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Differentiated Error Correction: A Grounded Theory

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Biodata

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Abstract

The findings of theory-first studies about error correction are inconclusive since they compare different techniques of error correction without specifying the conditions under which they can be applied. Through open-ended interviews and in line with the sampling procedures of Grounded Theory, this study theoretically sampled eight experienced EFL teachers' perspectives to uncover the conditions that help teachers differentiate error correction techniques to cater for individual and group differences. The rigorous coding schemes of the grounded theory method yielded a set of categories – "Differentiated Error Correction" as the core category, coupled with some sub-categories such as "Learners' Purpose", "Learners' Age", and "Learners' Level of Proficiency" together with "Task Objective" and "Source of Error" – which explain with the fewest possible categories the conditions that determine the 'what' and 'how' of error correction. Further studies need to be undertaken to uncover more determining conditions in other contexts. Only then can the field replace situated knowledge of error correction with universal knowledge which is assumed to be applicable across a myriad of conditions.

Keywords: grounded theory, theoretical sampling, differentiated error correction, classroom conditions

Introduction

A synthesis of theory and practice implies that there are two main conditions that are conducive to language development in English as a Foreign Language (EFL)

contexts: involvement in communication or consistent activities in which students can form and test hypotheses about the target language by being allowed to make mistakes; and corrective feedback or error correction that allows students to evaluate, reflect and change their linguistic performance by enabling students to notice the gap between the forms they produce and the target language forms. If teachers stick to the former at the cost of the latter, students will be communicatively competent but linguistically incompetent. On the other hand, if they stick to the latter and ignore the former, students will be linguistically competent but communicatively incompetent.

Although corrective feedback has recently become one of the prominent buzzwords of second language studies, there has been a dearth of studies that conceptualize practitioners' views from the bottom-up. The reason is that, more often than not, research on error correction has been theory-first in approach. Thus the field is in urgent need of data-first approaches which aim at conceptualizing language teachers' perspectives on error correction rather than testing hypotheses derived from dominant theories of second language acquisition. Instead of following a theory-first approach which starts with preconceived notions, this study follows a data-first approach which aims at uncovering and conceptualizing teachers' perspectives on error correction.

Literature Review

Polarized views of errors have been translated into two contrasting approaches to language teaching: form-focused instruction and meaning-focused instruction. According to behaviourists, untreated errors lead to fossilisation and therefore require rigid and immediate correction if bad habits are to be avoided (Skinner, 1957). Teachers who believe in Skinner's perspectives, focus on form-focused instruction. Form-focused instruction treats language as an object to be studied, i.e., instead of using language to communicate meaning, students learn about the formal aspects of the target language. This approach provides learners with explicit information before or during exposure to second language (L2) input, by means of either grammatical explanation or negative evidence in the form of corrective feedback (Sanz & Morgan-Short, 2004). In this approach error correction is often used to ensure accuracy. This approach has produced a host of students who are grammatically competent but communicatively incompetent. According to language acquisition scholars, language

learners cannot communicate because:

- Early focus on grammar inhibits the development of fluency (VanPatten, 1988).
- A skill must be practiced repeatedly, until no attention is required for performance (McLaughlin, 1990).
- Language acquisition device (LAD) can only accept natural input (Schwartz, 1993).
- Declarative memory cannot translate into procedural memory. Each uses a different part of the brain (Paradis, 1994).
- Meta-linguistic knowledge does not actually transform into implicit knowledge (Hulstijn, 2002).

Conversely, Chomsky (1959) approached error from a cognitive point of view, according to which errors are seen as the result of the learner thinking through the process of rule formation. According to Corder (1967), errors provide evidence of progress. Similarly, Selinker (1972) argued that errors are a natural part of the learner developing interlanguage. Krashen and Terrell (1983) prohibited error correction, since they believed it had no place in a Natural Approach to learning language. On a pragmatic level, Long (1977) suggested that much corrective feedback is erratic, ambiguous, ill-timed and ineffective, whilst Truscott (1998) maintained that error correction is ineffective and even harmful. These theoretical perspectives led teachers to meaning-focused instruction, which is an aspect of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). As CLT came into fashion, a common position was that errors were not important as long as they did not affect communication (Littlewood, 1981). Overstating the importance of meaning at the cost of form together and ignoring errors produced students who were communicatively competent but grammatically incompetent. The following studies are examples:

- The level of foreign language proficiency has deteriorated in the last 25 years. The median proficiency score for foreign language majors is now probably no higher than 1+ (Valette, 1991).
- Despite the focus on communication, a disappointing proportion of pupils are making the transition to creative control of the target language system (Mitchell, 2000).

To solve this problem Long (1991) suggested that CLT should not focus on forms, i.e., teach isolated rules, rather it should focus on form, i.e., teach rules in context. This involves an integrated approach to language instruction, incorporating attention to language structures within a meaning-focused activity or task. One method for achieving an integrated approach is to provide error correction whilst learners are using the language to communicate. Many second language acquisition researchers argue that such a method is optimal for learners to learn to use the language fluently and accurately (e.g., Doughty, 2001). There is growing evidence from individual research studies (e.g., Ellis, Loewen & Erlam, 2006; Loewen, 2005) that this type of error correction can be useful for L2 learners. In addition, a recent synthesis of error correction research has found that, in general, it is beneficial for learning (Russell & Spada, 2006).

Having considered error correction as beneficial, teachers have followed different methods for correcting errors. One method that has received considerable attention recently is recasting. A recast, according to Lightbown and Spada (2006), correctly reformulates a student's incorrect utterance whilst maintaining the central meaning of the utterance. Current research is mixed on whether or not recasts are beneficial to learners. Several research studies have found that recasts facilitate language learning (Ayoun, 2001; Braidı, 2002; Doughty & Varela, 1998; Han, 2002; Havranek, 2002; Iwashita, 2003; Leeman, 2003; Mackey & Philp, 1998; Oliver & Mackey, 2003); however, these studies have only been able to demonstrate a positive effect on short-term learning (Ayoun, 2001; Braidı, 2002; Doughty & Varela, 1998; Han, 2002; Havranek, 2002; Iwashita, 2003; Leeman, 2003; Mackey & Philp, 1998; Oliver & Mackey, 2003). Recasts are favoured by some researchers because they are relatively implicit and unobtrusive. However, Loewen (2007) believes that recasts are so implicit that learners often fail either to notice them or to perceive their corrective intent. Despite this limitation, Long (2006) asserts that foreign and second language teachers should not reject the use of recasts in their classrooms.

Researchers who dislike recasts tend to favour prompts or elicitations as a type of feedback. In prompting, the teacher does not provide the correct form but rather attempts to get the student to self-correct. Panova and Lyster (2002) found that students who received prompts achieved greater accuracy in subsequent language processing than those who received recasts. Lightbown and Spada (2006) argue that trying to get students to correct themselves involves them in deeper mental processing

and thus may have a greater impact on learning. However, this technique is effective only if learners have some latent knowledge of the form. If the form is entirely new, no amount of prompting will suffice.

Another type of error correction is the provision of meta-linguistic information regarding the error. Recent studies are contradictory as to the effectiveness of meta-linguistic explanations. Bitchener et al. (2005) and Sheen (2007) both found that there is an advantage for meta-linguistic explanations over direct error correction alone. On the other hand, Bitchener (2008) and Bitchener and Knoch (2008) found no advantage for those who received meta-linguistic explanation after a similar two month period.

It is also important to consider the student's response to feedback, often called uptake. Again, perhaps not surprisingly, there is controversy regarding the importance of uptake. Some researchers argue that in recasting, it is not important for students to produce the correct forms themselves since such uptake may be mere parroting of the form provided by the teacher. Others, drawing on Swain's (1995) Output Hypothesis, insist on learners' producing the correct form since (a) it helps learners move somewhat beyond their current ability; (b) it helps teachers make sure that their correction has been noticed by the learner. Compared with recasting, prompting makes uptake a very necessary and essential component of the interaction. Finally, some studies (e.g., Loewen, 2004) have found that successful uptake is one of the main predictors of students' subsequent accurate test scores.

Despite the inherent contradictions in efficacy of different techniques of error correction, many scholars advise language teachers to incorporate form-focused activities and corrective feedback in communicative classes. Among others, the following researchers consider provision of negative evidence or corrective feedback as beneficial:

- Both repetition and focus on form have measurable benefits for L2 speech processing (Trofimovich & Gatbonton, 2006).
- Within the context of second language acquisition (SLA), negotiation of meaning and feedback facilitate language acquisition (Gass, Mackey & Ross-Feldman, 2005).
- Attention and awareness have been identified as two cognitive processes that mediate input and L2 development through interaction (Mackey, (2006).

- Students naturally want the English they produce to be understood, and they usually expect to be corrected (Ur, 2000).
- Feedback that allows students to evaluate, reflect and change their behaviour is conducive to learning (Jenson, 2005).
- Feedback has been directly linked to the process of hypothesis formation and testing, which has been shown to facilitate restructuring and system learning (Rosa & Leow, 2004b)

Whilst these studies provide the reader with researchers' views on error correction, none provides language teachers' perspectives on error correction. This is because by nature all of the foregoing studies are theory-first which aim to shed light onto classroom practice through tested hypotheses. These studies will be of little use in practice unless studies are undertaken which aim at theorizing teachers' perspectives on error correction. These perspectives may shed light and complement researchers' views. Thus the field is in urgent need of data-first studies which aim at theorizing teachers' views about error correction.

Research Methods

Participants

The study started with an open-ended interview with an experienced male teacher who was willing to share his views on error correction with the researcher. Analysis and coding of this first interview shaped the subsequent questions and participants that could help develop the concepts and categories that emerged. The study took place in Shahrood, a large city located in the centre of Iran. All participants were selected from urban areas. The researcher sought out experienced EFL teachers—those who had been teaching for at least seven years. Eight participants who taught EFL to secondary school children were located at five institutions. Two females and six males participated in the study. Three of the participants had earned their Masters' degrees in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL); three had received their Bachelors' degrees in TEFL; and two had earned their Bachelors' degrees in other fields.

Sampling

Instead of statistical sampling which starts with a representative sample of participants, theoretical sampling works by selecting subsequent subjects based on the information which has emerged from the data already coded (Sarantakos 2005, p. 166). More specifically, instead of statistical sampling of participants to ensure that each member of the accessible population has a non-zero chance of being selected, this study used theoretical sampling to guide the questions used to collect data and indeed the sources of data, so as to ensure that the theory could be developed fully. Theoretical sampling is generally accepted as a critical feature of grounded theory (Webb 2003; Becker 1993). It is defined as:

...the process of data collection for generating theory whereby the analyst jointly collects, codes, and analyses his [sic] data and decides what data to collect next and where to find them, in order to develop his [sic] theory as it emerges (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p.45).

Participants were sampled based on their willingness to share their views and experience of error correction with the researcher. Theoretical sampling of concepts ended after interviewing eight participants since the researcher was faced with theoretical saturation, i.e., a point at which new data seemed to be redundant.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection, coding, and analysis were iterative, i.e., cyclical rather than linear. Analysis led to the development of concepts and categories but these were taken as transient so as to accommodate new data. Since the study was data-first, the researcher tried to enter the field with as little presupposition about error correction as possible. Thus literature review followed data collection and analysis rather than preceding it as is common in quantitative studies. In effect, the researcher entered the field to discover the main concerns and views of participants about error correction through open-ended interviews. Grounded Theory is founded on the conceptualisation of data through coding, using a method of constant comparison. Through analysis, interview transcripts and memos were fractured into conceptual codes. Then, during a process of comparison these individual codes were compared, and were collected

together to form meaningful categories. Finally, through a process of selective coding, a core category that pulls all concepts and categories together was selected. As the analysis is abstract in time, place and people, it lends itself to modification in light of new data (Glaser, 2001; Glaser & Holton, 2004). In the light of this statement and through a process of constant comparison the emergent concepts and categories were constantly modified to accommodate new data. In effect, the concepts and categories were modified so that no data were left out

In short, the coding schemes of the Grounded Theory method yielded a set of categories – "Differentiated Error Correction" as the core category, coupled with some sub-categories such as "Learners' Purpose", "Learners' Age", and "Learners' Level of Proficiency" together with "Task Objective" and "Source of Error" – which explain with the fewest possible categories the conditions that determine the 'what' and 'how' of error correction. More specifically, these conditions helped participants differentiate their error correction. During the research, each participant was assured confidentiality through the use of pseudonyms in the reporting of data. They were also assured that once the data were coded, identification of the individual participant was not paramount, because the concepts generated by the participants—not the individual participants—were at the centre of study (Glaser, 1978). As for the credibility of the findings, following Yin (2003), the final version of emergent concepts and categories were validated through member checking.

Limitations

Despite the methodological rigor of Grounded Theory, findings such as these are not a guarantee of truth, for truths are always partial (Clifford, 1986), and knowledge “situated” (Haraway, 1988). It also cannot be ignored how interviewer and interviewee negotiate face or manage impressions (Goffman, 1959) in interviews. An interview is but a snapshot in time. Much is left unsaid about events and persons despite the intention of the interviewer to provide a holistic account. Of course, more interviews in other contexts would deepen understanding of this exploratory study.

Results

In contrast with theory-first views on error correction, which take one technique or other to be applicable across varying conditions, this data-first study clearly indicates

that error correction is contingent upon a host of factors including learners' purpose for learning, age, and level, as well as task objective and source of error. More specifically, whereas theory-first views presume that teachers use recasts, prompts and meta-linguistic feedback uniformly regardless of actual classroom conditions, this data-first study, which is deeply grounded in practitioners' perspectives, shows that one technique that is beneficial under one set of conditions may be inefficient and, at times, limiting under another set of conditions. Rather than being universal, knowledge of error correction is situated in nature. It is the clarification of these determining conditions that accounts for differentiated error correction as implied by the participants. Morrison and Petrella (2004) found that one-size-fits-all instruction simply will not be as effective as differentiated instruction. Along the same lines, participants in this study realised that “direct-correction-fits-all” can be as erroneous as “indirect-correction-fits-all”. As such they differentiated the 'what' and 'how' of error correction in the light of the specified conditions in order to create the best learning experience possible. What follows is an elaboration of the conditions that determine teachers' approaches to error correction.

Learners' Purpose for Learning

Results clearly show that the 'what' and 'how' of error correction is determined by a host of factors including learners' purpose for learning. In one class there may be different groups of students who learn English for different purposes. There may be some who learn English because they need it for academic purposes. On the other hand, there may be some who learn English for social purposes such as travelling. Whereas the first group may want their errors to be corrected because accuracy is a main concern for them, the second group may not want their flow of speech to be interrupted because communication and fluency is vital for them. Ali, one of the participants, believed that he should differentiate his error correction to respond to these two distinct needs:

Your error correction techniques cannot be independent of learners' purpose. There are some learners who need English for social communication. Focusing on form for such learners is totally inhibitive. On the other hand, there are some learners who need English for academic purposes. This group takes form as an

unalienable objective. Thus, you should attend to the form of their speech through error correction. Moreover, there are some who are learner teachers. That is, they learn English to teach it. This group should not only produce the correct form, they should also have some sort of meta-linguistic awareness of the forms of language to make use of it in clarifying these forms for the students in future. Thus, as you see different levels of error correction is involved.

Similarly Reza, another participant, differentiated error correction based on the same learner variable. He stated that his being lenient or strict towards learner error depended on learners' expectations of the course. Just like teaching, error correction should respond to learners' needs. He stated:

If they learn English for academic purposes, I correct all of their errors since in information communication within academic circles accuracy is more important. On the other hand, if they learn English for social communication I try to be lenient and focus on fluency. Sometimes I teach teacher learners. In this case I try to correct each and every error since they need not only to be aware of errors in their speech but also they need to be able to verbalize their meta-linguistic awareness to their students in the future.

Along the same lines another participant believed that the 'what' of error correction should be derived from learners' concerns. For students who need English for social communication, pronunciation is a main concern. Conversely, for those who need English for doing academic tasks, grammar is of vital importance. What follows better illustrates how he differentiates his approach to accommodate different needs:

Take pronunciation for instance. In social communication it is very important. Thus I try to correct pronunciation errors for those who need English for social communication. On the other hand, pronunciation, stress and intonation are not a concern for academic purposes since in Iranian schools and universities students' communication is mostly in written form. As far as these aspects of language are comprehensible, their use of language is accepted. Whereas I ignore errors of grammar for social communication, I try to correct grammatical errors for those who need English for academic purposes.

Learners' Age

In studies that have compared direct and indirect approaches, two (Ferris & Helt, 2000; Lalande, 1982) have reported an advantage for indirect feedback, two (Robb et al., 1986; Semke, 1984) have reported no difference between the two approaches, and one (Chandler, 2003) has reported positive findings for both direct and indirect feedback. The results are inconclusive in that whilst all of them specify the error correction technique, none specify the conditions under which the technique was applied. Participants in this study believed that whilst direct error correction is effective for adults, children respond better to indirect error correction. More specifically, they believed that children grasp better the target language form through implicit, inductive approaches. Conversely adults come to grips with the target language form better through explicit deductive approaches. Compared with adults, children rarely understand it if the teacher explains a target language rule. Karim explains:

When children talk, I try to ignore their errors. If I have to correct their errors, I correct them in such a way that does not hurt their feelings. As they talk, I never correct. Rather, I write the erroneous forms and familiarize them with the correct form inductively. Since children do not know technical jargon, they cannot understand it if I explain the rule. Thus, I try to immerse them in examples of the correct use of the erroneous form, and I leave the rest to the learners.

I believe they can induce the correct form from examples.

Whereas Karim prefers the implicit approach for children, Mohammad explained why he does not use this approach for adults. He related his preferred approach to error correction to the nature of language education in Iran. In Iranian high schools teachers mostly present grammar deductively. Over time, learners get used to it and like the technical jargon of grammar. He stated, "no matter how many examples I present, they expect me to give them the rule." Moreover, he believed that adults are mature enough to come to grips with abstract rules. On the efficacy of meta-cognitive awareness for adults he explained:

In Iran a good language teacher is one who teaches grammar deductively. If you do not teach grammar, they do not accept you as

a language teacher. To respond to this cultural expectation, I try to prepare a list of ill-formed sentences learners made during their communicative efforts. Then in the practice phase of my class, I try to help learners get the correct form through giving rules and explanations. I like delayed error correction on two grounds: first, it helps me approach errors systematically through planning, and second, it does not interrupt students as they try to communicate their purpose.

Whilst both participants prefer delayed error correction rather than immediate, on the spot error correction, they follow two different approaches to help learners become aware of the target language form. Children get the right form better through discovery provided that teachers present them with ample examples. On the other hand, adults better understand the target form via explanation. Of course this does not imply that adults do not need examples.

Learners' Level of Proficiency

Participants believed that depending on learners' levels of proficiency they use different methods and different degrees of error correction. They differentiated their error correction techniques based two distinct objectives: fluency and accuracy. Most of them seemed to agree that at lower levels of proficiency they should focus on fluency. When learners are able to convey their intended meaning fluently, they focus on accuracy. It is at this stage that error correction comes into play. Behnoosh explains:

At lower levels, I focus on communication and learners' communicative intent rather than the form of their speech. At these levels we should rarely correct learners' errors for two reasons: first, correcting de-motivates learners, and second, they are likely to encounter and discover the correct form at other higher levels. At higher levels, I correct learners directly by showing what the erroneous form is and then try to present them with the relevant linguistic information through explanation.

Whilst Behnoosh related infrequent error correction in the early stages to learners' motivation to communicate, Zahra related it to creating confidence in beginners. She

believed that correction may create the feeling of incompetency in learners. To justify her position she explained:

It depends on how well students can communicate. At lower levels, I ignore ill-formed structures because the main objective is to enable students to communicate. Correcting errors may erode their confidence and they may come to the conclusion that they are not able to communicate. At this stage, I try to appreciate their efforts to get their meanings across. At higher levels, I try to devote some time to form-focused tasks. In these tasks, I clearly state that the purpose is language learning rather than communication and I try to correct their errors through exposure and explanation.

Task Objective

One teaching unit may be organized around different types of tasks. Whilst some aim to involve students in communication, others may aim at presenting learners with practice. Moreover, some tasks are devoted to developing pronunciation and some to improving grammar and vocabulary. One of the common pitfalls of error correction is to correct all errors irrespective of the objective of the task. This unsystematic approach not only disrupts communication, it is also useless in terms of creating form-awareness. Participants believed that what to correct depends on the task objective.

Ali stated:

In observing classes I have found that error correction is totally unsystematic. That is, each and every mistake is corrected on the spot. I believe that error correction should be systematic. I believe that error correction should be in line with the objectives of the task in hand. That is, if we teach grammar, we should correct grammatical mistakes. If the purpose of the task is to improve learners' pronunciation, I focus on their pronunciation errors and try to ignore errors in other areas such as grammar or word choice. I believe if you correct everything, you correct nothing; the reason being that students lose the objective of the task and they do not learn anything at all.

Another participant stated that her teaching objectives are twofold: communication

and practice. Thus she divides class time into two phases to respond to the specified objectives respectively. The interesting point about her approach is that she limits error correction to the practice phase. She stated:

There are two distinct phases in my class: a communication phase and a practice phase. When my students communicate, I never correct their errors. I encourage them to concentrate on meaning and get it across by any means. On the other hand, in the practice phase of the class I focus on form. During communication, I write students' major errors down. Then in the practice phase I write the errors on the board and help the students internalize the correct form through inductive and deductive approaches: inductive for children and deductive for adults.

Source of Error

One cannot start correcting errors without first differentiating the source of errors. In Audio-lingualism teachers' recognized interlingual errors, i.e., errors that are caused by first language habits, as the only source of errors. Today, however, such a supposition is not accepted. Thus teachers should differentiate their approach to error correction depending on the source of the error. Participants in this study differentiated two main sources of error: interlingual errors and intralingual errors. This realization helped them select different approaches for each. Ali explained:

While students are communicating, I write their errors down. Then I classify them into interlingual and intralingual errors. For each group, I follow a different strategy. For interlingual errors, I try to juxtapose the first language form and the target language form on the board. Then through explanation, I try to make students aware of the differences. As for the second group, i.e., intralingual errors, I never correct them, since I believe that through further exposure to the target language, learners will discover the correct form and they will self-correct the faulty rule that produces the faulty form.

Similarly Daryoosh reiterated that it is the realisation of the source of error that helps him differentiate between which errors to correct and which errors to ignore. Sometimes students wrap target language words in first language structures.

Sometimes, however, they use the target language structure but it is faulty or limited. He believed that the latter type does not require any correction since through further exposure to the target language structure the learner will realize the correct structure and self-correct his or her speech. As to the former he added:

Some of my colleagues distrust theoretical findings but I personally believe that if they are applied in the right time and place they pay off. For instance, I always rely on contrastive analysis to correct errors that are rooted in their first language. When my students do not know a target language structure, they suppose that they can pick it up from their first language. For instance, when a student says "I am agree" or "Reza married with Maryam" I am sure that he is using Persian structures to speak English. By juxtaposing the first language structure and target language structure, I make them aware of the differences. I do believe that leaning a new language involves overcoming the differences between first language structures and target language structures. Although very useful, it never works for intralingual errors. I never correct these errors since I believe that students will discover the correct rule on their own.

Discussion and Conclusion

Although participants were not up-to-date with literature, years of teaching experience had led them to the realisation that they cannot cater for a myriad of individual differences in terms of background, age, level, purpose, etc. with one technique of error correction for all. This realisation, although derived from a different source, i.e., practice, is in line with the latest theoretical findings concerning instruction. Connor, Morrison, and Katch (2004) found that students achieved more growth when their instruction was matched to their needs—different children with different needs benefited from different opportunities. Similarly the participants in this study realised that error correction leads to language development if it is tailored to meet individual differences. Connor, Morrison, and Petrella (2004) found that one-size-fits-all instruction simply will not be as effective as differentiated instruction. Along the same lines, participants in this study reached out to individuals and small groups and varied the 'what' and 'how' of error correction in order to create the best learning experience possible. Thus, they differentiated error correction in terms specified in the

results section of this study to meet the needs of individuals and groups within one and the same class or at different levels of proficiency.

In studies that have compared direct and indirect approaches, two (Ferris & Helt, 2000; Lalande, 1982) have reported an advantage for indirect feedback, two (Robb et al., 1986; Semke, 1984) have reported no difference between the two approaches, and one (Chandler, 2003) has reported positive findings for both direct and indirect feedback. Even though many findings from oral corrective feedback studies in second language acquisition research point to an advantage for direct over indirect corrective feedback (Carroll, 2001; Carroll & Swain, 1993; Ellis et al., 2006; Havranek & Cesnik, 2003), there are others (Kim & Mathes, 2001; Leeman, 2003) that claim the opposite. The contradictory results may lie in the fact that these researchers wrongly assumed “direct- correction-fits-all” or “indirect-correction-fits-all”. Although all of them specified the method of error correction, none specified the conditions that determine the 'how' and 'what' of error correction. They wrongly presumed that one technique of error correction is applicable across varying ages, levels, tasks, and purposes.

This data-first study, which is deeply grounded in practitioners' perspectives rather than in top-down theories, shows that one technique that is beneficial under one set of conditions may be inefficient and, at times, limiting under another set of conditions. Moreover, it indicates that studies such as the ones referred to in the literature review would seem to be futile unless they cater for classroom conditions that shape teachers' action. Rather than being universal, knowledge of error correction is situated in nature. It is the clarification of these determining conditions that account for differentiated error correction discussed by the participants.

Having theorized teachers' views, the study informs second language acquisition researchers and curriculum designers by providing them with a set of hypotheses rarely encountered in previous literature. The findings are significant to researchers in that not only do they provide them with a new set of hypotheses about error correction, they also help them modify their views and hypotheses in the light of the findings of this study. They equally help curriculum designers and material developers to accommodate practitioners' views in designing and developing content-focused and form-focused materials. The findings are also significant in that they bridge the gap between researchers and practitioners. However the findings are especially significant in that they give voice to an oft-silent group in the language

education circle, i.e., language teachers, in some contexts such as Iran. Despite the significance of the findings, however, further studies need to be undertaken to uncover more determining conditions in other contexts. Only then can the field replace situated knowledge of error correction with universal knowledge which is assumed to be applicable across a myriad of conditions.

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Electronic Professional Development, Action Research and Blogging: an Ideal Combination.

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Biodata

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Abstract

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) provides tools for electronic interaction that enables global dissemination of information and inter-personal connectivity. An internet-based electronic professional development course for English language teachers can allow any teacher with access to a computer and the internet to participate. Electronic professional development that utilises the Action Research (AR) paradigm allows the design of a pedagogically culturally sensitive course. Although AR has been effectively utilised within teacher professional development for over forty years (Zeichner, 2001; Parsons & Brown, 2002), it has not been widely implemented in English language teacher development (Richards & Farrell, 2005) or within electronic professional development (e-PD) courses. This paper introduces an electronic professional development course for English language teachers (e-PD4ELT), discusses how AR can be implemented within an e-PD course, and provides an appropriate AR model for the course using a blog within a personal learning electronic environment.

Key words: professional development, blogging, action research, on-line distance learning

Introduction

Over the past 25 years of English language teaching, teacher training and providing teacher professional development, in seven different countries, I have had the pleasure to have worked with many English language teachers in a variety of educational

settings. These range from primary schools in Brunei Darussalam to universities in Australia, from a language school in Madeira, Portugal to international schools in Malaysia and Fiji. The vast majority of these teachers believed that professional development (PD) appropriate for their pedagogical environment was essential. Richards and Farrell (2005) indicate that:

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 provides a major source for further professional development (p. 2).

In my experience, however, access to professional development varies greatly. In developing countries, English language teachers are often working in areas where teacher development courses and further or higher education institutions running PD courses are not readily available. In profit-oriented language schools the cost of providing PD can be deemed prohibitive. Sending teachers, heads of department or teacher trainers on short term teacher development and learning courses can be both expensive and logistically complicated. Moreover, educators attending such courses are not necessarily being provided with appropriate material for their real pedagogical needs, however contemporary the methodology being introduced may be. To contextualise this, over the past 10 years I have been involved in providing a number of short-term English language teaching professional development courses for educators, particularly from Thailand and China. The general feedback from the course participants was that the courses were very informative and enjoyable but that less than half of the course content provided was useable in their cultural pedagogical environment. The restrictiveness of the curriculum, the pressure of an examination-driven curriculum, the culturally acceptable behaviour of a teacher, the linguistic cultural bias of the course material and what was perceived as customary practice in the classroom were all reasons cited. An electronic professional development course which is supervised and supported via the internet has the potential to alleviate many of the intrinsic problems associated with attending a face-to-face PD course. An electronic professional development course based on the Action Research paradigm has the capacity to be pedagogically and culturally empathetic in meeting the specific contextual needs of the participants.

The increasing global accessibility of the internet, and the development of resources

available, has certainly enriched English language teachers' pedagogy and connectivity. Websites, such as <http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk>, <http://www.tefl.net>, <http://www.eslcafe.com>, <http://www.teachers.tv> and <http://www.tefl.com> have increasingly enabled pedagogical interest groups to form and provide expert information and ideas. Through discussion groups and message boards within these sites, English language teachers have been able to join online teacher communities where they can share pedagogical knowledge, ideas, lesson plans, specific information on geographical areas, schools, and even information pertaining to personalities within the industry. This electronic connectivity has "benefited all those who have chosen, or are in a position, to use the medium, but most specifically, those in remote areas without access to physical communities" (Pledger & Mitchell, 2005). Universities and further education institutes have been quick to embrace the technology and are now providing a wide variety of electronic distance courses leading to professional and academic qualifications. However, in my experience, teachers do not necessarily have the time, finances or desire, to be involved in the rigours and demands of academic courses. Nevertheless, teachers appreciate the practical help and advice within their personal pedagogy that organised professional development strives to provide.

PD and the Electronic Provision of PD Courses

Chang & Beaumont (2000) discuss how PD has traditionally been presented top down, that is, participants are presented with information from an authoritative figure through workshops or seminars. The specialist would expect newly acquired pedagogical methodology to be implemented by the teacher and the expert/teacher interaction is heavily weighted towards the expert's end. Chang & Beaumont point out that, "this traditional top-down approach frequently fails to bring about changes in the attitude of classroom teachers and therefore their practice" (p. 84). Inherently, this top down approach does not allow teachers the flexibility to develop or experiment with new ideas and does not permit teachers to feed back their findings, through experimentation, to the course supervisor. On-line PD courses that I am aware of, and have tutored on, such as the on-line DELTA, are presented as top down courses and are assessed as such. Participants are deemed successful according to the authoritative figure's assessment of the ability to discuss and implement introduced methodologies.

McFadzean & McKenzie (2001) suggest that the two greatest benefits of an e-PD

course are that, a) it is accessible to anyone with an internet connection and; b) it does not require a specific timetable, that is, participants do not have to attend a particular location at a precise time. This is “any time/any place learning” (p. 471).

Participant isolation however, is posited as a potential deterrent to following an on-line course so a course also needs to employ on-line community-generating strategies that a dedicated website can utilise. To alleviate a feeling of isolation and stimulate interaction with an electronic course Shepherd (1999) suggests that an e-learning course should, a) be immediately appealing and accessible; b) allow for reflection; c) be logical and methodical; d) be clearly of practical use; e) present material both linearly and holistically; and f) contain much visual and audio material. I also believe that using icons created from a course participant’s (CP) personal photograph, a function provided within Moodle (<http://moodle.org/>), the educational software program used to create e-PD4ELT, can greatly facilitate a feeling of interpersonal interaction and community.

In designing the e-PD4ELT course the ideas and concepts offered above have been closely respected. In conjunction with this, incorporating the Action Research paradigm as the basis of participant interaction with the course would provide an ideal tool for personalisation, adaptation and cultural relevance. Action Research enables participants to decide, through experimentation and reflection, what their needs and requirements are in relation to the presented pedagogical theory or methodology.

The Electronic Professional Development for English Language Teachers (e-PD4ELT) Course

At the time of revising the manuscript, I was in my final year of doctoral studies at James Cook University, Queensland, Australia. For my research I wished to answer the question: Can a professional development course for primary and high school English language teachers be delivered effectively electronically, through the mediums of the internet and DVD, be supervised via a dedicated website and be pedagogically culturally sensitive? To answer this question I produced the e-PD4ELT course (<http://www.epd4elt.com>) and trialled the course with teachers in Australia, Fiji, Japan and Vanuatu.

At present, the e-PD4ELT consists of a range of contemporary English language teaching methodologies presented in five modules. The pedagogical methodologies were chosen for inclusion based on, a) recent research and assessment of post-course oral and written feedback from international English language educators attending face to face professional development courses in Australia; b) through my personal international teaching, teacher training and consultancy experience, particularly over the last 12 years. The topics covered in the five modules are:

Module One: Language Corpora and the Lexical Approach. In the 1970s, second language acquisition researchers such as Corder, Hakuta, Keller and Peters (2001) questioned whether the traditional grammar focus of language learning courses was neglecting such fundamental principles of linguistic communication as the possibility of communicating effectively through an utterance formed without grammar words, and that collocations and language chunking are an integral part of language. Through the development of utilised linguistic corpora (e.g., Bank of English, British National Corpus: <http://www.collins.co.uk/Corpus/CorpusSearch.aspx>) it was possible to determine the most widely used lexical items and collocations on which to build an English language-learning syllabus. In the early 1990s linguistic academics such as David Willis, who went on to produce the COBUILD English Course, and Michael Lewis, who wrote *The Lexical Approach* (1993), propounded the concept that lexis, word collocations, and lexical chunks play a fundamental role in the structure of language (Harmer, 2001). More recently Richards and Rogers (2001) stated that:

A lexical approach in language teaching reflects a belief in the centrality of the lexicon to language structure, second language learning and language use and in particular to multiword lexical units, or chunks, that are learned and used as single items (p. 132).

Chen (2004) discusses the practical application of using the lexical approach in the classroom and introduces a variety of corpora that have been useful resources.

Module Two: Grammar-Based Syllabi, a Deductive, Inductive or Combined Approach. English language syllabi produced for primary and high schools are often based on a sequential grammar methodology that is taught deductively; that is a grammar point is presented, the rules are given, and students practice the grammar point through written and/or oral exercises. However, there has been a strong body of

support, backed by empirical research, for using a student-centred, inductive approach to the learning of grammar. An inductive approach presents authentic language parcels requiring the learner to discover underlying principles and patterns, and hence, rules. Nunan (Richards & Renandya, 2002) reports that, through using an inductive approach to learning grammar, students commented on “their newly awakened self-confidence and self-reliance in their language learning” and said they “could see the value of putting themselves in the position of information gatherers” (p. 141). Nunan also finds that this approach can be just as effective for the acquisition of grammar and lexical items. Hedge (2000) discusses second language acquisition theories, such as the input hypothesis and the notion of intake, in relation to teaching grammar. This posits the concept that second language learners obtain information about a second language (L2) from their linguistic environment. This environment, in language teaching, can often be restricted to, and stimulated by, the classroom. From this environmentally attained linguistic information, language acquisition can occur through a number of processes. These processes are, 1) noticing (Carroll, 2006; Schmidt, 1990, 2001; van Lier, 1996) where a learner’s attention is tuned in to a specific feature; 2) reasoning and hypothesising, where a learner, particularly an adult, makes inferences leading to an hypothesis; 3) reasoning deductively, where the learner attempts to apply rules already learnt; 4) analysing contrastively, translating or transferring, by making comparisons, directly translating or transferring grammatical knowledge, between an L1 and L2 the learner can often come to a clearer understanding. However, this may also have the opposite effect when L1 rules are very different to L2 ones; 5) structuring and re-structuring, where the learner applies rules and is successful or not, in which case new structures need to be trialled; 6) automatising, through regular and consistent successful use of an item, the learner needs not think about it before use. It could be argued that if the deductive teaching system is overlaid on the process shown above, there is not a match, suggesting that a deductive approach does not concur with second language acquisition theory. However if the same is done with an inductive approach, there appears to be a compatibility. This suggests that an inductive approach would be more effective. Certainly, the first 3 processes above can be achieved through an inductive approach, but a short-cut to automatising could occur if a deductive approach was adopted for processes four and five. There appears to be a pedagogical dichotomy between the two methodologies, although both methodologies have value and, through good

planning, can complement each other. Widodo (2006) discusses the practicality of teaching grammar through a combined approach.

Module Three: Task-Based Learning and Pedagogical Scaffolding. This approach is largely student-centred and operates on two levels; the learning of specific language required by the student to achieve the planned task and the learning of language required in negotiating with both peers and facilitators. Tasked-based learning incorporates pedagogical scaffolding, which requires the teacher to plan task support and guidance needed to achieve the required linguistic outcomes. According to Richardson and Rogers (2005), task-based learning and teaching is a methodology which uses specific and meaningful tasks as the principal unit of lesson or curriculum planning. Harmer (2001) adds that the focus is on the linguistic requirements needed on all levels to accomplish either a task needing to be performed or a problem needing to be solved. There are three principal phases in task-based learning: the pre-task negotiation phase, the task production/completion phase and the post-task, feedback phase. Language requirements for each phase can often be very different, but all are directly related to the presented task and communication within each phase is relevant and significant. The premise is that meaningful communication occurs between all those involved in answering the task and the language used is processed and internalised by the language learner more effectively. In addition, Belgar and Hunt (as cited in Richards & Renandya, 2005) stated that “learners’ analytical abilities will be equal to the task of coming to accurate conclusions about grammatical and lexical usage” (p. 96). Practical applications of task-based teaching in the Asian context is discussed by Nunan (2006), and Kebble (2008) presents a procedural report of a successful task-based activity, including a discussion of student feedback.

Module Four: Multiple Intelligences and Language Learning Strategies. Language teachers are quite aware that learning strengths vary from student to student and that language activity interaction can occur at differing levels of interest and cognition. It is clear that some people learn new skills better through oral and written explanations of language systems whereas other learners prefer rules augmented by visual clues, diagrams and pictures. Some learners are successful through working with peers, in pairs and in groups, whilst others find working independently on word games, worksheets and writing more stimulating. Howard Gardener (1983, 1993) argued

against “intelligence” as a single measurable entity, as in I.Q. testing, and offered the concept of multiple intelligences. Gardner originally offered seven categories: Verbal/Linguistic, Logical/mathematical, Visual/Spatial, Musical/rhythmic, Bodily/Kinaesthetic, Interpersonal/Intrapersonal and, ten years later, added an eighth, Naturalistic. Recognition of Gardner’s eight intelligences in students can enhance the provision of language teaching materials to encompass and stimulate each learning style. Along with catering for Multiple Intelligences the teacher can also ascertain the ways in which students approach their learning, that is, how students organise themselves and their work and what study procedures they follow. Through this analysis the teacher can introduce and provide strategies to enhance the learning process. From a learning point of view, then, there are two main factors to consider; a) how do I learn best (multiple intelligence); b) what can I do to enhance the learning process (learning strategies). Kinoshita (2003) and Schmidt-Fajlik (2004) present valuable practical insights into both Multiple Intelligences and learner strategies in the classroom.

Module Five: Content-Based Instruction and a Cross-Curricula Approach. Content-Based Instruction (CBI) in English language teaching (ELT) refers to the teaching of an academic subject, subject matter or topic through the medium of English. Broadly speaking, CBI in ELT has two distinct outcomes; 1) development of English language skills; 2) development of the subject knowledge base. Although these outcomes are concurrent, they do not need to have the same weighting. In some cases, a subject is taught in English because the language of the subject has traditionally or extensively been in English (e.g. Computer Science, Physics, Mathematics) and English enhances the comprehension and accessibility of the subject-specific matter, material and lexis. In other cases, subject content provides the motivation for student attention, where English becomes the conduit for linguistic interaction with the subject matter and with teachers and peers. According to Stoller (as cited in Richards & Renandya, 2002) research into CBI has shown that material in a content-based course is easier to remember, leads to deeper psychological linguistic processing, increases motivation and interest, and develops an increased proficiency in both the topic and the L2. Stoller also points out that CBI in ELT does not need to be exclusively topic-oriented as the teacher can teach aspects of English language, such as grammar and lexis, concurrently. School based teachers may find the concept of teaching English through

other curriculum subjects appealing and practicable. English language teachers would be required to collaborate with other subject teachers to discover topics, lexis and supporting language that could be introduced concurrently in the L1 and in English. For further information, both Grace Chin-Wen Chien (2003) and Hui-fang Shang (2006) discuss their practical, school based experiences of integrating CBI in English language teaching.

The information presented within each module of the *epd4elt* course for course participants to consider are; 1) an introduction to the module's methodological topic or topics; 2) a lesson plan showcasing the methodology; 3) a video clip of that lesson being presented; 4) 2 – 3 relevant and contemporary journal articles, generally of a practical nature; 5) a 10 question multiple choice quiz to help in the consolidation of the information provided. CPs are encouraged to interact with the information presented by firstly discussing the presented material in relation to their teaching situation; secondly, by experimenting practically within the methodology through the planning and implementation of a lesson or through micro-research in the classroom; thirdly, to communicate their ideas and findings with the course provider and with other course participants; finally, to discuss what course participants can extract from the presented teaching ideas and methodologies to enhance their teaching in relation to their own pedagogical style and culture.

The practical experimentation and subsequent discussions within the output phase of the PD process utilises the Action Research paradigm, which enables participants to research topics that transpire from the present theoretical material in relation to their perceived interests and concerns. Chang and Beaumont (2000) suggest that “[f]undamental to the action research movement is the argument that teacher-initiated classroom research is an effective, some would argue the only, way to bridge the gap between theory and practice” (p. 84). Crookes (1993) suggests that Action Research can play a vital role in a language teacher's professional development as:

- (1) its results are actually as relevant to the immediate needs and problems of teachers as any research can be;
- (2) it supports the process of teacher reflection, which is vital for educational renewal and professional growth;
- (3) engaging in Action Research may facilitate teachers doing other kinds of research and using the results of such research; and
- (4) because of its basis in critical theory, it faces up to the unquestioned values embodied in educational

institutions (p. 137).

Within the e-PD4ELT website participants are able to present their Action Research topic, record their findings, and develop electronic discourse with the course provider and with other participants. To create the course's electronic structure on-line I have chosen to employ the Moodle educational software platform after being introduced to Moodle whilst attending the 12th Annual Conference on Education at the University of Brunei Darussalam. The decision to use Moodle was made for a variety of reasons; 1) it is shareware therefore free; 2) there is a strong international support network and users are very approachable for help and advice; 3) it is very flexible and contains a wide variety of applications; 4) it is relatively easy to use. Each participant within Moodle has their own Personal Learning Environment (PLE) which requires a unique login name and password to enter. This PLE is initially created by the course provider and contains all elements presented within the course. However, the course participant is able to personalise this e-environment, to a certain extent. Moodle enables the course provider to include chat lines, message boards and blogs for inter-participant communication. Regarding e-PD4ELT, blogs are utilised specifically for the recording of the stages required for the process of Action Research.

Developing an Action Research Model Appropriate for Use in Electronic Professional Development

Parsons & Brown (2002) discuss the relevance of AR for teacher professional development when asserting, "Action Research methodology provides teachers with the means of acquiring valid, useful data, which in turn can be used for the development of effective strategies of professional practice". Hobson (2001) also stated that "investigations conceived, implemented, and evaluated by actual teachers in real classrooms among live school-children promise to better stand the tests of practicality and personal relevance. This is research to be used by teachers, not merely played for purposes beyond the classroom."

Woods, O'Brien, Millrood and Andrews (2000) discuss research conducted in Russia into local Russian English teachers and their introduction to a more communicative approach to English teaching by the British Council, known as the Tambov Project. The main focus of the research was to create a model of the

psychological processes teachers needed to undergo in order to change an embedded style of pedagogy. The psychological processing model moves from unfreezing, or unlearning, of existing beliefs and practices, the induction and imbedding of a new pedagogical practice and the refreezing, or durable integration, of newly acquired skills into everyday practice. Although I feel this conceptualised model is sound and one to which I have referred to in the design of my course, I would like to suggest that both “imbedding” and “refreezing” are not desirable as they suggest a state of permanency. A reconfiguration, a bringing together of prior and new pedagogical elements, allows the flexibility for enhancement at any time. A position of reconstruction is the result of the professional learning process encountered by teachers that leads to integration, adaptation and adoption of newly developed approaches.

Deconstruct → **Reconfigure** → **Reconstruct**

Figure 1: Revised psychological processing model

The results of a study conducted by Beaumont and Chang (2000) into the feasibility of PD through Action Research showed that Korean teachers of English previously had; a) perceived a gap between theory and practice; b) thought research findings were often inaccessible; c) felt decision making was initiated from bureaucracy. After the introduction of an Action Research style of PD, participators stated that a “spirit of enquiry” had been created. They also felt that they had begun to acquire ownership of the process of professional change and hence, enhanced PD.

Kember (2001) discusses the willingness of Hong Kong Chinese English language teachers to be involved in the adoption of Action Research as a tool for professional development during the 1990s. The aim of the Action Research PD was to create a more student-centred pedagogical approach to English language teaching. The PD providers, mostly university lecturers in education, were sceptical of the success of an Action Research approach to PD because they felt that teachers accepted the authoritarianism of traditional information dissemination, the Confucian model of pedagogy. The PD providers also thought that participating teachers would expect to be taught everything that was needed to be known in a top-down fashion. However, teachers readily accepted the Action Research approach to PD. This was proven through a discernible increase in teacher participation in PD courses. Over 100 Action

Research projects, funded by the University Grants Committee of Hong Kong, were run over a period of 8 years from 1992 to 2000. This involvement showed a marked increase in PD participation over the previous decade.

When considering the e-PD4ELT course, I offer the above evidence to demonstrate that an AR approach would be viable and acceptable to English language teachers, even if they have previously only ever experienced a top down approach to PD. AR allows teachers to interact with course material through specific experimentation within their own pedagogy, to analyse the results, and extract what is applicable and relevant for their personal teaching situation and style. More information with regards to AR and teaching and how AR can become a pedagogical practice, can be found in Parsons & Brown (2002), and Cherry & Bowden (1999). Further information on AR in particular relation to English language teaching can be found at the BBC/British Council site: <http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/transform/teachers/teacher-development-tools/action-research>.

The Implementation of Action Research within the e-PD4ELT Course

A variety of concepts describing the implementation of Action Research are available in the literature. The concept presented by Kemmis and McTaggart (1988), which shows an ongoing cyclical approach to AR through a repeated sequence of “plan, action, observe, reflect”, initially appeared to be the most appropriate model to utilise for the e-PD4ELT course. However, although AR within the course is based on Kemmis and McTaggart’s model, I felt the need for a revised approach that would respect the time constraints of practicing teachers involved in PD and the functional requirements involved for utilising a blog. Specifically for e-PD4ELT, a practical and more time efficient five stage model for AR has been developed (below).



Figure 2: Action Research for e-PD4ELT

The elements within this model are described below:

Information Appraisal: (blog entry No.1)

As previously mentioned, the course provides course participants with a variety of

forms of information relating to the introduced ESL methodology within each module. The CPs are able to synthesise this information and consider whether this methodology is presently being used, if it could be improved upon and, if it is not a part of the teacher's pedagogical repertoire, how it can be introduced and adapted to the CP's personal teaching situation. To contextualise this process I refer to an example from my own teaching experience of making movies as a task-based project, as described fully in Kebble (2008). After the appraisal of the material presented in module 3, the CP may wish to discuss, within blog entry No.1, the fact that the current course book being used follows a formulaic approach to content delivery and that some students appear de-motivated. The CP may discuss the possibility of using a task-based approach to re-motivate students, but is concerned that a move away from the syllabus would be construed as disadvantageous by the head of the department, and that some students would have problems understanding the learning process and hence become disruptive. A personal written appraisal of this summary can then be posted within the CP's PLE blog as module entry No.1. All blogs are accessible to all CPs and CPs are encouraged to read and comment on other CPs' blogs. Comments and further discussions can be accommodated within the discussion board facility specific to that module.

Research Plan: (blog entry No.2)

Course Participants are required to decide on an area of research and create a plan of action. CPs are required to formulate a question based on a concept for Action Research. The examples provided within the course are; a) will making and publishing a list of the learning strengths of my students help them to recognise their and their peer's learning strengths? b) How do my students react to doing a mini-project instead of working from a course book? c) How effective is scaffolding? What happens if I do not provide appropriate guidance within a task-based lesson? CPs are asked to consider how their question can be appropriately researched and to decide whether to conduct the research through the production of a lesson plan or through some form of empirical data collection. Again, the example provided within the course's guidelines is, "this could be as simple as counting the number of kids who use a certain word/phrase in a given period of time or how successful the students were at understanding a concept through a simple testing process ('put up your hands if you know the answer to this...')". Course participants are also

informed that although intuition is a very useful pedagogical tool, quantification can be problematic. As such, comments based on a CP's intuitive assessment through experience of teaching and knowledge is both relevant and useful and requires statistical substantiation, if possible. If my practical example, introduced above, is discussed further, the CP may decide to experiment with a task-based approach and plan a series of lessons designed to encourage students to achieve a specific task, in my case, making a movie. In the planning phase the CP incorporates the syllabus' grammatical, lexical and topical focus for the week and, in so doing, placates the concerns of the departmental head. For the research plan of this phase, the course participant decides to investigate whether; a) students enjoyed fulfilling the task, as an indication of motivation; b) have understood the linguistic value of the task-based process, that is, that their linguistic achievements correspond with the curriculum or course book. The CP asks the micro-research project question "do students find a task-based approach enjoyable and do they understand the pedagogical rationale?" To quantify the research outcomes the CP produces a short post-task questionnaire to assess the students' level of interaction within, and enjoyment of, the set task. The research question and subsequent research/lesson plan is recorded as blog entry No.2.

Implementation

CPs teach the prepared lesson or conduct the relevant research. Beaumont and O'Brien (2000), Parsons and Brown (2002), and Hansen Twiselton and Elton-Chalcraft (2008) provide extensive and invaluable practical information on how to conduct in-class research.

Reflection: (blog entry No.3)

Having collected empirical data, CPs are required to reflect on whether the question has been definitively answered and what can be learnt from the results of the conducted research. CPs are encouraged to discuss what can be gleaned from the empirical data collected or from an analysis of the outcomes of the lesson. CPs are reminded that intuitive impressions are an important facet of the research and can supplement and enhance conclusions drawn from collected data and that it is important to include both in a discussion. CPs are encouraged to draw a conclusion based on their initial questions. The example given to e-PD4ELT CPs to emphasise the combination of empirical data and intuitive impression within the course

information is, “my students found doing a group project on sea mammals very exciting and motivating. The feedback from the questionnaire showed that, using a 5 point Likert scale ranging from ‘really disliked to really liked’, 85% of the class fell in the ‘liked’ and ‘really liked’ categories. However, through close in-class monitoring, it was observed that the L1 was used quite extensively and some students spent rather too much time off-task”. CPs are encouraged not to be reticent about discussing all aspects of their findings, even when certain elements of the research are not as successful as envisaged. CPs are told that there is much to be learnt from all empirical outcomes, particularly as what may have been perceived as unsuccessful may, in fact, have its own success. Baumfield, Hall and Wall (2008) expand on this concept when they point out, “[i]t is important to be working in an environment where problem-posing as well as problem solving is valued and where encouragement to experiment also recognises that not everything will necessarily succeed” (p. 117).

My own practical research, previously introduced, utilised a post-task questionnaire that showed my students had initially been uncomfortable leaving the course book and engaging in a task-based approach. Although they had all thoroughly enjoyed involvement in the task, the intrinsic linguistic developmental value of fulfilling the task was not understood until we had entered into a post-task discussion about the linguistic facets of their engagement.

The Future: (blog entry No.4)

CPs are asked to discuss and make decisions on how they intend to develop, improve and integrate the tested concept or methodology within their pedagogy. What is your next step? How do you believe you can improve the learning process and the outcomes? If we continue from the example in (3) we may decide our students need to undergo a training program of how to work in groups and how to answer tasks. It may be that the organisation of the individuals in groups needs to be changed or that each member needs to be given a specific task. In relation to my practical example, I was able to conclude that, in future, task-based projects can be implemented to encourage motivation but that I should enter into a pre-task dialogue with students to explain and discuss the intrinsic linguistic value found within task involvement.

The blog area of the e-PD4ELT website is provided for all CPs to discuss the four recordable elements of their AR within each module and is accessible to all. A Discussion Board is also provided within each module and CPs are encouraged to

discuss their investigations and findings with their peers. With the kind permission from a CP, an example of the four blog entries for each of the course modules can be found within the e-PD4ELT website.

Conclusion

Professional development courses in English language teaching, in my experience, are traditionally and predominantly presented in a top-down manner, where course participants are encouraged to adopt the methodology expounded. Prescriptive course delivery does not allow for the cultural pedagogy of course participants and hence can be deemed, to varying degrees, pedagogically irrelevant. Action Research provides an appropriate paradigm for interaction between a professional development course and a course participant to cater for both cultural and pedagogical diversity. Electronic provision of a professional development course for teachers can enable extensive connectivity between a participant, course material, a course provider and between course participants. A clearly defined Action Research model enables participants to approach the Action Research element of the course requirement systematically. This systematic approach can be aptly recorded utilising a blog within the participants' Personal Learning Environment that can be provided within an electronic Professional Development course. Action Research enables course participants to personalise and adapt course material to their particular pedagogical situation. Finally, personalisation caters for both cultural and pedagogical diversity and enables a course to be culturally and pedagogically empathetic. (Please note, the e-PD4ELT course's URL is <http://www.epd4elt.com> and the course material can be accessed using visitor/visitor48 as the login/password. All are welcome to use any material provided within the website).

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