



The importance of incorporating INSET programs into second language instruction for the attainment of professional development

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Abstract

School development rests upon its staff development. There is evidence in the ELT literature that by promoting reflection on teaching practice, continuous teaching improvement can be sustained. Professional development is seen as an integral part of current efforts to transform and revitalize education. The promise of high-quality education is dependent not only on a total restructuring of schools, but also on the knowledge and commitment of practitioners to restructuring it. In any context where the professional growth of teachers is taking place, reflection on the nature and the quality of the teaching and learning in that context is clearly of crucial importance. But although reflection has been claimed as a goal in many teacher preparation programs, the way in which it might be fostered in teachers is still a problematic issue. Reflection then cannot be taken for granted and consequently, professional development would not be achieved just by doing the job. Teachers' powers of reflection need to be facilitated through INSET programs.

Actual teaching occurs in a relatively ill-structured, dynamic environment which is continuously changing in a way that is not always under teachers' control. Teaching involves decision-making and the large amounts of decisions teachers are constantly



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making are highly influenced by how they see the world (Freeman, 1989). Back in 1991, Wallace argued that the number and complexity of these professional decisions daily made by teachers is such that they cannot be explained only in terms of the conscious application of specific taught skills. He has been concerned with establishing the nature of teaching as a professional activity with the aim to discover how such an activity can best be learned. In reference to this issue, he has described three different models of professional preparation: the craft model, the applied science model, and the reflective model.

He sees the first one as basically static and imitative with a focus on the importance of the experiential aspect of professional development. According to this model, teaching is mainly a practical skill and learning how to teach involves a novice teacher watching and imitating a master teacher and following the latter's directions for improvement. The second model considers the explosive growth of relevant scientific knowledge but does not provide the necessary strategies to be able to relate this to professional practice. The implication is that teachers learn to be teachers by being taught research based theories and then applying them in practice. Here the implication may be that professional knowledge can be generalized. These two models view the teacher as essentially receptive, with almost no place for individual initiatives.

The third model gives due weight both to experience and to the scientific basis of the profession. According to Wallace (1991) teachers learn how to teach by reflecting on their own experience and applying what they have learned in order to develop their professional abilities further. In contrast to the previously mentioned models teachers are actively involved in their own development. According to the reflection model, external sources of input do not appear as a significant contributor to learning. The reflective model then highlights that teachers' behavior is largely determined by deeply held conceptual schemata or mental constructs that are brought to the training development process. This conceptual schema can be divided into two different but



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related kinds of knowledge. These types of knowledge, which he coined *received* and *experiential*, contribute to the professional preparation of teachers. *Received knowledge* refers to that derived from what has been read or taught. *Experiential knowledge* refers to the knowledge derived from professional experience.

The received knowledge includes, among other things, the necessary and valuable element of scientific research. The experiential knowledge, on the other hand, relates to the professional's ongoing experience. Learners, as trainees on teaching practice or as professional teachers need to take advantage of the enormous amount of professional knowledge and expertise available. Ur (1996) argues that focusing on learning from oneself is a somehow limited notion. She adds that teachers' experience can be enriched by other peoples' experiences, critical observations, attending lectures and through the reading of related literature. Ur claims that useful theories may help in the analysis and reflection of their own teaching practice.

Whereas the craft model and the applied science model are generally associated with teacher training, the reflective model is related to teacher development. However, Ur (1996) claims that neither model of teacher learning is satisfactory on its own. She adds that teacher training is generally associated with the preparation for professional practice usually through formal courses at colleges or universities. Teacher development, on the other hand, generally refers to the professional learning by teachers already engaged in professional practice. The main difference between these concepts is that teacher training implies pre-service learning, while teacher development involves in-service or INSET. But the issue here does not revolve around their differences, but rather their integration and areas of convergence. It is important then to evolve a model which conflates the best of both to design optimally effective professional courses, both initial and continuing.

Special attention has been paid in recent years to the areas in which teachers may develop professionally and personally (Gebhard and Oprandy, 1999). Teacher



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development is seen as an individual and internal process (Freeman, 1989), a process of continual unfolding of beliefs and teaching practices throughout a teacher's career (Gebhard and Oprandy, 1999). Teachers can develop beliefs, attitudes and knowledge about a given subject matter, about to whom it is being taught and about socio-cultural, institutional and situational contexts (Freeman 1989). Beliefs and attitudes about teaching are important because they are the underlying force behind *what* and *how* we teach. Teachers can develop by systematically observing what goes on in their own classrooms, exploring their own teaching through a cyclic process of reflecting and then acting on knowledge gained through reflection. To reflect on teaching involves asking oneself questions about our beliefs about teaching and learning and to what extent what we do in class reflects those beliefs. It is through searching for answers that our beliefs about and attitudes towards teaching can be challenged and develop further.

In teacher development, the starting point is the teachers' own experience. New information is sought and shared rather than imposed. It is then learnt by being reflected on, tried out, processed in terms of personal experience and, finally, taken in by the teachers in whatever form they find appropriate. Teachers can also reflect on their teaching practices through observation of other teachers' lessons and through carrying out action research (AR) in their classrooms. AR is defined as a teacher-initiated classroom research, which seeks to increase the teacher's understanding of classroom teaching and learning to bring about improvements in classroom practices. AR is highly attractive for three main reasons. First, AR involves small-scale investigative projects in teachers' own contexts. Second, it can have specific and immediate outcomes directly related to practice in the teachers' classrooms. Third, by using the data collected mainly through observation, it is possible for teachers to reflect and develop their own teaching skills (Burns 2010, 1999; Hopkins, 1993; Nunan, 1990; Luchini & Serati, 2010; Luchini, 2010; Luchini & Roselló, 2007; Luchini, 2004; Luchini, 2002; Wallace, 1991).



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A continuing cycle of practice and reflection leads to a dynamic, developmental concept of professional competence. Thus, the core of a model for professional training or development involves professional action and reflection on that action. This continuing process of reflection on received knowledge and experiential knowledge in the context of professional action may take place after or during the practice itself. Schon (1983) calls them reflection on action and reflection in action respectively. Gilpin (2001) states that reflection can be learned, but even though there is evidence that it is possible to gain in reflective depth during a course, there is no evidence on whether the learned behavior is transferable to the workplace once the course is over. In most of his AR studies, Luchini questions to what extent those teachers who worked with him under his supervision during the implementation of his projects were eventually able to transfer to their own contexts and without his support all the knowledge and experience they presumably claimed they had gained during these projects (Luchini & Serati, 2010; Luchini, 2010; Luchini & Roselló, 2007; Luchini, 2004; Luchini, 2002). Until more studies of this type are successfully carried out, the long term accomplishment of this type of training will be a matter for further speculation.

As was said earlier, INSET programs are considered as unique opportunities for teachers to develop themselves both professionally and individually. INSET programs can be designed to achieve a number of objectives. These may include upgrading the teachers' conceptual knowledge of their subject, to increase their confidence as regards the syllabus content, to introduce them to innovative teaching methods and to provide material support and a forum for sharing ideas and experiences. By concentrating on the conceptual understanding of topics, using problem solving and group work, the workshops provide an educative experience which can be adapted and transferred to the teachers' own classrooms.



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INSET should be perceived as a long-term process. The way in which this process is articulated will determine the degree of teacher participation. Teachers will learn from INSET as long as they perceive its relevance and integration with their concerns (Roberts, 1998; Locke, 2006). Learning then will occur if teachers are genuinely engaged with it, understand its basis and recognize a need for a change. In his capacity as coordinator of the English Language Department at CADS and Universidad CAECE, both private educational institutions in Argentina, Luchini, along with the other author of this paper, planned, designed, implemented and later evaluated¹ different types of INSET programs (for information about these projects see Luchini & Serati, 2010, Luchini, 2010, Luchini & Roselló, 2007, Luchini, 2002). The starting point of all these cooperative projects was an evaluative meeting held by the coordinator together with the teaching staff. In these evaluative meetings, based on assessment results, they identified a puzzled area that called for immediate change². Based on this need for change, they negotiated ideas and worked out a systematized course of action. As Roberts (1998) explains, to promote teachers' ownership it is essential to take into account the teachers' needs in the negotiation of INSET content and procedures. No INSET plan can be based on a single long-term decision about teachers' needs (Nunan, 1988; Locke, 2006).

All the phases of the cycle of planning, orientation, implementation, support and feedback need adequate resources (Roberts, 1998). The implication of considering

¹ Weir and Roberts (1994) claim that the purpose of evaluation is to collect information systematically in order to indicate the worth or merit of a program or project and to inform decision making. Evaluation is then considered as the systematic collection and analysis of all relevant information necessary to promote the improvement of the curriculum, and assess its effectiveness and efficiency, as well as the participants' attitudes within a context of particular institutions involved (Brown 1989, cited in Roberts, 1998).

² Freeman (1989) sustains that it is necessary to expand our thinking with regard to change and the teacher. He emphasized that change does not necessarily mean doing something differently, it can mean a change in awareness. Change can be an affirmation of current practice. He adds that change is not necessarily immediate or complete. Some changes occur over time, with the inset provider serving only to initiate the process. Some changes are quantifiable whereas some others are not, some changes can come to closure some are open-ended.



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INSET as a long-term process is that providers should set aside the necessary resources to ensure the smooth running of the INSET program as it has been scheduled. The conditions for effective INSET programs should include the recognition of the need for change, the involvement of teachers in the implementation of change, an awareness of personal theories upon which the new learning could be constructed, support from colleagues, integration of different modes of learning, realistic timescales, and an active involvement of teachers in the whole process (Roberts, 1998).

Roberts (1998) points out that influential research in the late 1970s and early 1980s have suggested five principles for effective INSET design: (i) consider teachers' valuable practical knowledge, (ii) teachers' learning is adaptive and heuristic, (iii) teachers' learning is dynamic and continuously evolves through phases of calm and turbulence, (iv) teachers learn through experience and participation in curriculum development, not from abstract principles alone, and (v) professional learning is critically influenced by organisational factors in the school. Although both practical and relevant content are features of effective INSET programs, internal features are not the sole determinants of its success. Teachers' personal contexts have an equally important impact (Hayes, 1991). Veenman *et al.* (cited in Hayes, 1991) provided a set of characteristics that INSET courses need to have to be able to lay fair claim to their effectiveness. They found that internal features and the characteristics of the school as workplace were significantly related to the impact of INSET at three levels: classroom level, school level and knowledge use. They added that INSET programs would be more effective if, among other things, their content were related to teacher's needs and relevant to their job, if the working climate were supportive so as to prompt participants' involvement, and if feedback were systematically provided to teachers.

Hayes (1991) states that there is a significant gap between what teachers think and do together in workshops, and what an individual teacher thinks and does in the classroom. Therefore, active participation and positive attitudes to in-service activities



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may have no effect on classroom practice. It is important then to take into account that what is taken from a course is mediated by teachers' personal beliefs, experiences and circumstances. This is one of the golden rules for the success of INSET programs in whatever context they are meant to be implemented.

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