

## DIRECTIONS IN TESOL TRAINING IN NEW ZEALAND

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TESOL teacher training in New Zealand is in a developmental phase which means there is little cohesion or consistency in training provisions. Courses from which trained teachers emerge, range from four weeks to one year. Some of these courses have practicums; some do not. It is fair to say that in many cases, TESOL training courses are more based on the perceptions of the trainers than on any significant research base. An earlier report by Bernhardt and Hammadou (1987) on the USA foreign teacher education research base found that scant attention had been paid to this area. They suggested that not enough is known about the preparation of foreign language teachers conceptually or research-wise. Freeman and Richards (1993) have also stressed the necessity of examining the conceptual foundations of teacher education programmes in order to develop a better awareness of the role that teacher education plays in teaching. The questions underlying Bernhardt and Hammadou's research are also relevant to New Zealand:

1. What should language teachers know?
2. What should they do?
3. How should they be prepared?

This survey is seen as a modest beginning to what we see is an urgent need for more systematic and principled gathering of information in New Zealand. Such information will enable providers to make more informed decisions in teacher training courses rather than relying on their perceptions. We wished to establish a link between the professional activities of teachers of ESOL to adults and their training, both pre- and in-service. The survey aimed at establishing a link between what teachers are actually doing and how competent they feel about doing it. Any gaps between what they are doing and their perceived competency could indicate areas on which teacher training might focus, either before teachers reach their own classroom or once they are there. The questions asked in this survey were seen in the context of international trends and the English Language teaching scene in New Zealand today<sup>1</sup>.

Richards (1992) in his bottom up approach sees the theory of teaching as a starting point, enabling teachers to explore, define and clarify their own classroom processes and their own individual theories of teaching and learning. This reflects a trend that sees the teachers standing alongside the theories that are integral to teacher education programmes. While this raises challenging questions, it does have significant implications for teacher training. Are teachers actually ready to identify the reasoning underlying their teaching on a pre-service training course (assuming the course has a teaching practice

component ) ? Should teachers do this independent of their learners and specific classroom settings, both of which are variables ? Nunan (1990) stresses the importance of developing skills that enable teachers to explore, clarify and define what goes on in their classrooms . He sees teachers as investigators and argues that teachers should be more involved in action research where there is a cycle of observation, identification of the problem , intervention and evaluation. Teachers are seen by Nunan as investigators. There is certainly a move away from educators prescribing what should be happening in an English lesson. Freeman and Rogers (1993) note that the research to date on the merits of developing from prescriptive to a descriptive developmental phases is incomplete and inconclusive. Courses that provide limited and somewhat inflexible exposure to ELT methodology are sometimes seen as being narrowing and manipulative. Courses of shorter duration are more vulnerable to this criticism. However, as Davis ( 1990 ) notes in his TEFL research report on the RSA Cambridge Certificate in the Teaching of English as a Foreign Language to Adults, all trainees need to demonstrate some kind of receptivity and this is not always synonymous with manipulation.

Lange (1990) refers to the art and craft of teaching. The 'art' is the decision making processes based on knowledge and experience and the 'craft' is the specific knowledge of the subject matter and of teaching it as well as knowledge of teaching in general. Within this paradigm, TESOL training in New Zealand has tended to focus on the craft with little attention to the art.

These trends are consistent with the demands that EL teachers face in the country today. Employment conditions in New Zealand have important implications for the skills a teacher may need. With the scarcity of permanent positions, teachers may end up teaching at more than one institution. They may move from an EFL holiday course of Japanese students to a night class of permanent residents. They may be on a short-term contract in a polytechnic with a patchwork timetable that spans three or four different ELT programmes. Freeman and Richards (1993) have noted that all programmes have an embedded conception of teaching. In view of the diversity of the teaching contexts in New Zealand, knowing which skills teachers should acquire is a complex issue. Advancement in the field is more and more dependent on performance, versatility and adaptability. Teacher training should be incorporating these attributes. They have to be more effective at assessing their students, evaluating their programmes and service and reporting on them. Do teachers feel they have the skills to do this?

Competition for students between institutions is another reality that has implications for teacher training. The currents of market forces mean that ESOL teachers in their institutions have to respond quickly to student and market needs. This comes at a time when cost efficiencies mean that the luxury of full-time course writers is over. Teachers are increasingly doing more than teaching. They are writing, piloting, managing, evaluating, marketing, adapting as well as teaching. Clients are demanding English courses that fit their needs. Tertiary Institutions overseas for example are wanting the English course their students take in New Zealand to be an integral part of their degree course. The survey wanted to investigate how competent teachers felt they were if they were involved in these wider activities.

With employers demanding more from teachers, we were also interested to find out how much teachers felt they shaped the institutions they worked in. If teacher training programmes are preparing people to make choices, will the climate out there offer them the freedom to make choices? Do teachers feel they have any input into the way their institutions evolve ? Underlying this question is the notion

as to the whether institutions and the programmes they offer or the teachers themselves are the prime factors in shaping conceptions of effective teaching.

## RESULTS

Teachers of ESOL in a variety of institutions involved in adult education from the polytechnic and private sector were asked to comment on the 10 following statements:

1. I design the course I teach
2. I prepare materials related to the needs of the students
3. I keep up-to-date with developments in my profession
4. I share problems with my colleagues
5. I evaluate courses and lessons
6. I advise students on a personal level
7. I assess my students using a variety of methods
8. I am active in shaping the institution(s) I work in
9. I can give effective lessons consistently in relation to the amount of class contact I have each week
10. I can reflect on the effectiveness of the class I have just taken

These statements were chosen because they represent areas where teachers were seen to be increasingly involved.

Teachers commented on these statements twice. Firstly they gave an indication of how often they undertook the activity in terms of four general time frames: frequently, sometimes, infrequently, never. The results are shown in Rating 1 (see Appendix A).

Secondly, teachers evaluated their competency in carrying out these activities.

They graded themselves in the following ways: effectively, reasonably, inadequately or unskilled. It was felt that these four gradings could be interpreted with reasonable objectivity by respondents. The results are shown in Rating 2 (see Appendix B).

Because exactly 100 teachers responded to this survey, it is possible to interpret results in terms of percentages.

The investigation was carried out to see how the two results correlated. For example if it could be seen that a majority of teachers frequently designed their own courses (Statement 1), the second statement would show how competently they evaluate themselves. If there was an indication that course design was a frequent activity for teachers, but they did not feel generally competent in this area, teacher educators could construe that course design was an area needing emphasis.

In fact, 63% of respondents indicated that they are frequently involved in course design and 36% felt they could do this effectively. A further 58% felt they could design programmes reasonably.

In terms of material preparation, a notable majority of teachers are involved (86%) and 40% graded themselves as working in this area effectively. The remaining 60% rated themselves as performing this activity reasonably.

A third area which predominates amongst teachers is the concept of reflection on the effectiveness of performance. 78% of teachers indicated they frequently reflected on the effectiveness of the class they had just taken: 44% could do it effectively and 52% reasonably.

In terms of shaping the institution in which they work, 37% indicated that they are infrequently involved. Of these, 43% rated themselves as being reasonable at doing this.

## CONCLUSIONS

The results conclude that a significant number of teachers are involved in designing courses, material preparation, course evaluation, assessment and reflection.

However, while teachers are expected to function in a wide variety of roles, it is interesting to note that significantly fewer felt they were active in shaping the institutions they work in. Is it, as earlier mentioned, relevant to include in TESOL training programmes, elements involving decision-making skills, when teachers may not play an effective part in the decision-making process? The relationship between teachers and the institution they work in, and the influence this has on teacher effectiveness could be an area further investigated.

The majority of the respondents involved in the areas covered felt they were doing a reasonable job. However, there was often a sharp drop in the numbers who felt they were doing an effective job. This could be seen as an indication of the need for further in-service training and more emphasis on pre-service TESOL training courses on areas such as course design, course evaluation, and assessment. More perceived competency in these areas might naturally lead to teachers becoming involved to a greater extent than is evident in the survey, thereby increasing productivity.

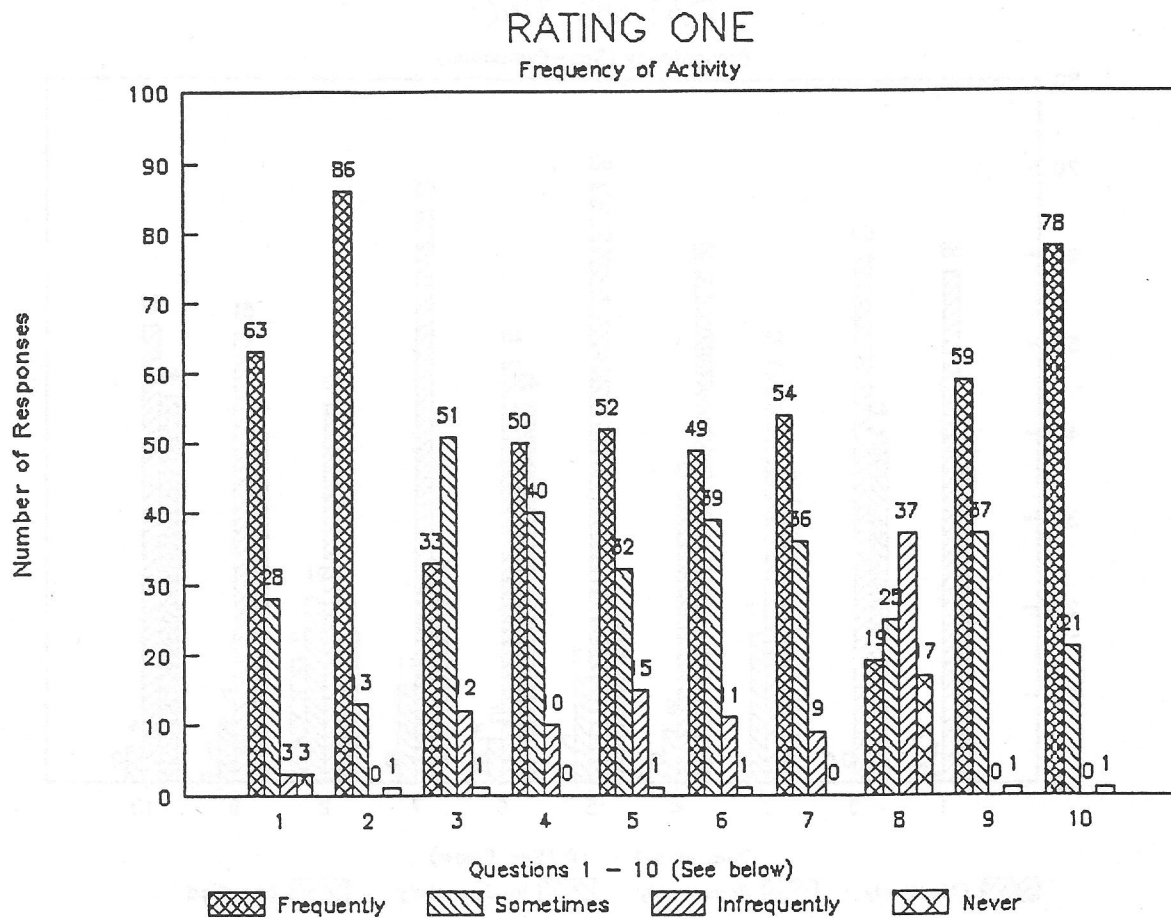
TESOL training faces challenges and important issues in the future. What skills should be given priority? Precisely what should the relationship be between in-service and pre-service TESOL Education programmes regarding skills and content? We need an adequate research base on which decisions are made. This may lead to more consistency in teacher training courses on a national scale. Rather than basing TESOL training courses on the perceptions of trainers it will become possible to be guided by the needs and the conceptual processes of the trainees themselves.

## Note

1 Teachers from the following institutions answered this survey:

Wellington Polytechnic  
Christchurch Polytechnic  
Carrington Polytechnic  
Auckland Institute of Technology  
(including Refugee Education)  
Shore English School of Language  
Worldwide School of English  
Dominion School of English

## APPENDIX A

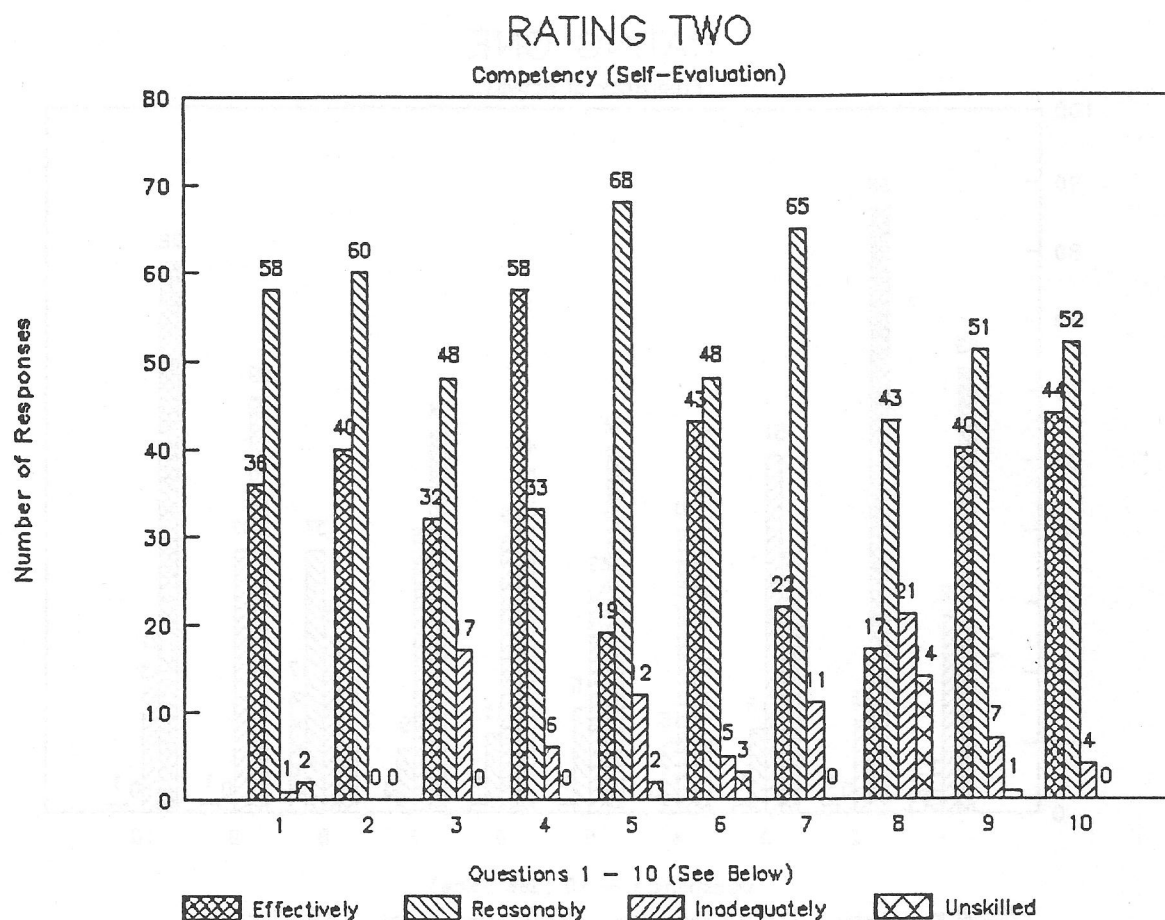


**Sample Size: 100**

1. I design the courses I teach.
2. I prepare material related to the needs of the students.
3. I keep up to date with developments in my profession.
4. I share problems with my colleagues.
5. I evaluate courses and lessons.
6. I advise students on a personal level.
7. I assess my students using a variety of methods.
8. I am active in shaping the institution(s) I work in.
9. I can give effective lessons consistently in relation to the amount of class contact I have each week.
10. I reflect on the effectiveness of the class I have just taken.



## APPENDIX B



**Sample Size: 100**

1. I design the courses I teach.
2. I prepare material related to the needs of the students.
3. I keep up to date with developments in my profession.
4. I share problems with my colleagues.
5. I evaluate courses and lessons.
6. I advise students on a personal level.
7. I assess my students using a variety of methods.
8. I am active in shaping the institution(s) I work in.
9. I can give effective lessons consistently in relation to the amount of class contact I have each week.
10. I reflect on the effectiveness of the class I have just taken.

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