Staff Development Programs
in
English Teaching

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Introduction

I have participated in staff development programs since the very begining of the staff development phase at Chulalongkorn University Language Institute and later had a chance to observe an initial teacher training program at the Institute of Education, University of London during the Spring Term 1981–1982. I also participated in a seminar on Professional Development in Universities organized by Alan G. Harding from Bradford University and Associate Professor Somkid Kaewsonthi from Chulalongkorn University at Chulabhorn Dam, Kon Kaen in April 1982. I would like first to identify what staff development is and how important staff development programs are to English Language teachers. Then various types of staff development programs are suggested together with important points worth noticing in organizing any program. Finally, an initial teacher training program at the Institute of Education, University of London is discussed in detail to illustrate the points mentioned earlier. I hope that this article will be of some use to anybody who works along this line whether he be a program organizer or a trainee himself.

What is "staff development"?

Staff development may be viewed either as a product – the growth of the individual or as a process – the conditions offered or imposed by an institution to effect that growth. If staff development is considered both a process and a product, the following statement may be used to describe it:

– *Personal and institutional policies, practices and programs which may effect the knowledge, skills and attitudes of the academic staff and which will benefit students, staff and the institution alike.*

Staff development is a new term but not a new concept. What may have been lacking is past efforts and what some institutions are now seeking to achieve is to make a staff development a co-operative and conscious responsibility rather

than an individual reaction. Staff development can play a vital part in institutional development in that it helps fulfil institutional needs. Workshops, seminars and courses concerned with various aspects of teaching can be organized to support new development in teaching.

How important is staff development to language teachers?

Although teachers are usually keen on their specialized fields, language teachers cannot teach a foreign language by simply giving lectures. In other words, one cannot teach language skills in the same way as one teaches history or philosophy. More importantly, teaching a foreign language is much more difficult when we are not native speakers of the language we have been teaching. This is why we need a staff development program in which the teachers have a chance to achieve greater confidence and capability as language teachers.

Since no two classes are exactly alike in background or ability, it is the teachers' duty to select, adopt or adapt the teaching techniques that suit each particular class. To ensure effective classroom teaching, a teacher should try to catch up with new trends in language teaching. They should be exposed as much as possible to various effective teaching techniques through literature or direct observation and participation. This is perhaps an area where we need a special kind of program which combines theory with practice. The teacher must learn *"to wear many hats"*. He is an actor, art director, playwriter and technician at work with a new audience each time he enters a classroom. The creative teacher can always bring new ideas into the classroom to maintain his students' enthusiasm.

One of the comments we have often heard is "Oh! the textbooks are awful!" no matter whether they are books sold on the market for commercial or educational purposes. Quite a number of teachers are not quite sure whether to follow the textbooks closely or not. There are two extreme points of views here, one relying completely on the textbook, the others rejecting it. Geofferey Broughton in *English Language Teaching:* Vol xxi No. 3 says, *"To follow our course-book blindly may be wrong-headed but it's equally unwise not to rely on the course writer for what he is expert in. In fact, we, the teachers in the classroom and the writers of our textbook courses, should work in partnership, one complimenting the other"*. This is definitely a call for an institution to set up staff development programs to train teachers how to use existing materials more effectively.

Types of Staff Development Programs in Language Teaching

Institutional needs will determine the types of staff development programs to be established. Teachers' personal needs will also influence the ways the programs are conducted. For instance, in-service training courses for the junior staff, intermediate
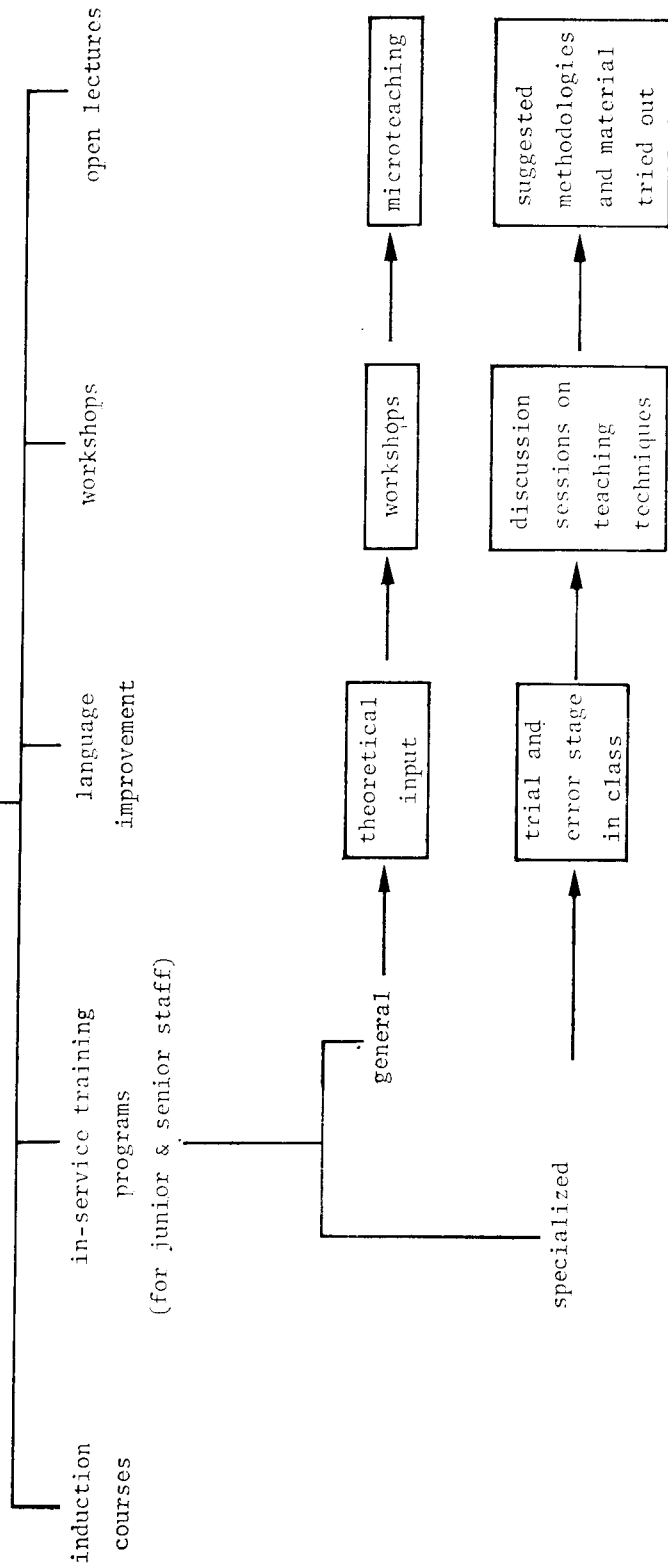
or advanced courses for senior staff, whose content will depend on the attitude of the participants in each course.

Basically, our teacher training programs should be divided into two types: *general and specialized*. All teachers no matter what subject they are teaching should be required to attend seminars on up-to-date trends in foreign language teaching and learning. New methodologies and procedures can be introduced through lectures, followed by workshops and micro-teaching. Emphasis should not just be put upon constructing lesson plans but rather upon application of theories through practical work, especially if the participants are experienced teachers. New staff members to the institution should be offered induction courses where they will be thoroughly trained as language teachers at the institution. They will have a chance to get acquainted with new courses they are going to teach. They might go so far as doing teaching practice in the classroom.

Specialized programs should be organized for teachers teaching the same subjects and share the same problems. They should be encouraged to discuss the merits and the drawbacks of their individual teaching methods. Also, they should work together as a team trying to solve problems through group effort. New ideas can be tried out in a real class. Teachers can then observe the new ideas in action and offer their suggestions. In this way, the teaching quality is improved and developed, which is exactly the main aim of the program.

Short workshops or open lectures can also be a part of staff development programs. In the workshops, teachers might do something of specific of interest. For example, a workshop on how to write an objective test or train teachers in other ways of evaluating students or a workshop on communication games can be organized. Open lectures are another method of sharing new ideas. For example, we could learn from a guest speaker from London how one can set up oral tests and what type of tests can be applied to our institute and suit our own needs. Also, sessions on language improvement for the teachers can be useful to nonnative speakers who teach English.

DIAGRAM I

Staff Development Programs

induction courses

in-service training programs
(for junior & senior staff)

language improvement

workshops

open lectures

general

specialized

| theoretical input | → | workshops | → | microteaching |

| trial and error stage in class | → | discussion sessions on teaching techniques | → | suggested methodologies and material tried out |

Points worth taking into consideration in organizing staff development programs.

1. Time

Usually during the semester, teachers are busy teaching and doing routine work. For the teachers to benefit fully from a staff development program, it must be set up at the right time. Careful sheduling of staff development meetings is very important. Teachers cannot be taken away from their regularly assigned classroom schedules, nor can they be expected to give up all of their free time. Teachers need time to prepare for their classes as well or to simply unwind for an hour.

2. Conflict between tutors and participants

There often arises the feeling of resentment between the tutors and the participants especially in a teacher training program where teaching techniques are emphasized. Tact must be shown on the part of the tutors when observing teachers, particularly those teachers who have been teaching for some time. However, constructive suggestions about the teacher's performance in the classroom are welcomed and expected. The teacher should not be expected to completely revolutionize his or her teaching style over night. Change requires time and patience. Teachers should know well in advance what the tutor expects of them before they are observed. In addition, the organizer of the program should promote trust and confidence among participants so that the atmosphere is academically friendly and constructive.

3. Resources

Resources will determine the extent to which any program can be established. If an institution is well-equipped with labs, recording facilities, library and video tapes, all of these can be integrated for the mutual benefit of teacher and student. For the institution that has limited facilities, teachers should be trained to make the best use of everything at hand.

4. Cost vs. Benefit

To compare the cost and the benefit of any staff development program, an evaluation of the program must be carried out such as through the questionnaire. Also, a follow-up evaluation of the participants is suggested as a long-term evaluation of the whole project because the participants are usually active and willing to try out new ideas or new teaching methods only when they are on the course.

Initial Teacher Training Program at University of London

To make my points clear and to give an example of a staff development program one can establish at his institution, I would like to present a descriptive and analytic study of the initial teacher training program at the Institute of Education, University of London. I hope that some common characteristics either good or bad shared by all teacher training programs are discovered and are taken into account.

There were three groups of people participating in the program : five tutors, six diploma students whose option was teacher training and thirty – five teacher trainees, all of whom have had three years' experience in teaching English as a foreign language somewhere else outside English such as France, Italy, Nigeria, Malaysia and Hong Kong. The tutors were to give suggestions and make assessments. The teacher trainers' job was to try to be more or less like the tutors, helping these teacher trainees with suggestions about the lessons they gave. Indirectly, they also learned how to be an efficient teacher trainer and I was one of them.

The program started in the second term. In the first term, the teacher trainees had done their teaching practice in London, where they were assigned to a certain school and had done the observation of a few pupils at school. They also had a chance to study Spanish as a preparation for Madrid teaching practice. This second term lasted ten weeks five of which were in London and five of which were in Madrid.

The program is roughly divided into three parts : *theoretical input, microteaching and teaching practice in Madrid.* Obviously, these three parts are structured in this way so that the program moves smoothly from the theoretical to the practical side. During the first three weeks, the trainees are presented with theories before they go into a real Spanish classroom. They are given a chance to practice classroom management and to try out various teaching techniques they have studied. The materials used are taken from English coursebooks used in Spanish classrooms.

Early sessions were devoted to organization of teaching material through syllabus design, scheme of work and lesson planning. Samples of a scheme of work and lesson plans were distributed. The trainees spent half an hour working out a scheme of work and a lesson plan through group work. One group was given a coursebook to work on. However, the trainees had no idea at all who the students were and what their needs were. Too many people in a group (8 trainees in a group) led to too much discussion. And although they were told that they had to state the aim as explicitly as possible, they couldn't. This is perhaps due to lack of practice. Moreover, to construct a scheme-of-work and a lesson plan needs time and an understanding what the complete course entails. By actually working one out and being given a chance to compare what bad and good ones are, the trainees might have grasped the concept of what goes into making a good lesson plan.

The observation also led me to believe that the trainees were not sure whether to follow the coursebooks strictly or not. Most of them, I believe, are influenced by their own attitude towards the coursebooks. They did not know to what limit they could supplement the textbooks. This then resulted in poorly or slowly constructing a scheme of work and lesson plans. Some complained that they could not anticipate further lessons. The problem is that they did not see the whole frame but separate details. This is also a reason why in some lessons I observed that the activities were not at all integrated.

The next stage in the theoretical input in London included Reading Skills, Extensive Listening Skills, Developing oral Skills and Writing Skills. Through this period that students were bombarded with demonstration of various effective teaching techniques. Lists of rich sources of materials and ideas were distributed. In my view, these sessions are tremendously helpful and valuable. But the Madrid teaching practice shows that students completely forgot all about the lectures. They sometimes mixed things up. For instance, they followed closely the advice that the sound system should be taught little but often. Surprisingly, few trainees tried to teach the sound system by contextualizing the words. Usually too long a time was spent on teaching minimal pairs. What is even worse is that some trainees demanded productive skill before recognition on the part of the pupils.

As far as reading is concerned, the reading element appears in almost every lesson though not to a great extent. The trainees used both intensive and extensive reading as their teaching techniques. However, they did not actually follow the ideas put forward to them through the lectures. For intensive reading, the usual, rather uninteresting technique they used was reading through a text questioning and commenting on the grammar and vocabulary found in it. Sometimes they asked the pupils to read a text silently first. Then they went through the text with the pupils once again. Rarely had they provided context support, set scenes, explained topics and key vocabulary beforehand. The result was the pupils turned to translation in the class. They never used context clues to explain vocabulary. Some trainees listed unfamiliar words on the blackboard and gave the meanings. Rarely had they asked gist questions or pushed pupils to skim or scan before going into detailed questions. Another problem worth mentioning is before teaching any reading text, the teacher himself must prepare the lesson carefully. For example, a trainee could not make her lesson interesting because she herself had no idea of what cubism was when she had to teach "Art World Mourns Picasso".

In Madrid, extensive reading is dealt with through two systems, by having class sets of titles and by operating a class library system. The readers used are Collins and Longmans Graded Readers, which are popular in Spanish schools. The usual technique the trainees used with the first form classes was either playing a cassette or reading the text aloud himself while the pupils followed the script.

Another technique resulting from not having enough books for the number of pupils in class was giving a few pupils some books to read at home and asking them to report back to the class what is going on in the particular chapter they were assigned to read. It is uncertain whether this defeats the purpose of extensive reading or not. In this way, it is not reading for pleasure any more as pupils had to do some work too. The books were given to others in the next class period, so it might happen that students read only the part which they were assigned to read instead of reading the whole story for pleasure.

In a third form class, a trainee came up with a successful technique. Pupils were grouped according to the books the teacher had got. Pupils were asked to read books at home and in the class period, they worked on summarizing the story with their friends who had read the same title. Each group was given a worksheet. This worked well as students seemed highly motivated. They finished the books earlier than the teacher expected.

A few trainees kept a class reading chart for the extensive reading done. This is purely reading for pleasure. Pupils were not asked to do any extra work. Names of pupils, the titles of the books available in the class library, dates when books are borrowed and returned are shown in the library chart. The trainees also made up a questionnaire for more personal information which is a good idea. The questionnaire is as follows :

Questionnaire

Name :

Title of Book :

1. Did you like reading this book?
   - ☐ very much
   - ☐ quite a lot
   - ☐ not at all

2. Was it_____?
   - ☐ difficult   ☐ interesting
   - ☐ easy   ☐ boring

3. How long did it take to read?
   - ☐ less than one hour
   - ☐ about one hour
   - ☐ more than three hours

4. Would you tell your friends to read it?
   - ☐ Yes   ☐ No

5. What kind of books do you prefer ?

    ☐ Science fiction   ☐ Romance   ☐ History
    ☐ Detective Stories   ☐ Novels   ☐ Animal Stories
    ☐ Non-fiction

6. Is there anything else you would like to say about this book?

For writing, the trainees used writing as reinforcement of whatever had been taught orally. Some used writing as a means to keep students quiet. There was not much work done concerning guided compositions or essays. On the matter of keeping records of students' performance, it was seldom done. One trainee I observed corrected the pupils' papers just before the class period. In fact, to keep a record of pupils' written work is one of the ways to get to know one's pupils better.

Closely related to the session on testing, one striking feature worth taking notice of is that apparently no one set up a diagnostic test to measure pupils' ability when they first arrived in Madrid although they had been told about various types of tests and their uses. They only had to guess and assume their pupils' level of English. Most of them used a cloze test when they wanted to know the reading ability of their pupils. But some set out to use the readers right away.

The sessions on error analysis and contrastive analysis might have been more profitable if the trainees had learned Spanish more systematically. Sometimes they seemed not to know that some mistakes might be due to interference of the mother tongue. If mistakes are classified into two broad categories, oral and written, it is noticeable that the trainees were more conscious of the oral ones.

As for sessions on semantics, they do not seem useful at this stage when trainees were going to do real teaching practice where they had to deal with a lower linguistic level of English although it is undeniable that they are useful for those who want to become language teachers. However, Spanish pupils connot be taught English in the same way English kids are. For foreigners studying English, there must be some reasonable grammatical rules to hold on. Perhaps the trainees need to read more grammatical books to learn about the language system.

I saw several instances of faulty language instruction. For example, to explain the difference between *"There will be sunny spells"* and *"It will be sunny"*, a trainee said, *"There + will be* is used to describe more than one thing and *it + will be* to describe only one thing"*. This explanation, I believe, misled even good pupils. If they remember this rule well, they will certainly generate unacceptable sentences. In teaching a relative clause modifying people beginning with 'who', a trainee did not allow 'that' to be another alternative for 'who' when one pupil came up with 'that'.

In another case, a trainee presented the Past Simple with the getting up routine, which is generally used to present the Present Simple. Of course, the most important verb pupils will encounter in this scheme is '*to get up*', which is not a regular verb.

There could also be more sessions on the teaching of vocabulary. It is very unreasonable for the trainees to define unfamiliar words simply by giving a definition, rather than giving examples or contextualized situations. A few trainees gave the definitions as follows:

fine = *you pay some money*

smooth = *opposite of 'rough'*

enthusiastic = *you are enthusiastic when you are excited.*

During the micro-teaching period, the tutors were not allowed to take part in the discussion because the trainees did not want to be criticized by them. Therefore, the trainees' weakpoints were not remedied. One trainee drilled the following sentence patterns with their peers.

Are you going to work this morning?

I ought to go to work but I'm not going to.

He divided peers into two groups. One group repeated "*I ought to go to work.*", another "*but I'm not going to*" after the teacher. The drills were neither real nor communicative. In Madrid, they failed to manage drilling and its pace as a result of lack of practice. They could not get the time allocation to each activity in a lesson right. Sometimes the language of instruction was not clear, confused pupils and eventually ruined the lesson itself. What the trainees lack is management skill. In one class where a trainee used taped material, the class was chaotic because she perhaps did not check carefully enough whether the tape sounded clear. In another class, a trainee had to rewind the tape several times but he lacked this skill. He did not know where to start or to stop. This could be harmful as pupils' attention span might be interrupted. They should have been made to realize the importance of pacing and classroom management not by being told so but by actual practice or by being exposed to lessons where classroom management fails or succeeds. It might be helpful if they were put in a pupil's position in a simulation period.

Another difficulty arose from the peers. Their role must be made clear during the microteaching. They should play the role of pupils in class although they can be observers at the same time. In one lesson, they pretended to be more silly than Spanish pupils. In one completion exercise, they had to choose '*ought*' or '*ought not to*' to fill in each blank. One trainee pretended not to understand a very simple instruction. In this way, the microteaching period was not so helpful.

In brief, the trainees need more careful preparation and guidance in such a way that they see the whole picture of the learning and teaching process where theory and practice go side by side. This program on the whole was not as successful as it should have been. One obvious cause is that the tutors and the trainees could not get along. Usually the trainees were frightened and upset by the comments the tutors offered. A few even felt ill whenever the tutors appeared in the classroom to observe them. Perhaps what a teacher trainer can do to stop this from happening is to make assessment right at the end of program on the basis of improvement on the part of each individual trainee. The hardest thing in my viewpoint for the tutor was to get involved with the trainees who had different personalities. Definitely, different personalities produce different techniques in different lessons. Some made use of the theoretical input but some did not. Most relied more on their previous experience. They brings us back to consider these points : *Time, Conflicts between tutors and participants, Resources and Cost VS. benefit.*

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