Highlights of Teacher Training

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Extract

Teacher training has to be carried out in a fully professional end effective manner since it gives teachers an opportunity to initiate and take part in the pursuit of professional competence. The information, theory, and skills that are part of the profession can be accomplished in an effective manner through experiential training. By adopting a critical attitude and asking 'what' and 'why', we begin to exercise control and at the same time transform our classroom life. Becoming a reflective teacher allows us to change. This change, however, takes time, courage, knowledge, and support to occur. Knowledge and support come from teacher training courses as well as the new trends. In other words, teacher-training courses are needed to influence teachers towards effective change.

Highlights of Teacher Training

The *New Webster's Dictionary* gives the following definitions for the verbs **Teach** and **Train**:

- ❏ **Teach:** to instruct; to educate; to discipline; to impart knowledge of; to follow profession of a teacher.
- ❏ **Train:** to discipline; to instruct or educate; to exercise body or mind to achieve high standard of efficiency.

If a person who is not in the business of language teaching looks at these definitions, they would not see much difference between them. However, for those who are in the business the difference resides first in the group of individuals who are actually being taught or trained. The former are students—people who study in order to achieve higher education. The latter are trainees—people who are willing to become teachers or are currently teaching. In other words, we can say that the level in which instruction is given establishes such difference. The first level is Teacher-Student instruction. Trainer-Trainee is the second one; and last but not least, Trainer-Trainer instruction. If you want to become a trainer, you have to be a teacher first. In the same way, if you want to train trainers, you have to train trainees first. The experience of working on the previous levels is indispensable for the trainer. Such experience gives the trainer the wisdom and sensibility necessary to manage different groups of trainees and situations that can come up unexpectedly.

In the second level, there are two sub-levels—PRESETT and INSETT. Pre-service Teacher Training (PRESETT) is formed by a group of trainees who have not worked as Language Teachers and whose experiential knowledge is given only by their own experience as students and their views and beliefs of what a good teacher might be. On the other hand, actual English teachers form In-service Teacher Training (INSETT) where trainees bring a lot of experience and a repertoire of techniques and knowledge that can be shared with their colleagues.

There are many aspects that have to be taken into consideration in teacher training. Peter Strevens (1974) outlines some of the teacher training principles as follows:

- *The prime elements of the situation*
- *The characteristics of the 'ideal' language teacher*
- *A scheme for training teachers towards the ideal*
- *Practical training in the skills element*
- *Differences between teacher-training courses*

According to Strevens the prime elements of the situation are variables that have to be reconciled if we want to make a training course adequate and appropriate. These variables are: *1. The personal attributes of the trainee, 2. The individual and group attributes of the pupils, 3. The nature of the educational process, of teaching in general, and of language teaching in particular, 4. The target situation for which the trainee is being trained, and 5. The realistic*

possibilities of training. These prime elements are not the components of a teacher-training course, but as mentioned above they are variables.

The characteristics of the 'ideal' language teacher can be divided in *1. Personal qualities: inherent and acquired through experience, education, or training, 2. Technical abilities: ability to discern and assess, classroom skills and techniques, knowledge of the syllabus and materials used, and 3. Professional understanding: sense of perspective, awareness of trends and developments, and acceptance of improving their effectiveness.*

"Not every human being would make and adequate teacher." "Potentially damaging or ineffective individuals should be discouraged from entering the profession." (Strevens, P. 1974:21) There are limitations, which prevent the ideal from being attained, however; the following is a scheme for attaining such ideal. The four basic elements of a teacher-training course are: *1. Selection: initial and terminal, 2. Continuing personal education of the trainee, 3. General professional training as an educator and teacher, and 4. Special training as a teacher of foreign or second language: skills, information, and theory.* The *information* content can be learned from reading, lectures, or other techniques of the kind. The *theory* component needs discussion, practice in solving problems, tutorial explanations, and time to absorb new habits. The *skills* component requires practical training.

Practical training in the skills element has been developed by decades of teacher devotion, intelligence, ingenuity, and experience. It cannot be learned through lectures or discussions. It has to be carried out in a fully professional end effective manner.

The last principle that has to be taken into account is the differences between teacher-training courses. The sources of such difference are: *1.Time available, 2. Target situations, 3. Educational standard and maturity of the trainees, and 4. Staff and facilities available.*

Not all teacher-training courses start from the same point, nor are the aims the same in all cases. There are three models of training courses according to Wallace (1994). The *Craft Model:* involves imitation and close following of models given by 'master' teachers. (Fig. 1) The A*pplied Science Model:* the traditional and probably the most prevalent model for the professions. This model is essentially one-way. It is up to the trainees to put the conclusions of their findings into practice. If they fail, it is because they misunderstood the findings. Changes can be established only by those expert in the knowledge, and not by the 'practitioners' themselves. (Fig. 2) And the *Reflective Model* that acknowledges and builds on the existing constructs and experience of the trainee; it involves reflection on shared experience. (Fig. 3)
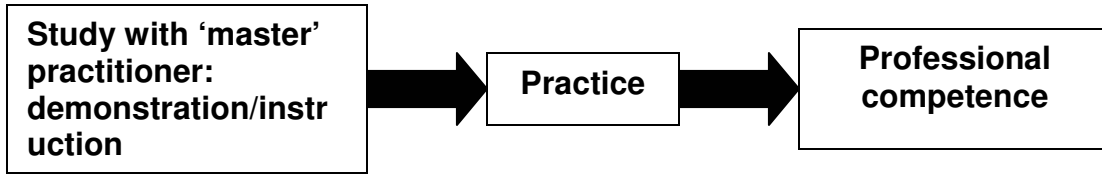
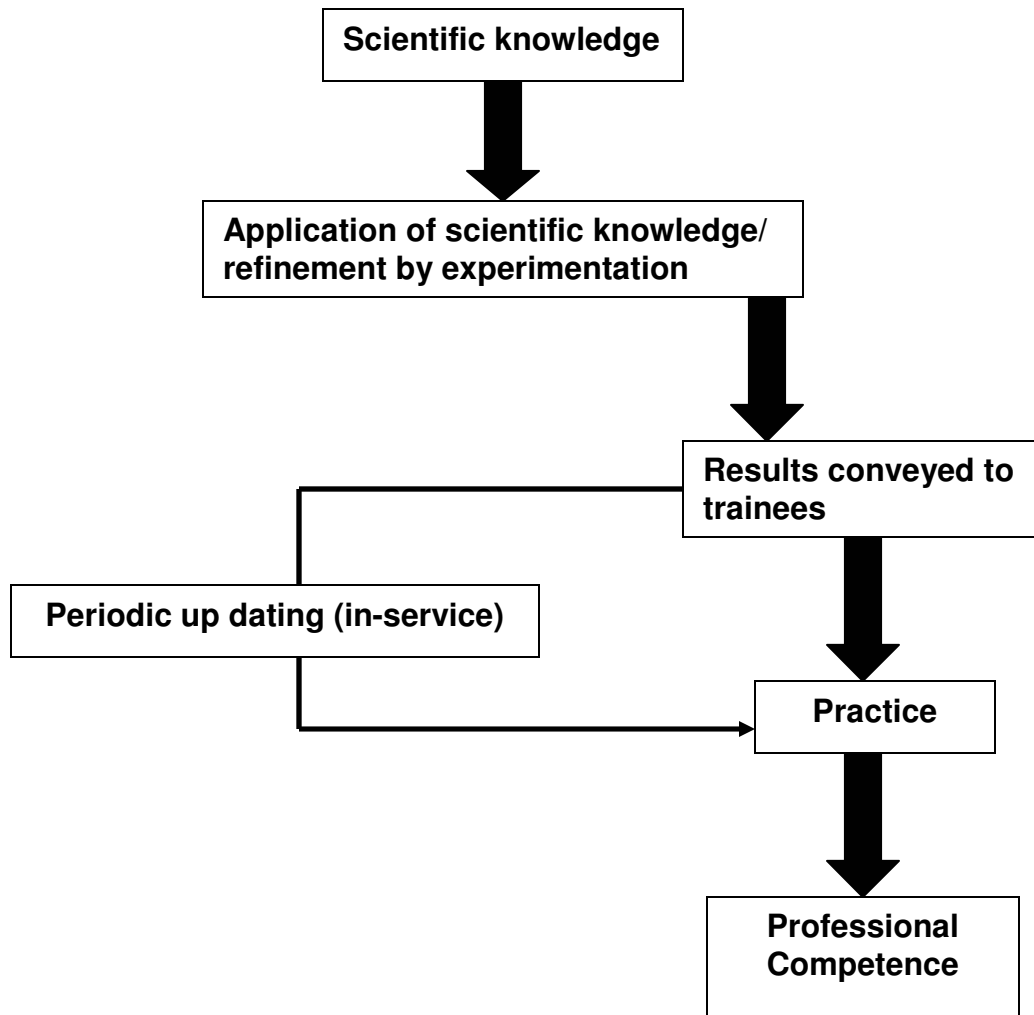*Figure 1. The Craft Model of professional education*

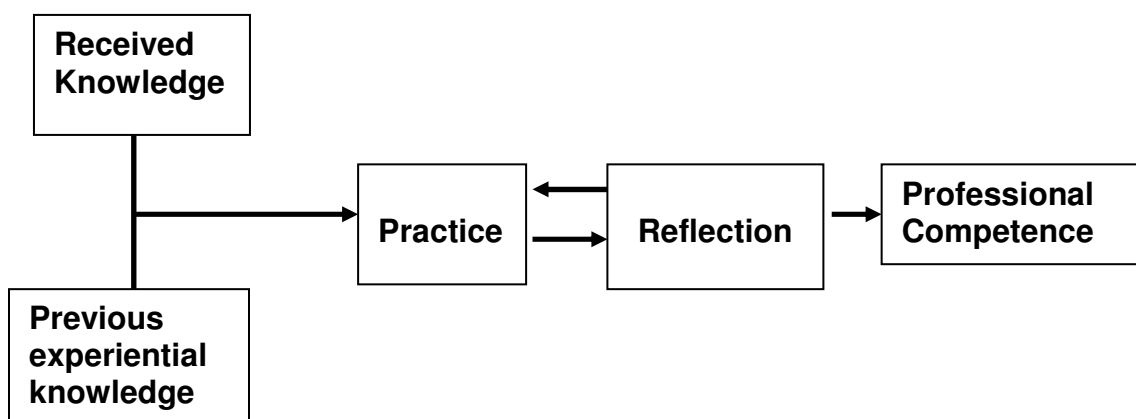*Figure 2. The Applied Science Model*

Figure 3. The Reflective Model

What kind of course do we need? If our choice is to follow the craft model, then the result might be a bunch of robot-like teachers that follow directions, imitate what they see in the training course, and take for granted what the 'master' practitioner says. If, however; our choice is the applied science model, then the product may be a group of intellectual teachers that have a great knowledge of the new trends and who are always willing to put into practice anything that the experts have experienced and approved. Even though there is a lot more intellectual work from the part of the trainee in the applied science model, there is still a lack of being able to make wise changes in order to adapt, improve or even reject what is not appropriate to their contexts. These changes can only be made in an efficient way trough reflection. Such reflection is considered as a crucial part of teacher competence in the reflective model, which I consider to be the most efficient for teacher-training courses. It offers the best chance of producing autonomous language teachers capable of taking their own decisions by in-taking the new knowledge and building it up with their past and present experience, reflection, and chance to share it with other trainees. Through experiential training, the elements of information, theory, and skills can be accomplished in an effective manner, since there is time for lectures, readings, discussions, problem solving, critical thinking and practice.

"You can't have learning students without learning teachers." (Fullan 1993:138) Underhill (1998) says that teacher development means being on the same side of the learning fence as students. For me, it is a long life process that never ends and brings us closer to professional competence, which is not totally reached and achieved. Teacher-training courses are an opportunity for teachers to initiate and take part in the pursuit of professional competence. Bolitho (1996) states that development may not be possible without the help of others. Sharing knowledge and experiences, and valuing colleagues' contributions are an important part of teacher development where the improvement of teaching is the main goal. This improvement can only be achieved again through reflection.

According to Bartlett (1990), reflection is more than 'thinking' and focuses on the day-to-day classroom teaching. "Through reflection we may transform the social relations which characterize our work and our working situation." (Kemmis, 1986:5) Bartlett also states that the process of reflective teaching consists of five elements: *1. Mapping: What do I do as a teacher?, 2. Informing: What is the meaning of my teaching? What did I intend?, 3. Contesting: How did I come to be this way? How was it possible for my present view of teaching (with reasons) to have emerged?, 4. Appraisal: How may I teach differently?, 5. Acting: What and how shall I now teach?* This process forces to adopt a critical attitude. By asking 'what' and 'why', we begin to exercise control and open up the possibility of transforming our everyday classroom life. Becoming a critically reflective teacher allows us to change and move towards professional competence.

Wright (1999) points out that changes in the way we teach do not happen overnight. They take time to develop, as well as, courage, knowledge, and support. Meanwhile courage is a personal quality, knowledge and support can come from our institution by means of teacher-training courses. We are in a constant educational change, in a change in teaching, and in a change in our institution. We must constantly move through the development continuum and

reflect on our teaching in order to improve as professionals. We need to learn to incorporate the new trends to our teaching and learn to use the old ones differently. Teacher-training courses are needed to influence teachers towards effective change. The Personal qualities, technical abilities, and professional understanding can and must be developed through training courses as well as the skills, information and theory components.

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