Closing Remarks: Summary of the Symposium

Qiufang Wen
Beijing Foreign Studies University
Beijing, China

The three keynote speakers presentations were informative, enlightening, and engaging. Professor Freeman presented a dynamic and interactive model for the design and implementation of teacher training and development. Professor Liu provided a telling example of how Native English teachers and Nonnative English teachers can collaborate to create a win-win situation. Professor Nunan explained how to carry out action research. The three topics were well chosen in the sense that they are complementary to each other, and that they enable the participants to have a better understanding of English teacher development in EFL contexts.

I am not a researcher in the field of teacher training and development. However, I have been a teacher for 30 years, a teacher trainer for preservice teachers as well for in-service teachers for more than 20 years, and a designer for the training program of teacher development for about 10 years. Therefore, I will give my responses to the three presentations from the perspective of a teacher, a teacher trainer, and a designer rather than from the perspective of a researcher. Finally, I will list the participants’ questions together with the speakers’ answers.

FREEMAN’S SOCIAL PRACTICE MODEL

The model proposed by Freeman will enable a program designer to theorize and evaluate her or his practices more systematically. Take our short training programs, for example. This year, the National Research Center for Foreign Language Education with Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press ran five workshops for teacher learning and development: two workshops on strategy-based instruction, two workshops on learner corpus and English language teaching, and one workshop on academic reading and evaluation. Each workshop had 200 participants from more than 100 universities, including with eight teacher trainers. The workshops lasted 3 to 4 days and 8 to 10 hours each day. Big classes were intermingled with small class discussions. In general, the workshops were a great success. As the designer of the workshops, I have now realized that our success can be explained by the model proposed by Freeman. For example, one of the important principles, which was repeatedly emphasized at the beginning of our workshop, is sharing; that is, teaching is neither telling nor testing. Teaching is sharing, sharing between the teacher and students, and sharing among students. Teaching is to create situations where the teacher and students are able to construct new knowledge together and to grow intellectually together. The other often stressed principle in our workshop is participants’ multiple roles; that is, all participants have multiple roles (as a learner, a teacher, and a commentator) to play in a workshop. As a learner, the participant needs to engage in hands-on activities, reflect on his or her own learning experience, and share that learning experience with other people. As a teacher, the participant is expected to design tasks for training, discuss how to accomplish these tasks, perform these tasks for the purpose of training and be ready to accept others’ critical comments.
As a commentator, the participant is supposed to make comments on others’ teaching in a professional way and put forward constructive suggestions. In other words, the roles of the trainer and the trainees are not fixed; they are interchangeable. These two principles well display Freeman’s theory that teacher training is a kind of social practice.

The collaboration model between nonnative-English-speaking (NNESTs) and native-English-speaking teachers (NESTs) described by Liu is excellent and perfect. Having half NNESTs and NESTs, along with a visionary leader such as Professor Jun Liu, creates a group dedicated to building a community. They learn from each other, help each other, and grow together. Indeed, this is a win-win situation. I would like to congratulate Professor Liu and his colleagues for their remarkable achievements as a result of their collaborative efforts in a learning community. However, this model is too ideal to follow. First of all, many universities cannot afford to have so many native English teachers. Secondly, they are not always lucky enough to have a visionary leader like Professor Liu. However, we can gain some insights from their practice and see to what extent we can improve our collaboration between NESTs and NNESTs.

**NUNAN’S ACTION RESEARCH MODEL**

Professor Nunan provided a detailed and clear explanation of action research. As he pointed out, action research is a very flexible tool for an individual, a group, or a community. Nunan identified the defining features of action research:

- Problem driven
- Change oriented
- By teachers themselves rather than outsiders
- Cyclic in nature
- With a public account

I agree with Nunan that collaboration shouldn't be a defining feature of action research. It is true that individual teachers may not in a position to do so. However, I don’t think providing a public account qualifies as a feature for action research, either. In my opinion, a public account is the same as collaboration, which is highly desirable but not essential for action research. A print publication is extremely difficult, if not impossible, and a public verbal account is helpful but not a must. Let's look at the following example. When we ran a workshop on strategy-based instruction, quite a few students wrote in their journals at the end of the first day’s training expressing the hope that the workshop would have more lectures rather than hands-on activities. After reading the trainee’s journal, we had a discussion and realized that many students were not used to our way of training. As a result, we decided to change our schedule. The next morning before we had our new class, one trainer reiterated the principles and explained why we did not take the lecture format. In the journal of that day, some trainees indicated that the additional explanation was important and necessary because it enabled them to understand why the training program was designed in such a way. Can we call the above incident a piece of action research? In my opinion, it certainly is but in Nunan’s view, it can not be because it had no public account.
QUESTIONS TO THE SPEAKERS

Altogether the participants asked six questions. The first question went to Professor Freeman:

1. Given Prof. Freeman’s model is effective, how can we make sure the designer accepts this model? Who are responsible for training the designers?

Freeman replied that the designers of teacher training programs are often policy-makers at various levels. However, the policy-makers at the lower level may be trained by those at the higher level.

2. Shantou University is rather unique. Can Professor Liu give some suggestions to other universities in China?

Liu admitted that the Shantou model is indeed unique, but he said that Chinese educators can still take some ideas from his model in EFL teacher development.

3. If the key difference between reflective practice and action research is publication, can Professor Nunan tell us how we can get action research findings published? Can you recommend some international journals to us, which accept that kind of research report?

Nunan explained that publication primarily referred to putting the action research into words or sharing the findings of action research with colleagues. He had no way to guarantee the publication of action research in TESOL Quarterly.

4. What are the similarities and differences between Freeman’s his model of teacher learning as social practice and Vygotsky’s initial triangle model of activity (tool-subject-object)?

Freeman acknowledged agreed that he had taken some ideas from Vygotsky, but his model was for teaching learning activity and his map of a social practice was simply a graphical representation of his model.

5. What is the relationship between Wenger’s community of practice, Freeman’s community of explanation, and Engestrom’s community?

Freeman explained that his community of explanation refers to a group of people who share common ways of reasoning about the world or certain aspects within it; Wenger’s community of practice refers to a group of people who follow common rules in their practice; and Engestrom’s community is a different concept altogether.

6. Professor Liu’s presentation was titled “Empower NNETs through collaboration with NETs,” but he did not give detailed information about how to do that. How do you empower NNESTs and NESTs?
Prof. Liu pointed out that the most important thing for a nonnative speaker is to feel confident and be fully aware of his or her advantages and disadvantages in EFL contexts.

To sum up, this one-day symposium provided timely input for EFL teachers, particularly to Chinese English teachers who are facing daunting challenges from the English teaching reforms initiated by the Ministry of Education. Inspired by this symposium, I am sure, all of us will make more contributions to the field of teacher development.
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TESOL Symposium on English Teacher Development in EFL Contexts
November 10, 2006
Shantou University
Guangdong Province, China

Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, Inc.
700 South Washington Street, Suite 200
Alexandria, VA 22314 USA
Tel: 703-836-0774
Fax: 703-836-7864
E-mail: tesol@tesol.org
http://www.tesol.org/

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