

Chapter 1 **Faith, guilt and doing the right thing:**
Theory applied and theory discovered

1 Introduction	2
Acquiring and updating competence	
2 Bad habits	2
Top-down transmission and the teacher as receiver	
The right way to teach	
Guilt and embarrassment	
The need to know	
Awe of authorities	
3 Enquire within: being your own expert	4
Disempowerment	
Inadequacy of the experts	
Different views of teachers' knowledge	
Application and discovery	
4 Opening your classroom door	7
The black box	
Collaborative investigation	
5 Articles of faith	7
Beliefs and habits	
Questioning instead of taking for granted	
6 A dispassionate view	8
Seeing both sides	
Teachers' folklore	
The relativity of everything	
7 Glimpses through classroom keyholes	9
Choices and rationales	
8 The archaeology of methodology	11
How we become what we are	
Theory and practice: a two-way street	
9 Beyond methods	13
If we can't say what the best method is, what else <i>can</i> we say?	
Factors more basic than methods	
Classroom process	
The reflective cycle	
10 Recommended reading	15
11 References and bibliography	15

1 Introduction

Teaching is obviously an intensely practical undertaking. We think many teachers believe, or assume, that the practice of teaching is, or should be, based on the application of theories elaborated in parent or feeder disciplines, especially linguistics and psychology. This type of top-down approach to professional education, whereby knowledge is handed down to practitioners by experts remote from the everyday realities of the workplace, is common in many fields apart from teaching. In this 'applied science model' (see Schön 1983 and 1987, and Wallace 1991) professional competence develops through practice informed by the results derived from scientific knowledge and experimentation. Since scientific knowledge is in a continuous state of flux and development, professional competence needs to undergo periodic in-service updating. And committed teachers who are keen to optimize and develop their professional competence tend to look to the purveyors of seminars and training courses, and the authors of teaching materials and books for teachers, as the immediate source of the latest knowledge.

In this chapter, and indeed throughout this book, we would like to suggest that although teachers can certainly benefit from such initial training and subsequent updating, over-dependence on this model can lead to neglect of teachers' own expertise, resources and potential for self-development, to an impoverishment of their work, and to unnecessary feelings of guilt and embarrassment. After all, who is in a better position to be an expert on teaching – the doer or the theorizer?

But in order to do justice to this role as experts, teachers need to bring to conscious awareness as much as possible of the knowledge they have of what they do, and how and why they do it, so that they can properly evaluate it, experiment with it and develop it. In this chapter, and throughout the rest of the book, we want to offer some frameworks for conducting this investigation.

2 Bad habits

Here are some typical remarks which we have heard from experienced teachers at the beginning of in-service training courses and seminars. Perhaps you yourself have said, or at least thought, things like this:

I've been teaching for a few years now and I'm sure I've got into all sorts of bad habits.

I'd like to get some feedback on all my mistakes.

You can't teach well in the school where I'm working 'cos they haven't got any decent materials.

My methodology needs updating.

I think I need to give my classes more comprehensible input, but I don't really understand what it is.

Here in Hammerfest we're so out of touch with current developments.

I bet you'll have a fit when you see how I teach.

Statements like these bear witness to the guilt teachers sometimes feel at not doing things the right way, and the faith they often place in experts to tell them what that right way is. Some of the assumptions that underlie these heartfelt cries include:

- There is a straight and narrow Way of Teaching, from which we sometimes stray like lost sheep.
- I don't mind exposing my teaching to my learners, but the prospect of an expert observing one of my lessons is fraught with fear, guilt and embarrassment.
- If I make mistakes in my teaching, you will be able to identify them better than me.
- Today's methodological recommendations are better than yesterday's.
- The world of EFL has a centre and a periphery, and if I have the misfortune to be on the periphery, I have to look to the centre for guidance and inspiration.
- I can't function fully as a teacher without the support of certain tools.
- I have to understand current key ideas in linguistics and applied linguistics so that I can put them into practice in my teaching.

Task 1

Which assumption could go with each of the above statements?

Commentary ■ ■ ■

I've been teaching for a few years now and I'm sure I've got into all sorts of bad habits.

- There is a straight and narrow Way of Teaching, from which we sometimes stray like lost sheep. The Right Way may be conceived of as eternal or, more commonly, subject to historical development. It is perhaps recorded in the pages of teachers' methodology books or the notes in the files of tutors on training courses, but often seems ethereal, and housed, if anywhere, in the collective consciousness of other, anonymous but better, teachers.

I'd like to get some feedback on all my mistakes.

- If I make mistakes in my teaching, you will be able to identify them better than me. Because of your position and your experience, and because you are more in touch with current trends and recommendations, you are equipped to measure me against certain standards, and to note and report the nature and extent of my shortcomings.

You can't teach well in the school where I'm working 'cos they haven't got any decent materials.

- I can't function fully as a teacher without the support of certain tools. Perhaps the coursebooks are out of date, perhaps there is a limited selection of supplementary materials.

My methodology needs updating.

- Today's methodological recommendations are better than yesterday's. Faith in science and belief in progress are deeply established in us, despite doubts thrown up almost daily in the news. Whether from a general feeling that we could do better, or from specific instances of obvious failure, we are eager to at least consider any new ideas in the hope that they will enable us to take a small step, or maybe even a great leap forward in the effectiveness of our teaching.

I think I need to give my classes more comprehensible input, but I don't really understand what it is.

- I have to understand current key ideas in linguistics and applied linguistics so that I can put them into practice in my teaching. And this is made difficult by the fact that these ideas are often expressed and discussed in a language which is impenetrable for those not regularly involved in such discourse.

Here in Hammerfest we're so out of touch with current developments.

- The world of EFL has a centre and a periphery, and if I have the misfortune to be on the periphery, I have to look to the centre for guidance and inspiration. This is partly, but not only, a question of geography. The 'centre' may be identified with the 'developed' countries, the 'west', the national capital, a particular university department, a particular group of schools, a team of authors, and so on.

I bet you'll have a fit when you see how I teach.

- I don't mind exposing my teaching to my learners, but the prospect of an expert observing one of my lessons is fraught with fear, guilt and embarrassment. So I feel ambivalent about the prospect of you coming to see my lessons: on the one hand I want the benefit of your expert eye to note where improvements need to be made, but at the same time I'd feel more comfortable if you stayed away. ■

3 Enquire within: being your own expert

In this section, we'll look at the relative roles of outside sources and internal personal resources in contributing to teachers' professional development.

Task 2

What outside sources do you use in order to continue developing as a teacher? Can you think of examples which have been particularly beneficial or enriching, or any which have disappointed you, and not given you what you had expected?

Commentary ■ ■ ■

Teachers can benefit greatly from:

- being observed and receiving feedback;
- observing other teachers and finding out how at least a few members of their huge invisible peer-group go about the task of teaching;
- taking an active interest in current ideas in the fields of language pedagogy and applied linguistics, not least those emanating from innovative and productive sources (people, places, institutions, publishers);
- taking part in courses, workshops, seminars and conferences where they are introduced to new ideas and activities for classroom use;
- enjoying access to a range of teaching materials and technologies.

However, we and many other teachers we have talked to have often been disappointed because, for example:

- observing other teachers can result in the feeling 'That was really good, but I could never teach like that';

- what observers say to us after our lessons reveals more about them than about us;
- presentations at conferences sometimes don't quite seem to give us anything that's exactly applicable to our teaching situation;
- when we try to read about current issues in applied linguistics we find them obscured by jargon and difficult to relate to the classroom;
- the sheer range of published materials available can appear bewildering. ■

What's more, if the *only* channels of enquiry into professional development which teachers use lead *away* from them, towards outside authorities of various kinds, the result can be an unnecessary and debilitating degree of disempowerment. And this can degenerate into an abdication of responsibility for personal development, a feeling that it isn't worth trying to do things better, perhaps combined with a sense of guilt about not doing things right, and a retreat into secrecy at the prospect that anyone might find out how we teach. Learners, of course, see every day how we teach, but very often they aren't credited with possessing the faculty of critical observation.

There probably isn't much point in expecting 'experts' to give an ultimate, unequivocal answer to the question 'How should we teach?', since there has been a succession of so many different – often mutually contradictory – recommendations over the last century or so, to say nothing of the less well-known earlier history of the field (see Howatt 1984). And there is no definitive evidence that English language teaching as a whole is any more effective than it was ten, or twenty, or fifty years ago. Indeed, it's hard to imagine how this question could ever be researched, or whether it would be reasonable to expect any clear answer, given the diversity of circumstances, reasons for learning and possible ways of assessing effectiveness.

In his *Introducing Applied Linguistics* (1973, p 11), S. Pit Corder writes:

... applied linguistics deals with that part of the language teaching operation which is potentially susceptible of some sort of rigorous systematization. We are still a long way from achieving such a systematization ... For this reason linguistics can, as yet, scarcely claim to give firm answers to any but a few problems in language teaching.

The *as yet* indicates a faith that linguistic science *will* deliver the goods in the future, but it is also implied here that there are other parts of teaching which are not amenable to 'rigorous systematization'. We think it may well be the case that these other elements constitute *most* of the language teaching operation, that they depend on numerous variables which make every class – and every teacher – different from every other, and that the individual teacher is not just the best but actually the *only* person in a position to observe and respond fully to these variables.

From a different point of view, Anthony Howatt, in his introduction to *A History of English Language Teaching* (p xiv), suggests that the idea of putting theory into practice accounts only partially for whatever development there has been in this field.

... if there is a latent point of view beneath the surface [of this book] it is a belief that progress in the teaching of languages, as in many practical arts, is neither a function solely of the application of theoretical principle, however persuasive, nor of an unthinking reaction to the demands of the immediate market, but of the alchemy which, whether by accident or by design, unites them to a common purpose.

Although we will emphasize educational factors rather than strictly market ones, we hope that a similar underlying attitude to the role of theory will emerge from *this* book.

Donald Freeman, in a 1986 paper on Training, Development and Teaching Teaching (pp 4-5), writes:

While knowledge which reflects various facets of teaching – applied linguistics, language acquisition, methodology and so on – increases, the understanding of teaching itself, and how it is learned, does not.

(...)

Let me make three assertions about the state of language teacher education: First, while we recognize the results of successful language learning, we have an uneven, often hypothetical, understanding of how language is learned. Second, because we lack that understanding of the learning process, we have only a hazy sense of the actual teaching performance which brings about successful language learning; language teaching remains a highly idiosyncratic, often hit-and-miss, operation. Third, because we don't have a clear, integrated understanding of language learning and the teaching performance which fosters it, we cannot define the teaching competence on which such teaching performance ought to be based.

We would add to this that the answers to these three challenges will be to some extent, and perhaps to a large extent, different for different teachers, and that teachers, with their intimate knowledge of their own classes and lessons, hopes and fears, successes and failures, are uniquely well placed to be their own 'experts', and to *discover* their own personal theories, rather than only attempting to *apply* theories which have been elaborated by other people in other contexts. Carl Rogers' idea that 'learning is persons' implies the inadequacy of assuming that teachers can be taught everything about what to do when they teach, and that this knowledge of what to do will stand them in good stead in their work, regardless of the particular realities of who they are and who their learners are. In contrast to 'teaching as behaviour' and even 'teaching as thought linked to behaviour', Freeman, this time in the IATEFL *Teacher Development* newsletter no. 18, 1992, proposes a third view of teaching as 'knowing what to do'. In this view,

... the classroom context and the people in it become central and crucial. They are not just settings for implementation; they provide frameworks for knowing.

(...)

This third view of teaching as knowing what to do introduces some points which should be of interest and concern to anyone in education. First, it suggests that teachers themselves, and not others like administrators, curriculum or materials writers, or researchers are in the best position to examine and define the knowledge-base from which they operate. Second, it suggests that the prescriptivism in much of teacher education and professional credentialing is largely pointless if the aim is to guarantee qualified practitioners. Such efforts are bound to be ineffective because they do not account for, because they cannot within their static and a contextual frameworks account for, these highly context-dependent ways in which teachers know what to do.

We hope this book will help you to account for what you do and how you know what to do.

4 Opening your classroom door

Task 3

Take a sheet of paper and jot down in a few sentences or phrases how you would describe your teaching to someone who wanted to get a feeling of what it's like to be in your classroom. If possible, tell or show these notes to a colleague; they may wish to ask questions or comment.

You could also use these notes as the basis for identifying things you are happy with, things you would like to change or improve, or things which simply interest you about your own teaching and which you would like to investigate and get to know better. In any case, file your notes away in a safe place with a view to coming back to them in the future and re-assessing their validity.

If you feel the relationship between you is right, you could also ask your learners to report on what it's like to be taught by you, perhaps in the form of a writing exercise.

Commentary ■ ■ ■

Classrooms have often been characterized as 'black boxes' because once the door is shut and the lesson starts, no one outside has any idea what goes on inside. But it may be that even we ourselves as teachers don't really know what goes on, and the task of articulating what kinds of places our classrooms are may help to force our awareness of how we see our classrooms and perhaps where our blind spots are. This awareness may be thrown into sharper relief by being reflected off another person. It may also be a way in to literally opening the classroom door and inviting someone else to report their impressions of what they see. We believe that being observed *can* be one of the most fruitful experiences for a teacher engaged in professional development, and we will explore this possibility in Chapter 3. ■

5 Articles of faith

Here is an exercise to help throw some more specific light on what kind of a teacher you are.

Task 4

Decide whether each of the following statements applies to you wholly (1), partly (2) or not at all (3):

- I always correct learners' errors.
- I talk as little as possible in lessons, so that the learners have as much opportunity to talk as possible.
- I always ask my learners to speak in complete sentences.
- I think it's a waste of time for learners to do lengthy writing exercises in the classroom.
- I gave up drilling years ago.
- I use authentic materials as much as possible.
- I don't explain meaning; I illustrate it.

- I don't show learners how to spell a word until they've heard it and practised pronouncing it.
- I don't like to allow silences of more than a few seconds during lessons.
- I always try to elicit from learners first, rather than giving them language myself.
- I use a lot of songs and games to lighten the atmosphere on Friday afternoons.
- I don't use translation, and I don't allow my learners to use their mother tongue during lessons.
- I make sure everyone in the class can say the word or sentence being practised before I move on to the next point.
- I always stand and never sit when I'm teaching.

If possible, discuss your responses with colleagues, and exchange and discuss other similar statements of personal principle. Are your beliefs and principles really as absolute as you think? How long have they been true? How did you learn them or become convinced of their value? Have you ever tried to go against them? If so, what happened?

You could also consider this: Are there any statements in the list which you would *like* to apply to you? Why do they appeal to you? Why don't they apply to you, in fact, and what would you need to do in order to make them apply?

If you have the benefit of being able to discuss teaching regularly with colleagues, listen to what you say, perhaps particularly when you and your colleagues disagree. You may well find other statements of principle to note and examine.

6 A dispassionate view

Now take a dispassionate view of the statements in Task 4.

Task 5

Reformulate each statement into a recommendation for any teacher (eg *Always correct learners' errors*, *Talk as little as possible in lessons*, etc) and brainstorm three arguments in favour of, and three arguments against each recommendation. If at all possible, do either the initial brainstorming or a reporting and discussing phase together with other teachers. Setting your own convictions aside for a moment, see how many arguments for and against you can muster.

Commentary ■ ■ ■

Example: I talk as little as possible in lessons, so that the learners can talk as much as possible.

This is a recommendation quite firmly established and influential in some ELT circles, either officially or in the form of folklore, and failure to follow it is a frequent source of teacher guilt. Perhaps it has its origin in the fact that, whereas teaching is often assumed to consist of telling and explaining, the teaching of a living language calls for a different approach: it seems obvious that people learning a language for productive use – and in most cases this means primarily for oral production – should practise speaking it in the classroom. Talking on the part

of the teacher perhaps needs more justification, particularly if it is seen as taking away speaking opportunities from the learners. Teachers sometimes feel that they talk unnecessarily much because they are inefficient in classroom management, and they waste time which could be used more productively. And if it turns out that a substantial proportion of teacher talk is unnecessary, this does indeed suggest that some reorientation is desirable. But simply taking a quantitative approach and minimizing teacher talk is probably too crude a solution.

The *so that* in the statement under discussion implies a causal connection. Whether there actually is such a connection is an empirical question, and it is likely that the answer will vary according to numerous factors. Nor can it be taken for granted that the best use of learners' classroom time is necessarily talking. It may be that they will benefit equally, or more, if some of this time is set aside for reflection, writing or listening. A reduction in the *quantity* of learner talking may allow for a higher *quality*, however this is defined. Minimizing the quantity of teacher talk may deprive the learners of access to valuable listening practice, opportunities for incidental learning and for communicative interaction with a more fluent speaker of the language they are learning.

What is important, then, is to investigate not only the quantity but also the type and function of talking done by the participants in the classroom, and then experiment to see whether the quality of learning can be improved by making any adjustments. In addition, those teachers who tend to talk uncontrollably and fill as much air space as is available, might usefully work on the discipline of not talking at all during activities or phases where it is not strictly necessary; it is only by adding no-talking options to their repertoire that they will subsequently be able to *choose* whether or not to talk according to the demands of the situation, instead of automatically falling into the habitual option of talking.

You may find in doing this task that you discover new arguments that support your view, or persuasive arguments in the other direction. These may suggest experiments with unfamiliar – or rediscovered – techniques. Most importantly, we would like them to suggest that any technique or style is likely to have a reasonable rationale – and to be effective – in certain circumstances, but can, if not kept in awareness and questioned, become an unthinking habit or empty ritual divorced from its original justification. So, for instance, it may be that, especially in some teaching situations, learners can benefit enormously from opportunities to listen at length to the teacher's voice, and the conclusion might be that there is a need to balance this with the wish to give the learners as much high-quality speaking time as possible. ■

7 **Glimpses through classroom keyholes**

In the following short extracts, we see glimpses of different teachers at work, and imagine a possible rationale – no doubt only one of many – behind what happens.

1 The class are practising saying a word which is difficult to pronounce. As each learner has a go, the teacher says: 'Good!' 'Well done!' 'Very good!' 'Not bad ... try again, like this ... listen ... good! Much better!' and so on. Everyone is smiling, attentive, trying hard, laughing good-humouredly at the difficulty of the task and the mistakes being made.

Comment: We can speculate that this teacher has discovered from experience that this class, at least, works very well in an atmosphere where she is constantly challenging the learners, rewarding them, emphasizing their successes and encouraging them when they can't quite manage the task of the moment.

2 This class is engaged in a similar task to the first one. But the atmosphere and the interaction are very different. In their own time, and in no set order, the learners try to pronounce the word. Some of them make several attempts, until they seem satisfied, or tire temporarily of the effort. The learners listen to each other very carefully, and often there is a consensus of nodding and 'Yes, it's good' when they recognize a successful version of the word. The teacher also listens intently, but says little, except that when one of the learners says the word to her in a questioning manner, she says 'Yes,' or 'Say it like this,' and taps the rhythm of the word on the table, or mouths the sequence of vowel sounds in the word.

Comment: We can speculate that this teacher believes in allowing learners to pay careful attention to their own pronunciation and develop their own criteria of what is correct, or what is acceptable and the best possible at the moment. She lets them work primarily with their own collective resources, but is ready to intervene when these resources fall short of what is needed.

Task 6

How would you describe the rationale for the glimpses that follow?

3 The teacher is introducing some vocabulary which the learners are going to meet in a reading passage. The teacher writes the words on the board one by one, and asks the class if anyone can provide an explanation. Sometimes the learners give explanations in English, sometimes translations into their L1. If no one knows a word, or a wrong explanation is offered, the teacher explains; in these cases, the learners often check by suggesting a translation, which the teacher confirms if correct. There are supplementary questions about some of the words; the teacher answers these briefly.

4 A similar activity to 3 above. But in this class the teacher explains or exemplifies each word without saying the word itself. The learners are invited to say the word if they recognize it from the information given; if not, the teacher says it and gets the learners to repeat it before she writes it on the board.

5 This teacher is also going to use the same reading text as in 3 and 4 above, with a class of the same level, but does no preparatory work on vocabulary at all.

6 The learners are reporting back on a decision-making task. One says 'We have chosen this one.' The teacher replies 'chosen'.

7 The same situation as in 6 above. But this teacher replies 'You've chosen this one, have you? Why?'

Commentary ■ ■ ■

In considering alternative approaches to a certain type of teaching task, you may find yourself clearly favouring one rather than another. The above exercise may be helpful in looking beyond personal preference and thinking your way into alternatives. ■

8 The archaeology of methodology

The next task will help you investigate where such preferences come from.

Task 7

Now reflect on how your practice has developed since you started teaching, and why you teach the way you do now. The answer to this will probably be quite complex, and it may be that you can only sketch it out at the moment, but it may well include reference to:

- theories you hold about teaching and learning;
- what you were taught on training courses (for English language teaching or other subjects);
- what you've read in books and magazines for teachers;
- exchange of ideas with colleagues;
- observing other teachers;
- ideas you've developed yourself through experience.

But dig deeper into the past, too, for example into the way your teachers taught you when you were a child.

Commentary ■ ■ ■

Here is part of one response to this task:

The whole impression I got from the initial ELT training course I did – which I should say was great, and the best educational thing I'd ever done – was that lessons should be busy, with lots of 'pace', lots of oral practice, which often meant drilling, and correcting, relentlessly but nicely, and then giving the learners gradually a bit more scope and a bit more, until in the end they were using a new item 'freely'. It was certainly great fun and very different from what I'd considered teaching to be like previously, and I went along with it quite happily for a while. But then it gradually began to seem less and less like me, I wanted to slow things down, give more time for working things out, trying things out. And as I needed to spend less energy on thinking about what I was doing and see the lesson more from the learners' point of view I began to realize that for some of them it was really a bit of a game, that they could apparently reach the point where they were getting it right, as long as the focus of the lesson was clear and they were channelled towards saying certain things, but it didn't help them much when they came back the next week and they'd forgotten it all, or when we met outside the school and chatted in English.

And I started reading a bit about how people need to be actively involved mentally with a language and not just perform tricks with it, and how they go through different stages of hypotheses and make different types of errors. And that made sense because I noticed that I could 'correct' the same error again and again and when it did eventually start coming right it was often a long time later and it didn't seem to have anything to do with me directly, it just sort of corrected itself. So I tend not to take such a rigid view of correction, and emphasize more giving opportunities for use and experimentation, and encouraging people to develop their own criteria of what's right and wrong, although even in this I've come to realize the importance of pointing out errors and helping people

to work on them if they're really concerned about it. And if I think it helps, I'll deal analytically with grammar. That didn't use to be the done thing, as far as I could see, but some people really expect it and I think it can help them if it's made approachable. And if you don't allow for that they'll probably do it anyway on their own, and get it wrong, more than likely.

In retrospect it seems there was a sort of conspiracy that there were certain things that were OK to do and others that weren't. Maybe a lot of it was just a fashion for a while, and maybe just in a small sector of the English teaching world, although I learned a lot through it and I think it was an excellent starting point for me. And maybe people like me even contributed to that conspiracy, or fashion, 'cos we allowed ourselves to be led by it. I feel much more relaxed now – I mean relaxed in lessons, 'cos I'm not trying to keep things moving fast all the time, but also relaxed about being able to choose how to do things, depending on what suits my style and what I think will work in that particular class, without worrying that the Teaching Police are going to come knocking on the classroom door to make sure I'm doing the right thing. (JONATHAN) ■

A principled and professional approach to teaching needs to be based on something more than keeping up with fashion. The relationship between principle and practice is complex. On the one hand, ideas filter through from education, applied linguistics, psychology, neurology and so on, and seem to suggest more or less direct applications to teaching. But we should be wary of embracing any of these ideas wholesale and assuming that by implementing them we absolve ourselves of responsibility for further critical thought and decision-making. Above all, we should be careful not to assume that one set of recipes will work for all learners, all teachers, all contexts.

On the other hand, we may through intuition, deliberate experiment or chance arrive at discoveries of Things That Work. Out of a sense of responsibility to our own development and the collective development of EFL teaching, we might then want to find out if these discoveries are generalizable and capable of yielding some new guiding principle for our practice, and, ideally, *why* they are valid, if they seem to be so. In other words, as well as subjecting recommendations from outside to critical examination, we can also begin with observational data concerning our own practices, prejudices and habits, and derive principles, theories, models, or rationales from these. Theory and practice are linked by a two-way street.

And even if a discovery resists any attempt to assign a rationale to it, we shouldn't dismiss it. If I discover that a certain class of mine learn better with their seats facing east than west, I would be well advised to make use of that fact, although I would be equally well advised not to be too hasty in recommending it as a universal panacea for effective language learning.

9 Beyond methods

Clearly, people *do* learn languages (and have learned them through the ages) by all sorts of methods, some involving classrooms and teachers and others not. Perhaps what matters is not so much what methodology we use, but other more basic underlying factors to do with how people feel about the place they are in and the people they are with.

Task 8

Think about classrooms you have been in, as a learner, a teacher or in any other capacity. Which of these metaphors express something of your feelings towards those classrooms?

The classroom is:

- a workshop;
- a playground;
- a courtroom;
- a factory;
- a greenhouse;
- a parade ground;
- a prison;
- a minefield;
- a church.

Are there any other metaphors that suggest themselves to you? Compare your answers with colleagues.

Commentary ■ ■ ■

For example, a classroom is a courtroom where the learners have to plead their knowledge of the subject to the teacher facing them behind the desk, and the teacher judges whether or not their performance is convincing. If it is, they can be acquitted, at least for the time being; if not, they are punished, by harsh words, by low marks, by being given extra homework and so on. A classroom is a greenhouse where special fertile conditions for learning are set up in an atmosphere deliberately different from the one outside, and learners are tended by teachers who monitor their progress and give them any additional mental nourishment necessary, but where it can get uncomfortably hot and stuffy sometimes. And so on. ■

Task 9

Now think about your ideal classroom. What metaphors would describe it? What can you start doing now towards achieving it?

Commentary ■ ■ ■

Metaphors can be dangerously seductive and lead us away from accurate perception of reality. But they can also act as spectacles to enable us to see things from a different perspective and therefore perhaps more clearly, or to have new insights – to see into things which were previously hidden. ■

As another way of looking at and thinking about classrooms from a viewpoint innocent of methods, theories and techniques, here is a summary called *What I hope for in a classroom* by Earl Stevick (1976, p 159) which is divided into observations about the students and observations about the teacher.

Task 10

You might like to jot down your thoughts under that title, *What I hope for in a classroom*, before you read. Otherwise, read what Stevick says and decide whether you would subscribe to the same views, or if there are things you would want to change, add or take away.

As the years go by, I find myself less concerned with which method has been chosen for a particular class, and more interested in how it is being used. I am particularly aware of what I see when I look at students and teacher.

Students

- 1 I hope to find the students involved in whatever they are doing, contributing to it and getting satisfaction from it on many levels of personality.

That is to say, I hope *not* to find them concentrating on merely coming up with correct responses (even in a structure drill), or on grinding out correct sentences or free conversations just for the sake of grinding out correct sentences or free conversations.

- 2 I hope to find the students comfortable and relaxed, even in the midst of intense intellectual activity or vigorous argument.

This does not mean that they are loafing on the job. In fact, students who are really comfortable with what they are doing are less likely to loaf.

This also means that the students are not apprehensive that they will be punished if they fail to live up to the teacher's expectations.

- 3 I hope to find that the students are listening to one another, and not just to the teacher. I also hope that they will be getting help and correction from one another, and not just from the teacher.

This means that the students are not like separate lamps plugged into a single power supply, in such a way that the power used by one diminishes the voltage available to the rest.

Teacher

- 4 The teacher is in general control of what is going on.

This does not mean that everything the students do comes as a direct response to a specific cue from the teacher.

- 5 The teacher allows/encourages/requires originality from students, whether in individual sentences, or in larger units of activity, or in choice among a range of techniques.

This does not mean anarchy or chaos.

- 6 One of the first things I notice is whether the teacher seems relaxed and matter-of-fact in voice and manner, giving information about the appropriateness or correctness of what the students do, rather than criticizing or praising them.

The teacher does not, either by word or by unspoken message, say to students, 'Now always remember ...,' 'You shouldn't have forgotten ...,' 'You are a good/poor student,' or 'Now try to do this so that I may judge you on it.'

Commentary ■ ■ ■

Here, the focus on the *how* rather than the *which*, and on looking at the *people* in the classroom, is an expression of an interest in the *process* which goes on within and between the participants in a lesson. Probably Stevick's hypothetical observations of teachers and learners are compatible with the use of any method at all, or with instances of teaching which are not recognizable as any particular

method; rather, they would suggest that the teacher is working in accordance with some personal knowledge of 'what to do' in a particular context. There may be various routes to this knowledge, leading through intuition, introspection, attending courses, participating in formal and informal peer networks, and so on, but depending crucially on the teacher's awareness of that context, not as a 'setting for implementation', but as a 'framework for knowing'. ■

The model of professional education appropriate as a description for this kind of development would seem to be the one conceived of by Douglas Schön and Michael Wallace as the *reflective model*. In this model, practice is initially informed by *received knowledge* from authoritative sources and by the practitioner's own already-existing knowledge derived from experience. But competence then develops through a repeated *reflective cycle* of practice and reflection. Top-down transmission of authoritative knowledge is not discounted, but is allotted only a limited role, and one which is likely to diminish with time in the development of an individual. Theory can be discovered and developed through practice.

Task 11

How do you rate yourself on your achievement of those criteria from the above extract which are important for you, together with your own additions? If you're not sure, how can you find out? What steps can you take to improve your rating?

10 Recommended reading

Training Foreign Language Teachers by Michael Wallace applies the concept of reflective professional training to the context of language teaching.

Anthony Howatt's *A History of English Language Teaching* illustrates in a thoroughly readable way that the work we do is part of a long-established tradition of interaction between theory and practice, and that what appear to be new ideas are often old ones recycled, refurbished or reinvented. In this way the book emphasizes the importance and value of the historical perspective which is so often lacking in discussion and writing about English language teaching.

11 References and bibliography

- Corder, S.P. 1973 *Introducing Applied Linguistics* (Penguin)
- Freeman, D. 1986 *Training, Development and Teaching Teaching: A descriptive paradigm of teaching an examination of related strategies for language teacher education* (School for International Training, Brattleboro, Vermont)
- Freeman, D. 1992 Three Views of Teachers' Knowledge. In *Teacher Development* (newsletter of the IATEFL Teacher Development Special Interest Group) no. 18
- Howatt, A.P. R. 1984 *A History of English Language Teaching* (OUP)
- Schön, D.A. 1983 *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action* (Temple Smith)
- Schön, D.A. 1987 *Educating the Reflective Practitioner: Toward a New Design for Teaching and Learning in the Professions* (Jossey Bass)
- Stevick, Earl W. 1976 *Memory, Meaning and Method* (Newbury House)
- Wallace, M. 1991 *Training Foreign Language Teachers: A Reflective Approach* (CUP)