EXPLORING FIVE MEXICAN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND ITS RELATION TO AUTONOMY

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Introduction

This paper summarises the findings from a small scale research project conducted in Mexico with 5 university tutors. The purpose of the study was to explore the teachers' beliefs about language teaching, learning and professional development. By gaining a greater awareness of these teachers' beliefs and practices, I was able to draw up a plan to help them enhance their professional development in the future. The data was explored and discussed with reference to the notion of 'teacher autonomy', since the tentative links between teachers' professional development and teacher autonomy remain a significant concept in the relevant literature.

I will start by discussing the relevant literature. Following this, I will provide an overview of the data collected. Finally, some brief recommendations will be made for future work in this area. Even though the data is drawn from a relatively small sample of 5 Mexican teachers, I believe the insights into teaching and learning that the date offer may be of interest to other teachers in other contexts.

Professional development

Underhill (1997) states that professional development involves teachers in a constant process of learning about their practice and discovering and using their own potential. For Richards (1998), this process requires teachers to create their own personal teaching methodology that takes into account their experience, beliefs and understanding about good teaching. He adds that reflection, self-inquiry, self-monitoring, and self-evaluation are necessary elements in fostering professional development, since they help teachers to be better informed and to evaluate their professional growth, as well as to plan for improvement. Likewise, Richards and Farrell (2005) assert that teacher development involves teachers in understanding themselves and their teaching; in analysing their teaching practices, beliefs, values and principles; in keeping up-to-date with theories and trends; and in sharing their experiences with colleagues. To sum up, it can be said that in order to develop professionally, teachers should feel a continuous desire to learn more about themselves as professionals, and about their profession.

In listing the skills and attitudes that enable teachers to develop, Roberts (1998), stresses the importance of self-awareness for professional development. For him, teachers should be conscious of their strengths and weaknesses, of the nature of their own development and knowledge, and of their own beliefs about teaching and learning. The value of the latter has also been pointed out by Woods' (1995) research on teacher cognition. This research suggests that in order to develop, and have a better understanding of their practice, teachers must articulate their personal theories of teaching.

What is emphasised nowadays is the need to encourage teachers to find a way of teaching that is the appropriate to their own context; this is coupled with the need to support them in acquiring and developing the skills and attitudes needed to exercise their decision-making in the most suitable way.

Teacher autonomy

Many definitions of learner autonomy have been provided in the literature. According to Benson (2001), the definition that is most widely accepted is that of Holec (1981: 3): "To take charge of one's own learning is to have, and to hold, the responsibility for all the decisions concerning all aspects of this learning."

Holec's definition places emphasis on two important dimensions: responsibility and capacity for making decisions. Little's (1991: 3) definition of autonomy complements Holec's by making more explicit the cognitive capacities that are important for learner autonomy. As he emphasises: 'Essentially, autonomy is a capacity – for detachment, critical reflection, decision-

making, and independent action'. He also asserts that the bases for autonomous learning are those of reflection and self-evaluation.

For some, teachers who aim to develop learner autonomy need to be autonomous themselves, and should have experienced and reflected on their own autonomy in the first place. However, a great deal more is involved in the concept of teacher autonomy than simply being capable and responsible for the development of learner autonomy. This has been acknowledged by several scholars. For example, McGrath (2000:102) considers that there are two dimensions to the construct of teacher autonomy:

- Self-directed professional development / action.
- The exercise of professional freedom (freedom from control by others).

McGrath's (2000) first dimension is closely related to the view of the teacher as a researcher and as a reflective practitioner, involved in the management of his or her own development and practice; the second dimension takes into account ways in which teachers respond to the constraints within their own context. Smith and Erdoğan (forthcoming) have expanded on McGrath's dimensions of teacher autonomy, and introduced the notion of teacher-learner autonomy, which emphasises the importance of recognising teachers as learners, and focusing on their professional development. If, as Smith and Erdoğan suggest, one of the dimensions of teacher-learner autonomy is 'the capacity for self-directed professional development', then it is important to find out how teachers acquire this capacity, and to ascertain the ways in which they can foster this.

In unpacking McGrath's (2000) conceptualisations of teacher autonomy, Smith and Erdoğan (forthcoming) subdivide the dimensions of teacher autonomy as follows:

In relation to professional action:

- Self-directed professional action = 'Self-directed teaching'
- Capacity for self-directed professional action = 'Teacher autonomy (capacity to self-direct one's teaching)'
- Freedom from control over professional action = 'Teacher autonomy (freedom to self-direct one's teaching)'

In relation to professional development:

- Self directed professional development = 'Self-directed teacher-learning'
- Capacity for self-directed professional development = 'Teacher-learner autonomy (capacity to self-direct one's learning as a teacher')
- Freedom from control over professional development = 'Teacher-learner autonomy (freedom to self-direct one's learning as a teacher')

The above representation by Smith and Erdoğan (forthcoming) clearly distinguishes two different dimensions of teacher autonomy (i.e. professional action and development), each of which involves three different aspects (self-direction, capacity and freedom).

For the purposes of this study the constructs of 'Teacher autonomy (capacity to self-direct one's teaching)' and 'Teacher-learner autonomy (capacity to self-direct one's learning as a teacher') have been used. In this study the main focus and interest has been on ascertaining the capacities for self-directed professional action and development, as perceived and articulated by the teachers.

Barfield et al (2002) suggest that the possible characteristics of 'autonomous teachers' may involve:

- Negotiation skills;
- Institutional knowledge in order to start to address effectively constraints on teaching and learning;
- Willingness to confront institutional barriers in socially appropriate ways to turn constraints into opportunities for change;
- Readiness to engage in lifelong learning to the best of an individual's capacity;
- Reflection on the teaching process and environment;
- Commitment to promoting learner autonomy.

It is possible to relate the above statements to some of the dimensions discussed by McGrath

(2000) and Smith and Erdoğan (forthcoming). For example, "…willingness to confront constraints on teaching and learning", as well as "reflection on the teaching process and environment" can be related to the dimension of the 'capacity to self-direct one's teaching', as they are essential elements that can enhance such capacity; "readiness to engage in lifelong learning" is more related to the 'capacity to self-direct one's learning as a teacher' as it expresses the importance of a desire for continuous improvement. According to my understanding, the conceptualisations of teacher autonomy, with a focus on more self-directed action and development (McGrath 2000; Smith & Erdoğan forthcoming; Aoki 2000), relate to teachers' engagement in constant reflection over their teaching, and over their professional development, in such a way that they direct their actions towards enhancing their students' learning.

The role of reflection in professional development and its relation to teacher autonomy

Metacognitive awareness, responsibility, and in particular, reflection, seem to be some of the key elements needed in developing teacher autonomy. Moreover, the importance of engaging in continuous reflection and inquiry over one's teaching and over our students' learning has been acknowledged to be an essential element in developing both teacher and learner autonomy. (Little 1995, Tort-Moloney 1997, Vieira 1997, 1999, 2003; Thavenius 1999, McGrath 2000, Huttunen 2003, Kohonen 2003, Pinter 2007, Barfield et al 2002, Wallace, 1998).

Little (1995), for example, asserts that teachers are autonomous when they manage their teaching with a sense of responsibility to engage in constant reflection and inquiry.

Becoming a reflective practitioner also seems to be essential in developing professionally. For Nunan and Lamb (1996:120) 'reflective teachers are ones who are capable of monitoring, critiquing and defending their actions in planning, implementing and evaluating language problems'.

Thus, reflection about one's teaching, including the use of metacognitive skills (reflection about the planning, monitoring and evaluating of teaching and learning) may mean being aware of the many different aspects that impact the outcome of our practice. It may also entail being alert to the need to make complex decisions when managing the process of learning, and thinking back to issues that could be changed or improved. In this sense, reflection is a key element in developing the teachers' capacity for self-direction. Moreover, the development of all the different types of awareness (of self, personal theories, beliefs and values) inform teachers' decision-making. In other words, reflection helps to obtain a deeper understanding of teaching, which in turn serves as the basis for evaluation, decision-making, planning, and action to motivate change and improvement (Richards and Lockhart 1996; Wallace 1991).

In considering the role that reflection plays in developing teachers' capacity to self-direct their teaching and learning, it is also important to bear in mind that this capacity entails actions and decision-making. Reflection and decision-making are heavily influenced or affected by the knowledge and beliefs that teachers hold about teaching and learning. Therefore, to be able to understand the motivations behind teachers' decisions, it is useful to learn about the sources of teachers' knowledge and beliefs.

The role of teachers' knowledge and beliefs in professional development.

Richards (1998) recognizes two different types of knowledge that influence teachers' practices. One refers to the subject matter and how this knowledge can be structured and taught more effectively. The other is linked to what teachers have constructed as their own philosophy about good teaching, i.e. 'teacher belief systems'. The two types of knowledge come into play when decisions have to be made in teaching, but it has been proven that the latter plays a more influential role (Woods 1995).

For this reason, it is essential to learn about what has shaped teachers' experiences as learners and as practitioners. Furthermore, it is necessary to uncover other factors that may influence teachers' beliefs, such as contextual, personal and academic aspects, because teachers often describe their practice of language teaching in terms of these beliefs.

Research methods

In order to explore the five Mexican teachers' (Participants A, B, C, D and E) perceptions of their professional development and its relation to teacher autonomy, a hybrid instrument was used.

Originally, a questionnaire was designed which was sent directly to the teachers to complete. However, given the fact that several questions were open-ended, an email dialogue was also initiated with the participants, so as to explore their lengthier responses, in the shape of an email based interview.

The questionnaire consisted of two sections. Part A was designed to obtain information about the participants' professional background. The aim was, firstly, to consider respondents' professional development from the perspective of their expertise in the field; secondly, the questionnaire sought to ascertain whether in fact experience or qualifications played a role in developing a deeper understanding and awareness of their role as a language teacher. Part B consisted of nine open-ended questions. The first eight questions were intended to elicit different aspects of how teachers perceived their professional development and its relation to autonomy. Questions one and two (see Appendix 1) were intended to elicit teachers' beliefs about good language teaching in terms of the qualities of a good language teacher, and about their roles in the classroom. They were aimed at finding out what factors had shaped their beliefs (i.e. training, experience, cultural or institutional policies), and also provided a point of departure for the rest of the interview.

Questions three, six and seven (see Appendix 1) were designed with the aim of obtaining answers from the participants regarding any features of autonomy understood as 'self-directed professional action'. Question three was of a broader nature, and was designed to elicit the extent to which teachers were aware of the ways in which they assessed their own practice, as well as which other factors might influence the evaluation of their practice.

Question six was designed to ascertain the factors influencing the decisions that teachers make when they plan their teaching, rather than eliciting the steps they follow when they plan.

Question seven was intended to elicit an example of how teachers monitor their own practice and what kind of factors play a role in their decision-making. The three aspects - planning, monitoring and self-evaluation- are thought to be closely related to the concept of self-direction in terms of the capacity for making decisions in the classroom. Question four (Appendix 1) required participants to describe what elements in their context encourage or hinder their development and their control over their teaching. It aimed to explore their awareness of the constraints and opportunities in their context, as well as wider issues that might affect their professional development. Questions five and eight (Appendix 1) were intended to elicit the participants' ideas as to the ways in which they had developed in the profession and about their plans to go further. Both questions were related to the construct of autonomy in the sense of 'capacity to self-direct one's learning as a teacher' and were aimed at eliciting how they manage to improve. In addition, eight open-ended questions were formulated (See Appendix 1: Interview questions).

Teachers' responses

There are many ways in which the data could have been analysed. In this paper, I shall simply provide a flavour of the data harnessed, and will focus on some important themes related to teacher autonomy. I will report on the (1) teachers perceptions of good teaching; their insights in terms of (2) self-monitoring; and (3) self-evaluation; and finally their reported (4) initiatives in taking charge of their own professional development.

Perceptions of good teaching

Participants A, B, D, and E, commented that a central characteristic of good language teaching and good language teachers is the fact that they place a great importance on students' needs, interests, likes and dislikes. This is exemplified in the following quotes:

> "You must get involved in your students' interests, likes and dislikes; this will help you plan successful classes". (A: 8-9)

> "I believe a good language teacher places his/her students needs in the first place and helps and supports them to achieve these needs". (B: 4-5)

> "Language teaching should be determined by students' needs and potentials". (D: 4-5)

> "…above all, a good language teacher is interested in his/her students' learning and creates as many opportunities as he/she can for his/her students to like and practice the language inside and outside the classroom". (E: 6-8)

A further belief about the characteristics of a good language teacher, as emphasised by three participants, was the teachers' knowledge about the subject matter and pedagogy. It is possible that

this belief emerges from their previous experiences as students, and perhaps from the traditional teaching context in which the teacher is regarded as the one who possesses and transmits *the* knowledge. The following quotes illustrate this point:

> "As a language teacher you must be sure about the things you are going to teach, you are supposed to know the language functions appropriately". (A: 6-7)

> "… (the teacher) is able to provide answers to the learners' questions and doubts". (B: 15)

> "From my point of view, a good language teacher should have a good mastery of the English language and know about teaching methodologies and techniques, learning styles, and all those important aspects related to the teaching and learning processes". (E: 4-6)

This view of the teacher as a source of knowledge, and the idea that knowledge about the subject matter and pedagogy play an important role in good teaching may however be considered as one of the sources of motivation for further development. When teachers have a desire to learn more about their profession because they consider knowledge a key element in their practice, it may be more likely that they will look for ways to further develop professionally, and will be open to new ideas on how to do so on their own or with colleagues.

It is revealing, however, that only one of the participants expressed a view of a good language teacher as someone who is constantly seeking to improve his/her practice:

> "…a good teacher never ends studying! Knowledge and life are in movement, so you must be in movement as well, getting everyday preparation (sic) for those new generations that expect more from you every class". (A: 10-12)

> "A good language teacher knows that he/she is not perfect, that mistakes are new chances to improve; he/she accepts his/her mistakes and looks for the best ways to avoid them". (A: 13-14)

Willingness and a desire for continuous improvement have been considered as some of the characteristics of autonomous teachers (McGrath 2000; Barfield et al 2002; Smith and Erdoğan forthcoming).

With regard to the factors that influence the decisions teachers make when they plan their lessons, all the participants accepted that they use the text book, the syllabus or the programme imposed by the institution as a point of departure for planning. However, they also stated that they use their own criteria on how to adapt, enrich or transform a lesson. This attitude is consistent with their belief that it is important to motivate students by choosing meaningful activities to engage them in learning while at the same time taking into account their needs, likes, and interests.

For example, participant A seems to follow the syllabus more closely, although she does select activities that she considers appropriate for her students:

> "Based on this fact (that you have a syllabus to follow) and the topic you will teach, you may select according to the group's interests and abilities". (A: 78-9)

Participant B said that she keeps in mind the aims, but she also tries to motivate her students while attending to their needs:

> "The reason for my choices of activities and materials, as well as interaction has mainly to do with achieving the aims and motivating the students to learn and respond to their need to learn the language". (B: 60-2)

Participant C stated that she usually supplements the course book by looking for materials and activities that respond more to her students' problems and needs:

> "So as for the choice of the topics, sometimes my choice is a bit forced by the syllabus in itself, but I always try to get things around it; for example, I try to make things a bit more unpredictable…" (C: 90-2)

> "I usually have extra things, for example for grammar or vocabulary because I always have the feeling that the books are very limited. You always have the sense that they (the students) are not getting enough practice or that maybe the practice is not what they need. Once you get to know your students you know what problems they have, so I look for resources elsewhere." (C: 105-8)

Participant D said he takes into account his students' needs and likes, although he feels constrained by the syllabus and the resources available:

> "My lesson planning deals with weaving together such mandatory requirements (the syllabus and the textbook) and the students' needs and likes and the resources available." (D: 69-71)

Participant E said that she usually looks for activities that activate her students' previous knowledge, that enhance their learning and

motivate them, and that foster the real use of the language through communication:

> "Whenever I plan a lesson, I think about an activity that helps me introduce the topic to my students and activate their knowledge on the subject. I try to use their background knowledge to generate learning. Next, I provide models for them to practice that particular language point and look for different activities to reinforce their learning in different ways so that they don't get bored. Finally, I design or look for an activity where they can integrate their new learning to their existing knowledge and use it to communicate in English in a 'real' situation in the classroom, so I promote pair and group work to make language practice and tasks more realistic". (E: 58-64)

These quotes would seem to illustrate that the participants have developed an ability to create their own methodology based on their perception of their students' needs and goals and their context (Richards, 1998).

Self-monitoring (flexibility).

Self-monitoring has been considered as one of the ways in which teachers can develop and enhance their practice (Richards 1998), and is also seen as a characteristic of reflective teachers (Nunan and Lamb 1996), which in turn plays a key role in becoming self-directed in one's teaching. Thus, in this study, it was considered important to explore when, and to what extent, teachers monitor themselves during their practice.

In this regard, participants A, B, and E noted that they consider a lesson plan as a tool that can be adapted or changed during the course of the lesson. This is especially the case when they sense that students are not being engaged, do not understand, or need something more. That is, they are constantly monitoring their students' learning.

For example, participant A provided an account of how she managed to involve the students' own experiences, in order to help them understand the meaning and use of a grammatical structure:

> "I remember one day, when I was trying to explain "Past Modals" using a text from the book that talked about a person who made some mistakes in his life and he was regretting them (sic); students seemed not to understand; so I interviewed one of them and I invited him to tell us about a big mistake in his life, then I asked him about the changes he would have made if he could live through that part again. He said lots of things. I asked my other students to do the same and some of them took it in such a serious way, that started to cry and I got confused, I didn't know if continuing or stopping; finally we continued and I feel my students understood the topic". (A: 88-94)

Participant B commented that there are several situations in which the need to depart from the original lesson plan arises:

> "It is not uncommon to depart from one's original lesson and this happens when students are really motivated to learn or there is a real communication breakdown between my students and me; when they ask questions that might move me away from what I have initially planned to do". (B: 72-4)

Participant E expressed the fact that teachers have to be sensitive to students' reactions and responses in order to adjust the lessons:

> "…from my experience I can say that almost never everything goes as planned in a lesson. We have to adapt, add or omit things depending on our students' reactions and responses". (E: 71-3)

She further elaborated her answer by saying that 'What we have to do as teachers is to develop our skills to improvise and use our students' reactions in our lesson for our students' benefit'. (E:74-5)

Participant B, who said that she has learned to be sensitive to her students' needs, also expressed the same view:

> "I think that in the classroom, what I learned to do was to be sensitive to the needs of the learners because teachers generally stand before the students in the classroom and do not look at each of the students' needs". (B: 88-90).

In my opinion, these answers show an awareness of the need to develop the skills to find the best ways of directing teaching towards enhancing the students' learning (see for example: Edge 2002; Kumaravadivelu 2006; Pennington 1990; Richards 1998).

Self-evaluation

Teachers' self-evaluation of their practice can be considered as a commitment to analysing and evaluating their own teaching acts (Kumaravadivelu 2006). It involves reflecting, questioning or engaging in critical reflective inquiry over one's own practice (Wallace 1991; Barfield et al 2002; Kohonen 2003). Furthermore, self-evaluation is considered as fundamental for the professional development of teachers towards autonomy. From my point of view, self-evaluation is also connected with the moral responsibility of helping students to achieve their learning goals,

and with 'becoming the best teacher you can be' (Underhill 1997).

The data obtained by this study reveals that the participants rely on what they observe about their students – their satisfaction, their achievements and their language performances - to evaluate their practice; some of them even ask for students' feedback about lessons. For example, participants E and B rely on their perception of students' success or performance in the classroom:

> "As teachers, we can observe our students' reactions to our teaching and notice if they are really learning to use the language or not".(E: 21-2)

> "When I see that my students are able to use the language to communicate successfully, I realise how effective my teaching has been". (E: 26-7)

> "I do not at present carry out a formal evaluation procedure during or after each lesson, but I ask my students questions about the lesson just covered and then I gauge from their answers if we need to review or revisit the content of the lesson". (B: 19-21)

Participant C assesses her practice based on the students' motivation and satisfaction with the course:

> "Many times I just play by the gut feeling. My gut feeling is like when sometimes you finish a lesson and you go: 'Oh man! That was a wonderful class – the students were motivated, you as a teacher were motivated as well, the objective of the lesson was achieved, you saw there was some growth in them, they were able to complete what they were supposed to and having a good time as well". (C: 32-5)

Participants A and E go further, involving students in the evaluation of their practice:

> "I usually ask my students about my teaching, if they feel comfortable, if they would like me to change something…" (A: 34-5)

> "In addition, at the end of each semester, I ask my students to answer a questionnaire as a kind of feedback for me to improve my teaching practice and find out what can be improved". (E: 27-9)

Additionally, three of the participants (A, B and C) commented that they regard formal evaluation as a valuable tool to assess their practice:

> "I usually observe my students' exam results, my students' behaviour…" (A: 36)

> "In general, at the end of the course, I am able to evaluate my teaching from the results of the final evaluation". (B: 21-2)

> "Of course, I also have to rely on exams and tests because it's one of the ways you have to measure whether they have become in control of a particular structure or vocabulary. I also rely a lot on students' progress. I tend to compare what they were being able to produce at the beginning of the semester or the term and then what they're able to do later". (C: 35-40)

Finally, two of the participants expressed the fact that they do reflect on their teaching as a way to evaluate and improve their practice. However, they engage in reflection in different moments of the teaching process. Participant A asserts that she engages in reflection about her teaching on a daily basis as a way of assessing what needs changing:

> "Believe it or not; I am always thinking in the way I teach. I try to improve things that do not work well today (sic) or during the lesson". (A: 33-4)

Conversely, participant D comments that it is only at the end of the course that he thinks back on its objectives and reflects on the outcomes:

> "I only evaluate my teaching at the end of the course by reflecting and determining to what extent my students and myself are satisfied…" (D: 36-7)

In talking about reflection over one's practice, participant A feels it is not an easy task to carry out:

> "It is difficult to reflect on your own practice, because most of the times we would like to be loved by everyone; but we can improve very much by being self-critical and by accepting criticism from people who really knows about the topic". (A: 37-9)

To sum up, according to the data obtained in this study, the ways in which this particular group of teachers self-evaluate their practice are mostly connected with the information they gather about their learners' performance, success or satisfaction, whether formally or informally. Some of them engage in reflection as a way of changing or improving, although the way in which they do so is not very systematic. It may be that raising teachers' awareness about different tools or methods available to them to engage in more systematic processes of self-inquiry and evaluation (e.g. reflective or exploratory practice and self-monitoring) could be an initial way of supporting their development.

Professional development initiatives

Ways in which teachers develop or improve are

varied and numerous, and depend on the teachers' own desire and motivation to continue learning (Head and Taylor 1997). Attending conferences, seminars and short courses seem to be the most popular ways in which teachers strive to further their professional development but many other opportunities have been mentioned.

For example, participant B said that she fosters her professional development by attending and giving presentations in conferences:

> "I have always made it a point to attend conferences and other gatherings where I am able to talk or get updated in the field of ELT". (B: 44-5)

Participant C mentioned that a good way to further her professional development is by becoming a teacher trainer and helping other teachers:

> "I think I try to foster my professional development by training and helping other teachers because that way I have to read and learn more. Every time I prepare a workshop I learn new things and when I share them with others and they also share their experiences, then we all grow as professionals". (C: 75-7)

Both responses emphasise the importance of sharing experiences and knowledge with other colleagues, which also motivates them to engage in learning.

There are other ways in which teachers foster their professional development. For example, participant C does so by learning from peers or instructors:

> "I also like asking teachers about activities I see them do in their classes - activities which I really like or didn't know about, this helps me keep fresh". (C: 79-81)

> "Anyway, at that time, some people from UNAM (the National University) went to CCH-UG (a high school) where I was teaching then and they gave us a very nice course on constructivism, ok, and one of the people who went there, I can't remember his name, but he was, I really liked him because he talked about constructivism, but he didn't talk about it, he let us construct the course, you know what he…, he had wonderful activities, so he had us working all the time, so he was monitoring, facilitating, but he was the course in himself!". (C: 250-4)

Participants also mentioned that they improve by changing their usual way of teaching, by taking risks of doing things differently and experimenting with new ideas and methodologies. This is illustrated by the following quotes from the excerpts:

> "I really did something crazy that day that I hadn't done before…" "… so I said I'm going to start doing my classes as workshops". (C: 280; 291-2)

> "I always think of new ways to introduce, practise and use the grammar of the "program" and in topics that may be interesting for students, this has brought variety and accuracy to my teaching, I think". (D: 97-8)

> "I think I improve my teaching by disregarding as much as possible the imposition established by the fixed system and paying attention to the students' needs and likes, which is something that not always can be done". (D: 95-7)

Participant E also finds useful to read extensively in English and to look for opportunities to practise the language:

> "I practise the language everyday, I try to read as much as I can in English to extend my vocabulary and be aware of the different words and phrases I can use in English". (E: 49-51)

Being open to accept or to ask for feedback from colleagues and students has also helped some teachers to improve their practice. Also, an open attitude to learn from peers and from their own mistakes is a key element for professional development. Participants E and A emphasise this as follows:

> "… I try to learn from my mistakes taking my students suggestions and feedback into consideration". (E: 51-2)

> "Each semester my students answer a questionnaire and express their opinions about the course and they often suggest me to interact more with them and include more dynamic activities in my lessons. As a result, I am really trying to overcome this personality problem taking my students' recommendations into account to improve my teaching practice". (E: 87-90)

> "Your partners (trusty and responsible ones) and students are really helpful, if you can get an evaluation of your work from them, and take it as a chance to improve, you are on the other side…" (A: 69-70)

> "… be open-minded, correct you mistakes if any, ask for help… …if you are conscious that you are human, and that humans make big mistakes, there is no problem try to solve them and learn…" (A: 105; 64-5)

As can be seen above, many examples have been given and they show that these teachers, indeed, initiate activities to enhance their professional development. It may be that other, newer ways in

which they can do this in the future could be explored, such as small scale action research, exploratory practice, team teaching, observation or collaborating in a project with a colleague.

Conclusion

The data show that these teachers have clear ideas about what good language teaching entails, and they have interesting examples to share about monitoring and evaluating their practice. They also actively initiate activities to enhance their professional development. The data further show that these teachers articulated in their responses some of the features of self-directed professional action and development (the capacity to self-direct one's teaching and one's learning as a teacher, in Smith & Erdoğan forthcoming). However, participating in a wide range of activities such as selecting textbooks; the design of syllabi, materials, or departmental exams; participating in developmental groups, online discussion forums, and the publication of articles or newsletters could be also be introduced and promoted as other avenues for professional growth (Vieira 2002, 2003 ; Pinter 2007).

For future INSET programmes it may be a good idea to offer a variety of useful approaches and tools to further develop their abilities to monitor the effectiveness of their teaching, to analyse and evaluate their own practice (Wallace, 1991, 1998), and to extend their capacities to self-direct their teaching and their learning as teachers (Smith & Erdoğan forthcoming).

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INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

PART A. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

1. **How long have you been an English teacher?**

2. Your academic and professional training. I have…

☐	A master's degree in Education or related to Language Teaching.
☐	A master's degree in other areas.
☐	A first degree from a university or "Normal Superior" in English Language Teaching
☐	A first degree from a university or "Normal Superior" in another area different from ELT.
☐	A teaching qualification, like COTE, Teacher's Course, etc.
☐	Other qualifications that you find relevant.
	Please give details:
☐	I am currently involved in getting a degree/qualification.
	Please give details:
☐	I am planning to get a degree / qualification related to ELT
	Please give details:

1. What are your beliefs about good language teaching? What does a good language teacher do or have?

2. In your opinion, what are your main roles in the language classroom? Please describe and explain as much as possible.

3. How do you evaluate your teaching? (During / after each lesson, at the end of each course)

4. In your opinion, which features of the context where you work support your job as a teacher? Which features do you think hinder it?

5. Could you share with me ways in which you foster your professional development? Please provide at least two examples.

6. Please describe as detailed as possible how you go along when planning a typical lesson. Talk about what helps you decide about the topic, activities, materials, types of interactions, and so on. What are the reasons for your choices?

7. Can you describe an incident during one of your lessons that made you depart from your original lesson plan and that was used to enhance your students' learning? For example, it could be something that somebody contributed and you used it in the lesson, or perhaps something you noticed that was necessary to add or omit.

8. How do you improve your teaching?

Think about a time when you were in a situation that led you to learn something new about teaching or to change some of your ideas about teaching. What did you learn? How did you learn it? From what sources?

For example, attending lessons to learn another language (being a language student again), attending conferences, working with peers in a project, a difficult teaching environment, or any other situations that you can think of.

9. You may use the space below to add any other comments.