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## **Modern teacher training: the experience of other countries**

### **Typical teacher training criteria**

Before starting the discussion on teacher training in the national framework, it must be acknowledged that worldwide, teachers for state schools, private schools, and universities, are trained for different purposes, depending on the institutional demands and lesson goals. In this way their future institution determines what will be involved in the training, evaluation, and eventual passing or failing of that teacher. Moreover, the qualities which are required for a teacher of, for example, mathematics, differ greatly that which are needed for a teacher of English. Not only do they differ in terms of subject material, but also in the approach to the lesson. Most would agree with the Vygotskyan concept of language as a sociocultural tool and thus the approaches taken in the language classroom should inevitably be different to those disciplines less focused on social interaction.

Despite the natural variation in what makes a good teacher (there is more than one way to skin a cat): the UK government has created the Teacher Development Agency (TDA) which has standards for excellent teachers in Secondary and Tertiary Education.<sup>1</sup> The standards are made up of criteria for what constitutes *good* teaching. Some examples:

#### **Plan and teach well-structured lessons**

- *promote a love of learning and children's intellectual curiosity*
- *reflect systematically on the effectiveness of lessons and approaches to teaching*

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<sup>1</sup> Available on the UK Government website:

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/665520/Teachers\\_Standards.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/665520/Teachers_Standards.pdf)

## **Manage behaviour effectively to ensure a good and safe learning environment**

- *manage classes effectively, using approaches which are appropriate to pupils' needs in order to involve and motivate them*

If we turn to the Cambridge CELTA program for teaching English, we also see a set of criteria which must be fulfilled to receive a certificate.<sup>2</sup> Some examples:

- *managing the learning process in such a way that lesson aims are achieved*
- *selecting appropriate teaching techniques in relation to the content of the lesson*
- *providing clear contexts and a communicative focus for language*

To pass the course the trainee teacher must abide to what is considered *correct* teaching from their supervisor. The problem lies in that some of the criteria in any training program are simply too restrictive. If we take the last given example from the CELTA criteria: '*providing clear contexts and a **communicative focus for language**,*' then we can see that it is inflexible in what is required in a language classroom. Not every class needs to be communicative: there is of course a time and a place for communicative activities, yet if there is a written translation focus then why should the teacher need to practice communicative skills, and subsequently not receive their certificate even though their teaching is correctly geared towards their aims? There is, therefore, a disparity between what the supervisors want to see and what the teachers need to be able to do in their professional practice upon completion of the course. These examples show that training may not be moulding teachers into what they need to be, rather what the supervisors want to see.

Furthermore, many of these criteria require critical reflection. For example in section 4 of the TDA: '*reflect systematically on the effectiveness of lessons and approaches to teaching.*' It is unfair to expect novice teachers to be

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<sup>2</sup> Available on the Cambridge website:

<http://www.cambridgeenglish.org/images/21816-celta-syllbus.pdf>

able to exhibit this critical reflection during their training. After all, it takes some teachers lifetimes to gain new perspectives on teaching methodologies. We, as trainers, can teach *episteme* (through lectures), and *techne* (through trainee observation), yet *phronesis (praxis)*<sup>3</sup> is something which cannot be taught and must be reached by teachers themselves.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, although both the TDA and the CELTA criteria contain essential ingredients for a good teacher; one key problem facing all teacher trainers is how to reconcile the relative inexperience of trainee teachers with the wisdom and reflection which is needed for effective teaching.

### **A specific problem for the UK**

Moving on from worldwide issues in teacher training, the UK will be used as a case study to show a context specific issue. Statistics provided by the National Association for Language Development in the Curriculum (NALDIC) state that as of January 2013, 1 in 6 students at primary school in the UK do not have English as a first language, and the figure is 1 in 8 at secondary schools.<sup>5</sup> One area in London: Tower Hamlets had 76.1% of students not having English as their first language. This massive influx of foreign students in primary and secondary schools who have a low-to non-existent knowledge of English has made the teaching environment *significantly* different and respectively the teacher will need to adapt to these circumstances.

However, despite the changing environment, many teacher training programs do not adapt accordingly. Many teacher trainee models, and common thinking on the topic, still follow the *craft model* of knowledge transmission.<sup>6</sup> In other

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<sup>3</sup> For translations from the Greek: *episteme* – knowledge of a subject (a sound knowledge of English grammar), *techne* – knowledge of how to do something (how to give classroom instructions), and *phronesis* – (the wisdom to act in unplanned circumstances and choose the best course of action)

<sup>4</sup> Flyvbjerg, B. (2004) Phronetic planning research: theoretical and methodological reflections. *Planning Theory and Practice*, 5 (3): 283-306

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.naldic.org.uk/research-and-information/eal-statistics/eal-pupils/>

<sup>6</sup> Wallace, M. J. (1991) *Training Foreign Language Teachers: A Reflective Approach*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

words, there is an *expert* who transmits his/her knowledge to the *trainee*. Unfortunately, this model requires a master who was trained in the past. If we take the NALDIC statistics from 1999, then the number of primary school students who did not have English as a first language was 1 in 13, and Tower Hamlets had only 34.8% as not having English as a first language. A master teacher who was trained in 1999 may have completely inappropriate ideas from his/her own training as it was received under completely different circumstances.

A solution to this problem might be seen in a different model of teacher training.

### *The applied science model*

Rather than taking a one-size-fits-all approach to teacher training, the applied science model of training approaches teacher training by first looking at the desired results and then working backwards from there. In this way, like scientific research finds out empirical facts about the world, teachers too can take an empirical objective, for example how to teach to a classroom where  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the students do not have English as a first language, and working from empirical research, create the optimal conditions for seeing it reached.<sup>7</sup> Further implications will be seen in *action research* once the teacher is in a professional setting: wherein the teacher can conduct their own research on their own classes, acting as a professional and a researcher simultaneously. This allows the benefits of a positive feedback loop to be seen and any necessary adaptations can be quickly implemented into teaching practice. This approach is preferable to the more traditional *craft model* as it allows for more targeted solutions to current problems. In our example of immigrant children with low levels of English, research *must* be carried out in how to improve their levels of

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<sup>7</sup> *ibid*

English, rather than simply relying on outdated models of teaching which are no longer applicable.