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An Action Research Project

**Preparing teachers of English for Ongoing
English Language Teaching Reform in Chinese Tertiary
Education**

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Abstract

In 2004, 180 universities in China have been chosen to undergo an experiment---changing English teaching from prevailing teacher-centred classroom to learner-centred classroom. The chief aim of this change is to enhance students' English proficiency. This paper reports the procedures of an action research project aimed to give teachers strategies for exploring and reflecting on their own classroom practice. It is expected that the process of self-reflection will contribute to professional development of the teachers involved. This study reports on twenty in-service teachers of English from Shanxi University of Finance and Economics were involved in this action research project with five major steps.

Step 1: The 20 teachers meet to discuss the feasibility of implementing a learner-centered classroom, and possible outcomes of this reform for their classroom setting.

Step 2: Participants individually reflect on their own practices and classroom-monitoring strategies.

Step 3: The teachers meet again and share their views on the planned changes to the learner-centered classroom.

Step 4: The teachers observe a real English class demonstrated by one of them in learner centered teaching model.

Step 5: 20 teachers are allocated into small groups to conduct microteaching. Each group shares their teaching strategies with other small groups for the use in the classroom setting. On

implementation in the following semester, these teachers will meet again to continue reflecting, planning, monitoring and evaluating as they work towards achieving the initial objectives.

Key Words: universities; English language teaching; action research; professional development

Introduction:

At the beginning of 2004, *College English Curriculum Requirements* (For Trial Implementation) were drawn up under the guidance of Ministry of Education in China. It aims to promote the new developments of higher education in China, deepen teaching reform, improve teaching quality, and meet the needs of the country and society for qualified personnel in the new era (2004:16). College English, a required basic course for non-English major students in colleges and universities, intends to “develop students’ ability to use English in an all-round way, especially in listening and speaking, so that in their future work and social interactions they will be able to exchange information effectively through both spoken and written channels and at the same time they will be able to enhance their ability to study independently and improve their cultural quality so as to meet the needs of China’s social development and international exchange” (2004: 16). The distinctive difference between the new curriculum from the former one consists in that new curriculum stresses the introduction of new teaching models with the help of modern information technology, particularly network technology. It also requires changing the existing teacher-centered pattern of language teaching to the learner-centered pattern. These new requirements are leading to many changes, which are not merely restricted to the changes in teaching practices or approaches, but, more important, to changes in teaching philosophy, which deals with teacher’s ‘knowledge, beliefs, attitudes and thinking that inform such practice’ (Richards, 1998, xviii). “it is teachers who, in the end, will change the world of school by understanding it” (Stenhouse 1985).and this is what this paper demonstrates. Our assumptions are that if teachers are able to be actively involved in what is happening in their own classrooms, they

will be in a position to discover whether there is a gap between what they teach and what they believe in, to develop some strategies for changes they have to deal with, and to make decisions about their teaching either individually or through collaborating with their colleagues. This process of reflection leads itself to a particular kind of research linking professional action and research, that is ---action research, and is therefore can play an important part in professional development.

180 colleges and universities from all over the country thus have been selected to experiment with these newly designed curriculum. This reports on the involvement of Shanxi University of Finance & Economics.

Descriptions of the teachers concerned

Shanxi University of Finance and Economics is a local comprehensive economic university with 20,580 students in total and 1,400 staff members. It is composed of 14 faculties, including the Faculty of Business Foreign Language which took part in the project is where we are working in. 70 teachers of English in the faculty have been teaching College English and English for Special Purpose to the undergraduate, and postgraduate students as well as the part-time students. Twenty in-service teachers in the faculty are involved in this project. Aged between twenty-four and forty-eight, majoring in English, graduated from either comprehensive universities or normal universities in the time of 1970s-2000s respectively. They therefore have received quite different education, focused on different ideologies and perspectives on language learning and teaching, and most of them conduct their classroom teaching in the way in which they were taught—for example, teacher’s explanations and students’ memorization, imitation and repetitive practices are prevalent teaching models at tertiary institutions. The behaviors of the teacher and the students in the classroom is well interpreted by Cortazzi and Jin (1996). They describe how “ much behavior in language classroom is set within taken-for-granted frameworks of expectations, attitude, values and beliefs about what constitutes good learning, about how to teach or learn, whether and how to ask questions, what textbooks are for, and how language teaching relates to broader issues of

the nature and purpose of education” (ibid: 169). The teachers’ approaches are evidently influenced by classical humanism, which Clark (1987:3-8) views it as knowledge-oriented. It gives rise to grammar-translation approaches, dealing mainly with grammar, vocabulary and phonology.

In addition, it was taken for granted in the past within our school that English majors had the ability to teach English without any further professional training since it was considered that “anybody who learns some English can teach the language, regardless of whether or not they know anything about teaching and learning” (Thorne and Wang, 1996). These people often begin their teaching careers right after their graduation with a Bachelor of Arts degree. During their teaching careers, few of the teachers have an opportunity to be retrained because of the heavy work load and the financial problems that undertaking further education may involve. Every teacher has to be in charge of at least three classes of 50-60 students each week (each class takes four hours a week). Now learning English is very popular in China, English teachers are urgently needed, in particular, for spare time schools. So many teachers are busily engaged in teaching tasks, not only in their own university, but also in spare time night schools. Therefore the lack of opportunity and motivation for gaining knowledge of theories of linguistics, psychology, and pedagogy remains a serious problem for the teachers in our faculty. It became particularly serious issue since the publication of new *College English Curriculum Requirements* at the beginning of 2004, which demands not only that teachers should “adapt to the new model of English teaching”, but also “opportunities should be created so that the teachers can enjoy sabbaticals and engage in advanced studies, thus ensuring a sustainable improvement in their academic performance and methods of teaching” (2004: 25). WU (2004) reveals her findings that “our EFL teachers are not ready for the educational reform”. Therefore these twenty teachers to be involved in the experiment have little choice but to prepare themselves for the ‘top-down’ requirements to change their teaching styles and this requires that they develop professionally. Wen (2004) predicts that the “top-down” educational reform is supposed to be more effective, but without a clear definition and without research based findings”

However, the new curriculum, being based on constructivism and progressivism, focuses on learner-centered teaching modes and the development of the individual as a whole person, the promotion of learner responsibility and capacity for learning how to learn and how to learn a language (Clark 1987 :22-23). These different theoretical principles need to be explored, but how? Williams and Burden (1997:52) suggest from a constructivist perspective that “ if teacher improvement projects are ever to be successful, they should always begin with the question ‘how does this change relate to these teachers’ understandings of their work?’ what this in turn will lead us to do is to pay close attention to the meaning that teacher make of the physical environment of their classrooms, the syllabus or particular teaching practices, and to act in accordance with our understanding of these meanings”. Additionally, they also stress that teachers should “ become more self-aware with regard to their beliefs and the ways in which they make sense of the world, particularly with regard to their views about education and how those views themselves come to be shaped” (ibid: 53). Thus, it is important that great effort should be made to improve teachers’ self-awareness. “Some educational theorists have fostered the notion of *critical reflection* (Boud, Keogh & Walker 1985). Schon (1983:49-50) suggests that reflection may lead to “the conscious development of insights into knowing-in-action”. He describes the ‘knowing-in-action’ this way:

“...The workday life of the professional depends upon tacit knowing-in-action. Every competent practitioner can recognize phenomena-families of symptoms associated with a particular disease, peculiarities of a certain building site, irregularities of materials or structures-for which he cannot give a reasonably accurate or complete description. In his day-to-day practice he makes innumerable judgments of quality for which he cannot state adequate criteria, and he displays skills for which he cannot state rules and procedures. Even when he makes conscious use of research-based theories and techniques, he is dependent on tacit recognition. Judgments are skilful performances” (1983:49-50). This is one of the main thrusts of the movement towards teachers as action researchers(Kemmis 1985). For this reason we have used action research methods in this project..

Theoretical bases for the research

This kind of 'bottom-up' teaching research has been defined in a number of different ways, such as the definition by Kemmis and McTaggart (1982:5 in Nunan 1990) “ The linking of the terms 'action' and 'research' highlights the essential feature of the method: trying out ideas in practice as a means of improvement and as a means of increasing knowledge about the curriculum, teaching and learning. The result is improvement in what happens in the classroom and school, and better articulation and justification of the educational rationale of what goes on. Action research provides a way of working which links theory and practice into the one whole: ideas-in-action”.

Wallace (1998:1) defines it as “the systematic collection and analysis of data relating to the improvement of some aspect of professional practice”. He explains why teachers of language should involve themselves in ‘action research’ on the basis of the assertion that most teachers would like to develop their expertise progressively while they continue in their chosen occupation. Furthermore Wallace puts forward several conditions as to what proper action research consists of. “ some writers recommend that action research should be collaborative or team-based. Others suggest publication or at least sharing of the process and results of the investigation in some way. It has also been suggested that the same stringent requirements of validity, reliability and verification for conventional research should also apply to action research” (ibid: 17). Finally, Wallace sums up the differences between action research and other more traditional types of research are in that action research “ is very focused on individual or small-group professional practice and is not so concerned with making general statements. It is therefore more ‘ user-friendly’ in that it may make little or no use of statistical techniques”. (ibid:18).

Nunan (1992:19) argues that “A descriptive case study of a particular classroom, group of learners, or even a single learner counts as action research if it is initiated by a question, is supported by data an interpretation, and is carried out by a practitioner investigating aspects of his or her own context and situation”. Meanwhile, he provides a figure to illustrate the

scope of action research and the various stages involved. Therefore, teacher's action research will be served as a bridge to fill the gap between the teacher and the researcher.

Teachers' actions and behaviours definitely have great impact on the learners. It is the teachers who have the final answer as to what is done in their classroom. So teachers have to review or reflect their own actions often in order “ not only to improve their own performance, but also to learn more about teaching and about themselves”(Harmer 2001). The purpose of research is that teachers reflect and understand their own classroom, their own teaching, and their own students better. Though the conventional criteria of reliability and validity in research are less likely to be met in action research, what is more important is that teachers conduct research that is “illuminative”. The research can address issues that can lead to debate and discussion and as such can contribute to the process by which teaching develops.

Cohen and Manion(1980:211) suggests five general ends of action research:

1. As a means of remedying problems diagnosed in specific situations, or of improving in some way a given set of circumstances;
2. As a means of in-service training, providing teachers with new skills and methods and heightening self- awareness;
3. As a means of injecting additional or innovative approaches to teaching and learning into a system which normally inhibits innovation and change;
4. As a means of improving the normally poor communications between the practising teacher and academic researcher;
5. (Although lacking the rigour of true scientific research) as a means of providing an alternative to the more subjective, impressionistic approach to problem solving in the classroom.

Teacher research can have great potential for professional self-development and renewal. Walker(1985:3-4) takes this view: As teaching has become increasingly professionalized and the management of educational organisations more systematised, so 'research' has increasingly become something that teachers are expected to include in their repertoire of

skills.

Action research project:

Action research typically includes a number of phases which often recur in cycles:

Planning

Action

Observation

Reflection

(Richards, et.al 1996)

First of all, it is necessary to make a plan to decide the methods we will use in terms of our situation. We make use of both ‘informal’ strategies, such as discussion and some “formal” strategies, such as conducting questionnaire, observing a classroom teaching and micro-teaching etc., which are proved to be effective by Wallace (1998: 5). He states it is “ discussions with our colleagues on classroom experiences or problems relating to specific students. This kind of ‘talking shop’ can have a whole range of useful functions; accessing useful background information, articulating possible solutions to everyday classroom problems, improving self-esteem, relieving tension, and so on”.

We then plan to meet on twice a week basis for five weeks to cover this five-step procedure as follows.

Step one

We begin with a ‘talking shop’, in which 20 teachers meet to discuss one questionnaire (Appendix one), which is especially designed for the reform by ‘Teacher Development Project’ group at China Foreign Language Educational Research Center.

The rationale of this step is that we all agree learner-centered teaching model should be introduced into our teaching process, because English has been taught as the compulsory foreign language on the secondary school and tertiary curriculum for many years in China. In recent years, English has been introduced into the primary school curriculum in an increasing

number of cities across China. Efforts are being made to plan a two-stage learning process consisting of the primary/junior high/senior high stage and the university stage, which cover a total span of 14-16 years. However, university graduates, who are assumed to function adequately in English at work, are found out to fail to develop the necessary competence. They are unable to meet the needs generated from the country's rapid developments in the economy, science, and technology, and from increasing contact with the outside world. It is generally expected that learner-centeredness may help improve learners' competence of using English. However, most of the teachers are less confident in teaching language with new model. To question one and two, for instance, 60% teachers don't agree English teaching is easy for them, 20% are not sure about it; 13% agree. For example, some of the teachers commented that:

▲ I have had hardly any opportunities of talking with the English natives or those people coming from English-speaking countries.

▲ I have never had access to authentic English publications on English teaching and learning, so I do not know how and what to teach (with/ using) in new approaches.

As a matter of fact, language teachers are put under more pressure than in the past. They are expected not merely to initiate set responses from their students but rather to initiate a wide range of unpredictable contributions from students and to respond naturally and spontaneously to them. This in turn requires teachers to continually adjust their speech to an appropriate level of difficulty from class to class and student to student and to 'solve unpredictable communication problems from moment to moment' (Mitchell 1988). However, the education the teachers have received in the university may only include (1) methodology/pedagogical skills; (2) linguistics; (3) literature; and (4) language improvement. These courses put emphasis on "increasing knowledge and awareness about the system of the language, rather than an ability to use this knowledge in real communication" (Cullen :1994). Thus the chances for language teachers to discover the 'underlying rules of language use of themselves' are slim. This results in the improvement of teacher's knowledge about it instead of "communicative command of the language". It seems that teachers have to "improve their own command of the language so that they can use it more fluently, and above all, more

confidently, in the classroom.”(Ibid.). They also have to experience the learner centered model themselves before they can implement it in their own classrooms.

We organize our teachers to watch a student-centered videotaped lesson made by one of the leading presses in China (who advocates and supports ongoing ELT reform). It shows us the roles that teacher and the students play respectively in class. In the following discussion, however, some teachers express concern about the student’s performance in the examinations; and others feel somewhat guilty because they neither supply students correct answers to every exercise nor give lectures as before. All in all, they doubt if this new teaching model can work as well as it is expected.

Step two:

The participants are then required to reflect on their own teaching individually before they articulate what changes they are going to make in their class.

▲ Teacher Wang states “ I occupy almost all class time since I come into the classroom. I give instructions, asking the students to read the new words aloud after me, explaining them, analyzing difficult sentences grammatically and translating the text sentence by sentence, listing language points drawn from the text for them to write down”.

▲ Mr. Ma said, “ When I organize some activities such as pair work, or group work, students seem reluctant to do it, they think it a waste of time. Some are even absent for class, they think these activities have nothing to do with their exams.”

▲ Miss Liu states “My students have interest in taking part in such activities, however, the size of the class is too large, the chances for them to speak are slim”.

A lot of studies (K. E. Johnson 1991, Woods 1991 in Richards 1998) show that “teachers are relatively free to put their beliefs into practice”. But surprisingly, what the teachers do in class

often contradicts what they believe in. 80 percent of them strongly disagree with question 4 and 7 of the questionnaire. On the contrary, almost 90 percent of them strongly agree with question 31, 45 and 48. It seems quite evident that the teachers' attitudes and beliefs about language teaching are based on a strong student orientation, but these beliefs are not evident in their classroom practices, which are driven more by exam –based, structured grammar activities. Likewise, Peacock's investigation reveals a big difference between teachers' beliefs and students'. Peacock (1999 in 2001) compared the beliefs of 202 students and 45 university ESL teachers, and found several broad differences, notably on Horwitz's two core beliefs about vocabulary and grammar. Sixty two percent of students believed that “ learning a foreign language is mostly a matter of learning a lot of new vocabulary words”, but only 18 percent of teachers agreed. Peacock concludes (following Horwitz, 1988) that students with this belief may focus on memorizing vocabulary lists, to the exclusion of teacher-directed tasks. He suggests that students may also be very dissatisfied with a teacher who does not emphasize the learning of vocabulary in classroom tasks, materials and homework. Sixty four percent of students believe that “ learning a foreign language is mostly a matter of learning a lot of grammar rules”, while only 7 percent of teachers agree. It is concluded that students with this belief might focus on memorizing grammar rules, to the exclusion of other tasks. Peacock also suggests that students could become very dissatisfied with a teacher who does not emphasize grammar in, for example, classroom tasks and when marking essays.

Brindley (1984:97) sums up students' beliefs, especially from Asian countries as follows:

- ▲ Learning consists of acquiring a body of knowledge,
- ▲ The teacher has this knowledge and the learner does not,
- ▲ It is the role of the teacher to impart this knowledge to the learner
- ▲ The learner will be given a program in advance.
- ▲ Learning a language consists of learning the structural rules of the language and the vocabulary through such activities as memorization, reading and writing.

Step 3:

The teachers meet again and share their views on the planned changes to the learner-centered classroom. This time the teachers read the quotes from experienced teachers all over the world (appendix two), and then think about which activities they would like to put into their classroom practices.

The rationale for this step is that teachers have to make decisions as to what teaching model they think good enough for improving student's language competence.

Irujo (2002 in Breen and Littlejohn (ed)) asserts that "the theoretical basis for learner-centered teaching is provided by constructivism, a view of learning that suggests that learners create their own knowledge based on their previous experience and their social interactions", which is based on three principles of constructivism outlined by Poplin (1993). The first one is that the learners acquire knowledge by constructing new meanings through social interaction, not by receiving knowledge from outside source; the second one is that the learners transform new experiences through what they already know; the third one is that learning is self-regulated and self-preserving.

Step 4:

In this step ,the teachers observe a real English class as demonstrated by one of them using a learner centered teaching model.

The rationale for the demonstration by one of the teachers instead of watching a video is as follows. (a) This teacher is the colleague of the other teachers. They share a similar educational background and experiences which make them trust one another. (b) The teaching material is exactly what they are using in their teaching. Thus, they may question or evaluate the lesson more purposefully.

The objectives of the observation is to persuade the teachers to think about the learner centered approach instead of the prevailing English grammar and vocabulary course; and to

encourage teachers to try to use group or pair work to alleviate some of the problems of large classes by enabling small groups of students to share and discuss texts, and work on learning tasks together. Some oral activities are included as a way of adding variety to lessons and motivating students.

Before they observe the lesson, teachers are given six criteria before they observe the lesson for evaluating whether this new teaching model can work well (appendix three). Then they may discuss it in terms of its effectiveness.

Step 5:

20 teachers are allocated into small groups to conduct microteaching. Each group shares their teaching strategies with other small groups for the use in the classroom setting.

The rationale for the microteaching is to give each teacher as many opportunities as possible to plan, replan, and teach, reteach one lesson so as to experience how learning takes place. They are also involved in the evaluation of four other teachers. Four teachers in each of the group occupy in turn the roles of teacher, student, observer, and supervisor separately from different viewpoints. In the process, they can ‘conceptualise their experiential knowledge and relate it to their knowledge of theory’ (Ahrens, 1992:12). They are able to support each other by working in pairs and in-group. In a long run they will feel comfortable ‘in giving and receiving such support’ (ibid.). A recent student comments on the microteaching in this way: Microteaching is a good way of learning how to teach because the teaching is only done in a small scale or small group. Analysis is done after the first teaching and the ‘learning’ teacher would be able to learn through mistakes and from experience, even though it is not too realistic because the acting pupils are just your colleagues. (Ibid.)

Objectives of the microteaching are firstly, to encourage teachers to reflect on their own teaching, conceptualize what they have been doing and relate it to what they read in previous sessions. Secondly, all teachers are provided with the maximum number of opportunities to

expose themselves to the task of planning and evaluating microlessons by using English and to teaching a microlesson. Finally, it's quite effective to foster peer cooperation and build individual and group confidence

When teaching, a group may consist of four teachers. One teacher (A1, C1, E1, G1) in each group teachers, of the other three, one (A2, C2, E2, G2) is observer; one (B1, D1, F1, H1) is supervisor; one(B2, D2, F2, H2) is student.

1. After ten minutes of teaching, they discuss the teaching in terms of the evaluation criteria and their own observation.

A1	A2	C1	C2	E1	E2	G1	G2
↓		↓		↓		↓	
B1	B2	D1	D2	F1	F2	H1	H2

2. In this teaching stage, one (B1, D1, F1, H1) is teacher; one (B2, D2, F2, H2) is observer; one (A1, C1, E1, G1) is supervisor; one (A2, C2, E2, G2) is student. When the teaching is over, it is evaluated using the agreed criteria.

A1	A2	C1	C2	E1	E2	G1	G2	↑
↑		↑			↑			
B1	B2	D1	D2	F1	F2	H1	H2	

3. Teachers in pairs work together to replan their teaching in the light of the evaluation before reteaching, the groups are rearranged and the second member of each pair is the teacher

A1	A2	B1	B2	E1	E2	F1	F2
C1	C2	D1	D2	G1	G2	H1	H2

Evaluation of the research:

At the beginning of the semester, we conducted a questionnaire to students to be experimented about their needs, learning styles and habits, their favorite teaching approaches. Over 50 % of the students take motives to learn English as passing the National College

English Tests, so they would like the teaching approaches from exam-orientation. These findings show clearly a big gap between student's expectation and the requirements of Ministry of Education. Teachers are wondering if it will be acceptable to apply student-centered approaches experienced themselves in their classrooms. Nevertheless, The demand for English and for English teachers, particularly for our own teachers trained to teach English in my country, has increased greatly. So the rapid expansion of concern with the teaching of English has brought into high relief the need for teachers professionally trained in English teaching. These twenty in-service teachers are satisfied with this research process. We do believe that in-service teachers can improve their own English to the level of competence required in dynamic classroom by exploring their own classrooms, and planning to observe and reflect on their teaching with the help of some new theories, approaches. Therefore, their 'knowledge, skills, awareness and attitude' all can be modified to meet the needs of English learning and teaching. However, teacher education or teacher development programs are almost non-existent at tertiary level. In addition, "professional development is a lengthy, gradual process of learning, featured by reflective thinking, constant evaluations of one's own teaching and constant pursuit of improvement, by exploration and experimentation" (Wu, 2004). Because of other practical reasons and constraints mentioned above, only those highly motivated teachers may push themselves to this path. We still have a long way to go.

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Appendix one

Questionnaire on College English Teaching Reform

1. English teaching is always easy for me.
2. English is easy to learn\.
3. The teacher plays a more important role in students' English learning than any other factor does.
4. Student activities are actually a waste of time in classroom teaching.
5. Students can learn as much from their peers as from their teachers
6. The more effort teachers make, the less efficient teaching will be.
7. Giving lectures is more efficient in my teaching than any other class activities.
8. My students can never be responsible for their learning unless are pressed by teachers.
9. Teachers' job in the classroom is to motivate the students in learning by designing all kinds of meaningful activities.
10. Teachers should not be too particular about language points.
11. Non-English majors focus more on meaning than form in their learning.
12. Language collocation is not crucial for our students because they are not English majors.
13. My students benefit a lot from my feedback on their class performance.
14. Language fluency is more important than accuracy,\.

15. English is only a tool for our students to learn other subjects
16. We teachers should not expect non-English majors to do as well as majors.
17. I only give feedback on students' written work.
18. Students' course grades should be based more on their class performance than on how they do on the final tests.
19. Non-English majors also need separate intensive listening, speaking and writing courses rather than one comprehensive reading course.
20. Frequent praises may not work with college students.
21. Non-majors cannot appreciate the beauty of English language.
22. I like preparing lesson with other teachers.
23. Multi-media facilities help teaching greatly.
24. I cannot teach without the assistance of a computer.
25. I am a very efficient teacher.
26. Computer is a headache rather than a helper in teaching because they divert students' attention from the language to visual pleasure.
27. Students get frustrated when they don't understand much of what is being said in the first reading of any text..
28. My students seldom work on English after class because they just don't have time.
29. My students usually preview the texts.
30. If I do not check my students' homework, they don't even bother doing it.
31. I always give my students chances to speak in English in my class.
32. CET Band 4 & 6 tests motivate students to learn English.
33. If students were only evaluated by their class performance, they would treat their English classes more seriously.
34. Teacher authority would hinder learner independence.
35. The best method to let students understand the texts is through translation.
36. It is an efficient way for students to think in Chinese while writing composition.
37. Everyone can learn English well so long as he puts his mind to it.
38. A good language learner always has a large vocabulary.
39. A good language learner always tries to use his/her mother tongue in learning a foreign

language.

40. A good language learner is usually active in class.
41. Some people are born smart learners of English, while others are not.
42. A good language learner can learn English well without a teacher's help.
43. Good learners must be very interested in the language learning.
44. I feel rather uncomfortable coming to the class unprepared.
45. Form-focused intensive text learning is more important than meaning-focused listening and speaking practice.
46. Pattern drills are boring to my students.
47. Students need frequent preaching on their learning beliefs.
48. If students understand the importance of a learning task, they will be more cooperative in doing it.
49. Thinking about what a text says is more important than memorizing what it says.
50. Language learning is pretty much like learning any other subjects.

Appendix two

1. I like to use English language newspaper or magazine articles with all of my learners some of the time. My colleagues ask me, 'how can you do that with beginning readers? I can't' I think they imagine that I ask my learners to sit down and read a whole article, which I never do. In fact, I only use selected parts of the articles from the paper. Sometimes I just ask them to match headlines to pictures, other times to find out three words in an advertisement describing a product. Or they might scan for the name of the country that an article was written about. These are pretty simple tasks, but the learners seem to like knowing that they can understand

parts of a real English-language newspaper.

2. Invariably, when I give my learners a text to read, I first ask them to read it once very quickly for the main ideas. Once everyone has got the general idea, they read the whole passage again, then one or two of them tell me in their own words what they understood. Next, I usually ask them to work in pairs or small groups to find answers. By doing it like this, I think they get a lot more out of the text, and there's plenty of learner-to-learner interaction, too.

3. I discourage the use of dictionaries in the classroom: learners can become over-dependent on them. I try to get my learners to guess words that they don't know, or if they can't manage that, then I try to help them to find out the meaning by asking leading questions. If they really don't understand something, they can look it up in their dictionaries at home.

4. I've been teaching for ten years and in my reading lessons I always go around the class, asking individual learners to read aloud in turn. In this way, the other learners understand clearly: they can hear something as they follow in their books and I can also check their pronunciation. They seem to like being the ones to 'shine' - at least, when they pronounce the sentences correctly!

5. When I teach reading, I give the learners the text to read and ask them to read aloud, one by one. Then we go over any unfamiliar vocabulary, when I try to have learners guess the meaning. If they can't, I give them the equivalent word in their native language. Then I ask them a couple of basic questions to check their comprehension of the main ideas. After that learners work in pairs to answer comprehension

questions and then we re-assemble into one class and check all the answers.

6. A lot of teachers I have worked with often ask their learners to read aloud. When a learner reads aloud, he often feels tense, and that can't really help him to grasp new language, can it? Besides, after he's read aloud, he usually can't even answer a basic question: he has to reread the passage silently to try to find the answer. So I don't think it's helpful at all and I don't do it any more. I wish more of my colleagues agreed!

7. I always give my class the activity that they are to do at the same time as I give out the text; I never ask them just to 'read the text' because they wouldn't have a reason, then, to read. So I explain the activity and then they can do it while they are reading.

8. When I teach reading, I like my learners to use the other skills, too. I do various things. For example, before reading a passage, my learners discuss the topic or brainstorm vocabulary they predict they will hear; or they listen to a short passage on a related topic and discuss it. At the reading stage, I make sure to spell out why they are reading. We read a passage more than once, each time with a new task. The learners fill in a chart, or match pictures to paragraphs or answer true/false questions. Finally, I save enough time for a follow-up, like a role-play or group work where the learners write a different ending or discuss the issue in the text.

9. When I prepare to teach a reading passage, I read it once or twice and underline essential words that the learners might not know. I circle the words which might be similar to the learners' first language or which might be easily explained by the context surrounding the word; I then decide how many of the remaining underlined

words to pre-teach. I only pre-teach a few new key words- maybe five in a passage that's two or three paragraphs long-because I don't want my learners relying on me for every single definition. With the circled words, I often write the sentences in which they occur on the board and the learners work in small groups to guess the meaning from the context. After they've read the text, I often do an activity, such as a role-play or a game, to practice the new vocabulary they have come across.

Appendix three:

1. Communicative purpose: The activity must involve the students in performing a real communicative purpose rather than just practising for its own sake. In order for this to occur there must be some kind of 'gap'(information or opinion) which the students seek to bridge when they are communicating.
2. Communicative desire: the activity must create a desire to communicate in the students. That is, even though speaking is forced on the students, they must feel a real need to communicate.
3. Content not form: when the students are doing the activity, they must be concentrating on what they are saying not how they say it. They must have some 'message' that they want to communicate.
4. Variety of language: the activity must involve the students in using a variety of language, not just one specific language form. The students should feel free to improvise, using whatever resources they choose.
5. No teacher intervention: the activity must be designed to be done by the students

working by themselves rather than with the teacher. The activity should not involve the teacher correcting or evaluating how the students do the activity, although it could involve some evaluation of the final ‘product’ of the activity when the activity is over. This assessment should be based on whether the students have achieved their communicative purpose, not whether the language they used was correct.

6. No material control: the activity should not be designed to control what language the students should use. The choice about what language to use should rest with the students. (Ellis, 1986)

Trainee teachers are given a table to tick if they think the activities meet the criteria. Put a cross if they think they do not. In some cases they may not be sure, so put a question-mark.

Criteria	Activities									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1 Communicative purpose										
2 Communicative desire										
3 Content not form										
4 Variety of language										
5 No teacher intervention										
6 No materials control										

when they finish filling in the table, rank the ten teaching activities according to how communicative they think each activity is overall.

1.(most communicative)

2.

3.

4

5.

6.

7.

8.

9.

10.(least communicative)