Dealing with Theory in Intensive TET for NNS Teachers:ReflectionsonaCourseforMexicanTrainees[1]

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1. THE PROJECT AND THE COURSE

In 1997 the Government of the State of Baja California, Mexico, announced that English would be incorporated to the public primary schools curriculum. The Secreataría de Educación Pública (SEP), in charge of organising and piloting the project, decided that classes would be taught by primary school teachers who could speak English. The teachers would be trained and the project would be piloted in a small number of schools in Ensenada, Tijuana and Mexicali.

The School of Languages of the Universidad Autónoma de Baja California was selected to design and run the course. The syllabus was designed in the Campus Mexicali and sent to the three campuses where it was to be offered.

The course comprises a total of 185 hours, divided into three modules, each including 2 or 3 subjects (see Appendix 1). As an appointed tutor for a subject in the first module, I found the syllabus and general aim of the subject over-reaching and too dense for the group of NNS (non-native speaker) learner-teachers that would take it in Ensenada.

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I developed the perception that this situation could derive from resorting to different models of teacher education in the conception of the syllabus as well as from a lose adjustment to the real context. This led to the idea that a close analysis of the syllabus in the light of TET (Teacher Education and Training) models and the profile of the real participants in Ensenada could help improve the course.

This study explores current models of TET, analyses the syllabus in the light of those models and describes the changes to the syllabus that emerge as necessary. The effectiveness of these changes is then evaluated from the analysis of the opinions of the course participants as expressed in a survey.

2. RELEVANT ISSUES IN TET

Decisions that affect courses, whether at the stage of design or when modifying them, are necessarily based on assumptions rather than certainties. In Brumfit's terms, "...teacher training courses...should not claim that we know how learners learn or how good teachers teach...we do, in fact, know too little to be able to generalise efficiently" (1979:1). It is therefore necessary to be clear about those assumptions before effective and coherent decisions can be made. A look at some current issues in TET is necessary to establish a framework to guide this process.

2.i. Training vs. Education vs. Teacher Development

Widdowson's (1993) distinction between training and education proves to be an illuminating starting point in viewing the general purpose of a course. In his own terms,

> "...a course which instructs teachers to adopt particular techniques or follow a particular method is a training course (...) Teacher education, on the other hand, while indicating the relevant parameters, leaves them open, and so encourages enquiry: It is essentially concerned with theorizing about practice on the assumption that this provides for its appropriate but principled adaptation." (1993:269)

Michael Wallace (1991) cites Edge to introduce one other current construct in TET, that of teacher development. This idea of professional development is not exclusive to the language teaching profession, and got to it "from the literature of teacher education in general" (Widdowson, 1999). In discussing it, Wallace states that "training and education is something that can be presented by *others*; whereas development is something that can be done only by and for *onself*" (1991:3

through reflection on practice and critical thinking.

This view is in line with Widdowson's assertion that "educating teachers, in the sense of making them aware of principles...still presupposes a transmission view of teaching" (1999:2). It becomes evident, then, that there are also assumption behind these distinctions.

2.ii. Paradigms of Knowledge and Models of Teacher Education

All contrasts and distinctions in the perception of teaching and teachers' knowledge ultimately derive from two opposing traditions deeply embedded in our culture: the positivist and the phenomenological paradigms of knowledge (Roberts, 1998). In essence, a positivist view is knowledge-centred, and values generalisable truths undistorted by subjectivity and therefore external to the individual. A phenomenological view, in contrast, is person-centred, values the meanings that the individual builds, and emphasises the unpredictable nature of situations (Parlet and Hamilton, 1977, in Roberts 1998).

The inescapable effect of these paradigms in shaping thought becomes evident if we explore distinctions such as process and product teaching, teaching as 'equipping' or as 'enabling' (Prabhu, in Woodward, 1991) and, of course, teacher training and education and teacher development. It is then these paradigms that underlie the different approaches to teacher education.

When dealing with models of teacher education, different authors use varying terms and classifications. Wallace (1991) makes reference to the craft, the applied science and the reflective models. Johnson (1995) refers to a scientific (external) and an experiential and idiosyncratic (internal) view of learning, and Zeichner (in Roberts, 1998) speaks of the behaviourist, personalistic, traditional craft and enquiry models.

Despite diversity in terms, all classifications are based on viewing the task of learning to teach from one of the two paradigms. Within positivism, learning is centrally seen as either the imitation of a model or the accumulation of what Schön calls "received knowledge" (in Wallace, 1991:52). Within the phenomenological paradigm, it is viewed as a process of constructing personal meanings from received knowledge and permanently reviewing them in the light of experience. The adoption of a model, then, brings with it implicit assumptions on the nature of knowledge and the role of the trainee in his/her own process of acquiring it.

Adopting Wallace's (1991) terms, a craft model reduces the process of learning to teach to the imitation of others' behaviours, and seems consequently to assume

that it is possible to identify "good teaching" and replicate it. It sees the learner-teacher as a prospective practitioner that can be trained to acquire and apply skills that more expert teachers have devised.

An applied science model "derives its authority from the achievements of empirical science" (Wallace, 1991:8) and "assumes that the more research-driven knowledge teachers have, the better their teaching performances will be" (Johnson, 1995:29). It reduces the trainee to an empty vessel to be filled with theoretical knowledge, and expects him/her to somehow apply the findings of empirical research to the teaching situation (Wallace, 1991).

A reflective model, on the other hand, both acknowledges and values the trainees' ideas and prior knowledge and experience. The assumptions behind it are not only ethically different (Roberts, 1998) but also involve a qualitatively different view of the process of learning. Taking a constructivist stance, the model takes the trainees' background as its starting point and attempts to build on it. It takes account of both the filtering effect of personal beliefs on received knowledge referred to by Roberts as "the washing out process" (1998:295), and the value of collaborative work, through which "aims are...clarified, experiences are shared, language and concepts for understanding practice are refined...[and] personal insecurities...are reduced" (Pollard, 1997:18).

Being person-centred, the reflective model views expertise as resulting from a combination of "received knowledge" and reflection on "experiential knowledge" (Schön, in Wallace, 1991:52). "It leads to a concept of teacher preparation as more a matter of education by self-reflection than of training by direction and transmission of technique" (Widdowson, 1993).

Broadly speaking, then, we can establish an association of the craft model to training, the applied science model to education, and the reflective model to professional development. When dealing with concrete courses, however, we should keep in mind Robert's (1998) warning that models and paradigms are idealisations and as such not applicable in their pure forms to a more chaotic reality.

Robert's (1998) urge for the recognition of the complexities of learner-teachers needs and a view of paradigms as compass points -in line with Woodward's (1991) bi-polar scales for clarifying attitudes towards teacher education- suggests that theory, practice and reflection should all have a place in courses aimed at forming teachers. Emphasis on each component will vary with idiosyncratic characteristics, and be defined when designing the syllabus.

2.iii. The Models Applied: Syllabus Design

Richards and Rogers' (1986) framework for describing methods has been applied to syllabus and curriculum design by several authors (e.g. Roberts, 1998, Woodward, 1991, White, 1988). Its three levels of approach, design and procedure help us order and visualise the elements in a course. In discussing the framework, both Roberts (1998) and Woodward (1991) state that the selection of a model of teacher education occurs at the level of approach and takes shape at the level of design, to be finally operationalised at the level of procedure.

The level of approach is then that of abstract ideas and beliefs. It is here that the inclusion of theory is decided, and where the designer must define what is meant by theory, since "in discussing and defining the field of language teaching theory, it is important to recognise that there are various categories...to be sorted out" (Yalden, 1987:9). Yalden cites Stern to state that we can speak of

> "theory in three different senses. The first is the systematic study of the thought related to a topic or activity (T1)...The second definition (T2) subsumes what are often referred to as language teaching methods, approaches, philosophies or schools of thought. The third definition (T3) is the concept as employed in the natural and human sciences as a hypothesis or set of hypotheses that have been verified by observation and experiment" (Stern, 1983:25-26, in Yalden, 1987:10).

At this point, the designer should keep in mind Stern's suggestion that "No language teacher –however strenuously he may deny his interest in theory- can teach a language without a theory of language teaching" (1983:27).

Design is the stage at which objectives, contents, sequence, roles, materials and assessment take a concrete form, and where the interaction of theory and practice is determined. At this point, the designer should consider Brumfit's suggestion that "...since a training course is not aiming to produce either linguists or educational theorists, it [should] be an integrated course" (1979:2). The designer should also keep in mind Wallace's warnings that "students have a natural tendency to 'compartmentalise' knowledge which is received...from different tutors...[and that] the application of academic information to practice is usually a fairly sophisticated operation, which most trainees can not achieve without guidance" (1991: 56).

It is also at the level of design that it becomes imperative to be aware of what Roberts (1998) calls high priority variables. The purpose of the course, time, resources and known or anticipated characteristics of learner-teachers should be the starting point in planning, a generally acknowledged fact in the literature on syllabus design (e.g. Yalden, 1987; White, 1988).

If the course is to deal with theory, two factors become particularly important: the assessment of the participants' background knowledge, and the availability of class-time to ground theory in a dynamic way, to thus avoid what Stones describes as "obsessive 'syllabus covering' traversing vast tracks of verbalising" (1984:5).

The level of design, however, is not necessarily the last instance in defining what happens in the course. When discussing Richards and Rogers (1986) framework, Woodward (1991) states that it fails to illustrate how the three levels interact and can modify each other, since it may be taken to suggest only top-down influences. Roberts also points at how the tutor-trainees interaction is "marked by constant adjustments" (1998:103), thus being capable of producing bottom-up changes. This is what actually happened in the course in Mexico that I describe in this study, when, after having met the trainees, I decided that changes to the syllabus were necessary.

3. THE COURSE

3.i Description

The course comprises 185 class-hours, divided into 3 modules. The first module allots 30 hours to English Grammar and 25 hours to Contemporary Trends in English Teaching. The second module allocates 30 hours to Methodology for Teaching the Four Macro Skills and 30 hours to Second Language Teaching Techniques. The third module consists of 25 hours for Lesson Planning, 25 hours for Material Design and 20 hours for Evaluation.

The general objective of the syllabus is "to enable the trainee to select the most adequate theories for teaching English, as well as use the corresponding techniques in order to achieve the objectives of her/his syllabus" (translation).

The 17 participants are public primary school teachers willing to participate in the project and a group of teachers from private schools that were placed in the course in order to reach the desired number. Since only three of them have

taught English for more than 2 years and four have no teaching experience, and because this is the first course for 75% of them, they can, as a whole, be considered novice teachers.

The participants were selected after having taken a 101-item TOEFL-like test that evaluated grammar and listening comprehension. They were also interviewed individually and required to write a short essay on their opinion on the inclusion of English in the primary school curriculum. The essays enabled a first insight into their background knowledge on TESOL.

This work is restricted to discussing the first teaching-related subject in the first module, from now on referred to as 'the course'.

3.ii The First Teaching-related Subject: Contemporary Trends in Language Teaching

The aim of this course, as stated in the syllabus, is "to provide the participant with knowledge of the different trends in teaching a second language that have been proposed throughout history so that s/he can achieve a better development in her/his professional career" (translation). The contents are divided into three areas: "Approaches and Methods", "The Building of Theories" and "The Role and Purpose of Teaching a Second Language" (see Box 1).

A positivist, transmission-oriented view of learning becomes evident in the wording of the aim: *participants will be provided with knowledge.* The knowledge to be provided, as indicated in the list of contents and defined by the mostly theory-oriented reading material (see Box 1) falls within Stern's (in Yalden, 1987:10) T2 and T3 categories: theory on methodology and approaches and theory emerging from empirical research.

Thus far, the syllabus can then be described as taking an 'applied science' approach, and as such seen as an instance of the metaphor of the trainee as an empty vessel to be filled with knowledge. The consequent role of the trainer is that of knowledge holder and provider.

The general objective of the course, however, states that "At the end of the course, the participant will know the different trends in second language teaching and be able to place her/his professional work within those which s/he considers appropriate to her/his context in order to optimise her/his teaching practice" (translation, see Box 1).

Box 1 - **SYLLABUS** (translation), January 1999

Subject: CONTEMPORARY TRENDS IN ENGLISH TEACHING

General Aim:

To provide the participant with knowledge of the different trends in teaching a second language that have been proposed throughout history sot hat s/he can achieve a better development in her/his professional career.

General Objective:

At the end of the course, the participant will know the different trends in second language teaching and be able to place her/his professional work within those that s/he considers appropriate to her/his context in order to optimise her/his teaching practice.

Time: 25 hours

Contents:

I. Approaches and Methods

I.1 The Oral Approach and Situational Language Teaching

I.2 The Audiolingual Method

I.3 Communicative Language Teaching

I.4 Total Physical Response

I.5 The Silent Way

I.6 Community Language Learning

I.7 The Natural Approach

I.8 Suggestopedia

I.9 Comparing and Evaluating Methods

II. The Building of Theories

II.1 Nativist Theories of SLA

II.2 Environmentalist Theories of SLA

II.3 Interactionist Theories of SLA

III. The Role and Purpose of Teaching a Second Language

III.1 The Communicative Era: The 2nd. Era

III.2 Issues and Methodology in Teacher Training

Bibliography:

Richards, J. and Rogers, T., Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching, CUP, 1986.

Rossner, R. and Bolitho, R., Currents of Change, OUP, 1990

Larsen-Freeman, D., and Long, M. An Introduction to Second Language Acquisition Research, Longman, 1991.

Omagio, C., Teaching Language in Context, Heinle and Heinle, 1986.

Thus stated, the general objective seems to acknowledge on the one hand, that not all principles are universally generalisable, and on the other, that effective teaching calls for a flexible practitioner who can adapt to varying circumstances. Although the emphasis on knowledge is still present here, there seems to be a more phenomenologically-oriented view of the process of learning to teach in the statement that the teacher will her/himself decide what is appropriate to her/his context.

The aim and objective can then be seen as an instance of Roberts' (1998) suggestion that no single paradigm is applicable to the complex needs of learner-teachers. The acknowledgement of this complexity then calls for contents, materials and a methodology that address both the need for knowledge and guidance in its application, and the need for reflection and the critical appraisal of theory. From this stance, the role of the trainer is basically that of facilitator.

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3.iii Some Foreseeable Problems

The acknowledgement of learner-teachers' needs for both knowledge and reflection contributes to the success of a course only if what Roberts (1998) calls high priority variables have been adequately assessed. This process becomes particularly difficult when, as in this case, a course is designed for a whole state and there is no possibility of contacting participants in all sites. The first encounter with the participants in Ensenada during recruitment suggested that the syllabus called for adjustments. As the appointed tutor, I therefore suggested that it was necessary to re-analyse the contents and materials of this first course in the light of the stated aim and objective and considering the characteristics of the participants and the available time.

The results of the selection test suggested that the level of difficulty of the reading materials that had been listed at the stage of design (see Box 1) was too high for the participants. On the one hand, there seemed to be a mismatch between their level of competence in English as assessed from the questions in the test and the interview and that required to deal with the readings. On the other, the written section of the test suggested that the learner-teachers lacked the metalanguage and background knowledge that the texts took for granted.

A second problem was foreseen in relation to time constraints. Twenty-five hours distributed in five subsequent 5-hour Saturday sessions seemed too few to deal with all the contents. The combination of difficult -perhaps inaccessible- reading material and dense content seemed to point at only one possible methodology, lecturing, which, when dealing with pedagogy, suggests disbelief in one's own expositions (Stones, 1984).

The fact that this was the first course for most participants also suggested that it would be necessary to help them translate theory into its practical application, a fact acknowledged in the syllabus, which describes the course as theoretical and practical, though impracticable due to time constraints.

3.iv. Adapting the Syllabus to the Context: Proposed Solutions

The changes proposed centred around two areas: contents and materials. The rationale was that a reduction in the number of topics and the selection of more accessible materials would result in more time for dealing with technical vocabulary as well as with activities aimed at both aiding comprehension and linking theory to its practical application, thereby preventing the participants from "compartmentalising" (Wallace, 1991:56) theory.

These changes would, in turn, set the conditions for activities aimed at leading the trainees to view theory critically, link it to their experience either as teachers or learners, explore their own beliefs and, in the process, become aware of the role of reflection in professional development. In addition, the changes would enable the use of varied group dynamics based on collaboration, with an expected positive effect both on learning and motivation.

Content was then reduced to only the first area: approaches and methods. Applied linguistic theory, defined in terms of Stern's (in Yalden, 1987:10) T3 category, was briefly introduced when dealing with approaches and methods stemming from theories included in the syllabus. For example, bahaviorist, nativist and interactionist views of second language acquisition were briefly introduced and exemplified.

This decision was made on the basis that trainees would profit from being "introduced in the mysteries of the craft" (Widdowson, 1999:2) through an immediately applicable rather than a more abstract field of theory. The brief presentation of applied linguistic theory was expected to awake the trainees' curiosity.

The reading material was changed and considerably reduced. Passages were selected on the basis of their expected accessibility to the trainees and their relevance to the topics in the syllabus. The criterion for the selection of new reading material was its being directed at novice teachers. The new reading material was selected from books by Harmer (1983), Lewis (1985; 1993), and Larsen-Freeman (1986). From the original list, only a few passages form Richards and Rogers (1986) were selected.

The selected reading texts dealt with key concepts and technical vocabulary, such as language functions and signification and value, as well as with descriptions of methods and theories of learning and principles behind them and tech-

niques associated to them.

With more time thus made available, tasks planned at the stage of implementation centred around three main objectives: understanding principles, understanding how principles are translated into practice, and viewing principles critically in the light of the participants' beliefs and experience.

When dealing with understanding theory, different dynamics were used and lecturing was restricted to complex aspects and in all cases kept short. Most tasks involved reading short passages and explaining them to classmates. Varied techniques were used to maintain interest, such as jig-saw reading or elaboration of posters in groups. Comprehension was always checked through post-task group discussions. During these activities, all technical vocabulary was explained, and each learner-teacher elaborated her/his own glossary.

Activities aimed at understanding how principles are actualised in practice were also varied. They involved the search for underlying principles in textbooks, exercises and tasks, the adaptation of principled tasks for children, and group demonstrations following the principles and using the techniques of given methodologies.

Even though reflection on the actual application of principles in the classroom could not be implemented because there were participants who were not working and the course encompassed only five sessions, the reflective element of the course was implemented in three different ways.

During the first session one hour was used for the exploration of the participants' views of language teaching and teachers in the form of ideas, beliefs and anecdotes. Subsequent work on different methods was systematically associated to comments made during this first task, aimed at surfacing unconscious beliefs.

All methods explored were discussed in terms of their applicability to the learner-teachers' real or prospective contexts. Participants were encouraged to express and justify their views on principles and techniques.

The participants were also required to write short reflective essays discussing their critical views of the theory discussed in class and its applicability to their contexts. They were encouraged to comment on the extent to which they considered they could personally adopt these principles and techniques in terms of their personalities, knowledge and experience.

4. EVALUATION

Throughout the five sessions, and judging from the participants' level of motivation and understanding, my perception was that the changes done to the syllabus had been adequate. At the end of the course, and after grades had been informed, a questionnaire was applied to twelve participants to explore their opinions on the course. They were asked to be critical, since their views were valued and the information would be used to improve the course.

The questionnaire (Appendix 2) was targeted at surfacing the participants' opinions on different areas of the course. An agreement scale was used, so participants had to express "the *intensity* of their attitude" (Henerson, et.al., 1987:87) to given statements on a 5-point scale. Statements were included to double-check opinions.

The analysis of results (Box 2) suggests that learner-teachers found the study of methods and approaches (*statements 8, 13* in Appendix 2) useful, with an average grading of 4.83 from the 5-point scale. Both this average and individual answers are consistent with a third statement (*3*) exploring the perceived usefulness of content in general, in average graded 4.91. While participant 1 (see Box 2) commented that it had been excessive, participant 2 stated that it had led to understanding, and participants 4 and 9 that the usefulness had resulted from its practical component. This suggests, then, that changes were made in the right direction.

The usefulness of the study of applied linguistic theory (*statements 9, 14*) was graded 4.33 and 4.25 in average. It should be noted that the questionnaire failed to ask about the proportion of the syllabus that in their opinion should be devoted to this area. Grades may therefore have been assigned considering the inclusion of only brief explanations, as was done in this course.

The usefulness of reflective activities (*statements 10, 12, 15, 16*) was graded 4 and 5 in all cases, with the exception of two participants.

The overall methodology used in the course (*statements 4, 5, 6*) was assessed with an average of 4.93. The distribution of work on theory and its practical application (*statement 4*) was assigned a full 5. This again suggests that changes were adequate, since no time would have been available for class dynamics if they had not been made.

Box 2 – Analysis of Results

Participant

Area	*State-ment*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Av.
Content	*3*	4*	5 *	5	5 *	5	5	5	5	5*	5	5	5	4.9
	7	5	5	4	5	5	5	5	5	5	4	5	5	4.8
	Av.3,	4	5	4.5	5	5	5	5	5	5	4.5	5	5	4.8
Theory on Methodol.ogy	*8*	4	5	4	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	4.8
	13	5	4	4	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	4.8
	Av.8,	4.	4.5	4	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	4.8
Theory on App.Ling	*9*	4	4	3	5	5	4	4	5	4	5	5*°	4	4.3
	14	5	2	3	5	5	4*°	4	5	4	5	4*	5	4.2
	Av.9,	4.	3	3	5	5	4	4	5	4	5	4.5	4.5	4.2
Method ology used	*4*	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	4	5	5	5	4.9
	6	4	5	4	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	4.8
	A.4,	4.	5	4.6	5	5	5	5	5	4.6	5	5	5	4.9
Reflect. Essays	*10*	5	4	5	1	5	5	5	5	5	4	5	5	4.5
	15	5	5	5	2	5	5	5	5	5	4	5	4	4.5
Reflective tasks	*A.10*	5	4.5	5	1.5	5	5	5	5	5	4	5	4.5	4.5
	12	2	5	5	4	5	4	5	5	4	5	5	5	4.5
	16	5	5	5	1	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	4.6
Vocabulary	*11*	5	5	4	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	4.9
	17	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
	A.11	5	5	4.5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	4.9

Comments made by Participants (literally transcribed from questionnaires)

Statement 3

*0. "It is a lot of content in a short time".
*1. "Because in a short time I understood all the techniques".
*2. "Because the theory is totally related with the instrumentation".
*3. "Because we compared and analyzed the ideas behind the approaches and methods".

Statement 9

*0. "I think that a teacher must have an idea of what we are teaching, (where it comes form, etc.)

Statement 14

*0. "May be not on the first module".
*1. "I think it is good just to let them know what it is (not to go too deeply)

The statements on the area of technical vocabulary (*11, 17*) were graded in average 4.91 and 5. These high scores may be related to the level of difficulty of the reading texts which, in spite of changes, was still somewhat high.

When asked to assess the level of difficulty of the reading materials (*statement 18,* Box 3), 58% of the learner-teachers expressed it was adequate and 42% found it relatively high, which suggests that further adjustment is necessary.

Box 3 – Analysis of Results - Level of Difficulty of Reading Material					
Statement 18					
	Extremely high	Relatively high	Adequate	Relatively low	Extremely low
%	0	42	58	0	0

The ranking of authors by difficulty (*item 19,* Boxes 4-5) indicates that not all new material was adequate. The questionnaire does not make it possible to assess whether the perceived difficulty resulted from the author's language or style or from the difficulty inherent in the topic. Whichever the case, one of the selected authors, Lewis (1985; 1993), was classified as the most difficult to read by 66% of the participants. In re-examining these selected texts, it became clear that they do not address novice teachers.

Box 4 – Analysis of Results -Ranking of Authors												
Statement 19												
Participant												
Author	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
J. Harmer	2	1	2	2	2	2	1	2	2	2	4	4
D.Larsen Freeman	4	4	4	4	4	3	4	3	4	4	2	2
R.&Rogers	3	3	3	3	3	1	3	4	1	3	3	3
M. Lewis	1	2	1	1	1	4	2	1	3	1	1	1

1=most difficult/4=least difficult

Box 5 – Analysis of Results -Ranking of Authors - Percentages				
Statement 19 -				
Most difficult author to read	J. Harmer	D. Larsen Freeman	Richards and Rogers	Michael Lewis
%	16.66	0	16.66	66.66

Easiest author to read	J. Harmer	D. Larsen Freeman	Richards and Rogers	Michael Lewis
%	16.66	66.66	8.33	8.33

Larsen-Freeman's book on methodology (1986) was found the easiest to read by 66% of the participants, and none classified it as the most difficult. Passages on methodology selected form Richards and Rogers' (1986) were graded the most difficult by only 16.66% and the easiest by 8.33% of the teacher-learners. This may be attributed to the fact that the texts were kept to a minimum and selected on the basis of the assumed background knowledge and the simplicity of the language used.

Harmer's (1983) text was found the most difficult by 16.66% of the participants and the easiest by another 16.66%. The remaining 66.33% classified it as the second most difficult, which also calls for a reassessment of its inclusion. It should be pointed, however, that the selection, which dealt with theories of learning, was the first reading to be introduced. Difficulty could then have resulted from the complexity of the content, and the possibility of dealing with it towards the end of the course rather than at the beginning is worth considering.

It is interesting to notice that the level of difficulty of the reading material, which was still high for almost one half of the participants, did not result in a low grading of the usefulness of content. This may be attributed to time having been devoted to aiding the understanding of technical vocabulary and to the use of class dynamics that helped them translate theory and concepts into concrete practical forms, the two aspects of the course graded the highest.

5. LEARNING FROM THE EXPERIENCE

A tutor's faithful adherence to a syllabus in which problems have been

detected can be described as unreflective practice, particularly inappropriate in a course aimed at forming 'flexible' teachers. Changes become indispensable, no matter how far-reaching.

The changes made to the syllabus of this course reached the level of approach in their shifting of its orientation from an applied-science to a more reflective view of learning. Features associated to teacher education and teacher training were, however, also retained. Theoretical knowledge was transmitted and some activities led teachers to apply specific techniques.

Theory was, notwithstanding, approached, analysed and applied critically, and learner-teachers were led to take an active role in their own process of learning. The resulting eclectisism seems to have satisfied some of the learner-teachers' varied needs. This was made possible by having taken a flexible stance and adapted the syllabus to the context.

In addition, evidence of the prevention of the compartamentalisation of knowledge emerged from the testimony of the teacher of a subject in the next module (Patricia Carrillo, UABC, pers. comm.), who found that the learner-teachers were able to spontaneously link practical contents to theory.

While all the changes to the syllabus seem to have been made in the right direction, some still need further reviewing. The design of reflective activities for participants with no teaching experience needs to be reviewed. The selection of reading materials needs to be reassessed in terms of the level of complexity of both the language used and the treatment of topics, as well as the background knowledge that the texts take for granted.

While this analysis is beyond the scope of this work, the critique to this course would not be complete without my awareness of this need for further adjustments, as well as my acknowledgement of my own 'filtering' assumption that courses on theory for novice NNS teachers call for a hands-on, guided and reflective approach.

NOTES

1. If this is the case, the general high grading suggests that having introduced this area briefly did in fact awake the trainees' curiosity, as expected. This would also explain the apparent contradiction of participants 6 and 11, who graded the area 4 and 4.5 in average but added comments stating that it should not be included in the first module, and that it should be covered only briefly.

2. Participant 1 assigned 2 to the usefulness of giving opinions and evaluating (*statement 12*). Since she is one of the trainees with no teaching experience, she may have found no basis on which to evaluate the usefulness of principles and techniques. Participant 4 graded three of the four statements 1, 2 and 1, which might be due to her allotting a high value to theoretical knowledge.

3. Even though it cannot be definitely asserted that participants would have found the whole of Richards and Rogers' text too difficult, it seems reasonable to assume they would have, since it does not address novice teachers and takes some knowledge of linguistics for granted.

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APPENDIX 1* – *Modules and Subjects

MODULE I Subject: GRAMMAR Time: 30 hours. Subject: CONTEMPORARY TRENDS IN ENGLISH TEACHING Time: 25 hours MODULE II Subject: METHODOLOGY FOR TEACHING THE FOUR MACRO SKILLS Time: 30 hours.	Subject: SECOND LANGUAGE TEACHING TECHNIQUES Time: 30 hours. MODULE III Subject: LESSON PLANNING Time: 25 hours Subject: MATERIAL DESIGN Time: 25 hours Subject: EVALUATION Time: 20 hours.

APPENDIX 2* - *Questionnaire

CONTEMPORARY TRENDS IN ENGLISH TEACHING

1. Are you working as a teacher of English at present? Yes No

Sex: F M

This is the _____ course for teachers I take.
Degree_____

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2. For how long have you worked or did you work?

_____

PLEASE TICK THE BOX OF YOUR CHOICE. WHERE THERE IS SPACE TO MAKE A COMMENT OR ANSWER A QUESTION, PLEASE KEEP TO THE SPACE PROVIDED.

	Totally agree	Partially agree	Neutral	Partially disagree	Totally disagree
3. I found the content of the course useful for a novice teacher.	®	®	®	®	®

Why?

	Totally agree	Partially agree	Neutral	Partially disagree	Totally disagree
4. The distribution of work on theory and its practical application was adequate.	®	®	®	®	®

Why?

	Totally agree	Partially agree	Neutral	Partially disagree	Totally disagree
5. Work on putting the principles of methods in practice helped me understand them.	®	®	®	®	®

	Totally agree	Partially agree	Neutral	Partially disagree	Totally disagree
6. Group dynamics helped me understand theory.	®	®	®	®	®

	Totally agree	Partially agree	Neutral	Partially disagree	Totally disagree
7. The contents of the course helped me understand the principles behind some teaching methodologies.	®	®	®	®	®

	Totally agree	Partially agree	Neutral	Partially disagree	Totally disagree
8. If my answer to 7 was **Totally agree, Partially agree, Neutral or Partially disagree**, I consider this understanding useful in helping me become a teacher.	®	®	®	®	®

	Totally agree	Partially agree	Neutral	Partially disagree	Totally disagree
9. I consider theory on applied linguistics (Nativism, Interactionism) helpful for novice teachers.	®	®	®	®	®
	Totally agree	Partially agree	Neutral	Partially disagree	Totally disagree
10. The homework helped me think about how I could use knowledge on theory in the classroom.	®	®	®	®	®
	Totally agree	Partially agree	Neutral	Partially disagree	Totally disagree
11. I think that learning technical terminology is useful for novice teachers	®	®	®	®	®
	Totally agree	Partially agree	Neutral	Partially disagree	Totally disagree
12. Being asked to evaluate and give my opinion on methods and techniques helped me link theory to practice.	®	®	®	®	®
	Totally agree	Partially agree	Neutral	Partially disagree	Totally disagree
13. I believe that studying theory on methodology is beneficial for novice teachers.	®	®	®	®	®
	Totally agree	Partially agree	Neutral	Partially disagree	Totally disagree
14. I believe that courses for novice teachers must include theory on applied linguistics.	®	®	®	®	®
	Totally agree	Partially agree	Neutral	Partially disagree	Totally disagree
15. Writing essays helped me relate the content of the courseto my personal ideas.	®	®	®	®	®
	Totally agree	Partially agree	Neutral	Partially disagree	Totally disagree
16. Exploring my own views on teaching and teachers in Session 1 helped me relate theory to my personal ideas.	®	®	®	®	®

17. I learned some new terminology

Yes. ®

No ®

	Totally agree	Partially agree	Neutral	Partially disagree	Totally disagree
If my answer to question 17 was yes, understanding this terminology helped me understand the readings.	®	®	®	®	®

	extremely high	relatively high	adequate	relatively low	extremety low
18. The level of difficulty of the reading material was...	®	®	®	®	®

19. Order the following authors in terms of how difficult it was to read them. Number 1 is the most difficult and number 4 the easiest.

Jeremy Harmer.	®	Richards and Rogers.	®
Diane Larsen Freeman	®	Michael Lewis.	®