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Content and Process in language teacher training

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In this study, we draw attention to content and process aspects of EFL teacher training. It states as its goals: (1) to look at some of the conventional ways of defining 'content', one of basic elements in teacher training; (2) to enhance our understanding of 'process', a component interacting with 'content'; and more importantly, (3) to help to develop an awareness of different models dealing with those two interrelated aspects. Some of the points raised from the discussion on three models are further elaborated.

Ⅰ. Introduction

It is true that EFL teacher training has received

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little direct attention, compared with the long history of rich debate on EFL teaching methods. However, the overall picture has changed over the last fifteen years. Attempts have been made to conceptualise underlying assumptions of EFL teacher training. Considerable thought has been given to the discussion of the content of EFL teacher training(see, for example, Holden 1979; Marsh 1981); Jordan 1983;Duff 1988). In the early 1990s, further work has continuously developed (see Richards & Nunan 1990; Wallace 1991)and there is a lot going on in the field. In recognition of the importance of teacher training, a number of reference books have been published directly for those involved in EFL teacher training. Among them are Willis(1981a), Gower & Walters(1983), Hubbard et al.(1993), Doff(1998), Woodward (1991 & 1992), Wajnryb (1992) and Parrott (1993). These books intend to provide, in a variety of ways, information about the theory and practice of ELT. They involve trainers and trainees in training activities designed to link these two elements.

There is a great deal of debate surrounding the ways teachers should be trained. In the present study, we consider two key issues of EFL teacher training. As far as training is concerned, there are two basic elements: 'content' and 'process'. According to Woodward (1991;11), content is what we refer to as 'what' or 'information', and process is about 'how to convey'. Along with content, developments in methodology and techni-

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ques of teacher training, that is, process have had constant attention.

II. Content in EFL Teacher Training

It is suggested that the interdisciplinary and multi-disciplinary nature of language teaching makes it complex to define teacher training content. Alatis(1974) uses an acronym 'LAPSE' for the courses that should be included in EFL teacher training programmes. L stands for linguistics; A for anthropology, and covers cultural aspects of language; P for psychology and psycholinguistics; S for the sociolinguistics; E for both English and education. It is also acknowledged that there are so many elements to be considered in categorising the content of training courses. Strevens(1974:19-20) summarises four basic elements (they are not the components of a teacher training course but rather variables which direct the choice of component):

1. Selection, both initially, for acceptance as a trainee, and terminally, for acceptance as a teacher;
2. Continuing personal education of the trainee;
3. General professional as an educator and teacher;
4. Special training as a teacher of a foreign or

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second language.

It is generally recognised that there are two basic and common course components: theoretical knowledge and teaching practice. A balance between theory and practice is important in the training course. It is unfortunate that trainee teachers often pay little attention to the theoretical bases upon which a given approach rests. Trainee teachers more urgently request recipes for practice, but without the theoretical underpinning, many courses become only temporary solutions to existing problems. Teachers find themselves without any point of reference in the situation when the focus changes. Williams (1974:115) suggests that they should attempt to get down to the principles on which methods and techniques are based and cautiously adopt those modes of teaching which best fit their own personal and situational attributes. The point here is that teacher training courses excluding theory may be narrow in their scope and restricting to teachers' long term teaching effectiveness. Likewise, Willis(1981b:46) sees the point:

> 'Practical work always seems to be more relevant to trainees than theoretical lectures; but participants must be made aware of the theory behind new approaches or of the reasons for particular

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techniques, otherwise they may use them without fully understanading their purpose and fail to integrate them effectively into the existing course of study.'

In the above quotation, it should be pointed out that lecture process can contain theory and practice, not necessarily be theoretical. Moreover, theory does not have to be delivered through lectures. There are trainee-centred activities which can be theoretical. Strong emphasis on theoretical knowledge necessarily means that method courses cannot be practical enough. As Scarbrough(1976) emphasises, theory should be of practical value. Many teacher training courses consists of a series of lectures on relevant educational and language teaching principles, often exemplified by a few demonstration lessons. Teachers look at course books and refer to various journals and books on language teaching. Then, at the point where they are engaged in teaching practice activities, most of them have difficulty in relating the theoretical input to practice. What is called for is a well-balanced mixture of those two ingredients. With respect to the balance, Williams (1974) suggests that EFL teacher trainees should do their utmost to keep abreast of theoretical findings related to ELT and try to relate them to their practical language teaching, but he also says that knowledge

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alone will not do the job; adopting a handful of skills will not either.

Ⅲ. Process in EFL Teacher Training

The content aspect of training goes together with the process. These two aspects cannot be separated in the training course; one component interacts with the other. In the field of EFL teacher training, there are suggestions about how they should be dealt with on the course. There are different ways in which content can be provided and different kinds of operations that the trainees can be asked to perform. As Ellis(1986) observes, it is necessary for the trainer to make decisions from a wide range of options. This section points out some of the underlying assumptions for the 'process' or 'methodology' of teacher training. In the subsequent sections, we examine how different models deal with these two components.

1. Woodward's Loop-Input

Woodward(1989 & 1991) introduces the idea of *loop input*. Its underlying assumption is that teachers, by using the loop techniques, experience the process as well as, and at the same time as receiving the content.

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That is, content and process are provided simultaneously in the way that teachers can experience techniques for themselves in the training context. In this training method, teachers experience an activity in which the method exemplifies the content. This model has the advantage of maximising active trainee participation. As Figure 1 illustrates, content and process are aligned in a certain position related to each other. Those two training aspects go together without being dealt with separately.

Figure 1:Loop input(content=process=content: Woodward 1991 :14)

In Woodward's full loop, a process is demonstrated using content about the process itself, for example, a

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jigsaw reading activity using texts about jigsaw reading. It seems that the full version might drive teachers mad if the whole training course were spent in that way, so the idea of the full loop input needs to be developed towards trainees' intellectual level. We would suggest a half loop[1], where a process is demonstrated using content from the same methodological area such as a jigsaw reading activity using texts about the principles of teaching reading. The half loop relates method (process) with content, but not directly. Like in the full loop, trainees are considered as teachers in the half loop.

In addition to the full and half loops, the loop-input model can be broadened further. It is also possible that a process is demonstrated using content relevant to trainees' interests and at their own language level, a reading comprehension activity using a text about a current educational issue. In this case, it seems to be a link with language improvement of trainees, native or non-native speakers. More challenging materials can be used. A process can also demonstrate the use of content relevant to trainees' supposed learners pitched at the learners' language level. In these two cases of broaden loops, content can be anything. Here, trainees are treated as people. More importantly, through training experiences in the broadened loop, trainees can form

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concrete ideas about rationale, theoretical principles and should be better able to apply them in unexpected situations.

2. O'Brien's 'E-R-O-T-I' Model

O'Brien's(1981) 'E-R-O-T-I' model demonstrates how we can integrate theoretical input with practice in EFL teacher training. The rationale for this model is that it helps the trainee assimilate effectively the ideas being put across by trainers in the courses. O'Brien (1981:55-59) identifies five elements as essential to various types of teacher training courses. The key points of each component has are summarised:

1) Experience : trainees create an awareness of what it is to be a learner; they are concerned with what and how their students learn;they are exposed to a new approach or techniques as learners.
2) Observation : trainees have the opportunity to observe, with a critical look, the new ideas in operation through demonstration lessons or video clips.
3) Trial : trainees are given the opportunity to

1 I am personally indebted to M.Beaumont for the idea of the half loop.

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try new ideas out with peer groups or with a real class; they gain confidence in handling the new ideas.

4) Integration : trainees adopt the new ideas to personal style; decisions must be taken as to how the ideas can be fitted into their own teaching: trainers' reaction and suggestions are accepted.
5) Rationale : trainees are engaged in the analysis process with some preliminary background reading, with the trainer's exposition of the new ideas and their rationale, with trainees' own reactions and personal experience in implementing the new ideas; this element have a central place in the whole process.

Figure 2 shows how these five elements can be operated.

Figure 2 : The 'E-R-O--T-I' model (O'Brien 1981:59)

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O'Brien(1981:60) suggests that these elements should be operated for a teacher training course to be truly effective without limiting a course to rationale, observation and trial, which is the traditional prescriptive way. He warns of the risk of sterility in the attempt to hand knowledge and skills down from above, from rationale and observation to trial.

As mentioned earlier, O'Brien's experience element has a different interpretation from Ellis' experiential training practices of teaching practice with peers/ learners (see Section Ⅲ-3). In the initial experience phase of O'Brien's(1981:55ff) model, trainee teachers take the part of learners, though not necessarily, in a class taught by the trainer using new ideas. As shown in the four cases of the loop-input model in the previous section, trainees can take part as trainess and teachers as well as learners. In this phase, various activities based on the loop-input can be used (see Secion Ⅲ-1, for examples). As O'Brien(1981:55) points out, teachers can have direct personal experience of the new ideas rather than second-hand contact through journals or colleagues. This direct experience can create awareness of what a learner experiences. As O'Brien (1981:55) emphasises, this is of importance to practising teachers, who are concerned with what and how their students learn. It is assumed that if teachers have

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been exposed to new ideas successfully as learners, the experience will help them accept, assimilate and apply new ideas more rapidly and readily to their own situations.

The experience element is normally followed by trainees' analysis of ideas(rationale) and by observation. While the E-R-O sequence is normally used, we should note that the 'Rationale' element can be mixed with the other elements[2]. Therefore, the sequence can be like this: E-R-E-R-O-R-O-R. Having grasped the basics of new ideas, teachers will move on to Trial. The 'trial' element has the same meaning as Ellis's experiential training practices with peers/learners(see Section Ⅲ-3). O'Brien (1981:60) suggests that planning and clarification of its objectives should not come directly from Observation (as shown by the broken arrow in Figure 2), but from Rationale. Teachers are, then, ready to move on the Integration phase where they apply the new ideas in their own classes. In this phase, teachers often pose a basic question: How can they integrate new ideas from the course into their own teaching situations? This phase should be linked with Rationale, Experience, Observation and Trial. As O'Brien(1981:61)

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2 In O'Brien's model, the two-directional arrows signify the mixing of those elements.

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points out, the process does not stop there; instead teachers should be equipped to carry on for themselves the on-going process of adopting, adapting anddeveloping new ideas in their classrooms after the teacher training course.

3. Ellis's Teacher Training Practices

Ellis(1986 & 1990) categorises teacher training practices into *experiential* and *awareness-raising* practices. His schematic outline of teacher training practices is shown in Figure 3:

Figure 3: An outline of teacher training practices (Ellis 1990: 28)

Experiential practice in the figure is different from the

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'Experience' component of O'Brien's model. While teachers are engaged in teaching practice with peers/learners in Ellis's experiential training practices, they participate as learners in O'Brien's 'Experience' element (see Section Ⅲ-2). According to Ellis(1986:92), 'awareness-raising' practices are illustrated as those which are intended to develop the trainees' conscious understanding of the principles underlying EFL teaching and/or the practical techniques that teachers can use in different kinds of lessons, that is, E-R-O. The dotted line in the above figure means that the two types of training practices can be integrated in one activity, for example, the trainee is engaged in teaching practice to increase understanding of particular issues through reflective evaluation as well as to develop his classroom teaching skills. Ellis (1986) makes a further point that those two training practices are not mutually exclusive and they do not need to be separated. It is very often the case that teacher training programmes involve both of these practices. This means that these training practices cannot be separated neatly into content and methodology.

'Awareness-raising' is a key idea that has recently developed as an underlying principle for a variety of teacher training activities. As Freeman(1989:33) defined earlier, *awareness* is the capacity to recognise and

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monitor the attention one is giving or has given to something. Accordingly one responds to the aspects of a situation of which one is aware. Freeman (1989) emphasises that without awareness there would be no way to explain how a teacher manipulates what he knows as appropriate in service of a pedagogical objective. Thus, it plays a fundamental role in explaining how the teacher makes use of his knowledge, skills and attitudes in making pedagogical decisions. As mentioned already, reflection can only be effective with awareness.

Woodward (1991:10ff) also stresses the importance of awareness-raising activities. She rejects the view that sees a trainee teacher as an empty bottle to be filled by information imparted by trainers through series of lectures. Instead, in Wallace's (1991) tem,. trainee teachers bring existing conceptual schemata of mental constructs to the training course. Wallace (1991) uses the term to refer to a cluster of related concepts such as ideas, beliefs, attitudes, etc., which shape our behaviour in various ways. He further argues that the information about those trainees' mental constructs are vital to maximising effectiveness of training or supervisory procedures. Such information can be obtained through a variety of awareness-raising activity in the training course. As Woodward (1991) illustrates, in the

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awareness-raising activities, trainee teachers' eyes are turned inwards to find out what is inside them. These awareness-rasing exercises are provided to direct trainee teachers to discover more about themselves at the level of various issues.

In Ellis's framework, awareness-raising practices consist of training *activities* and *procedures*. Training *activities* specify different ways in which data[3] can be provided. They also specify various operations that the trainee is required to carry out in the tasks based on the data. On the other hand, training *procedures* can be described as the trainer's methodology for activities in the courses. There is a variety of procedures for exploiting activities: lectures, workshops, group discussion. It is necessary for the trainer to identify the various options open. See Wallace 1991, in particular Chapter 3, for various modes available in teacher training.

Ⅳ. Conclusion

The number of issues arising from EFL teacher training activities is so large that those slected for dics-

3 It consists of the materials that the trainer uses in training sessions,e.g. video recording, reading, ELT text books.

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sion here represent only a small fraction. Up to now, we have considered two key aspects of EFL tacher training:content and process. It has also been suggested that the two components cannot be separated in EFL teacher training. We have examined different models dealing with those two interrelated aspects. The three models elaborated in the previous section have shown how the two aspects are interrelated with each other in language teacher training courses. What has been discussed in this paper is not necessarily related to a specific EFL teacher training course. Instead, those underlying principles are made explicit to help trainees and trainers select their own meaningful emphasis for any kind of training programme.

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