

ONLY 2P + 2R: AN ALTERNATIVE ROUTE TO SUCCESSFUL EFL TEACHER TRAINING

Didi Suherdi
Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia

Abstract

This paper is intended to present the summary of a series of in-service training programs developed in response to unsatisfactory results of previously conducted training programs in Indonesian context. In the past, such training programs were dominated by explanations of teaching methodology and normally lacked of good demonstrations. Quite often, these programs left serious confusions in the part of the participants and finally ended up with reluctance in implementing the innovations. This in many cases led to frustration in the parts of the teachers.

An initiative based on sound understanding of Indonesian teachers' cultural background has been taken and tried out in many provinces in Indonesia. The data show that teachers began to respond positively and many of them willingly tried to implement it in their classrooms. The experiences including critical issues and problems around the implementation will be presented and discussed in sufficient detail in this paper.

Key words: in-service training, explicit models, real teaching, reflection

Introduction

Professional development has increasingly been one of the most frequently heard and discussed term in many professional groups daily life. For this purpose, HRD has been the heart of many business organizations these days. This has also been the case for teachers. The introduction of *Undang-undang Guru dan Dosen* (UU No. 14 Tahun 2005) into our educational system has made this term get its significance in our life as teachers

or lecturers. This law, together with PP No. 19 Tahun 2006, has as its consequences the demands for teachers and lectures to develop better strategy for the development of their professionalism.

Many initiatives have been attempted and implemented in many aspects of our educational system, including many kinds of teacher training. Teacher training, especially in-service training has invited attentions from many educators, teachers, and experts in education as well as those interested in educational affairs. Besides the success, its failures have also given positive contribution to these longstanding efforts. To the writer's knowledge, we can only have very few to mention when we are expected to name successful teachers. The number will even be smaller when we are required to name teachers with successful students. These phenomena have been evident in many innovation disseminations. Hence, it is considerable to argue that we need (1) to take lessons from past experiences, and (2) to take radical, yet feasible steps towards the improvement of the teacher training practices. For its urgent nature and its magnitude impact on the current practices, this writer will take in-service training as the main focus in this paper.

Lessons from Recurring Failures

This subheading is somewhat judgmental and even tendentious. However, this is not intended to say that we have no success at all in our efforts in the past. This is rather an attempt to take advantage from the 'diagnostic' data available to us from those practices. Very often we hear complaints from teachers returning from an in-service training saying that "it's confusing," and "teaching will then be more complicated," or "it is easy to say, but ...". One of the most positive responses is "theoretically it's clear that the innovation is promising, the question is how to put it into practice?" Of course, we have also completely positive response such as "It's really inspiring!" and "Amazing!" or even "Excellent!" Later when the writer was about to finish this paper, he found out that this kind of responses is not only the case for those teachers, as reported by Pettis (2002: 395), similar reactions were also found in her experience as a teacher training instructor. First instances of the response indicate that there have been weaknesses in our in-service trainings. Some are due to the insufficient understanding of innovations even among the

instructors, and some to the lack of their interconnectedness with the real situations faced by the teachers in their classrooms. The others proved to lack of practical models and consequently lead teachers to frustrating and helpless positions and quite often end up with reluctance to implement the innovations. These have always been the answers from many teachers to such questions as “What have the in-service trainings you attended given to you?” In the meantime, the second instances indicate that for few of them the in-service trainings have given them inspiration for the betterment of their classroom practice. However, due to lack of actual models, the inspiration is not strong enough to help the teachers sustain their efforts in improving their teachings.

The Place of Theoretical Perspectives

The emphasis on actual models as mentioned above is not meant to nullify the significance of theories in any efforts of improving teaching quality. As frequently stated in some literature, theoretical knowledge helps teachers understand the nature of language, English language, teaching and English language teaching, and learning and English language learning. As accentuated by Stern (1983: 24) “There are certain situations in which theory becomes particularly evident: in language teacher training, in advising or supervising language teachers, in curriculum planning, in the writing of textbooks ...” He further explained that “In such situations, we have to express our view on language teaching, to make choices, to take up position ...” While it is true that teachers’ experience helps much in this respect, relevant knowledge as mentioned above will signify the contribution of their experiences and their beliefs about the language, learning, teaching, the program and the curriculum and language teaching as a profession (Cf. Richards and Lockhart, 1994; Alwasilah, 2000; Ur, 2002; and Suherdi, 2008). For that reason, discussion on theoretical perspectives is of much importance in teachers’ in-service trainings. However, placing theoretical explanations as the main agenda in an in-service training is far from being effective.

The Needs for Explicit Models

Having been equipped with relevant knowledge does not mean that a teacher is ready to implement an innovation effectively. Indonesian experiences indicate that without

explicit models, teachers are very often faced with technical problems that render the implementation ineffective. Hence, optimum exposure to explicit models is imperative for the teachers if successful implementation is expected. Modeling proved to be contributive to successful training (See, for example, Christopher, 2007). Modeling has also been useful for successful English learning in Indonesian contexts (Emilia, 2005; Suherdi, 2007; Hawa, 2008; Nisak, 2008, and Huda, 2008).

The Needs for Active Engagement

Explicit modeling will surely provide inspiring input for the teachers to improve their teachings. However, experience also show that without active engagement and involvement, teachers proved to lack basic experiences that are often very helpful in conducting the initial steps of the implementation. This condition brings about some unnecessary premature failures that proved to be very discouraging for the teachers. Therefore, involving teachers in the activities conducted in in-service trainings can by no means be neglected.

The Needs for Real Experiences

Another factor that is central to the success of an in-service training in Indonesian educational contexts is real experiences in implementing the innovation from the outset, i.e. since their time in the in-service training. Again, experiences show that real teaching in a real classroom helps teachers develop better sense of the innovations. In addition, these real experiences proved to develop teachers' confidence and belief in the use of the principles and theoretical foundations underpinning the innovation in improving teaching and students' learning.

Only 2P + 2R

Realizing the unique nature of the need complex of Indonesian teachers in succeeding his involvement in in-service trainings, the writer has been trying to develop a series of principles that may help develop better way to successful in-service trainings, especially in the TEFLIN (Teaching of English as a Foreign Language in Indonesia) contexts. Unlike what its name suggests, the development of this set of principles has been a very

long and winding series of efforts started in early 2000 and accentuated in 2005 when the writer was involved in some series of teacher in-service training at the national level, especially in relation to the implementation of what is known as competence-based teachings. In the writer's observation, there have been recurring sessions full of complaints and pessimistic voices from teachers concerning what they have learned from previous trainings (See for example, Suherdi, 2006). The writer has always noticed this phenomena in all of the in-service trainings in which he served as one of the instructors (from 1995 up to the time this paper is written). This has been the writer's concern since then and accordingly some efforts have then been initiated the outline of which will be discussed in the remaining parts of this paper.

Starting from July 2001, the writer developed a teaching model called MABKBIA using *sinternatif* (in Indonesian, which in English means synergetic, interactive, negotiative, and affectionate) features based on a set of relevant Islamic teachings that has been abbreviated into ARTS---Amanah, Rahmah, Tausiyah, and Sillah). This model has been tried out and implemented into real teachings in the UPI Lab schools and presented in a meeting in Indiana University in which the writer called for written comments from the audience fortunately coming from many different culture and religious backgrounds the result of which was reported in writer's doctoral dissertation (Suherdi, 2005). The most relevant point of this initiative is the way in which the writer trained the experimental teacher to adopt the teaching principles. In this case, the teacher was provided with explicit model that was presented in real class relatively equal to the experimental class of the study. To the writer's knowledge, the teacher was successful in adopting and/or adapting the principles and put it into her own practice.

Lessons from the aforementioned practice were very helpful for the writer in conducting similar trainings for 90 teachers from all over Java run by the British Councils Indonesia in cooperation with Indonesia MONE (Again, see Suherdi, 2006). Putting into the training agenda experiences from the lab schools experiment, the writer was given opportunities to exemplify alternative ways of putting the curriculum content into classroom practice. The most critical point here is the combination of reflective sessions, modeling, and peer teaching. Simon Collidge of the British Councils (in personal conversation) said that this alternative strategy had been successful in Columbia and he

was sure that it would bring the same success in Indonesian context. This paper is not intended to discuss the trainings in detail, it suffices to say that, to the extent that it motivated the participants to improve their teachings, the training was a success (Again see Suherdi, 2006). This strategy was then adopted and implemented by the Directorate of Junior High School Education (Direktorat PLP) in in-service trainings for junior high school teachers (ranging from April to April 2005).

The trainings gave productive lessons for the writer. In the writer's observation, participants were more motivated and eager to participate. They seem to enjoy almost every moment of the trainings. However, there had been many questions remaining, especially on how to anticipate problems commonly they faced in real classrooms. This was because the training only allowed them to do peer teaching which, as we know, is normally characterized with 'rather unnatural incidents'. In other words, many facilities that they might have in peer-teaching will by no means be available in their own classrooms. This is understandable since their students in the peer-teaching were their own fellows that had already had relatively good mastery of English. In the meantime, what they will face in their classrooms are students with various linguistic and learning problems.

Again lessons from previous trainings helped the writer realize some other important point in helping teachers develop their teaching. In December 2005, the writer was invited by the same directorate to give similar trainings to some groups of teachers in Jogjakarta, Banjarmasin, and Makasar. The agenda and the strategy employed were complementary to the writer's lessons, i.e. the inclusion of real teachings at the end of the trainings. While peer-teaching led teachers to modeling of the teaching approaches recommended, real teaching led teachers to realization that they were able to implement the approaches in real situations. They also realized that students were eager and able to communicate in English.

All these fruitful learning endeavors then led the writer to go extra miles to developing all the necessary tools for the administration of the whole steps in the trainings. In cooperation with an English MGMP (English Teachers Circle) in Bandung, the writer started to record the models of teaching. The models were recorded in the natural settings, i.e. without recording directorship. All of the recordings were conducted before

a group of not less than 60 teachers watching. This recording has then been used as the object of viewing in the alternative strategy recommended in this paper and hence we are ready to discuss the alternative strategy. So, what is ONLY 2P+2R? It is simply an abbreviation of a series of steps in teacher in-service training consisting of two parts: input and output stages. The first part is subsumed under ONLY standing for **O**brol-obrol tentang teori yang melandasi inovasi yang dipelajari (talking about theories), **N**onton model (watching the recorded alternative models of teaching), **L**ihat prakteknya dalam kelas (observe the real practice in the classrooms), and **Y**a, tinggal coba (now, it's your turn to try). In the meantime, the second part 2P+2R means 2 Ps (Planning and Peer-teaching) and 2 Rs (Real teaching and Reflection). In other words, the strategy consists of two stages. First, the input stage serves as the development mechanism in which teacher develops their understanding and conviction that the innovation being introduced is promising in real classroom practice. This stage comprises three main steps: (1) developing teacher's understanding and theoretical insights on relevant theories underpinning the innovations through O; (2) zeroing in on the details of the practical sides of the innovations through N; and (3) developing teacher's conviction on the applicability of the innovation in their classrooms through L. Second, the output stage serves as the reinforcement mechanism. This includes developing their ability (1) in planning teaching-learning program through the first P; (2) in implementing the innovations in limited and natural-like settings as the rehearsal stage before the real teaching through the second P; (3) in implementing the innovations in real classrooms through the first R; and (4) taking the lessons learned from the real teaching and drawing conclusions and making productive projection to their daily teaching activities.

Since April 2006, the strategy has been introduced to teachers in many parts of Indonesia and cheering teachers. Some modification has also been made, one of which is what the writer did in cooperation with MGMP Ciamis. In this case, the first part was conducted in a plenary sessions conducted by the Ciamis MGMP, while the second part conducted in the branch offices in many parts of Ciamis. Similar formats were also conducted in cooperation with MGMP Kota Bandung Barat, Sukabumi, and Bogor. Productive and positive feedbacks have been well organized and documented. However, to develop stronger claim of the effectiveness of this strategy, a longer well-designed experiment is

needed. For that purpose, an agreement is now in progress to carry out a one-year experiment in implementing ONLY 2P+2R in initiating a bilingual program in UPI lab schools, starting this academic year. Hence, theoretically more motivating results as well as practically more promising alternative strategy is still on the move.

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By

**Didi Suherdi
Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia**

SANUR PLAZA HOTEL

