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## PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT: PARALLEL TEACHING AND COLLABORATIVE MENTORING

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**Abstract:** This paper aims to identify certain common issues in the field of professional development, namely, its' main focus is on the issue of collaborative learning and teaching. The effects of parallel teaching and collaborative feedback are noticeably positive in the recent years of development. Reflective feedback, self-reflections and observations all serve as indicators of overall professional development and of course, provide teachers with insights regarding their teaching methodology. The term collaboration (which might also be found as cooperation), stands for equal treatment and understanding of the individuals in the classroom and implies “working together to achieve a certain, common goal.” Participants in the case study are MA students of Faculty of Education, English Language Teaching at IBU, which were engaged in parallel teaching in one of my courses. The procedure was followed by observation, self-reflection and self-criticism. The first procedure was implemented in order for students to observe each other in their teaching styles, namely, to observe how two different students teach the same lecture. The second part of the procedure, namely the self-reflection part was intended for students to make a comparison between themselves and their colleagues by noticing what was lacking in their teaching and the third procedure, self-criticism served as a starting point in admitting that criticism is regarded as positive feedback in teaching, rather than negative. The whole procedure of events was followed by a round-table discussion, in which, students accepted their colleagues' remarks. Questions that students responded to were questions such as: “What could I improve?” and “What was lacking in my lesson?” “How did the experience help me improve my theory?” “What did I enjoy in this experience?” etc. Also, statements that followed the experience were such as “I advise you to...” and “I would differently apply the following (in my teaching)” etc. The experience with the obtained results, student remarks and future recommendations will be presented below.

**Keywords:** collaborative teaching, parallel teaching, feedback, observation, self-reflection etc.

### 1. THE CONCEPT OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

**I keep six honest serving-men**

**(They taught me all I knew)**

**Their names are What and Why and When**

**And How and Where and Who. (Rudyard Kipling, “The Elephant’s Child”)<sup>134</sup>**

The term “professional development” is understood according to its' meaning on the individual scale: an artists' professional development would mean the expertise gained in fine arts texture and color for example or a musician's professional development would imply the expertise gained in combining tunes and sounds into something beautiful. As with English teachers, professional expertise and development means not only the concept of knowledge in the field of teaching but also means the gained insights from others in what you do and how you do it (how you perform a lesson, what methodology you use) and the impact you have on your learners. Professional development means performing lessons before an audience of learners and in front of colleagues and being open towards their remarks and feedback on your teaching i.e. *collaborative teaching*. It also means accepting criticism and implementing the same in improvement rather than disappointment. We refer to this as *reviewing and reflecting* on teaching and imply that it is a very important element in development. Accordingly, some benefits that are gained are:

- greater awareness;
- increased motivation;
- effective teaching;
- benefits to students;
- overcoming isolation;
- facilitating teacher initiatives etc. (Richards & Farell, 2005, pgs. 55-56)

Although such professional support is more than needed, it is often neglected. Rarely do colleagues teach together or share ideas. In conducting BA research for diploma projects, my students go through hell in finding English teachers who would actually support and approve of their presence in their classrooms, as if, a young learner could actually harm a professional teacher in what he or she does (knowing that students themselves are at their stage of

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<sup>134</sup> Rudyard Kipling (1902) *Just So Stories*.

development and lack expertise in the field). Often, even institutional requests are ignored. In my MA course entitled “*Practice in English Language teaching and professional development*” among other concepts, I dwelled upon the notion of professionalism and emphasized that collegial support is more than needed in this development. In the midst of the course, we were developing teacher-training workshops with my students, agenda’s and topics and towards the end, my students were parallel-teaching and observing. From the beginning and until the end of the semester, students really formed the theory and notion of cooperation and learned to “handle” their ego and accept feedback. This is of course, only a changing part in who they will become someday and stage 1 in their overall professional development.

## 2. THE CONCEPT OF COLLABORATIVE DEVELOPMENT

A very important aspect of teaching and learning is sustaining a good relationship among the learners in the class i.e. promoting the value of working together and helping each other. The term collaboration (which might also be found as cooperation), stands for equal treatment and understanding of the individuals in the classroom; it represents the moral and ethical values of individuals of the society and as so, implies “working together to achieve a certain, common goal.” The prior leads the former. What we wish to teach our learners regarding collaboration is what we ourselves learn from co-teaching and collaboration. The main idea regarding the issue is in accepting the fact that learning, just as teaching, is an ongoing process. This process, indeed can be made easier with the help of the others around us, be it our classmates (as learners) or teacher colleagues. At higher institution, specifically in ELT departments, the issue of collaboration is considered as a basis of overall success. In some books, it is often even referred to as *collaborative development*. Edge (1992a and b) coined the term cooperative development to describe a specific kind of relationship between speakers and the people listening to them-whose role is crucial...” Furthermore, “in cooperative development a relationship of trust is necessary...” (Edge, 2003, pg.58) The word *collaboration* comes from “co-labor,” or “work together.” According to *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*, to *collaborate* means “to work jointly with others or together especially in an intellectual endeavor.”

According to Reich, new skills needed by twenty-first-century workers are abstraction, system thinking, experimentation, and collaboration (as cited in Thornburg, 2002). “Collaboration is important for two crucial reasons. First, many of the challenges facing us today cut across a wide range of disciplines, which can often only be bridged through teamwork. Second, by interacting with others, we can often discover new approaches to problems” (p. 34)

One of the most compelling reasons for collaboration, Risko and Bromley (2001) suggest, is that it “moves professionals and families from the deficit model to one that affirms and is responsive to students’ strengths, backgrounds, beliefs, and values” (p. 11). They also posit that collaboration “reduces role differentiation among teachers and specialists, resulting in shared expertise for problem solving that yields multiple solutions to dilemmas about literacy and learning” (p. 12) This relationship consists of the rapport which is sustained among teacher colleagues and the student-student or peer relationship. In order for collaboration to take place, the peers that collaborate should have trust in one another and believe that the assumptions of the other are honest feedback and intended for the best. During the 80’s, in 1982, Judith Warren<sup>135</sup> Little examined the differences between more and less effective schools and found that the more effective ones had a greater degree of collegiality. She discusses unique characteristics of collegiality (or collaboration) in schools where teachers participate in the following activities:

1. Teachers engage in frequent, continuous, and increasingly concrete and precise talk about teaching practice.
2. Teachers are frequently observed and provided with useful critiques of their teaching.
3. Teachers plan, design, evaluate, and prepare teaching materials together.
4. Teachers teach each other the practice of teaching. (pp. 331–332)

Colleagues which work together in the same institutions, have an easier form of collaboration, however, a matter of discussion is the issue of “fear of embarrassment” that colleagues usually have regarding feedback or observation (which are part of collaboration). Rarely do institutional colleagues observe or provide feedback to their peers. This occurs due to a low level of awareness regarding criticism as positive (rather than) negative feedback. We tend to think of ourselves as professionals and think that the feedback we might receive is a threat towards this professionalism. However, during trainings and workshops, teachers often do communicate different points of view and discuss different issues. In such settings, the feedback is not regarded as a threat, but as discussion, leading us to

<sup>135</sup> Little, J.W. (1982): Norms of collegiality and experimentation. Workplace conditions of school success. In: American Educational Research Journal 19, pp. 325-340.

the assumption that our classrooms and our teaching instruction(s) under observation cause us feelings of uncertainty.

### 3. CASE STUDY: STUDENT-STUDENT COLLABORATION (Parallel teaching)

Apart from learning together in groups, pairs and by completing tasks, ELT “teachers-to-be” students can actively participate in frontal teaching activities i.e. parallel teaching. In this form of collaboration, 2 students teach the same skill or topic together, in parallel sessions i.e. the first student begins the lesson and the other student follows. This form of collaboration not only helps students manage classroom instruction and plan for teaching, but also provides students with feedback and reflection. It is quite an interesting experience indeed. While one student is teaching, the student colleague observes. In this manner, the student observer provides insights and feedback regarding the methodology and approaches that the student colleague is using. Also, the student observer notices the advantages and disadvantages of the teaching methodology and the differences in the approaches that they have and in the style of teaching. My MA students were participants in this form of collaboration in the previous semester. They were provided with the topics that were supposed to be taught to my BA students in the course “*Teaching young learners 1*” and accordingly, prepared tasks and activities that were presented to the students. Apart from this, they were required to submit: lesson plans, observation forms (see Fig.1-2 below) and self-reflection forms regarding their teaching experience and of course, their peers teaching. Some of the questions that they responded to were questions such as: “What could I improve and what was lacking in my lesson?” “How did the experience help me improve my theory?” “What did I enjoy in this experience?” Also, statements that followed the experience were such as “I advise you to...” and “I would differently apply the following (in my teaching)” etc. Students that participated in the experience noticed many different aspects of teaching and noticed the differences that they all had in classroom management and instruction. The experience also served as an implication that feedback is positive criticism and that making oneself aware of the lacks in teaching, help in further improvement of the process.

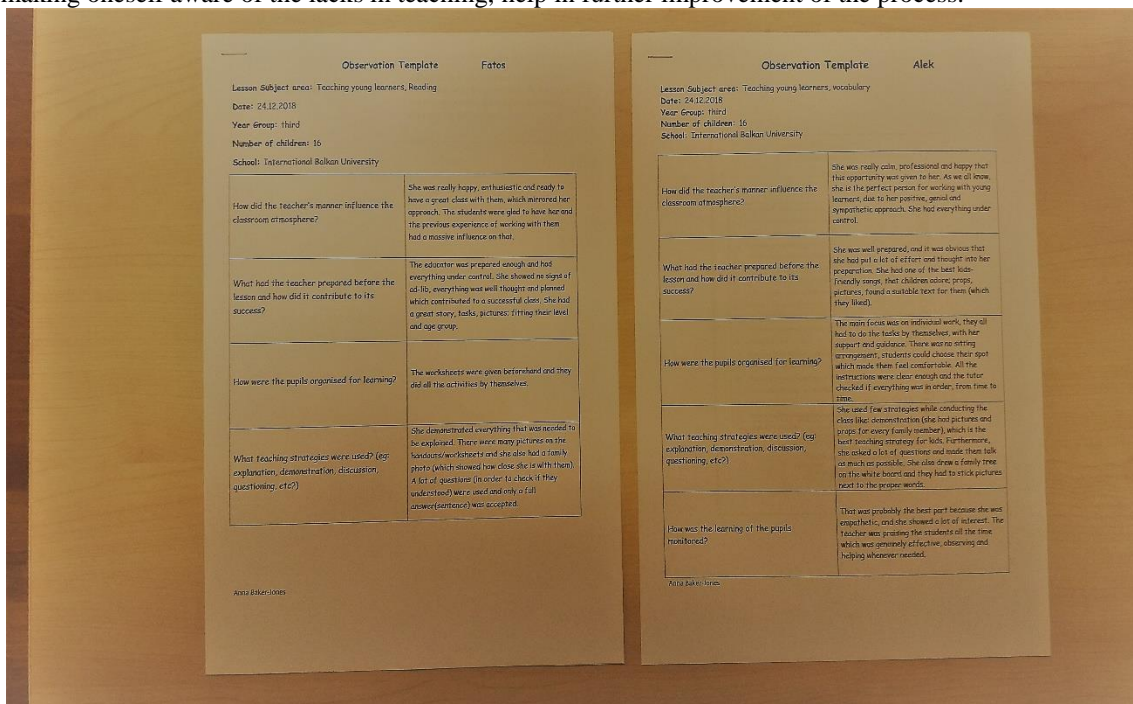


Fig.1. Student samples (Observation forms)

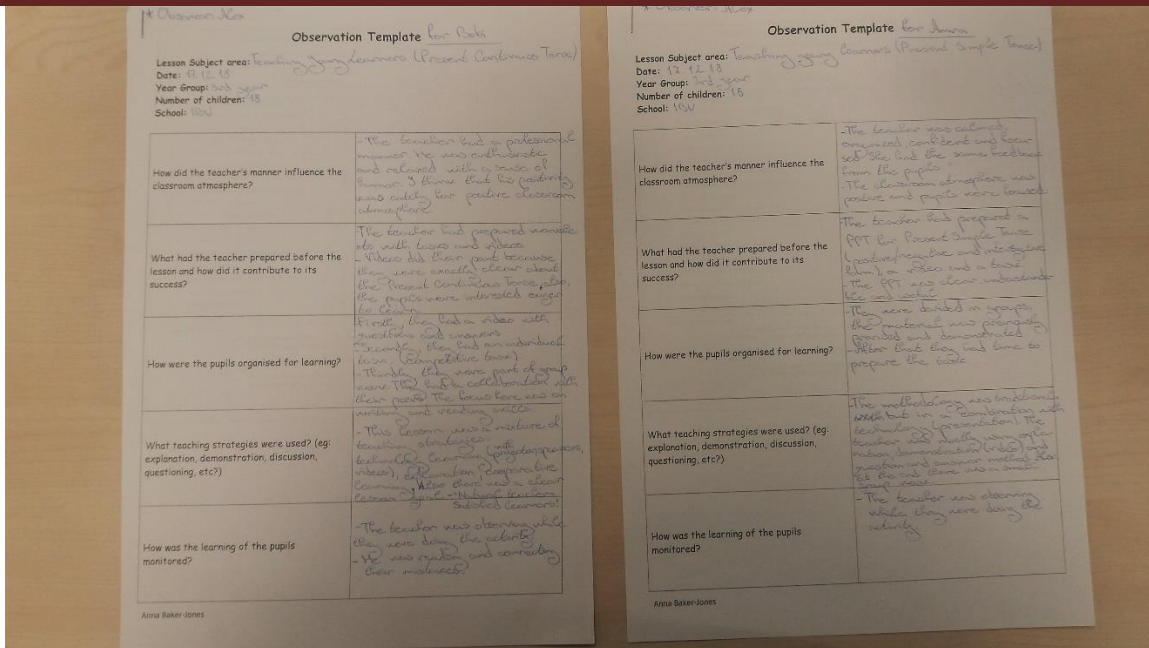


Fig.2. Student samples (Observation forms)

**4. STUDENT- FEEDBACK/RESPONSES**

**Q1. How was the experience?**

- S1: "I had never thought of such an experience! The differences among us were so evident!"
- S2: "The feeling of someone observing you while teaching the same lesson was quite interesting."
- S3: "For the first time, I felt good with all the remarks I received. It was time I accepted the truth about my teaching."
- S4: "This form of cooperation strengthened the bond of teaching."

**Q2. "What could I improve and what was lacking in my lesson?"**

- S1: "I should have started the lesson differently. I liked how my peer began teaching much more than what I actually did..."
- S2: "I needed more student interaction. I was so much focused on my slides and teaching that I never really involved my learners as much."
- S3: "I should have presented more photos and images to my learners...and prizes! I loved how Alex provided learners with prizes."
- S4: "I think student cooperation and competition were missing in my case. What the other colleagues did with their tasks made me notice how I could have differently done my part. If I were to be given a second chance, I know exactly what I would do."

**Q3. "How did the experience help me improve my theory?"**

- S1: "At the beginning I was quite skeptic. During the end of the experience, I was quite impressed. I learned many new things, but most of all, I learned how to work together."
- S2: "I now know what to do and how to do it."
- S3: "I liked working together. Me and my partner developed many ideas together."
- S4: "I learned to see teaching on a different perspective- I learned to take what was good and leave out what was not. I liked this change."

**Q4. "What did I enjoy in this experience?"**

- S1: "I mostly enjoyed teaching a group of university students."
- S2: "I liked the part of own planning the most: my own ideas, my own style..."
- S3: "The whole feeling of being an authority- I was the teacher and I could make a difference."
- S4: "I enjoyed getting feedback. It actually meant that someone was really trying to help me find myself in teaching."

**Round-table discussion “I advise you to...” and “I would differently apply the following (in my teaching)”**

On the overall round-table discussion, students actually reflected quite well on the experience. They were very honest and reflected the truth regarding the observation and the self-reflection stage. The general truth that was concluded was that teachers’ who were more into grammar as students, were dependent on a more traditional approach during teaching i.e. more rule-based teaching and exercises and traditional teaching than interactive teaching. The two groups of students had two different tasks: the first group had teaching grammar during which, one student provided learners with grammar rules while the second student developed a game with them. The first student accepted the fact that learning grammar by heart was most important for her, while the second student accepted the fact that learning interactively and through games and visuals was most important for him. The second group had teaching reading and vocabulary and the first presenter chose to develop a family tree with the learners, by which they were actively engaged in the process. The student that followed did the opposite- she tried to interact in telling a story and actually failed due to too much teacher-talk and very low student involvement. Both traditional student-teachers accepted the fact that they had learned a lot from their peers and that they would definitely try to implement the same in their teaching in the near future.

**CONCLUDING REMARKS**

The whole event of experiences developed the theory that teaching depends on the individual perspective. Even though the same lesson was to be prepared by two students, they both had different approaches and different methods. Also, even though they had previously discussed what they would teach and how, the way that they actually implemented “theory into practice” differed. It was noticed that the effect and impact on the student learners also differed- they were more enthusiastic to partake in activities and tasks that involved them rather than sit back and listen to traditional lectures. However, the most impact was noticed on the student-demonstrators who implemented parallel teaching. The most positive features that were part of the experience referred to the relationship and to the bond that was established; students were aware of their mistakes and saw a different version of themselves in teaching. They also concluded what they were lacking and made the distinction of the different methods. The effect of parallel teaching is immediate: while teaching occurs, self-reflection is present. Both teaching and observation serve as indicators of the overall success. Students learn the importance of criticism and self-criticism in teaching but most importantly, they learn how to cooperate and work together without fear of embarrassment.

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