

Towards Balanced and Strategic Performance Evaluation in TESOL Training Courses

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"Research... confirmed that acquiring skills and strategies, no matter how good one became at them, would not make one into a competent reader, writer, problem solver or thinker... The habit or disposition to use the skill and strategies, and the knowledge of when they are applied, needed to be developed as well."

(Resnick and Klopfer, 1989)

1. Introduction

Teacher in-service and training for elementary, middle and high school, and volunteer English teachers has been a part of the mandate of the Foreign Language Institute at Cheju National University since its inception in 1991. The instructors from around the world who have taught these courses have enjoyed the highly collegial environment that has spurred on personal and professional development. Part of this ethos has been the informal yet highly productive discussions about best practices and issues in the EFL and teacher training field. This action research project is just one dimension of the ongoing action research on effective teacher training and curriculum development that the author has been involved in at the Foreign Language Institute since 2000 (Fisher, 2001). In 2001, the middle and high school teacher in-service included performance evaluation theory and techniques that culminated in a course grading rubric that included more performance evaluation (Fisher and Bourner, 2001). Spirited discussion about the types, purposes, role, and goals of performance evaluation as applied to the Korean middle and high school

2003 with a focus on choosing appropriate criteria for performance evaluation and were integrated into the course manual.

1.1. Literature Review

1.1.1. Performance in language learning

Competence vs performance has been one of the key issues surrounding performance-based assessment (Ellis, 1994). According to Chomsky's Universal Grammar theory, linguistic competence is "knowledge" rather than "behavior" or "performance" (Chomsky, 1986). Although this is a useful construct in language acquisition, this indicates at least in part a focus on declarative knowledge rather than procedural knowledge. Performance issues, however, are imperative in the assessment of knowledge and teacher change. Situation-specific anxiety, as opposed to trait anxiety and state anxiety, has been known and been shown to affect second language learners in classrooms everywhere (Scovel, 1978).

1.1.2. Performance testing

Communicative, or performance, language tests are characteristically criterion-referenced (Morrow 1991)-- excellent for diagnostic measurements. Numerous books on constructing and using language tests have been written. In most of these discussions the authors classify a measurement strategy as either norm-referenced (NRM) (i.e., standardized) or criterion-referenced (CRM) (i.e., domain-referenced or "performance" tests. Long (1999) elaborates briefly that NRM's are general tests intended to be used to classify students by percentile for measuring either aptitude or proficiency for admissions into or placement within a program. CRM's, on the other hand, are more specific, achievement or diagnostic tests intended to measure absolute performance that is compared only with the learning objective, hence a perfect score is theoretically obtainable by all students who have a mastery of the pre-specified material, or conversely, all students may fail the test. CRMs are most accurate in helping teachers (and administrators) to assess the strengths and weaknesses of individual students with regard to the curriculum

course and administrators can make more informed decisions about curriculum changes or adjustments. This concern with matching informational needs with the appropriate testing instrument is critical to “sound testing.”

1.1.3. Reflection

The concept of “reflective practitioner” has been pioneered by Donald Schon (1987), as a way of describing and developing skilled and thoughtful judgment in professions like teaching. It has quickly gained popularity in education as a rationale for moving teacher educators and staff developers beyond mindsets focused on rather narrow forms of training, to ones embracing wider processes of thoughtful education--not just in the sense of ivory-towered contemplation, but in ways that link reflection directly to practice.

1.2. Teacher Change

The importance of “beliefs” and “understandings” is central to the success of change process. As Michael Fullan states: “All substantial innovations have underlying beliefs, rationales or philosophies...(Those involved will) have to come to understand and believe the new assumptions and ideas that underline that reform.” (Fullan, 1991, 2) Teacher must be encouraged to build their own mental models and develop their own meanings and beliefs. This includes the active provision of experiences which confront theory and allow for the evaluation and re-evaluation of aims and purposes. As teachers conduct and share their own action-research, meanings can be exchanged and a culture extended which includes and accepts the experiences and beliefs of all participants. Fullan et al (1998) concluded that the message for the individual teacher is to demonstrate openness to learning and to contribute to other teachers’ learning as a taken-for-granted habit of everyday life. Acquiring new skills, testing out practices, working with others on an improvement project, taking courses and workshops that are designed with follow-up applications, and assessing and discussing results are among the many examples available.

values, or ideas was not going to work in most cases. Instead teachers had adapt or simply reject theories or methods that were too incongruent to the Japanese context. Another key was that successful teachers were very flexible, and attuned to the needs of their students.

The single distinguishing characteristic of the best professionals in any field is that they consistently strive for better results, and are always learning to become more effective, from whatever source they can find. The teacher as career-long learner is central to our guidelines and to this essay as a whole. As Block (1987) states:

One of the fastest ways to get out of a bureaucratic cycle is to have as your goal to learn as much as you can about what you're doing. Learning and performance are intimately related; the high performers are those who learn most quickly (p. 86).

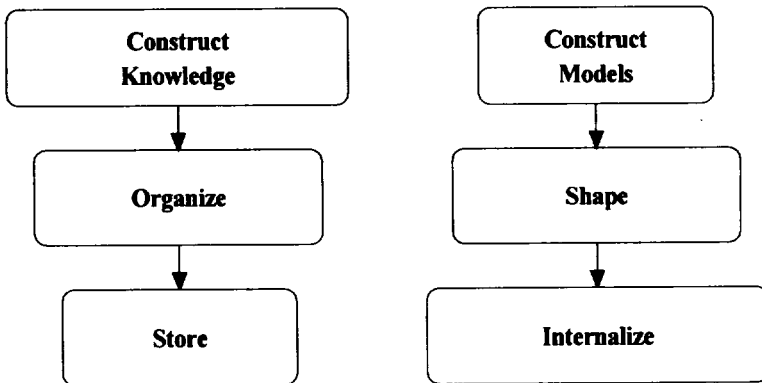
1.2.1. Constructivism

Constructivism asserts one principle whose application has far-reaching consequences for the study of cognitive development and learning as well as for the practice of teaching, psychotherapy, and interpersonal management in general: knowledge is not passively received but actively built up by the experiential world, not the discovery of ontological reality.

Edwards and Mercer (1987) further state that Vygotsky, a proponent of constructivism, was proposing that children's understanding is shaped not only through adaptive encounters with the physical world but through interactions between people in relation to the world---a world not merely physical and apprehended by the senses, but cultural, meaningful and significant, and made so primarily by language. Human knowledge and thought are themselves therefore fundamentally cultural, deriving their distinctive properties from the nature social activity, of language, discourse and other cultural forms. The idea of knowledge being constructed by the student shows appropriate respect for the intellect of the learner and reflects the subjective and evolutionary view taken of knowledge. The student, in such a view, is not a passive recipient of data but a constructionist trying to understand her world, having meaningful experiences, making personally significant connections, developing mental

2. Declarative and Procedural Knowledge

Knowledge can be organized into two basic categories: declarative knowledge and procedural knowledge (Marzano et al, 1997). Learning declarative knowledge involves a learner knowing, understanding, and explaining information such as concepts, facts, and vocabulary items. In contrast, learning procedural knowledge requires a learner to perform a process or to demonstrate a skill, whether primarily mental or physical. Although the steps involved in the complex task of learning a new method of teaching are not always linear, there are a definable set of skills and process that make up procedural knowledge. In order to help learners learn, teachers or teacher trainers must understand how teaching and assessing declarative knowledge is different from teaching and assessing procedural knowledge (Anderson, 1995).



Most tasks involving the use of knowledge require both declarative and procedural knowledge. Decision-making or problem solving demands that learners follow a process (procedural knowledge) but it is the declarative knowledge (what learners understand about the topic) that is the primary factor in learners successfully completing tasks and obtaining useful results (Marzano et al, 1997)

2.1. Teacher Training Evaluation

to observe teachers in action using their knowledge in the real setting of the classroom (Rea-Dickins & Germaine, 2000). CELTA, one of the most respected teacher training program in the world, puts a high premium on performance evaluation.

3. The study

3.1. The Context

This research was conducted during a 30 hour non-credit course entitled “TESOL training for Young Learners” at the Foreign Language Institute at Cheju National University from May 3 ~ June 2, 2004. The 100 minute classes were held from Monday to Friday from 9:00 ~ 10:30 am over the 4.5 week period.

There were 8 participants in the study. Seven were Korean teachers of English and 1 was a Canadian teacher of English. The English level of the Korean teachers ranged from Intermediate High to Advanced Mid levels of English language skills as measured by the ACTFL criteria. All of them had taught English between 2 and 16 years and were currently teaching

English to young learners in Korea.

3.2. The Action Research Questions

The original action research questions were:

1. How effective is the procedural knowledge model for a 30 hour TESOL teacher training course?
2. What are the effects of the performance-based evaluation tools on the learning and/or teacher change process?

3.2.1. The TESOL Training Course Procedural Knowledge Design

Although the 30 hour TESOL for Young Learners course syllabus was broken down

systematic acquisition of procedural knowledge. Together, the instructor and the participants started by constructing a model and shaping it within the classroom. They then tried out new techniques or strategies in their daily teaching to whatever extent was possible within the constraints of their teaching situation or assignment in order to complete the internalization phase.

In the model construction phase, declarative knowledge was interwoven into almost every strategy in every topic. This declarative knowledge usually consisted of the learning theory and second language acquisition theory that undergirded the particular topic, and was first elicited from the participants through small group discussion questions, situations/problem solving, or personal reflection by the instructor gave a brief lecture. The participants then read the step-by-step lesson instructions or lesson summary before watching the instructor model the strategy.

In the shaping phase, the participants did the technique or activity and then discussed its potential uses, adaptations, or critiques of the application to a specific classroom age group, ability, groups, or type of learners in Korea. The mental rehearsal, visualization, and reflection involved in shaping naturally led to the internalization phase.

The assessment of this course consisted of 2 demonstration lessons (25% each), a final exam (40%), and a participation mark (10%). Because these performance-based assessment tools are usually associated with a high degree of learner anxiety, specific measures were taken to reduce anxiety that would affect performance.

The two demonstration lessons were performed in a simultaneous performance model. Instead of each participant giving a demonstration lesson in front of the whole class, the participants worked in groups of three situated around the classroom. At a signal from the instructor, Person #1 in each group began their 5 minute demonstration at the same time while the instructor circulated and viewed part of each participant's lesson. When the five minute time limit was up, Person #2 set up for their demonstration lesson as the instructor completed the criterion-referenced mark sheet. The criteria for the evaluation was given 1 week ahead of time and discussed in class in detail. The participants wrote out a brief lesson plan and could

demonstration lesson up to 3 more times in front of the whole class at a mutually agreed upon time.

Written on the second last day of class, the participants received the questions 5 days before the final exam. There were short and medium answer questions instead of essay, multiple choice, true/false or fill-in-the-blank. The answers were not to be written in complete sentences and no marks were given or taken away from grammar, spelling, and punctuation. Two 30 minute in-class small group study sessions were held during the week before the exam and the instructor gave a review of key vocabulary and concepts about each question the day before the exam.

3.2.2. The Research Instruments

The research instruments were extensive instructor notes and journaling, anecdotal notes from classroom discussions, reflective journaling by the participants, 4 informal interviews with each participant, and 3 questionnaires.

As the course progressed, the instructor judged it appropriate to conduct only 2 informal interviews and administer 1 questionnaire at the end of the course. In the instructor's opinion, any more research evaluation would disrupt the positive class ethos and atmosphere which would in turn hinder or thwart the learning of the participants.

3.2.3. Results and Discussion

The first question, "How effective is the procedural knowledge model for a 30 hour TESOL teacher training course?", was initially assessed from the instructor's point of view. From the anecdotal of the participants found a strong relationship, four of the participants found a moderate relationship, and two participants found a weak relationship between procedural knowledge construction and the implementation of new teaching practices. On the other hand, all 8 participants reported that their capacity to implement new strategies, techniques, and ideas in the classroom had increased.

The second question, "What are the effects of the performance-based evaluation

techniques and strategies during the thrice weekly in-class practice sessions over the 4.5 week period. During the informal interviews, the participants all noted that because of the performance testing via demonstration lessons, they focused on successfully teaching a lesson instead of learning about ways to teach a lesson. Seven out of the 8 participants believed that the demonstration lesson requirement acted as a positive impetus for increasing the number of teaching strategies they could use in any given class for young learners. When asked about the perceived amount of change or addition to teaching techniques, 5 participants noted significant change, 2 noted some change, and 1 noted little change. The 7 participants that noted some or significant change were then asked where the change occurred. Change was identified in teacher confidence (5), overall teaching effectiveness (4), listening strategies (6), speaking fluency strategies (7), intonation strategies (7), reading strategies (5), and drama/roleplay ideas (3).

Overall, performance evaluation was considered important to essential in language learning by all of the participants from question 1 in the questionnaire. During two separate serendipitous social conversations 2 months later, two of the participants said that they felt the TESOL training course accomplished four things: improved their language skills, provided many new English teaching ideas, increased their confidence as English teachers, and solidified the need to incorporate more performance assessment in language learning in their classrooms.

Anxiety reduction in performance evaluation became a prominent focus for the instructor and participants during this TESOL teacher training course. In the demonstration lesson, both the instructor and the participants found that immediate feedback (within 2 minutes of the demonstration lesson) and the ability to redo the demonstration lesson to be the key to success. Although the participants noted that the simultaneous performance model reduced anxiety, 6 found that it was somewhat distracting to have other lessons happening at the same time. Additionally, throughout the course, each person commented that they would have liked to see everyone's demonstration lessons. In the final exam, the participants found that having the exam questions 5 days beforehand and the review of concepts and key vocabulary terms by the instructor as the key to success. In tandem with each participant's affirmative

important in affirming the participants' previous teaching competencies.

As this course progressed, one of the concerns of the instructor became how much the participants would integrate the new procedural and declarative knowledge into their current practices, attitudes, and values. This was measured in part by question 8 in the questionnaire. Six of the 8 participants stated that on the final exam, 50% of the answers were their own ideas and 50% were the instructor's ideas and 2 of the 8 participants said that 25% were their own ideas and 75% were the instructor's ideas. Given the short time period of the course, this indicates that one of the dangers of performance evaluation was avoided to a certain extent: copying the model but not shaping or internalizing.

3.2.4. Recommendations

Videos of teaching strategies by a variety of teachers and students would be an invaluable addition to a TESOL training course. One missing piece of the shaping step of the procedural knowledge process was the critical analysis and subsequent discussion of the strategies modeled. Unintentionally, because the instructor modeled all of the strategies, each of the teachers stated in one of the interviews that they did not feel free to openly critique any aspect of the strategy. When they disagreed with the potential efficacy of a strategy or technique in the classroom, they did not discuss it with each other in the classroom. A valuable opportunity for shaping, adaptation, or modified was lost.

The addition of a weekly questionnaire that assessed changing teacher values, beliefs, attitudes, or classroom practices would delineate the teacher change process more effectively. Each of the participants believed that they had adopted new teaching ideas that impacted their teaching beliefs but were unable to speak concretely about more than one instance.

It would also be useful to do systematic follow-up with each participant on a monthly basis to assess teacher change over time as well as to collect information on which strategies could be most easily adapted to the Korean young learner classroom. Although this was proposed by two participants, it was impossible to do

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Appendix A

May 3 <u>Introductions</u> (30) Icebreakers and Warm-ups (60)	May 4 Second Language Acquisition for Children (90)	May 5 Children's Day HOLIDAY!	May 6 Pronunciation and Intonation (90)	May 7 Pronunciation and <u>Intonation</u> (30) Lesson Plans (60)
May 10 Pronunciation and <u>Intonation</u> (30) Speaking (60)	May 11 Speaking (90)	May 12 Speaking (90)	May 13 Demonstration <u>Lesson #1</u> (30) Speaking (60)	May 14 Vocabulary (90)
May 17 <u>Vocabulary</u> (30) Functional Language (60)	May 18 Functional <u>Language</u> (30) Grammar (60)	May 19 <u>Listening</u> (60) Pictures and Videos (30)	May 20 Demonstration <u>Lesson #2</u> (30) Reading (60)	May 21 <u>Writing</u> (60) Language-learning Games (30)
May 24 Language-learning Games (90)	May 25 Songs, Chants, and Drama (90)	May 26 Buddha's Birthday HOLIDAY!	May 27 University Foundation Day HOLIDAY!	May 28 Western Thinking <u>Styles</u> (60) Exam Review (30)
May 31 Western Thinking <u>Styles</u> (60) Final Exam Review (30)	June 1 <u>Final Exam</u> (45) Assessment, testing, reporting (45)	June 2 <u>Multi-media</u> (45) Class Evaluation (15) Closing Ceremony		

Appendix B

Questionnaire Questions	Participant Response	
How important is performance testing in English learning?	95%	2
	90%	4
	80%	2
When most of the class got very high marks on the final exam, do you feel...	Shocked	1
	Interested	4
	Disappointed	1
	Neutral	1
	Angry	1
How much did this final exam reflect the testing maxim of "test how you teach and teach how you test"?	100%	1
	80%	6
	70%	1
In performance testing, which type of test question is		

If you were the teacher of this TESOL for Young Learners course, what types of questions would you have included on the written final exam?	Multiple choice 2 Short answer 4 Fill in the blank 3 Long answer/essay 5 Matching 2 Other
How valuable was it to receive the questions 5 days before the exam?	95% essential 6 90% very valuable 2 80% valuable 65% quite valuable 50% somewhat valuable 35% not really valuable 10% not valuable 5% not valuable at all
Many students said that there was not enough time to write the exam. Do you agree or disagree? How much time would have been helpful?	Not enough time 4 Enough time 4
How did you feel when you received your final exam marks within 20 minutes of writing the exam?	Shocked 1 Excited 7
In every question except the reading question, how much did you integrate your thoughts and ideas into your answer?	100% (all my ideas) 75% (mostly my ideas) 50% (half my ideas) 6 25% (mostly teacher's ideas) 2 0% (all the teacher's ideas)

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