

Using Call at Initial Teacher Education for Teaching Young Learners

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Abstract

Related research and practices for teaching English to young learners have gained momentum in recent years with the age factor coming onto stage. Now young learner syllabi are designed in line with children's needs and classroom practices have become multi faceted. Naturally, such strides in language teaching have also introduced the requirements for materials that go hand in hand with the interests of this group. Therefore, this paper aims to introduce a procedure model for initial teacher education programs that prepare teachers for young learner classrooms. The main characteristic of the model is that it heavily relies on Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL), thus adopting computer literacy as a springboard for future classrooms. Applied at the Mersin University Education Faculty at ITE (Initial Teacher Education) classes, the model suggests a multi-dimensional computer use for teaching purposes. In the first place, the trainer gives the teacher candidates a list of topics to cover in the classroom for the theory part on a MOODLE platform. Next, the issues identified and searched in advance are handled in the classroom on a weekly schedule. In the meantime, the trainer loads the information for the theory on the platform at a regular basis. The teacher candidates are responsible for presenting their courses after the theoretical part of the course is over. They are supposed to present a lesson, which requires computer literacy within the plan the trainer offers. The whole lesson they conduct is based on authentic audio- visual materials they create either with the help of Web 2.0.tools such as [1], [2] or the various tools they produce for teaching by using some features of the computer programs. After the microteaching lessons, they receive feedback from their peers on a MOODLE platform the trainer uses for the courses. Finally, they write their reflections on the platform, where they can see and share one another's views.

1. Introduction

Related research and practices for teaching English to young learners have gained momentum in recent years with the age factor coming onto stage. The current tendency of teaching young learners is specializing in teaching this age group, which requires awareness in terms of pedagogical content knowledge [3]. The physical and mental features of young learners are the basic dimensions the young learner teacher has to consider while stepping into the classroom. The nature of the courses to be offered to the attention of the young learner also plays an important part in the determination of the syllabus as well as the accompanying materials.

Now young learner syllabi are designed in line with children's needs, and classroom practices have become multi faceted. Naturally, such strides in language teaching have also introduced the requirements for materials that go hand in hand with the interests of this group. These materials are supposed to bear properties of being appealing to the interest and the taste of children, which is possible through the use of technology. Therefore, this paper aims to introduce a procedure model for initial teacher education programs that include courses preparing teacher candidates for young learner classrooms. The main characteristic of the model is that it heavily relies on Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL), thus adopting computer literacy as a springboard for future classrooms.

2. Technology in ITE classrooms

It is a fact that the world of education has experienced new strides, and technology has contributed to these giant steps to a large extent. The fields technology is utilized in education can be obviously seen in education cycles; particularly, by the teachers who are in the core of education activities. Although technology in education is basically limited to the use of computers, and the web usages and environments

are today part of the mainstream [4], the range of the utilization and the involvement of the participants can be increased to a certain degree.

In the general sense, it can be said that modern technologies have “changed” the way teachers teach [4]. This shift from the traditional to the contemporary has also changed the way learners “learn”. Under the circumstances, it is clear that this new dimension in language teaching has affected all the layers and actors of education. Compton [5] states that the increase in online learning has not coordinated with the increase in teacher training for language teachers beyond the technical and software specific skills, and it further remarks that CALL teacher preparation needs to be developed if we want new generation language teachers to be ready for online teaching platforms.

Before the actual teaching and learning process starts, we suggest that technology literacy should be on the agenda of the language teachers far earlier than they get involved in their teaching activities, and that the seeds of such practices should be sown at the very beginning of the professional years; namely, during the Initial Teacher Education. Our assumption is that the sooner teachers become familiar with the technology literacy, the less difficulty they face while using it. Moreover, the condiment technology will add to the taste of the lessons in curricular and extra-curricular environments would be only a few of the possible positive aspects to be counted among the numerous ones. The model we explain here uses one of these online environments, Moodle [6], an Open Source Course Management System (CMS), also known as a Learning Management System (LMS) or a Virtual Learning Environment (VLE). As a supporting view, Robb [7] states that using Moodle as a Virtual Learning Environment or as a Course Management System has been adopted by almost every educational institution either in the form of an extension to the traditional courses or as a means for its distance education program.

Besides the direct and observable effects of technology on language teaching pedagogy, it can be seen that it also indirectly contributes to the education of the teacher candidates in the ITE program. The environment offered by technology also improves the socio-constructivist nature of language teaching since it facilitates teachers to become both the student and the teacher of their own learning processes [8]. In this respect, the teacher candidate learns the spirit of collaboration, which will be the cornerstone in the years ahead for an ideal profession. Therefore, the aim of this study is to illustrate how acquaintance with technology could be established and applied in the years before the in-service time starts.

3. The Classroom Procedure

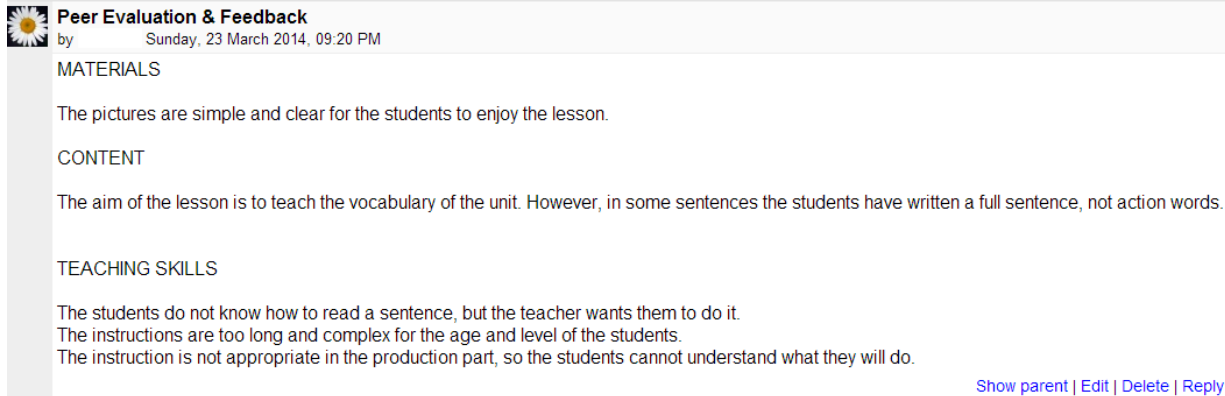
Applied at the Mersin University Education Faculty at ITE classes, the model suggests a multi-dimensional computer use for teaching purposes. The procedure is as follows:

In the first place, the instructor gives the teacher candidates a list of issues to cover in the classroom for the theory of the course, titled, Teaching English to Young Learners.

Next, the issues are handled in the classroom on a weekly schedule. The students are held responsible for reading and preparing for the discussion to be raised in the course time. The subject matter aimed as content knowledge for the teacher candidates is related to first language acquisition and foreign language learning as the essence of the courses.

As the next step, the teacher asks the candidates to make their presentation plans based on a schedule. The teacher candidates are responsible for presenting their courses after the theoretical part of the course is over. They are supposed to present a lesson which requires computer literacy which is based on authentic audio-visual materials they create either with the help of Web 2.0. tools [1], [2], or the various tools they produce for teaching by using some features of the computer programs.

The procedure starts with micro teaching, during which time each student presents a lesson for young learners with the help of the computer. If the teacher candidate wishes to be videoed, which is optional, there is a further possibility for self-reflection after the course is over. The other students write their comments of the lesson on a sheet allocated for peer evaluation. After the teaching is over, the instructor and the peers give feedback instantly. However, if there is more they would like to share, they use the Moodle platform for feedback (See *Figure 1*).



Peer Evaluation & Feedback
by [User] Sunday, 23 March 2014, 09:20 PM

MATERIALS
The pictures are simple and clear for the students to enjoy the lesson.

CONTENT
The aim of the lesson is to teach the vocabulary of the unit. However, in some sentences the students have written a full sentence, not action words.

TEACHING SKILLS
The students do not know how to read a sentence, but the teacher wants them to do it.
The instructions are too long and complex for the age and level of the students.
The instruction is not appropriate in the production part, so the students cannot understand what they will do.

[Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)

Figure 1. The Screenshot of the Moodle for the Peer Evaluation of a micro-teaching presenter

As can be seen from Figure 1, the teacher candidates can use the forum page of the platform when they need to discuss further over the lesson, or e-mail the peer evaluation sheets after the course both to the teacher candidate and the instructor. Finally, the candidate teacher is evaluated on the basis of the micro-teaching performance, the peer evaluation and the self-reflection.

4. Conclusion

The model suggested in this study is preferable since it embodies both the pedagogical and the content knowledge as the two milestones of language teaching. Since the environment offers practicality to the participants, it can be said to trigger teacher reflection as well. Teachers or teacher candidates feel free to reflect on their practices while also sharing the experiences with those of the other participants. On the other hand, the system can be used for the improvement of pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) and knowledge about language (KAL) in the sense that participants can follow the courses provided by the instructor in this environment.

In cases when the virtual ITE programs are held, the online platform can replace face to face interaction. However, Koçoğlu et al [9] states that, according to the study they have conducted, the research that advocates blended courses to be as useful and effective as face to face courses has been confirmed; however, the findings contradicted with the views which supported the superiority of blended courses over the conventional face to face courses as for student learning. They also state that the combination of online classes and face to face learning enables a teacher education program to increase its convenience, practicality, ease of access and effectiveness while sustaining the quality of the program.

It is undeniable that language teachers need to improve their competencies and update their literacy in the name of professional development. However, the journey starting in the teacher education years of ITE programs should not come to a halt once the profession starts, and the cycle of learning should maintain itself as teachers are active in their classrooms.

The model offered in this study could be a suggestion for further applications, for the need for innovative ideas for educating language teachers of the future has always remained constant, and the world of education has always welcome good practices.

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