INDONESIAN JELT
Indonesian Journal of English Language Teaching

INDONESIAN JOURNAL OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING

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INDONESIAN JOURNAL OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING (INDONESIAN JELT) SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

AIMS AND SCOPE

Indonesian Journal of English Language Teaching (Indonesian JELT) is a peer-reviewed journal in which submitted articles will go through a blind review process. IJELT is published twice a year in May and in October every year. It is devoted to the teaching and learning of English. It also invites articles related to language evaluation. Committed to finding the solution to problems associated with the study of English Language Teaching (ELT), Indonesian JELT strongly encourages submission of unpublished articles on topics that are highly relevant and contribute significantly to issues in ELT. The journal particularly welcomes manuscripts that are drawn from research related to other cross-disciplines (e.g. linguistics, sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics, education, culture as well as first and second language acquisition), the application of theories, critical analysis of theories or studies.

GENERAL INFORMATION FOR SUBMISSION OF ARTICLES

General

- Articles must be written in English and should be related to the areas of English language teaching, learning or testing. Articles in the area of applied linguistics are welcome, provided that they are relevant to ELT.
- The Indonesian JELT also invites *review articles,* which provide a descriptive and evaluative comparison of the materials and discuss the relative significance of the works in the context of current theory and practice. Submissions should generally be between 700 and 1,500 words.
- Articles must be typewritten on A4-sized white paper (8.27" x 11.69"), double-spaced with 1" margins with a 12-pt Times New Roman font.
- The Editors require that articles be submitted as e-mail attachment that exactly matches the hardcopy and are formatted as a Microsoft Word document. Identify your document with your own name and affiliation, e.g. Yassir_ATMAJAYA.doc. Do not send your text in the body of e-mail.
- The Editors reserve the rights to adjust the format to certain standards of uniformity.
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Paper Length

Texts should be between 6,000 and 7,000 words in length. A word-count should be given at the end of the article. The word-count should include abstract, tables and appendices.

Abstracts

All articles should have an abstract comprising 100-250 words in length. A word-count and keywords are required at the end of the abstract.

Criteria for Acceptance

A manuscript will be accepted for publication if it meets the following requirements:

- Its topic and contents reflect the aims and scope of the Indonesian JELT.
- It is likely to arouse readers' interest and is accessible to a broad readership.
- It offers novel and original insights as well as makes significant contribution to the body of knowledge related to this journal.
- It contains a cogent and coherent theoretical basis so as to reflect sound scholarship (especially for practical articles). Theoretical articles and report research should include discussion and implications, and application for practice.
- It has clarity of presentation, is well written and organized, and conforms to the format of this journal.

Articles and a brief bio-data (max. 150 words) should be sent to: ijelt@atmajaya.ac.id

Transmissive and transformative approaches to language teacher education

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Abstract

In this paper I compare two contrasting educational philosophies that have had a significant impact on the way we approach and understand our practice as teacher educators. These have been labeled in several ways such as *top-down versus bottom-up* or *product versus process based*. I will characterize them a *transmission-based* approach and an *ecological* approach. My aim here is to describe and compare these two approaches and suggest how they offer complementary perspectives on the nature and practices of second language teacher education.

Keywords: teacher education, transmission-based approach, ecological approach

Introduction

When we design teacher education programs for language teachers it is important to begin with a clear conceptualization or understanding of the nature of second language teaching as well as of how we understand teacher-learning and development. A number of different conceptions of teaching and teacher learning can be identified when we review trends in the field of second and foreign language teaching. In this paper I compare two contrasting educational philosophies that have had a significant impact on the way we approach and understand our practice as teacher educators. These have been labeled in several ways such as *top-down versus bottom-up* or *product versus process based*. I will characterize them a *transmission-based* approach and an *ecological* approach. My aim here is to describe and compare these two approaches and suggest how they offer complementary perspectives on the nature and practices of second language teacher education.

A transmission-based approach

Developing a syllabus

What can be called a "transmission-based" approach views teaching as something that consists of many different elements, each of which can be

identified and become the focus of teacher training and development. These different elements form the contents of a teacher education curriculum and syllabus and as such can be sequenced, taught and assessed. This has been referred to as a 'waterfall' model (Tessmer and Wedman, 1990) where the output from one stage serves as the input to the stage that follows. Learning takes place through a transition-like process as content moves from its starting point (the syllabus) and finds its way to the recipients – teachers in training. This is a conventional way of planning a course and central to it is the planning of a syllabus. This is described in Richards and Rodgers (2001, pp. 143-4), summarizing Docking (1994):

> The traditional approach to developing a syllabus involves using one's understanding of subject matter as the basis for syllabus planning. One starts with the field of knowledge that one is going to teach (e.g. contemporary European history, marketing, listening comprehension, or French literature) and then selects concepts, knowledge, and skills that constitute that field of knowledge. A syllabus and the course content are then developed around the subject. Objectives may also be specified, but these usually have little role in teaching or assessing of the subject. Assessment of students is usually based on norm referencing, that is, students will be graded on a single scale with the expectation that they spread across a wide range of scores or that they conform to a pre-set distribution.

The challenge in designing a teacher-education course then becomes essentially one of "delivery". How does one "deliver" the syllabus – the prescribed body of knowledge, stills, attitudes etc. -- to teachers in training? (This process is discussed in the subsequent section below).

There have been many attempts to describe the core components of teacher knowledge and skill in order for the planning of teacher development programs. I attempted such a description (table 1) in these terms (adapted from Richards 2017).

However as I pointed out elsewhere (Richards 2017);

> There is no clear consensus in the TESOL profession as to what the essential content knowledge required by TESOL teachers should consist of. The kind of content courses teachers may be required to study generally reflects where they complete their graduate course and the interests and background of the academics who teach such courses. For

example the core courses in the M.ED TESOL degree at the University of Sydney (2016) are *Discourse and Language Teaching, Second Language Acquisition, Methodology and Language Teaching, Literacy and Language Teaching, Language, Society and Power* while those in the MA English Studies (TESOL) degree at City University of Hong Kong (2106) are *Approaches to Language Teaching, Discourse Analysis, Dissertation, Language in its Social Context, Literary and Cultural Studies, Research Methods in English Studies, Second Language Acquisition.*

Table 1. The core skill and knowledge of language teaching

The Core Skill and Knowledge of Language Teaching

Content knowledge: the teacher's understanding of the subject of second language teaching, including knowledge about language and English, pedagogical grammar, phonology, teaching theories, second language acquisition, as well as the specialized discourse and terminology of language teaching.

Language ability: the teacher's proficiency in English and his or her ability using English as the language of instruction.

Pedagogical knowledge: ability to restructure content knowledge for teaching purposes, and to plan, adapt, and improvise based on the teaching context.

Knowledge of teaching methods: familiarity with one or more teaching approaches or methods.

Practical knowledge: the teacher's repertoire of classroom techniques, routines, and strategies.

Contextual knowledge: familiarity with the school or institutional context, school norms, and the school culture as well as the larger cultural national, community, ethnic, bureaucratic, professional, religious, linguistic, economic and family contexts in which a school is located and with which it interacts.

Knowledge of learners: understanding of the knowledge, beliefs, dispositions, attitudes, motivations, learning preferences as well as culturally based expectations and preferences etc. that learners bring to the classroom.

Ethical knowledge: moral and ethical principles that shape the teacher's attitudes and behavior and his or her relations with students and colleagues.

Experiential knowledge: knowledge of the learners accumulated over time, understanding of typical problems and solutions, effective use of materials and resources.

Personal knowledge: the teacher's personal beliefs and principles and his or her individual approach to teaching.

Reflective knowledge: the teacher's capacity to reflect on and assess his or her own practices.

Operationalizing the content of the syllabus

In planning a teacher development course or program, once a core body of content has been identified the next stage involves codification of it in terms of a set of standards or competencies that teachers are expected to master and be able to demonstrate in their teaching, the competencies themselves dependent on the particular stage a teacher is at in his or her professional development. In the 1960s this would have involved developing statements of behavioral objectives. Describing learning in terms of the mastery of core skills was also a feature of competency-based teaching which emerged at the same time and that has re-emerged in more recent times as a dominant approach in curriculum design (Richards and Rodgers 2014). The adoption of a standards-based framework is now common in many countries. Leung (2012, pp. 161–2) comments that "outcomes-based teaching in the past thirty years or so can be associated with the wider public policy environments in which the twin doctrines of corporatist management (whereas the activities in different segments of society are subordinated to the goals of the state) and public accountability (which requires professionals to justify their activities in relation to declared public policy goals) have pre- dominated." They represent attempts to set standards against which student performance and achievement can be judged and compared at any given stage of a teaching program. Leung further notes that the terms used to designate outcomes-based approaches include attainment targets, benchmarks, core skills, essential learnings / skills, outcomes-based education, performance profiles, and target competencies.

Producing statements of this kind is usually the responsibility of curriculum development specialists in a ministry of education, of professional organizations or of individual teaching institutions, and reflect local understandings and contexts of teaching and learning, such as who the teachers and learners are, what the institutional context is and the resources that are available.

Choosing a pedagogical strategy

When teacher education is viewed a process of transmission or transfer, the course-designer's task is to design effective procedures and strategies that will "impart" the required knowledge and skills to teachers. The challenge of program implementation is one of how to enhance the uptake of subject and pedagogic knowledge. This is typically achieved through a repertoire of course-room practices that includes lectures, discussions, readings, simulations, projects, case studies, practice teaching and so on. Learning progresses through activities that involve *understandin*g (of theories, ideas, concepts), *observing (*teaching behaviors and

techniques), *practicing* (of techniques, strategies and routines) and *applying* (in simulated or real teaching contexts). Here is a description of how a well-designed undergraduate teacher education program is organized in an Indonesian university: (Rudianto 2017).

To achieve the ELE program outcomes, we have developed a four-year program that includes three dimensions: *studying, experiencing*, and *instruction*. Through these three ways of learning, the students are expected to acquire the skills, knowledge, attitudes, and behavior of a future professional English language teacher.

Studying. The students will study the concepts and principles of English language teaching and learning and acquire the body of knowledge that is needed by future English language teachers; they will develop knowledge of the English language and develop skill and competency in its use; and they will develop the knowledge and skills needed to read and understand research as well as carry out research related to English language teaching.

Experiencing. The program also offers experiential learning to provide opportunities for students to apply the knowledge they have acquired. All courses are conducted in English to help students develop their skills in English. Teaching practice in schools also gives students opportunities to meet practitioners in local schools and to apply the knowledge they have acquired.

Instruction. The students also learn through direct instruction in class. This learning is characterized by lectures, discussions, structured tasks, online discussion, and presentations.

Initiating change

Key to initiating teacher-learning is the nature of change - a process that is complex and multifaceted - and how to initiate change in novice-teachers' beliefs and practices. The goal is to move teachers' understanding beyond the learning they have acquired from previous experiences, and to familiarize themselves with new knowledge and skills that encapsulate what is assumed to best practice in language teaching. Much of the focus of graduate courses in language teaching is consequently directed toward reshaping teachers' knowledge and beliefs through the study of some of the extensive body of research and theorizing on second language learning and teaching.

However, teachers' beliefs are often resistant to change. Clark and Peterson (1986) noted the following:

⌡The most resilient or "core" teachers' beliefs are formed on the basis of teachers' own schooling as young students while

observing teachers who taught them. Subsequent teacher education appears not to disturb these early beliefs, not least, perhaps, because it rarely addresses them.

⟩ If teachers actually try out a particular innovation that does not initially conform to their prior beliefs or principles and the innovation proves helpful or successful, then accommodation of an alternative belief or principle is more plausible than in any other circumstance.

⟩ For the novice teacher, classroom experience and day-to-day interaction with colleagues has the potential to influence particular relationships among beliefs and principles and, over time, to consolidate the individual's permutation of them. Nevertheless, it seems that greater experience does not lead to greater adaptability in our beliefs and, thereby, the abandonment of strongly held pedagogical principles. Quite the contrary, in fact. The more experience we have, the more reliant on our "core" principles we become and the less conscious we are of being so.

Consideration needs to be given therefore to how to keep teachers "on track" so that they don't revert to previous modes of thinking and acting or move outside of the prescribed domains of curriculum content. (As an example from a different domain, a highly regarded pianist recently recounted his experience studying at a well-known conservatorium. After his final performance examination the chief examiner presented him with a list of ways in which he had "departed" from the way his teacher played one of his examination pieces[1]).

There are several ways in which teachers can be encouraged to

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[1] Another example from the musical domain is given by musician William Schumann, commenting on the American composer Aaron Copland's approach to teaching composition:

"As teachers of composition, composers more often than not tend to impose their own views on their students and to instill adherence to their own technical procedures. Copland is that rare composer who helps his students find their own means of expressing themselves, rather than mastering his own techniques, which may or may not be germane to their particular talents. Copland combines the scholar's knowledge of music of the past with an encyclopedic understanding of all contemporary music. As an outcome of his extraordinary knowledge and clear philosophy in his approach to teaching, his pupils compose in a variety of styles. A less doctrinaire attitude would be difficult to imagine. In essence, Copland is saying that an effective teacher can have his own strong convictions, yet feel it an obligation to expose his pupils to esthetic doctrines and technical procedures with which he himself may not be in particular sympathy, but which seem right for the pupil. Here is the opposite of the authoritarian- concern for the nature of the individual and not with the imposition of a priori conclusions." (From the introduction to Aaron Copland, *How to Listen to Music*).

maintain a "correct" way of teaching.

Correctly implementing the teaching approach

At the level of classroom practice, in order to ensure that teachers are making the intended changes, taking up new teaching practices and teaching to the competencies identified in the curriculum and in order to build efficiency into the delivery system the features of a corporate culture are often co-opted into the language-teaching profession. In order to make the delivery system maximally effective managerial practices that focus on goal setting, standards, testing and grades such as with the Total Quality Management business tool that was designed to improve efficiency and reduce errors. Performativity is seen in processes that are employed to standardize teaching and testing, to audit institutions and to survey and monitor teachers as language teaching becomes just another business with products to be delivered to clients. Lema (2017, p. 9) comments. "Giroux refers to the "age of economic Darwinism in which educators are expected to adapt to free-market regulations by becoming traders and salesperson of knowledge, students become the customers and consumers of knowledge, and education becomes an industry of commodities ready to be exploited and managed as any other business".

Hence, in order to control and manage programs and teaching, schools may have procedures in place to ensure a close degree of alignment between the stated curriculum and teachers' practices. These include:

⟩ schemes of work that are provided for teachers or that teachers develop themselves;
⟩ teachers' lesson plans, which may be reviewed by supervisors;
⟩ observation, both for purposes of monitoring, professional development, or evaluation;
⟩ procedures for the evaluation of teacher performance.

Using a prescribed approach or method

In addition teachers are often encouraged to adopt an established "approach" of philosophy of teaching (e.g. *learner-centredness, co-operative learning, communicative teaching,*) or a particular teaching method such as *Task-Based Teaching* or *Content-Based Teaching*. Methods are central to many teacher education programs and depending on where they study, one or more methods or approaches is often chosen as the basis for classroom instruction. These are believed to best encapsulate the current state of knowledge and best practice in language teaching and can be used to achieve the competencies identified in the institutional or national curriculum. For example in the Philippines a widely used general teacher

training text (*Methods of Teaching*: Salandanan 2012) presents a variety of teaching methods classified according to whether they are intended for whole-class teaching, small group teaching or for individualized instruction. Different methods reflect different assumptions about the nature of good teaching, the practices and techniques teachers should make use of, the teacher's role in the classroom, the kinds of language and resources they should use, and the kinds of grouping arrangements and interactions that should occur in their classrooms. Presented with a recommended approach or method such as *Task-Based Teaching, CLIL*, or *Text-Based Instruction*, the teachers' task is to study the method and its principles and then apply the procedures it recommends to their own teaching. To be able to do this, teachers need to replace their existing understanding of teaching methods with one or more alternative philosophies. This is normally addressed in a number of ways:

⟩ *By persuasion*: philosophical or ideological reasons may be used to support the new beliefs, such as arguments in favour of the value of learner autonomy or collaborative learning.

⟩ *By citing theory and research that supports the new method*: this has characterized promotion of the Natural Approach and Task-Based Language Teaching as was also true of earlier methods such as Audiolingualism.

⟩ *By citing evidence of successful learning outcomes*: this is often seen in discussions of CLIL and Content-Based Instruction.

⟩ *By appeals to authorities*: support from credible experts and authorities can also be persuasive, such as recommendations from leading academics, "gurus," educational authorities and organizations, and so on. Support of this kind was crucial to the acceptance of Communicative Language Teaching in the 1970s (Richards 2014).

Of course teachers are not robots. They are intelligent, thinking individuals who have their own understandings and preferences for how to teach, and the pressure to abandon previous modes of thought and practice can create stress as the teacher attempts to adapt to the constraints imposed by a new philosophy of teaching (Pennington and Richards 2016), one which may involve renegotiation of the teacher's identity.

The ecological approach: teaching as emergent practice

An alternative understanding of teaching starts from a view of the curriculum as process or as an ecology – a bottom-up view of curriculum that views the curriculum as something that emerges from classroom

practice.

The word ecology comes from the Greek oikos, meaning "household", combined with the suffix -logy, meaning "the study of." Thus, the discipline of ecology is literally the study of households, including the plants, animals, microbes, and people that live together as interde- pendent beings. It is a discipline that has increasingly placed an emphasis on holistic studies of both parts and wholes (Zhao and Frank, 2003, p. 8).

Similarly Aoki (in Pinar and Irwin 2005) talks of the "lived curriculum" and of the curriculum as "lived practice." Van Lier (2004) was a powerful advocate of the ecological understanding of curriculum:

> In the ecological perspective, the curriculum does not start out by specifying and sequencing materials, but with the activities, needs, and emergent purposes of the learner. On the basis of activities and emergent needs, the teacher makes resources available in the environment, and guides the learner's perception and action towards an array of affordances that can further his or her goals (Van Lier, 2009, p. 7)

As Kennedy comments (2013, p. 26): "It is person-centred, considers users' needs, identifies problems rather than rushing to solutions, and does not rely on top-down mechanistic models but is a process that works towards interaction between participants at all levels." It sees teaching as something that is more personal and individual. While at the national or institutional level the curriculum is generally quite specific in term of aims, objectives, or learning outcomes and how these are operationalized in the form of the syllabus and textbooks, teaching is not simply a process of enactment. Teachers achieve their aims in different ways, reflecting their beliefs and experience as well as the context in which they are teaching. Teaching is more than just a technical process in which teachers "present" lessons that have been prepared by others, from a book or elsewhere, or "realize" or "implement" plans, even if they have made these themselves. Good teaching is a dynamic and interactive process. Many unplanned things occur during lessons. Teachers "create" lessons from the ground up, so to speak. This is what Aoki calls the "lived curriculum" and what we are referring to here as the "ecological perspective".

When teaching is viewed from an ecological understanding, the focus is on how the teacher creates opportunities for learning in the particular learning community that constitutes his or her class. This is a dynamic process that involves interaction, negotiation, improvisation, observation, experimentation, and reflection. Tudor (2003) characterizes the ecological perspective as an insider view of teaching that seeks to

understand the teaching-learning perspective from the viewpoint of the participants and to capture how they experience its subjective reality. It sees teaching and learning as multi-faceted and involving a dynamic interaction between the teacher's methodology and the context of teaching. It is thus a situated or local approach to understanding the decision-making that is at the heart of teaching. At the same time it requires a re-evaluation of how we understand the relationship between theory and practice and the need for the development of a research agenda that acknowledges the complex realities of teaching and learning in the classroom as well as the nature of pedagogical decision-making. In what follows I outlines some of the characteristics of an ecological approach to teacher-learning and how teaching viewed as emergent practice can be supported.

Realizing personal values and principles

Teachers teach in different ways, bringing to their teaching their own personal beliefs and principles as well as their own interpretation of a teacher's role in the classroom. Hence, even though two teachers work toward identical goals, they may choose different ways of getting there. For example, Bailey (1996) and Richards (1996) both report studies of how teachers' principles prompted departures from their lesson plans. Bailey described the principles that prompt teachers to make the following improvisations:

> *Serving the common good:* Change focus to a problem that many learners experienced in the class.
> *Teaching to the moment:* React to immediate opportunities that arise during lessons.
> *Furthering the lesson:* Move the lesson on when possibilities are exhausted.
> *Accommodating different individual learning styles:* Improvise with different teaching strategies.
> *Promoting student involvement:* Allow space for students to participate.
> *Distributing the wealth:* Stop particular students from dominating the class, and encourage other students to take turns.

Teachers' principles such as these are a product of their experience, their training, and their beliefs. Breen (n.d., p. 45) suggests that teachers' principles are central to their capacity to adopt change and provide a type of lens through which they review innovations:

> Any innovation in classroom practice – from the adoption of a
> new task or textbook to the implementation of a new

curriculum – has to be accommodated within a teacher's own pedagogic principles. Greater awareness of what these are on the part of the designer or curriculum planner and, indeed, the teachers themselves, will facilitate harmony between a particular innovation and the teacher's enacted interpretation of it in the classroom. The opportunity for teachers to reflect upon the evolving relationship between their own beliefs and their practices lies at the heart of curriculum change (Breen op.cit).

The kinds of principles that support the teacher's practice may, of course, lead to either a teacher-dominated product approach to teaching or, alternatively, reflect a more ecological view of learning. The following are some examples of principles of the first kind:

- Teach to the test.
- Always work toward accuracy of language use.
- Follow the lesson plan.
- Avoid distractions.

Examples of principles of the second kind are:

- Find out how learners learn best.
- Acknowledge diversity among learners as a strength.
- Minimize the teacher's role in the lesson.
- Facilitate learner responsibility or autonomy.

An important focus in teacher education, therefore, is to provide the means by which teachers can make explicit the theories and principles that inform their teaching. As Leung and Teasdale (1988, p. 20) observe:

> Clearly there can be effective teaching without teachers making explicit the theories which underlie their practice. However, we would contend that, other things being equal, privileging and developing the intellectual frameworks which inform teaching offers a principled way of conceptualizing teaching as purposeful action.

The role of identity

An important factor that shapes the way a teacher interacts with his or her learners and the kind of teaching he or she employs is the nature of teacher identity. How a teacher understands and expresses his or her identity influences the kind of principles a teacher seeks to realize and is a primary determinate of the social relations that develop within the teacher's classroom. It hence serves as a backdrop to the kind of teacher he or she is and the kind of teaching he or she seeks to realize and how he or she sees both the role of the teacher as well as that of the learners. Learning to teach

is a struggle not only around methods and content knowledge, but essentially, about who one is as a 'teacher'. Teacher development can be seen as part of the process of "transformative re-imagining of the self" (Danielewicz 2001, p. 133). From a sociocultural and critical perspective, teacher identity is seen to be socially constructed, as well as influenced by the powerful ideologies teacher-learners bring to the classroom with them. A social perspective emphasizes that teachers are not only involved in cognitive processes but also social processes.

Teachers construct their identity through the unfolding social interaction of the classroom and in relation to the specific activities and relationships that come into play in language teaching (Pennington and Richards 2016). This reminds us that teachers are different. Each teacher is a unique individual whose self-image and sense of identity is based on values and beliefs about how he or she should conduct their life and behave in front of students, colleagues and parents. This means that teacher-identity, like other forms of identity is set according to a concept of "good" and "proper" or "appropriate" behavior-guiding actions. This value-construct then provides mental images for monitoring and assessing one's own performance, so that a person has in a sense two different identities, (1) an *aspirational* or ideal identity that is "a mental construct or image and goal for behavior" (and (2) a *performed* or actual identity, as those aspects of identity which are revealed in behavior, whether motivated consciously or unconsciously.

In teaching, identity emerges as a dynamic construct which is shaped by the particular context in which the teacher works (e.g., a teacher of young learners, of boys, of girls, of adults) and which may have different dimensions at different times. A challenge for a new teacher is deciding on the kind of identity that will work for him or her, depending on the teaching context – who the students are and what their expectations are for a teacher. Various facets of the teacher's identity are played out every day in the classroom as a set of attitudes and behaviors and also constitute an image which the teacher has of her/himself and wishes to project and realize through teaching acts. The identity which a teacher projects in a classroom at a given moment or over time will also be in part a projection of the teacher's view of the institutional role of *teacher* and in part a projection of a unique individual identity based on the teacher's autobiography.

While one's teaching craft draws on aspects of personal identity stemming from the person's unique nature and history — these must also connect to the concept of a teacher's identity as articulated by the discipline or profession of language teaching. Thus, a teacher creates a professional identity by connecting his or her individual characteristics to the characteristics of the field as a whole and to the qualities and attributes it

expects of a good language teacher. These may differ according to the teacher's "method" or approach, since different methods and approaches reflect different assumptions about teacher and student identities, as is reflected in sometimes contrasting teaching philosophies supporting task-based teaching, Cooperative Learning, learner autonomy and so on. Different teaching methods or approaches assume particular roles for teachers, and these may at times conflict with a teacher's sense of her/his own identity. Thus, a teacher who is required to teach according to a set syllabus or course book or to the prescriptions of a particular method philosophy may experience "identity stress" in attempting to adapt to the constraints imposed by using that syllabus or book or method.. Similarly, teaching in a new context – whether it be a new type or level of a course, a new school or district, or a new country – and with new student groups always requires adjustments and offers opportunities for identity negotiation in response to context (Pennington and Richards 2016).

Engaging in improvisational teaching

Teaching as improvisation means teaching accompanied with observation, reflection, and assessment, enabling the teacher to make "online" decisions about which course of action to take from a range of available alternatives. These interactive decisions, based on critical incidents and other unanticipated aspects of the lesson, often prompt teachers to change course during a lesson. Rather than adhere strictly to a script or lesson plan that dictates the nature of the lesson, the teacher, while keeping broader purposes in mind, adapts, revises, changes direction, and improvises around significant or teachable moments that occur during lessons. This notion of teaching as improvisation is illustrated in the teachers' comments below.

> *The longer I teach the more often "teachable moments" emerge in my teaching. It might be a topic, a particular text, a situation – many prompts can invite me to share a story or an experience with my learners which relates to the lesson goals. Usually I find these diversions are helpful; sometimes they relieve tension when we have been working hard on something. For instance, one day I was working through some examples with my EAP class on how to integrate another writer's ideas into my own text. In the example I was using, one of the learners suddenly stopped me to ask about the name of one of the authors in the in-text citation. Since I had noticed that my learners frequently confused Western authors' first and family*

names, this gave me a perfect opportunity to draw attention to the names of the authors in the text and to ask them to suggest what the citation would be if each of them had written the original text. Personalizing the example in this way and being willing to be diverted from the focus of the activity at hand is sometimes necessary. I usually tell myself if one learner has thought it important enough to ask the question, others are likely to be wondering about the same thing. It's important to be ready to let the learners' agenda take over at times.
(Teacher A, English teacher, UAE)

Teachers who engage in what we can call "principled improvisation" view lessons as a collaborative process between the teacher and the learners, shaped by the teacher's plans for the lesson but also moving in unpredictable directions through the interactions that take place.

These new directions result from "online" processing of the lessons and may be prompted by critical incidents that arise as well as the learners' responses to a lesson. No matter how brief or detailed the teacher's lesson plan may be, the teacher monitors students' performance during a lesson and makes many individual decisions based on how the lesson is proceeding. These decisions may involve providing an explanation of a concept or language item, clarifying procedures to carry out a task, questioning students about language knowledge or changing the focus of an activity, as we saw above in the discussion of teachers' principles and as we see in the following comments from teachers on their lessons (cited in Richards 1998), which illustrate that teaching is not so much a process of realizing plans, but a creative interaction between plans, student responses, and teacher improvisation:

I realized that they were having difficulty with the vocabulary, so I decided to add extra vocabulary work and spent more time eliciting vocabulary than I'd planned. By building in an extra vocab activity, they were able to do the writing task more successfully.

[...]

I always think of lesson plans as a kind of springboard. I never write them out in full and usually just work from a few points I want to cover. But I am always ready to drop my plan if something comes up that I see the students want to spend more time on. Or perhaps they are having a difficulty with language that I had not anticipated, so I might need to spend more time

on vocabulary or grammar or something.

[...]

I changed my mind twice during my last lesson, sensing that what I'd planned was too much for the students. I think I must have taken into account their body language, subconsciously almost. I'd been going to get them to complete worksheets individually as homework for the next class, but then I decided to get the class as a whole to collaborate and do it as a whole-class activity, pooling their knowledge. It worked really well.

Drawing on creative thinking

Another way in which teachers create lessons from the "bottom- up" is through using dimensions of individual creativity to enable them to move beyond the prescribed syllabus or textbook unit and to build lessons that are reflect creative thinking. Creativity is usually described as having a number of different dimensions:

- the ability to solve problems in original and valuable ways that are relevant to goals;
- seeing new meanings and relationships in things and making connections;
- having original and imaginative thoughts and ideas about something;
- using the imagination and past experience to create new learning possibilities.

Creativity depends upon the ability to analyze and evaluate situations and to identify novel ways of responding to them. This is not necessarily the same as engaging in improvisational teaching, since creative thinking may shape the form of a lesson *before* it is taught during the planning stage. Of course sometimes teachers improvisations are also very creative, though they need not necessarily be, as for example when a teacher decides to add a grammar drill to a lesson to increase the accuracy of the students' performance on a task.

Bruner (1962, p. 3) defined creativity as "an act that produces *effective surprise*." Fisher (2004, p. 9) comments:

It is originality that provides effective surprise. To do the same things in the same way is not to be creative, to do things differently adds variation to mere habit, but when we do or think things we have not done before, and they are effective, we are being original and fully creative.

The creative teacher does not simply present lessons from the book. He or she looks for original ways of creating lessons and using the textbook and teaching materials and seeks to create lessons that reflect his or her individual teaching style. This is another way of saying that being creative means seeking to adapt and modify lessons to better match the learners' needs. For this reason creative teachers are generally very different from each other. Learning to be a creative teacher does not mean modeling or copying the practices of other creative teachers, but rather it means understanding the principles that underlie creative teaching. Individual teachers will realize these principles in different ways.

> *Even though my students don't seem to like writing in class, I realised that they do quite a bit of writing in their daily lives, in the form of tweets and Facebook updates for example. I created a twitter account and a Google+ page for our class and got students to start writing short messages in response to each other. Gradually I assigned them different roles and had everyone contribute different parts to a short story we wrote collaboratively. The students loved it as it made the activity more familiar to their out-of-class experiences.* (Caroline, Colombia)

> *In my Business writing course we have to work with lots of very routine texts such as email messages, blogposts and business letters. To make it more interesting I ask students at the start of the semester to invent their own company, logo, staff list and products so that they can use this material when they are developing their own scenarios and situations throughout the semester rather than having to stick rigidly to examples in the textbook. In this way, they create a kind of personal narrative throughout the semester, telling different stories about what has happened in the company and what they need to communicate about.* (Manuel, Peru)

Using one's own materials

The approach known as Dogme (a term taken from the film industry that refers to filming without scripts or rehearsal) advocates building lessons around resources found in the classroom. It is based on the idea that instead of using a pre-planned syllabus, a set of objectives, and published materials, teaching is built around conversational interaction between teacher and students and among students themselves. "Teaching should be done using only the resources that the teachers and students bring to the classroom – i.e.

themselves and what happens to be in the classroom" (Meddings and Thornbury 2009).

Thornbury (2012) explains that Dogme considers learning to be experiential and holistic and language learning to be an emergent jointly constructed and socially constituted process motivated by both communal and communicative imperatives. He further comments (2013, p. 219):

> In effect, Dogme attempts to accommodate two kinds of emergence: at the social, or macro, level where language emerges out of collaborative activity, and at the individual, or micro, level, where each learner's developing linguistic system evolves out of the need to satisfy their social and communicative needs.

Rethinking the role of the teacher

Teaching from the ecological perspective means that the teacher sees his or her role not so much as being a technician but as being a facilitator whose task is to help learners realize their own potential for learning. Key to this task is the ability to observe, to listen, and to reflect. The reflective practitioner reviews and reflects on his or her assumptions and beliefs and the assumptions underlying his or her teaching practices, for example through the use of activities such as journal writing, blogging, peer observation, or though audio or video recording some of his or her lessons. In the following account, a teacher describes how journal writing provides a regular opportunity to reflect on his teaching, enabling him to become more self-aware in his approach to teaching as well to plan for the future.

> *I keep a teaching journal in which I jot down thoughts and reflections on my teaching. I try to take 30 minutes or so, once a week, to look back at my teaching and reflect on things of interest, orissues that arose that I need to think more about. If I have tried out a new activity and it worked particularly well, I may make a note of it for future reference. I find journal-writing to be a useful consciousness-raising tool. It helps me focus on things that I may otherwise forget and helps me make better decisions about my future teaching. It's interesting to read things I wrote at different times to get a sense of my understanding of myself as a teacher.*

Engaging in reflective and exploratory practice

Reflective and exploratory practice refers to activities that teachers use to better understand the relationships between teaching and learning and the nature of classroom life and to try to appreciate how learning emerges out of the opportunities or affordances that are provided in the classroom. The reflective dimension to these activities refers to exploring classroom experience through a reflective lens, that is, one which questions the meaning of classroom experiences for both teachers and learners. The exploratory dimension, as developed by Allwright (2005) and others, refers to teachers and learners identifying issues and concerns in teaching (e.g., the use of the mother tongue in teaching; learning with large groups of learners) and examining them through the use of everyday classroom activities and practices rather than conventional research methodologies.

Focusing on learning from the learners' perspective

Teaching from the perspective of the learners is reflected in the following aspects of the teacher's lessons:

- The degree of engagement learners have with the lesson.
- The extent to which learners' responses shape the lesson.
- The amount of learner participation and interaction that occurs.
- The learning outcomes the lesson produced.
- The ability to present subject matter from the learners' perspective.
- How the teacher is able to reshape the lesson based on learner feedback.
- How the lesson reflects learners' needs and preferences.
- How the lesson connects with the learners' life experiences.
- How the teacher responds to learners' difficulties.

Here a teacher describes how she made a shift in her understanding of teaching as she realized the need for a learner-centered perspective on teaching:

> *As a beginning teacher, I was given the lower levels of English, and classes tended to be large, about 30 students. I enjoyed the dynamics of a large class and prepared my classes thinking of how I could get across the grammar I was teaching. I looked at the textbook and planned how to get through each activity of the unit I was planning. I felt if I could go through every textbook and workbook activity, students would learn. Of course, this type of thinking was somewhat top-down because I assumed that giving out the*

information on these activities would be the way for my students to learn the language. In essence, I controlled these activities, beginning with the first activity and continuing on with each one. The activities seemed to be rushed. In one of my classes, I was teaching questions in the present simple tense, such as "What do you do?" "Where do you live?" etc. I ran through the activities, and at the end of the class, two of my students asked me if they could use the grammar related to their lives. It was a wake-up call for me, and I learned two things. I realized my way of thinking was not tapping into my students' lives, and that completing all the book activities was not necessarily the best way for learning. (Teacher B, teacher, Mexico. Cited in Richards 2015b, p. 121)

Senior (2006, 200) suggests that a central aspect of learner-focused teaching is creating a classroom that functions as a community of learners. "It is sometimes forgotten that language classes operate as communities, each with its own collection of shared understandings that have been built up over time. The overall character of each language class is created, developed and maintained by everyone in the room." Teachers employ different strategies to develop a sense of community among their learners. These include using group-based activities, addressing common student interests and concerns, regularly changing seating arrangements so that students experience working with different classmates, using humor and other ways of creating a warm and friendly classroom atmosphere, and recognizing that students have social, as well as learning, needs in the classroom.

Activities such as those described above can also help lower the level of anxiety many learners experience in classroom learning. Trying to communicate in a second language is inherently stressful, since loss of face is involved if one's efforts are less than successful. For the learner, trying to understand how the class functions, how typical classroom tasks (such as group work) unfold, what his or her role should be in the class, and whether he or she has correctly understood the teachers' intentions can also create anxiety. Teaching therefore means not only engaging learners with the content of lessons but also considering the emotional demands that learning a language involves and helping students develop the emotional skills needed to use English in both these situations (Dörnyei 2001; Dörnyei and Murphey 2003). The kind of bond that the teacher establishes with his or her students plays a part in lowering the anxiety level in the classroom. Developing an awareness of the causes of negative emotions associated with language learning can also be achieved through activities in which students

talk or write about how they deal with the affective dimensions of language learning.

Helping learners become autonomous learners

Learner autonomy refers to the principle that learners should take increasing responsibility for what they learn and how they learn it (Benson 2011). Autonomous learning makes learning more personal and focused and contrasts with the traditional teacher-led approach in which most decisions are made by the teacher. A focus on learner autonomy can be realized in a number of different ways – for example, through the teacher's awareness of his or her learners' needs, through introducing and modeling strategies for independent learning, through giving learners techniques they can use to monitor their own learning, through regular consultation with students to help learners plan for their own learning, and through the use of a self-access center where a variety of self-directed learning resources are available. Benson (2011) outlines five principles for fostering autonomous learning:

1. Be actively involved in student learning.
2. Provide options and resources.
3. Offer choices and decision-making opportunities.
4. Support learners.
5. Encourage reflection.

In teaching that seeks to develop autonomous learning, the teacher becomes less of an instructor and more of a facilitator. Indeed, students are discouraged from relying on the teacher as the main source of knowledge and urged instead to develop a capacity to learn for themselves, and an awareness of their own learning styles and learning strategies. The Council of Europe's European Language Portfolio (ELP; Little 2002), which is intended to help support autonomous learning on a wide scale, demonstrates the application of the principles of learner autonomy. The ELP has three components: a language passport, which summarizes the owner's linguistic identity; a language biography, which provides for a reflective account of the learner's experience in learning and using the foreign language; and a dossier, in which the learner collects evidence of the development of his or her proficiency in the language. The ELP involves regular goal setting and self-assessment.

Conclusion

In any teaching context, teachers are confronted with the challenge of creating lessons that engage their learners, that support and guide their

learning, and that provide content and activities that lead to successful learning outcomes. Various teaching contexts determine the role that the individual teacher plays in the process. On the one hand, many of the decisions that involved in teaching are outside of the teacher's control. They have been made by others and good teaching is identified with the teacher's successful use of recommended methods, teaching strategies, and materials. A successful lesson is one that conforms to expected norms of practice. However, the alternative understanding of teaching that we refer to as an ecological approach here views teaching as something that is more indeterminate. While it occurs within defined parameters and is not simply a case of "anything goes", its nature is much less predictable and reflects both the individual attributes that the teacher brings to teaching and the dynamics that develop in the teacher's class. These, in turn, reflect the learning culture that develops over time as a result of the interaction among the students and between the teacher, the students, and the content of his or her lessons. In this sense, classroom teaching and learning becomes an ecology. As Tudor emphasizes, this involves viewing language teaching from beyond the official perspective seen in curriculum frameworks and statements of competencies. It involves recognizing that there are different rationalities involved in understanding a situation rather than a single concept and that there are different perceptions and choices possible. Participants bring different understandings and perceptions to the classroom context and to their experience of teaching and learning and this is the reality that needs to be acknowledged and explored.

The author

Professor Jack C. Richards has had an active career in the Asia Pacific region and is currently an honorary professor at the University of Sydney, at the University of Auckland and an adjunct professor at Victoria University, Wellington. He is a frequent presenter worldwide and has written over 150 books and articles on language teaching as well as many widely used classroom texts. In 2016 the TESOL organization as named him as one of the 50 TESOL specialists worldwide to have made a significant impact on language teaching in the last 50 years.

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