1 The nature of teacher education

This book is about how teachers can continue with their professional development as language teachers once their period of formal training is over. It also examines how supervisors and administrators can provide opportunities for such development to take place. The need for ongoing teacher education has been a recurring theme in language teaching circles in recent years and has been given renewed focus as a result of the emergence of teacher-led initiatives such as action research, reflective teaching, and team teaching. Opportunities for in-service training are crucial to the long-term development of teachers as well as for the long-term success of the programs in which they work. The need for ongoing renewal of professional skills and knowledge is not a reflection of inadequate training but simply a response to the fact that not everything teachers need to know can be provided at preservice level, as well as the fact that the knowledge base of teaching constantly changes. The following vignette is an example that shows the approach a teacher in Korea is taking to manage his own professional development.

Vignette

After teaching in Asia for 2 years without any qualifications and no teaching attributes beyond rough reflection (why didn't that lesson work?), I did the RSA CTEFLA in England (I'm an American). The course was frustrating because so much of what was taught seemed Eurocentric, with little relevance to teaching EFL in Asia. But it gave me tools and reference points for class reflection, and started me off with independent reading. Seven years later, I have begun a master's course in teaching foreign languages. It was the intervening time, however, that provided my principal opportunities for professional development. I am an active member of several TEFL societies: Attending conference sessions and reading newsletters and journals provides insights into the actions and thoughts of my contemporaries. I read professional materials regularly, and write book reviews on a monthly basis. Although I sometimes don't study these as deeply as a graduate student

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would, the presentation of new ideas and the opportunity to balance them against conference presentations, newsletter articles, and regular chats with my colleagues allow theory and practice to find meaning in my own lesson planning. On the other hand, most of the planned staff development sessions I have attended have been of little relevance to the classroom. I would do better to use this time to reflect more carefully on the lessons of the past week. My aim for the next few months is to get in the habit of keeping a reflective journal, and reviewing and analyzing those entries every month or two. Unfortunately, although there have been many papers arguing the merits of reflective journals, there is little to teach how to analyze them. I have more research to do.

Robert Dickey

Reflection

- What are your plans for your professional development in the next few years?
- What kinds of organized staff-development activities have you found most useful?

As this example illustrates, teachers have different needs at different times during their careers, and the needs of the schools and institutions in which they work also change over time. The pressure for teachers to update their knowledge in areas such as curriculum trends, second language acquisition research, composition theory and practice, technology, or assessment is intense, and it is the school and the classroom that provide a major source for further professional development.

The teacher-education activities discussed in this book are based on the following assumptions:

- In any school or educational institution, there are teachers with different levels of experience, knowledge, skill, and expertise. Mutual sharing of knowledge and experience is a valuable source of professional growth.
- Teachers are generally motivated to continue their professional development once they begin their careers.
- Knowledge about language teaching and learning is in a tentative and incomplete state, and teachers need regular opportunities to update their professional knowledge.
- Classrooms are not only places where students learn—they are also places where teachers can learn.

- Teachers can play an active role in their own professional development.
- It is the responsibility of schools and administrators to provide opportunities for continued professional education and to encourage teachers to participate in them.
- In order for such opportunities to take place, they need to be planned, supported, and rewarded.

The example above also illustrates another crucial aspect of the notion of teacher education: the fact that it is a process that takes place over time rather than an event that starts and ends with formal training or graduate education. This process can be supported both at the institutional level and through teachers' own individual efforts. Both approaches will be discussed in this book. Although the primary audience addressed is classroom teachers, the kinds of activities discussed here often depend for their success on the active cooperation of program coordinators and others within the school or institution, and this audience is addressed when appropriate.

Teacher training and teacher development

Teacher training

Two broad kinds of goals within the scope of teacher education are often identified, *training* and *development*. Training refers to activities directly focused on a teacher's present responsibilities and is typically aimed at short-term and immediate goals. Often it is seen as preparation for induction into a first teaching position or as preparation to take on a new teaching assignment or responsibility. Training involves understanding basic concepts and principles as a prerequisite for applying them to teaching and the ability to demonstrate principles and practices in the classroom. Teacher training also involves trying out new strategies in the classroom, usually with supervision, and monitoring and getting feedback from others on one's practice. The content of training is usually determined by experts and is often available in standard training formats or through prescriptions in methodology books. The following are examples of goals from a training perspective:

- Learning how to use effective strategies to open a lesson
- Adapting the textbook to match the class
- Learning how to use group activities in a lesson
- Using effective questioning techniques
- Using classroom aids and resources (e.g., video)
- Techniques for giving learners feedback on performance

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An example of a large-scale training initiative was a recent 60-hour in-service training program on text-based approaches to the teaching of grammar in Singapore schools, which was a mandatory course for all teachers of English in Singapore secondary schools. The content of the course was developed by an outside provider, the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate (UCLES) in conjunction with the Singapore Ministry of Education, and the training sessions were run by three educational institutions over a period of 24 months. In this case, the training was provided to help with the implementation of a new English language curriculum, one that seeks to link the teaching of grammar to the analysis of texts.

Teacher development

Development generally refers to general growth not focused on a specific job. It serves a longer-term goal and seeks to facilitate growth of teachers' understanding of teaching and of themselves as teachers. It often involves examining different dimensions of a teacher's practice as a basis for reflective review and can hence be seen as "bottom-up."

The following are examples of goals from a development perspective:

- Understanding how the process of second language development occurs
- Understanding how our roles change according to the kind of learners we are teaching
- Understanding the kinds of decision making that occur during lessons
- Reviewing our own theories and principles of language teaching
- Developing an understanding of different styles of teaching
- Determining learners' perceptions of classroom activities

Strategies for teacher development often involve documenting different kinds of teaching practices; reflective analysis of teaching practices, examining beliefs, values, and principles; conversation with peers on core issues; and collaborating with peers on classroom projects. However, although many things can be learned about teaching through self-observation and critical reflection, many cannot, such as subject-matter knowledge, pedagogical expertise, and understanding of curriculum and materials. Professional development, therefore, should go beyond personal and individual reflection. For example, it can include exploration of new trends and theories in language teaching; familiarization with developments in subject-matter knowledge such as pedagogical grammar, composition theory, or genre theory; and critical examination of the way schools and language programs are organized and managed.

The following vignette from a young English teacher in Cambodia shows how he is trying to address both his immediate needs and his longer-term development.

Vignette

I did my BA TEFL degree in Cambodia, and taught part-time at a private institute while I was studying. After I graduated, I got a job teaching at the university and I have been teaching there now for 2 years. My part-time job was the starting point of my development as a teacher and enabled me to make connections between my university course and the classroom. Before I started teaching at the university, I worked for 2 months with some of the senior lecturers and subject coordinators to familiarize myself with the tasks I would have to carry out. Since I have been teaching at the university, I have also tried to observe other teachers and learn from them. I have also taken a computer-training course. A highlight for me was attending my first international conference, held in Phnom Penh. Now I think I appreciate the importance of research for any professional development. Staff-development activities in my department (mostly in the form of a discussion guided by a more experienced senior lecturer) have also been very useful. I also organize a speaking club for our students, which has taught me the importance of extracurricular activities in language learning. My main challenges at present are caused by having to teach large classes and the shortage of up-to-date books and resources in our library. I hope I will have the chance for further training in the future.

Chan Virak

Reflection

- How much collaboration is there among teachers in your institution? What forms does it take?
- What are some of the problems language teachers face in the first years of teaching?

Understanding teacher learning

Teacher-education processes derive their rationale from assumptions about the nature of teacher development and how it takes place. This field has been

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called teacher learning (Freeman & Richards, 1996) and is concerned with exploring questions such as the following: What is the nature of teacher knowledge and how is it acquired? What cognitive processes do we employ while teaching and while learning to teach? How do experienced and novice teachers differ? These questions are themselves dependent on our conceptualization of the nature of language teaching and our understanding of the knowledge, attitudes, skills, and processes we employ while teaching.

Conceptualizations of teacher learning

A number of conceptualizations of teacher learning can be found underlying recent and less recent teacher-education processes, and although such conceptualizations sometimes overlap and may be understood differently by different theoreticians, they can lead to different approaches to teacher education.

Teacher learning as skill learning

This view sees teacher learning as the development of a range of different skills or competencies, mastery of which underlies successful teaching. Teaching can be broken down into discrete skills that can be mastered one at a time. The skills targeted with this approach (e.g., questioning, giving explanations, presenting new language) are those identified with a model of effective teaching. Teacher training involves presenting and modeling the skills and providing opportunities for teachers to master them.

Teacher learning as a cognitive process

This approach views teaching as a complex cognitive activity and focuses on the nature of teachers' beliefs and thinking and how these influence their teaching and learning. It emphasizes that "teachers are active, thinking decision-makers who make instructional choices by drawing on complex practically-oriented, personalized, and context-sensitive networks of knowledge, thoughts, and beliefs" (Borg, 2003, p. 81). In teacher education, it encourages teachers to explore their own beliefs and thinking processes and to examine how these influence their classroom practice. Processes used include self-monitoring, journal writing, and analysis of critical incidents.

Teacher learning as personal construction

This educational philosophy is based on the belief that knowledge is actively constructed by learners and not passively received. Learning is seen as

involving reorganization and reconstruction and it is through these processes that knowledge is internalized. New learning is fitted into the learner's personal framework (Roberts, 1998). In teacher education, this has led to an emphasis on teachers' individual and personal contributions to learning and to understanding of their classrooms, and it uses activities that focus on the development of self-awareness and personal interpretation through such activities as journal writing and self-monitoring.

Teacher learning as reflective practice

This view of learning is based on the assumption that teachers learn from experience through focused reflection on the nature and meaning of teaching experiences (Schon, 1983; Wallace, 1991; Richards & Lockhart, 1994). Reflection is viewed as the process of critical examination of experiences, a process that can lead to a better understanding of one's teaching practices and routines. In teacher education, this has led to the notion of reflective teaching, that is, teaching accompanied by collecting information on one's teaching as the basis for critical reflection, through such procedures as self-monitoring, observation, and case studies.

The teacher-development activities discussed in this book are not linked to a single theory of teacher learning because we believe that teachers can usefully learn from procedures drawn from different educational philosophies. However, the majority of the activities discussed throughout the book can be seen as reflecting a view of teacher learning as a cognitive process, as personal construction, and as reflection on action.

Novices and experts

Another important dimension of understanding what is meant by teacher development is the difference between a novice teacher and an expert teacher. Although the nature of expertise in language teaching is an underexplored research field (however, see Tsui, 2003), some of the differences between novice and experienced language teachers seem to lie in "the different ways in which they relate to their contexts of work, and hence their conceptions and understanding of teaching, which is developed in these contexts (Tsui, 2003, p. 245). Expert teachers thus exhibit differences in the way they perceive and understand what they do. Some of these differences include the following (Tsui, 2003):

- A richer and more elaborate knowledge base
- Ability to integrate and use different kinds of knowledge
- Ability to make sound intuitive judgments based on past experience

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- A desire to investigate and solve a wide range of teaching problems
- A deeper understanding of students and student learning
- Awareness of instructional objectives to support teaching
- Better understanding and use of language learning strategies
- Greater awareness of the learning context
- Greater fluidity and automaticity in teaching

Experienced teachers approach their work differently from novices because they know what typical classroom activities and expected problems and solutions are like (Berliner, 1987). By comparison, novice teachers typically are less familiar with subject matter, teaching strategies, and teaching contexts and lack an adequate repertoire of "mental scripts and behavioral routines" (Berliner, 1987, p. 72).

The following vignette, from a teacher in the United States, shows not only the influence of a Master of Arts (M.A.) in teaching ESL but also the inspiration of working with expert teachers on this teacher's professional development.

Vignette

I got a Master of Arts in teaching ESL from the University of Minnesota. But more important, I worked in a variety of well-organized ESL/EFL programs right from the start of my career. I've been fortunate because I've always been in contact with people who were experts in some aspects of the field, so I've been able to have lunchtime conversations that helped keep me up to date. The most helpful things in my professional development were those informal contacts with smart people. That's how I developed my interests in vocabulary teaching, in using corpora to enhance teaching, and in writing materials. Also very helpful were courses I took in linguistic analysis and English syntax at the University of Minnesota, although the methods courses I took, which were little more than surveys of the faddish "methods" of the 1970s and 1980s, were not helpful—I have never applied any of that in my teaching life.

Larry Zwier

Reflection

- How have you been able to apply what you learned in your TESL/TEFL studies since you started teaching?

- How can teachers and schools make best use of the expertise of experienced teachers?

Many of the teacher-development activities discussed throughout this book seek to enable teachers with different levels of expertise to work together through peer observation, team teaching, mentoring, group discussion, and joint planning and problem solving.

Individual and institutional perspective

The individual perspective

Professional development is directed toward both the institution's goals and the teacher's own personal goals. Achieving personal growth and improving departmental performance can go hand in hand. Most schools strive for a mix of both. The vignettes above demonstrate that teachers are generally interested in adding to their professional knowledge and keeping up to date with theory and practice in the field, in improving their teaching skills so that they feel more confident about what they teach and achieve better results with their students. They may also be interested in clarifying and understanding their principles, beliefs, and values, as well as the nature and values underlying the schools in which they work, so that they can be empowered. These can all be considered as examples of teacher development from the perspective of the individual teacher. From the point of view of the teacher's personal development, a number of areas of professional development may be identified:

- *Subject-matter knowledge*. Increasing knowledge of the disciplinary basis of TESOL—that is, English grammar, discourse analysis, phonology, testing, second language acquisition research, methodology, curriculum development, and the other areas that define the professional knowledge base of language teaching
- *Pedagogical expertise*. Mastery of new areas of teaching, adding to one's repertoire of teaching specializations, improving ability to teach different skill areas to learners of different ages and backgrounds
- *Self-awareness*. Knowledge of oneself as a teacher, of one's principles and values, strengths and weaknesses
- *Understanding of learners*. Deepening understanding of learners, learning styles, learners' problems and difficulties, ways of making content more accessible to learners

- *Understanding of curriculum and materials*. Deepening one's understanding of curriculum and curriculum alternatives, use and development of instructional materials
- *Career advancement*. Acquisition of the knowledge and expertise necessary for personal advancement and promotion, including supervisory and mentoring skills

The institutional perspective

In many situations, teacher training provides adequate preparation for a teacher's initial teaching assignments during the first few years in a school. New teachers tend to have a fairly heavy teaching load and tend to get the more "basic" and less problematic courses. However, it is also generally the case that the preservice courses they took were of a fairly general nature, somewhat theoretical, and not directly relevant to their teaching assignments, and thus much of what they need to know has to be learned on the job, as is seen in the vignettes above.

After teachers have been teaching for some time, however, their knowledge and skills sometimes become outdated or there may be a lack of fit between the knowledge and skills the teacher possesses and what the school needs. For example, a teacher may have to take on more difficult tasks for which he or she has not received any formal training, such as the preparation or supervision of entrance tests; or, as a result of staff changes, the teacher may have to take on new assignments that were not previously part of his or her teaching; or a key staff member may leave and his or her teaching may have to be taken over by others, none of whom share the teacher's specialization. Qualifications too soon become outdated as a result of changes in the field.

The most practical response to this situation is for the school to provide the means by which teachers can acquire the knowledge and skills they need. Here, teacher development is primarily conceived of in terms of the needs of the institution. Because it refers to developmental activities within a school or institution, it is usually referred to as *staff development* and often takes the form of *in-service training*. It is intended to directly or indirectly enhance the performance of the institution as a whole, as well as to contribute incidentally to the teacher's individual development. Hence it has the following goals:

- *Institutional development*. Improvement of the performance of the school as a whole, that is, to make it more successful, attract more students, and achieve better learning outcomes. Most successful organizations regard the training and development of their staff as a matter of high priority.