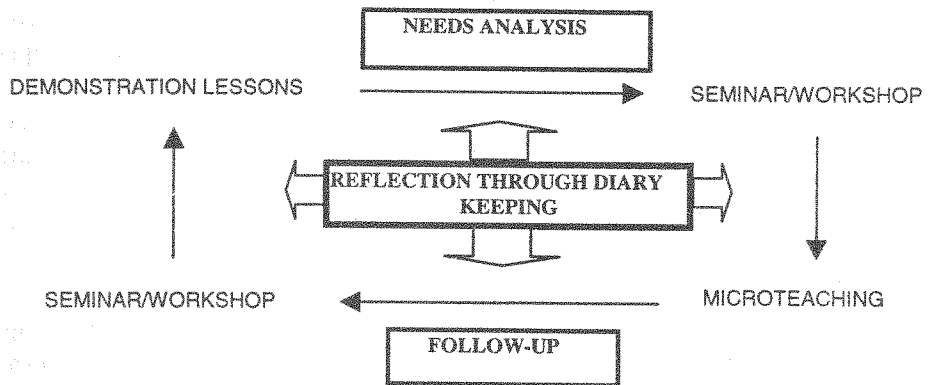

Figure 3 A model for the implementation of an in-service training programme

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Teaching diaries

Throughout the training course, trainees may be encouraged to keep a diary of their experiences. The diary can provide space for reflections on personal teaching practice, theories, colleagues and general impressions. The question has been raised as to the validity of diary studies in the investigation of the teaching self (McDonough 1994: 57). It is probably true that most teachers reflect upon their teaching practice, but it is equally true that these reflections are not always acted upon. The diary may be considered as a means of entering into one's own thought processes, delving into a personal vision of the world and concretising those many considerations that spring to mind every time the teacher steps into the classroom, only to fade into oblivion as soon as the direct teaching experience has passed. Kurtoglu Eken (1999: 240) emphasises the fact that, as teachers, "we are often so absorbed in our purpose, our procedures, and on the technicalities of what we do, that we are not able to observe those valuable processes as they occur through the lesson". Keeping a diary "involves not only recalling the past, but the very act of recreating the past in an attempt to discover and invent the self" (Kehily 1995: 29). This exploration of the self through diary writing is not necessarily a desire to acquire an absolute truth, but to explore

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different angles of our human and professional experience in an attempt to understand that "complex, multidimensional and dynamic system of representations and meanings which develops over time as the result of interactions between the person and the environment" (Coldron and Smith op.cit.: 712). And these multiple factors are inextricably intertwined. In fact, what very often results from this type of exploration of the self is that our experience seems to be "rendered in fragments and compressed subjective episodes" (Shaw 1983: 43) with many "gaps, exclusions, repositionings and repressions" (Kehily op. cit.: 25-26). This is not necessarily a defect, as the close analysis of a teaching diary can lead to enlightening insights into what the writer thinks or believes or, possibly more important, what he or she has failed to think about before, or, as Cosh (1999: 25) claims, "genuine development comes about through self-awareness, reflection, and open-mindedness". Diary studies and autobiographical accounts may help in identifying specific and very subtle problems, for instance in becoming aware of prejudicial behaviours and thus place the professional practitioner in a position of "deconstructing very subtle internalizations" (Curtis 1998: 29) or "unlearning" (Nixon 1999: 626) those aspects of behaviour which may have a negative effect on teaching practice.

From a purely practical point of view, the data provided in a diary study would need to be examined carefully and, if possible, backed up with supporting evidence. As Halbach (1999: 184) suggests, "the evaluator needs to find more than one piece of evidence to support any point". Moreover, observations may also be supported by further reading and discussion with colleagues, possibly in specific seminar sessions.

Demonstration lessons

Such lessons may be used as a starting point for discussion of specific aspects of teaching techniques. Forrester (1974: 54) draws attention to the dangers of smooth performances by highly trained teachers who possess a repertoire of set piece lessons which serve nothing more than the purpose of demonstration lessons and which are perceived by many trainees, who have less experience, as far beyond their capabilities, and perhaps a demonstration of what he or she could not possibly do with a large and uncooperative class. In this sense demonstration lessons, if they are to be employed in an in-service training programme, should bear direct relevance to the needs of the trainees, taking into account the kinds of problems they will encounter in their own teaching environment. It is important to note that trainees are,

however, curious about how trainers put their ideas and theories into practice (Kennedy 1996: 180), and this kind of activity may serve as an aid in increasing the trainer's credibility in the eyes of the trainees.

This type of lesson should not serve as a role model for the trainee, either, but more as a discussion point. The lesson may be analysed in terms of the specific teaching techniques used or of its language/communicative content (Moore 1977: 209), preferably if the lesson is focusing on one particular aspect of teaching relevant to the training programme.

It can be interesting to allow the trainees themselves to participate as 'students', in order to go through the experiences that their own students would have, if the technique being practised were applied by them at a later date in a real teaching situation. One way of creating this learning experience is to take a foreign language which none of the trainees speak and demonstrate a first lesson. Golebiowska (1985) has identified a number of problems with this approach, in that the trainees will inevitably have a heightened awareness of the aims of the lesson (ibid.: 275) and will not, therefore, participate as genuine language learners would. Furthermore, within a group of professional teachers who consider themselves to be experts in their field, intra-group competition is highly likely, and this would have a negative effect, not only on the lesson itself, but possibly on later activities more directly related to the trainees' perceived view of the teaching issues involved in the training programme. She also argues that such lessons may be viewed as somewhat futile if the time is limited, and if the trainees are aiming to teach English, more effort could be directly focused on problems caused to learners by the English language (ibid.: 275). Britten (1996: 164) identifies a significant problem in that "non-native trainees have to outgrow not only ideas about teaching and learning foreign languages which were acquired as pupils in school [...], but also perhaps previous ideas about the nature of language and what it means to know a language". Therefore, rather than an exotic language unknown to the trainees, perhaps advanced English could provide a more motivating basis for a demonstration lesson. This would be beneficial, for example, in the case of non-native speaker trainees who could undergo the learning experience while extending their English language skills, since, as Cullen (1994: 165) claims:

> A poor or rusty command of English undermines the teacher's confidence in the classroom, affects his or her self-esteem and professional status, and makes it difficult for him or her to follow even fairly straightforward teaching procedures such as asking questions on a text, let alone fulfil the pedagogical requirements of new, more communicative curricula.

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Demonstration lessons can only be effective if follow-up sessions are used to highlight specific points of the lesson and their relevance to the training programme, and give the trainees the opportunity to discuss the demonstration in the light of their own experience. This takes us on to the next section.

Seminars and workshops

The role of the tutor is vital in the seminar or workshop situation, as an over dominant role may result in reduced trainee creativity, or the imposing of a role model on the trainees, albeit with the best of intentions and often quite subconsciously. The role of the tutor may well vary according to the level of experience of the trainees, and Freeman (op. cit.: 27) outlines three approaches, starting with the "supervisory approach" for inexperienced teachers, where the tutor is viewed as the source of information. He then moves on to the "alternatives approach" where the tutor shifts his or her role between that of overall authority and that of facilitator of the learning process. Finally the "non-directive approach" allows for the free development of the trainee's potential with "comments, questions and suggestions which reflect the teacher's world and are not evaluative or judgemental" (ibid.: 27). In this way the trainee is encouraged to ask questions about his or her own teaching practices, which may be based on previous learning experiences. This is what Britten (op. cit.: 123) considers to be an essential part of a consciousness raising exercise to bring about an increased awareness of possibly subconscious preconceptions about teaching, which may even stem from as far back as school learning experiences, or from working in an unstimulating and demotivating professional context. Consequently the tutor's role is one of great complexity: teacher, mentor, peer and facilitator. As Kolb (1993: 146) claims:

> Thus, one's job as an educator is not only to implant new ideas but also to dispose of or modify old ones. In many cases resistance to new ideas stems from their conflict with old beliefs that are inconsistent with them. If the education process begins by bringing out the learner's beliefs and theories, examining and testing them, and then integrating the new, more refined ideas into the person's belief systems, the learning process will be facilitated.

In practice the second approach is probably the most frequently adopted on in-service training courses. Tutor intervention is, in the final analysis, inevitable, even if the activities in seminars and workshops are supposedly

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learner-centred.

The types of activities employed in this context could be classified under the broad heading "exploratory skills practice" (Britten op. cit.: 221). The serve to "maximise individualisation, participation, feedback" are intended to give rise to in "viable discovery learning" (ibid.: 122). Such activities can be initiated by questionnaires or by assigning problem solving exercises based on groupwork or pairwork. This can then lead into general feedback sessions, where overall conclusions are drawn from the tasks set. One such activity could be the 'maze', as exemplified in Kennedy (1999). A number of cards with problems or questions based on teaching practice are prepared. Each card offers a number of possible solutions. The trainees have to discuss the alternatives, make a choice, and that choice feeds into another card explaining the consequence of the action taken and further suggestions for the next step to be taken. It is worth noting that with this type of exercise, there may not be one definitive answer or solution, but the groupwork cooperation and stimulus in relevant tasks to produce ideas and contribute actively is undoubtedly beneficial to the professional development of the trainees.

Microteaching

This technique was the subject of much discussion in the late nineteen-seventies and early nineteen eighties. Microteaching gives the trainee the opportunity to focus on a specific aspect of teaching in a supportive environment and receive feedback on his or her performance.

Although it has been argued that microteaching may do very little to really affect teacher behaviour, the experience is often considered to be useful. Geddes (1979: 13) points to some evidence which demonstrates little difference between the outcome of a microteaching programme and a more traditional, lecture-format programme. It could be pointed out, however, that microteaching serves to "bridge the gap" (Carver and Wallace 1974: 184) between theory and the real classroom, giving trainees confidence in using the skills necessary to teach effectively.

This approach can take many forms, but Geddes (op. cit.: 11) characterises "exploratory microteaching" as the form best suited to in-service training, as it is intended to relate the practice to the previous experiences of the trainees and thereby give rise to wider discussions, which bring together elements of extremely practical skills, such as questioning techniques, management of student-teacher interaction or giving clear instructions, alongside

more theoretical issues.

In practice trainees may work together in small groups and are set a specific task to carry out in a five to ten minute teaching session. Peer teaching is generally accepted to be the most convenient way of setting up this type of teaching practice from an organisational point of view, and although Phillips (1974: 127) points out that the situation may be somewhat artificial, the advantages of the tangible implementation of the trainees' own ideas in the classroom far outweigh the disadvantages. Similar to the seminar or workshop situation, the creativity of the trainees themselves should be encouraged within loose guidelines set out by the tutors. Thus, as well as increased creativity, there is a type of group cooperation which has its relevance in "modern integrated disciplinary approaches" (Geddes op. cit.: 23) in schools today.

In practical terms the microteaching lesson can cover a great variety of teaching skills. Cripwell and Geddes (1982: 234) suggest working from the instructions provided in teacher's books, in order to develop organisational skills directly relevant to the needs of the trainees, i.e. translation of the written word into practice. This could be coupled with providing the trainees with particular problems to solve. The microteaching lesson need not necessarily be seen merely as the vehicle for the practice of a restricted number of skills, especially at more advanced levels of teacher development. As Geddes (op. cit.: 11) states:

> One microteaching session may have several objectives, for example, to analyse and practice a particular skill, to relate the practice of the skill to psychological theory, to relate the skill to particular subject matter, to give the student teacher experience of success in a scaled down foreign language teaching situation.

Thus, microteaching could serve the purpose of examining more closely personal teaching practice. This may be taken further with "re-teach sessions" (Carver and Wallace op. cit.: 185) to re-practice specific teaching skills in the light of feedback discussions and seminar sessions.

Follow up sessions

Theoretically the teacher's training should never be considered as complete. In-service courses serve to keep him or her up to date with current practices and innovations, leading to greater professional satisfaction and

consequently improved performance in the classroom. As Waters and Vilches (2000: 127) claim.

> The seminar climate is beneficial, as it provides the teachers with refreshment, opportunities for reflection, a chance to adopt new perspectives and so on. However, once they have acclimatized to the seminar atmosphere, those same teachers often find it difficult to cross back over the intervening 'Sea of Teacher Learning' and successfully apply the ideas they studied in the seminar within the different cultural norms of the school environment.

Unfortunately, participation in a programme of in-service training does not guarantee a positive change in the trainee's teaching behaviour, and a series of on-going controls may be effective in ensuring that the interest and creativity stimulated on the training course are carried through to the classroom, in what Tracey et al. (1995: 239) term "transfer of training".

Follow-up could take two forms. Firstly, a questionnaire format which could be used not only to assess the benefits the trainee has gained from the training course, but also what types of changes could be implemented on subsequent courses to improve results. Subsequently a further questionnaire could be employed to analyse possible changes or developments in trainee teaching procedures, as a consequence of the training course. Murdoch (2000) suggests that trainees should make a concrete plan of action to be implemented on returning to the real classroom. In this way "a motivating, teacher-driven basis for performance appraisal" (ibid.: 57) could be provided.

Secondly, a follow-up session including further seminars to compare and discuss the kind of progress made by the trainees and demonstrations based on post-training experiences. Such an approach would ensure an increased desire to see the training programme as part of the personal and professional development of the teacher, directly relevant to his or her needs and not merely an entertaining incident in the humdrum routine of professional life.

Conclusion

As observed at the beginning of this paper, teaching may be considered a complex process comprising a considerable number of variables which the teacher must be able to deal with competently and effectively. Within the context of in-service training for teachers of English as a foreign language, the problem of setting up a training course entails the examination of its content from a multiple perspective in order to offer a valid and satisfying

learning experience to the trainees. In this way professional growth is facilitated, and the trainee is better able to take on responsibility and be more readily aware of his or her actions and the implications of those actions within the teaching and more general educational context. I would like to conclude by quoting Schön (1983: 68), who reflects upon the somewhat indefinable nature of successful practice in the contest of a profession, in this case teaching, where a satisfactory quantifiable scientific basis for the evaluation of an effective practitioner in that field has not yet been developed. Further moves need to be made towards the clear definition of a practising professional theory-maker:

> When someone reflects-in-action, he (sic) becomes a researcher in the practice context. He is not dependent on the categories of established theory and technique, but constructs a new theory of the unique case. His inquiry is not limited to a deliberation about means which depends on a prior agreement about ends. He does not keep means and ends separate, but defines them interactively as he frames a problematic situation. He does not separate thinking from doing, ratiocinating his way to a decision which he must later convert into action. Because his experimenting is a kind of action, implementation is built into his inquiry.

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