

MODES OF LEARNING IN TEACHER EDUCATION COURSES

Claudia Jawsnicker*

JAWSNICKER, C. Modes of learning in teacher education courses. **EDUCERE** - Revista da Educação, Umuarama, v. 7, n. 1, p. 77-89, jan./jun. 2007.

ABSTRACT: This article examines the current literature regarding pre-service teaching courses by investigating how different theories of knowledge are addressed in such teacher education initiatives according to theoretical rationale offered by Richards and Nunan (1990), Freeman and Richards (1996) and Roberts (1998), among others. It also discusses the theory underpinning a reflexive approach to teacher education.

KEYWORDS: Training. Teacher Education. Reflection.

TIPOS DE APRENDIZADO EM CURSOS DE TREINAMENTO DE PROFESSORES

RESUMO: Neste artigo se procura examinar a literatura relacionada a cursos de treinamento para professores, investigando como as diversas teorias de aquisição do conhecimento são desenvolvidas nestes cursos, a partir do referencial teórico de Richards e Nunan (1990), Freeman e Richards (1996) e Roberts (1998), entre outros. Neste estudo ainda se discute o referencial teórico norteador de uma abordagem reflexiva sobre a prática educativa.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Treinamento. Professores. Reflexão.

MODELOS DE APRENDIZAJE EN CURSOS DE ENTRENAMIENTO A PROFESORES

RESUMEN: Este artículo busca examinar la literatura relacionada a cursos de entrenamiento a profesores, investigando como las diversas teorías de adquisición del conocimiento son desarrolladas en estos cursos, desde el referencial teórico de Richards y Nunan (1990), Freeman y Richards (1996) y Roberts (1998), entre otros. En este estudio se discute también el referencial teórico norteador de un abordaje reflexivo sobre la práctica educativa.

*Jornalista, Mestre em Educação, Docente da Faculdade Assis Gurgacz e da UNIVEL, em Cascavel, PR. jawsnicker@certto.com.br

PALABRAS CLAVE: Entrenamiento. Profesores. Reflexión.

INTRODUCTION

Variouly identified as teacher development, teacher education and professional development, at the heart of all of these practices there is a common focus on a long-term process based on teachers' needs, awareness and understanding of a given situation (UNDERHILL, 1998; FREEMAN, 1998; MEDGYES; MALDAREZ, 1996; ROBERTS, 1998; SCHON, 1983). The idea of teacher education¹ also has traditionally been related to the acquisition of goal-oriented behaviors, and the providence of solutions to a set of predictable problems, following an external agenda, based on a set syllabus, information and skills transmission.

In the past years the understanding of teacher education has broaden. Lange (RICHARDS; NUNAN, 1990) describes it as the continuing intellectual, experiential and attitudinal growth of teachers. Larsen-Freeman (1989, apud RICHARDS; NUNAN, 1990) proposes a view of teacher education related to the understanding of the importance of teachers using their own experience and personal principles in the classroom.

Pre-service teacher education courses have a responsibility to provide teacher-students with a breadth and scope of knowledge, which will eventually become part of a teacher's background knowledge (RICHARDS; NUNAN, 1990; WALLACE 1991) and should give teachers sufficient knowledge to be able to make their own choices to develop their teaching skills.

A variety of modes of teaching and learning are used in teacher education courses. The methodology, strengths and weaknesses of these modes are described below.

DEVELOPMENT

The traditional content base of pre-service education courses usually includes generic teaching skills that are relevant to the preparation

¹In this article there has been a choice for the expression *teacher education* (RICHARDS; NUNAN, 1990, FREEMAN; RICHARDS, 1996; ROBERTS 1998).

of second language teachers - areas of teaching regarded as essential to the repertoire of any teacher. According to Richards (1998, p.4), these skills can be summarized as:

- i. Selecting and setting up activities;
- ii. Presenting language;
- iii. Asking questions;
- iv. Checking students' understanding;
- v. Eliciting;
- vi. Providing practice of new items;
- vii. Monitoring students' learning.

Richards (1998) states that goals in such training initiatives can be sectioned into the following competencies:

- i. General communication skills: to help teacher-students develop effective communication skills as a basis for teaching;
- ii. Theories of teaching: to help teacher-students develop a critical understanding of major theories of second language teaching, and their implications for teaching practice;
- iii. Language proficiency: to assure the teacher-students will achieve a certain level of proficiency in the language so they can be able to use the target language effectively as medium of instructions;
- iv. Subject matter knowledge: to make teacher-students understand the nature of language and language use, such as phonology and phonetics, English syntax and discourse analysis;
- v. Pedagogical reasoning skills and decision-making: to help teacher-students to analyze pedagogical problems, and develop alternative strategies for teaching;
- vi. Contextual knowledge: to help student-teachers understand the role of context in language teaching.

The key issue for the course designers with responsibility for pre-service courses seems to be how these teaching competencies should be addressed. Should different dimensions of teaching be interrelated and integrated with one course strand? Should they develop simultaneously?

Are they equally essential? If not, how should they be prioritized? Should they be addressed differently according to the teachers' level of experience?

Nunan (1992) believes that acquisition of subject matter should provide a foundation for the development of pedagogical reasoning skills. His belief is mirrored in Li and Tang's study (1996, apud RICHARDS, 1998) comparing novice and experienced teachers' approach to planning a reading lesson. This found out that without a thorough knowledge of the content of teaching teacher-students have difficulty turning content into appropriate plans for teaching. Similarly, Grossman et al (1988, apud REYNOLDS, 1989) found out that teachers who feel insecure about the subject matter of their field avoid teaching certain aspects or become uncritically dependant on the textbook. Richards, Ho and Giblin (1994, apud FREEMAN; RICHARDS, 1996) report on a group of teacher-students that had a very limited understanding of English as the subject matter they were teaching, and hence felt insecure about dealing with questions students might ask during a lesson.

Richards (1998) argues that inability to use the target language proficiently may lead to inadequate access to basic teaching skills, such as lack of clarity in giving directions or asking questions. Willis (1981) stresses that it is necessary to constantly review and practice the language so that teachers can expand their language teaching skills and techniques. Heaton (1991) favors the interdependence of language proficiency and general teaching skills. He argues that when the training course seeks to improve the language skills of a teacher, it is deliberately seeking to improve his or her particular teaching skills.

This distinction of areas of knowledge is related to the Shulman's (1990) concept of Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK), which requires teachers to have different categories of knowledge related not only to subject matter, but also to the student, the school context and educational aims. According to Shulman, PCK can be broken down into seven knowledge bases:

- i. Content knowledge: referring to the amount and organization of knowledge in the mind of the teacher;
- ii. General pedagogic knowledge: which includes broad principles

and strategies of classroom management and organization that appear to transcend the subject matter;

iii. Curriculum knowledge: knowledge of materials and programs;

iv. Pedagogical content knowledge: a combination of content and pedagogy;

v. Knowledge of learners and their characteristics;

vi. Knowledge of educational characteristics and cultures;

vii. Knowledge of educational purposes and values.

Elbaz (1983) classifies three levels of teacher knowledge: *rules of knowledge*, which are prescriptions for behavior in routine situations, *practical principles*, which is the abstract knowledge gained from experience and reflection, and *images*, which comprise intuitive and often metaphoric expressions teachers select to describe their practice and their perceptions to what teaching should feel and look like. Images represent a different kind of knowledge, related to teachers' personal, subjective and implicit theories of teaching or their own understanding of what teaching is about. Clandinin (1985, apud RICHARDS, 1998) understands the concept of 'image' as different from formal, theoretical knowledge as it is connected with past experiences of the individual. Johnston (1988, apud RICHARDS, 1998, p. 50) suggests that "images are not always conscious, and reflect how teachers view themselves". Elbaz (1983, p.137) contends that "a beginning teacher has fairly clear images, but few rules and inadequate principles to guide her work". The concept of 'images' is similar to Zeichener *et al's* (1985, apud RICHARDS, 1998) '*perspectives*'. These can also be understood as ways in which teachers understand, interpret and define their environment and use such interpretations to guide their actions.

Almarza (1994, apud FREEMAN; RICHARDS, 1996) sought to explore the interaction between teacher-students' pre-training knowledge and the knowledge gained in teacher education courses, and how this influenced their practice. According to the study, the teachers' personal theories of teaching influence them to react differently to the theoretical models presented on the program. In a similar investigation, Zeichener *et al* (1994, apud FREEMAN; RICHARDS, 1996) followed teachers

through their year long professional training and their first year in the classroom, and found out that their own personal views of teaching, their '*perspectives*', served as powerful influences on how they taught. According to Pennington (1987, apud RICHARDS; NUNAN, 1990), instruction alone will not be sufficient to impact on teachers' practices substantially and over the long term. It is possible to say, then, that models of teaching presented in teacher education are interpreted in different ways by individual teacher-students as they deconstruct them in the light of their own beliefs, assumptions about teaching (their images) and teaching experience.

Learning and teaching options in teacher education courses

When selecting activities to be addressed in pre-teaching education courses, designers are usually faced with the difficult task of how to select, address, integrate and prioritize learning and teaching options. Do the teacher-students have the same needs? Do the tutors have the same interpretation of the students' needs?

Bearing in mind the diverse profile of the teacher-students', course developers should bear in mind that a multiple-activity approach would be advisable because: a) it would expose teacher-students to a variety of learning experiences; b) would hopefully extend the teacher-students' repertoire of learning strategies; and c) would take into account that the teacher-students' learning style vary. Wallace (1991) suggests that the idea of involving trainees in a variety of teaching activities, such as minicourses, workshops, seminars, microteaching and watching videos, makes the training process more interesting for the tutor too as he or she is able to evaluate the trainees fairly by seeing them operating in a variety of teaching situations.

According to Larson-Freeman, the concepts of the *micro* and *macrodimensions of teaching* (1989 apud RICHARDS; NUNAN, 1990) must be addressed in training initiatives. She explains that activities and learning experiences in micro-perspectives reflect the training view of a teacher preparation. These activities can be summarized as:

- i. Teaching assistantships – assisting an experienced teacher with

aspects of a class;

- ii. Workshops and minicourses – participating in training sessions focusing on specific instructional techniques;
- iii. Microteaching – presenting structured mini-lessons;
- iv. Case-studies – observing films and videos in which determined teaching strategies and behaviors are demonstrated.

Activities in the second domain, the macro-perspective, reflect a view of teacher preparation as education and focus on clarifying concepts and thinking processes that would guide the teacher-student. These include:

- i. Practice teaching – participating in teaching experiences that are closely supervised by a skilled teacher;
- ii. Observation – observing experienced teachers and discussing observations with a tutor, in a follow-up session;
- iii. Discussion activities – reflecting on the degree to which one's experience as a teacher-student relates to theory.

These concepts resonate with Ellis' (1989, apud RICHARDS AND NUNAN, 1990) views of distinguishing teacher preparation practices into two categories: *experiential*, which involves the student-teacher in actual teaching, and *awareness raising*, which is intended to develop the teacher-student's conscious understanding of the principles underlying teaching.

As well as considering the content areas, practices and activities to be developed during a pre-service course, another relevant question in the course designers' mind is usually related to *how* should these issues be addressed in order to encourage reflection and at the same time meet the students' needs?

A reflective approach to teacher education courses

More recently teachers are increasingly viewed as active agents in the development of their own practice and decision makers who use their specialist knowledge to guide their actions. Many pre-service education

initiatives – especially in Brazil - have lately emphasized the importance of a reflective approach to teaching, based on the assumption that teachers should develop their own individual theories of teaching, and explore the nature of their own decision-making, developing strategies for reflection that might lead to change (SCHON, 1983; RICHARDS; NUNAN, 1990, RICHARDS, 1998). In fact, in the last decade there has been considerable discussion on how the focus of teacher education has moved beyond training to core questions of the teaching process: its conditions, designs and processes (RICHARDS; NUNAN, 1990, FREEMAN; RICHARDS, 1996; RICHARDS. 1998).

Cruikshank and Applegate (1981) define reflective teaching as the teachers' thinking about what happens in classroom lessons, and thinking about alternatives of achieving goals or aims. According to Carr and Kemmis , 1983, p. 4:

these goals are directed towards enabling teachers to develop the pedagogical habits and skills necessary for self-directed growth and toward preparing them, individually and collectively, to participate as full partners in their making of the educational process (CARR; KEMMIS, 1983, p. 4).

The view of teachers as active agents emphasizes the importance of the teacher thinking about what happens in the language classroom and the opportunity to consider the teaching event thoughtfully and analytically. Lange (1989, apud Richards; Nunan 1990, p.247) observed that “the reflective teacher knows the art and craft of teaching, and considers it carefully both during and after interaction with students”.

Can such a reflective approach be adopted in initiatives designed for teachers who are in the early years of their career cycle? Diamond (1991) believes that the focus of pre-service initiatives should rest on educational ideas and principles that illustrate the realities of teaching:

In devising school-based programmes of pre-service education, teacher educators need to resist the temptation to aim at short-term goals such as mastery of the survival skills relating to discipline. They need to seek instead to help beginning teachers to use practice teaching to become students of their own teaching. (DIAMOND 1991, p.19)

Although Diamond's ideas seem quite sensible, they also seem very difficult to put into practice. Firstly, education initiatives more often than not represent a consequence of the institution's need to ensure that the curriculum is delivered efficiently and in a standardized format rather than being designed for developmental reasons. Secondly, although the philosophy of reflection and enhanced decision-making are important there are nevertheless foundational skills that a teacher-student needs.

According to some previous studies by Huberman (1989) and Appel (1995), teachers in the early years of professional lives go through a survival phase, in which they start to develop tips and techniques, routines, ways of presenting the self for survival purposes. The idea that teachers go through a 'survival stage' is echoed by Richards (1998), and Huberman (1989) who explain that is in this phase that the teachers confront their teaching practice for the first time, and strive to attain control of their classrooms, instructional mastery and the respect of their supervisors. Huberman (1989) summarizes the main challenges novice teachers have to face during this phase:

The survival theme has to do with reality – shock, especially for teachers with no prior teaching experience, in confronting the complexity and simultaneity of instructional management: the preoccupation with self (“am I up to this challenge?”), the gulf between professional ideals and the daily grind of classroom life, the fragmentation of tasks, the oscillation between intimacy and distance with one's pupils, the apparent inadequacy of instructional materials given the diversity of pupil characteristics – the list goes on.

Huberman (1989), Appel (1995) and Richards (1998) add another important feature to this initial survival stage: the feeling of stress and anxiety caused by the great number of tasks and responsibilities teacher-students have to face in meeting new role demands. Roberts (1998, p. 72) believes that the feeling of stress is also caused by the difficulty to adapt to a new role. “Student-teachers are engaged in a dramatic role change from pupil to teacher, from dependant to adult”.

Would it be possible to move beyond the 'training' aspect of the program and seek to develop teacher-students' awareness of the principles underlying the concepts of lesson planning, class management and content delivery? Would it be feasible to develop reflective practice in my

educational context? How would the teacher-students react to reflective tasks?

The mastery of basic teaching skills has to be a pre-requisite to acquiring a reflective and personal philosophy of teaching. Roberts (1998) explains that the mastering of these basic skills or 'routines' frees the attention of the teacher from the detail of repeated interaction to enable more strategic thinking. Roberts (1989) reports that empirical evidence on teacher-students' responses to reflective activities is still limited. However, he points out that there is some evidence that survival concerns might militate against risk-taking and the admission of difficulties. "Reflection on practices and beliefs requires the person to have established some secure routines to reflect on in the first place" (ROBERTS, 1989, p.73). Kennedy (1993) argues that although several training courses may claim to want to encourage trainees to develop their own theories of professional action through, for example, experiential learning, it may be preferable for inexperienced teacher-students if tutors make explicit their own philosophies and beliefs.

A reflective approach to teacher education requires active roles of both teacher- student and tutor. The teacher-student must adopt the role of an autonomous learner, in addition to that of apprentice; and the teacher educator is no longer that of a tutor, he or she must guide the teacher-student in the process of generating and testing teaching practices. Would the fact that teacher-students' and tutors' roles and responsibilities were to be broadened represent a difficulty for those concerned? Would this lead to role ambiguity or even role conflict? It seemed essential to evaluate these aspects.

CONCLUSION

Training initiatives have traditionally focused on two models of teacher learning: The craft model, in which the teacher-students learn from the example of a 'master teacher' whom they observe, follow instructions, and imitate; and the applied science model in which the teacher-students learn and study a variety of theoretical issues which are then applied to classroom practice. Both models are based on the assumption that trainees arrive at the training situation with no experience of education and are

willing to take up new ideas.

However, opposed to the above models, many teacher educators advocate more context-sensitive models, suggesting a model in which there is an integration of theory and experience. This reflective model highlights the trainee, and what he or she brings to the training initiative emphasizing the fact that people seldom enter into professional training situations with blank minds and /or neutral attitudes. The rationale on the existing conceptual schemata or mental constructs that students bring to the training context, such as their own views, ideas and beliefs of what teaching is about. The source of these mental constructs can be many: personality, social and cultural factors, among others.

The basis of a reflective model of teacher education is received and experiential knowledge. The first as is the one through which the teacher-student becomes acquainted with a variety of theories, skills, concepts and research findings which are widely accepted as being part of the intellectual content of the profession. The second would be the one through which the teacher-student will develop knowledge by practice of the profession.

These ideas argue that training initiatives should not be seen as a mere process of providing teacher-students with skills and techniques, but rather help them develop a personal identity as a teacher based on their own views and beliefs. The idea of linking theory and practice in teacher training initiatives resonates with Kolb's theory of experiential learning (ROBERTS, 1998; NUNAN, 1992) which presents a comprehensive framework for teacher learning; cycles that integrate experience, reflection, discussion and opportunity for experiment

Through experiential learning the student moves from the known to the new through a process of making sense of some immediate experience, and then going beyond the immediate experience through a process of transformation. Teacher training initiatives must offer a potential learning atmosphere of shared partnership, a common purpose and joint management of learning.

It is understandable, however, that pre-service teacher initiatives cannot be expected to be consistent with only one model of knowledge, as no one paradigm is adequate to account for the complex, variable and context-specific nature of teacher learning. Any attempt to classify a

teacher education program as belonging to one of a few distinctive types is bound to oversimplify the case.

REFERENCES

- APPEL, J. **A diary of a language teacher**. Oxford: Heinemann, 1995.
- CARR, W.; KEMMIS, S. **Becoming critical: knowing through action research**. Geolang: Deakin University Press, 1983.
- CRUICKSHANK, D.; APPEL, J. Reflective teaching as a strategy for teacher growth. In: **Educational Leadership**, Cambridge, v. 38, 1981.
- DIAMOND, P. **Teacher education as transformation**. Oxford.: Oxford University Press: 1991.
- ELBAZ, F. **Teacher thinking: a study of practical knowledge**. New York: Croom Helm, 1983.
- FREEMAN, D. **Doing tacher research**. Cambridge: Heinle & Heinle, 1998.
- FREEMAN, D.; RICHARDS, J. (Ed.). **Teacher learning in language teaching**. Cambridge: CPU, 1996.
- HEATON, J. B. **Using english in the classroom**. Singapore: Longman, 1991.
- HUBERMAN, M. The professional life cycle of teachers. In: **Teachers college record** Cambridge, v. 91, n. 1, 1989.
- KENNEDY, J. Meeting the needs of teacher trainees on teaching practice. In: **ELT Journal**, Cambridge, v. 47-52 Apr. 1993.
- MEDGYES, P.; MALDEREZ, A. **Changing perspectives in teacher education**. Oxford: Heinemann, 1996.
- NUNAN, D. (Ed.). **Collaborative language learning and teaching**. Cambridge: CPU, 1992.
- REYNOLDS, M. (Ed.). **Knowledge base for the bginning teacher**. London: Pergamon Press, 1989.
- RICHARDS, J. **Beyond training**. Cambridge: CPU, 1998.
- RICHARDS, J.; NUNAN, D. **Second language teacher education**. Cambridge: CPU, 1990.
- ROBERTS, J. **Language teacher education**. New York: Arnold, 1998.

SCHON, D. **The reflective practitioner**. London: Ashgate Arena, 1983.

SHULMAN, L. Knowledge and teaching foundations of the new reform. In: **Journal Of teacher education**. Oxford, v. 41, n. 3, 1990.

UNDERHILL, A. Training, development and teacher education. In: **EFL Gazette**, July, 1998.

UR, P. Teacher training, teacher development In: **English teaching professional**. 8 July, 1998.

WILLIS, D. **Teaching english through english**. London: Longman, 1981.

Recebido em / Received on / Recibido en 09/05/2007
Aceito em / Accepted on / Acepto en 12/07/2007