

## **Pedagogical Knowledge as a Way out of the Beginning ESL Teacher's Stress and Exhaustion**

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### **Abstract**

The current environment of the ESL classes of institutes, in which EFL teachers work, often places the ESL beginning teachers under stress. This stress can be defined as the result of imbalance between the demands that are placed on them in their classrooms and the resources that the particular teacher, has for coping with these demands. Those teachers, who experience continued stress, often start to feel burn-out and the burn-out leads to leaving the profession. Emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and loss of feelings of personal accomplishment are considered to be the three components of this burn-out. From among latent changes, reciprocity and pedagogical knowledge, as the assets of teaching and the factors that would support them, in their time of stress and exhaustion, pedagogical knowledge has been selected to be examined here. It would help beginning ESL teachers to get rid of the obstacles which prevent them from enjoying their job and doing their best in arriving at the goals of ESL teaching and learning as a necessity of the life these days.

**Keywords:** Beginning Teachers, Pedagogical Knowledge

## **Introduction**

In recent years, pedagogical knowledge, has been a focus of research in the literature of teacher knowledge (Magnusson, Krajcik & Borko, 1999; Shulman, 1986). Findings yielded by the research of pedagogical knowledge help researchers deepen their understanding of teacher knowledge in specific areas such as mathematics (Marks, 1990) and science (Lee and Luft, 2008). They also help to professionalize teaching by setting standards in teacher education programs.

In the United States, due to growing number of immigrants, English as a second language (ESL) has always been an essential and important course for English language learners (ELL) and good English is a pathway to academic success and good job opportunities for ELL students.

It is commonly recognized that pedagogical knowledge is essential to develop teachers' knowledge and to prepare novice teachers for effective teaching (Grossman, 1990). However, a survey of the literature reveals little research on pedagogical knowledge and teacher education in the area of ESL.

## **Review of Literature**

### **What is pedagogical knowledge?**

Research has shown that one of the factors that enable effective teachers is their rich Pedagogical Knowledge (Loughran, Berry, & Mulhall, 2006), a knowledge that is built up over time and experience. This form of professional knowledge unique to each teacher can only be gained through teaching practice. The academic construct of pedagogical knowledge is recognition that teaching is not simply the transmission of concepts and skills from teacher to students, but rather, a complex and problematic activity that requires many and varied on-the-spot decisions and responses to students' ongoing learning needs. While much has been written about the nature of Pedagogical knowledge since Shulman first introduced the concept in 1987 and its elusive characteristics have led to much debate, there are still gaps in our knowledge about teacher development of Pedagogical knowledge. However, the work of Magnusson, Krajcik, and Borko (1999) is helpful in clarifying this special form of a teacher's professional knowledge by proposing that Pedagogical knowledge is made up of four components. In their view, an experienced teacher's Pedagogical knowledge encompasses his/her:

- Knowledge of curriculum (what, why and how to teach),
- Knowledge of assessment (why, what, and how to assess),
- Knowledge of students' understanding of the subject, and
- Knowledge of instructional strategies.

### **Planning a course**

Teachers are often asked to work with a course plan that already exists. This may be an explicit document generated within the institution, or a more implicit Statement such as a prescribed course book. But, sometimes, individual teachers or groups of colleagues need to plan

a course themselves. These suggestions should help you to plan a coherent learning experience for your students.

- Know your learners.
- Formulate aims and objectives.
- Name the strands of the learning experience.
- Consider the language content.
- Think about topics and text types.
- Think about processes.
- Decide on a sequence for the course elements.
- Get feedback on your draft course.
- Develop a formal, public document.
- Remain open to change.

### **Choosing the right course book**

A good course book makes a tremendous difference to a program. For learners, it can give confidence and reassurance, as well as the opportunity to look ahead and see what's coming next. For teachers, it offers a framework for course planning as well as lesson-by-lesson support. Sometimes we are told which book to use; but often, individual teachers or groups of colleagues are asked to choose a main book for their program. The following suggestions should help you to evaluate potential course books and choose the best one for your learners.

- Get a clear picture of your students' language learning needs. Then see how well the course book matches them. Is the emphasis on grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation etc. appropriate?
- Examine the syllabus organization. Contents pages usually make it clear whether the book is primarily organized according to a structural, functional, lexical or indeed a multi-syllabus.
- Think about how your students want to learn. Ask yourself whether the methodology suggested by the course book is in fact appropriate for them.
- Examine the subject content of the book. Language learning is part of a wider educational experience, and the thematic content of a course book should be considered from this perspective. A book should provide stimulation and cognitive challenge, without causing bewilderment or offence. This can be a difficult balance to strike when books are written in one cultural context and used in another.
- Think about the kind of classroom interactions you want to have. Find out whether the book is likely to provide them. For example, how much time might your learners like to spend working individually? In pairs or groups? as a whole class? And what sort of tasks would they get most benefit from? By looking at the activities suggested in the course book, you will see how your learners might be relating to each other as they use it.

- Consider your own needs as a teacher. Course books are usually accompanied by teachers' guides, which vary a great deal in the level of support they provide. Ask yourself whether you can empathize with the advice given in the teachers' guide, and what you can learn from it. Will you feel comfortable adopting the roles the teachers' guide suggests for you?
- Consider the needs of your institution. Course books usually come as part of a package that includes teachers' guide, workbooks, cassettes, video...if not more. Is your institution able and willing to purchase all of these? If not, you will need to assess whether the course book is in fact usable without all the other elements of the package. You should also consider how long your new purchases will be expected to last!
- Work with colleagues to choose your course book. Where a book is being chosen for a whole teaching team, it is important for all colleagues to be involved.
- Ask your learners about their criteria for a good course book. This will give you a useful picture of their priorities.
- Whatever evaluation techniques you use, keep your own situation firmly in mind. There are no inherently good or inherently bad course books, only course books which are better or worse in particular situations. Make sure any evaluation you undertake reflects your own priorities.

### **Designing your own materials**

Despite the excellent range of published materials available, and all the options that we have for flexible use of these, there are still occasions when teachers need or prefer to make their own materials. The following suggestions will help you make the most of whatever resources you have available to create materials that will enhance your students' learning experience.

#### *Appearance*

- It is advisable to take care over the appearance of your materials. Not everyone has access to desktop publishing software and laser printers, but we can all make good use of layout, white space and print sizes to make our materials look attractive. By taking care over your materials, you show learners that you have a serious attitude to preparing for the class.

#### *House identity*

- All your materials should include a heading with the name or logo of your institution, course or class gives them a more 'official' stamp and is another encouragement for learners to take them seriously. Learners are more likely to file numbered, titled handouts than odd sheets of paper!
- Have clear objectives for the materials. If you push yourself to say explicitly what your objectives are, it is more likely that you will be able to develop materials that are relevant

to your learners' needs and to the objectives of your course. As you write the materials, the objectives are a reference point to make sure your materials stay on task.

- Choose source material carefully. Your materials will probably be designed around some sort of written or spoken source text. Make sure this is appropriate for the learners in terms of topic and level—and that it lends itself to an exploitation that is relevant to your learners' needs and the objectives of the course.
- Design appropriate tasks. The tasks in your materials need to be appropriate to your course objectives and your learners' interests. They should also be manageable within the time frame you have available. Learners should enjoy them in their own right and/or be able to see why they are important for a future goal.
- Include clear rubrics. Almost all materials include instructions to the learners, and those you make for your own class should not be an exception. Especially for a complex series of tasks, learners can find it reassuring to see all the steps written down in the materials.
- Make the materials personally relevant to the learners. Designing your own materials is an ideal opportunity to build on what you know about your learners' lives and interests. For example, if you are choosing a reading text about a famous person, might it be someone your learners are particularly interested in?
- Ask a colleague to help you. If you get into the habit of asking a colleague to look over drafts of your materials, you will get valuable ideas and suggestions. Mistakes are also far less likely to slip by two people! And if you offer to do the same for your colleague, you will get exposure to even more materials design ideas.
- Consider sharing your materials with colleagues. The time involved in designing your own materials can really pay off when a group of colleagues are sharing materials around. Between you, you can build up a bank of materials for use with particular types of classes. These can be stored in a central area in the staff room. Knowing that others will use your materials is also an excellent incentive to make them as complete and clear as you can.
- Ask learners to contribute source texts. Learners could be asked to search out texts which interest them on particular topics, and you could incorporate some of these into future materials. ESP (English for Special Purposes) learners especially may appreciate the chance for this sort of input—they, after all, know exactly what sort of texts they need to deal with.
- Ask learners for feedback on your materials. They may be particularly willing to give this if they see it as an opportunity to influence the materials you and your colleagues will be designing for them in the near future. It can be very satisfying to learners to see their suggestions and views incorporated into materials.

### **Planning the Assessment**

This section describes different steps within the planning process, highlighting issues most relevant to the assessment of ELLs.

### **Test Purpose**

The purpose of a test must be clear in order for valid interpretations to be made on the basis of the test scores. Tests have different purposes. For example, one test may be used to evaluate students' readiness to advance to the next grade, while another evaluates students' need for remediation. It is also important to outline the specific interpretations that will be made based on the scores. For example, tests used as a criterion for high school graduation will affect students differently than tests designed to inform instructional decisions.

### **Defining the Construct**

A second criterion for validity is a precise and explicit definition of the construct the test is intended to measure. For K-12 assessments, state standards underlie the test specifications.

Sometimes other state documents, such as curriculum frameworks, may clarify knowledge and skills stated in the standards. When defining a construct for an assessment to be given to ELLs, consider in particular how English language skills interact with the construct. For example, when defining the construct for a mathematics test, consider whether it is intended to be a test of mathematics, in which case the test should require no or absolutely minimal English proficiency, or a test of the ability to do mathematics within an English-language educational environment, in which case the ability to comprehend word problems in English may be part of the construct. Similarly, those who define the construct should pay attention to how much of the vocabulary of the discipline in English is to be viewed as part of the assessment.

Defining English proficiency as part of a target construct for an assessment in mathematics or science is neither right nor wrong. It is essential, however, that these definitions be explicit. Furthermore, even if English proficiency is part of the construct, take care to define what level of English proficiency should be expected of students. When defining the linguistic demands to be included in the construct, make an effort to include professionals with backgrounds in educating ELLs.

### **Developing the Assessment Specifications**

Assessment specifications define the test content and explain how that content will be assessed. Assessment specifications also provide a link between a state's content standards and the items or tasks that appear in a particular test. ELLs will therefore, considering ELLs during the initial development of assessment specifications is utterly important. The following points relevant to ELLs should be addressed when writing K-12 assessment specifications.

- **Domain of Knowledge and Skills**

States are likely to have documented content standards for the subject area to be assessed. States may also provide performance standards and other documents that define the domain and their expectations for student achievement. Test developers should review these documents carefully and note the degree to which each standard calls for the ability to read, write, speak, or listen in English.

- **Number and Types of Items or Tasks**

In general, all other things being equal, tests with more items will supply more reliable scores.

- **Relative Weights of Tasks and Skills**

The weight of a task or content category is generally decided by the importance of the assessed task relative to the other tasks on the test and the degree to which the tasks tap content described in the state's standards.

- **Assessment and Response Forms**

Assessment specifications describe how the tasks will be presented to the students and how the students are expected to respond.

### **The Role of Subject Matter Knowledge in Teaching**

Helping students learn subject matter involves more than the delivery of facts and information. The goal of teaching is to assist students in developing intellectual resources to enable them to participate in, not merely to know about, the major domains of human thought and inquiry. These include the past and its relation to the present; the natural world; the ideas, beliefs, and values of our own and other peoples; the dimensions of space and quantity; aesthetics and representation; and so on. Understanding entails being able to use intellectual ideas and skills as tools to gain control over every day, real-world problems.

Philosophical arguments as well as common sense support the conviction that teachers' own subject matter knowledge influences their efforts to help students learn subject matter.

Conant (1963) wrote that "if a teacher is largely ignorant or uninformed he can do much harm" (p. 93). When teachers possess inaccurate information or conceive of knowledge in narrow ways, they may pass on these ideas to their students. They may fail to challenge students' misconceptions; they may use texts uncritically or may alter them inappropriately. Subtly, teachers' conceptions of knowledge shape their practice--the kinds of questions they ask, the idea they reinforce, the sorts of tasks they assign.

Here it focuses on what Shulman (1986) calls subject matter content knowledge. What teachers need to know about the subject matter they teach extends beyond the specific topics of their curriculum. Shulman (1986) argues that "teachers must not only be capable of defining for students the accepted truths in a domain. They must also be able to explain why a particular proposition is deemed warranted, why it is worth knowing, and how it relates to other propositions" (p. 9). This kind of understanding encompasses an understanding of the intellectual fabric and essence of the subject matter itself. For example, while English teachers need to know about particular authors and their works, about literary genres and styles, they also need to know about interpretation and criticism (Grossman, in press). A history teacher needs detailed knowledge about events and people of the past but must also understand what history is: the nature of historical knowledge and what it means to find out or know something about the past. Scheffler (1973) writes that this kind of subject matter understanding "strengthens the teacher's powers and, in so doing, heightens the possibilities of his art" (p. 89).

That teachers may hold such goals for student learning that grow out of their study of subject matter does not, however, dictate a particular pedagogy. In helping students develop such understandings, teachers may play a variety of roles and draw on a variety of knowledge and

skills. Teaching styles and the manner in which teachers organize their classrooms may also vary.

### **The knowledge of instructional strategies**

The NTC introduces the tool in workshops that establish a common language among educators regarding effective methods for language-focused instruction. District teachers, mentors, and administrators use the six key strategies to identify good teaching skills that help them plan lessons that are accessible to a range of students.

- The first of the six key strategies is vocabulary and language development, through which teachers introduce new concepts by discussing vocabulary words key to that concept. Exploring specific academic terms like algorithm starts a sequence of lessons on larger math concepts and builds the student's background knowledge.
- The second strategy is guided interaction. With this method, teachers structure lessons so students work together to understand what they read—by listening, speaking, reading, and writing collaboratively about the academic concepts in the text.
- The third strategy is metacognition and authentic assessment. Rather than having students simply memorize information, teachers model and explicitly teach thinking skills (metacognition) crucial to learning new concepts. Research shows that metacognition is a critical skill for learning a second language and a skill used by highly proficient readers of any language. With authentic assessments, teachers use a variety of activities to check students' understanding, acknowledging that students learning a second language need a variety of ways to demonstrate their understanding of concepts that are not wholly reliant on advanced language skills.
- The fourth strategy is explicit instruction, or direct teaching of concepts, academic language, and reading comprehension strategies needed to complete classroom tasks.
- The fifth strategy is the use of meaning-based context and universal themes, referring to taking something meaningful from the students' everyday lives and using it as a springboard to interest them in academic concepts. Research shows that when students are interested in something and can connect it to their lives or cultural backgrounds they are more highly motivated and learn at a better rate.
- The final strategy is the use of modeling, graphic organizers, and visuals. The use of a variety of visual aids, including pictures, diagrams, and charts, helps all students—and especially ELL students—easily recognize essential information and its relationship to supporting ideas. Visuals make both the language and the content more accessible to students.

### **Methodology**

To prove the positive impact of pedagogical knowledge on decreasing the stress of novice ESL teachers, a two-semester qualitative research was conducted which described and analyzed the events in a foreign language teaching practice course, focusing on the meanings of those events to the participants (student-teachers, teacher-educator and teacher education researcher).

#### **First phase:**



The instruments used in the first phase of the research were first, the teaching practice course content to study the theoretical foundation and course objectives of the teaching practice classes. Secondly, the video recording of the two-semester teaching practice class observations to describe the development of the process of the teaching practice. Thirdly, audio recordings of the interview with teacher-educator in order to investigate the teacher-educator profile and his teacher education conceptions.

**Second phase:**

At the end of the two semesters of teaching practice classes, firstly, some questionnaires were distributed among student-teachers to make their profile and analyze their conceptions about EL teaching and learning. Secondly, student-teacher reflective journals to analyze proposed activities and thirdly, student teachers' reflection sessions on their teaching practice. Fourthly, video-recordings of reflective sessions to reflect about teaching practice actions and results.

**Findings**

The findings revealed that student teachers could make a better association between their theoretical knowledge and their experiences in teaching, after two semesters of pedagogical knowledge classes which were taught by experienced teacher educators.

**Discussion**

The student teachers taught ESL in their teaching practice classes. These teaching practices were video recorded by the researcher and a copy was given. Then, in some reflective sessions these observations were discussed and video recorded again with reflection on their pedagogical practice in order to investigate student teachers decrease of stress and then, doing better in solving problems regarding such topics as teaching approach, activities and objectives, teacher and student roles, teaching grammar, teaching vocabulary, and self-evaluation.

After two semesters of teaching and experiencing in teaching practice classes and under the control of the experienced teachers, the student teachers did really better in linking their experiential knowledge to their theoretical knowledge, as a result of the decrease of their stress and exhaustion.

**Conclusion**

The purpose of this study is to investigate the impact of beginning teachers' pedagogical knowledge and skills during their beginning of teaching. The results of this study showed that the beginning teachers' pedagogical knowledge decreased significantly novice teacher's stress and helped them continue their job as a teacher successfully and self-confidently.

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