A Closer Look at the Concept of Teacher Education: Focusing on Pre-service and In-service Teacher Education Programs.

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ABSTRACT: This study adopted a more modern view towards teacher education programs. The study identified the characteristics that teacher education programs should have. The main focus of this study was on the investigation of pre-service and in-service teacher education programs. Characteristics of pre-service and in-service teacher education were identified in more detail, and the qualities they should have were better elucidated. Finally, the challenges to pre-service and in-service teacher education programs were identified. Both teachers and teacher trainers may benefit from the discussions of this study.

Key words: Teacher education, pre-service programs, in-service programs

INTRODUCTION

Teacher education programs have started to be more inclusive to voices of practitioners often following more bottom-up processes of structuring the design of such programs contrary to traditional research on the development of teacher education and professional development known for its top-down processes of knowledge transmittance in which creativity and dignity of the teacher are overlooked (Arikan, 2002). Teacher education can be seen as polarized between two positions, one narrow external accountability and control, and the other of internal autonomy and limitless personal transformation. What goes on in this paper is modern view towards teacher education focusing on pre-service training and in-service teacher education.

The Characteristics of Teacher Education Programs

Scannell (2012) maintains that alternative teacher education programs are often created in response to a shortage of teachers from traditional programs, but more often are sequel to dissatisfaction with the quality of graduates of different programs. He identifies characteristics that are logically related to the quality of programs: Institutions should have a concept about what a good teacher is and should have designed a program to educate such a person.

Candidates accepted into teacher education should have characteristics predictive of success in the program and teaching.

Institutions should have good relationship with schools so as to ensure the opportunity for candidates to observe and work with teachers who are good role models.

Faculty should be knowledgeable about their content area and nature of schools, and they should be assisted in their efforts to stay current with scholarship in teaching and schooling.

Teacher education should be well managed and should have adequate resources to meet its goals.

Moon, Leach, and Stevens (2005) assert that most teacher education falls into one of three categories: (1) pre-service education and training (2) in-service qualification upgrading, and (3) continuing professional development (CPD). Each of these categories can have very different requirements and educational approaches. For instance, a
short- or medium-term program that trains new teachers will have different requirements than an ongoing program that updates teachers' knowledge and skills.

**Pre-service Teacher Training**

Pre-service training, according to Richards and Schmidt (1985) is a course program of study which student teachers undertake before they begin teaching. It often sets out to show future teachers' basic teaching techniques and give them a broad general background in teaching and their subject matter.

Lucas, Villegas, and Freedson-Gonzalez (2008) add that Pre-service teacher education programs can engage prospective teachers in various types of activities that will prepare them to learn about ELLs in their future class.

**The Basic Linguistic Principles that All Pre-service Teachers Must Understand**

To be effective, as Lucas, Villegas, and Freedson-Gonzalez (2008) argue, today’s teachers need a broad range of knowledge and skills, including deep content knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, knowledge of how children and adolescents learn in a variety of settings, skills for creating classroom community that is supportive of learning for diverse number of students, knowledge about multiple forms of assessment, and the ability to reflect on practice. To list the essential understanding of second language learning for linguistically responsive teachers we can name the following:

- Conversational language proficiency is fundamentally different from academic language proficiency and it can take many more years for ELLs to become fluent in the latter than in the former.
- Second language learners must have access to comprehensible input that is just beyond their current level of competence, and they must have the opportunity to produce output for meaningful practices.
- Social interactions in which ELLs actively participate foster the development of conversational and academic English.
- ELLs with strong native language skills are more likely to achieve parity with native English-speaking peers than those with weak language skills.
- A safe, welcoming classroom environment with minimal anxiety about performing in a second language is essential for ELLs to learn.
- Explicit attention to linguistic form and function is necessary to second language learning.

Pre-service teacher’s education programs, as Lucas, Villegas, and Freedson-Gonzalez (2008) explain, can engage prospective teachers in various types of activities which are likely to prepare them to learn about ELLs in their future class. They can, for example, be asked to prepare a report that describes the language an academic background of ELL, which may involve interviewing mainstream classroom teacher to learn about his or her class, and to find out strategies that the teacher uses to learn about the background of ELLs. If the target student also receives ESL instruction, the teacher candidate can ask the ESL teacher similar questions about the student. The second form of data gathering can be observing the selected student during instruction in subject matter classes and in ESL to focus on his degree and level of participation in the class. This observation can be extended to encompass activities outside the classroom with the purpose of documenting the learner’s use of English in his native language. If possible the pre-service teacher can speak directly with the learner about his or her use of English and native language outside the classroom. These sources of information can be used to prepare a linguistic and academic profile of the selected ELL.

**How to Help Pre-service Teachers**

According to Lucas, Villegas, and Freedson-Gonzalez (2008), to help teacher candidates gain insights into the effects of different linguistic and academic students’ profiles on the teaching and learning of subject matter in mainstream classes, the assignment could be structured as a comparative analysis of two ELLs with contrasting profiles. Teacher candidates can share the results of their investigation with fellow students in the teacher education program. By working in groups, teachers are capable of identifying the best information gathering strategies from among those documented. “This helps pre-service teachers develop a repertoire of strategies for learning about the future ELLs” (Lucas, Villegas, & Freedson-Gonzalez, 2008, p. 8).

**In-service Teacher Education**

Nelson (2007) describes in-service training as workshops and lectures designed to keep practicing teacher informed about current trends and practices in their field. In-service education as defined by Richards and Schmidt
(1985) refers to the experiences which are provided for teachers who are already teaching and which form part of their continued professional development (CPD).

**Activities Involved in In-service Teacher Education**

As Richards and Rogers (1985) contend, in-service education or training usually takes place for a specific purpose and often involves the following cycle of activities:

- “Assess participants’ needs
- Determine objectives for in-service programs
- Plan content
- Choose methods of presentations and learning experiences
- Implement
- Evaluate effectiveness
- Provide follow-up assistance” (Richards & Schmidt, 1985, p. 416)

As they further explain, in-service programs for language teachers are sometimes referred to as Continuing Education for Language Teachers (CELT).

Likewise, Cullen (2001) argue that the language that teachers use in the when giving instructions, explaining, asking questions, responding to and evaluating students’ contributions, signaling the beginning and end of activities and lesson stages and so on taking place so as to improve language at in-service level not only enhance teacher’s fluency in classroom, but can it also be combined easily and naturally with the pedagogical aim of training. However, Casey and McWilliam (2008) assert that providing in-service teachers with workshops consisting of lecture, discussion, and simulations has consistently been associated with weak and inconsistent changes in teacher behavior.

**Characteristics of In-service Activities**

Veenman (1994, cited in Hayes, 1997) explores characteristics of effective in-service activities concluding that knowledge utilization and implementation will be more extensive under the following conditions:

- School organization and climate are supportive and well organized.
- The content of the in-service training activities is geared to the professional spheres of influence of participants.
- There is clear advance explanation of the goals of the in-service programs.
- The subject matter is relevant to the job.
- Practical skills are presented.
- Extra time is invested in in-service activities.
- There is active involvement of the participants in the learning activities.

Jaatinen (2007) adds a new dimension to in-service teacher education and introduces the conceptualization and interpretation of one’s experience and the developing teachership based on such activity as one of the most central starting points both in pre- and in-service teacher education. The teachers are supervised and guided to recall their experiences, consider and conceptualize them using the theoretical knowledge connected to their experiences as help.

**Challenges for Teacher Education**

One of the challenges to teacher education in practice is the widely held view of teaching as improvisation, uncertain, and impervious to specification. As they argue, even among some teacher educators, there exists resistance to a view of teaching as a high precision and exacting practice. Arguments made for a greater prescriptiveness and training in teacher education have encountered opposition rooted in concern that such an approach would ‘de-skill’ the work of teaching. This view seems to have two origins. One part of this resistance originates from the view of teaching as improvisation, and another part appears to originate from the inherent nature of expertise. “At least some knowledge and skill wielded by experts is tacit, and not all practitioners are able to make the understanding and reasoning that guide their actions visible to others (Polyanyi, 1985, cited in Ball & Forzani, 2009, P. 507).

Another challenge is the insufficiency of the knowledge base about teaching practice (Ball & Forzani, 2009). As they argue, effective professional education prepares teachers with knowledge and skills that would enable them to engage in instructions helping children to learn. However this field lacks a broad and sufficient understanding of the types of instructional practices that make a difference to students’ and although this varies across school subject
areas, understanding of the kinds of skills, dispositions, and knowledge that might enable teachers to engage in effective instructional practice is similarly thin. As they state, the lack of precise professional language prohibits our capacity to specify and teach practice.

The last challenge pertains to the process of schooling and the effect of different kinds of resources on students’ learning. As they argue, research has not so far been able to differentiate sufficiently among the effects of professional knowledge, dispositions, and skills. Analysts do not appear to understand how different kinds of resources matter to pupils of different backgrounds.

Final remarks
Teacher education seems to be an essential part of any language teaching program. Teacher education programs are created in response to lack of teachers in traditional programs or the dissatisfaction with the quality of graduates of different programs. Most teacher education falls into one of three categories: (1) pre-service education and training (2) in-service qualification upgrading, and (3) continuing professional development (CPD).

Pre-service training is a course program of study student teachers undertake before they begin teaching. It often sets out to show future teachers’ basic teaching techniques and give them a broad general background in teaching and their subject matter. In-service training, however, can be defined as workshops and lectures designed to keep practicing teacher informed about current trends and practices in their field. It also refers to the experiences which are provided for teachers who are already teaching and which form part of their continued professional development (CPD). In contrast to pre-service training, in-service education or training usually takes place for a specific purpose and often involves such activities as assessing participants’ needs, determining content, implementing, etc. Both pre-service training and in-service education are of high importance in the process of teacher education.

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