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EMERGENT SKILLS AND BELIEFS IN AN INITIAL
TEACHER PREPARATION COURSE

A thesis presented in
fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
in Second Language Teaching
at Massey University

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1999
ABSTRACT

Research on teacher preparation has focused primarily on traditional preparation courses or, in the case of ESL, on the university-based BATESL or MATESL courses. In contrast, the present study focuses on the much shorter Trinity Cert. TESOL initial course, involving distance learning modules and a four-week on-campus segment. In particular, it investigates the major constructs, and the key components within each construct, developed by nine trainees, many of whom were complete novices, from the initial signing-up for the course until its completion. Data was collected by means of questionnaires, interviews, written lesson evaluations, feedback from tutors and a stimulated recall procedure during practice teaching.

Results indicated that trainees developed beliefs about teaching which could be grouped in three main sets of constructs: personal, planning and classroom. Personal constructs were found to be comprised of subject matter knowledge, role models and confidence; planning constructs were made up of lesson planning, materials and timing; and the components of classroom constructs were shown to be classroom management, student needs, communication and error correction. Personal constructs were largely present at the beginning of the on-campus four-week course, although subject matter knowledge, in particular, had been developed during the distance learning modules. Planning constructs and classroom constructs, which are shown to be closely intertwined, were seen to undergo rapid development, starting with peer teaching and leading on to classroom practice teaching.

The major outcomes of this study point to the importance of role models that trainees bring to the course, the necessity to develop subject matter knowledge well before the course, the individual differences between the trainees in terms of converting input from the course into output for practice teaching, and the extent to which teachers experienced in another field of teaching are at an advantage over the complete novice. The study concludes with several suggestions for focusing trainees so that they can gain the maximum benefit from the course. In addition, ways in which minor aspects of the course could be improved are put forward.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my sincere appreciation to all of those who have helped me while undertaking the present research. My special thanks go to Drs Cynthia White and Margaret Franken for their professional input during the period of the research and the subsequent writing. Dr White, in particular, has been an inspirational supervisor, encouraging me, first of all, to follow through my interest in this area, then counselling me and guiding me whenever necessary, regardless of personal inconvenience. Her continued confidence in times of stress has helped me to maintain my motivation and see more clearly the path ahead.

I would also like to acknowledge International Pacific College, who have provided research grants in support of this study. Their assistance with tapes and equipment aided the research greatly, as did the provision of research hours. Even greater thanks must go to my colleagues at International Pacific College, especially Ms Dianne Beatson, the Director of the Institute of TESOL, for the many ways in which they helped me out and allowed me the space to complete this research.

I am especially indebted to the nine trainees who agreed to participate in this research during a very busy four-week period when they did not need any extra interruptions. Needless to say, without them the research would not have been possible. In addition, I am grateful to the students in the classes which were video-taped. I hope that, as a result of this research, our courses will be even better for future trainees.

The greatest thanks must go to my family who have supported me over the last two years. My husband, Stuart, and daughters, Vicki and Lisa, have all shown exceptional patience and understanding when my research has shut them out, but have been ready to help when I have needed them. Finally, my extended family may now appreciate my return to the land of the living!
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

1 INTRODUCTION ........................................................................ 1

2 TEACHER PREPARATION ..................................................... 6
   2.1 Terminology and the teacher preparation process .................. 6
   2.2 Role Models ................................................................. 9
       2.2.1 Who are the role models? ......................................... 9
       2.2.2 The effect of role models .......................................... 10
       2.2.3 Concerns with role models ...................................... 11
       2.2.4 The associate role model ........................................ 12
   2.3 Reflection in Teacher Preparation .................................... 13
   2.4 Preparation for an Unknown Future ................................. 15
   2.5 Summary ................................................................. 15

3 NOVICE TEACHERS ............................................................ 16
   3.1 Expectations of Teacher Trainees ................................. 16
   3.2 Factors Affecting Novice Teachers ................................. 17
       3.2.1 Relationships with students .................................. 17
       3.2.2 Confidence ...................................................... 18
       3.2.3 Stages of understanding ....................................... 18
   3.3 Novices vs Experts .................................................... 19
   3.4 Experienced Teachers in a New Subject Area ................. 21
   3.5 Subject Matter Knowledge ............................................ 21
       3.5.1 Pedagogical content knowledge ................................ 23
5.3 Subjects

5.3.1 Selection ................................................................. 54
5.3.2 Characteristics of subjects ............................................. 54
5.3.3 Why study Cert. TESOL? ............................................. 57
5.3.4 Individual details ...................................................... 58

5.4 Data Analysis .............................................................. 60

5.5 Summary ............................................................................. 63

6 RESULTS: PERSONAL CONSTRUCTS .................................... 64

6.1 Introduction ........................................................................... 64

6.2 Teacher Role Models .......................................................... 66

6.2.1 Role models identified by trainees .................................... 66
6.2.2 The associate teacher as role model .................................. 68
6.2.3 The importance of language learning ................................. 68

6.3 Confidence ........................................................................... 70

6.3.1 Confidence during practice teaching .................................. 71
6.3.2 Did confidence develop during the course? ......................... 72

6.4 Subject Matter Knowledge ................................................... 73

6.4.1 Pre-course knowledge of English grammar ....................... 74
6.4.2 Identification of personal weaknesses ................................. 75
6.4.3 Subject matter knowledge and classroom teaching .............. 76
6.4.4 Tutors' observations ...................................................... 79
6.4.5 Final position .............................................................. 79

6.5 Summary ............................................................................. 80

7 RESULTS: PLANNING CONSTRUCTS .................................... 82

7.1 Lesson Planning ............................................................... 82

7.1.1 Sources of input ........................................................... 83
7.1.2 Why plan? ................................................................. 85
7.1.3 What to plan .............................................................. 86
7.1.4 Over-riding problems .................................................. 88
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7.1.5</td>
<td>Making changes</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.1.6</td>
<td>Planning progress</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>Materials</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.2.1</td>
<td>Using textbooks</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.2.2</td>
<td>Working without textbooks</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>Timing</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>RESULTS: CLASSROOM CONSTRUCTS</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>Meeting Students' Needs</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.1.1</td>
<td>Trainees' relationships with students</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.1.2</td>
<td>Different student groupings</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.1.3</td>
<td>Need for reinforcement</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.1.4</td>
<td>Meeting needs in mixed ability classes</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.1.5</td>
<td>Student enjoyment vs student learning</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>Classroom Management</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.2.1</td>
<td>The use of classroom aids</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>Monitoring Students and Error Correction</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.3.1</td>
<td>Monitoring students</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.3.2</td>
<td>Error correction</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.4.1</td>
<td>Input and output</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.4.2</td>
<td>Instructions</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.4.3</td>
<td>Explanations</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.4.4</td>
<td>Voice</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>DISCUSSION OF RESULTS</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>The development of trainees' beliefs during the course</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix A  Required Course Components ........................................ 171
Appendix B  Details of Distance Learning Modules ................................. 172
Appendix C  Classroom Observation Guide ......................................... 174
Appendix D  Lesson Plan Sheet ......................................................... 175
Appendix E  Teaching Practice Lesson Observation Sheet ....................... 176
Appendix F  Trainees' Self-evaluation Form ....................................... 178
Appendix G  Personal Information Questionnaire .................................. 180
Appendix H  Initial Questionnaire ..................................................... 182
Appendix I  Initial Interview Prompts .............................................. 184
Appendix J  Final Interview Prompts ................................................ 185
Appendix K  Introductory Letter ....................................................... 186
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 2.1 Grenfell's relationships between theory and practice ......................... 9
Figure 3.1 Stages in classroom understanding .............................................. 19
Figure 3.2 Relationship between pedagogical content knowledge factors .......... 24
Figure 3.3 Undesirable relationship model .................................................. 26
Figure 3.4 Desirable relationship model ...................................................... 27
Figure 3.5 Model of early pedagogic reasoning (Bennett, Carre and Dunne) ....... 29
Figure 3.6 Model of the second stage of learning to teach (Bennett, Carre and Dunne) ............................................................................................................ 30
Figure 4.1 Professional education development model of Cert. TESOL trainees 42
Figure 5.1 Data analysis procedure ............................................................... 60
Figure 6.1 Relationship between beliefs and constructs ................................. 65
Figure 6.2 The process of subject matter knowledge growth ............................. 75
Figure 6.3 In-course subject matter development ........................................... 76
Figure 6.4 Subject matter/pedagogical content knowledge development cycle ... 79
Figure 7.1 The interrelationship between planning and activities ..................... 87
Figure 9.1 Interrelating constructs and the place of experience in teacher trainees' beliefs ................................................................. 123
LIST OF TABLES

Table 2.1 Differences between teacher training and teacher development ............ 7
Table 2.2 Concerns about trainees' role models and their effects .................. 11
Table 2.3 Why trainees find it difficult to reflect ......................................... 13
Table 2.4 Advantages and disadvantages of journal-keeping ............................. 14
Table 3.1 Major differences between novices and experts ................................. 20
Table 4.1 Stresses and possible solutions on short courses ............................... 36
Table 4.2 Components of the IPC Trinity Cert. TESOL course ............................ 38
Table 5.1 Instrumentation used in study .......................................................... 47
Table 5.2 Possible problems regarding the use of videos and their resolution ... 51
Table 5.3 Characteristics of subjects ............................................................... 56
Table 5.4 Reasons for studying Cert. TESOL .................................................... 57
Table 5.5 Explanation of data analysis .............................................................. 62
Table 6.1 Components of personal constructs ................................................ 65
Table 6.2 Characteristics of teachers identified as role models ....................... 67
Table 6.3 Why trainees thought language learning was important ..................... 69
Table 6.4 Trainees' language learning and overseas experience ....................... 69
Table 6.5 Trainees' confidence .......................................................................... 70
Table 9.1  Similarities among trainees ............................................. 126

Table 9.2  Differences between experienced teachers and inexperienced trainees  129

Table 9.3  Attributes shared by the most successful trainees  ...................... 131