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Abstract Proposal

Title: *The Algerian Teacher of English in the Digital Age: For the Implementation of an In-Service Digital Education*

Much has been written on the Algerian learners' internet practices, social media uses, digital identities etc.; much less, however, has been done on their Middle and High School teachers of English and their uses of electronic media, in and outside school. What is these teachers' digital proficiency? What form(s) of in-service training do they receive in the broad field of IT? What are the true challenges that face them in our global electronic age?

Our joint paper is both an empiricist investigation and a reflective contribution aimed at addressing the above issues in relation to: one, the implementation of a competency-based curriculum in the Algerian course of English informed by effective and creative digital literacy; two, the pressing demands of our global, digital age in terms of cultural exchange and intercultural communication. The results of our research will hopefully suggest a new approach for the implementation of an efficient in-service digital course to the Algerian teachers of English.

Introduction

The teacher development issue is of a major importance in our country within this period of a big change in the ultimate goal of education, the contents as well as the approaches. Building learners' autonomy needs a teacher development policy that goes hand in hand with the new education policy put forward by the reform. The inadequacy of the Algerian teacher development policy in English language learning with the engaged reform has been highly criticized. The present in-service teacher training policy substantiates a top-down approach and is therefore centralized around one-shot workshop type of seminar, by following the cascade model. This type of procedure is close to teacher-training and far from responding to the philosophy of teacher development.

It is commonly acknowledged now that a teacher development policy should respond to teachers' needs, strengths and weaknesses to help teachers to cope with the change. Accordingly, teachers should be therefore involved in the finding of new and personal ways of "learning to learn" for the purpose of acquiring linguistic, communication skills and professional understanding of instructional classroom processes on the one hand, and of acquiring skills of syllabus innovation, implementation, and experimentation, on the other hand. What is needed, then, is a long term teacher development program in which in-service teachers are invited to deconstruct and reconstruct their own experiences/practices in ways that might enable them to understand and internalize the constructivist practice. To do this, the need to support the teacher development policy in Algeria by ITCs should be envisaged to equip teachers with the right competencies that lead them to autonomy.

A teacher development course should be multidimensional as it encompasses theory and practice, shared reflection and interaction between new and experienced teachers, discussion and evaluation of teaching practices in relation with educational theory. In addition, the program is constructivist as it links students' learning needs with doing (practice) and their personal experience. This type of a program has to be cohered within a new vision of teacher development inserted in an efficient in-service digital course

In our examination of teacher professional development under the new educational climate of the Algerian system, to ascertain whether the Algerian teacher educational policy responds to the new demand and changes imposed by the constructivist trend, we feel it worth providing a methodological framework to conduct a study on the implementation of the reform.

The overall goals of the Algerian curriculum in English language learning sets clearly the new teacher profile responding to the competency-based approach and the constructivist tend of education. It particularly reads:

L'approche par les compétences, basée sur une logique d'apprentissage, ne veut en aucun cas amoindrir le rôle de l'enseignant. Elle se propose d'aider l'enseignant à devenir autonome en le libérant du « carcan » des fiches pédagogiques qui ne tiennent pas en compte des spécificités de chaque élève (...) pour cela il doit : -travailler régulièrement par situations problèmes -négocier et mener des projets avec ses élèves

-considérer les savoirs comme des ressources à mobiliser

-travailler en collaboration avec les collègues

(Document d'accompagnement du programme d'Anglais de 3eme année secondaire, 2006 :11)

Review of literature

The use of a teacher education policy makes it necessary to rely on models of teacher professional learning. In this respect, Wallace (1991:5) distinguishes three major models: **the craft model, the applied science model, and the reflective model.**

The craft model encompasses training courses which are based on imitation and reproduction of classroom practices and reproduced during teacher training sessions. They refer to the traditional type of teacher-training which is defined by Penny Ur (1996) as “the learning of skills and techniques through observation and imitation of classroom model”.

This option of training courses is inscribed under the banner of traditional teacher-dominated modes of learning to which teachers are exposed during their own schooling. Kennedy (1997) refers to them as “apprenticeship of observation pedagogies”. In this model, a teacher learns to teach in the way apprentices learn crafts.

Attention is needed to the distinction between the former model and the applied science model. Differently from the craft model which is solely based on the reproduction of classroom practices, the applied science model appeals to theory about applied linguistics and didactics inasmuch as through this model teachers learn to teach by being taught research-based theories before implementing them in their classrooms. It is a model which combines

theory and practice. Teachers are provided with theoretical assumptions which they are asked to implement in their classrooms.

Radically different from the two models mentioned above, is the reflective model which follows out a learning process and develops moral, cultural, social, and intellectual aspects of the whole person as an individual and a member of society. The reflective model is based on experience from which personal theories about teaching and learning are reflected before they are tried out in the field. This model suggests that teachers learn to teach by reflecting on their own experience to develop their professional abilities further.

Teacher professional development models

After having given a general view on teacher training and teacher development, we can now turn more precisely to teacher professional development models. Before considering the issue, it is of particular interest to define a model. In this respect, two definitions can be found in literature. A model can mean a design for learning, underlying knowledge about teaching practice and approaches facilitating teachers' knowledge; or it can be seen as a staff development plan used to as a guiding framework for the design of a staff development program. The following models have a direct relation to Joyce and Well's definition.

i-The Cascade Model

The cascade model is a top-down approach to teacher training; it is based on centralized training. The cascade model, called also a multiplier approach, is organized through large scale centralized workshops or courses driven by expert instructors who transmit theory via lectures and presentations or paradigms to be reproduced. In this model, one or two teachers from every school are trained at off-site courses and are given the role of pedagogy transmitters. The pedagogical authorities rely on those teachers who attend the workshops to pass the newly gained information to their colleagues. Based on exhortation rather than on practice modelling, these workshops have rarely a positive impact on teachers' approaches and lead to little change in teachers' classroom practice. According to E. Leu (2004:2), "This can be an effective strategy for transmitting messages about aspects of educational reform, for example, when mechanisms and support are in place, to ensure that the multiplication takes place. This is rarely the case and therefore most frequently the information does not cascade down to lower levels at all".

ii- Cases and Case Methods

Currently, there is a growing consensus that cases and case method in teaching are powerful tools for teacher professional development. In order to understand fully what cases are, and why they represent genuine materials for teachers to grow professionally, a definition of “cases” is required. According to Judith H. Schulman (2002) , a case includes reflective comments made by a teacher-author who raises many questions on his performance. Teacher empowerment can be driven through case writing which is awareness-raising, and discussion about experiences through examination, exploration, and analysis of what takes place in the classroom.

Teacher development through case study provides guidance and refinement of classroom practices. Case methods generally include discussion, role play, written analysis and aim at developing attitudes and techniques, skills of observation and competences. For quote Schulman, “cases are powerful means to develop habits and techniques of reflection as well as stimulus, to analytical thinking” (ibid).

A suggested teacher learning model

Unlike the top-down approach, a teacher professional development curriculum based on a constructivist orientation should be a curriculum designed to cope with the big change; one which should be matched closely to teachers’ needs, strengths and weaknesses. This cannot escape the involvement of teachers in the finding of new and personal ways of “learning to learn”; the acquisition of language and communication skills and professional understanding of instructional classroom process, the acquisition of skills of curriculum innovation, implementation, and experimentation. In sum, to empower teachers is to prepare them for long-term self- development through a program relevant to the local context and culture, so that teachers can encounter classroom realities and problems.

Teacher development should be a process, not an event. It should be considered as a continuum of learning with teachers having different needs and experiences, teachers who share the same long-termed goals. This professional learning process has to be achieved in stages or short- time goals in collaboration with school supervisors, qualified inspectors, highly trained head-teachers, and peer-teachers.

Dealing with this teacher-development program model, Dr Linda Valli (University of Maryland College Park-College of Education -Department of Curriculum and Instruction

(2004) insists on encouraging teachers to think about professional development across the entire spectrum of teachers; she believes that they should be immersed in:

- (1)-pre-service training (teachers who are just beginning their preparation as teachers),
- (2) -induction programmes (teachers newly licensed), and
- (3) -in-service training (experienced teachers).

L.Valli (2004) suggests to push trainees' thinking in new directions and to deepen their knowledge through a reading program that should be assigned to every teacher-student. This program will encompass diverse readings evolving around core ideas. The inspector's role will be that of a facilitator, evaluator, resource and provocateur. Teachers will share their interests, questioning and findings in class discussions and through e-mails.

In the author's view, the program which comprises:

- (1) required readings,
- (2) recommended readings;
- (3) a detailed class schedule which organizes topics over time and relates every topic to specific texts and authors of the required and recommended readings sections, and
- (4) an assignments/grading section which engages teachers to prepare term final papers. All the scheduled assignments are designed to contribute to their meaningful professional development and educational improvement efforts.

The program is detailed in its assignments/grading section. It comprises a teacher development procedure evolving around class readings, note taking, and teachers' participation in discussions according to the class schedule. Teachers are encouraged to submit questions, observations, ideas, outlines and papers throughout the training period. To be effective, all this should follow a timeframe.

By responding to the core questions set in the program using the extensive notes they write about their readings, and sharing their insights with others in organized class sessions, they can develop alternative perspectives, criticisms, and consider their weaknesses. All this should serve as a basis for the accomplishment of their final papers. Every participant is encouraged to take part in discussions and is given the opportunity to be a leader once a semester. He will be asked to lead or co-lead a class discussion and make a summary within two days following class. These notes and other relevant questions should serve for reflection and exploration and lead to complementary sources beyond the assigned readings.

Designed assignments are of different types. They encompass short papers, website assignments, and a final paper with presentation. During the training period, every teacher is asked to submit two or three papers in which he should state the chosen topic, to give a feedback of his readings by stating whether his thinking about topic is confirmed or altered, and whether they added to his knowledge. Then he is asked to write a well-reasoned critique of the readings and a reference list of at least three extra articles which are closely related to the topic of the final paper, with some direction for reading recommendations.

For his website assignments, the student teacher should provide, individually or in groups, an exploration of two or three professional development websites, which are closely linked to the focus of the topic and contribute toward his final assignment. He is asked to compose an email message in which he will explain the general purpose of the websites, assess their strengths and weaknesses and finally make recommendations for improvements.

For his final paper, the trainee is asked to create an ideal teacher training program, alone or in group. The paper should follow suggested guidelines in the form of questions. The suggested outline is:

- What is the basic problem you're trying to address?
- Why is this significant area for teacher learning and improvement?
- What does the scholarly literature contribute to your knowledge? (Where does it fall short?)
- What might be the elements of an ideal program?
- Why is this model not widespread? What are some obstacles (individual and institutional) and how might they be overcome?

The paper should comprise thirty pages and twenty references and the trainee(s) can interact with the teacher for appropriate feedback to questions, outline, drafts, throughout the semester. To end with, an assignment point system is put to the attention of the learning community to show how grades will be distributed. A point system is provided to evaluate teachers contributions.

The author states that the grading will account for participants' substantive contributions based on readings, insights demonstrations, grasp of the literature in writing work and presentations, on-time attendance and contributions based on readings. In other

terms, contributions will rely on tasks. In the end, On-Line Resources and references are provided.

A suggested teacher learning model for the Algerian system of education

In the same perspective, our recommendation would be to design a course which takes into account the Algerian context of education and teacher development, revolving around a community learning in every educational district under the supervision of higher education institutions. This course will serve in-service teacher development, and the grades will count for half the mark given to teachers for their advancement in their careers; the second half will be the mark gained by the teacher during the visit of the district inspector.

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Studies have shown that an appropriate use of ICT connects learning to real-life situations and therefore improves educational quality. Being an ongoing lifelong activity where learners can bring changes in their projections by seeking knowledge, which departs from traditional approaches. Consequently, they will need to seek out new sources of knowledge; this is the reason why skills in using ICT will be an indispensable prerequisite for teachers.

To guide teachers in the acquisition of the digital competency, an appropriate learning environment should be thought of. In this perspective, it is worth dealing with the notion of coaching.

a- Peer Coaching

An additional teacher development model is peer coaching. Peer coaching is defined as a process in which two or more teachers work together to meet a predetermined purpose to refine classroom practices and performance.

b- Collegial coaching, or reciprocal coaching which is based on a reflective process of teachers who engage in professional dialogue about their practice for the purpose of refining it.

c- Challenge coaching, for its part, demonstrates a more engaged approach to teacher development inasmuch as it develops a team approach to working in problem solving contexts on the implementation of instructional design and delivery of a new curriculum, textbook, of teachers guides. This model encompasses features of competency-based approach to teacher development.

d- Collaborative learning and Mentoring: Collaborative learning has gained ground in the teaching process. Accordingly, collaboration in teacher education is also considered to be a key element and “a powerful vehicle for exposing and developing knowledge of teaching” (Freeman *et al*, 1996:79).

e -Teacher professional development and E-learning

E-learning is a predominant feature of the methodological competency. It encompasses personal research and collaborative learning inasmuch E-learners interact with one another and exchange knowledge and skills for the purpose of modelling their research projects.

Through E-learning, teachers encounter problem- solving situations which mindfully engage them in collaboration and interaction with peers. Therefore, teachers’ use of a computer should not focus on the tool as deliver of content but on how this media can facilitate his construction of knowledge. In other terms, what imports is more the process of learning rather than the product.

The rapid development of knowledge and the increasing accessibility of information sources make the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) more and more essential. The potential they represent for research, information processing, creation and communication in learning communities is further enhanced by the possibility of instantly exchanging ideas or sharing or processing data from a distance. Information and communication networks, thus, create new prospects for lifelong learning (Quebec Education Program-Secondary School Education, Cycle One, 2004:46).

As clearly indicated above, prerequisite knowledge, particularly with regard to computer use, is considered as an important factor. Together with other significant factors such as critical judgment and creativity, prerequisite computer knowledge (digital competency) is seen as one of the most fundamental cause of the learners' difficulty to build a sequence of knowledge from internet.

It is now commonly acknowledged that the use of technology stimulates and facilitates learning especially through project-based activities, teacher-learner collaboration, learner-learner collaboration, and cross-disciplinary work.

It follows that the situation of teacher education, adds a sense of urgency to teachers' need to be equipped with technology competencies so as to develop themselves professionally on the one hand, and to help their students to construct high-order skills, problem-solving strategies and discovery learning, on the other.

To discover new topic or deepen others, select appropriate problem-solution situations which can serve for classroom activities to construct competences, make knowledge acquisition more accessible to learners, help learners to provide solutions to the problems in the learning process, teachers **should be accompanied with a digital program which will bring to the fore the necessity to:**

- 1- support teachers-centered and self-directed learning that facilitates a** meaningful use of computers, knowledge building through a series of operations which lead to selecting, organizing, and interpreting information and data. By accessing to a variety of sources, teachers can gain a critical view on the quality of the learning materials.
- 2- produce a creative environment** that develops teachers' new understanding and the possibility to bring many alternatives to solution-problems in accordance to specific situations encountered by learners. In addition, this creative environment offers all types of texts and resources, addressed to beginners and advanced learners. Within This perspective, ICT offers purpose designed applications which lead to innovative ways to meet a variety of students' learning needs.
- 3- promote collaborative learning inside a school, an educational district, a state within a distance-learning environment.** Collaborative learning via ICTs enables teachers to discuss, communicate, share experiences, ask for alternatives, suggestions, analyze solutions, and explore alternatives to problems.

Besides, ICTs facilitate teachers' research as they can collaborate without move, at any time, by interacting with colleagues who are as committed to classroom work as they themselves do. By so doing, teachers share diverse research experiences from one another in order to express themselves and reflect on their teaching.

- 4- develop critical thinking skills** by interpreting concepts, making choices in their teaching sources and classroom activities, giving learners the possibility to suggest alternatives.

As shown above, the use the digital competency can improve teachers' performances in the classroom if it is performed within research skills which ask for critical use and interpretation of information and communication. Teachers should therefore be keen on (1) identifying, (2) selecting, (3) classifying, (4) comparing information, (5) carrying out Web searches (6) using software programs, (7) communicating with e-mails. It also highlights the need to: (1) know how to search for, (2) find, (3) select, (4) store and organize information using various formats, (5) attach files, (6) compress them, (7) consult specialized sites, data banks, written documents; (8) learn to choose among the peripherals at their disposal and use them appropriately. In short teachers should be able to use the ICTs appropriately within a collaborating perspective.

Conclusion

To conclude, it is a truism to say that E-learning is extremely beneficial for teachers inasmuch as it allows them to have access to online courses and electronic conferencing as well as e-mail support from colleagues to keep in touch with a large teacher community so that information available in the web and the discussion they enter can feed into their continuous development.

For purposes of enhancing teacher professional development, it is recommended that in-service programmes should be lengthy and involve teachers in defining the content and objectives rather than having topics imposed upon them. In this respect, a bottom-up approach to teacher education suits better teachers' construction of autonomy as it leads to collaborative learning, motivates teachers, and provides problem solution activities. To put it in other terms, effective in-service programme should target teachers' needs.

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