

# Peer Teacher Development within a University Context

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Teachers develop, teachers research? How? This paper explores how collaborative teacher development at the university can best become one part of sustained curriculum development. To this end, I first look at fundamental concepts in teacher development and teacher training. To contextualize potential aspects of such teacher development (abbreviated to TD through this paper), I then examine lessons learned from one five-month case study, and later review other characteristics and forms of TD, casting a detached eye over concomitant constraints. I conclude that the most appropriate form of organized TD for curriculum development is group-based action research.

## FUNDAMENTAL CONCEPTS IN TEACHER EDUCATION

What is teacher development and when did it start to assume its current forms? To my knowledge, the first national conference on foreign language teaching with a TD theme took place in 1987 in Ohrid, Macedonia, in the former Yugoslavia. At that time, TD was a relatively new concept in English language teaching and was being propelled forward by the Teacher Development Special Interest Group of IATEFL<sup>(1)</sup>. As with most new concepts, TD soon found itself in opposition to existing interests and ideas, the principal one of which was teacher training.

To create a distinct identity for it, proponents of TD wrote many newsletter articles outlining the differences between teacher development and teacher training<sup>(2)</sup>. In essence, teacher training was seen as a compulsory initial professional formation stage and was skills-based, while teacher development claimed a voluntary, ongoing, holistic voice for itself. This distinction tended to polarize the two interests and to separate them, as Woodward (1991, pp. 147-8) notes, and it was not until the late 1980s / early 1990s that overlaps between the two fields began to be articulated, and the notion of the reflective practitioner (e.g., Nunan, 1989; Nunan and Richards; 1990; Richards, 1990) began to be commonly propagated and popularized. Currently, teacher development and teacher training are seen as two complementary parts of the broader field of teacher education; teacher training has increasingly borrowed from TD, while TD has looked more widely for parallel trends, needs and ideas in other adjacent professional fields.

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Accredited teacher training courses, for example, have—since the early 1980's in some cases<sup>(3)</sup>—increasingly tended towards including a component of reflective practice. Such courses tend more and more to draw on a more complex understanding of how teachers become socialized in the profession (Willis & Willis, 1996) and of the way in which human beings construct the contexts in which they live and work (Clarke & Davis, 1997). Similarly, teacher development may, for example, draw on counseling roles (Edge, 1992; Underhill, 1989), take cues from management of change studies (Braham, 1995; Somekh, 1997), as well as adapt paradigms of general educational action research (Hopkins, 1993). Moreover, it is commonly agreed that the emphasis on the teacher as a classroom researcher has now gained some established value, both for the individual teacher and the future development of the profession as a whole.

All this in turn has been closely accompanied by the emergence of the concept of appropriacy in classroom learning and teacher decision-making. Whereas earlier generalized truths may have been conceived and handed down from applied linguists and schools of education to the presumably receptive and appreciative practicing teacher<sup>(4)</sup>, the flow of ideas, practice and research is now both multi-directional and particularized: the teacher is increasingly positioned as an equal and knowledgeable partner in dialogues around language teaching and learning. It is also widely claimed that localized solutions need to evaluate and contextualize general theories—not take them just at face value—and that appropriate teaching choices, decisions and theorizing can be best understood and described within particular and specific contexts (Holliday, 1994).

## **A CASE STUDY: CONTEXTUALIZING PEER TEACHER DEVELOPMENT**

This section looks at lessons learned from a five-month TD exploration, which was undertaken by my colleague, Bill Plain, and myself in response to an overwhelming feeling of stress and 'busy-ness'. Busy-ness is undoubtedly a feature of modern life—a familiarly frustrating element of a teacher's work at times—and anybody who has worked at the Foreign Language Center at the University of Tsukuba might readily attest to this. Yet, if, as Underhill (1989), for instance, argues: *... my effectiveness as a teacher depends largely on the way I am in the classroom, on my awareness of myself and my effect on others, and on my attitudes towards learners, learning and my own role* (p. 254), how are we to remain fresh and unjaded in what we do as teachers? It was this question that we faced in 1995, and together we sought to find a viable TD solution.

### **Routinization**

Our shared dilemma was one of a sense of routinization: we felt rushed for time; we had little space for reflecting openly and honestly on our teaching; information overload was bearing down; and there was no organized discussion of learning and teaching between colleagues within the

English Section<sup>(5)</sup>. We felt locked into unshakable routines of work and teaching. We perceived the need to talk and listen to each other, so that we could become more aware of the classroom routines that we were constrained by, and to see more clearly possibilities for change.

In later workshops with teachers from universities, colleges, junior and senior high schools<sup>(6)</sup>, we realized that this sense of routinization was a common experience for many different teachers. More than anything, teachers expressed, in their evaluations of the workshops, the need for time and space to talk about their teaching—to have an empathetic listener before whom they could question and clarify what mattered to them individually and their own development as a teacher. As two different teachers commented:

*I have felt superficially that teacher development is learning new knowledge and techniques, but somehow I felt deep down there should be other ways for developing my teaching...I find now what is important is to look deeply into myself, to look at my own lessons honestly and objectively, and ask myself: do I really want to change my lessons and in what direction?*

*Often times ... we can't see our problems/successes very clearly ...by having someone mirror our comments...we force ourselves to listen to ourselves (often times we possess the answers).*

These comments reinforce strongly the value of two central aspects of the solution that Bill and I chose: the important roles that collegial support and attentive listening can play in teacher development. From this, we developed an approach directed to deroutinization<sup>(7)</sup>—the effort to regain a learning attitude about one's teaching.

The approach that will be described is directly derived from Edge's 1992 model of cooperative development. In that model, Edge argues for teachers to follow carefully structured roles in cooperative development, and, in particular, he describes how such roles can be framed as 'Speaker' and 'Understander'. However, it is not just these roles that Edge claims are useful for teacher development. He also outlines nine particular skills, divided into three areas, that need to be practised. First, the area of *exploration* requires practice in attending, reflecting and focusing. Second, the area of *discovery* needs rehearsal in the skills of thematising, challenging and disclosing. Finally, the area of *action* can profit from skills work in goal setting, trialling and planning. While Bill and I were aware of Edge's model, we also wished to explore what would happen if we followed those two roles of listener-understander and speaker with a minimum of other conditions set as to how we should organise our interaction. In turn, this flexibility allowed us to interpret the same overall process as Edge's in different terms and from different perspectives. This will be explained in more detail in the next sub-section.

## Basic frame and negotiation of roles

In the initial session we agreed on roles and format. Bill and I agreed to meet once a week for an hour as often as our schedules would allow. For the first half hour, one of us would play the role of listener-understander, and the other the role of speaker<sup>(8)</sup>. The listener role was seen by us as the more critical part: it required discipline and practice. In essence, the listener was required:

- not to agree or disagree but to listen in order to reflect back what the speaker was trying to say
- to mirror the body language of the speaker and to follow attentively and with respect
- to encourage the speaker to clarify his thoughts
- to reflect back, at an appropriate juncture, the key ideational and emotional content of what the speaker had said by using cues such as (*So, let me just reflect back what you're saying...*).

From this, we would reverse roles and continue for another half hour. The one-hour sessions were audio-recorded by each of us, and each week before the next meeting, we would listen to the previous meeting and review where the articulation of our ideas and concerns was taking us. Thus, the general frame was derived from Edge (1992), but did not follow the specific steps that he outlines.

## Example exchanges in the teacher development process

In this section I would like to offer some example exchanges between the speaker (S) and the listener-understander (L) so that the process can be further understood:

### **Example 1: Negotiation of Roles and Format**

*L: Can you explain this? I think that I have some experience, but please explain so that I can be clear on your concept.*

*S: I guess it is listening closely to what the person is saying and empathetically in the sense of trying to recognize first of all their feelings of what they are talking about and ask questions to clarify the speaker's emotional state or emotional point of view with regard to what they are talking about. ...The listener is not an investigator but he is trying just to understand as best he can what the speaker is saying...I think it's important that we don't get into agreeing or disagreeing with each other. I may totally agree with what you are saying, but I think it's important I don't say to you 'Ah, I know exactly what you are saying. I had that experience in my class last week' because I am going to take away the integrity of your position if I do that. So really a listener is going to be a warm human mirror to the other person. Does that make sense?*

*L: It reflects an approach to counseling that I met at the University of Sydney in my undergraduate days. I don't know if I have seen it elsewhere, but it is something that make sense to me, and I am familiar with the approach.*

### **Example 2: Reflecting Back of the Speaker's Ideas and Themes**

*S: To a large extent, this factor of choosing what you want to learn is very fundamental. It is not always that you choose that you want to learn what you are doing at present. Sometimes you are given something to do in which you find your own interest and curiosity and therefore it becomes light learning, not heavy. But the moment the imposition is felt as an imposition, then it does produce this sort of counter-reaction or force which wells up from within the individual and itself opposes the act of learning...The whole process has become darkened by the process of internalization of the fact that learning is something which comes from outside and it is directed from outside.*

*L: So, key words there are conflict, choice, imposition, and from the outside. You seemed to emphasize when you were speaking that it is a conflict, but it is an unclear conflict. It is buried deep inside the adult student ...*

*S: Precisely. This comes to one back through, I think, the ideas of Krishnamurti and his concept of freedom as a way of developing the self but also as a way of learning ...Realizing that while I try to do this with university students where the majority are not able to benefit from the fact of being given freedom in the classroom, it is an enormous problem trying to let the student be aware that he is in a position of freedom and that that freedom gives him the possibility of doing something for himself. Most seem to shy away from the situation.*

In these exchanges, the listener helps the speaker develop their line of thinking. The listener refrains from intervening with their own opinion or evaluation of the speaker's stance. Instead, the listener highlights the key points of what the speaker is saying. This requires a great deal of concentration at the beginning because it is a quite different mode of interaction from usual styles of conversation, discussion or debate. In time, too, the listener would begin to probe what the speaker said (*When you say ....., what do you mean exactly?*) and to encourage the speaker to articulate concrete actions (*So, from this, what are you intending to do with this class?*) - all the while seeking to help the speaker become clearer to himself of what he was conceptualizing and beginning to re-think. This, in a nutshell, is the effort after deroutinization that was mentioned earlier.

A postgraduate student later transcribed all the sessions. At the end of about 10 one-hour meetings, Bill and I reviewed the transcripts and analyzed them, looking for patterns of development in how we had interacted. Was there, in other words, a schematic regularity of teacher development that might apply for other teachers interested in such an approach?

### **PHASES OF DEVELOPMENT**

In our review of the transcript, we managed to perceive several clear phases of development, which I believe are frequently characteristic of learning cycles (whether for ourselves as teachers or for our students as learners). Each of these developmental phases will be described in more detail here.

### **Starting phase: Orientation, negotiation and adaptation**

Collaboration requires negotiation. In terms of the case study, there is an initial phase to such a teacher development project where the participants establish common ground, articulate their individual areas of interest, clarify their roles and modify appropriately the model that they have chosen to use. We were fortunate in that we both trusted and respected each other, and we felt willing to open up to each other about our teaching. This helped us to proceed quickly and, to some extent, shorten this initial phase. This phase can thus be qualified as an orientation stage, where the participants build and establish an important, non-judgmental sense of trust between themselves. This may be seen as stating the obvious, but in our experience it is rare for this to exist as a defining feature of collegial relationships—it comes over time, largely, but sometimes it remains impossible to establish, in which case any sense of such shared collaborative teacher development is a lost cause to begin with. Because such work is still not common practice, TD options usually need a gestation period in which a shared discourse can be created. In a parallel way, it is important to note here that teacher development cannot be imposed—it is a question of individual and professional choice. It is also worth acknowledging that one reason why teachers may shy away from TD is fear of negative evaluation by their peers.

### **Secondary phase: Perception of inner and outer processes**

In this secondary phase, the predominant element is one of de-blocking in what we came to call the inner and outer processes. Here, the inner process refers to an increased awareness of one's own mental and emotional routines and defences, and a reference to internalized models as an evaluative standard of one's own perceived and unattained goals as a person or teacher. On the other hand, the outer process here touches on the routines that the person has established in the classroom as a teacher, and on a sustained critical examination of them. Within the inner process, questions of irritation with one's students or oneself, moments of rebellion, surprise and disbelief, a sense of dissatisfaction, or questions of authority and trust, may come up as each person notices the patterned routines of how they behave and respond.

At the same time, through reference to external models (in Bill's case Krishnamurti, in mine Rinvoluceri<sup>(9)</sup>), the speaker begins to become aware of other goals and possibilities, and begins to visualize change in broad detail. As this is happening, within the outer process, the speaker starts to question their conventional understandings and images of the classroom, to set new classroom goals... and, simultaneously, to begin to break through their established teaching methods and routines by taking risks and trying something new. Trying something new here does not necessarily mean a new type of exercise, but rather it refers to a substantial change in one's conceptual framework for teaching:

L: *So you are trying to give the students control over some aspects of their learning?*

S: *Of their style of learning...I think the important thing is the setting of the goal rather than reviewing the goal. To review the goal is important. I have often done diaries at the end of the lesson. I hadn't done diaries at the beginning of the lesson to help them sort of reflect or think about what they are about to do. I think this is a key part maybe. I think also the key part is giving them space to plan. I am not sure how I am going to do this with the low level class but I think a reflectiveness about what they are going to do is a good thing to aim for.*

### **Third phase: Dynamic of experimentation**

This third phase is where the development begins to take off—we noticed that we began to try out a new range of options in the classroom, adopt a different teaching role, and to ask our learners also to move beyond their established learning routines. Here we started to perceive more keenly our own development and to become more deeply reflective about the processes of classroom learning/teaching; simultaneously, we became more engaged in the teacher development process itself; as a result, we started to re-evaluate our roles in both the inner and outer processes. This is to some extent where, after the difficulty of the second phase, the pay-off for investing effort in one's development as a teacher begins to take shape, and where one's own personal and professional motivation are enhanced:

*S: People work within a paradigm and stay within a paradigm because of the time and often the money invested and personal involvement invested in creating that way of doing things - often at a theoretical level it becomes a whole approach, a whole philosophy, a whole way of doing something and therefore a total paradigm. And to let change occur you have to be willing to lose the time that you spent on creating what you have already created.*

The dynamic thus created opens the door more towards future experimentation.

### **Fourth phase: Increased awareness**

This fourth phase is characterized by a steeper gradient of change and a more finely focused development. We began to set ourselves new and unexpected questions in the inner process, and to express unformed ideas to each other. Meanwhile, in the outer process, we started to re-see with different eyes: we set different interpretations on classroom events that would previously have gone unnoticed or have been merely ascribed a routine meaning. We also perceived the classroom with an increased power of observation and sense of experimentation; we began to adopt an inquiring, hypothesizing stance to how our learners were acting and learning.

### **Fifth phase: Cyclical growth**

It is from this phase that we felt ready to re-search in more concrete terms what we and our learners did in the classroom. The growth and change in awareness in the preceding four phases may seem abstract and remote to the reader, but it records in specific terms the necessary intellectual and emotional challenge of beginning to re-evaluate honestly one's own teaching. Underhill (1992) gives credence to this claim when he comments:

The whole process of asking high-yield questions in relation to my performance and my potential is fraught with an equally high risk of destabilizing my view of myself through bringing my unaware beliefs, attitudes and behaviours into awareness. The following map plots four cyclical stages in the relationship between awareness and competence in the development of my performance.

**Stage 1. Unconscious incompetence**

I am not aware of what I am not doing well.

**Stage 2. Conscious incompetence**

I become aware of what I am not doing well.

**Stage 3. Conscious competence**

I am aware of doing it more competently.

**Stage 4. Unconscious competence**

My new competence becomes second nature

(...) But stage 2 is the one that hurts. This is where I may begin to feel deskilled and destabilized as my self-image is challenged by the discovery of the disparity between what I think I am doing and what I am actually doing. This second stage is the crucial development stage, and is precisely where the supportive climate of the surrounding group comes into play. Conversely, though lack of appropriate support, it is the stage that often gets overlooked. (Underhill, 1992, p. 76)

Underhill's four stages broadly correspond with the phases that Bill and I noticed in our own development: orientation, negotiation and adaptation; de-blocking; taking risks; experimentation; increased awareness.

### **Teacher development effects**

How can such development work be justified and what results might it lead to in practice? Before looking at these questions, I would like to emphasize that such TD work focuses on aspirations and goals rather than on problems and perceived failures: it should not be construed as a torturous process of self-examination (although it can be difficult at times, as Underhill points out). As teachers, we all have successful lessons, and we also have lessons where things do not go quite as well as they might.

Indeed, the case study outlined above shows one way for interested teachers to build on their successes and to multiply them. It offers a simple way of starting to take a more active and



structured approach to one's own ongoing development as a teacher, and to question why certain things work and how they might be developed and extended further. Thus, one teacher in a workshop on deroutinization commented in the following manner:

*I had never heard of cooperative learning before. I work in a teaching environment where people neither talk about their teaching problems nor their teaching successes, so it's quite refreshing to know that there might be techniques and ways to overcome the loneliness of a long distance teacher.*

Two points are worth bearing in mind in adopting such a teacher development solution: keeping realistic expectations and building on successes. Keeping realistic expectations here means setting oneself a manageable time commitment for conducting such teacher development sessions with a colleague, and taking a long-term view of how the change process may work. For example, Bill and I devoted a total of ten hours in face-to-face meetings over five months; we also took time between the meetings to listen to the tapes and to review where our ideas were taking us; we also spent half as much time again, namely five hours, looking through the transcript and analyzing it to find patterns in our development. The small changes (rather than sweeping revolutions) that we began to make in our teaching came through slowly and over time.

On the other hand, building on successes here means starting from the strengths of successful lessons and course, then re-examining why certain elements are successful, before re-searching how those components might be adapted and applied to other courses and skills:

*S: Well, I think rather than look at where I am swinging about and spend a lot of time questioning why, maybe it is better for me to look at what worked and understand why and then go back to where I have been swinging about, so that I have got, if you like, a pathway towards a certain success level out of that confusion.*

*They may not be the same class because it is a different skill, but I think in a course where students have largely become self-motivated and can handle and want to read an art and design book on their own, and they started out as elementary-level readers who could read one or two pages at the beginning of the year or translated every word, I think that is a success. I think therefore it is good to look at why maybe that gives satisfaction.*

*L: So ... you think it is better to take a positive element of your teaching and transfer one way or another to the more difficult part*

*S: Maybe to give a base for looking at more difficult classes...*

In my case, this focus in the teacher development work on questions of content and choice led to a series of changes in other skills courses (listening, speaking and writing) in the following two years. It also guided me also to make further changes in my approach to extensive reading (Barfield,

1997a).

### **An example practical change derived from teacher development work**

One brief (in fact, prosaic and banal) classroom example may serve to illustrate further the notion of pedagogic recycling and development that can come as an offshoot from such TD work. This example is derived from my focussing on the successes of an extensive reading course and questioning how those might be extended to other skills areas. In an extensive reading course where students used a class library of graded readers in the first term, one of the many motivating elements that I identified was that of choice. In turn, I began to understand more clearly choice as one of the key components of fostering learner development for my students. How, though, could choice be applied in a listening class when the students were using a set text (in this case, *Airwaves*, Macmillan, Japan) and we had a language laboratory to work with?

Until that point I had lockstepped my listening class. To start to make a series of simple changes, I had the whole unit pre-recorded for the students on their individual tapes; I asked the students in pairs to read through the listening instructions for each of the exercises in the unit, and to choose a minimum of three exercises that they wished to try with their partner. Pairs of students would then select their own listening exercises, work on them individually, compare answers in pairs, and then take a copy of the answer key and self-correct, before looking at a copy of the tapescript and listening again together, highlighting any parts of the tapescript which they had found difficult or where they had made wrong answers according to the exercises in the book.

After this, they then discussed in Japanese why those parts might be difficult for them to understand through listening. Next, they reported back in English (sometimes in Japanese if they needed to) to the whole class, in a review stage of the lesson, what they had decided. As a class, we would then look at selections from the tapescript, and identify the hearing problems that the students had commonly encountered: consonant clusters, vowel reductions, elisions, and so on. Listening solutions were then explored. In short, a quite different learning sequence for this listening class evolved naturally out of recycling and adapting a successful component from a reading course, that of choice, and a clearer learner development edge was fashioned. In turn, this raised for me further questions about the students' own awareness of their learning processes (Cotterall, 1995)—and what changes I might also make in other skills courses (the development cycle thus extending itself and moving into new areas of experimentation). This is not to say that such a solution would necessarily work for another teacher - the point is here to show how sustained reflection on one's own practice can lead to more elaborate developments that fit soundly within one's own current framework of learning and teaching.

## CHARACTERISTICS AND LIMITATIONS OF TEACHER DEVELOPMENT

Moving on now from this particular case study, I would like to open out the discussion of teacher development towards other considerations and constraints. First, though, how can teachers distinguish TD modes from each other? One useful way is to categorize teacher development choices into process-oriented and/or outcome-oriented modes of development (Chidambaram & Bostrom, 1996, pp. 179-182).

### Other process-oriented modes of teacher development

The cooperative counseling/cooperative development approach to TD outlined in the case study above situates teacher development as a pair activity with the prime emphasis on growth and change of awareness over time. Logistically, this pair option would seem to be the easiest way to get started. Where time for face-to-face interaction is limited, such an approach can also be adapted to structured e-mail communication, as Barfield and Kotori (1997) and Cowie (1997) show. Teacher diary studies (McDonough, 1994) offer another easy way of getting going. Other related process-oriented approaches take groups as their basis<sup>(10)</sup>. One example of group peer mentoring is McClain's multinational group (McClain, 1995), which based its meetings around video recordings of lesson segments, with the recorded teacher presenting to the group what they had learnt from analyzing the recording; the group acted as a supportive but detached sounding board to help the presenting teacher develop further their own awareness of their own teaching.

### Outcome-oriented modes of teacher development

Outcome-oriented modes of teacher development can be understood as options which involve the creation of a particular public product. In this type of TD, less time and focus are given to process, and much more are devoted to the final concrete outcomes. This might take the form of a joint presentation at a conference, seminar or local teachers' meeting, where the audience is drawn from beyond those engaged in the TD work<sup>(11)</sup>. It might also involve the joint conduct of classroom research, learner surveys, and the writing up of the results for a wider audience—to one's colleagues or, again, beyond the workplace. These are all valid, familiar forms of teacher development: the options described here are meant to be neither exhaustive nor exclusive of other choices.

### Other related teacher development concepts

Exploratory TD processes for teachers require a high degree of personal investment (Palmer 1993, p. 168), and offer, more than anything, one way for getting started on a sustained re-examination of one's own teaching. This is the basic challenge of TD, for, as Head and Taylor note, making the initial move is the most difficult (Head and Taylor, 1997): *The most difficult part can be*

*getting started, since it is likely to involve giving up the safety of old habits, and thinking as well as acting in new and unfamiliar ways* (p. 206). However, it must be noted that a cooperative teacher development approach presupposes that those who choose to do it have developed 'the skills necessary for self-discovery' (Lansley, 1994), and that the participants will therefore be able to benefit from such work. In an interesting critique of Edge's model, Lansley (Lansley, 1994) describes this predisposition as 'morally literate'; despite its shortcomings, he acknowledges the potential of such work: *For morally literate teachers or potentially morally literate teachers, such self-discovery is without question beneficial* (p.52). In particular, the effort after self-discovery acts as a pivot for three interlinked teacher education concepts: articulation, explanation and community of explanation/practice (Freeman, 1997). Freeman notes:

In reflective teaching, when teachers interact, they are creating new communities of explanation ... These communities often differ from the dominant or prevailing explanations in their work settings... you need someone to talk to about your work ... and in that process, you explain your work so that it will make sense to him/her. But this changes the work itself: by putting words on to or into it, you are making it different... My point is that explanation shapes practice; the way you define it shapes what you do about the issue. And likewise new ways of making sense breed new forms of teaching ... sustaining new forms of explanation is primarily a matter of belonging... You remain connected to that group because you are sustained by its explanations .. and vice versa. The group makes the explanations work for you. (Freeman, 1997, pp. 64 - 65)

From this point of view, a group option is both more powerful and more meaningful. However, within the context of the essentially chaotic academic culture at the Foreign Language Center at the University of Tsukuba (which is by many accounts typical for universities), we may see that a commitment to collaborative teacher development—that is, articulating one's work, making sense of it with one's peers, and, through doing so, fostering a small community of explanation—requires much effort. This is, in my view, its greatest challenge—but also its greatest limitation: there are others too, which will be looked at next.

### **Constraints on teacher development: Observable needs and unarticulated contexts**

TD can take many forms, as this paper points out, and a sustained reflective inquiry into one's own teaching requires different forms to suit different teachers' needs and values. Because the work described takes place within a university context, inevitably questions also arise as to appropriate methods of inquiry. Clearly, the subjective-experientialist approach is at odds with the

objectivist scientific method of academic inquiry, as McDonough, for example, notes (McDonough, 1994): ... *context-bound investigations, by whatever technique, still raise central questions of validity and generalizability...* . (p.58). The risk, though, is to downplay the value of teachers' accounts own of their practice because they do not meet the demands of wider theoretical interpretations that claim stability and power through their objectivist representation. Clarke (1994), for example, comments:

Discussions of language lessons in which the individuality of teachers and the idiosyncracies of each teaching/learning event are not highlighted contribute to the diminution of teachers. And this, I believe, can be traced to societal and professional tendencies to separate theory from practice and to relegate teachers to the less important role of practitioner. (Clarke, 1994, p. 11)

He argues that the pull towards generalisable, statistics-driven results in applied linguistics downgrades 'local and incommensurable experience' (Clarke, 1994, p.16), and that outside researchers, despite all claims to the contrary, cannot account for all the variables at play in the local language classroom; thus, their findings miss out on the rich panorama of everyday classroom learning and teacher knowledge, and in so doing reduce their relevance to inaccurate generalizations.

In the same paper, Clarke later outlines the case for "trustworthiness" and "particularizability" as major components for a new approach for teacher-initiated theory-building. To give some further idea of the constraints that impose on teacher decision-making, he also reports on a study into literacy instruction, where, through analyzing together with Clarke a video recording of their lessons, teachers were able to identify:

11 constraints that impinged on their decision making to varying degrees during a typical day: personal philosophy, physical space, time, availability of resources, interpersonal and institutional factors, community considerations, assessment and curriculum requirements, and classroom routine. (Clarke, 1994, p.17)

This points to the ethnographic complexity of properly contextualizing classroom research—and to another way of conducting teacher development-initiated research. It also raises immediately questions of time for doing such full-scale contextualized research. However, this brief example does show the relatively remote nature of teacher development approaches that do not deal directly with classroom data (a point made by Nunan (1989) throughout his book). This is clearly a major limitation in the teacher development case study described earlier in this paper: this needs to be recognized.

On this basis, I would therefore argue that teacher development meetings can be most usefully centred on different types of specific classroom data, and that group teacher research projects need to be kept simple and focussed if they are not to consume vast amounts of limited time. In my view, such group projects are possible, but they also need a gestation period for the group members to understand both process and outcome. Moreover, I would further claim that small-scale action research projects probably offer the best way for teacher development to meet the contextual constraints of TD within a university, and to go some way towards maintaining a necessary classroom focus, a clear but experimental research methodology, and a concomitant academic interest and value.

## **RECONSIDERING TEACHER DEVELOPMENT OPTIONS**

This paper concludes by restating the benefits of TD work in that it helps teachers to de-block their thinking and decision-making and become more aware of their own values and attitudes towards teaching. In doing so, such an approach opens the teacher towards a revitalized learning attitude and encourages greater consideration of, and sensitivity towards, their learners' learning styles, preferences and needs.

At the same time, it is also important to note different modes of teacher development, be they process-oriented or outcome-directed, and to describe their limitations. TD requires both time and commitment. While the examination of a process-oriented case study has revealed here distinct patterns that will seem to many clearly recognizable as part of a reflective growth period, the case study also shows that one major limitation is its position at one step removed from classroom events. This limitation is characteristic of single-path inquiries; thus, one desirable feature of future teacher development work would be to include multiple perspectives on the same series of classroom events and lessons.

Such a multiplicity of views would lend greater plausibility in any interpretations that were articulated within a wider teacher-researcher community. Ways of achieving such triangulation might include (but not exhaustively so): video segments of lessons; teacher diaries; analysis of lesson transcripts; audio and video recordings of pair and group work and analysis of the way the students interact; structured discussion and reflection on these events, and, in order to understand better the many constraints that may impinge on both teacher and learner behavior, a wider inquiry into teacher/learner beliefs and constructs of learning, learners' diaries, learner surveys and interviews, as well as explicit description of institutional pressures, expectations and goals.

Such studies would in turn reveal a richer, more contextualized understanding of the classroom, and provide the basis for the development of localized teacher theories; they would contribute to the development of English curriculum teacher knowledge, as well as build a substantive foundation

from which to interpret and evaluate the claims and generalizations derived from applied linguistic research and other relevant academic fields of foreign language teacher education.

### **Connecting action research explicitly with curriculum development**

Just as triangulation is a desirable feature of action research method and design, it is also a desirable element for connecting action research with wider curriculum development. Through action research, teachers may come to a much finer understanding of what is possible, effective and necessary in their day-to-day teaching, as well as in overall course design. It offers too an 'in-house' means to share and explore the curriculum-in-use.

Were action research projects to be linked to the articulation of specific performance and learning objectives for first-year English courses, clear and transparent links would be created towards a basic curriculum plan. Indeed, one element of action research, it could be argued, should be to articulate publicly and concretely a range of learning and performance objectives, and modular choices, for different skills courses at the four different levels of low, mid, high and advanced. By doing so, such collaboration and research would gradually come to focus work towards planned, piloted and public curricula. In my view, it is towards these broader end-goals that curriculum development work could move in tandem with action research. After all, if teachers don't research their classrooms and try to explore and address common areas of concern, who will?

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### **Notes**

1. The International Association of Teachers of English as a Foreign Language, a UK-based association. TESOL, IATEFL and JALT form the three largest international professional organizations for English language teaching across the world.
2. Meara (1993): Pit Corder (1973) actually suggested that language teaching was basically a hierarchically organised set-up: *linguists produced descriptive grammars, which served as raw material for applied linguists whose job was to produce pedagogical grammars. Course writers took these pedagogical grammars and turned them into textbooks. Teachers used the textbooks to teach the children. The flow was clearly from the top of this hierarchy to the bottom, and lower levels were not expected to influence the higher ones in any way.* (p.279)
3. The Teachers' Development Forum, which ran voluntarily for two and a half years at the Foreign Language Center from 1993 to 1995 was created in response to this vacuum. It involved teachers of many different languages.
4. June 1995 Tokyo JALT Spring Conference; October 1995 21<sup>st</sup> International JALT Conference, Nagoya; Hokkaido JALT November 1995; Ibaraki JALT January 1997, April 1998; Foreign

Language Center In-service Teacher Development Seminar July 1995, 1996, 1997.

5. Two points need to be made here. First, the term deroutinization was what we found the most useful for describing the process and effect of our work. Later we realized that N.S. Prabhu had already used the term in a similar fashion (Prabhu 1992). Second, though the roles we took were based on Edge's 1992 classic, *Cooperative Development*, we deliberately chose to evolve a more flexible *modus operandi*.
6. See Edge (1992) for more ideas and detail here.
7. Krishnamurti is a twentieth-century Indian spiritual leader whose lucid observations on the modern world and the nature of education preoccupied Bill deeply. In my case, Mario Rinalucci, well-known in ELT for his humanistic techniques and texts, proved to be an important reference point.
8. Through my own survey of several teacher development options in Japan, working both within university contexts and elsewhere, the group process-oriented mode was clearly the more popular in Japan; the duration of a group's active functioning ranged from between six months to two years or more before disbanding. (Barfield: 1997b)
9. For example, full-time members and part-time members of Foreign Language Center English section staff participated in such a one-day workshop meeting in November 1996. This meeting - *Curriculum Development: Classroom Realities and Possibilities* - featured the following workshops: *Dictation in Listening Classes*, Hiroko Ayabe and Akiko Kawasaki, Foreign Language Center, University of Tsukuba; *Learners as Researchers: Group Survey Projects and Report Writing*, Andrew Barfield, Foreign Language Center, University of Tsukuba; *Video-mediated Communication*, Cecilia Ikeguchi, Tsukuba Women's University; *Awareness Raising for Collocations*, Hirosada Iwasaki, Foreign Language Center, University of Tsukuba; *Developing Aural/Oral Competence through Dialogue Transcription*, Bob Juppe, Tsukuba Women's University; *Shared Responsibilities in the Reading Class*, Martin Roche-Nishimori, Foreign Language Center, University of Tsukuba; *Process Thinking through Paradigms and Pair Group Teaching*, William Plain, Foreign Language Center, University of Tsukuba; *Multimedia Materials for Teachers from CD-Rom and the Internet*, Yvonne Stapp, Foreign Language Center, University of Tsukuba.

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