LETRA: A TEACHER TRAINING PROGRAM BASED ON THE ADOPTION OF DIFFERENT ROLES

STÉPHANE COLOGNESI, *Université Catholique de Louvain*

SILVIA LUCCHINI *Université Catholique de Louvain*

ABSTRACT. This Note from the Field presents a teacher training program that seeks to support changes by the trained teachers in their own practice. Change in practice is made possible by the teachers' assuming four successive roles in the training program: Learner, Engineer, Teacher / Observer, Reflective Analyst (LETRA). LETRA has been tested and tried and has shown promising results. The design of the program is presented in this text, step by step. The views of teacher participants are highlighted.

LETRA: UN PROGRAMME DE FORMATION DES ENSEIGNANTS BASÉ SUR L'ADOPTION DE RÔLES DIVERS

RÉSUMÉ. Ce relevé de recherches présente un programme de formation des enseignants qui vise à accompagner le changement des pratiques personnelles d'enseignant individuel. Le changement de pratique est rendu possible par l'adoption de quatre rôles successifs par les enseignants participants dans le programme de formation : Apprenant, Ingénieur, Enseignant/Observateur, Analyste Reflexif. Ce dispositif a été mis en place dans le cadre d'une formation à l'Université de Taiwan et a produit des résultats prometteurs. Le programme de formation est présenté dans ce relevé, étape par étape, ainsi qu'une liste des divers rôles. Les points de vue des enseignants participants sont mis en évidence.

The most common training paradigm for teachers, usually called Continuing Professional Development (or one-shot, drive-by-workshop), is often still used. It focuses on conveying specific content. It is provided to teachers by experts in their field over one or more days. Teachers register for the training after having chosen it from a set proposed by the training organization. Darling-Hammond and Richardson (2009) have shown the limitations of this training paradigm, because it does not facilitate the transfer of learning to professional practice. Nor does it address the complexity of context. Even when the teachers say that they are interested in the training and intend to try out the practices in their classes, they rarely actually do it, troubled by questions such as "How am I going to change what I'm doing in order to incorporate this new approach?" or "How am I going to do this with my students in practice?" Consequently, the training content is not really taken on board.

The aim of this text is to present a teacher training program that seeks to support changes by the trained teachers *in their own practice and context*. Change in practice is made possible by the fact that teachers assume each of four successive roles in the training program: Learner, Engineer, Teacher / Observer, Reflective Analyst (thus: LETRA). LETRA has been tested several times, with the same encouraging results for teacher training. In what follows, the program's design is first presented. Then, we report on testing it, providing the participants' opinions.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS THAT CONTRIBUTED TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF LETRA

In the first decade of the 2000's Frenay and Bédard (2006) and Vanpee et al. (2010) developed the AECA (Authentic Contextualized Learning and Teaching) model. The model was intended to optimize the chances of transferring what had been learned in training, thus ensuring durable construction of the knowledge acquired. The authors identified two principles that allow learners to apply more easily the knowledge gained from training. The **first principle** is attending to the authenticity of the context, which is characterized by three aspects: (1) keeping training situations as close as possible to professional situations; (2) proposing diverse, complete and complex problem-solving situations to support competence development; and (3) proposing several solutions, conclusions and interpretations for a single problem. The **second principle** involves cognitive companionship, which is based on establishing relationships between the trainer and the teachers being trained. The trainer observes, guides, and coaches the participants by giving feedback based on the trainer's own observations and providing them with support, thus introducing a reflexive approach (Vanpee et al., 2010).

In support of these principles, four types of professional learning activities have developed within the literature (Geijsel et al., 2009; Janssen & van Yperen, 2004): knowledge sharing, innovation, experimenting, and reflexive practices. We found these four types of activities inspiring for our own approach, since in LETRA, teachers undergo four different roles, each related to one of these types of professional learning activity. Following the work of Vial and Caparros-Mencacci (2007) and Vivegnis (2019), we define 'role' as a temporary-situated acting modus played by an individual in relation to a project or a task. The impact of role-taking has already been documented in pre-service teacher training (Colognesi, 2017; Colognesi, Deschepper et al., 2019). It has also been the subject of our previous research on the roles of practicum supervisors (tutors and university supervisors; Colognesi, Van Nieuwenhoven et al., 2019). Our challenge here was to mobilize role-taking in teacher professional learning training.

LETRA: PRACTICE SHARING

LETRA is primarily intended for teachers who work in the same establishment; the challenge is therefore an innovation that has been introduced into a professional community, an innovation that the teachers will have to transfer

to their practices in class. We describe the training program in reference to the various successive roles played by the participants: Learner, Engineer, Teacher / Observer, Reflexive Analyst. We describe an actual training that was lived through. The professional learning goal, in this instance, was to train teachers in how to teach discourse genres according to an action-oriented approach (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, 2001), more specifically through the *Itinerary method* (Colognesi & Lucchini, 2018).

At the outset of the LETRA training, the objectives are stated and the intention is defined: to build an instructional approach aimed at students. To do this, the teachers are informed that the trainer is going to have them go through several stages to help them to complete this complex task, which is linked with their professional framework and their daily work. Following the description of each stage are teacher testimonials of when this approach was tried, here with teaching discourse genres in the French-language department of a Taiwanese university. Of the eight teachers in the department, seven took part in the training. Five were Taiwanese and teach grammar, while the other two were French and teach composition (written expression), philosophy, and French history. As part of the French program at this university, the students were given activities designed to help them learn the French language and its morphosyntactic and lexical specificities, which they must reuse in their written products using the required formats during the composition classes, but without the teachers giving direct support in the knowledge-transfer process. The students were consistently taught using a more traditional transmission approach; therefore, we were interested to learn how teachers' ideas might shift by participating in LETRA training. During the training, we recorded and transcribed the sessions. We then applied a qualitative analysis to the recorded transcriptions to highlight categories that refer to the effects of our training program using LETRA. In the following sections, feedback from the teachers is used to illustrate our points. Their identities have been disguised using initials.

The Learner's Role

I enjoyed this experience; I wasn't expecting to be active like that today. (JA)

By experiencing it for myself, I become aware of the progress made, the stages of the Itinerary. (RA)

What helped me, when I encountered difficulties, were the trainer's interventions. He told me that it was good, and supported me. I see the effect that can have on students when you give them that kind of support. (BR)

At Time 1, by being in the Learner's role, the teachers would experience an instructional approach such that they might develop its use with their students. The approach entails a complex situation that could generate obstacles and the need for support. We would know whether the teachers appropriated the content of the training, structured at the end of Time 1 during the conceptualization

phase, if they were cognitively active (Chi & Wylie, 2014; Tricot, 2017). Table 1 details the unfolding of the Learner's role.

TABLE 1. *Learner's role*

Learner's role	
Experiencing an *Itinerary*	The trainer and the teachers introduce themselves.
	The trainer presents the collective project: building an instructional program to writing intended for students. This instructional program will be tested during training time.
	Teachers "live" an *Itinerary* (Colognesi & Lucchini, 2018) as if they were the students. It concerns a discourse genre. They write down the questions they have as they go along.
	The trainer presents the theoretical approach: structuring the foundations and stages of an *Itinerary* based on the questions that came up during the experiment.

The French-language teachers at the University of Taiwan were not expecting to be actively involved; instead, they thought they would be participating in a transmission-based learning module as usual, as the opening teacher quote attests. Afterwards, the teachers felt that taking on the role of Learner was beneficial. They identified two reasons. First, being in Learner role allowed them to feel what the students may experience when they are exposed to such an instructional model. Second, by experiencing the teaching/training for themselves, they went through the methodological stages specific to the content of the training. The Learner's role ensured that they tried out the structure and the activities themselves that were to be transferred into a class for their students. They also discovered that the trainer could play a role other than that of the teacher who conveys content. Indeed, in the *Itinerary method*, the teacher accompanies the students, supporting them with scaffolding, allowing them to discuss among themselves and to evaluate their peers. The teacher solicits the students' metacognition in order to reflect on their strategies (see Colognesi et al., 2020 and 2021, for details on this instructional program and the teacher's activities). This is, therefore, not a transmissive type of teaching.

The Engineer's Role

Initially, I resisted. That's not my usual reaction. I didn't understand why we were doing things that way. But then I got it. And I realize now that my classes must be quite boring. (EL)

It's both an individual and a group effort, switching from one to the other. We have never tried this in our teaching practices. (BR)

Preparing in a group is extremely important. We come to an agreement, we complement one another, we think of the instructions to give. (JA)

Having built it together gives us pointers on how to go about it. (MC)

At Time 2, when the teachers are asked to adopt the Engineer's role, the teachers will find themselves in a completely new and complex situation, which would consist of building a teaching-learning approach intended for their students, transferring what was done at Time 1 (see Table 2 for the Engineer role). The various tasks (the development of the lesson, the necessary materials, etc.) need to be divided between the teachers, who work in subgroups. The trainer supports the subgroups, intervening by providing scaffolding whenever necessary, and suggesting resources that could be used to put together the activities. The teachers also need to contextualize the activities, because the teachers are the ones who know best their students and their students' needs and motivations. The trainer makes sure that the teaching proposals are coherent. Time 2 ends with the teachers'/engineers' presentation of the activities developed by the subgroups, in such a way that all teachers have a clear idea of the instructional approach as a whole and know how to validate it.

TABLE 2. *Engineer's role*

Engineer's role	
Building an *Itinerary* for students	The teachers jointly develop a common framework of different activities for students.
	The teachers divide the tasks between them.
	In subgroups, the teachers build the various parts of the Itinerary, based on the common framework.
	The teachers present the activities to their colleagues and seek their feedback / reactions.
	Teachers improve activities. They develop lesson materials for the students.
	The teachers define the position of each participant during the following experiment: the trainer leads the entire group and the teachers intervene as appropriate.

When teachers had to construct an instructional approach for their students similar to the one they had tried out, the French-language teachers at the University of Taiwan compared their own habits with the positively-viewed methods proposed to them. They considered the students' context, their specific characteristics, needs, and questions. The collaboration between the teachers was an opportunity for them to find out about the expertise of their colleagues, including unsuspected complementary characteristics. Adopting the roles of Learners and Engineers gave teachers the necessary tools to complete the task independently with their students. We feel that this is the first element that allowed changes to begin to happen.

The Co-Teacher's and Observer's Role

As an observer, it was very positive for me to see how the students reacted. I very much appreciated that. I saw motivated students; they really got into the task. During the discussion in subgroups, I heard students talking in French, even a student with a low level of proficiency dared to speak out. I really enjoyed that. For heaven's sake, they held a

discussion in French; normally they don't say anything and are quite stressed. It's different than what we usually do during classes. (MD)

There was cooperation between the teachers. This exercise allowed us to see how others work, how you can complement one another. We're always alone during our classes. Here, we saw one another, all the teachers together in one classroom. It's about observing not only the students, but also the other teachers. (EL)

At Time 3, the trainer applies the teaching proposal worked out in Time 2 with a group of students. The teachers are placed in the role of the Teacher / Observer. Equipped with an observation chart, they focus on one student in particular, or on a specific working subgroup. During the experiment, the participants can intervene to support the trainer in the management of the lesson: they can specify instructions, support a subgroup, clarify certain terms, intervene to improve moments of sharing, and so forth. This is a co-teaching exercise. By building an activity for students and by testing it together during their classes, the teachers can develop innovation and adaptation skills, and so avoid simply reproducing a learned method (see Table 2 for Teacher's/Observer's role).

TABLE 3. *Teacher's / Observer's role*

Teacher's / Observer's role	
Experimenting with students	The trainer sets up part or all of the activities built by the participants in a class of students.
	During the experiment, each teacher fills out an observation chart, based on observing one or more students, the trainer or the various phases of the activities.
	The teachers intervene in the experiment when they think it is appropriate.

Periods of observation in class were a true revelation. The French-language teachers at the University of Taiwan realized that it was possible to do what we proposed in our training with their own students, by noticing its direct effects on how they learned. The participants said that they observed not only the students, but also their own colleagues, and really valued their interventions and specific characteristics, which they did not necessarily know about. The observation also included the trainer and the way he managed the class of students.

The Reflexive Analyst's Transversal Role

Our students are not used to this kind of process. We introduced a new process. They follow us. We invited them to discover things by themselves, to cooperate. I truly appreciated this way of working. (JA)

Things – the process itself – did not go as "we" had hoped because "our" instructions weren't clear. But as soon as S gave further details and laid out the documents, the students started to collectively observe the format of the documents. (RA)

We will apply this in our classes. (MC)

At Time 4, in the Reflexive Analyst's role, the participants are asked to step back and critically review the experiment with the students (Altet, 2004; Bocquillon & Derobertmasure, 2018). This is their chance to reflect on what they have done and to go back over the opportunities and weaknesses observed in the activities that they developed for their students. Any changes in habits, the reactions of the students, the different stages, and so forth, are all discussed. Although the Reflexive Analyst role occurs predominantly at the end, the participants can also talk about their own actions, difficulties, the strategies used, and so forth during each phase of the training (See Table 4: Reflexive Analyst's role).

TABLE 4. *Reflexive Analyst's role*

Reflexive Analyst's role	
Doing a reflexive analysis and taking a step back	The teachers react spontaneously with regard to the experiment.
	The teachers share observations on the various phases.
	The teachers exchange views about the perceived benefits of the day's work.

The aspects developed above would not have emerged with the University of Taiwan teachers without setting aside time for reflexive analysis throughout the activities and during the final stage of the training. The result was a collective degree of satisfaction among the French-language teachers at the University of Taiwan with what was achieved. During this period, a number of teaching questions emerged, such as how to talk about writing strategies, how to help students assess their peers, and what syntheses to create of the learning process. Moreover, any limits encountered were not attributed to the trainer who managed the complete activity. In fact, the criticisms voiced consistently mentioned "we" (and not "you"). An even more interesting fact was that the teachers suggested various possible adaptations for an improved version of the instructional approach, which reinforced our opinion that they now felt capable of transferring that approach.

CONCLUSION

We believe we can say that the LETRA training approach enables teachers to be trained to teach complex abilities, by facilitating knowledge transfer and didactic innovation by their successively entering into each of four roles. Three aspects can be highlighted with respect to the French-language teachers we worked with at the University of Taiwan.

First, the teachers saw how they could change their practices.

Second, this change was brought about by their successively adopting four proposed roles, which were built on four basic principles allowing knowledge transfer (content transmission, contextualization, cognitive companionship, reflexive analysis).

Third, the two most important driving forces for change seem to have been: firstly, the teachers' feeling that adopting the Learner's and Engineer's roles, with the support of the trainer, had equipped them with the requisite skills; secondly, the confirmation that "it works" and that the teachers were able, while co-teaching during the third phase, to run the instructional approach and manage the complexity of the training.

The roles presented here are consistent with the types of professional learning activities needed to cope with rapid changes in the teaching profession (Geijsel et al., 2009; Janssen & van Yperen, 2004) and contribute to ways in which to transfer training content into professional practice (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009). The results of using the LETRA approach are promising, and we hope may encourage other teacher trainers to use the different roles in their training modules. The use of these roles has already been documented for initial teacher education (Colognesi, Deschepper et al., 2019). The experience reported here spurs us to further empirical investigation so as to explore its significance in the context of in-service teacher education.

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STÉPHANE COLOGNESI is Professor at the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences of the University of Louvain, in Belgium, and co-director of the Interdisciplinary Research Group in Socialization, Education and Training (GIRSEF). His research interest focuses on learning and instruction in both primary and secondary school as well as in higher education. More specifically, Colognesi's research concentrates on Learning and Instruction (writing and oral), Teacher Education, and support for teachers. stephane.colognesi@uclouvain.be

SILVIA LUCCHINI is Professor at the Faculty of Philosophy, Arts and Letters of the University of Louvain, in Belgium. Her research interests are in the field of language acquisition, particularly French, whether as a foreign language or as a first language/reference/teaching language. She is particularly interested in the teaching/learning of reading and writing in contexts of linguistic or plurilingual minimization. silvia.lucchini@uclouvain.be

STÉPHANE COLOGNESI est professeur à la Faculté de psychologie et des sciences de l'éducation de l'Université catholique de Louvain, en Belgique, et co-directeur du GIRSEF (Groupe interdisciplinaire de Recherche sur la Socialisation, l'Éducation et la Formation). Ses recherches portent sur l'apprentissage et l'enseignement, tant dans l'enseignement primaire et secondaire que dans l'enseignement supérieur. Plus précisément, ses recherches se concentrent sur l'apprentissage et l'enseignement de l'écrit et de l'oral, et sur les dispositifs de formation des enseignants. stephane.colognesi@uclouvain.be

SILVIA LUCCHINI est professeure à la Faculté de philosophie, d'arts et de lettres de l'Université catholique de Louvain, en Belgique. Ses intérêts de recherches se portent surtout sur les dispositifs d'acquisition des langues, du français en particulier, que ce soit comme langue étrangère ou langue première/de référence/d'enseignement. Elle s'intéresse particulièrement à l'enseignement/l'apprentissage de la lecture et de l'écriture dans les contextes de minimisation linguistiques ou plurilingues. silvia.lucchini@uclouvain.be