The teacher's sense of plausibility

by Alan Maley

Dr Neiman Stern Prabhu is one of the pioneers in the development of task-based learning and the communicative teaching of language through his work on the Bangalore Project in India in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The work he instituted as part of the project has since become one of the bases of current language learning theory and practice. However, the teaching of language methodology through teacher training courses does not necessarily ensure it will be taken up and used by all teachers. Far more important in Prabhu's view is teachers' own 'sense of plausibility', which is based on experience and which determines how they think about language and how language is best learned. This often-unconscious process of reflection informs teachers' personal psychology and influences what teaching and learning approaches they find plausible and therefore acceptable. The paper aims to explore Prabhu's contributions to language learning and teaching through the development of task-based learning and the communicational approach, examine his concept of 'the teacher's sense of plausibility', and give it substance by applying it, as an example, to the author's own career. It emphasises how teachers develop professionally (and personally) by building a personal theory of teaching action based upon their own accumulated experiences – and reflection on them. In doing so, the article suggests that the continuing development of a personal 'theory' of teaching can be a valuable element within the framework of teacher development as a whole.

KEYWORDS: *Prabhu, teacher development, Bangalore Project, task-based learning, communicative approach, plausibility*

1. INTRODUCTION

Objective history is useful, but perhaps more interesting are our personal histories. Five key strands of places, personalities, ideas, publications and critical moments demonstrate how our personal histories influence our approach to teaching and learning. In his article, *The teacher's sense of plausibility,* Dr Prabhu (1990) argued that teachers build their personal theories of teaching and learning through a continuing process of reflection on life experiences. It is this process that fuels their personal and professional growth.

This conceptualisation of teacher development is significantly different from the training paradigm which currently enjoys popularity. The training paradigm is broadly algorithmic in nature. *If we give teachers X forms of training, they will emerge with Y competences*. The plausibility paradigm, by contrast, is broadly heuristic. *Whatever training we*

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give them, teachers will adapt and transform it according to what works for them and to the belief system they have evolved, and this is forged through the experiences they undergo. The act of teaching and learning is not scientific, but highly individual and personal to both learners and teachers. While my own 'sense of plausibility' will be different from that of other teachers, my expectation is that by sharing experience some valuable truths may emerge from it which are shared across the profession – and that we might do well to attend to them at least as much as we do to the more algorithmic systems of teacher education.

2. THE BANGALORE PROJECT

Prabhu developed his ideas during the Bangalore Project, known among its members as the *Communicational Teaching Project*. This was an English teaching project carried out by teachers in primary and secondary schools in southern India over one to three years in the late 1960s and early 1970s with the support of the Regional Institute of English in Bangalore (Bengalaru) and the British Council in Madras (now Chennai), where I was working at the time. The project was a response to

an increasing feeling in India that, as Prabhu described it, *'the development of competence in a second language requires not systematisation of language inputs or maximisation of planned practice, but rather the creation of conditions in which learners engage in an effort to cope with communication'* (Prabhu, 1987, p. 1).

Up to that time, Indian second language education (and foreign language education) had focused on a Structural-Oral-Situational (S-O-S) approach, in which language competence was seen to be based on mastering the grammar system. The work of Prabhu and his colleagues was devoted to building communicative competence to achieve social and situational appropriacy. In doing this, Prabhu pioneered three major developments in second and foreign language education, two of which are now firmly established and one (the main focus of this article) which deserves deeper consideration. These developments are task-based learning, the communicational approach and the teacher's sense of plausibility. I will deal with each in turn, but first I will outline what was Prabhu's own course of development as a teacher.

3. PRABHU'S BACKGROUND

I had the pleasure of interviewing Dr Prabhu for the *Teacher Trainer Journal* in 1989. During the interview, he outlined what he understood by the teacher's sense of plausibility. First, he mentioned his own influences, the linguists Harold Palmer

(1921) and Noam Chomsky (1957). *'Early in my ELT career'*, he said, *'I stumbled on Harold Palmer's 'Principles of Language Study'. It's a very small book. I really was greatly moved by what I thought was a pedagogic sense of intuition and excitement in that book. It's a book I've read again and again since then. The other thing was Chomsky's 'Syntactic Structures'. It's equally small! These two books had a great influence on me. In a way, I've been trying to make sense of language teaching in a way that is in harmony with those two views'* (Maley, 1989, p. 1).

The key difference for Prabhu was to move from focus on grammatical competence to a focus on meaning, for which the Bangalore Project was a major stimulus. He said, *'I think it came, at least in southern India, at a time when there was a wearing off of people's belief in the structural approach. There was a kind of psychological readiness. In my own mind, the idea that grammatical competence might be provided through a preoccupation with meaning took shape suddenly as a result of earlier tentative thinking. I saw it as taking Harold Palmer's thinking a step further. Because of the psychological readiness, a few people in the project said 'Why don't we go ahead and do it in the classroom?' And also, it seemed a good way of stimulating professional discussion in the light of actual teaching and evidence about teaching made available to people – rather than going on with seminars, etc. So, it*

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was one way of getting professional discussion going and making it more meaningful' (Maley, 1989, p. 2).

The key issue for Prabhu was what he saw as classroom attitude. He found that the imposition of a structural methodology actually demotivated teachers. As he said in the interview, *'The implementation of the structural approach in India … became a fixed set of procedures which teachers carried out with no sense of involvement, and in some cases actually with a sense of resentment. I can't think of that kind of teaching being beneficial to learning, whatever the method'* (Maley, 1989, p. 2). Teacher and, therefore, student motivation was all important to Prabhu and led him to focus on how to develop motivation through learning through doing tasks which demanded communication in the language being learned.

4. TASK-BASED LEARNING

In a summary of a talk in Chennai in South India in 2017, Prabhu compared second language

learning (L2) to the process of first language learning (L1). If L1 is the medium through which the child makes sense of the world around it, L2 performs the same function. In Prabhu's opinion, it is the process of engaging in interesting second language activities that really stimulates learning. That is why he advocated a problem-solving format or, as he also described it, a task-based learning programme, nowadays adopted by most interactive textbooks and online language learning programmes.

For Prabhu, one of the most successful ways of learning was through reading. He believed that texts are much more structured and condensed in meaning than a group of sentences and allow readers to understand them at different levels. He went on to add that task-based reading comprehension *'involves a more sustained pre-occupation with meaning than oral exchange (with a more intense contact with the language)'* (Prabhu, 2017, p. 42).

This focus on reading as a key means to improve understanding reinforced Prabhu's understanding of the relationship between 'passive' and 'active' vocabulary and his belief that comprehension stays well ahead of production throughout life, both in the use of L1 and L2. In Prabhu's view, the emphasis should not be on production, but on comprehension. *'Learners'*, he said, *'find themselves producing the language before they are*

ready for it, and make errors by overgeneralising, resorting to the L1, etc. This leads to the teaching of grammar as a way of remedying the deficiency. Grammar teaching is thus remedial in nature, not developmental, just as medication is remedial in contrast to nutrition. Though it is right to teach grammar as a remedial measure, it is not right to do so while it is still possible to develop comprehension further – it will be like resorting to medication in preference to nutrition. It is best to leave grammar teaching until about the end of formal education' (Prabhu, 2017, p. 42).

From the point of view of the teacher therefore, *'The teacher can learn to judge the challenge level of tasks through trial and error over a period of time, while the learners too learn by repeated engagement to do successively higher levels of problem-solving while coping with higher levels of the language. The syllabus for the class, that is to say, can emerge in the process of teaching and learning'* (Prabhu, 2017, p. 43).

5. THE COMMUNICATIONAL APPROACH

The communicational approach puts the stress on communicative competence. As long ago as 1914 the linguist Leonard Bloomfield stressed that *'real language teaching consists of building up in the pupil those associative habits which constitute the language to be learned'* (Bloomfield, 1914, p. 294). What Prabhu originally described as the communicational approach owed a lot to the

development of the functions of language explored by David Wilkins (1974) at the University of Reading in the UK and incorporated in the Council of Europe Threshold Level and Waystage projects compiled by John Trim and Jan Van Ek in 1975, now enshrined in the Council of Europe Common Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR).

This approach stresses the importance of interaction in the classroom, of pair and groupwork practice in solving problems together in the language to be learned. The initial stress tends to be on the development of oral and listening skills as opposed to Prabhu who, as we have seen above, emphasised reading. Key tools used in the communicative approach are *information gap activities* which set students a problem to be solved and *role plays*, in which students in pairs are encouraged to exchange opinions and ideas and also act out roles in common situations such as shopping or giving directions. So Prabhu, while agreeing with the basic principles of the communicative approach, diverges from this in the way of implementing it.

Both task-based learning and the communicative approach are well established in language teaching methodology. However, Prabhu's third principle of language teaching evolved through the Bangalore Project is far less established while potentially far more subversive.

6. THE TEACHER'S SENSE OF PLAUSIBILITY

In my interview, Dr Prabhu outlined his understanding of the teacher's sense of plausibility. *'I'm thinking more and more about what it means for a teacher to work with some understanding of how the teaching leads to learning, with some concept that has credibility to the teacher himself. Also, about what it means for the teacher to be influenced by other concepts and how ideas change. To the extent that we can understand this, we can look for ways to clarify and facilitate the process'* (Maley, 1989, p. 3).

The key issue for him was the danger of what he called 'the routinisation of teaching' which demotivated both teachers and learners.

'I think in teaching, as in any human interaction activity, one needs to work with some understanding, some concept of what is going on in teaching, how the act of teaching might lead to the act of learning. That conceptualisation of intentions and effects and so on is 'a sense of plausibility'. I call it that because I don't want to make any claims about it's being the truth. For that teacher, however, it is the truth! There is a very real sense in which our understanding of phenomena at any one time is the truth for us. There is also in teaching, as in other recurrent interactions, a need for routinisation. But if the job becomes 'over-routinised', there is no sense of plausibility. The 'sense of plausibility' gets buried or frozen or

ossified. From that point of view, the aim of professional activity should be to keep the teacher's sense of plausibility alive and, therefore, open to influence by the ongoing experience of teaching and interaction with other teachers' perceptions and senses of plausibility' (Maley, 1989, p. 3).

Prabhu expressed his views in more detail in his 1990 article *'There is no best method – Why?* for the *TESOL Quarterly* (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) journal (Prabhu, 1990). He recognised that imposing a methodology to ensure uniformity of approach might suit education systems and textbooks, but the key factors in successful teaching and learning are the motivation of the teachers and the learners. He cited the applied linguist Jack Richards, who wrote:

The important issues are not which method to adopt, but how to develop procedures and instructional activities that will enable programme objectives to be obtained' (Richards, 1985, p. 42).

For Prabhu, what allows teachers to achieve that motivation is not just classroom interaction, but the opportunity to reflect on their influences, and one of the ways to do that is to create an environment where teachers can exchange views.

All teachers, Prabhu points out, are subject to a series of influences throughout their career that change the way they approach their classes. Some of these are enduring personal beliefs about language learning and teaching, often learned through their own education, and others are learned through classes they teach, teacher training courses, articles and the teaching materials they use. In our interview, Prabhu expressed reservations about imposing particular methodologies through teacher training. He said:

'I think the problem in teacher training is finding a way of influencing teachers' thinking without seeking to replace their existing perceptions. Teachers ought to be able to interact with ideas from outside, and those ideas have to be available to them and, in fact, to be put forcefully so as to give them full value. But how to do this without psychologically intimidating or cowing down teachers or demanding acceptance of the ideas is, I think, the problem of teacher training. It's giving value to what teachers think, but giving value too to the ideas one puts to teachers' (Maley, 1989, p. 4).

This process of aligning new ideas and methodologies with teachers' own experience and beliefs is part of the process of teacher development. He adds, *'There has to be some measure of routinisation, but there needs to be some room for something to be at stake, some scope for satisfaction and dissatisfaction, so that*

something is learned from the act of teaching' (Maley, 1989, p. 3).

7. WHY THE TEACHER'S SENSE OF PLAUSIBILITY IS IMPORTANT

'The enemy of good teaching is not bad method, but over-routinisation', wrote Prabhu in his TESOL Quarterly article (Prabhu, 1990, p. 174). In the article, he recognises the importance of organised teaching, but also understands its limitations. *'Language instruction that attempts to cater directly to social objectives, learning needs, target needs, learners' wants, teachers' preferences, learning styles, teaching constraints, and attitudes all round can end up as a mere assemblage of hard-found pieces of content and procedure – a formula that manages, with difficulty, to satisfy multiple criteria and therefore cannot afford to let itself be tampered with. There is, however, a price to pay for this simplification of pedagogy. The instructional procedures most directly derivable from a specification of needs, wants, and objectives are those of supplying to learners the relevant tokens of language, or getting them to rehearse target language behaviour in simulated target situations. Any concept of developing in learners a more basic capacity for generating tokens of language when needed, or for adapting to unforeseen target language behaviour as necessary, leads one toward ideas about the nature of language ability and the process of language acquisition – complex methodological issues that*

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the discovery procedure seeks to avoid' (Prabhu, 1990, p. 164-165).

Routinisation occurs for a number of reasons; syllabus, exams, textbooks, teaching methods, teacher training, teacher qualification examinations. All these have their place in creating an organised teaching learning system. It is the teachers' sense of plausibility, their understanding of what enthuses them that creates motivation and enables them to motivate their students. *'This personal sense of plausibility may not only vary in its content from one teacher to another, but may be more or less firmly or fully formed, more or less consciously considered or articulated, between different teachers. It is when a teacher's sense of plausibility is engaged in the teaching operation that the teacher can be said to be involved, and the teaching not to be mechanical'* (Prabhu, 1990, p. 172).

Mechanical teaching, according to Prabhu, *'results from an over-routinisation of teaching activity, and teaching is subject to great pressures of routinisation. It is, after all, a recurrent pattern of*

procedures on regularly recurrent occasions. It is also a form of recurrent social encounter between teachers and learners, with self-images to protect, personalities to cope with, etc. And, like all recurrent social encounters, teaching requires a certain degree of routine to make it sustainable or even endurable' (Prabhu, 1990, p. 173). There are reasons for teachers to value at one level the routinisation of their work. A role-defining routine can help overcome problems of adequacy, confidence, overwork, status, satisfying peers' and superiors' expectations. Above all, it can provide a standard, which says the teaching has been done, regardless of the learning success of the students.

Prabhu also makes the point that a successful method in itself, which is widely accepted, such as task-based learning and the communicational approach, can achieve a high level of plausibility by influencing a large number of teachers' perceptions. There is some truth to all or most methods, but what is the most plausible for the teacher at any given time may vary. The key is interaction and dialogue; teachers exchanging with each other their best methods and ideas and arriving at a modus vivendi for the class or institution. As Prabhu concludes, *'The search for an inherently best method should perhaps give way to a search for ways, in which teachers' pedagogic perceptions can most widely interact with one another, so that teaching can become most maximally real'* (Prabhu, 1990, p. 175).

And so, we come back to Prabhu's sense of real motivation. The question to ask about a teacher's sense of plausibility is not whether it implies a good or bad method, but, more basically, whether it is active, alive, or operational enough to create a sense of involvement for both the teacher and the student. To summarise, if we regard our professional effort as a search for the best method which, when found, will replace all other methods, we may not only be working toward an unrealisable goal but, in the process, be misconstruing the nature of teaching as a set of procedures that can by themselves carry a guarantee of learning outcomes. However, by making assumptions about a 'best method' we either assume that methods have value regardless of teachers' and learners' subjective understanding, or we consider subjective understandings of methods, which means objective evaluation is useless. Prabhu's alternative is clear. *'If, on the other hand, we view teaching as an activity whose value depends centrally on whether it is informed or uninformed by the teacher's subjective sense of plausibility – on the degree to which it is 'real' or mechanical – it becomes a worthwhile goal for our professional effort to help activate and develop teachers' varied senses of plausibility'* (Prabhu, 1990, p. 175).

What is important in teacher training, concludes Prabhu, *'is the process of teacher development, to introduce a process of reflection and exchange,*

'The key is interaction and dialogue; teachers exchanging with each other their best methods and ideas and arriving at a modus vivendi for the class or institution'

which allows teachers to decide what works for them and puts them in a situation where they review and maybe revise their approach to teaching and learning' (Prabhu, 1990, p. 175).

8. HOW TO APPLY PRABHU'S 'TEACHER'S SENSE OF PLAUSIBILITY'

For Prabhu, the key technique for successful reflection was writing. In the Bangalore Project, there was surprisingly little teacher training as such. Instead, Prabhu encouraged the teachers on the project to reflect, write and discuss. Writing was crucial. He said:

'I want to try to get the teachers to state on paper what they've said. Trying to write clarifies things. It straightens one's thinking. It reveals and develops new thoughts. This is the 'process writing' philosophy. So, a small number of teachers trying to state their perceptions, and then other teachers trying to state their perceptions but taking in the perceptions of the first group – this cannot only help those teachers immediately, but it can also reveal to us some of the processes by which

teachers' perceptions work.' He suggested, *'Perhaps there's room for something like a journal – not in the sense of learned articles – but of teachers' statements circulated to other interested teachers'* (Maley, 1989, p. 3).

I first met Prabhu when I was appointed Regional Director for the British Council in South India. My previous posts included British Council English Language Officer in Yugoslavia (as was), Ghana, Italy, France and First Secretary Cultural Affairs at the British Embassy in China and finally British Council Director South India, before taking up the post of Director General of the Bell Educational Trust in UK, and I was a published author throughout this time. At each stage of my career, I have applied Prabhu's principles by reflecting on my experience and what I have learned and how that learning has added to my enduring beliefs about teaching and learning and as a consequence how it has affected my work in teaching and training teachers. How I do it is simple, although the reflection process that leads to it is not.

I write down key reflections in a series of bullet points and keep them safe so that I can refer to them later. Then I compare how my enduring beliefs about language and teaching have changed over the years.

If I look back over my career, I can discern certain enduring beliefs, some going back to my early

experiences at school and university. Here are some examples; the first an exchange with a French family, one from my experience of learning German during National Service with the RAF, one from university and one from my British Council posting in India. One of my earliest memories was an exchange with a French family. I was learning French. They did not speak English. The lessons I learned have formed some of my enduring beliefs about language learning and teaching. What were the enduring beliefs I formed on the basis of these experiences?

A) That being able to speak a foreign language was a major advantage.

B) That teachers can change their students' lives for the better. This had been a truly transformative experience for me. It literally changed my life.

C) That I could learn a lot on my own, without a teacher.

D) That learning languages was a lot of fun.

E) A growing suspicion that I might be good at something after all.

These beliefs were reinforced by my experience of teaching myself German during my National Service in Germany, after a disappointing experience with a German teacher with a very

literary bent. The enduring beliefs I formed on the basis of these experiences are listed below.

A) That teachers were only of limited use.

B) That reading was a very powerful technique for learning a language.

C) That language learning is a highly emotional, deeply personal experience, not just a rational one.

D) That I was beginning to get the hang of learning languages, and was not afraid of trying more of them.

Postgraduate study at the University of Leeds and practice teaching in Madrid were other major learning experiences. What influence did these experiences have on me?

A) I became sharply aware of the divide between academic theorising and classroom reality.

B) I realised that my future did not lie in academic research, but rather in exploring practical materials and methods.

C) I realised that the socio-political context strongly influences language teaching. (The Franco regime in Spain was lukewarm towards anything foreign.)

D) Motivation is key to learning. Unmotivated students do not learn much.

E) Colleagues can often be more helpful than lecturers. (Luckily my classmates included many with extensive overseas teaching experience which they shared with the novices like me.)

F) I developed what was to be a lifelong interest in literature in English written by non-native speakers of the language and in the many evolving varieties of English worldwide.

As a last example, I cite my experiences as Director British Council South India from 1974–1980. This affected my development as a language learner, teacher and trainer in the following ways.

A) I was greatly influenced by the ideas of Dr Prabhu and his proposal of a procedural syllabus based on tasks.

B) I was immersed in the complexities of a pluri-lingual society, in which English had multiple and equivocal uses. Many of my assumptions about English as an international language had to be re-assessed in the light of this.

C) I became re-enthused about literature in English. There was a plethora of established and up-and-coming poets, novelists and playwrights in English. I ran two short-story competitions with

subsequent publications of winning entries. India also stimulated my first interest in creative writing as a support for language learning.

D) It was in India that I first became interested in the importance of 'the voice' for teachers. This emerged from a visit by Patsy Rodenburg, then voice coach at the Royal Shakespeare Company. This was an epiphany for me, and led me to develop courses for teachers on voice, and the publication of *The Language Teacher's Voice* (Maley, 2000).

David Horsburgh, the founder of the revolutionary educational experiment at Neel Bagh, died a week after my arrival in India. But I soon had the opportunity to visit his unconventional school and was deeply affected by his views on institutional education shared by other thinkers such as Ken Robinson (2015) and John Holt (1982). The Neel Bagh school, founded by Horsburgh in 1972, was deeply influenced by the ideas of Bertrand Russell and the logical philosophy of Robert Frederick Dearden, and was visited several times by the philosopher Jiddu Krishnamurti and by the poet Rabindranath Tagore.

It was what we would call nowadays a progressive or 'free' school like Montessori, Steiner or Summerhill. What made it special was its ability to treat each child as an individual and to focus on human as well as academic development. To

achieve this, Horsburgh (1983) set in place an academic organisation, many of whose principles are still considered radical today.

First, there were small classes. Numbers might vary according to the subject being taught, but the average class size was 10 students. Secondly, classes were multiple-graded. In other words, in each group students were of mixed age, gender and educational ability. The older students were encouraged to advise the younger ones. The academically cleverer students were encouraged to support those experiencing difficulty. There was a degree of streaming. A student might join a lower level group for languages and a more advanced group for mathematics, for example. Thirdly, although there was a timetable and teachers had a schedule, the focus was on individual and group work. There might be short class presentations, but then the students would divide into small groups or work on their own, and this was where the real learning was considered to take place.

The principle was that you can present a topic to a group, but the learning happens at the level of the individual student. The teacher was effectively the facilitator and might be asked by student groups to offer additional sessions of advice and support as required. Sometimes parents would come in from surrounding villages two or three mornings a week in order to prepare for an examination or simply

learn about something they needed to know, and they were allocated a teacher. However, these were not the 'official' teachers, but the students themselves with the official teachers in the background ready to provide help if required.

Fourthly, and perhaps most surprisingly, there were no examinations. The academic and skills progress of the students were, of course, observed by their teachers and the tasks they completed assessed, but the aim was to encourage the students to monitor their own learning development, become aware of what they had achieved and still needed to achieve and then move on. Many would move on to take state examinations and to continue their studies at college or enter the professions.

All in all, the aim was to reproduce the atmosphere of the local community in the school and to concentrate on human development even more than on academic development, although the students were expected to work hard at all times. In this 'family style group', older students mixed with younger. They socialised and worked together, calling on the adult teachers as needed. This is why the focus was on the student as a developing human being, and the role of learning in helping that process in the interests of the student, the group and of society as a whole.

What about teacher training? The teachers were trained in academic knowledge and teaching

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skills, but what they learned at Neel Bagh was to focus on the students' psychological development. Neel Bagh introduced its own teacher training programme focusing on observation and reflective skills rather than technical teaching skills. This meant understanding the individual's psychology, learning style and aptitudes and taking the time to be aware of students' unexamined feelings and knowing how to recognise potential, encourage and bring out the best in them. This was a very different approach from the large class authoritarian, examinations-focused style most schools have to maintain today just to ensure everyone gets a primary and secondary education. The Neel Bagh school closed soon after David Horsburgh's death in 1984, but this experience transformed my own views on education and the need for radical change.

The lesson is simple. All teachers are different. Your experiences and hence your beliefs as a teacher may be very different from mine. The key is what works successfully for ourselves and for our students. By reflecting on and writing down

our key learning experiences, we can build a picture of the real influences which affect our teaching and relationships with our students.

9. CONCLUSION

The work of Prabhu in developing the concepts of task-based learning, focusing on meaning and communication, effectively launched the seminal breakthrough in communicative teaching methodology which is still such an important part of language learning today.

However, even more important in the long run is probably his concept of the teacher's sense of plausibility. This is what the teacher believes is the best way to teach and help students learn based on his or her own experience, reflection and enduring beliefs. These come from reflecting on what has been learned and what has worked at each stage of career development, and it means that ultimately teaching methods will depend on the teacher's own beliefs regarding what works. The implication is that even teacher training courses and systematic 'algorithmic' training in methods of application cannot change teaching methodology unless teachers themselves are convinced it will be successful in helping them help students learn. In the end, as Prabhu points out, there may be 'no best method' for teaching language.

I have tried to amplify Prabhu's notion of 'the teacher's sense of plausibility' with reference to my

own history in language and language teaching. But why did I bother to do this?

1. According to Socrates, the unexamined life is not worth living. I believe that retrospective reflection on our professional development can be highly revealing. It can help strip away unexamined suppositions and prejudices, and this can feed into changes in our current practice.

2. As I mentioned in the introduction, I believe that there is an over-emphasis in teacher training as an algorithmic system, and that not enough attention is paid to the human, personal side of learning and teaching. Regular group sharing and discussion of individual 'senses of plausibility' can be highly rewarding as part of a teacher training programme.

3. Such a programme could draw on a number of published sources too. These include Esther

Ramani's *Theorizing from the Classroom* (1987), an early example of looking at teachers' conceptualisation of their practices; the classic account of a language teacher's life in Appel's (1995) *Diary of a Language Teacher*; an informative Pickett's (1978) survey of experienced language learners' personal accounts; Jacobs and Sundara Rajan's (1996) early attempt to collect teachers' stories – this is currently being followed up by Floris and Renandya (2018). My account of teacher creativity might also be the starting point for further work (Maley & Kiss, 2017). There is also a promising ongoing project in China run by Richard Young (Young, 2016).

I conclude with Young's comments in his study proposal (2016): *'Very few previous studies in applied linguistics have addressed the synergy between the personal history of teachers and learners and the discourse of language learning in the classroom.'* It is time for change.

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