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Title: Teacher education of English Language teachers: developing awareness
Abstract:

In English Language teacher education programmes in Singapore a knowledge base as well as a practical component based on language teaching methodology and practice teaching (practicum) is included, Larsen-Freeman (1983).

The programmes include a knowledge base drawn from linguistics and second language acquisition theory, procedural knowledge based on language teaching methodology, pedagogical grammar, the teaching of reading, writing, listening and speaking skills, language testing, unit and lesson planning) and the practicum

The practicum which is compulsory is taken towards the end of the post-graduate diploma in education. The components include practice teaching, observation of experienced teachers and peers, regular classroom teaching with supervisor and discussion activities Britten D.(1985) Chaudron (1989).

Microteaching of peers comes towards the beginning of training together with courses on methodology. Teacher trainers feel that microteaching of peers is often an artificial activity removed from the reality of the regular classroom. Secondly practice teaching starts fairly late in the training programme. In order to overcome the gap in the teachers' experience, from 1988 onwards a eight week school attachment programme called "Pupil Experience" has been included as part of teacher training (during the beginning of the course) at the Institute of Education in Singapore.

In order to prepare effective language teachers, it is felt that teacher education has to include activities and experiences that will help the novice teacher to understand and acquire the means by which the effective teacher arrives at significant instructional decisions (Richards J.C. 1987) J.C.Richards & T. Rodgers (1986), Carr & Kemmis (1983), Strahan D.(1990), Schon (1987), Shulman L. (1987), Grimmett P.(1989). This paper considers this eight week attachment programme. It considers how teacher education should involve an individual oriented approach with a focus on developing decision making and training in self-awareness. The paper considers the role of reflection in the training of English Language teachers. Teachers who were supervised were required to keep weekly journals of their teaching experiences. These journals help the teachers to record their progress and their reflections about their learning: learning about the practices they are developing and the process for studying these practices, that is, through observation. An analysis of these journals will be presented pointing out novice teachers' reflections on instructional improvement related to their knowledge base, evaluations of their actions, decisions and reactions, and the nature of self-development documented in these journals.

Richards (1987) points out that while there has been an expansion in the knowledge base, that is, the theoretical concepts, research issues and subject-matter content less attention has been paid to language teaching processes in teacher education of language teachers.

Teachers it is said are unused to recording what they do daily in the course of their work. What they share with their peers is the occasional exchange of comments on their pupils.

Activities and experiences are therefore needed to help the novice teacher understand and acquire the means by which the effective teacher arrives at significant instructional decisions. Training in self-awareness in teaching is seen as an important dimension.

In short in pre-service training courses where the teacher is rushed through a large number of courses it is necessary to include components that help to

relate theory to practice, to relate to children's to consolidate understanding and reflect needs upon their teaching practice.

Teachers' background

The sample included one group of 60 English Language teachers who had completed undergraduate courses on phonetics & phonology, sociolinguistic and electives on child language acquisition, discourse analysis etc. But many lacked an understanding in applied linguistics, language teaching and language learning issues. The other group of 60 English Language teachers had completed undergraduate courses in literature, social studies and the sciences.

The Curriculum course was given 120 hours and was divided into modules on listening/speaking /reading writing and pedagogical grammar.

During ' Pupil Experience' teachers were attached to schools to teach pupils with poor results in English Language from week 3 onwards, once a week, (one and a half hours) on a particular language skill. Teachers were given help on lesson planning, materials and worksheets for observing pupil behavior during learning tasks, that is,(listening comprehension, speaking). The teacher acted as facilitator during role-play activity, reading comprehension and process writing.

Thus the role of teacher preparation has changed to one of teacher development and teacher education . The trainee teacher has become an observer and a researcher and the teacher educator to one who guides the student teacher to generate and test hypotheses of pupil learning processes. Teacher education involves an individual-oriented approach with a focus on developing decision-making and hypothesis-generating skills; the emphasis is on the process rather than on a specific method or model of teaching.

Guidelines that are used during Practicum (Pair Teaching Workbook: R. Skuja)

A. Checklist for reflecting on your preparation.

Review initial decision

- focus and purpose of the lesson objectives
- pupils needs, diagnosis, level and interest
- input, text materials
- processes involved in doing tasks

B. Review choice of activities/ tasks

AVA in relation to lesson components (ii) task sequence, interaction and in relation to (ii) questions, explanations and checks on learning.

C. Checklist for reflecting on your presentation.

Review (1) organisation ; time management, sequence of tasks and activities (ii) performance: communicating questions, explanations (iii) pupil participation : prompting, probing promoting co-operation, sharing evaluation (iv) class management: participation during group, pair, peer activities (v)tasks effectiveness: lesson outcomes, pupil motivation, interest and learning.

D. Some question to consider after teaching.

What do you think the pupils actually learnt? Did you achieve your aims? What tasks were successful or useful? What interfered with learning ?

E. Journals: Reflect and try to write about the following aspects at the end of each week:

- (1) Things that I feel pleased about in my teaching.
- (ii) Things that did not go so well.
- (iii) What I intend to concentrate on next week or what I need help with.

Teachers' Reflections on Instruction

Analysis of journals during Pupil Experience

What is presented below is an analysis of teachers observations recorded in their journals.

Teaching strategies and instructional decisions

How rich input supports learning:

- use materials students are familiar with
- use cartoons as visuals
- give examples of discourse in real-life interviews sessions
- providing rich language input - supplying them with brochures, magazines & pictures
- fluency vs accuracy - need to place equal emphasis

How different approaches help learning:

- use role play to communicate
- breakdown in communication increases anxiety
- make sure not to prolong activity for too long, pupils get bored.
- drills are not effective as often students feel compelled to learn and reproduce perfectly
- verbal instruction Follow up with activity worksheets.
- it is the responsibility of the teacher to look out for the most effective methods their students use and to employ these strategies to teach vocabulary
- teacher should act as facilitator and anticipate problems with class presentation.

How learning takes place:

- need to give thinking time
- provide element of challenge which is a key to better learning of vocabulary
- teacher needs to give encouragement, provide prompts etc. to provide support for learning.
- need to be teach strategies need to develop precesses of prediction and teach ways to use contextual clues
- encourage pupils to internalize
- allow pupils to develop their own format, not impose too much.
- coped well with reading comprehension task as it related to the previous weeks lesson on listening- topic discuss
- writing a dialogue seen as fun not a chore
- help to decrease their anxiety - provided materials to supplement their background knowledge.

Understanding Students' learning problems

- Diagnosis of linguistic competencies
- vocabulary difficul in comprehending texts
problems - adding ed to verbs such as 'fast'
- lack of connectives/tenses/irregular verbs.
- view writing with apprehension - pupils make grammar and spelling errors
- writing- difficulty on what to focus /where to start, what to elaborate / and how to conclude
- increase their awareness in editing compositions
- The 8 weeks of teaching has built up their confidence in English Language Weiji brought a crossword puzzle that he had designed himself to share with the class It shows his change of attitude towards the study of this language.
- setting up a real world situation helps them interview over radio - aid of props, cards
- lack of motivation creates learning problems
- writing - use of inappropriate words, ambiguity unable to self-correct -only a superficial understanding
- need for motivation - but self motivation may not be enough
- pupils have yet to internalise rules of structure - pupil is not monitoring his output - but when his attention is focussed by teachers he is able to somewhat to monitor & correct himself.
- pupils think in dialect/Mandarin before writing their thoughts down in English
- lack of confidence and fear of embarrassment

- listening comprehension not done well - showed lack of background knowledge, frustration at failed attempts to understand the passage.
- Post listening group-discussion, used English and a mix of dialect / Mandarin to out answers
- found it fun when what they do involves them and is related to the real world situation.
- Difficulty in getting them to participate - they are in of giving wrong answers.

Analysis of journal during practicum

What is presented below is an analysis of journals written during teaching practice.

Discipline :

Includes class cooperation and class management during group and peer activities

- 'concern that lack of discipline will disrupt and prevent completion of tasks, yet conscious that over-discipline increases tension and reduces class participation'
- 'presenting as a group lowers tension compared to standing in front of the class individually'
- 'peer activity gave opportunities to work with partners and this kept their interest'

Interest and motivation: (materials and activities)

Reaction to the fact that pupils said that they were bored and not interested in English lessons.

- 'selection of materials related to pupils experiences and therefore increased pupils interest in learning, their responses were quicker'
- 'selection of reading text was interesting and challenging, therefore discussion was lively and so pupils interest in the topic encouraged concentration and participation'

Pupils Learning

The need to build up confidence during pupil presentation -

- teacher feels encouraged when pupils show involvement and this leads to good pupil presentations. ' One class was well prepared for the presentation with the other it was like squeezing blood from stone. One girl shouted that she was a Chinese and that she knew nothing about Malay festivals. But in week 7 pleased that class was responsive, original, expressive and encouraging. Week 10 even shy pupils from weak class participated " a moment I shall always remember'.

Procedural:

Improve instructions and induction activities, provide focus and set purposeful tasks -

- 'need to make peer editing more structured and focussed'
- 'need to focus on inferential questions'

Time management

- 'I have established good rapport with the class - this increased class co-operation and I managed time well'.

Peer evaluation - 'adjudicators were sharp, built up criteria for evaluation as this will help evaluate learning'

Conclusion

The comments teachers made on their teaching strategies and instructional decisions (given above) shows the development of awareness (amongst teachers). What their pupils need in order to succeed in language learning tasks. The need to provide support materials in the form of language input and environment for learning is recognised by teachers. Teachers also show an understanding of language learning processes.

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