Are Good Teachers Born or Made? Factors in the Design and Implementation of Pre-Service Training Courses for English Language Teachers

On a number of occasions, either at professional seminars or with groups of learners or trainees, I have elicited lists of the qualities possessed by a good English teacher. I have usually found it helpful to ask participants to recall a particular teacher who they felt was 'good'. Descriptive adjectives and attributes suggested by participants in the MPIK Seminar were as follows:

a sense of humour
clear and systematic
kind
patient
resourceful
caring
knowledgeable
interesting
encouraging
adaptable
committed
innovative
understanding
fluent in English
creative
stimulating
observant
good listener
fair
skilful
hard-working
decisive

These attributes and adjectives can be divided, very roughly, into three categories, as follows:

I. Personal Qualities	II. Skills-related Qualities	III. Knowledge-related Qualities
a sense of humour	clear and systematic	Knowledgeable
kind	resourceful	
patient	adaptable	
caring	fluent in English	
interesting	observant	
encouraging	decisive(?)	
committed	skilful	
understanding	well-dressed(?)	
creative		
stimulating		
good listener(?)		
hard-working		
fair		
honest		
innovative(?)		

The question marks indicate my own uncertainty about how to classify these attributes. You might argue, for example, that good listening is a skill that can be learned, but how many training courses actually focus overtly on this? Conversely, there are some courses which do focus on decision-taking by teachers at classroom level, which is why this was allocated to the second category. The task of sorting into three categories can be left to participants. The lists in Appendix 1 were generated and categorised (without headings from me) by a group of Kenyan teachers in March 1991. They bear a striking resemblance to the lists which were 'brainstormed' by MPIK

seminar participants, and to other lists I have elicited, in that the personal qualities predominate.

For better or worse, teaching is primarily a way in which one person, perceived as influential, relates to a group of other people. In language teaching, with its emphasis on successful communication, a teacher's personality is bound to be particularly significant, and is likely to have an effect on the success or failure of learners. It is interesting, and potentially fruitful, to examine the list of personal qualities more closely, and to decide which of them might be developed consciously and which are innate.

Further food for thought is provided by Peck (1988), quoting data from a research project described by Sanderson (1983):

The good teacher of modern languages:

1. uses the foreign language predominantly,
2. is vigilant about pronunciation, intonation and stress,
3a. uses the foreign language for classroom instruction,
3b. uses the foreign language for the teaching/learning message,
4a. praises correct responses
4b. is sympathetic/positive about wrong responses,
4c. conveys warmth in the delivery of the message,
4d. conveys warmth through facial expression,
5. engages in intensive oral exploitation of material,
6. promotes understanding by non-verbal cues,
7. relates the foreign language to the target culture,
8. explains tasks clearly,
9a. is varied with regard to materials,
9b. is flexible with regard to objectives,
10. builds up on pupil error,
11. provides a variety of language activity,
12. involves the whole group,
13. is skilled in handling equipment,
14. promotes use of the foreign language by pupils.

(Sanderson, 1983)

from a group of American learners sampled by Altman (1981):

A real second language teacher is on my side.
A real second language teacher lets me be me and tries to understand what it's like to be me.
A real second language teacher accepts me whether he likes me or not.
A real second language teacher doesn't have expectations of me because of what I've been or what he or she has been.
A real second language teacher is more interested in how I learn than what I learn.
A real second language teacher doesn't make me feel anxious and afraid.
A real second language teacher provides many choices.
A real second language teacher lets me teach myself even if it takes longer.

A real second language teacher talks so I can understand what he or she means to say.
A real second language teacher can make mistakes and admit it.
A real second language teacher can show his or her feelings and let me show mine.
A real second language teacher wants me to evaluate my own work.

and, through a restricted-choice questionnaire, from a group of French school-pupils, as described in Girard (1977):

1. The good language teacher makes the course interesting.
2. He teaches a good pronunciation.
3. He explains clearly.
4. He speaks good English.
5. He shows the same interest in all the pupils.
6. He makes them participate.
7. He shows great patience.
8. He insists on the spoken language.
9. He makes pupils work.
10. He uses an audio-visual method.

Examination of this admittedly random set of data must inevitably pose some questions to a trainer, the most fundamental of which is about the whole enterprise of training: if, as seems likely, the most crucial qualities of a good teacher are personal, and in many cases innate, is there any point at all in running training courses? Or, perhaps more pertinently, are we getting the balance right between training, education and development? Is there too much emphasis on pure knowledge and on the acquisition of skills on current courses, particularly initial training courses? Are we emphasising product at the expense of process in training? Are we laying the foundations for future professional development or do we consider the job as done if a trainee emerges from a course with a qualification?

There is already much to reflect on in these questions. But the calls by speakers at this seminar for more autonomy, better decision-making skills, more self-reliance, more spontaneity and flexibility, and less imitation by teachers of the way they were taught, all serve to complicate the picture still further. Add to this a closer investigation of what is meant by the single word 'knowledgeable' in the third column of our brainstormed lists. My respondents have on various occasions spoken of knowledge of:

- language
- language systems
- learning theories
- psychological processes
- other school subjects
- current affairs
- literature
- applied linguistics
- young people's interests
- syllabus and curriculum

.....this list could be extended.

Even if we accept that the initial training courses are never going to produce perfectly-rounded teachers, and that the process of teacher development is truly lifelong, there is still a huge challenge, implicit in all of these expectations, for those involved in teacher education, as well as for the next generation of language

teachers. What kind of course do we need, both in terms of content and methodology? Who should teach these courses? What qualities are required of a teacher educator? Is it time to stop talking simply about 'training'?

In attempting to answer some of these questions, I shall consider briefly, three models of teacher training described by Wallace (1991):

(i) The Craft Model, based on other modes of training for trades and skills which largely involve imitation of established practitioners. In teaching, this would involve close following of models given by 'master' teachers and of guidelines in coursebooks or syllabuses. This model has been widely used by language organisations such as Berlitz and Inlingua, seeking to guarantee uniformity in their schools' teaching approaches and by, inter alia, trainers in francophone countries at the height of the popularity of the Audio Visual method in the sixties and seventies. It derives from a 'technician' view of the training process.

(ii) The Applied Science Model, which sees teaching as an application of theoretically derived principles. This model is common wherever universities are entrusted with teacher training, and is essentially 'top-down' in nature, and synthetic in approach: the trainee is obliged to construct a coherent picture of teaching/learning from the variety of inputs provided on the course, to wrestle with the often intimidating demands of reading lists and academic writing, and to make sense of the terminology which is a feature no less typical of language teaching than of any other area.

(iii) The Reflective Model, which Wallace supports in his book, and illustrates in the following diagram (Fig 1), which I have modified slightly for the purposes of this paper:

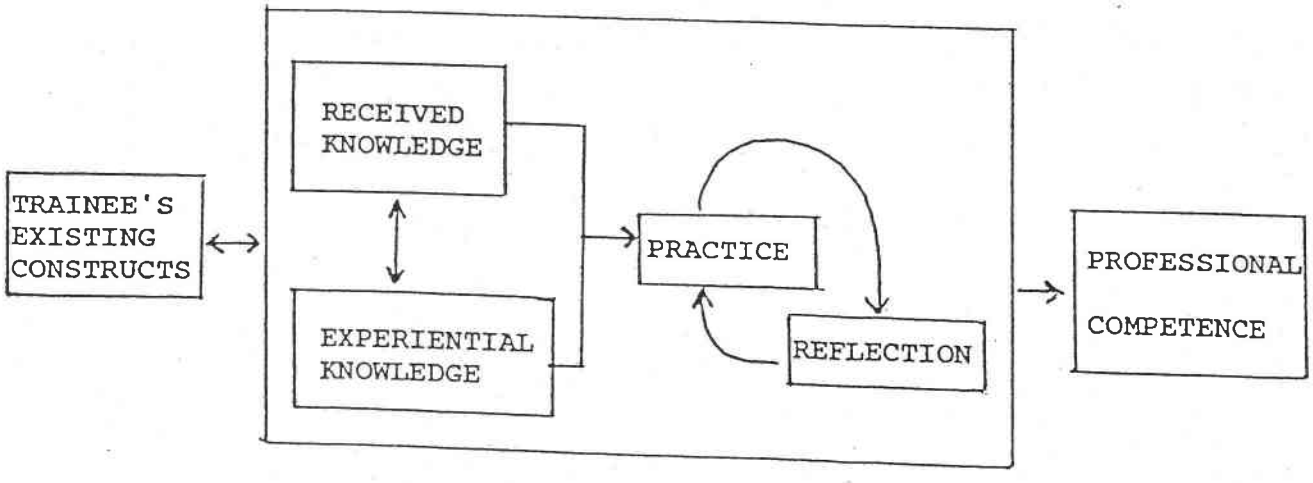
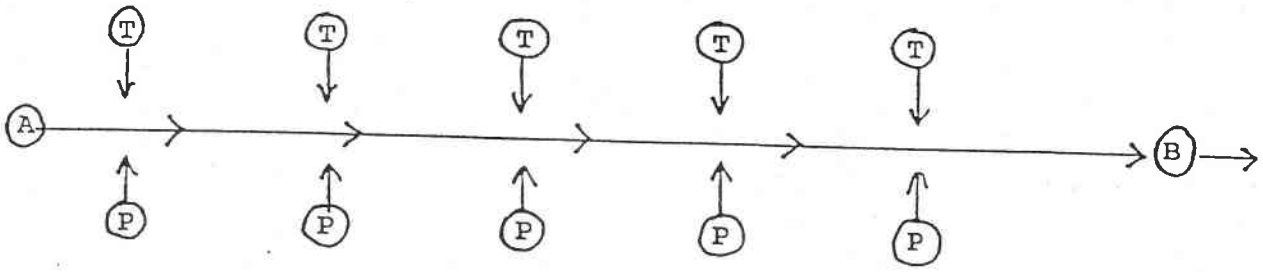


Fig 1

This model is also not a new one: variations of it are described in Schön (1983), Kolb (1984), Dennison and Kirk (1990), and Gibbs and Habeshaw (1989). The two key features of the model are that it acknowledges and builds on the existing constructs and experience of the trainee, whatever these might be, and that it involves reflection on shared experience. In concrete terms, in the initial training of English teachers, a trainee's existing constructs are, for example, her/his beliefs about language teaching and learning, her/his models of what constitutes good teaching, beliefs about the function of a coursebook, the role and importance of English, etc. Received knowledge includes inputs on the course from lecturers, from reading and from peers. Experiential knowledge is derived from shared experience on the course (eg viewing of a video, school visits, etc.). The reflection/practice cycle is invoked during the teaching practice period.

Looking more closely at the 'in-training' period in Fig 1., we might arrive at this kind of linear presentation of the process.



Beginning of Course

End of Course

A = trainee's existing constructs

T = inputs from tutor and reading

P = inputs from peers

B = trainee's position at end of course

Fig 2

The picture here is of a course based on an interaction between a trainee's existing constructs on the one hand, and those of tutors and peers on the other. The important feature in this kind of model is that existing experience is acknowledged and used as a resource by the tutor, in sharp contrast to models which, explicitly or implicitly, assume the trainee to be an 'empty vessel' to be filled up by wisdom furnished by the tutor.

Thus, the new position (B) which a trainee reaches at the end of the course, is one which contains elements of 'A' as well as of 'T' and 'P', and serves as a starting point for continuing professional development.

This kind of model seems to offer the best chance of producing a cadre of language teachers capable of taking their own decisions where required, of thinking creatively and autonomously, and of providing their pupils with the kinds of learning opportunities which are recommended in a communicative syllabus.

What are the implications of this kind of experientially-based approach for the planning of initial training courses? There are several which are at least worth considering:

1. Selection procedures. It seems important to look for signs of open-mindedness, of non-dogmatic attitudes, and of the capacity for independent thought in candidates for acceptance on a course.

2. Teaching methodology. There seems to be a need for an open, consultative style, with challenging tasks designed to stimulate interaction and reflection. Ellis (1985) has written coherently about the types of tasks, activities amd procedures which are appropriate in teacher-training. Lectures, for example, while possibly being part of a tutor's repertoire of modes of input, would not in general be an appropriate way to deliver such a course. There should at least be some visible methodological connection between the way the training course is conducted and what is expected of trainees in classrooms. Theoretical issues will probably be best approached from a basis of practical insights. The 'handing down' of theory would not be appropriate in a course of this nature.

   Initially, reflection does not just happen of its own accord. It needs to be developed, and this is the responsibility of tutors who must build into their training tasks both time and stimuli, usually in the form of questions, to accustom trainees (many of whom will have seldom received any encouragement to reflect whilst at school) to a new pattern of work. Much has been written (eg Bailey 1990 O'Dwyer 1985) about the value of keeping diaries during training, and there is considerable evidence that these are also valuable aids to reflection and self-evaluation in trainee teachers.

   A further important methodological implication is that trainees must graduate from dependency to autonomy during a training course. Britten (1988) has very usefully described the stages involved in this process, and those involved in initial training courses would do well to consider his message carefully. By the end of a course, a trainee must be able to analyse her/his own lessons, to reflect productively on classroom events, to plan, take decisions and work creatively. All vestiges of dependency on the tutor must be eliminated. This, in its turn, has consequences for the conduct of supervision on teaching practice for the way trainees are led to prepare lessons and, perhaps above all, for the way feedback is given. At least some of the difficulties experienced by teachers in their probationary year may be attributable to lack of attention to the need to develop autonomy.

   In all of this, as will be apparent, process on a course is bound to be at least as important as any products, such as assignments, essays, etc.

3. Content. There should be a comfortable and appropriate balance between knowledge and skills, and between theory and practice, with clear links between them.

   Language awareness work with a strong pedagogical bias, for example, will be of greater value than vacuum-sealed studies of linguistic theory or models of grammar. For examples of this see Wright (forthcoming) and Bolitho (1989). Studies of learning theory can be linked to classroom reality. Ramani (1987) has outlined useful procedures for relating theory to practice with practising teachers.

4. Staffing. There is likely to be a need for a course team to be established with shared perceptions of the process of teacher education. Tutors will need to be good listeners, to be as open-minded and non-dogmatic as they expect trainees to be, to be continually working on their own development and to be prepared to share in the reflective processes which they stimulate on the course. They will have to be personally balanced and professionally secure enough not to need to flaunt their own ability, knowledge or experience in an intimidating way, sensitive enough to support and empathise with their trainees as they go through a period of self-questioning and self-appraisal, and linguistically adept enough to avoid baffling (and alienating) trainees with the linguistics and pedagogical jargon which too often mystifies their own subject area. In short, they should be honest enough to trade off the often uncomfortable 'open-endedness' of the 'Reflective Model' against the benefits it can offer individual trainees; this may involve recognising that not everyone can teach in the same way, as implied in the 'Craft Model', and at least being cautious about the merits of the 'Applied Science Model' with its top-down approach.

In an earlier paper at this conference, Brown (1991) likened the trainer's work to that of a sculptor or carver who helps the carving of an animal to 'emerge' from a block of wood. The 'good teacher' of the title of this paper is, I suspect, 'in' many of the trainees who join initial courses and the challenge a trainer faces is to help her/him to 'emerge'. This process will necessarily be gradual: for the tutor it implies getting to know trainees' strengths and weaknesses, supporting them through their doubts and worries, and above all helping them to cultivate the kind of self-awareness which will ensure that their professional development continues long beyond the confines of the course.

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Appendix 1.

Qualities of a good teacher : from a brainstorming session with a group of Kenyan teachers and trainers (SELP National Seminar, Machakos 1991)

1. Personal Qualities	2. Skills-related Qualities	3. Knowledge-related Qualities
.....able to emphathize .....tolerant .....flexible .....approachable .....self-confident .....humorous .....friendly .....dedicated .....enthusiastic .....optimistic .....patient .....fair .....creative .....loving .....mentally sound .....sympathetic .....intelligent	.....aware of learners' needs .....organised .....competent .....a learner .....efficient .....resourceful .....a listener .....a motivator .....clear .....a facilitator .....skilful	.....knowledgeable