

Teacher Development for Progress: A Proposal to Design a Short In-service ELT Programme

Masayoshi SUGIURA

Department of Foreign Languages, Aichi University of Education, Kariya 448-8542, Japan

1. Introduction

Since the beginning of the new century, two significant developments have been made in language education in this country. One is that English language teaching started as part of “comprehensive studies” at some primary schools in 2002. The other more important development is an experimental attempt made by the Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology Ministry in 2003. In order to improve the qualities of Japanese teachers of English, it decided to provide intensive training programmes for approximately 50,000 English teachers at junior and senior high schools nationwide in the academic years 2003-2007 (*Nihon Kyoiku Shimbun*: 17 January, 2003).

It is crystal clear that the teacher plays a key role in raising the standard of English education. Some teachers, for example, could teach a foreign language successfully without turning to good teaching materials while some could not even with the help of the best possible materials. In other words, a teacher would be able to make materials more relevant to his or her teaching situation, but the reverse is not always the case. It is regrettable, however, that there are not so many teachers who can display such professionalism. Herein lies the great necessity to supply adequate teacher training for producing good communicative teachers.

This paper aims at designing a short in-service training program framework, with special emphasis on experienced Japanese teachers of English. The programme is intended to produce those teachers “who continue to develop throughout their professional lives” (Ur, 1996: 317). It should be noted, however, that the author is not in a position to organize such an in-service teacher-training programme at the present moment

2. Defining the programme

Though a large variety of programmes are planned and arranged for the purpose of improving the quality of English language teaching in various parts of Japan, they seem to leave something to be desired in quality as well as in quantity. It is essential at this crucial moment, therefore, to identify some problems common in most intensive in-service courses, and move the focus onto clarifying the main features to be included in the envisaged programme.

2.1 The main variables

The first problem is that some of the programmes are not well defined. It is not clear who are to be the envisaged participants in such programmes. The first step towards this scheme is, therefore, to make an analysis of the following two principal variables underlying the proposed programme: trainees and their students. The trainees targeted in this paper are defined as teachers with approximately ten years' experience. They are held to be relatively experienced in teaching, and thus influential on their peer teachers at school. In other words, they are expected to contribute more to their school after they complete this course. Their students vary from primary school children to senior high school students. If trainees come from different backgrounds, they should be grouped according to their schools where they teach. The basic format of the programme is more or less the same, however. They are highly recommended to get together and engage in the same activities if they need to exchange information and ideas with each other.

2.2 The integration of theory and practice

The second problem with such programmes is that theory and practice are not always integrated. If that

is the case, most trainees tend to feel at the end of the course that there is a wide gap between theory and practice in TEFL. This usually creates deep dissatisfaction among the participants. The best teacher training course should be based on principles as well as practice.

Hill & Dobbyn (1979) insist that far too much time tends to be given to theory and far too little to demonstration and supervised practice. The TEFL situation in Japan is far from satisfactory in that theory is also made light of. Most prospective English teachers studying in literature departments, for example, are not required to take up such important subjects as second language acquisition and TEFL methodology in their curriculum (Browne & Wada 1998).

Theory is no less important than practice, especially to experienced teachers. Ur (1992: 61) suggests that teacher training programme should be designed "to develop the professional theory of action of participants through the integration of both practical and theoretical input, experience, and reflection." It is true that some teachers try to avoid theoretical explanations behind individual teaching techniques, but they should be made aware of the theory behind new approaches or techniques. Otherwise they may use them without fully understanding their purpose. What they are lacking in most is the ability to explain theory underlying their classroom practice.

This special training programme, which will be based upon the above assumption, has the following two components: the skill component and the theory component.

2.2.1 The skill component

What should not be forgotten is the need to improve teachers' performance in the language classroom. Their good teaching styles are a requisite of raising the standard of English of their students. The skill component can be subdivided into the following two categories: language and methodology.

The primary aim of this programme is to improve the trainees' command of English so that they can perform with greater confidence in the classroom. Since they have few opportunities to be exposed to English, many Japanese teachers of English are not good at using English for communicative purposes. If they have an inadequate command of English, they are unlikely to teach English which is better than their own command of it to their students. It is highly desirable that their command of the target language should be at least adequate for classroom purposes. Cullen (1994: 162) states as follows:

With the propagation and increasing acceptance around the world of the principles of communicative language teaching, there is arguably more pressure on teachers than in the past to be fluent in English so that they can use it naturally and spontaneously in the classroom.

Methodology is mainly concerned with practical skills of teaching: how to manage classroom activities, how to assess the progress of each individual in the class, etc. The participants are expected to exchange ideas with their peers, and explore different methods and techniques for teaching English. This is intended to deepen their understanding of principles and processes involved in English language teaching. If time and facilities permit, demonstration and supervised practice are also included in the programme.

2.2.2 The theory component

All teachers need to keep abreast of developments in the profession of teaching. There are certainly many items which a language teacher needs to know: education, approaches, methodology, syllabus, materials, etc. If trainees are exposed to too much new knowledge and information lacking practical implications, however, they may possibly be at a loss at the end of the course. Besides, this is such a short training programme that it cannot cover all of these items at a time. When we draw up a programme, therefore, we should limit the content to the minimum essentials.

2.3 The form of participation

The third problem with some teacher training courses is that active participation and contributions are not always encouraged, particularly on the part of the trainees. This is largely because most of the pro-

grammes are made up of lectures. Traditionally, lecturers have been regarded as “outsider” or “authorities”, but both trainers and trainees in this programme are expected to exchange ideas and experiences and thus work towards the establishing of principles. This is an area where the experienced teachers can also make a valuable contribution towards areas of research. In other words, trainers can benefit substantially from the trainees’ experiences as well.

Since they are expected to be actively involved in all the activities in this programme, the number of the participants is limited to 30. In order to achieve this aim, groups are formed so that the trainees can have the chance to discuss and evaluate ideas among themselves without feeling threatened by too large a group. Mariani (1979: 76) stresses the importance of group work as follows:

Let us just say that, since teaching is essentially carried out with classes, that is with groups of people, it is only too evident that teachers should experience the group situation themselves, and should at the same time be acquainted with such topics as group dynamics, leadership, group control, socialization, etc.

Group work should be conducted not in the mother tongue but in English so that language skills, especially speaking and listening skills, can be improved.

3. The framework of the envisaged programme

The following is a suggested timetable which shows a five-day in-service training programme for experienced teachers of English. It goes without saying that the curriculum content will be enriched in proportion if ten days or more are allocated.

Table 1 Timetable

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
9:00-10:30	Introduction Warming-up	Lecture 2	Lecture 3	Lecture 4	Lecture 5
10:30-11:00	Break	Break	Break	Break	Break
11:00-12:00	Lecture 1	Discussion	Discussion	Discussion	Discussion
12:00-12:30		Reporting	Reporting	Reporting	Reporting
12:30-13:30	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch
13:30-14:30					
A	PW I	PW II	PW III	PW IV	Feedback
B	OW I	OW II	OW III	OW IV	Feedback
14:30-15:00	Break	Break	Break	Break	Break-up
15:00-16:00					
A	OW I	OW II	OW III	OW IV	
B	PW I	PW II	PW III	PW IV	

Let us see briefly how the above timetable works. Except on the first day, the morning session begins with a lecture on a topic given from a theoretical aspect, which is followed by discussion on the same topic. The afternoon sessions are all devoted to practical aspects. In other words, we pay much attention to theory and then seek its practical application in the morning, and shift our focus on practice in the afternoon. This is how we try to draw principles or theory from it on the same day. Thus, the integration of theory and practice is planned. The following shows how the individual activities are carried out according to the timetable.

3.1 Introduction & warming-up

In this initial period the trainers introduce the staff, lecturers, timetable, facilities and other related matters to the participants. It is very likely that the participants do not know one another. In such a case, this period is provided for their self-introduction. This activity has a more important function. As is defined, all the trainees are teachers of some experience. When they attend this sort of teacher training, they may be afraid of being made to look silly in front of their fellow teachers. What is required is to reduce the feeling of strangeness and tension at the initial stage. This session is also intended to brush up the participants’ oral

skills of English.

A useful warming-up exercise can be to ask participants first to interview each other in pairs and then to introduce one another, giving names, and details of the town, school, student age and type of teaching in which their colleagues are involved. The following seating plan in Figure 1 shows how the table(s) and 15 trainees are arranged so as to facilitate their activities:

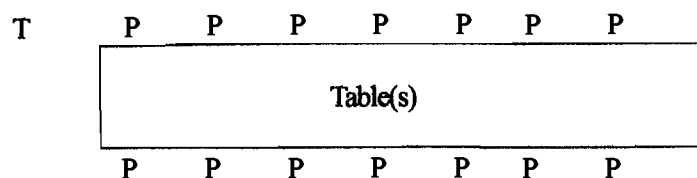


Fig. 1

One of the 15 trainees serves as a timekeeper (T) in rotation, signals to the rest to move at regular intervals. The participants (P) can thus talk in English easily with each other for two minutes or so, and then move to change their partners in a fixed order. It is hoped that at the end of this period they are all able to be familiar with each other to some extent.

3.2 Lecture & discussion

These periods are intended for the sessions to develop from theory to practice. Lecturers are invited from various circles, e.g. universities, educational institutions, different types of schools. After each lecture, the trainees are given the chance to ask questions about the topics which have been given. All the lectures but the first lecture (Lecture 1) are followed by group discussion. Six groups are formed, each of which is made up of five members chosen at random. In the group the members are asked to choose their group leader. The main function of the group leader is to co-ordinate their activities.

The topic and agenda to be discussed in this period should be related to the lecture given before. After a discussion they are asked to report back in plenary sessions on what they have talked about. They can learn how to give an oral presentation in English. Here, they are recommended to use an OHP in order to save time and make an effective visual presentation. Thus, all the trainees are expected to "reap the fruits of the extensive discussions of recent years on the status of linguistics as a science, on the nature of linguistic procedures, on the role of intuition, and so on" (Brumfit 1980: 67).

3.3 Oral work & practical work

The afternoon sessions are divided into two activities: oral work (OW) and practical work (PW). The former is devoted to improving the participants' oral communication skills, and the latter to observing and reviewing lessons on VTR. These are designed to develop from practice to theory. The 30 trainees are divided into two groups, A and B. If more trainers, preferably native speakers of English, and more rooms are available, they are divided into four groups, in which case two groups follow the same timetable.

4. The Content of the envisaged Programme

The main activities in this programme are lectures, discussion, oral work and practical work. Lectures, discussion and some of practical work are organised so that all of these three activities can deal with one topic in common on the same day. It is possible to make oral work independent activities since its main aim is to develop the trainees' speaking and listening skills.

The following is one attempt to give shape to the above-mentioned activities.

4.1 Lectures and discussion

Lectures play a leading role in this course, and most of them are followed by their related activities, i.e. discussion and practical work. In this light, it is no exaggeration to say that the choice of topics and lectures may decide whether or not this course will be successful.

4.1.1 The selection of topics

Brumfit (1979) suggests one possible design for a syllabus for training TEFL teachers. He puts 50 topics in the syllabus and classifies them in accordance with the following four phases: practical techniques, approaches by teaching level, analysis of methodological procedures, and organization and background information. These four phases develop from the particular to the general, and from practice to theory. Though his suggestion is intended for pre-service teacher training, it is relevant to in-service training as well and can be adapted to suit the purposes of this course.

As is suggested earlier, we take up only one topic for each discussion. Since our envisaged course lasts five days, we are obliged to choose only five topics. In order to reduce the number of topics, we cannot but omit the first and second phases, which seem more suitable for would-be teachers rather than experienced teachers. Therefore, our inevitable decision might be to choose five topics from the third and fourth phases. There are also other constraints to take into consideration when we limit the number of topics. First, the topics to be chosen should form a basis for discussion and, secondly, they should have practical implications. Thirdly, the topics should give the trainees new insights into language teaching. These three constraints have already been discussed in the previous section. The fourth constraint, which is somewhat contradictory to the third one, is that the topics should not be entirely new. Otherwise, the trainees might be overwhelmed with too much new information and knowledge. This backwash effect on them is what should be avoided at all costs.

Thus, the tentative topics to be chosen are (1) different approaches and methods, (2) action research, (3) phonetics, (4) material analysis and production, and (5) language as communication. If the course lasts ten days or more, we can add more topics to the list, e.g., teaching grammar, testing, communication activities. It should be noted that the content of the discussion and practical work is more or less dependent upon the preceding lectures. The above-mentioned five topics will be explained below in more detail.

(1) Different approaches and methods

This topic is dealt with on the first day of the week. It is worth reviewing some of the better-known methods which are still in use in one form or another. The possible choice might include the Grammar-translation method, Direct method, Audio-lingual method, Situational method, Total Physical Response, Communicative Language Teaching, etc. "There is no theoretical consensus for any one methodology" (Ferguson and Denno 2002). However, it is important to understand the principles underlying classroom practices. Due to lack of time, neither discussion nor practical work takes place after the lecture on this topic.

(2) Action research

Action research or classroom research has become increasingly important these days. Allright and Bailey (1991: xiv) state that classroom research is "a dynamic area of investigation and one bearing fruitful results of major relevance to many facets of teaching, syllabus design, materials development, testing, and teacher education." This topic is especially relevant to experienced teachers who have taught English in their own way. Conversational analysis is introduced as a means of analysing interaction in their classroom.

(3) Phonetics

Focus is placed on the use of phonetics in the classroom. Not only individual sounds but also rhythm and intonation are dealt with. The last two items play an important role in effective communication (Tench 1981), but in actuality have been neglected in foreign language teaching in Japan. A basic teaching strategy for teaching these is also presented with reference to classroom management. The following is a tentative list for discussion:

- (i) What steps have you taken (do you take) to improve your pronunciation (with emphasis on rhythm and intonation)?
- (ii) What steps do you take to help your students to improve their pronunciation?
- (iii) What are typical pronunciation mistakes made by your students?

(4) Material analysis and production

As occasion demands, teachers are often required to make a selection from a number of textbooks,

supplementary materials and reference books. The problem is that it is impossible to try out all available materials in a short time. Herein lies the necessity for some kind of assessment in advance. Thus, the lecturers should help the trainees to be able to make rational and systematic judgments about the materials that they have to use (Cunningworth 1979). If time permits, current thinking on syllabus design is also introduced in the lecture. A tentative list of items for an agenda is as follows:

- (i) What criteria have you used for choosing teaching materials?
- (ii) What supplementary materials do you think are necessary for your classes?
- (iii) What materials do you want in a textbook for your classes?
- (iv) How do you adapt teaching materials to your lesson, if necessary?

Cunningworth (1979) suggests the following procedures which can be used in the practical work: Each group is assigned a different book or textbook. Then the participants are directed to one unit which is typical of the whole, and are asked to look at it in depth while looking briefly at the rest of the book. Supporting taped materials and teacher's manual, if available, are also checked.

(5) Language as communication

The aim here is to help the trainees to consider some of the principles which guide them in their search for a method (Morrow 1981). They are expected by this time of the course to acquire some concept of Communicative Language Teaching. If necessary, the five principles advocated by Morrow (1981) would be introduced to them for the purpose of reviewing Communicative Language Teaching in transition. These principles are rather classical but contain a lot of thought-provoking ideas.

4.2 Oral work

As is mentioned above, what is most lacking in Japanese teachers of English is their command of English, especially of the listening and speaking skills. It is on these two skills that focus is placed in the afternoon session. On this occasion the trainee teachers should be regarded as language learners rather than teachers. Within a limited time, they would not be able to improve their English dramatically, of course. It is hoped, therefore, that they would, at least, feel stimulated and motivated to work further even after they finish the course. The following are some of the recommended activities suggested by Finocchiaro & Brumfit (1983: 157).

The trainees are asked to:

1. Talk about what they have heard in a speech or on television.
2. Listen to a telephone conversation and deduce from the utterances they hear what the person at the other end of the telephone line has said. And/or, take telephone messages and report them clearly to the rest of the class.
3. Pretend their briefcase has been stolen. Describe what was in the briefcase and what the thief looked like. And/or, pretend a crime was committed in their neighbourhood and that they have to supply an alibi. The other trainee should be asked to judge whether or not the alibi is plausible and tell why they feel that way.
4. Study the portrait of a person and tell how old they think the person is, what his occupation probably is, and any other relevant characteristics. And/or, play the roles of some well-known person who lived in the past.
5. Study a map of a community or highway (with road signs) and give directions to someone on how to get someplace. And/or, prepare a map based on directions you will give to get to a place, indicating turning points, landmarks, etc.

4.3 Practical work

Two periods of practical work are given to observing lessons in this programme. Observing real lessons

is desirable but may disturb or disrupt the class. Besides, teachers of some experience are less keen on micro-teaching and peer-teaching since they are likely to feel threatened by teaching in the presence of their peers. Class observation, therefore, can be conducted with the help of VTR's. Videotaped presentations are very effective if they are intended to provide glimpse of efficient and also less efficient teachers.

The second half of each period is devoted to discussion on the lesson on VTR. On this occasion, all the trainees are expected not only to review the lesson they have observed, but also to display their own knowledge, and relate experiences, ideas and classroom problems they are daily confronted with. Practical solutions to real classroom difficulties should be offered whenever possible. They can learn new methods and techniques that they can adapt and put into practice back in their own classrooms. It is at this stage that some principle or other should be drawn from those methods and techniques.

This session is intended "to develop an awareness of the need for continuing professional development, as well as an awareness that methods need adjustment to suit varying teaching contexts." (Ferguson and Donno 2003: 27)

4.4 Feedback

The Feedback session in the last period is just for reviewing and evaluating the whole week or course. This is also conducted in the form of group discussion. It is desirable to discuss and review all the individual activities included in this programme, e.g. whether the lecture on material analysis is useful or not. Suggestions for omission or additions are most welcome. The next programme will be organised on the basis of the feedback received in this period.

5. Conclusion

This is a tentative in-service training programme for TEFL teachers in Japan, with special emphasis on the secondary school level. It is difficult, of course, to tell whether this scheme will be successful or not until it is put into practice. It seems that the validity of this programme is in terms of how it affects the trainees' attitude and their influence on others. If they are stimulated to develop their language skills and teaching techniques after attending their course, it can be regarded as successful. It means that their potential for further professional growth is exploited through this scheme. Similarly if they encourage their colleagues to work towards the improvement of TEFL together, it may be regarded as more successful. It means that they exploit other teachers' potential for further professional growth as well. New teachers in particular would benefit if they find such a teacher as is constantly trying hard to grow professionally.

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