



Integrating a Methodology Component into a Language Improvement Course at Universidad Nacional de Mar del Plata

Pedro Luis Luchini

Universidad Nacional de Mar del Plata

Abstract

Many future non-native teachers of English around the world, and specifically in Argentina, express a strong desire to meet one of their most pressing needs: improve their command of English so that they can perform with greater confidence in their classrooms. The purpose of this paper is to critically analyse the effectiveness of the implementation of a pre-service language development course which included a methodology component, for student teachers attending a teacher training course at the Universidad Nacional de Mar del Plata (UNMDP), Argentina. In the light of the findings obtained, some possible avenues for future improvements and continuing professional development will be suggested.

Introduction

Most teacher training programmes around the world offer a fairly traditional combination of methodology, linguistics, literature and language development components. Although there is no doubt that all these elements should form an important part of any English Language Teaching programme, the fact remains that in many cases and specifically in Argentina, a considerable number of non-native teachers of English express a more generalised concern for their need to improve their command of the target language over the other components of the programme, assigning methodology a secondary role. Argentina,

however, is not the only country in the world where modern language teachers feel a real need for language development over the other programme components. For many Chinese teachers of English, for instance, teacher training signifies primarily raising the teachers' proficiency in the language, ranking the methodology component second in order of importance (Berry, 1990). This perception may take root in the teachers' need to use the language for authentic communicative reasons more fluently, and above all, more confidently in their classes, an essential requisite of communicative approaches for language teaching. However, a language improvement course for non-native speaker trainees combined with a methodology component can have a two-fold aim: to raise the teachers' language competency and to provide a model for teacher behaviour, thus bringing about a positive change in teaching practices (Berry 1990). Indeed, a language improvement course that contemplates these two aims is, it may be argued, likely to meet the needs or respond to the wishes of the teachers themselves.

The purpose of this paper is to critically analyse the effectiveness of the implementation of a pre-service language development course – *Comunicación Avanzada II (CA II)* which included a methodology component, for student teachers attending a teacher training course at the Universidad Nacional de Mar del Plata (UNMDP), Argentina.

In the first part of this paper, I will make reference to the importance of language development in pre-service aimed at improving the general language proficiency of student teachers, present Wallace's (1991) current three major models of professional education, and relate them to the teaching of language improvement. In the second section, I will briefly describe the key features of CA II: its participants, length, objectives, content, structure, task-types and materials used. In the following part, I will refer to the integration of a methodology component into this language improvement course, and, finally, in the last section, using criteria for effectiveness coming from relevant literature, my own experience,

and students' perceptions of the course, I will evaluate the course and then suggest possible avenues for future improvements and continuing professional development.

Literature Review

Most teacher training programmes for teachers of English as a foreign language around the world, at pre-service level, consist of a set of predictable components; namely, methodology, linguistics, literature, culture and language development. Despite the imperious need to expose the trainees to all these elements in order to equip them with the necessary tools and resources to become competent professionals, the issue remains that for a vast number of student teachers, their overwhelming desire is to improve their command of the language itself. This claim is well documented by a number of researchers who sustain that non-native trainees consider language proficiency as the basis of their ability to fulfil their future professional role (see Murdoch 1994, Cullen 1994, Berry 1990, Van Lier 1995, DeFelice 1998, among others).

Teacher trainees' real need for developing their language competence over other components of teacher training programmes, it may be argued, centres around two main conceptions. The first one relates to the fact that with the advent of communicative language teaching approaches, teachers feel the pressure to use the language in their classrooms communicatively, rather than simply limit its use for giving instructions or holding short exchanges with their students. That is, as Marton (1988:47) says "teachers should be prepared for any linguistic emergency" (in Berry 1990:99) in which they are able to explore and examine a variety of ways of interacting with their students in their classrooms. The second reason has to do with the relationship that exists between language competence and trainees' professional confidence. Indeed, relevant literature on the role and importance of the

language component in both pre and in-service teacher education, highlights the fact that an increase in the level of trainees' language proficiency may lead to a direct boost in their confidence and professional status (see Berry 1990, Cullen 1994, Murdoch 1994, Hundleby & Breet 1988, among others). However, and in reference to trainees' professional confidence, Berry (1990) points out that in many cases, this lack of confidence is more a problem of the trainees' perception rather than their actual proficiency. This might well be the case of trainees at the UNMDP who are about to graduate and still have the feeling that they are not well equipped to use the target language effectively in their classrooms in real communicative situations.

On the other hand, many teacher training programmes at pre-service level do include a language component but the issue remains that language use should not be confused with knowledge of the language. That is, language development may become confused with the subject matter of the linguistics component which includes a theoretical element that emphasises increasing knowledge and awareness about the system of the language (Bartels 1999). This last aspect often consists of the study of the English grammatical and phonological systems focusing on the trainees' understanding of how language works, rather than how it is used in real communications (Cullen 1994). This does not mean that the linguistics component should be removed from teacher training programmes. Indeed, and in reference to this, Halliday (1982:13) suggests that

... a linguistics course for teachers is fundamental. But I don't think it should be a sort of watered down academic linguistic course. It should be something new, designed and worked out by linguists and teachers together.

(in Van Lier 1995:108)

The linguistics component as well as language awareness activities may be useful for language development when they aim to develop the ability to use the language in real communications, that is, develop an understanding of how language works, so that these activities contribute directly to the trainees' proficiency in using the language itself (Wright & Bolitho 1993).

Nonetheless, the truth is that oftentimes, trainers do not provide student teachers with enough opportunities to use language in communicative activities. It is less time consuming to lecture on the usage of the main structures the trainees will need to teach in their classes than to create and carry out activities which promote practice in using them. Trainees should be exposed to a range of teaching modes and procedures, including seminars, workshops, lectures, discussions, cross-over groups, jigsaw learning, field study, pyramid groups, simulations, snowball groups, task-based learning, and so on (Wallace 1991). It is expected that this assorted range of modes of teaching and learning will maximise the effectiveness in their training, and, therefore, have some influence on their own classroom practices. Trainees who have been exposed to just a few types of training modes, especially those focused on lecturing, are bound to develop and adopt "a transmission style" of teaching (Murdoch 1994: 254) with their own students later on, that will not be well suited to foster communication skills. However, by experiencing and reflecting on a diverse type of activities and tasks in their teacher education classes, trainees will be better equipped to make informed decisions and, thus, choose the type of tasks and groupings that will best meet their pupils' needs (Murdoch 1994).

Earlier in this paper, I mentioned that a language improvement course that combines with a methodology component has two main aims: to raise the language competence of student teachers, which indeed is its primary role, and as Berry (1990) proposes, to provide a model for teacher behaviour. The aim in providing a model for teaching behaviour is not so much to

provide a model for imitation in itself but as an example for later analysis and discussion. The model is open to criticism, discussion and reflection and may as such be accepted or turned down, and most certainly be adapted by the trainees as a result of this process. An approach to teaching language as such that deals with linguistics and pedagogical issues simultaneously followed by a period of reflection, should aim at improving both the teachers' language competence and their professional skills as teachers since trainees deal with issues related to methodology through actual hands-on experience of activities and procedures in the teacher education classroom followed by a period of reflection and analysis (Cullen 1994).

The model of the reflective practitioner where student teachers are involved in awareness-raising procedures in order to facilitate critical analysis of their views and teaching practices, is now a commonplace in teacher education courses (Gilpin 1999). Although the primary aim of a language course for trainees at pre-service level should be to raise their level of linguistic competence, a secondary goal should be to help them work towards being reflective practitioners, that is, as Hedge & Whitney (1996:125) say

...at the same time as they learn a variety of teaching techniques, they build understanding of the principles underlying those techniques and develop critical frameworks for evaluating them and their relevance and usefulness for different teaching situations.

In reference to the different models of teaching preparation, Wallace (1991) proposes that those engaged in professional education develop their professionalism based on three major current models of professional education:

- a- the craft model: in this conservative model, the young trainees learn by imitating an experienced professional practitioner, that is, someone who is expert in the practice of the profession, and by following his instructions and advice.
- b- The applied science model: in this model the findings of scientific knowledge and research are conveyed to the trainees by experts in the relevant areas of investigation and it is up to the trainees to put the recommendations and suggestions from these findings into practice.
- c- The reflective model: this model proposes a compromise combination of both the trainees' experience, and the scientific basis of the profession. This model has two main dimensions: the "received knowledge" which involves knowledge that the trainees have acquired through research findings and theories and skills widely accepted as being part of the academic content of the profession; and the "experiential knowledge" (Wallace 1991:12) which relates to the development of the trainees' knowing-in-action by practice of the profession and to the opportunity to reflect on that knowledge. It is essential that there is a reciprocal relationship between these two elements, in so doing the trainees will be able to apply the findings of empirical science to their teaching situations and reflect on the received knowledge in the light of classroom experience, so that classroom experience can feed back into the received knowledge.

In analysing Wallace's (1991) models of professional education, rather than being wholly "craft", "science" or "reflective", Pennington (1999) proposes that teaching should in fact be an active process in which the features of the practices represented by the three models blend to form a profession. In the light of these different opinions, then, and reflecting on my own personal experience, teaching as profession should combine important bits taken from each one of these models so as to meet the needs of different specific teaching situations. Earlier in

this paper, I referred to the importance of providing student teachers with a model for teaching behaviour for imitation, analysis and discussion. It could be true to say then, that for some teachers, and especially those trainees at pre-service level with very little experiential knowledge, observing an experienced professional practitioner in action may provide these teachers with a wealth of ideas, attitudes, techniques and behaviours, which, later on, they can imitate and transfer to their own teaching contexts. The adoption of the craft model thus can liberate some teachers from their own fears of teaching by giving them security and offering them models on which they can fall back on and this, in turn, could be of great value for student teachers, especially at initial stages in their teaching professions. An ideal progression would be that, as these novice teachers move forward in their careers, they can provide an intellectual justification for what they do based on scientific knowledge followed by a period of reflection. In this way, features of the craft, the applied science and the reflective models as presented by Wallace (1991) can blend to form a profession.

The kind of approach that I advocate for teaching language to pre-service student teachers is an integral and practical part of a task-based methodology combined with reflection. Under this approach, participants are led to explore their own learning in their teacher education classes, beginning by experiencing, observing, describing, reporting and analysing the events of the sessions in which they participate in order to make explicit to themselves the assumptions that underlie what they do and then to review those assumptions in the light of theoretical inputs and actual teaching practices. The proposals considered in this section will be partly used as criteria to determine the effectiveness of CAII with regard to its implementation and the results obtained.

The Context

To understand how trainees enrolled in this teacher training programme at the UNMDP come and what they bring into CAII, I will briefly describe the programme and then, refer to the course key features.

This four-year programme aims at:

- producing competent teachers of English equipped with an adequate level of proficiency in English able to understand how the language works, and how it is used in discourse in order to teach it effectively
- developing an understanding of the content of language teaching
- developing an understanding of how students learn in the classroom
- bridging the gap between theory and practice

This teacher training programme is divided into four main areas under which classes are grouped according the different fields of study: Linguistics, Language improvement, Teacher education and Culture (see www.unmdp.edu.ar)

To enrol in this programme, students have to master an English proficiency level equivalent or superior to that required by the First Certificate in English test or the Test of English as a Foreign Language. When trainees come into CAII, at year four in this programme, they presumably bring along with them some received and experiential knowledge gained from the theoretical and practical methodological subjects taken in previous years, and a relatively high level of language competence, considering they have taken all the subjects related to language development prior to CAII (see www.unmdp.edu.ar).

CAII is a four-month language development course that aims to develop the trainees' written and oral communicative language skills at advanced level. I teach part of this course together with two other instructors and we meet our students once a week for a two-hour class. Although we share the same course objectives, we all have different responsibilities for the implementation of the course. While the other two teachers focus more on theoretical

aspects and extensive reading, I emphasise on practical tasks where trainees combine theoretical inputs with practical activities.

The course content of CAII revolves around two main central units: narration and argumentation. During the first part of the course, trainees are introduced to the principles and elements of narration where trainees are made to perform some activities such as role-plays and dramatisations, and they are also involved in the process of writing narrative texts using drafting. In the second part of the course, trainees are engaged in understanding the nature of argument for reading and writing and perform some communicative activities such as debates, class discussions and presentations. For this second part, trainees are also required to write an argumentative essay using drafting.

The Integration of a Methodology Component into a Language Improvement Course

I have been teaching CAII together with these two other teachers for five years now. My contribution to this course, until very recently, has been focused mainly on the provision of large amounts of input in the forms of endless lists of vocabulary which trainees had to memorise, piles of novels, short stories and articles to read, and lots of grammatical exercises aiming at eliminating mistakes in form and structure, among other things. A rather traditional methodology based on strong perceptions of language teaching which I experienced myself as a learner.

Throughout this time, although I managed to bring about some changes with regard to teaching materials, the results that I obtained at the end of each course, measured in terms of the trainees' linguistics achievements and their perceptions in relation to the course, kept on being far from what I considered satisfactory. Only after reading and understanding relevant literature on the content of language teaching and being exposed to influential teaching

models, was I able to reflect on my own teaching practices and, thus, understand how to effect the desired change that would eventually help both trainees' and myself meet our objectives and expectations satisfactorily.

Earlier in this paper, I stated that the general course objective for CAII centred around the further development of the trainees' competence and fluency in English so that they can communicate effectively as future teachers. However, without disregarding the main objective of the course, this academic year, I decided to bring the trainees to a competent level of English proficiency by engaging them in different tasks aiming at developing their own language repertoire and thus encouraging them to reflect and become aware of their own learning processes.

In order to partly illustrate this task-based methodology which aims at teaching language by combining reflection and analysis, it is worth looking at some of the materials and activities used with the trainees during the second part of CAII when dealing with argumentation.

COMUNICACIÓN AVANZADA II – 2002-

Instructor: Pedro Luchini

ARGUMENTATION TASK SHEET

AIMS

- to identify discourse components in argumentative writing and recognise their importance in conveying meaning
- to identify the schematic structure of an argumentative text: topic, issue, thesis statement, supporting ideas, opposing view, conclusion
- to practice vocabulary strategies for discovering and consolidating lexical items (Schmitt 1997)
- to write an argumentative essay following the steps and conventions as presented by the process and genre approaches to writing

- to analyse and reflect on the different stages involved in each one of these tasks and identify possible ways of adapting this work for different leaning/teaching situations

READING TITLE: OUR JUSTICE SYSTMNE NEEDS SHAPING UP (in Wood 1995)

- 1- REFER TO THE TITLE OF THIS ESSAY AND PREDICT ITS CONTENT
- 2- BRAINSTROM IDEAS IN GROUPS
- 3- READ AND ORGANIZE THESE PARAGRAPHS SO THAT IT BECOMES A SENSIBLE ESSAY (as trainees read the scrambled paragraphs, they should number them below in order)

1		3		5		7	
2		4		6		8	

- 4- DETERMINE HOW AND WHY YOU HAVE ORGANIZED THE PARAGRAPHS IN SUCH A WAY. BACK UP YOUR CHOICES.
- 5- CONNECTORS: identify and underline linkers throughout the text. Classify them according to their function within the piece of discourse.

CONNECTORS	ADDITION	CONTRAST	OTHERS

- 6- VOCABULARY: establish at least three meaningful links or associations for each one of these words provided. The links can be : a *definition* -an *example* -an *association* - a *translation* -an *opposite* -a *synonym* -an *illustration* -any *other...*

NEW WORD	LINK 1	LINK 2	LINK 3	LINK 4

A weekend Furlough				
He stalked the house				
Law-abiding				
Life term				
Was paroled				

7- SUMMARIZE THE INFORMATION CONTAINED IN EACH PARAGRAPH

PARAG	INFORMATION IN NOTE-FORM
1	
2	
3	

8- DETERMINE HOW THE WRITER ORGANIZED/PLANNED THE ESSAY.

9- DETERMINE AUDIENCE: TO WHOM WAS THE ESSAY ADDRESSED?

10- WHAT WAS THE PURPOSE OF THE WRITER IN WRITING THIS ESSAY?

COULD YOU SAY THAT THE ESSAY WAS EFFECTIVE IN THAT SENSE?

11- WHAT COULD HAVE BEEN THE OUTLINE THE WRITER CRAFTED BEFORE COMING UP WITH THE ESSAY?

12- WRITING ASSIGNMENT: Choose an issue from the readings you have done so far and write an argumentative essay . The following steps will help you organize and plan your work

- *group discussion*
- *brainstorming by the students*
- *organization of text: planning the outline*
- *writing the outline*

- *revising stage*
- *first draft*
- *feedback*
- *second draft*
- *proof-reading stage: grammar, spelling, punctuation, general presentation*
- *final version*

Activities

Below there is a possible sequence of activities that could be followed to complete this guide:

1. Ask trainees to get in groups of four
2. Allot time for the completion of each task
3. After the completion of each task, trainees are asked to explore and identify specific features of the target language point
4. Trainees are asked to compare the given data with their previous knowledge
5. After each task, trainees report on their findings. Some trainer intervention may be expected at this stage where doubts are cleared out, and necessary input might be introduced.
6. Reflection and analysis tasks: trainees are asked to think about the implications of each task in terms of its aims and objectives (e.g.: “*Why do you think I decided to include such an activity? If you had created this guide, would you have chosen similar tasks? How far do you think this activity will be useful when crafting your own texts?*”)
7. Once all the activities have been completed and probably before doing the written task, trainees would be asked to create a bridge from awareness of language to their own future classroom practices. This could be done by means of raising questions,

both specific and general, which, in this case can be linked to their “hidden theory” (Ramani 1987) on the teaching of writing skills: *“If you had to teach your pupils writing skills, would you choose to use a guide like this? What other important aspects of the writing process that you saw in your methodology class would you add that have not been contemplated here?”*

At this developmental stage of this study, the inclusion of the methodology component in this language course was done rather intuitively, that is, although I thought it would be interesting and more purposeful for trainees to reflect and, thus, relate what they did in their teacher training classes to their own learning processes, now, in hindsight, I think I lacked a structured and more principled theoretical basis for what I asked trainees to do. On second grounds, I only worked with some pedagogical skills; namely, vocabulary strategies, oral assessment, and writing skills, at the exclusion of others. This selection, though it might look capricious, was done for two main reasons: firstly, to meet some of the course expectations trainees had at the very start of the course. Secondly, the course duration was relatively short considering the items I had to cover, therefore, I was pushed to choose only some pedagogical skills which I thought would equip trainees with the necessary skills and resources required to pass the course. As a long-term goal, however, I thought these methodological techniques would help them shift their awareness of the importance of continuing development in their future careers as professional educators.

These analysis and reflection tasks aiming at combining language with methodology were also supported by another important ingredient. Before and while I was teaching this language development course, I held a few informal meetings with the methodology teacher in charge of “Didáctica e Investigación Educativa”, a course on teacher training skills which is also part of this programme and is delivered in parallel with CAII. At these meetings, we

agreed that in her classes, she would discuss and analyse the theoretical and practical implications of *some* of the tasks our same trainees had done in the language course and thus create a link between practice and current conceptual issues. This ideal blend between the language and methodology components aimed mainly at “raising the theoretical awareness of trainees by encouraging them to conceptualise their practices and thus narrow the gap between theory and practice” (Ramani 1987:3).

Implications and Recommendations

Looking back at the implementation of this language course, and based on what current literature says about this, my own personal experience, and student teachers’ achievements and their perceptions gathered from a questionnaire, I devised a set of debatable questions which will be listed and dealt with below aiming at analysing critically how effective this approach was for my context and in my particular situation.

1. *How far was the combination of language development with methodology effective in relation to the objectives set for the course?*

Most current literature on language development provision in pre-service teacher education programmes emphasises the need to intensify the focus on trainees’ language competence in order to produce more confident and thus competent teachers. The ideal language teaching approach suggested is one that combines language improvement and methodology by “using the learning experience which the trainees have undergone during the language sessions as the content for follow-up work on methodology” (Cullen 1994). Thus, the experience of language learning serves as a provider of the input for other components of the programme such as

methodology and language awareness (Murdoch 1994, Cullen 1994, Berry 1990, DeFelice 1998, among others). The principles of this approach to teaching language in pre-service, which was earlier outlined in the literature review session of this paper, was used as criteria for determining how effective the implementation of CAII was.

In the preceding section, I stated that the main objective I pursued for this language course was to bring the trainees to a competent level of English proficiency by engaging them in different tasks aiming at developing their own language repertoire and their reflection skills. By the end of this course, and in terms of language competence, trainees were able to internalise and use a wide range of specific vocabulary related to the different areas and topics covered in class, organise and sequence their ideas both in oral and written discourse, write extended and unified pieces of narrative and argumentative texts, and perform a set of assorted communicative activities. All this, it may be argued, showed a notable development in the trainees' language performance if compared with their initial stage prior to taking the course. As regards the impact of the methodology component on the course, the trainees were able to relate the implications of each activity done in class to their own learning processes and teaching practices, an achievement that will hopefully allow them to reflect on and review their own practices, explore new alternatives, and come to an understanding of how personal and professional improvement can be accomplished. In analysing these results, it seems that both course objectives and students' expectations were met. Therefore, it might probably be true to say that the implementation of this language course was, at first glance, effective, at least at this initial stage, in this context, and in this particular situation. However, the risk of claiming that this course was effective can be the result of having made a perceptual interpretation more than a factual one since there was no test/re-test assessment procedure, a technique which would have allowed me to measure the students' achievements in relation to my intervention before and after the course and thus claim that the trainees' outcomes could

have been somehow influenced by the adoption of this new approach to teaching language. In reference to this, in the next section, in analysing the trainees' achievements, I will raise some interesting points that will call in question the effectiveness of CAII under this new approach.

2. Which were the trainees' achievements and perceptions at the end of the course?

At the end of this course, trainees were made to complete feedback sheets to be later used as part of the course evaluation (the evaluation sheets are available). These evaluation sheets aimed to recapture the trainees' perceptions about the course in reference to their expectations, materials and activities used, and to the possible implications of the course in their future careers as educators. The results obtained provided some interesting information that might also help to determine how effective the course was. Most of the trainees claimed that, in general, almost all the expectations they had had at the beginning of the course were met. However, most of them complained about the length of the course saying that more time to practice oral and written skills would have been essential. In reference to this, three trainees pointed out:

- Student A: I think that most of the expectations of this course have been met, such as improving my fluency and accuracy when speaking, organizing my ideas in both oral and written discourse and enlarging my vocabulary. I also think that more time to practice oral and written skill is essential.

- Student B: I met my expectations but I would have liked this course to be longer. There are a lot more to be learnt.

- Student C: I have met the expectations but I also think that as students we need more time to brush up the different aspects of the language seen in this course.

As regards the materials and activities used throughout the course, more than 75% of the trainees enrolled in this course highlighted that awareness-raising was almost always present in most of the tasks they were engaged in. In relation to this, they said:

- Student D: the methodology was ok in terms of reflecting upon our own weaknesses and becoming aware of certain strategies to be used when carrying out certain activities.
- Student E: I'm not sure if I have internalised the strategies to achieve a better level of English. However, I'm aware of them. Awareness is the first step towards improvement and success. These classes helped in that process.
- Student F: I could relate the methodology implemented in this course with the theory of such methodology that we have been studying in other courses.

When referring to the possible implications this course could have in their future careers as teachers, three trainees stated:

- Student G: We can use the methodology implemented here for our own classes. Moreover, we have improved our oral and written skills so as to apply them properly when teaching.

- Student H: I think the course will definitely influence my future profession. I've tried to implement a few things we've been doing in class, and sometimes I've been thinking hard of what we've been talking about or discussing. I personally enjoyed the classes and consider them good examples and models.

Although the above testimonies, which were drawn from some of the trainees participating in this study, include an element of subjectivity, they may count as important pieces of evidence to claim that, in the eyes of the trainees, the implementation of this language course was, at least moderately, effective. However, as was pointed out earlier, the fact that no test/re-test technique was used to measure and thus determine the students' language acquisition gains does not allow to quantify findings. Indeed, data triangulation could have been used, and this involves data on outcomes achieved through tests combined with other more qualitative methods that are collected over a period of time, from more than one setting, and from more than one person. In this way, the combination of both methods – quantitative and qualitative - would have provided checks on each other and this, in turn, would have served to strengthen the evaluation and, ultimately, the course being evaluated.

3. Which were the implications of using a methodology component in a language development course in this particular context?

One cannot deny the numerous advantages, which were outlined earlier in this paper, of combining language with a methodology component. However, looking back at my personal experience, I feel the need to highlight some important aspects that could be worth thinking out:

- ✓ The teacher education class time that was used for reflection and analysis was time that could not be used for introducing specific language inputs, such as new vocabulary items, verb patterns, and so on, which was what trainees claimed they mostly needed. In order to meet this need, a possible alternative would be to agree with the methodology teacher that she discusses in her classes the tasks done in the language class and so bridge the gap between theory and practice using reflection and analysis. In this way, I could use my class time for having trainees work more on tasks directly focused on language improvement. Another possibility could be the implementation of a methodology notebook as Hundleby and Breet (1988) suggest. In this notebook trainees would write about examples of materials and activities used during the language improvement lessons to provide a useful resource for later analysis and reflection in the methodology class. This would imply, however, that both language and methodology teachers design and implement syllabuses in parallel so that we could work together collaboratively, rather an ambitious and ideal state indeed.
- ✓ Earlier in this paper, I mentioned that the combination of language and methodology was done rather intuitively, that is, I realise now that I lacked a more structured and principled way of working which, indeed, would have given me a theoretical justification and awareness of what I asked trainees to do. However, and considering that this was the very initial stage in this developmental process, I think the implementation of this approach to teaching language was to a certain extent effective. It is evident, however, that in the near future, if I mean to work with the methodology teacher collaboratively, we will need to structure and plan ahead our classes together in order to exploit fully the language improvement component.

- ✓ Looking back at the evaluation sheets, it transpires that the trainees' main concern focuses on the correlation between the length of the course and their language acquisition gains. That is, most of them assert that if the course had been longer, they would have improved their language proficiency considerably further. However, and as Berry (1990) says, this lack of proficiency might be quite possibly more a problem of perception than of fact. Indeed, I wonder what the trainees' perceptions would have been, if the course had lasted one full academic year. In reference to this, I suggest that trainers carefully analyse their trainees' language competence level in order to be able to identify and differentiate what is factual from perceptual and, on the basis of this, make informed-decisions leading to produce more competent language teachers.
- ✓ In order to strengthen the evaluation procedures, the test/re-test technique could be used to obtain data on outcomes achieved through tests to be later combined and compared with other more qualitative methods collected over a period of time.

Nevertheless, not all is gloom and doom. Although my above comments may sound a bit off-putting, the evidence gathered from the interviews with the student teachers participating in this study reveals that the adoption of this approach to teaching language was, to a considerable degree, beneficial, as one trainee pointed out “...awareness is the first step towards improvement and success. These classes helped in that process.”

Conclusion

In this paper I have critically analysed a language improvement course at pre-service level which aimed at combining a methodology component. In the light of this critique, I have tried to suggest that the primary aim of this approach is to respond to many future teachers'

actual perceptions and anxieties and to meet their most pressing needs by improving their command of English so that they can perform with greater confidence in their classrooms. The purpose of the adoption of this integrative approach to teaching language is essentially founded on consciousness-raising, that is, trainees are expected to deepen their understanding of the principles and processes involved in the language teaching as a result of their learning experiences, in the hope that this increased understanding will inform their own practices as future teachers, thus contributing to their continuing professional development (Cullen 1994). As I said earlier, this work is still at its developmental stage, further research would be needed to claim that this approach is effective for student teachers in similar or different contexts.

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