



XIII Coloquio de Gestión Universitaria en Américas

Rendimientos académicos y eficacia social de la Universidad

PREPARING NEW TEACHERS OF ENGLISH IN BRAZIL

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The aim of this paper is to reflect about curriculum design. It is a theoretical essay based on Perrenoud's(1999) and Freeman's (1989) concept of competencies as well as on the four pillars of competency-based teaching as discussed in the World Conference for All in Thailand in 1990. To this end, an exploratory study of the national scenario of the past three decades has been conducted into the area of English language teacher evaluation and education and supported by bibliographical and documental research. The information obtained has been organized into analytical categories such as: competencies, recruitment, communication, training, development, and evaluation. It is suggested that teacher preparation in tertiary education institutions needs to have its curriculum reviewed, in order to prepare quality teachers who in turn, will be able to prepare future professionals for the 21st. Century market. As for University professors, instead of thinking of themselves as specialists in their area of subject matter, they should look inside out and talk more to their colleagues about how their specialties could integrate and contribute towards the learners' better preparation for the profession. This paper argues that the curriculum in tertiary teacher education institutions should be competencies based rather than content based to enable them to prepare the workforce for the future.

Key words: competencies, curriculum, teacher education, higher education.



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1 Introduction

“Learning happens through the learner’s active involvement, he learns by means of what *he* does and not what the teacher does.”

(TYLER, 1995)

What does a teacher of English need in order to be a teacher? And how does the teacher acquire what he needs? We will try to answer these questions in this theoretical essay looking ahead, and project the title some eight or ten years from now.

In order to be a teacher, in our specific case an English language teacher in Brazil, he needs to have what Freeman (1989), calls KASA, Knowledge, Awareness, Skills and Attitude.

Knowledge: for example, of English and of teaching. A teacher of English cannot claim to be a teacher if he doesn’t know his subject matter and cannot speak the language accurately and fluently, and as far as linguistic competence is concerned, this has been a challenge to be overcome in the Brazilian context, due to the perceived low proficiency level of English brought by some professionals nowadays - food for thought! Awareness of his learners and how his practice impacts on them. The teacher also needs to have the right Attitude towards his students and vice-versa, a good rapport with them and a professional Attitude in his workplace. These are just some possible examples to illustrate KASA, the intersection of which we will refer to as competencies and to which we will come back later in this text.

Our next question is: how does a teacher acquire KASA? The first answer that comes to mind is during his preparation to become a teacher at a Teacher Training College and in our Brazilian context, at the University.

2 The role of English

Let’s look at the role of English Language Teaching (ELT) in Brazil over the last thirty years. Until 1996 English was not considered to be a regular school subject in the last two years of our secondary school. It was listed amongst the non-core subjects together with PE, Music, Crafts and Arts in some regions. It was introduced into the curriculum by the LDB in 1996 secondary schools as of the 5th. grade as a regular subject and students could choose amongst English, French or Spanish as one of the foreign languages to learn. As one foreign language was compulsory and a second one optional, English was the natural foreign language taught. However, this elective would never fail a student (BRASIL, 1996).



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Given the little importance attributed to the English language then, the job of an English language teacher was also undervalued. As a result, not many young people were attracted into the profession and those who did a BA in English at Universities saw better career prospects in translation, computer sciences, air companies, even in tourism rather than go into teaching.

More recently, however, Brazil began to miss financial opportunities in foreign trade, industry and commerce due to the inability of the workforce to speak English in the trading economy and awareness of the need for English started to gradually dawn on everyone. The State sector for example, introduced English earlier in the school curriculum and in some schools English has been introduced even in primary school.

The LDB acknowledged the need for at least two foreign languages, which makes English naturally be one of them. The PCNs³, have been written not just for the regular subjects but for English as well, and the role of English gradually began to play a more important part (BRASIL, 1996).

3 The preparation of new teachers

We would now like to come back to the preparation of new teachers of English in Brazil and here we are not talking about a small elite who teach at language institutes and who may get top class teacher education during their pre-service course.

In order to prepare quality teachers who in turn, will be able to prepare students for the 21st. Century market, Universities need to change their curricula and some of their professors' mind frame, who instead of thinking of themselves as specialists in their area of subject matter, should look inside out and talk to their colleagues about how their specialties could integrate and contribute towards the learners' better preparation for the profession. For example, by creating shortcuts instead of duplicating information across subjects and maximising learning by weaving together their different subject matter.

University curricula in general are content based. We maintain that the curriculum in tertiary teacher education institutions should be competencies based. If we take the *Exame Nacional de Desempenho de Estudantes* (ENADE) exam as an example, its objective is to test learning through competencies. I.e. "a student solving a problem using several cognitive resources" c.f. Perrenoud (2000, p.15).

Since according to Toro (2013), the minimum capabilities for the productive participation in the 21st Century are: the mastery of reading and writing, the capability to make calculations and problem solving, the ability to describe, interpret and analyse, to comprehend and operate in one's social environment, the capability to critically face



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communication media, the capability to locate and use information, the capability to work in teams.

The chart below gives a very summarized overview of what English Language teacher preparation in Universities in Brazil has been emphasizing so far and what we are looking for.

Teacher preparation in Teacher Training Colleges and Universities so far	What we are looking for
To prepare teachers who are autonomous and reproduce society.	To prepare autonomous teachers who are able to transform society.
Practical usage of knowledge and skills: schooling and organization.	The ability to activate knowledge to solve professional problems.
Learning seen as a process.	Learning seen as problem solving (e.g. project based learning).

Source:(Berchior¹ 2013)

4 Where do we start then?

Which is the professional profile we want to prepare?

The answer to this question should establish the professional competencies of an area, or a course.

Rather than content based teacher preparation or curricula at most Universities and Teacher Training Colleges, we suggest preparing teachers based on a competencies based curricula, which is by no means new to anyone, but it implements what preparation Universities just pay lip service to.

Course and Curriculum designers usually ask what teachers need to know in order to be competent professionals and the answers they get just point at content and at most skills, which naturally lead to content based curricula design.

What we suggest is looking into market and job demands, into the environment and into society and projecting the challenges faced now, some eight to ten years ahead. We will realize that just knowledge and skills will not suffice as curriculum components. We should as some already are, be thinking about competencies, although, some farsighted already talked about applying KASA in the 90's.



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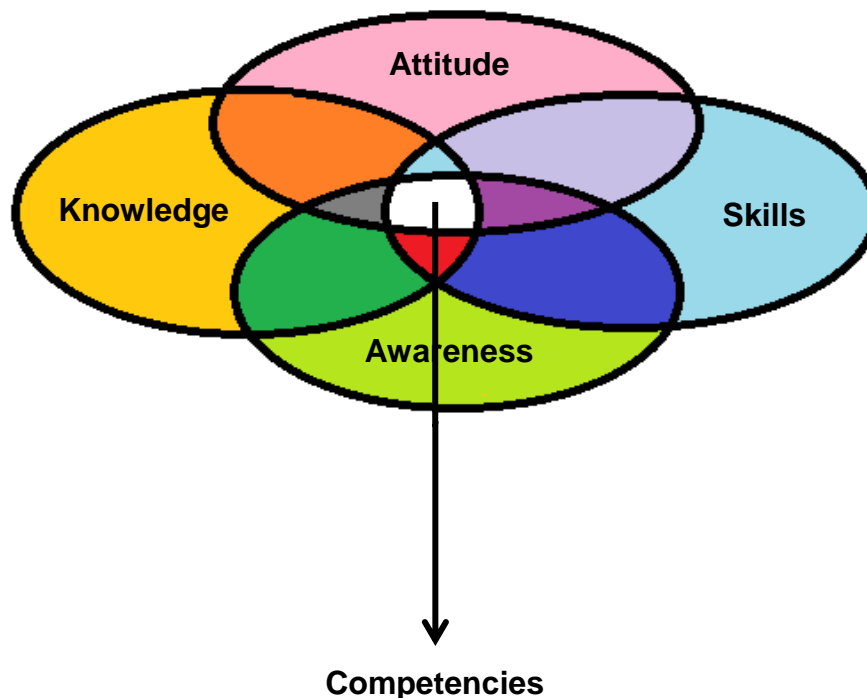
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Competency-based teaching as discussed in the World Conference for All in Thailand in 1990 is grounded on four pillars: learning to know, learning to do, learning to live and learning to be.

The *Lei de Diretrizes e Bases* of National Education (LDB), and the *Parâmetros Curriculares Nacionais (PCN)* emphasise the need to focus teaching and learning on the development of competencies rather than on conceptual content only.

5 What are Competencies?

Freeman sees, competencies as the interplay of Knowledge, Skills, Attitudes and Awareness for a teaching task to be well completed at a given proficiency level. The figure below summarizes and structures this proposition.



Source: created by the authors



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According to Perrenoud (1999, p.7), competencies may have several understandings. He sees them as the capability to act effectively in a given situation supported by knowledge, not being restricted by it, however.

If Perrenoud (1999), suggests putting knowledge into action, rather than leaving it as theory, then learners could learn through problem solving and need to learn how to learn, in order to be able to deal with change and the uncertainty of an unpredictable future.

Being competent involves calling for knowledge in different areas. Cultivating knowledge per se, or abilities guarantee competency, if you don't know how to select and apply them to a problem situation in order to solve or improve it.

The ten realms of competencies acknowledged as priority in the preparation of teacher education c.f. Perrenoud (2002), are as follows: to organize and direct learning situations, to administer the progression of learning, to acknowledge and act upon differentiation, to involve the learners in their learning and in their work, to work in teams, to take part in the school administration, to inform and involve parents in educational matters, to make use of new technologies, to face the duties and the ethical dilemmas of the profession, to administer his/her own continuing professional education.

6 How do we materialize a competencies based curricula?

Points to consider when designing the curriculum:

- a) Entrant profile; Market demands; Course Objectives: Why? What for?; Course differential? Course mission?; Competencies to be developed; Interdisciplinary and Transversally subject areas and Exit profile.

Points to consider when teaching the curriculum:

- a) Giving more emphasis to action - doing - than to theory. Learners need to find a purpose for theory.

Being aware of the dynamics of the teaching and learning process in the relationship teacher – subject matter – student. Where the student brings his motivation, his previous knowledge, his attitude towards the content. The teacher on the other hand, brings a social stimulus, verbal communication, information about the student's progress, a relationship with the student and his own attitude towards the subject matter. The content in turn, has specific components and calls for more appropriate approaches to be tackled as well as a certain order of presentation.





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Source: created by the authors

7 What is teaching like?

Teaching starts from the student. From what he already knows, and his attitude towards the subject. The teacher employs initial strategies to involve the learner in the learning process. He has to become responsible for his learning.

Every subject matter has an objective which is to be shared with the student as well as the related competencies, attitudes and values. This will be followed by a discussion of the professional scenario where these competencies could be employed. The cycle ends with an evaluation of the learner's performance vis-à-vis the objectives outlined. At the end of a period of time, targets need to be achieved in terms of competencies. In this sense, the teacher directs and controls learning, as he is constantly evaluating the progress of his learners during activities. He can this way, give feedback to students either as whole group and apply remedial action if needed or else, adopt a differentiation approach, if necessary.

Conclusion

No discrimination: every different content may require a different teaching approach and teachers in preparation need to know and be conversant with all methodologies and theories of teaching and learning in order to be able to make choices according to different contexts, and learners. However, it is recommended to use them as a backup to a real life problem situation or a case study.

Being aware of the *I-you-it* relationship in the classroom, where *I* is the teacher, *you*, the student and *it*, the content, the teacher will know which approaches and methodologies are more appropriate to implement in his classroom and KASA with the intersection of the dimensions will have enhanced his decision.

“Job requirements should define teacher preparation curricula – the best performer should be the model: what he does, how he does it, what he does it for” (DELUIZ 2013).

Notes

¹ Notes from a Workshop on **Working on competencies and active methodologies in tertiary education**, 2013.



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