

Developing Teacher Education Schemes¹

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In this paper, I want to set out some ideas on the possibilities which exist for a programme of teacher education. In doing this, I will be drawing on my experience of being involved in various forms of teacher education. For ease of description, I will identify four basic types of teacher education, although I should emphasise at the outset that none of these is likely to exist in reality in a pure form. All programmes of teacher education will be shaped to some extent by the context in which they take place, and this will inevitably draw on ideas which I have placed within another type. I will begin by first setting out some current views on the teacher and teacher-to-be as they participate in a teacher education programme and indicate how these views are reflected in the kind of experiences which are offered to them. In the final sections of the paper, I will draw together what I see as some key points and give some alternative ideas on how I think teacher education could proceed.

Views on the Teacher, Teacher-To-Be and Teacher Education

Central to any programme of teacher education will be a view, held by the programme organisers, of the capacities of the participants (the teachers or teachers-to-be) who are involved. There are likely, for example, to be certain assumptions about what the participants know already, are capable of understanding, and capable of applying in practice. It is these assumptions, then, which will shape the way the programme is put together and the experiences which are offered to participants. In this respect, one can identify at least four main views on teachers and teachers-to-be. They are what I have termed: a. *teacher as operative*, b. *teacher as technician*, c. *teacher as craftsman*, and d. *teacher as decision-maker*. I will outline each of these in turn, before discussing the various implications.

Type A: Teacher as operative

Sad though it may be, *teacher as operative* is probably the most widespread approach taken to teacher education. The main assumption within such approaches is that teachers or teachers-to-be know little or nothing, and

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unless they are given specific instructions on what to do, they are likely to make a mess of things. *Teacher as operative* programmes, then, emphasise the learning of *scripts*, in which the teacher is told what to do at every point in the lesson. The approach is found in short training courses offered by many language schools who recruit otherwise unqualified and inexperienced teachers to teach and, to a lesser extent, in many coursebooks, where precise and detailed guidance is frequently given in accompanying teacher's manuals. The basic proposition behind *teacher as operative* programmes, then, is that classroom activity must, as far as possible, be made *teacher proof* and that the teacher must be equipped with basic "survival routines" for teaching

Type B: Teacher as technician

A second line of approach, *teacher as technician*, bears some similarities to *teacher as operative* in that in both cases the notion of routines for teaching predominates. *Teacher as technician*, however, requires the teacher or teacher-to-be to apply a set of broader principles to classroom work. These principles are generally presented as fairly inflexible and the teacher is expected to apply them with exactitude. Common examples might be:

"Nothing should be said [by the learners] until it is heard, nothing should be written until it is read."

"The mother tongue should never be used in the classroom."

"Translation causes interference. Students should be encouraged to think in the foreign language."

Similarly, precise indications may be given in how learner errors are to be avoided, how drills should be handled, how new vocabulary should be presented and so on. In the heyday of Audiolingualism and the Direct Method, *teacher as technician* was probably the most common approach taken to teacher education but, still today, one finds elements of this approach in many teacher education programmes. In addition, some chains of language schools which adopt a particular *method* may approach teacher education in this way the Berlitz schools are a good example of this, as are the various designer methodologies such as The Silent Way, Suggestopaedia, Community Language Learning and so on.

Type C: Teacher as craftsperson

Whilst *teacher as operative* and *teacher as technician* emphasise following specified rules or outlines, *teacher as craftsperson* places more importance on a fuller understanding of the basis of those routines. In practice, it may be that a fuller understanding of the basis of those routines. In practice, it may be that a *craftsperson* approach to teacher education actually endorses the same kind of routines that are specified in the *operative* and *technician* approaches. The qualitative difference, however, is in the emphasis placed on the participants understanding *why* certain principles are applied. Thus, *craftsperson* approaches to teacher education involve participants in reading, discussing and absorbing the "received wisdom" on the practice of language teaching. Writings of language teaching "experts", particularly those who represent the established conventional ways that "good" language teaching utilises—and the knowledge held by the teacher educator will be emphasised. The teacher in this sense is viewed as an "apprentice" who is learning the ways that "master teachers" think, learning to see things through the eyes of the profession, and learning to utilise the vocabulary and concepts of the profession. Of the three approaches already discussed, it is probably this approach to teacher education which is at the moment currently gaining momentum. It is exemplified in particular by certificating courses which are run by centralised examination boards. Probably the most well known—and most influential—of these is the RSA DOTE and RSA Dip TEFL courses. Through such courses and examinations, the "established orthodoxy", determined largely by British approaches to communicative language teaching, is spread further as language schools come to regard the various RSA courses as the minimum requirement for employment.

Type D: Teacher as decision-maker

In their separate ways, each of the three approaches I have outlined can be seen as essentially "top-down" approaches to teacher education. In all cases, knowledge about what to do and judgements about what are the *correct* things to do in the classroom, come down to the teacher from some form of authority—either the authority of the employing institution or the authority of "expert" knowledge. The teacher is expected to absorb and accept this—or else risk failing the course and unemployment. In contrast to this, *teacher as decision-maker* approaches to teacher education, emphasise an analysis of the participants own understanding what happens in the classroom and why these things happen, rather than being viewed as a *consumer* of expert

knowledge, the teacher is viewed as potentially a *producer* of knowledge and is therefore encouraged to reflect on, discuss and investigate what happens in classrooms and what is involved in the process of language teaching and learning. "Expert knowledge" may indeed be drawn on—through readings, papers, workshops, and talks by a teacher educator and so on—but the status of this knowledge is viewed differently. *All* knowledge and ideas about language teaching/learning is viewed "critically" (not in the sense of "negatively" but in the sense of "with careful thought"). Its worth is judged in terms of how far it relates to the teacher or teacher-to-be's own experience, (either as a student or as a teacher), how far it helps to illuminate that experience and how far it helps in unravelling the puzzles and issues which confront the participants themselves. *Teacher as decision-maker* approaches may thus indeed involve exposure to and the learning of "survival techniques" and exposure to and learning about "expert knowledge", but these techniques and knowledge are themselves made the focus of debate, the main aim, then, is that the teacher's ability to make decisions in the course of teaching is enhanced and that the teacher is thereby able to develop professionally and achieve a deeper, personal understanding of the complex relationship involved in teaching and learning.

In the conduct of *teacher as decision-maker* type programmes, participants become involved in quite different sets of activities. Whilst the other three approaches may all be labelled "content-driven"—that is they emphasise particular knowledge or ideas being passed to the participants—a *teacher as decision-maker* type programme is likely to place equal weight on the content of the programme *and* the process involved. Both will be seen as opportunities for learning. Thus, whereas a teacher educator involved in the first three approaches might be concerned with finding ways to get participants to learn how to do certain things or learn about certain things, a teacher educator in a *teacher as decision-maker* approach will additionally be concerned with finding ways in which the participants own knowledge, own views and own ability to make judgements can be brought to the surface. Particular sections of a *teacher as decision-maker* programme outline are likely then to have a considerable number of blank spaces—increasing substantially over time—in which the programme can be made personally relevant to the participants, centre on their own experiences and questions and in which the programme itself can accordingly be re-negotiated.

Which Approach?

It is an appealing notion to consider each of these four approaches as true alternatives to teacher education. One may, for instance, suggest that *teacher as operative* will be the only feasible approach in certain instances. Additionally, one may suggest that there is a gradient here—a scale of the maturing professional, who may start off as “an operative”, move on to technical competence, achieve a broader understanding of general principles before developing his or her own personal understanding. I believe, however, that both of these suggestions are entirely mistaken for a number of reasons.

Firstly, the key point to recognise in each of the approaches that I have outlined, particularly in the first three approaches, is that they are based *not* on the nature of the actual participants involved but on the programme organisers’ *assumptions* about the participants—a subtle but important difference. Each approach this has the potential for being self-fulfilling. An approach which treats teachers as *operatives* is likely to produce *operatives*, an approach which treats teachers as *technicians* is likely to produce *technicians*, and so on.

Secondly, a view of the teacher necessarily involves a view of teaching, and to reduce teaching to (at worst) the unthinking application of routines or to the following of indications given by outside “experts” seems to me to run counter to what we now know about the process of language learning and believe to be important. In recent years, work in language learning has emphasised the development of the learners’ autonomy, the variety of strategies utilised by learners, their varying goals, motivations, and learning preferences, and the “uniqueness” of each classroom event. Given this, the demands placed on teachers do not involve the blind application of routings not the application of “received wisdom” on what is deemed “good teaching”. Rather, the teacher is required to *make judgement* on a moment by moment basis of what is then most appropriate thing to do in the classroom. “Learner autonomy”, in this sense, must be paralleled by the fostering of “teacher autonomy”.

It is perhaps important to explain what I mean by “teacher autonomy”. Just as “learner autonomy” is not intended to signify that learners are left entirely alone, unsupported in their efforts, “teacher autonomy” to me similarly suggests that there is an *informed* basis for their decisions. It does *not* mean that teachers simply do what they wish to do. An *informed* basis for class-

room decisions means that teachers know *why they* are doing what they are doing, in the context of *their* particular class—and can, if necessary, be called to account for this.

There is, however, a third important reason as to why the four approaches outlined earlier cannot be considered as merely “alternatives”. It is a fact—thankfully—that over time, most teachers mature, gain experience and develop a “feel” for what to do. Such a process is an implicit part of *any* form of learning. In language learning, we have already recognised this process through the concept of “interlanguage”. Language learners, we now know, pass through various stages in the development of their abilities in the foreign language. As they gain more experience and exposure to the language, their ability to produce, comprehend, respond, and make decisions on what is the appropriate thing to say, develops. So, too, is it with teaching. Any teacher, reflecting on how he/she taught his/her first lesson, would almost certainly say they would not do exactly the same thing again. Intervening experience will have created a more *informed* basis for decisions. We can, then, talk of a process of “inter-teaching”: teachers develop in their abilities, capacities and knowledge with time. This natural process seems to me to be the most important and *central* argument in favour of approaching teacher education as the development of the ability to make appropriate decisions. Whereas the first three types of teacher education I outlined are essentially “static” in their approach (that is, they emphasise a particular way of doing things), a *teacher as decision-maker* approach emphasises the changing nature of teacher experience and judgement. It focuses on *refining* and *supporting* a natural process in gaining teaching experience, and in developing the capacity for teacher autonomy.

There is no doubt that a shift towards a *teacher as decision-maker* approach poses significant practical challenges for those involved in teacher education and in the final sections of this paper I would like to set out some ideas on how these may be met.

What might a *Teacher as Decision-Maker* Approach to Teacher Education Look Like?

In the search for a clear specification of what a teacher education programme will focus on, most approaches emphasise a setting out of areas of content: “Handling reading texts”, “Language acquisition theory”, “Grammar” and so on, are all examples frequently found. In a *teacher as decision-maker*

approach, however, such specifications of content are unlikely to be relevant to any significant degree. Similarly, what participants actually *do* in the teacher education programme is unlikely to follow any detailed prespecified plans. A *teacher as decision-maker* approach will instead focus on a *negotiated* rather than prespecified statement of content and methodology. If the aim is to produce teacher who are decision-makers, then the first place to begin will necessarily be in relation to their own education.

Such a negotiated approach, however, poses significant problems. In the context of most teaching institutions, there is a very clear need to ensure that teachers who come from teacher preparation programmes have experienced similar processes and emerge similarly prepared for the task ahead. There is a need, therefore, for quality control. Secondly, an entirely negotiated basis for working is unlikely to be either readily understandable or readily acceptable to the majority of participants. Both of these facts, then, suggest to me that a *teacher as decision-maker* approach will need to have a *structure*. The challenge is to find a structure which, whilst ensuring a sense of standardisation and a sense of direction, is open-ended enough to allow individual teachers or individual groups of teachers to explore things in their own way and reflect on, discuss, share and evaluate their own experiences and ideas. This structure will need to ensure that participants can be exposed to outside, "expert" and new ideas but in ways which encourage participants to interact with that knowledge critically.

The challenge is a significant one but in recent years I have begun working with a variety of structures which seem to me to be leading in the general direction of *teacher as decision-maker*. I would like to focus in particular on two different sets of devices which I have utilised and which could form the basis for further work in this area. The first is a *thematic approach* to reflecting on decision, and the second is the utilisation of a *task-based* methodology. As will become clear, each of these sets of devices overlaps with the other.

A thematic approach

I have indicated that my approach to teacher education is likely to need some form of structure which gives the programme a sense of organisation, direction and standardisation. This structure however needs to be sufficiently broad to enable participants to develop their own ideas. One structure which I have used with teachers on numerous occasions, therefore, (and

which is reflected in the organisation of this paper) is the notion of *views*. *Views* I define as ways of thinking about different aspects of language learning. I focus principally on five main ingredients.

<i>Views of the teacher</i>	<i>Views of language teaching</i>	<i>Views of the learner</i>	<i>Views of language learning</i>	<i>Views of the language</i>
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With these reference points, discussions, readings, demonstrations, and descriptions of techniques can continually refer back to a set of categories which help to organise the participants developing knowledge and experience. My main approach this becomes one of asking questions and stimulating the production of participants' own questions as new ideas are introduced. For example, the presentation of a new teaching technique might stimulate questions such as:

- What picture of the teacher is implicit?*
- What is the teacher expected to do here?*
- What role does the learner have in all this?*
- What is the learner expected to do?*
- What does the learner contribute?*
- What assumptions are made about how languages can be learnt?*
- How is language being used here?*
- What is language according to this technique?*

Whilst the notion of *views* is a powerful one, I have found that there may also be a need for a sense of structure to the introduction of ideas. Thus, in my mind, I have developed a kind of grid which relates aspects of the *process of teaching* to the notion of *views*. These may, for example, be such things as planning, implementing, adapting, testing, checking, encouraging—broad categories of activity with which teachers typically find themselves involved. Thus, we may have something like this:

	<i>Views of the teacher</i>	<i>Views of language teaching</i>	<i>Views of the learner</i>	<i>Views of language learning</i>	<i>Views of the language</i>
Planning					
Implementing					
Adapting					
Testing					
<i>And so on.</i>					

The categories down the grid may come initially from the programme organiser (and may this form a "core"), but as the programme develops, participants themselves may identify further areas of focus. Similarly, the ideas,

techniques, readings, demonstrations, etc. may similarly come initially from the programme organisers but the responsibility for this may be passed gradually to the participants themselves. It will be clear, however, that not all the intersections of the rows and columns in the grid will produce meaningful points of discussion, and in any case an approach which laboured through all possible aspects of each category would be tiresome in the extreme. The grid is intended, rather, as a *starting point* and as a stimulus for reflection, discussion, and exploration.

A task-based methodology

Whilst the grid has helped to map out in my mind the broad areas which participants may be focusing on, there is also the methodological problem of how this may be activated in practice. My solution has been to draw on the notion of the "whole task" which focuses on the "aspects of teaching" I listed above, and which require participants to work together to produce some kind of product and which allow participants of varying lengths of experience to all contribute. An initial task, for example, with which I have worked on numerous occasions is the production of a poster which sets out the questions/issues/problems which a group of participants have, these posters are then exchanged between groups and the receiving group tries to identify "answer" or "comment". A little imagination in this area can produce a considerable range of such "open-ended" tasks. Some examples might be:

- Produce a list of 10 key pieces of advice to a beginning teacher. Put them in order of importance.
- Organise a cut up unit of material into teaching sequence. Justify your ordering.
- Produce a syllabus plan for a specified group.
- Describe what a teacher might do in a specified classroom situation.
- Brainstorm all the possible reasons that may lie behind a particular learner's described behaviour.
- Produce a course plan for a series of teacher education seminars.
- Demonstrate or observe a particular classroom episode. What roles for teachers and learners are involved?
- And so on.

A key feature to this approach, however, is that the decisions over what gets done in the teacher education programme is gradually negotiated between the participants themselves and the teacher educator (the team "teacher educator", it will be apparent, gradually becoming inappropriate). Responsibility for identifying, organising and implementing these "whole" tasks thus gradually passes to the participants, often with sub-groups of participants working on different areas, but reporting back to the group as a whole. At each point, however, reference is made back to the notion of *views* as a means of "digging deeper" into the ideas which come up.

Developing a Scheme for Teacher Education

In the preceding sections I have set out some ideas on how teacher education programmes can be organised and have argued strongly for an approach which focuses on developing the participants' ability to make decisions, rather than absorbing "outside" knowledge. I have also tried to show what such an approach may look like in practice and have given examples from my own experience in teacher education. Moving from an account of personal ways of doing things, however, to the design of institution-wide approaches to teacher education is quite a significant step and in this last section I would like to briefly outline some ways in which this may be achieved.

In principle, I believe that it should be perfectly possible to design various "packages" or "modules" of open-ended tasks which could be used by autonomous teacher groups (ideally working initially with an organiser of some kind) and which could link into a standardised framework. I have indicated above the kind of framework that I think could be adopted. The use of themes, and tasks focusing on aspects of teaching, seem to me to offer "organising principles" for a programme of teacher education which would be flexible enough to permit autonomy for individual teachers and teacher groups. The precise nature of how this could be developed in detail, would, I think, require extensive piloting of some kind. There are at least three main aspects in this. These relate to the issues of (i) *what teacher education modules could broadly focus on (content)*, (ii) *how teacher education sessions could be organised (methodology)*, and (iii) *the role of "expert" knowledge*.

What teacher education modules could focus on: data collection on issues of concern to teachers.

There are various devices which could be utilised in trying to gather data on the key issues or aspects of teaching which concern teachers and which could then act as starting points for "core" modules. These I believe would need to be open-ended, as the more conventional, closed questionnaire or interview type of data gathering techniques always run the risk of imposing the researchers own view. The kinds of tasks which I describe earlier, would certainly, I believe, produce useful data, as would mini-projects undertaken by teachers to investigate colleague's reactions and practice in relation to areas of concern to the teachers themselves.

How teacher education sessions could be organised: pilot projects on open-ended tasks.

As I have indicated, many of the tasks which could be used for data collection should also be utilisable as teacher education tasks in their own right, indeed, the data gathered could form the content for certain tasks. Data collection, however, is likely to suggest numerous other tasks and these could be drawn up within an agreed framework such as the *views* and *aspects* I outlined earlier. These tasks would themselves need to be piloted and evaluated by those involved. In addition, a framework would also need to show how responsibility and decisions about the programme itself could be gradually passed over to the participants involved.

What teacher education modules could focus on and how teacher education sessions could be organised: the role of "expert knowledge".

As I hope I have made clear throughout this paper, I believe that there is a definite role for "expert knowledge" in teacher education. I can see little point, for example, in depriving teachers of the ideas of "outside" authorities or requiring them to "reinvent the wheel" every time they encounter a practical problem. The key questions, as I mentioned earlier, however, is how such "expert", "outside" knowledge can be integrated into a teacher education programme in such a way that the participants interact with that knowledge critically. Once again I believe that a framework of open-ended tasks related to readings, descriptions of practice, demonstrations by teacher educators, and so on, are likely to be the most fruitful approach. These tasks will similarly need to be piloted and evaluated by those involved. Expert knowledge (in the form of articles, descriptions of techniques, videos, etc) could addi-

tionally be made available as reference (with indexing of some kind) for the participants.

Conclusion

As I hope I have shown, there exist powerful arguments in favour of a more open-ended approach to teacher education and practical means by which this could be done. The details of how this could be implemented and the practical problems it implies need, of course, to be discussed and determined further, but I hope I have been able to give some indications of the possibilities that may exist.