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**Language Proficiency for English Teachers – An English language
proficiency and methodology course for teachers who speak English as
a Second or Foreign Language**

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British Council ELT Master's Dissertation Awards: Commendation

MA in English Language Teaching

DISSERTATION

Language Proficiency for English Teachers – An English language proficiency and methodology course for teachers who speak English as a Second or Foreign Language

06 September 2016

Word count: 5256 words

Table of contents	Page
1. Abstract.....	3
2. English as an international language.....	3
3. The native/non-native debate.....	3
4. NNS self-perceptions.....	5
5. The preparation of NNESTs.....	6
6. Language proficiency in Language Teacher Education (LTE)	6
7. Addressing language proficiency.....	7
8. Language proficiency and methodology	7
9. Language teacher education	8
10. Current issues in LTE.....	8
11. Course overview	10
11.1 Aim and context.....	10
12. Course design and pedagogy.....	10
13. Instructional practices	11
13.1 5-step process.....	11
13.2 Loop input.....	11
14. Application	12
14.1 Principles and practices.....	12
14.2 Language improvement and themes.....	12
15. Limitations	13
16. Conclusion.....	14
References.....	15

1. Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to outline the theoretical perspectives underpinning a language proficiency teacher training course designed for teachers of English who speak English as a second or foreign language. The paper starts with a preamble on the current status of English as an international language and reviews the professional literature characterising the native/non-native debate. It continues with the presentation of the perceptions of self-ascribed non-native teachers and discusses issues related to language proficiency and how to address them. After a brief review of pedagogical trends in language teacher education (LTE), the paper describes the curriculum design and development of the course and concludes arguing that language proficiency is instrumental in helping teachers develop a positive professional identity which in turn enhances the quality of instruction.

2. English as an international language

The global spread of English as an international language, i.e. a language used for communication among people who do not share the same language, is deeply rooted in the dominance of Britain and the United States as world powers. The colonial history of the British Empire, the industrial revolution, globalization and international commerce and travel, the internet and the appeal of British and American pop culture are traditionally considered to be the catalysts for the global expansion of English as a lingua franca (Crystal, 2003).

Accepted statistics estimate that the total number of English speakers is about 1.5-2 billion speakers (Crystal, 2012), distributed around the world not only in countries where English is the primary official language (*inner circle*: e.g. UK), but also in countries where English serves as one of the official languages (*outer circle*: e.g. India) and in countries where English is used as a foreign language for international communication (*expanding circle*: e.g. China) (Kachru, 1989).

The global status achieved by the English language is attested by the fact that the majority of English speakers is no longer represented by so-called native speakers (NS), but by those who use it as a second or foreign language at both national and international level (McKay, 2002). In fact, non-native speakers (NNS), or bilingual/multilingual users of English (ibid), have been reported to outnumber monolingual users (NS) by a 4:1 ratio (Crystal, 2012) and communication among bilingual/multilingual users (NNS) represents 74% of global English use (Graddol, 2006).

The increasing importance of 'foreign' language users has prompted linguists to revise the traditional geographical model of English use and shift the focus to issues related to language proficiency: the revised model presents the global community of English speakers concentrically expanding outwards from high to low levels of language proficiency (Graddol, 2006).

3. The native/non-native debate

The term native speaker has been traditionally associated with anyone who learned a language 'in natural settings from childhood as first or sole language' (Kachru and Nelson, 1996: 81). The validity of the construct and the assumption that all native speakers share the same language

and culture have been challenged on the basis that the concept is abstract and relies purely on linguistic and physical characteristics (Kramsch, 1998). On one hand, there is evidence that not all native speakers share the same variety of the language they speak (ibid), and on the other the construct has been accused of depending on racism and imperialism more than linguistic competence (Amin, 2004).

The professional literature presents three different positions on the NS/NNS dichotomy. The first position (*Figure 1*), best illustrated by the work of Medgyes (1994), depicts speakers as either belonging to one or the other category; NS/NNS are therefore seen as two separate groups with different characteristics. The second position (*Figure 2*), drawing on the work of Davies (2003), supports the idea that the NS is a myth, an idealised model used as a benchmark: although with difficulties, any second language learner can become a NS. Davies (ibid) further suggests that the difference is one of power: NS status is more influenced by confidence and identity than first vs second language acquisition. The third position (*Figure 3*), influenced by sociolinguistic theory (e.g. Canagarajah, 1999; Cook, 1999), recognizes the complexity of the NS/NNS labelling and deems it problematic, as it reinforces biological rather than sociocultural factors in language acquisition. The native speaker fallacy (Phillipson, 1992), i.e. the lack of theoretical evidence supporting the native speaker as the ideal speaker, is particularly evident in an increasingly multilingual and multicultural world. Kramsch (1998), for example, points out that the NS/NNS labels have no relevance in a world where speakers should be valued for their intercultural abilities, whereas Brutt-Griffler and Samimy (2001) show that individuals can't be easily categorized as NS or NNS, simply because they themselves have difficulties in identifying with one group or another.

Figure 1. NS and NNS professionals are different

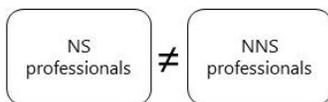


Figure 2. NNS professionals can become NS professionals

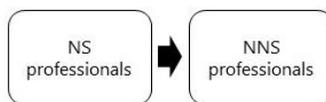
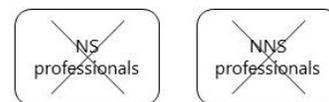


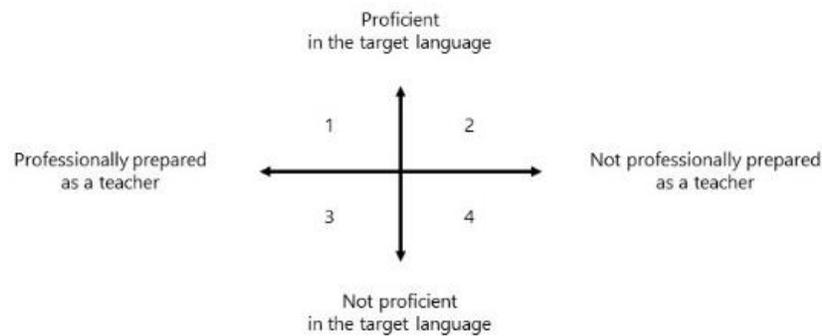
Figure 3. Labels are problematic to use.



Adapted from Kamhi-Stein, 2014

Starting with Paikeday (1985), researchers have been progressively promoting language proficiency as a better measure to determine the linguistic success of a language speaker. Pasternak and Bailey (2004), for example, suggest that instead of focusing on the NS/NNS distinction, the language teaching industry should place the emphasis on issues of language proficiency and professionalism. In their model (*Figure 4*), language teachers are placed along two intersecting continua, where different degrees of target-language proficiency and professional preparation are used to evaluate their expertise (ibid). *Quadrant 1* represents teachers who are proficient in the target language and professionally prepared. Conversely, teachers in *quadrant 4* lack language proficiency and professional preparation.

Figure 4. Intersecting continua of target-language proficiency and professional preparation



From Pasternak and Bailey, 2004

However, authors have conveniently maintained the distinction between NS and NNS in spite of the many objections raised: the distinction is paradoxically accepted in order to support arguments against nativeness in language teaching (Moussu and Llurda, 2008).

For the purpose of this project, the labels have been maintained to reflect the needs and desires expressed by self-proclaimed NNS, certainly not to suggest a linguistic problem.

4. NNS self-perceptions

Instead of focusing on differences, similarities, advantages and disadvantages which populate the NS/NNS discourse and therefore reinforce the dichotomy, this paper was influenced by research on non-native English teachers' (NNESTs) self-perceptions and self-assigned needs.

Reves and Medgyes (1994) demonstrated how NNESTs' awareness of their own language mistakes resulted in low self-esteem which then led to a sense of inferiority. Canagarajah (1999) pointed out that when NNESTs make mistakes or have doubts, their competence is more easily questioned. Braine (2004) confirmed that NNESTs themselves were generally less forgiving towards language proficiency and more prone to suffer from feelings of inadequacy and self-doubt. Samimy & Brutt-Griffler (1999) also revealed NNESTs' sense of inadequacy in ESL contexts where teaching competencies were more easily challenged simply because of the non-native factor. In other studies, Kahmi-Stein *et al.* (2004) reported that NNESTs generally felt less positive about their language skills than NESTs, and Llurda and Huguet (2003) pointed out that this could be linked to the level they were teaching. NNESTs teaching at higher level seemed more critical towards the NS/NNS debate and were less dependent on the NS model. Llurda (2005) added that those who had never experienced living in an English speaking country were more eager to support the NS as the ideal speaker and British English as the correct variety. Despite reports of discrimination, Dogancay-Aktuna's (2009) interviews presented a more positive linguistic picture of NNESTs self-perceptions, although some teachers wished a higher command of conversational English. Butler (2007) investigated attitudes among elementary school NNESTs and found that most complained about poor productive language skills.

5. The preparation of NNESTs

The ever growing demand for English instruction is well documented (e.g. Crystal, 2003) and there seem to be consensus that the majority of trained English teachers around the world are NNS (Braine 1999; Prodromou, 2003; Graddol, 2006). Some estimates put the figure as high as 80% (Canagarajah, 2005).

Existing literature on the preparation of NNESTs mainly outlines research findings of teacher training conducted in *inner circle* countries. These findings reveal that the majority of NNS course participants: (a) have had extensive prior teaching education and experience (Samimy and Brutt-Griffler, 1999); (b) plan to return to teaching in their home countries (Llurda, 2005) often in primary and secondary schools (Liu, 1999); (c) have lower language proficiency than NS participants but higher linguistic awareness (Llurda, 2005); (d) are eager to develop their proficiency as part of their professional development (Liu, 1999); (e) lack knowledge of English-speaking countries but are keen on learning about it (ibid); (f) are likely to know their students' L1 and use this knowledge to predict and anticipate difficulties (Samimy and Brutt-Griffler, 1999); (g) may suffer from a complex of inferiority in relation to NS colleagues (Kamhi-Stein, 2000) but are aware of other context-specific personal strengths (Samimy and Brutt-Griffler, 1999).

6. Language proficiency in Language Teacher Education (LTE)

As Kamhi-Stein (2009) notes, it could be argued that language proficiency is a central theme in NNS teacher-education programmes, especially in EFL contexts. This draws on the concept that, although language proficiency is 'only one element of professionalism' (Pasternak and Bailey, 2004: 161), a language teacher's confidence is 'most dependent on his or her own degree of language competence' (Murdoch, 1994: 258).

Berry (1990) and Murdoch's (1994) surveys of EFL teachers in Poland and Sri Lanka, for example, showed that language improvement was the number one priority in professional development. Johnson (1990) reported the need to raise the level of NNESTs' language proficiency in Hong Kong. Cullen (1994: 162), drawing from his experience working with NNESTs in Bangladesh and Egypt, reported an 'overwhelming desire' to improve English language skills. Vocabulary and pronunciation practice was the request of NNESTs in Hungary surveyed by Medgyes (1999). Lavender (2002) found that Korean teachers participating in in-service training in England regarded language improvement as the most important component of their course. McDonald and Kasule (2005) noted that teachers-in-preparation at the University of Botswana agreed that their studies had contributed to their improved English language competence.

More recent British Council reports seem to substantiate these findings and shed more light on the challenges faced by trainers and the desires expressed by trainees. In South Asia (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka), 95% of the 'teachers surveyed across the region indicated that they would like to improve their English language skills' (British Council, 2015: 37), a need also identified by some governments like India where large-scale state-wide programmes have been trying to support teachers through CPD in 'both their language teaching skills and their English language proficiency' (Hayes, 2014: 6). The narratives

of these reports (Bax, 2010; Tennant and Negash, 2010; Gunashekar et al., 2011; Edge and Mann, 2013; Powell-Davies and Gunashekar, 2013; Hayes, 2014; Skinner and Hou, 2014), whether coming from Indonesia, Korea, Senegal or Germany, appear to make the same suggestion: improve teachers' language proficiency to boost teachers' confidence and enhance the quality of instruction.

7. Addressing language proficiency

Literature on addressing language proficiency issues in LTE, as summarized by Kamhi-Stein (2009), seems to revolve around four distinct approaches. (1) Incorporating a language component in the curriculum and helping NNS trainees develop sociocultural competence (e.g. comparing and contrasting local and western-based pedagogical beliefs) as a stimulus to improve language skills and make instruction relevant to local contexts (Liu, 1999). (2) Personalizing language study to encourage trainees to work on individual/self-perceived language needs (Kamhi-Stein, 1999). (3) Including an element of familiarization with western-based pedagogical principles and, concurrently, working on productive language skills (Carrier, 2003). (4) Offering explicit grammar instruction, using real classroom materials, to raise both grammatical and pedagogical awareness (Borg, 2003).

However, language proficiency should not only serve a linguistic purpose, but should also help NNESTs develop a sense of professional legitimacy and self-confidence (Kamhi-Stein, 2009). Challenging the notion of the native speaker and questioning the ownership of the English language; preparing teachers to cope with the demands of popular communicative approaches and adapting them to local environments; exposing teachers to concepts like English as an International Language and helping them recognize the elusiveness of the notion of language ownership; and addressing culture-specific needs, expectations and limitations would all contribute to the development of a positive professional identity which in turn would 'positively affect teachers' instructional practices and standing in the profession' (ibid: 97-98).

8. Language proficiency and methodology

National policies and syllabi worldwide have increasingly moved towards the adoption of communicative approaches (Burns, 2005), and teachers are more and more expected to deal with unpredictable contributions from learners which require unplanned spontaneous interaction. Coping with the demands of these approaches has been observed to cause anxiety, especially when NNSs' lack of language proficiency constraints them when implementing these methodologies (Ho, 2004).

However, building on Berry's (1990) suggestions, Cullen (1994) pioneered the design of an in-service training course that dealt specifically with language improvement and methodology. In his model, the experience of language learning provided the input for other components like pedagogical skills and language awareness. Trainees first had direct experience of a particular approach/technique as language learners and then discussed it as teachers, evaluating its usefulness according to local/personal circumstances. Such framework clearly demonstrated the feasibility of simultaneously upgrading language skills and raising pedagogical awareness. The

strength of Cullen's model was that (1) it responded directly to the wishes/needs of the teachers; (2) it was founded on practice-driven experiential learning, thus offered opportunities for long-lasting effects; (3) it included a process of analysis and reflection, and therefore trained teachers to constantly question their own beliefs and practices vis-à-vis the reality of the environment where they taught.

9. Language teacher education

The development of LTE as a research field has a fairly recent history: from the early methodology courses for foreign language teachers of the 1920s in the USA (Schulz, 2000) to the establishment of the first EFL teacher training courses of the 1960s in the UK (Haycraft, 1988), the literature suggests that professional development for language teachers was mainly based on transmission of the latest theory in applied linguistics: 'it was assumed that such knowledge would enhance teachers' classroom practice' (Borg, 2011: 215).

The 1980s witnessed a renewed interest in teacher training (e.g. the work of the Council of Europe), but it wasn't until the 1990s that LTE started to be systematically researched and theorized. In their seminal work, Richards and Nunan (1990) first identified lack of empirical evidence in LTE and then called for a change in the assumptions underpinning teacher education. What they advocated was: '(a) a movement away from a 'training' perspective to an 'education' perspective and a recognition that effective teaching involves higher-level cognitive processes, which cannot be taught directly; (b) the need for teachers and student teachers to adopt a research orientation to their own classrooms and their own teaching; (c) less emphasis on prescriptions and top-down directives and more emphasis on an inquiry-based and discovery-oriented approach to learning (bottom-up); (d) a focus on devising experiences that require the student teacher to generate theories and hypotheses and to reflect critically on teaching; (e) less dependence on linguistics and language theory as a source discipline for second language teacher education, and more of an attempt to integrate sound, educationally based approaches; (f) use of procedures that involve teachers in gathering and analyzing data about teaching' (Richards and Nunan, 1990: xii).

What followed in the subsequent years was the development of these perspectives into an established domain of inquiry to better understand the nature of teacher learning and development (e.g. Richards and Lockhart, 1996; Freeman and Richards, 1996; Johnson, 2000; Malderez and Wedell, 2007; Burns and Richards, 2009). In her comprehensive review of LTE of the period, Crandall (2000) identified the following trends: (1) a shift from transmissive (product-oriented) to constructivist (process-oriented) theories of learning and teaching; (2) a stronger focus on 'situated teacher cognition and practice', i.e. contextualization of theory according to local environments; (3) recognition that prior learning experiences shape views of 'effective teaching and learning and their teaching practices'; (4) a view of the teacher as a professional who should theorize and direct his/her own development through 'collaborative observation, teacher research and inquiry, and sustained inservice programs' (Crandall, 2000: 34-36).

10. Current issues in LTE

As noted by Borg (2011), these themes continue to characterize LTE and provide the foundations on which current issues are built on. One of these issues is teacher cognition, i.e. 'understanding what teachers think, know, and believe, and how these relate to what teachers do' (ibid: 218). Contemporary sociocultural perspectives on LTE argue that 'teachers' prior experiences, their interpretations of the activities they engage in, and, most important, the contexts within which they work are extremely influential in shaping how and why teachers do what they do' (Johnson, 2006: 236).

Another issue is the knowledge base required by teachers. Richards (1998: xiv) proposes six different types of knowledge: 'general theories of teaching, teaching skills, communication skills, subject matter knowledge, pedagogical reasoning and decision making, and contextual knowledge'. Borg (2011: 219) observes that one characteristic of contemporary views on the knowledge base for LTE is the 'inclusion of knowledge which is internal to and created by teachers (e.g. personal theories and beliefs)', a feature in clear contrast with beliefs of transmission of knowledge which is passively acquired and then applied.

Linked to the previous theme is knowledge about language. Andrews' (2007: ix) study of teachers' language awareness (TLA), i.e. knowledge and understandings of the language systems, shows that 'the possession of an adequate level of TLA is an essential attribute of any competent L2 teacher'. However, lack of empirical evidence on how this knowledge is used in teaching means that more research is needed on how to develop TLA through LTE to support learning (Borg, 2011).

Reflective practice is another recurrent theme in modern LTE literature. The landmark works of Schön (1983) and Wallace (1991) laid the foundations of the current understanding of reflection in language teaching, i.e. the critical analysis of principles, attitudes, beliefs, assumptions and teaching practices for the improvement of classroom practice (Richards and Lockhart, 1996; Richards and Farrell, 2005). Reflective practice is firmly grounded on another important topic in contemporary LTE: the notion of the teacher as a researcher, i.e. the systematic investigation of aspects of professional practice in order to enhance its understanding and quality. It is important to note that research-oriented activities (e.g. learner questionnaires, classroom observations, journal writing, etc.) demand full personal responsibility and require teachers to see themselves as active agents of change and growth (Farrell, 2007). A parallel with the concept of teacher autonomy in professional development seems inevitable: throughout the volume edited by Sinclair, McGrath and Lamb (2000), it is clear that research and reflection are instrumental in increasing the capacity to self-direct one's learning.

However, as much as educators promote reflective practice as an essential activity for professional development (e.g. Burton, 2009), some critics (e.g. Akbari, 2007) argue that more empirical evidence is needed to prove that reflection results in better student achievements and teacher performance. Walsh and Mann (2015), for example, suggest a model for reflection that is more data-driven, collaborative and dialogic, and that employs a wide range of reflective tools.

11. Course overview

This section outlines the course design and development including its context, pedagogical principles and application, and perceived limitations.

11.1 Aim and context

The aim of the course is to enhance teachers' English language proficiency through language practice, analysis and reflection with the intention of raising participants' awareness of language systems, skills, methodologies and resources. The effect of the practice and reflection should boost confidence and with it the quality of instruction.

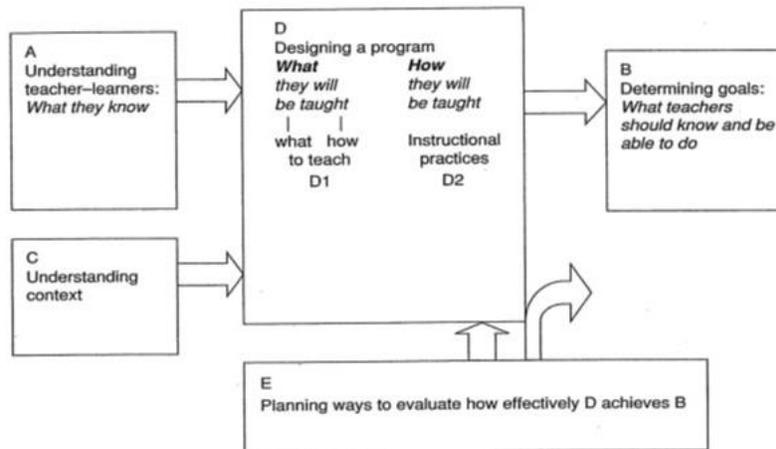
The course focuses on the needs expressed by bilingual/multilingual teachers of English who use English as a second or foreign language and who, according to the literature reviewed in this paper, mainly teach in outer and expanding circles, often in less privileged conditions where resources are scarce and difficult to access.

The level of proficiency required by participants to engage with the contents of the course should be on the high end of the *B level* in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, as required by many MA courses in TESOL/EFL. The trainer should ideally be one level higher than the participants and possess strong linguistic awareness. The course is for both novice and expert teachers and is intended as an in-service course for professional development. The length of the course is 20 hours in duration.

12. Course design and pedagogy

'Planning an educational programme focuses on *who* will be taught, *what* will be taught, *how* it will be taught, and *how* what is learned will be evaluated' (Graves, 2011: 115).

Figure 5. Framework for planning a curriculum



From Graves, 2011: 116

As illustrated in Graves' (2011) model (*Figure 5*), curriculum planning should be based on needs analysis, from both a starting (*A*) and an ending perspective (*B*): *A*, gathers information about the teacher-learners who will take part in the programme, i.e. who they are, what they know, what they can do, etc. *B*, gathers information about what the teacher-learners should be able to do as a result of the programme, i.e. the objectives of the programme. The programme itself, *D* in *Figure 5*, should be designed to bridge the gap between what the teacher-learners know at the beginning of the programme and what they should know when they complete it. The programme should encompass *what* (*D1*) teachers will be taught (in-line with the objectives) and *how* (*D2*) they will be taught, i.e. the instructional practices for learning. An important component is also the context analysis (*C*) which takes into consideration resources and possible constraints. The process is completed by the evaluation (*E*) of the effectiveness of the programme to assess how well the intended objectives have been achieved.

13. Instructional practices

The pedagogical principles underlying the way the course is taught are based on two models of knowledge construction: Malderez and Wedell's (2007) 5-step process and Woodward's (1986) loop input.

13.1 5-step process

The knowledge base which this course aims to enhance derives from the types of knowledge discussed on previous sections of this paper (e.g. Richards, 1998). Malderez and Wedell (2007) clarify that this knowledge can refer to: (1) *knowing about*, i.e. knowledge of the subject, context where it is taught and how it is learned; (2) *knowing how*, i.e. knowledge of strategies to support and assess learning; (3) *knowing to*, i.e. ability to mobilize and integrate the previous two

domains to support learning. Using any of these domains as a starting point, the 5-step model advocates the following process: *Step 1* - defining knowledge and describing an experience; *Step 2* – interpreting and explaining the experience; *Step 3* – listening to other experiences and other ways of interpreting the experience; *Step 4* – processing the various experiences, with a view of deriving new or revised perceptions and knowledge; *Step 5* – imagining yourself trying out new ideas according to personal context.

The authors (ibid) claim that this process is particularly effective for training that takes place outside the real classroom: trainees are asked to examine and reflect on their beliefs and practices in a constructivist manner, and then contemplate the possibility of implementing a change. They (ibid) add that to complete the process, trainees would ideally take part in a sixth step, which would give them access to a real teaching context.

13.2 Loop input

Building on mainstream experiential learning models (e.g. Kolb, 1984), Woodward (1986) described a process for learning, nicknamed 'loop input', in which the *content* of the learning experience is mirrored in the *process*. If a training session is about 'messenger dictation', for example, the trainer could assign trainees the roles of messenger and scribe, and ask them to experience the activity first hand (the messenger reads chunks of a text stuck on the wall and runs back to dictate it to the scribe). In typical experiential learning, the text of the dictation could be taken from any textbook. Loop input, instead, involves using a text which is itself about 'messenger dictation' and requires the trainees to discuss it after the activity is completed. This final step of unpacking the activity, or 'decompression' (Woodward, 2003: 302), allows the trainees not only to experience the process (messenger dictation), but also to reflect on its congruence with the content (dictation text).

The advantage of the loop input model is that it allows 'self-descriptivity' and 'recursion': the 'reverberation' between *content* (the text) and *process* (the activity) offers opportunities for deeper understanding and learning of concepts (ibid: 303).

14. Application

14.1 Principles and practices

The nature of the approach adopted throughout the course is constructivist: the trainer doesn't lecture and passively transmit knowledge but acts as facilitator to help participants construct new meaning and knowledge in relation to their experiences and existing beliefs.

This knowledge is constructed collaboratively using the 5-step process described earlier. Every session starts with a discussion which is intended not only to engage participants but also to make them think about and interpret their own experiences/beliefs. This is followed by reading or listening text which presents other ways of interpreting the same experience and introduces new ones. This is extended by further discussion to help participants compare and contrast

these different experiences and start constructing new/revised knowledge. The process is concluded by an end-of-session reflection in which participants are encouraged to imagine themselves implementing changes according to their revised ideas.

Wherever possible the course takes advantage of the loop input model through the use of an experiential cycle which involves a concrete experience and a reflection to conceptualise the experience for future experimentation. This is done by using reading and listening text whose content is congruent with the experience. An example could be the session in which participants practise top-down and bottom-up listening skills using a listening text which describes the two processes. This is followed by a discussion which helps participants see the coherence between process (e.g. top-down listening activity) and content (e.g. text on top-down listening processes) and thus deepens their understanding of the experience.

14.2 Language improvement and themes

The work on language proficiency is characterised by combining receptive (reading and listening) and productive skills (speaking and writing) for a dual purpose: on one hand participants are required to practise language skills with the objective of improving them; on the other, participants are encouraged to use these skills to analyse language at sentence and beyond-sentence level with a focus on grammatical and lexical items with the aim of increasing linguistic and pedagogical awareness. The activities used for this purpose mirror the kind of task types found in language proficiency examinations like Cambridge First. This was a decision influenced by personal experience as a learner of English: tasks like multiple choice, word formation, gapped texts, etc. not only challenge English skills but raise consciousness of the English language systems. Some tasks also lend themselves to the explicit study of meaning, form, use and phonology of particular grammatical and lexical items in context.

Receptive language skills and language analysis are then followed by speaking and writing activities to encourage participants to use appropriate language and discourse strategies to elaborate the sessions' themes. After generic feedback on the participants' language performance (recommended in the trainer's manual), the analysis and practice end with a final reflection on individual language needs: this offers personalisation for future language study and fosters autonomy.

The themes, and therefore texts, chosen for the course also serve a multiple purpose. Although participants should familiarise themselves with popular western-based pedagogical principles and evaluate them according to local contexts (e.g. developing listening skills), the objective is also to encourage them to engage with topics that could help them develop a strong professional identity (e.g. native speakership).

15. Limitations

The course is based on contemporary LTE principles and the design process included all stages mentioned before, although with some limitations.

The context, for instance, encompasses a wide international audience. In fact, the needs analysis is based on literature rather than on the real linguistic/professional necessities of the prospective participants. As a result, *what* will be taught has been selected according to its relevance to the reports reviewed and, partially, personal experience. This may limit the appeal of the course in highly localized environments with very context-specific needs. However, the course doesn't prescribe a fixed sequence and the variety of topics should offer sufficient alternatives.

The choice of texts is also personal and may reflect some of my personal beliefs/bias. However, the course is based on a solid framework in which the reading and listening texts are resources for language practice and analysis, and further reflection on pedagogical/professional matters. If trainers wished to explore different themes, text replacement would only require turning a text of choice into a Cambridge First-style task and complement it with some explicit language analysis and reflection activities. This would require little time.

The use of exercises taken from popular examinations could suggest that the course is like a test. However, the trainer is instructed not to treat the exercises as a way of testing linguistic awareness but as a means to increase it. On the contrary, I believe using familiar testing formats will make participants trust the course more and will cater for participants who are keen on testing themselves.

The syllabus doesn't include teaching practice: this limits the possibility of trying out new ideas generated during the training and affects the completion of the process of knowledge construction and experiential learning. From personal experience, however, it feels unreal to make participants try out new/revised classroom techniques with their peers during the training. As a result, participants are constantly encouraged to make plans for future experimentation and this should prompt them to take action after the training and therefore complete the experiential cycle.

The materials are visually simple (to be easy to photocopy) and don't include the use of technology. This was intentional as the course wants to be accessible also to participants who don't have the privilege of the latest electronic/digital resources. However, trainers are recommended to make use of technology if available and let participants question their usefulness in teaching/learning.

The evaluation of the programme is also complex: the result of the course should enhance teachers' confidence through language awareness and reflection on instructional practices. The impact on the identity, confidence and teaching of prospective participants can't be directly assessed by an end-of-course test, which as a consequence was deliberately omitted. However, perceptions about the effects of the course on beliefs and practices could be easily surveyed using a questionnaire.

Finally, the length of the course (20 hrs) is insufficient to have an immediate effect on the participants' level of language proficiency. However, the course will set a linguistic and professional improvement path and hopefully influence beliefs and practices. This alone has the potential of a positive and long-lasting effect.

16. Conclusion

In this paper, I reviewed the latest pedagogical trends in LTE, demonstrated that language proficiency is the most basic requirement for the language teacher and reported the wishes of NNESTs to improve their language competence. I then described a way to address the issue of language proficiency in an in-service training programme in contexts where there is a desire for it. The training I suggested attempts to combine language improvement and methodology by using resources that increase linguistic awareness and enhance classroom practice, and concurrently shape the professional identity of the participants. In my view, the framework has a number of strengths which can be exploited to fulfil the immediate needs of a vast majority of teachers. Firstly, the focus is on language improvement and thus addresses these pressing needs directly. Secondly, the approach considers previous learning experiences and promotes reflection based on classroom experience. This enables participants to question top-down approaches which they may have experienced in pre-service training. Thirdly, it engages participants with topics that consider sociocultural perspectives and implications. This empowers participants and gives them confidence of their status and competence. Finally, it advocates autonomy and independent learning, and therefore contributes to professional development after the course.

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