

English Teacher Competencies

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The effectiveness of language teaching depends not only on the students' aptitude, interest and view of language value, but also on the textbooks, instructional aids and readiness of the teacher. Teacher qualifications are, therefore, one of the most important factors in language teaching. For over a decade, educators debated about the competencies that a language teacher needs to possess in order to teach effectively. This article tries to pursue three interrelated themes involved in this debate – the definition of the word “competency”, the identification of English teacher competencies and some suggestions for development of competency.

The definition of “competency”

The word “competency” is not a new term. It is usually used in conjunction with “teacher”. The word “teacher competency” is variously defined. For example, it may be defined as the ability to apply (the essential principles and techniques of a particular subject matter field) to practical situations (Good, 1973). It is also defined as attitudes, understanding, skills and behavior that facilitate intellectual, social, emotional and physical growth in children. (Cooper and Weber, 1973) Some educators also considered competency as composite skills, behavior or knowledge that can be demonstrated by the learner and are derived from explicit conceptualization of the derived outcomes of learning. (Hall and Jones, 1976). However, Schallock stated that competency is the demonstrated ability to perform to criterion at functional and job levels. (Schallock, 1973)

From the above definitions, the writer of this article would like to give a brief, concise definition of English teacher competency as the knowledge, ability, skills and attitude that a good English teacher should possess in order to function and teach effectively.

Identifying English teacher competencies

In identifying teacher competencies, a critical question needs to be asked : what body of concepts is essential in making the decision required in the exercising of the competency. More attention needs to be given to the bodies of knowledge

and methods in other disciplines such as sociology, anthropology, psychology and philosophy. Eight broad guidelines based on the above disciplines were specified as English teacher qualifications at the TESOL conference in 1970. They were :

1. The personal qualities which contribute to the success of a classroom teacher insuring understanding and respect for the students and their cultural setting and which will tend to make him a perceptive and involved member of his community.

2. A proficiency in spoken and written English to a level commensurate with his role as a language model. His command of the language should combine both accuracy and fluency.

3. An understanding of the nature of the language, the variety of the language, the structure and development of the English language system.

4. The experience of learning another language and gaining a knowledge of its structure as well as a provision for a conscious awareness of another cultural system.

5. A knowledge of the process of language acquisition as it concerns first and subsequent language learning and as it varies at different age levels.

6. An understanding of the principles of language pedagogy and the demonstrated ability to apply these principles as needed to various classroom situations and materials.

7. An understanding of the principles and knowledge of the techniques of second language assessment and interpretation of the results.

8. An understanding of the factors that contribute to life styles of various people.

The question must come to mind of the reader--what competencies do we mostly expect from the English teachers in Thailand. One means of identifying the essential English teacher competencies is to ask for an assessment by those who have had classroom contacts with the teacher. The people in the best position to identify teacher competency would appear to be the lay community, professional teaching organizations, school administrators, University faculty and students. An attempt to investigate the competencies of English teachers in Thailand led to some research conducted in 1981. (Somsak Charoensook) This research was designed to determine what professional competencies English teachers in Thailand should possess according to the opinions of school administrators, educators in teacher training institutes, English supervisors, secondary school English teachers and English major undergraduates. The findings of this study indicated some of the necessary competencies of English teachers which were sequently organized as follow :

1. Being well informed in the subject matter and English structures with the emphasis on the depth and level of accuracy.

2. Being well trained in the four language skills ; listening, speaking, reading and writing, with the emphasis on speaking.

3. Being well-informed in the rationale and objectives of the curriculum.
4. Being able to apply different methods and techniques in teaching, with an emphasis on how to stimulate the learners' interest.
5. Having a good attitude towards English.
6. Having the qualifications and personalities of a good teacher, with an emphasis on professional responsibility and enthusiasm.
7. Being well-informed and able to apply both general psychology and psychology of language acquisition with an emphasis on the ability to bring about a good attitude in the students towards English.
8. Being well-informed and able to assess and evaluate instruction.
9. Knowing how to acquire and widen one's knowledge from the mass media and printed materials and accepting new innovations.
10. Being able to write behavioral objectives and lesson plans with an emphasis on the ability to organize contents and activities appropriately.
11. Being able to apply and produce teaching aids appropriate to the learners' intelligence.
12. Being able to apply his knowledge to serve society as a whole.

Suggestions for competency development

In order to be an effective teacher, one must be more than just aware of the competencies described but make a conscious effort to practice and improve each of them. The best approach to this development is through pre-service and in-service teacher training.

For preservice teacher training, competency-based teacher education program is proposed since it is conducted under the assumption that job related teaching skills can be identified, taught and used in the classroom. The role of the teacher was specified early in the program design. Therefore prospective teachers are held accountable for the demonstration of competencies, not just only for the acquisition of competencies.

Inservice teacher training is not an inflexible program of courses or one-short workshops which everyone attends after school. It is an on-going and flexible program designed by different groups of people to improve each person's job competency. It can be engaged in a variety of settings and a variety of times. There are many basic types of inservice teacher training such as :

1. role reorientation
2. content or skill specific development
3. continuing graduate level education
4. general professional development
5. career progression

The different types of inservice training will need different roles and different degrees of influence of the various participants, in the teacher education process. Howey suggested some approaches in retraining teachers. They are job-embedded activity, teachers' centers and teaching centers. (Howey, 1976)

The most dominant approach to inservice training seems to be job-embedded activity. This approach includes those learning activities which a teacher can engage during the normal courses of daily responsibilities. This includes self observation, experimentation with new teaching techniques or curriculum design and exploration with a different framework for diagnosing learning obstacles. The essence of this type of inservice training is teachers working closely together and learning from one another.

The second approach is the teachers' center. This center consists of teachers or persons who are familiar with the classroom setting. The teachers' center assumes its services as educational advisor. The advisor assumes such standard functions as observing, diagnosing, sharing, and modeling as well as attempting to serve as counselor and confidant as well.

The third approach is the teaching center or the cooperative training complex. Its ideal is to establish exchanges of personnel. It used the concept of releasing a set of experienced teachers from their schools for a number of possible inservice opportunities - observation and participation internship in a different prototype school program where they are able to pursue their own education as well as to contribute to both pre and inservice training of others.

It is the writer's belief that a glimpse at English teacher competencies and the way to develop them in this article can help English teachers fulfill their dreams of educational reform by providing them with the basis for improving themselves as effective English teachers.

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