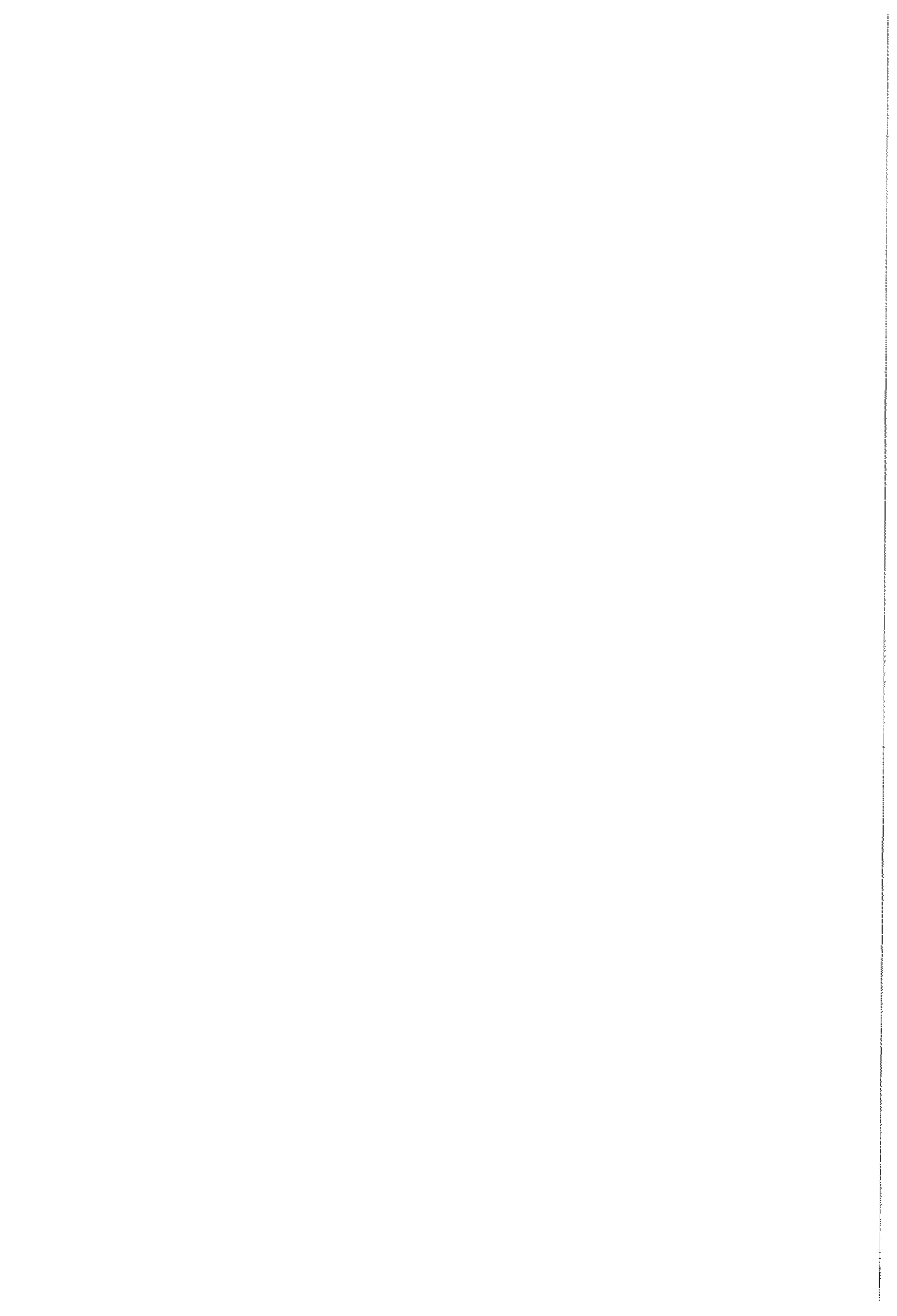


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**FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHERS
EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT:
PRE-SERVICE AND IN-SERVICE
TRAINING**

M^a del Pilar Montijano Cabrera



FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHERS EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT: PRE-SERVICE AND IN-SERVICE TRAINING

In the last few decades we have had the opportunity to witness the nonstop appearance of a multiplicity of new textbooks and manuals for learning a foreign language in the market. All these materials may vary in their intended learners as well as in their approaches to language teaching, however all of them share their attempt to **involve teachers actively** in the process of taking decisions about what and how to teach. By doing so they are assuming the **indispensability of the teacher**, an element without which learning could hardly take place in the classroom. Who would even doubt the value of teachers in any academic or educational domain? To borrow a sentence from Stevick (1976: 88): "Teachers are the most powerful single piece in the academic style education". Pennington (1990: 91) affirms: "The heart of every educational enterprise, the force driving the whole enterprise towards its educational aims, is the teaching faculty". Madrid (1995: 109) also claims: "(S)he (=the teacher) is indispensable in the foreign language teaching process when it takes place inside the classroom". In my opinion, it is actually so significant, that teachers may have a crucial influence on the unique character of any class, and are very much responsible for the success or failure of the FL class.

* What does being a FL teacher entail?

Corder (1985:11) refers to the whole process in which teachers find themselves involved as the "total language-teaching operation", because, according to him, "teaching is too vague in its meaning". By explaining it in that way, he seems to be assuming that just the single word "teaching" is not enough to encompass the whole set of processes and activities that FL

teachers need to perform before actually coming to class and then, once they are with the students. In fact, this latter represents only the end point of a really time-consuming activity, ranging from planning, preparing, correcting and assessing progress, etc –all of which are an indispensable part of every teacher's job– to actual classroom performance.

Teachers have to develop the responsibility of keeping things doing, and the flexibility to adapt to whatever circumstances may emerge. Being an FL teacher also entails being both a counsellor and a model for students to learn from. Teachers must create a relaxed and enjoyable atmosphere so that the students feel self-confident and willing to take part in class. Teachers must be active enough so that the class is dynamic and students do not get bored or drop out. Teachers must be in good mood, being patient if students do not grasp things at first, and avoid disruptive behaviour. Teachers must also satisfy the students' needs, trying to avoid a mismatch between the students' purposes in learning and the objectives set up as goals of learning. Teachers will have to correct if necessary and provide students with a wide range of occasions to participate, enlivening the process of learning. Teachers should not neglect the teaching of any constituent of the target language, including cultural anecdotes or experiences as part of the class aiming at the development of the students' socio-communicative competence.

Though teachers are not just "decision-takers", in order to achieve effectiveness when performing all their tasks, it is important that they reflect deeply upon every thing to be done in class, always trying to bridge the gap between the way students see things and the way teachers generally regard these same things.

As we have just said, the role played by any teacher goes far beyond what actually happens in the classroom: the EFL teacher is not only responsible for the learners' language development, but (s)he is also a contributor to the students' personal (social, emotional and cognitive) development by providing students with lots of activities and tasks by means of which they may get involved with their classmates and interact. Though many in-service teachers feel that their experience and knowledge are essential, can we claim that becoming a teacher is just a question of being trained professionally? Will it simply be developed through experience? Is all this something learnable? Can everybody become an efficient FL teacher provided (s)he acquire the required knowledge? Or, on the contrary, is it just a question of personality? How can pre-service teachers become FL teachers? Is it a question of being educated to develop the competence to do all these things in an effective way?

*** What makes a good foreign language teacher?**

Much the same as in other specialized subject of study, becoming a foreign language teacher requires specific requisites in training and education. This fact should never be neglected, especially in the light of a popular misconception which states that the command of that given language is enough. As Eskey (1982:39) points out: "A major problem world-wide in the field of language teaching is the popular belief that anyone who can speak a language can teach it". Conversely, becoming a good foreign language teacher entails a complex process in which many factors –personal, psychological, academic and social ones– may interact.

Once these misconceptions are left aside, those in charge of educating foreign language teachers do agree that teaching practice preparation should bring about the deployment of certain attitudes and skills, as well as knowledge in certain areas given the **manyfold roles** that teachers have to play according to the nature of the classroom activities and the teacher's behaviour as it relates to the students¹.

The eternal dichotomy: "are teachers born or made?" seems to lead us to face with two of the major components that make every good teacher performance: on the one hand, **innate qualities**, on the other, **acquired abilities**.

Although for some, a good FL teacher must necessarily be a born teacher, for some others teachers may gain effectiveness by deploying the necessary requisites as a result of instruction, training, education or personal experience. Most authors claim that the total operation of becoming a professional teacher and performing as such must be constituted by two elements, namely: "teacher education" and "teacher performance". Pre-service teachers are supposed to undergo a process of education until they get their degree at the faculty or college; in-service teachers, on the other hand, go through a nonstop process of continual experiential growth as a result of their rapport with students and accumulated time and practice which in fact may never end.

Maybe some other people hold the view that effective teaching can *only* be the result of accumulated time and practice, claiming that the ability to gain the students' respect and confidence will be naturally acquired by many teachers through practical exercise. However, if **experience** is the only

1. To define the role of the teachers, Madrid (1996: 113) states: "The teacher and the recorded material are used as models to be imitated, to allow the learner to develop a near-native accent. Teachers also act as organizers and managers of previously planned learning tasks". Harmer (1993: 235-243), on the other hand, distinguishes several roles of the teacher, according to their actual behaviour in an actual classroom activity: controller, assessor, organiser, prompter, participant, resource, tutor and investigator.

possible base enabling teachers to perform effectively, I'm afraid that the chances for those postgraduate students who wish to become competent foreign language teachers, are considerably reduced, and the picture becomes rather demotivating for them. On the other hand, we should assume that those who agree on the usefulness of experience as the source of the development of any good teacher qualities, are also taking for granted these experienced teachers' command of the target language, as **linguistic competence** has long been regarded as the basis of what makes a good teacher.

Without underestimating the teachers' competence in the language they are teaching, and accepting the value of experience in approaching the learner's problems and needs, we should also like to comment upon the necessary abilities which, apart from the innate skills, a good language teacher needs. There are certain personality traits that make certain people particularly fitted for the teaching profession. However, can these qualities be acquired by other people born "non-teachers"?

Though it may be true that a "born-teacher factor" could contribute to a more effective performance, it is important not to underestimate the value that **techniques, procedures** and **skills** deployed as a result of instruction may play a pre-eminent role when teaching a foreign language. Trainee pre-service teachers must be aware of the importance of developing certain qualities so that their potential performance becomes a combination of both their built-in personal characteristics plus some learned ideas as **useful tools** to improve their performance in future. It is in this sense that we want to find out the precise aptitudes that can be achieved and developed during pre-service teacher preparation in order to implement the most appropriate model to teach them to potential EFL teachers.

Among many other proposals, some authors² include the following as important components in the preparation for language teachers, namely, the development of didactic and pedagogic skills, an ability to analyse language, some knowledge of Linguistics and Psychology, as well as some information about education, syllabus and materials. However, full agreement for the incorporation of all these elements in potential EFL teachers' instruction is no longer found when it comes to the point of strictly delimiting the orientation to be followed. Thus, in agreement with the differing theoretical views of how the act of teaching may be best described, different teaching preparation programmes propose different systems for pre-service FL teachers' development and evaluation.

2. cf. Strevens (1974), Britten (1985), Lee (1977).

* **Different pre-service teacher training approaches**

The principles underlying the Spanish Educational Reform spotlight the view of the teacher as something more than a mere “conveyor of knowledge”; on the contrary, the teacher should act as an educator, someone who has to contribute to the students’ general education and personal development. A competent FL teacher must offer his/her students challenging opportunities for them to make the most of them, thus helping pupils to go on growing physically and intellectually. How will teachers achieve this goal?

Two are the most important approaches to FL education. Whereas some authors -for example, Fanselow (1977)- advocate a **competency-based** model to prepare teachers, in which teaching is analyzed into tasks that must be performed, the aim of the instruction process being the development of component skills, or put it another way, the intended teacher’s aptitude, others -among whom Larsen-Freeman (1983) is found- would rather choose a **holistic approach**, emphasising the development of the individual in those personal dimensions that are relevant to professional dimensions. This second view underlines the importance of qualities such as the teacher’s creativity, judgement sense and flexibility to adapt to whatever circumstance may emerge. Proponents of this view share the belief that training for pre-service teachers should go beyond the deployment of certain attitudes, trying to give the individual a more comprehensive and coherent instruction, “preparing people to make choices” (Larsen-Freeman, 1983:265), so that individuals prepare themselves to work in any context.

From my point of view, a comprehensive theoretical framework presented to trainee teachers, with the subsequent accumulation on their part of theoretical knowledge regarding the main principles underlying the field of EFL may help pre-service teachers’ potential performance and their making of choices. However, the way I see it, the main constituents of the process of becoming a professional FL teacher should be made up by a set of teacher-training practices. These practices may be of a different nature:

-on the one hand, some practices should be **experiential**: They should involve the trainee in actual “learning by doing”, by means of a practical, sequenced programme of tasks regarding the teaching of every target language constituent. This is achieved by actually teaching in class with their classmates, acting as if they were the students.

-on the other hand, noticing that no mere accumulation of purely theoretical notions is to be helpful it is equally important to provide the potential teachers with some practices to implement an **awareness-raising** component: it implies practices aimed at developing a conscious understanding on the part of the trainees of those principles underlying EFL

teaching learned in the previous component in order to learn when and how to deploy the skills, strategies and techniques they may use in future, when teaching. This is achieved by means of tuition, observation and peer-analysis.

Without neglecting the role of the above, let us not overlook the fact that professional development should be a permanent aim throughout the whole teaching career. It is essential that in the pre-service period, from the very beginning of their training, teachers receive the proper attitudes, in an atmosphere in which they absorb new ideas on methodology, and are helped both to form attitudes about effective instruction and also to formulate a personal philosophy of teaching. However, it is equally necessary that in-service teachers, too, should work on attitudes as well as on methods, in a receptive and open-minded way, so as to welcome new findings from research, and to be ready to incorporate them in their teaching practice. This is vital to the process of growing up professionally. In any case, whatever of these approaches to pre-service teacher training we feel ourselves more inclined to, something becomes immediately apparent: it is essential to continue recycling, working on attitudes and on methods, not only for trainees, but also for teachers already in service, if we really are to improve our teaching performance and to gain effectiveness in our practice.

*** Remaining active for in-service teachers**

It is always a very enriching experience in our professional lives as foreign language teachers to be appreciative of any chance to **reflect** on different aspects of anything dealing with the practical issues of our teaching routines. As pointed out by Widdowson (1983:110), any contribution “provides us with the opportunity to further our own education as language teachers”. It is always worthwhile to sit back and take time for reflection, as being a teacher is not just a matter of classroom activity, but rather seems to be a question of deploying the required ability to do the right things on the right occasions.

As practitioners of our educational system, there seems to be no doubt that some internal flow urges teachers all over the world to find themselves in a **continuous struggle** to make the most of every resource, every procedure, every technique, every activity, or whatever any other help they can certainly make use of. Given the inherent complexity in FL teaching, countless efforts have been made to aim at designing that model of teaching which may best bring about the **most effective** results in the students’ learning.

Recognizing the necessity to keep up the level of professionalism on the part of any ethical teacher may be just the starting point of a continuing training and recycling process which in fact may never end. Several suggestions could be made, in this regard, for teachers who do not want to

continue inactive. To start with, in connection to what has been previously said about the benefits from experience for any language teacher, we must however warn of the dangers of relying too much in one's own means, without being in touch, at the same time -as Rivers (1981: 491) states:

"The teacher must keep abreast of developments and achievements in countries where the language is spoken. In some cases important changes are taking place in the language itself. ... In all these things teachers are unwise to rely on their own resources. They should join professional associations, read and contribute to language-teaching journals, and participate in professional discussion at meetings and congresses. They should take advantage of the services put at their disposal for professional improvement: seminars, workshops, institutes, information centers."

This proposal is the least complex one to accept by those professionals who really want to keep up with of new findings from research aiming at improving their teaching practice. However, some other suggestions are also interesting enough to be taken into account. Noticing that no amount of purely methodological principles can counteract attitudes inherited from previous experiences, Pennington (1986) urges the introduction of the methodological component in any recycling -as well as pre-service- teachers course only after the individuals have gone through several stages aimed at an "attitude adjustment". It implies the introduction of a basic instruction component leading the trainees to shape or reshape those attitudes that govern student treatment and other aspects of classroom performance. Only after this "adjustment" has taken place, teachers will be ready to focus on methods and language skill development. She considers as the goal of any teacher training (pre-service or in-service) course to develop language, cultural and educational awareness, while moving towards more open-minded and broader perspective attitudes to the teaching practice.

Professional development, for some other in-service teachers, may give rise to a **continuing process of personal evaluation**, to assess their performance in the light of the foreign language teaching policy goals in the actual environments in which they are working, as well as the realization of individual potentialities and goals, to further their own professional expansion or improvement. The most important aspects of this process are systematic evaluation and continuing education³. This orderly process of reflecting on

3. As suggested before, it is important that teachers attend seminars and conferences, read journals, join associations or go on training courses to further their education and to improve their effectiveness. All these are valid sources of ideas for personal evaluation and enhancement, for those who actively seek their personal and professional development.

one's performance should comprise a set of components, namely: what, who, how, why and how much, to try to measure in a carefully arranged way those aspects of our practice that pose a problem for our students. It is certainly only by means of a methodical procedure such as this, that some improvement for teaching may be achieved.

The suitability to evaluate our own teaching in a systematic way is manifest. However, if many current language teaching situations were x-rayed, the resulting picture would reveal many teachers' distaste for reflection, simply because of their reluctance to abandon generally admitted methods and techniques, without even trying out the effectiveness of some others, gained as the result of formal 2LA research. As Lightbown & Spada (1995:106) remark:

"It is not always easy to step back from familiar practices and say, I wonder if this is really the most effective way to go about this?" Furthermore, many teachers are reluctant to try out classroom practices which go against the prevailing trends among their colleagues or in their educational contexts, ..."

* Some basic strategies for improving FLT effectiveness

Speaking about effectiveness, we must remember that there exist different perspectives, mirroring different theoretical assumptions regarding how to learn a foreign language⁴, with the subsequent development of methods and techniques to put it into practice appropriately, thus claiming theirs as the "best way" to gain higher and higher degrees of proficiency in classroom setting language acquisition. Nevertheless, the reply to the question *which theoretical proposal promises the most for improving foreign language teaching effectiveness in non-natural settings?*, remains unanswered as yet. As Harmer (1993:5) says: "Despite various attempts there is unfortunately no research which clearly shows the success of one method over another."

However, in order to obtain valuable insights of what is actually going on in our classes, the design of a questionnaire to know the students' points of view or the keeping of a diary to study the progression of the teaching process become useful tools for classroom analysis. Random data are not reliable. On the contrary, systematic observation and the conduction of periodic reviews -comprising the number of variables we are interested in studying- may lead us to the identification of any sort of trouble for our students. This is the starting point of an enriching recycling process which may help teachers improve their own education and gain effectiveness in their performance, whereas satisfying the students' needs at the same time.

4. For example: languages are learned mainly through imitation, some personal factors are paramount in learning a language, learners should interact freely through the target language to learn it, learners' errors should be corrected as soon as they are made, etc.

Perhaps the lack of an overwhelming success of a given method is precisely due to the countless attempts to devise one of *general applicability*. Classroom situations vary enormously, and so do the learners. Accordingly, all the efforts to find the theoretical proposal which holds the greatest prominence for developing foreign language learners competence should be made. Both formal and informal research may shed a light. Formal research implies vast scale measures and careful control of all the factors which may affect learning, and may need the collaboration of a great number of students to limit the possibility that the unusual behaviour of some individuals might create a misleading impression about what would be expected in general. Nunan (1994:2) explains that the conduct of research “involves rigour and the application of specialist knowledge and skills”, and it might be precisely due to this rather frightening image that many teachers want to escape. However, there is nothing essentially intimidating in the very nature of research, as pointed out by this same author later on: “research is a systematic process of inquiry consisting of three elements or components: (1) a question, problem, or hypothesis, (2) data, (3) analysis and interpretation of data.” Yet, if this proposal still seems too comprehensive for any average foreign language teacher⁵, there is another way in which (s)he can collaborate to the elucidation of many practical issues related to this field, namely, by carrying out informal analysis. This suggestion often involves small numbers, perhaps only one class with one teacher, and the emphasis here is not in what is most general but rather on what is particularly defining about this group, this teacher or even the special rapport between them. Whereas formal research is essential to support theoretical proposals, informal research may also be helpful in solving precise problems affecting a given context. It is generally admitted that what works in one context, may fail in another. Teachers must either collaborate with researchers, or take an active part in the analysis of the process of foreign language learning in their actual environment. The more enthusiastic they are in this, the more operative will the new methodologies become. Valid classroom research is extremely necessary, if we are to bridge the gap between theoretical postulations and actual teaching practice, so that a greater understanding of what really happens in the students’ minds may be arrived at, and many pedagogical and practical implications may be inferred from it.

5. Seliger & Shohamy (1990: 44) conceive of the preparation for research as “an evolutionary process consisting of *phases*, with each successive phase being a refinement of the preceding one”.

My proposal, in this regard, entails the need to connect 2LA research to curriculum design and classroom practice, that is, to relate researchers to FL teachers, given the myriad fields dealt with by the former which do have relevance to current language teaching practice. There is no doubt about the existent relationship between theoretical concern and practical applications to classroom performance. So, this suggestion encompasses an eclectic approach so as to join various perspectives to our particular teaching, and to derive from them awareness which will enhance every teacher's behaviour. After this, teachers should analyse their current context, and endeavour to answer why certain aspects of the target language pose major difficulties for their students⁶. This concrete informal research will have an immediate effect on actual teaching practice, and will also contribute to the general improvement of effective methodologies, provided teachers report their conclusions to 2LA researchers.

The invitation is still there to encourage teachers to look for solutions to most of their learners' day-to-day problems, by making the most of their proximity to the real second language learning process, as well as by trying out new insights from formal research. It is the most effective way to remain active, and keep abreast professionally.

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6. If teachers systematically register the most relevant data in *procesual evaluation forms*, they will find it easier to conduct their students' learning process and to notice any source of difficulty for their students. A model for students' continuous assessment can be found in Madrid & McLaren (1995: 265, fig.10.12). This table provides teachers with a suitable form to take note and record the students' work, and accordingly it enables teachers to derive and formulate potential research questions, those which may be raised from the observation and analysis of data recorded on the table. The facts that draw the teachers' attention may be broad in range. Some suggestions may be: "Is redundancy in input a facilitating factor in comprehension?", "Why do my students acquire some complex structures when they are still unable to cope with certain other easier ones?", "How do my students react when they find an unknown word while reading a new text?", ...

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