Developing a Motivational Teaching Practice in EFL Teachers in Slovakia: Challenges of Promoting Teacher Change in EFL Contexts

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Abstract

Raising awareness of the teacher's role in creating conducive learning environments has not traditionally been part of the aims of EFL teacher preparation programmes. This longitudinal mixed methods study explores the impact of a 20-hour experiential in-service teacher development course with the knowledge base drawn from L2 motivation theory, group dynamics, and educational psychology. Quantitative (pre- and post-test questionnaires measuring students' perceptions of their classroom environment) and qualitative (regular course feedback, teacher interviews, lesson observations, and field notes) measures were employed to assess the course impact on cognitive and behavioural change of 8 self-selected non-native EFL teachers in Slovakia. The results show that, in most cases, no change occurred in spite of the teachers' endorsement of the course material, and several outer-context-specific factors are discussed to explain this negative outcome.

Introduction

The quality of learning engagement in the classroom does not depend on students' cognitive abilities alone, but is also influenced by complex motivational and affective factors. Extensive research in the fields of L2 motivation and educational psychology has generated two important premises: first, the classroom environment is powerful in activating motivational beliefs of the students (Pintrich, Marx, & Boyle, 1993), which, in turn, affect their learning outcomes and second, teachers play a crucial role in creating motivating learning environments by employing a number of conscious and proactive motivational strategies (see Brophy, 2004; Dörnyei, 2001) and thus engaging in what Dörnyei (2006) terms a "motivational teaching practice".

This paper reports on a teacher development (TD) course designed with the aim to promote a motivational teaching practice among in-service EFL teachers in Slovakia. I was well aware that a traditional type of teacher training that would narrowly focus on a set of fixed motivational strategies without attempting to challenge teachers' cognitions was unlikely to promote significant change in teachers' classroom practice. My hope was, however, that a TD course that was designed to facilitate teacher change by (1) promoting reflection, (2) creating opportunities for here-and-now experience of the new approach, and (3) encouraging continuing professional development might ignite their enthusiasm and desire to explore ways of creating a motivating learning environment for their students. This expectation, however, turned out to be wrong. Although I did succeed in bringing a group of in-service EFL teachers to a point when they 'caught the fire' and seemed to endorse the new principles, what happened next was disappointing. Most of the participants, while thoroughly enjoying the course, did not even attempt to implement changes in their regular day-to-day teaching practice. This raised a number of 'big' questions with regard to what might have prevented the endorsement of new ideas from being realised in the classroom. This paper summarises some of the answers my data have revealed.

With its focus and research design, this study addresses several gaps in research on L2 teacher cognition. First, it is situated in a typical EFL context, which is largely underrepresented (Borg, 2003). The 8 research participants in this sample are non-native English speaking teachers, teaching monolingual and monocultural classes, and most of them work in the state school sector with a heavy teaching load and prescribed curriculum. Secondly, the only content areas researched in terms of L2 teacher cognition to date have been literacy and grammar instruction (Borg, 2003). This study extends these foci and investigates teacher change with regard to the teachers' motivational teaching practice. Finally, teacher change is, in this research study, examined in relation to the effect it has on students' appraisal of their classroom environment. The link between teacher learning and how the students experience it has traditionally not been focused on in research on L2 teacher cognition (although, see Freeman & K. E. Johnson's (2005b) examination of the "relationship of influence" between teacher learning, teacher activity and student learning). In order to explore it, a mixed methods

methodology was employed.

The background section provides a conceptual framework for a motivating classroom environment, highlighting specifically the aspects that are within the teacher's direct control. In so doing, I draw on the knowledge-base of L2 motivation research, group dynamics and educational psychology. I then review practical implications derived from research on L2 teacher cognition that have informed the TD course processes. After the presentation of the questionnaire results with regard to changes in students' perceptions of the motivating properties of their classroom environment, the subsequent Discussion section attempts to interpret the results by drawing on qualitative data, thereby outlining several key context-specific aspects contributing to the disappointing outcome of this study. The paper concludes with implications for EFL teacher education and suggestions for future directions in research on L2 teacher change in EFL contexts.

A Motivating Classroom Environment

With its major motivational construct of integrativeness, the "social psychological phase" of L2 motivation research characterised by the work of Robert Gardner (1985) introduced an important tenet: Because the learning of an L2 is influenced by a plethora of social factors, including attitudes, cultural stereotypes and geopolitical considerations, learning an L2 is a considerably distinct process from that of other school subjects. It seems, however, that by emphasizing the differences in terms of macro-contextual influences, early research on L2 motivation overlooked the aspect that L2 learning has in common with other subjects, the social psychological micro-context of the classroom, which has been found to have a profound impact on learning (Fraser, 1991; Pintrich & Schunk, 2002). A response to that omission in the 1990s marked an important shift in L2 motivation research towards understanding the impact of the immediate classroom context on learner L2 motivation and the debate in the Modern Language Journal in 1994 provides a flavour of this transformation (Dörnyei, 1994a, 1994b; Gardner & Tremblay, 1994a, 1994b; Oxford, 1994; Oxford & Shearin, 1994). The "cognitive-situated" movement (Dörnyei, 2005) brought about a boom in situated motivational frameworks encompassing various classroom-specific components and drawing on advances in cognitive psychology (e.g., Dörnyei, 1994a; Oxford & Shearin, 1994; Williams & Burden, 1997).

The following discussion outlines some of the key academic and social components of the classroom environment and briefly documents their impact on students' learning engagement and motivation by providing empirical evidence from studies conducted both within and outside the L2 motivation research.

The Teacher

The role of the teacher in engaging students in learning is immensely complex in that it concerns almost all academic and social aspects of the classroom environment. Dörnyei's (1994a) situated framework of L2 motivation outlines three key components of the teacher's role that impact on L2 motivation: the *affiliative motive* (i.e., students' desire to please the teacher), *authority type* (i.e. authoritarian, democratic or laissez-faire teaching style) and *direct socialization of student motivation*, which includes modelling, task presentation and feedback. The extent to which the teacher fulfils these roles, in other words, the extent to which opportunities for learner engagement are either constructed or obstructed, does not only depend on what the teacher does in the classroom, but also on how the classroom discourse is used (Walsh, 2002). Clearly, teachers are responsible for creating and maximizing learning opportunities (Kumaravadivelu, 2003) in very complex ways, fulfilling both academic and social roles.

The importance of attending to both pedagogic and social priorities by the teacher (Senior, 2002) has been acknowledged and specific teacher behaviours that enhance learner motivation have been outlined in numerous theoretical frameworks. These include classroom environment research (see e.g., the Classroom Environment Scales in Moos, 1979), self-determination theory (Noels, 2003; Noels, Clément, & Pelletier, 1999; Reeve & Jang, 2006; Skinner & Belmont, 1993), goal orientation theory (Midgley, Kaplan, & Middleton, 2001; Patrick, 2004; Turner et al., 2002), or research on L2 anxiety (Spielmann & Radnofsky, 2001). They all posit that in order to enhance students' motivation to engage in learning, creating sufficient opportunities for cognitive development (by, for example, promoting autonomy, emphasising mastery over performance goals, and providing informative feedback) seems to be equally important as creating a caring classroom climate.

Course

A study by Israeli researchers Donitsa-Schmidt, Inbar and Shohamy (2004) provides strong evidence for the superiority of the immediate learning context over macro-social factors. Despite the numerous cultural and geopolitical problems negatively affecting attitudes of Hebrew speakers towards learning the Arabic language, the variable that best predicted student motivation to learn spoken Arabic was the degree of the students' satisfaction with their Arabic study programme. Interestingly, even if students do not perceive a specific task as particularly intriguing, they still engage in it, provided their

attitudes towards the course as a whole are favourable (Dörnyei & Kormos, 2000). However, it does not require much speculation to conclude that such positive attitude towards the course is hard to accumulate in the absence of positively appraised *tasks*, which constitute the next theme to address.

Task

The decisive factors determining the quality of learners' task engagement appear to be meaningfulness, personal relevance, a degree of difficulty and a structure that allows flexibility in student interaction. The importance of these task characteristics has been acknowledged in both conceptual and empirical studies regarding language development during collaboration (see review in Donato, 2004), students' experiences during cooperative learning tasks (Peterson & Miller, 2004), flow theory (Egbert, 2003) and task motivation (Dörnyei & Kormos, 2000). Further characteristics of tasks that are believed to promote students' mastery goal orientation in the classroom have been identified by Ames (1992). These include novelty, variety, diversity, interest, reasonable challenge, and opportunities for students to set specific, short-term goals and to use effective learning strategies. Although such typologies may have problems when it comes to practical application (Blumenfeld, 1992), they, nevertheless, provide useful pointers for a motivational teaching practice (see, e.g., motivational strategies regarding tasks in Dörnyei, 2001).

Learner Group

Studying learner motivation at a purely individual level does not help the advancement of our understanding of learner classroom engagement because it overlooks one of the most powerful factors affecting the classroom processes: the social composition of the class. Peers appear to be influential in numerous ways, which has been documented in studies examining task motivation (Dörnyei, 2002), learners' willingness to communicate (Kang, 2005), and learner engagement and achievement (Buhs, Ladd, & Herald, 2006; Guay, Boivin, & Hodges, 1999).

However, it is not only general positive relationships in the classroom that influence the learning engagement of individual students, but rather, the specific dynamics present in the learner group characterised by the relationship of interdependence (Dörnyei, 1997; D. W. Johnson, 2003; Slavin, 1999). As summarized elsewhere (Dörnyei & Malderez, 1997; Dörnyei & Murphey, 2003; Ehrman & Dörnyei 1998), the extensive body of knowledge accumulated in group dynamics, a sub-discipline of social psychology, points towards a crucial influence the learner group has on the individual's learning engagement. Group dynamics throws light on first, how group cohesiveness, goal-orientedness, group structure with social roles and norms and leadership influence the extent to which an individual student engages in learning and second, how the teacher can facilitate the process of group development towards greater productivity.

Interim Conclusion

The previous review points to the immense complexity of classroom environments and thus makes it clear that fostering a motivating classroom climate is far from displaying a certain fixed set of behaviours by the teacher. Rather, engaging in a motivational teaching practice clearly requires the teacher to acquire a new mindset which acknowledges the role both cognitive stimulation and social support play in enhancing the students' learning engagement and thus their learning outcomes. A central issue with regard to training processes, therefore, concerns such practices that can promote the development of this new mindset and teaching practice consistent with the new cognitions.

Effective Teacher Development Processes

A number of studies in L2 teacher education demonstrate that "behavioural change does not imply cognitive change, and the latter . . . does not guarantee changes in behaviour either" (Borg, 2003, p. 91). Indeed, we witness situations when teacher trainees, though they may have conformed to the training course requirements in terms of their teaching performance, did not share the same conceptions of what teaching entails (Almarza, 1996) or, on the other hand, when teachers' declared attitudes did not correspond with their practices (Kennedy, 1996). Either kind of change is incomplete; in the former case, behaviours are abandoned once teachers feel no pressure to conform to certain expectations while in the latter case, newly declared attitudes do not inform practice and thus have no impact on student learning.

To ensure, therefore, that TD initiatives promote "significant and worthwhile change" (Richardson, 1990) in teachers' practices, they "must account for how individuals learn to teach and for the complex factors, influences, and processes that contribute to that learning" (Freeman & K. E. Johnson, 1998, p. 407). This is the key premise that has led to reconceptualising the language teacher education knowledge-base. Two factors that have been found particularly influential in how teachers learn to teach include teachers' prior experience and the socio-cultural context.

Teachers' Prior Experience in Learning to Teach

It has now been well established in research on teacher cognition that what teachers learn in teacher education programmes is filtered by prior experiences accumulated over the years of the "apprenticeship of observation" (Lortie, 1975). This set of language learning experiences is transformed, largely subconsciously, into beliefs about how languages are learnt and how they should or should not be taught. The extensive body of research on the subject shows that if these beliefs are not made explicit, questioned and challenged (Freeman, 1991), teachers' pre-training cognitions regarding teaching an L2 may be influential throughout their career (Borg, 2003) despite the training efforts.

Several tools have been suggested that can facilitate conceptual change by accommodating new principles into the teachers' existing belief systems. These include *language learning autobiographies* (Bailey et al., 1996), methods of cognitive apprenticeship, namely, *case studies*, *narratives*, and *practical arguments* (K. E. Johnson, 1996), or *data-based teacher development activities* (Borg, 1998). When the teachers' newly formed beliefs (as a result of a TD course, for example) are in conflict with their stable models gained through the apprenticeship of observation, *access to alternative images* of teaching and teachers are required for conceptual change to occur (K. E. Johnson, 1994). Thus, the modelling of desired behaviours and attitudes as well as the generation of experiential opportunities to engage in new practices are highlighted (Grossman, 1991; Kolb, 1984; van den Berg, 2002). Because implementing alternative models poses a considerable threat, *receptive and supportive training environments* where individuals are free to expose their beliefs and experiment with new ideas (Calderhead, 1991) appear to be a prerequisite for teacher development (K. E. Johnson, 1994; McCombs, 1991; van den Berg, 2002). Finally, we have come to understand that teacher cognition develops in variable and individual ways (Borg, 2003) as a result of teacher education. This implies the importance of *variable inputs* (cf. Woodward, 1992) which cater for these varied ways in which teachers make sense of and are shaped by teacher training programmes.

Impact of the Social Context on Learning to Teach

Despite any claims to the contrary (see Tarone & Allwright, 2005; Yates & Muchisky, 2003), the place of theory in teacher education programmes has never been questioned within the reconceptualised language teacher education knowledge-base (Freeman & K. E. Johnson, 2004, 2005a). Instead, attention has been drawn to the importance of pedagogical processes that enable L2 teachers to make sense of theory in light of their experiential knowledge of the context in which they work.

An example of such processes include creating forums such as Sharkey and K. E. Johnson's (2003), in which "expert" knowledge of researchers and authors of journal articles is entered into a dialogue with practitioners. These dialogues document how teacher practice is transformed as a result of reflection on theoretical knowledge through the teachers' experiential knowledge of the contexts in which their practice is embedded. Thus, any teacher education programme aspiring to promote teacher change should provide opportunities for teachers to situate theory within their own socio-cultural contexts through reflection (Bartlett, 1990; K. E. Johnson, 1999).

Interim Conclusion

To sum up, it has been argued that to bring about significant change in course participants' teaching practice, we need to take into account several conditions identified by research on teacher cognition when designing and conducting teacher training courses. These include confronting teachers' prior experience, providing opportunities to reflect on new knowledge in the light of particular socio-cultural context and creating a supportive and receptive climate in which such high-risk endeavours can be realised. The syllabus and the procedures of the TD course delivered as part of this study have been informed by these recommendations.

The Study

The purpose of the present longitudinal study was to explore the impact of a 20-hour in-service teacher development course with the focus on creating a motivating learning environment on the cognitive and behavioural development of eight English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers in Slovakia. I triangulated teacher attitudes and behaviours explored by methods of qualitative research on the one hand and developmental trends in student perceptions of their classroom environment obtained from quantitative questionnaire data on the other with the aim of capturing the multiple angles of the teacher change process. Rather than describing the teacher developmental processes documented by the qualitative data, the current analysis focuses primarily on one layer of the rich dataset: the changes in students' appraisal of their classroom environment. In the spirit of the saying, "The proof of the pudding is in the eating,"students' evaluations were believed to be a meaningful and desirable indicator of change in teachers' practices and, as the extensive observational and interview data reveal (not discussed here in detail), the trends in students' appraisal reported in the questionnaires seem to be a fairly accurate reflection of whether or not the teachers started to engage in a motivational teaching practice.

Participants

The 8 EFL teachers, 7 females and 1 male[1], who volunteered to participate in this longitudinal research project had originally gone through two stages of self-selection. In the first stage, they were among some 50 EFL teachers who responded to a call for participation in a conference for English teachers in Slovakia, specially organised as a first outlet for the research project promotion. Having become familiar with the research project and the nature of participation, 8 teachers volunteered to commit their participation for the duration of the project, ready to embrace all responsibilities and risks associated with it.

The research participants can be considered typical in terms of their entry to the ELT profession in Slovakia in that they had followed or were still following a standard pathway involving studying English at a university, which is typically combined with another subject in a joint degree. This combined BA/MA degree is a 5-year-long study, comprising subject-specific modules (including linguistics, literature and English teaching methodology) as well as a substantial teaching component, both in terms of general pedagogy and psychology modules and the teaching practice. An alternative qualification is a similar degree, however, without the teaching component, which was obtained by one research participant.

While most secondary EFL teachers in Slovakia will have been awarded either type of degree before embarking on a full-time teaching career, about 50% of primary EFL teachers are still unqualified (Butašová, 2005), many of them studying towards this degree by distance while being full-time English teachers, as was, indeed, the case for one of the research participants. Another research participant's case reflects a common situation in Slovakia when near-graduates often have part-time teaching jobs at schools and language centres (for more information about English language teacher education in Slovakia, see Gadušová & Harťanská, 2002).

Most research participants taught in the state school system, 4 of them in secondary, 1 in primary schools, and 2 participants were teaching at the tertiary level (university language centre); 1 teacher taught in the private sector. The teaching experience of the research participants spanned from 1 to 28 years (median = 3 years; for a summary of research participants' details, see Table 1).

Since the questionnaire data constitute the primary focus of the following section and one teacher's students did not participate in the questionnaire study, data of only 7 research participants will be reported here, while illustrations from qualitative data provided in the Discussion section will include all the 8 research participants.

Table 1: A Summary of the 8 Research Participants' Demographic Details.

Sex	Female	7
	Male	1
Pre-/In-service	Pre-service	1
	In-service	7
Teaching Experience	1-28 years (Median in years)	3
Education[a]	MA in English teaching[b]	7
	MA in English	1
Type of Institution	State Primary	1
	State Secondary	4
	State Tertiary	2
	Private Language School	1

[a] 3 research participants were enrolled on doctoral programmes, all of them in other than the English/English teaching subject
[b] At the time of the project, 2 of the 7 participants were studying towards the qualification

Instrument

A new instrument for measuring components of the L2 classroom environment was developed for the purposes of this study with scale items compiled from various frameworks, including the Classroom Environment Scale (CES) (Moos, 1979), as well as situated constructs in L2 motivation research (Clément, Dörnyei, & Noels, 1994; Kormos & Dörnyei, 2004), which have previously shown good psychometric properties. Responses were elicited on a 5-point Likert scale (1-strongly disagree -- 5-strongly agree). For a summary of the eight scales that made up the questionnaire, including both pre- and post-test Cronbach alpha reliability coefficients, descriptions and sample items, see Appendix.

Procedure

As has been mentioned above, the research project was centred around a teacher development course organised for the eight participants. The course included four 5-hour input sessions delivered between September 2004 and June 2005. The input was varied and included interactive mini-lectures, practical activities, case studies, and data-based activities followed-up with reflections and discussions. Apart from the focus on a motivational teaching practice, an emphasis was also laid on promoting continuing professional development, which was done through various activities in the course sessions, but also through on-site mentoring and creating channels for professional discussion among the participants between the sessions (e-mails, newsletters, on-line forum).

I collected feedback from the participants after each input session and also conducted regular lesson observations and qualitative interviews to first, obtain data about how the research participants were processing, interpreting and implementing the course input and second, to get a picture of the participants' personal and professional histories and existing belief systems. I also kept field notes describing what transpired during the input sessions and site visits and a regular research journal documenting my emerging understanding of the data.

The questionnaires, translated into Slovak, were distributed to 2 learner groups of each participating teacher on average at the outset of the project (i.e. between September--November 2004; N = 167), and then again at its end (May--June 2005; N = 176). The selection of the student groups was random, the only criteria being (1) the age of students so as to make sure they could understand the questionnaire statements, (2) similar group history (all groups had spent at least 2 years together prior to the research project), and (3) time considerations. The total length of the completion of the questionnaire was between 15-20 minutes. Each questionnaire was assigned a unique code and the data were entered into an SPSS data file for analysis purposes.

Analysis

A statistical analysis of independent-samples t-test was carried out to assess the change in the students' perceptions of the motivating qualities of their EFL classroom environment by comparing pre- and post-test data. Separate t-tests were conducted for the students of each individual research participant because different teachers were expected to respond to the course input differently and therefore computing only pooled results could have easily masked potential individual variation. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: T-tests Assessing Change in Students' Perceptions of Their Classroom Environment

		Lenka		Iveta		Denisa		Jana		Monika		Tamara		Silvia	
		M	t-value	M	t-value	M	t-value	M	t-value	M	t-value	M	t-value	M	t-value
Cohesive	Pre-test	4.02	1.06	3.61	0.70	4.31	3.36 **	2.93	2.04	3.70	-0.60	3.80	0.46	4.27	0.49
	Post-test	3.89		3.52		3.75		2.54		3.77		3.73		4.21	
Goal	Pre-test	3.78	2.17 *	3.06	-0.42	3.04	1.16	3.47	2.03	3.50	0.51	3.47	0.12	3.84	0.26
	Post-test	3.50		3.12		2.78		3.14		3.43		3.45		3.80	
T_Style	Pre-test	3.84	3.49 **	3.49	-1.19	3.77	1.97	3.84	2.60 *	3.43	-0.32	3.42	0.81	3.88	0.94
	Post-test	3.39		3.63		3.47		3.53		3.46		3.33		3.78	
Rapport	Pre-test	3.90	2.52 *	3.61	-2.70 **	3.84	1.00	3.68	2.39 *	3.79	1.68	3.72	0.62	4.31	-0.32
	Post-test	3.57		3.92		3.67		3.20		3.59		3.64		4.35	
Useful	Pre-test	4.21	3.39 **	3.71	0.85	3.81	1.80	4.01	0.52	3.59	0.74	3.77	0.72	3.96	0.57
	Post-test	3.70		3.55		3.36		3.86		3.45		3.62		3.84	
Hard	Pre-test	4.02	0.76	4.03	0.23	3.59	-1.44	3.77	-0.23	3.53	0.90	3.58	0.21	3.83	-0.26
	Post-test	3.81		3.98		4.07		3.86		3.31		3.54		3.90	
Selfconf	Pre-test	3.60	1.43	3.43	-0.05	3.35	0.56	3.42	0.02	3.48	0.44	3.26	0.18	4.02	1.00
	Post-test	3.32		3.44		3.18		3.42		3.40		3.21		3.83	
Accept	Pre-test	3.78	0.66	3.37	-1.11	3.71	2.70 *	3.44	2.20 *	3.51	-0.61	3.53	0.16	3.59	-1.76
	Post-test	3.70		3.53		3.30		3.08		3.58		3.51		3.82	

*p< .05, **p< .01

Results

As seen in Table 2, out of the total of 56 measures (i.e., 8 variables for 7 participants), only 10 changed significantly, out of which 9 actually decreased (it is beyond the scope of this article to comment on the decreasing tendencies). Thus, the data provide a very clear message: The students' perceptions of their classroom environment showed no improvement during the research project and therefore it is reasonable to conclude that the TD course failed in its goal to promote significant change in teaching practice that would make a difference for the students.

Admittedly, the developmental trends in students' perceptions can be a result of a host of complex issues (to minimise at least one such factor, I selected groups with longer histories rather than new groups). Therefore, any change between pre- and post-test data could not have been easily ascribed to the impact of the TD course. That was the reason I recruited several student groups of non-participating teachers serving as control groups and used a different statistical procedure to assess the differences between the two data sets. Because the discussion of the procedure and results could be potentially extensive and thus outside the scope of the current paper, it will suffice to state that the two sets of data showed no statistically significant differences and this result thus further corroborates the above conclusion.

The student data are, of course, no indication of whether or not change in the teachers' beliefs took place, which, in some cases, has been shown to precede change in teaching practice (Richardson, Anders, Tidwell, & Lloyd, 1991). However, the quantitative data are robust and further qualitative data (classroom observations and interviews) confirmed the conclusion that apart from 3 participants, who were beginning to manifest certain signs of potential impact, the teachers did not even attempt to implement changes to improve the learning environment for their students, regardless of the seemingly enthusiastic endorsement of the teaching input during the training sessions. The rest of this article explores the possible reasons for this outcome, thus providing a kind of "anatomy of failure."

Before I proceed, however, a caveat is in place. At the time of the writing of this paper, a systematic, computer-assisted analysis of qualitative data was still in progress. Nevertheless, by ongoing reflection on the growing data as well as on the research process, rigorous recording of those reflections in my research journal and frequent revisiting of the data records throughout the project, I was constantly involved in an analytical process of both direct interpretation and categorical aggregation (Stake, 1995). A more systematic analysis may, of course, reveal important themes and relationships that are not included in the present paper.

Discussion: Tracing Reasons for Absence of Change

Why did no change in teaching practice take place despite the apparent commitment of the research participants? There are two possible answers: Either the TD course was of insufficient quality, thus being unable to inspire the research participants, or various course-related, individual and/or external factors hindered their learning and/or prevented them from implementing new practices.

I would like to argue that the former reason was unlikely on several grounds. First, despite the considerable time commitment required for participation in the project, all the 8 participants remained involved until the completion of the course and, what is more, one of them even recommended it to their colleagues, which is documented in my email exchange with her. As a result, an additional university teacher participated in the final session. Second, ample evidence from my field notes (not presented here for the reasons of space) documented the teachers' active involvement and their enthusiasm and interest in the various topics, strategies and materials presented, which, along with the development of positive relationships within the course, suggest a general endorsement of the learning experience. Third, a summary of the teachers' feedback on each session (see Table 3), as well as comments made in interviews provide further evidence of the teachers' appreciation of the course, both in terms of content and processes. Let me just quote one illustrative interview extract, Jana's reaction to the course:

> [I liked] everything. Everything. The way . . . For example I am fascinated by the way you work. How you do a quality preparation beforehand . . .I am really fascinated by it. You know everything beforehand: what you are doing, how you're going to do it and . . . why you are doing it and know what sort of things can come out of it. You have certain expectations of the result. . . .I enjoy it thoroughly because I can learn from that. From the way you work. Or the materials, . . . also, the way you present things, the way you interact with the group, I enjoy it, simply. It interests me. Also the topics. I would, most of all, like to learn to teach, work and prepare as you do. Now, it is sincere. It's nothing like scratching your back or something. I mean it. I'm fascinated by that, no matter who it is. So I would be very happy to continue.

Table 3: A Summary of Feedback Elicited from Research Participants on Each Session of the Course

Type of		

Type of Comment	No.	Content focus
Positive	86	activities, processes, friendly people, materials, atmosphere, ideas, topics, feeling comfortable during the session, enthusiastic trainer, trainer's skills, practical tips, background reading, links between theory and practice, training management, food and drinks
Mixed	11	suggestions for change of the training day (Saturday unsuitable), particular activities, processes, lack of time, suggestions for types of activities they missed in the session
Negative	5	room, specific activity, lack of theoretical input in one session

Of course, none of the above gives evidence that the TD course processes sufficiently assisted teacher learning and further analysis of the qualitative data set may indeed point to gaps in the training design. However, because the appreciation of the course and the teachers' persistence and active participation was evident, I will examine a number of pertinent themes identified in the qualitative data pointing to the importance of the *context* in which the teaching practice of the participating teachers was embedded. The following discussion will consider a number of related issues, including teacher motivation, professional development culture and constraints of the school context.

A "Wrong" Type of Teacher Motivation

In order to change, one must be motivated to change. As has been documented above, the current research participants were, undoubtedly, exceptionally motivated. However, the emerging patterns in my data prompted me to consider the types of teacher motivation that might perhaps not provide sufficient fuel for change in teaching practice. Drawing mainly on the interview data, I will first examine the research participants' general motivation to teach, starting with their entry to the profession.

Most research participants chose their university programme because they either had a positive attitude towards English or because, as opposed to other school subjects like Maths or Chemistry, English was one they felt fairly competent in. Their initial motivation to major in English, therefore, was not to be teachers of English, but, rather, to know and use English. This ties in with motivational patterns reported in Kyriacou and Kobori's (1998) study of Slovenian teacher trainees for whom enjoying English and the importance of English were the top two motives to become English teachers. Subject matter-, rather than teaching-oriented motivation, in fact, seems to be the case on a more general level in Slovakia, as confirmed in informal discussions I had with university teacher trainers at universities in 2 different cities: The vast majority of students on the teacher preparation programmes do not have any particular attraction to a teaching career. As the head teacher at one of the research sites sadly observed, due to the unfavourable conditions (primarily with regard to remuneration), teaching as a career seems to be in the vast majority of cases a last resort for graduates in foreign languages.

Clearly, the above does not hold true for all my research participants, though the interview data do show such tendencies in Monika (at least initially), Iveta, and Jana. Although several research participants seemed to be satisfied in their jobs, the data reveal that it may not necessarily have been for the "right" reasons. Let us look at a few examples.

Lenka's major motivation was clearly the love of English, as for her it is "music to my ears" (Lenka's Interview 1, 28 September 2004). Having grown up in a family of teachers, Lenka had never considered any other career. The teaching job somehow felt a natural choice. Similarly, having been surrounded by teachers in her family all her life, Tamara knew she was "most probably going to do a teaching degree, what exactly, that was just the question of time". What she likes about being a teacher is the "feeling that I am important to them [students] at that moment" (Tamara's Interview 1, 22 September 2004).

Iveta, to give another example, was motivated to pursue any career in which her self-esteem is nurtured. Her account confirms that rather than a result of a conscious choice, her ending up in a teaching career was simply a matter of unpredictable twists in the course of events. In the following interview extract she is explaining why she did not choose English as the topic of her PhD dissertation:

> **Iveta:** I'm sure it would interest me more [writing a thesis on the topic of English teaching] and also I'm practising it whereas I don't do anything with [the other subject]. But when I enrolled, I didn't know that, that I'd be in school, teaching and stuff and probably I didn't consider it properly. So I originally thought, I'd finish the exam, finish the school year and then off to [an English speaking country] . . .

> **Interviewer:** What would you like to do [there]?

Iveta: Anything. Just go and see. Of course you'd have to study--that's the condition. So perhaps I'd enrol on an intensive English programme--that wouldn't do me any harm. And work. Anything.

Interviewer: [So] if you could choose [now, what would you do]?

Iveta: If I could choose, I think, just about anything would be better than this [teaching at this school]. It's killing me here. You do your best and nobody appreciates that, you work hard and nobody gives a heck.

The above extracts suggest that innovation directed towards improved conditions for student learning in no way tapped into Lenka's or Iveta's motivation to teach. Tamara's motive of being important in the classroom, which was an important part of her teacher identity, was, in fact, in direct contrast with principles of a motivational teaching practice, learner and group responsibility being one of them.

With respect to teacher motivation, then, my research participants seem to markedly differ from Tardy and Snyder's (2004) Turkish university teachers whose motivation to teach was shown to be driven by students' "moments of learning". On the contrary, the Slovakian teachers seem to strikingly resemble Johnston's (1997) research sample of Polish EFL teachers whose entry to the profession lacked a sense of agency and was either accidental or second choice. Even where teaching career was an obvious first choice for some of my participants, it was either subject matter- (just as in the Polish teachers' study) or self-esteem-driven. Yet, bearing in mind the underlying focus of the TD course, which is commitment to enhance student motivation to learn, it may be reasonable to speculate that the teachers' interest in their students' "moments of learning" may be a prerequisite for teachers' genuine desire to adopt a motivational teaching practice. Because this type of intrinsic teacher motivation (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997) was absent from the data of most participants, the possibility of their motivation to change may have been reduced.

The above finding seems puzzling to say the least given the teachers' documented enthusiasm and commitment for the duration of the course and warrants further inquiry into the research participants' *motivation to join the project*. A close inspection of the interview and course feedback data reveal that, contrary to the common-sense expectation, the teachers did not volunteer to participate in the project in order to explore ways of creating a motivating learning environment. Instead, their motivation to join appears to closely correspond with their motivation to teach. The boost in self-confidence and the opportunity to practise English emerge as major reasons and these, as has been tentatively suggested earlier, may not be sufficient to lead to significant change in teaching practice.

Absence of Reflective Teaching Culture

Engaging in continuing professional development activities that encourage reflection has been acknowledged as crucial for meaningful change to occur (K. E. Johnson, 1999) because they "allow for self-directed, collaborative, inquiry-based learning that is directly relevant to teachers' classroom lives" (K. E. Johnson, 2006, p. 243). Indeed, various tools for teacher development have been explored and successfully implemented in inner-circle contexts (e.g., Bailey, Curtis, & Nunan, 2001; Curtis & Szestay, 2005). Data in this study, however, reveal that such practices are not only not part of teachers' awareness, but they also seem extremely difficult to implement given the constraints inherent in this particular EFL state school context.

Contextual constraints on pursuing a reflective approach to teaching. My own exposure to the research context, coupled with an account of a principal in-service teacher trainer, have confirmed that it is not unusual for EFL teachers in the present context to interpret professional development solely in the sense of improving their linguistic competence, rather than the teaching practice, which is reminiscent of Maley's (1986) observation of the nature of English teacher development in China. In the light of the previous discussion of the participants' motivation to teach and motivation to join the project, this is perhaps unsurprising. However, even if awareness is raised of a reflective approach to teaching and of professional development activities that can foster it, engaging in them is far from easy, as Tamara's interview account eloquently illustrates:

> I never really think about my classes like I did today. You see, reflections like you suggested we write . . .well, it would surely be very helpful, but I really can't see how I could do that. During breaks, I barely have time to reach our staff room and change the books before another class starts. And to be quite honest with you . . .when the classes are over . . . my priority is to be ready for teaching tomorrow. And to get out of here as soon as possible. This is how one feels about it . . . . I'm glad I can go home where after cooking or cleaning, if I have time for it at all, a heap of unmarked essays or tests is waiting for me. I'm really happy when I have some little time that I can use for not thinking about teaching . . . .

It may be a result of such constraints that a reflective approach to teaching and indeed teacher professional development culture are not part of the context under scrutiny. The following two examples provide further insights into factors that are

at play when teacher development initiatives, such as the current project, are introduced.

Reflective inquiry obstructed by constant fear of language mistakes. As suggested before, non-judgemental peer observation as one of many ways of engaging in a reflective teaching practice (Bailey, Curtis, & Nunan, 2001) is a concept that is simply not part of the teaching culture under investigation. As a result, observation is notoriously seen as a threatening exercise, the main reason being teachers' feeling of being checked on. The realisation that observations would be an important part of the current research project was, in fact, one of the major aspects that put more teachers off participating in it. However, my data suggest that rather than worrying about their teaching competence, the teachers' feeling of being checked on was mainly related to their English proficiency. Having learnt about the research participants' major motives for teaching and pursuing professional development, this is no surprise, but rather a logical consequence. Numerous examples from the dataset confirm such claim.

For instance, the questions I was asked by Lenka after (and sometimes even during) observed classes were never actually related to particular teaching strategies or pedagogical problems, but always concerned vocabulary or grammar. She seemed to be constantly occupied with whether what she said in class (and even in the TD course itself) was correct. The following excerpt from my interview with Monika after her first two observed classes further illuminates this kind of uneasiness.

> **Monika:** . . . the second class you observed I was much more relaxed . . . .[I think it is] very inspirational. To take observation as something inspirational among colleagues, for example. That I don't go there to check on her, yes,[we should] get rid of this feeling, but [I should go] because I want to copy something, learn something. I think, however, that . . . that . . . we . . . that we have something like that in us, that, subconsciously, we do sit there and check. It is in you--you hear something, like your colleague made a mistake or something, it is there you can't wipe it out.

> **Interviewer:** Hmm . . . actually, I noticed in many teachers' classes that they are extra careful when they speak and when they explain things, they always look at me to sort of check whether it was correct.

> **Monika:** But I did that too. I think. That I searched for some assurance. Like--she's in England, she will know! (laughs) That's the first thing that comes to your head. But, for example, when XY [her senior colleague] was there to observe me or when I was in her class--I remember . . . she often turned to me--like "isn't it so" or "it is, isn't it!"(confirmation of grammar or vocabulary item) . . . .

Thus, one of the difficulties of encouraging continuing professional development in the present context seems to be rooted in the teachers' lack of teaching efficacy. My data show that insecurity in one's English proficiency is a substantial part of this lack of confidence, an issue which might act as a distracting factor in EFL teachers' development and which perhaps warrants more attention in research on L2 teacher cognition in EFL contexts.

Lack of skills to pursue articulated reflection. Another problem associated with attempts to promote change by encouraging "robust reasoning" (K. E. Johnson, 1999) stemmed from the teachers' inability to pursue articulated reflection. Given their motivation to teach outlined above, not only did the research participants not understand why they should reflect on their own teaching, but having never engaged in such exercise before they also lacked the actual skills and language to do so. Indeed, my data document that during post-observation interviews or in written reflections which were part of the TD course, few research participants were ready to reflect on other than superficial level on their rationale behind their classroom behaviour or particular TD course activities, which is also seen in the pattern with which feedback was returned, for example. When more reflective feedback on a particular topic was elicited, the return rate was significantly lower.

While the TD course was designed in a way that encouraged teachers' involvement in reflecting on their new and prior experiences, the exposure to new professional discourse with which to articulate them was limited by the length of the course and, thus, could not compensate for its absence in the teaching culture of the current context. As a result of these various factors, including heavy teaching load, fear of making mistakes and a lack of skills and discourse to pursue reflection, all contributing to the absence of reflective teaching culture, I had to carefully reconsider some of the planned TD course processes aimed at facilitating reflection as well as significantly adjust the methods for data collection that I had originally intended to employ.

Unsupportive System

In her report on a collaborative school-university partnership project aimed at fostering autonomous learning in Portuguese EFL classrooms, Vieira (2003) quotes "institutional resistance" as the major factor negatively affecting the possibility of sustained change. The issue of an 'unsupportive system' was, indeed, a recurrent theme in the data of most of

my research participants. Monika, for example, complained a great deal about insufficient school support and the mindset of most of her colleagues that prevented her from engaging in autonomy-supporting teaching practice. As she notes in her feedback on the final session, the fact that this approach to teaching is not greeted with the same level of enthusiasm by her colleagues makes her feel incompetent in the eyes of her students.

> . . .I am a bit sceptical about it [learner autonomy] unless we all [teachers of all subjects] start doing something about it. I do believe it is very important and something that is my priority, but my own experience is that I have not reached much understanding from students, on the contrary, the effect often was that I am not serious (or maybe competent) enough about teaching.

The feedback that we received after the initial conference was full of similar concerns. Although, at the end of the day, the extent to which some 50 participating teachers felt "revitalised", "energized" and motivated to experiment in their classes was 73%, they only saw a 51% chance to succeed, quoting contextual constraints, such as "older colleagues who don't agree with such approach", "prescribed curriculum and 45-minute classes", "the system" and "the reality of Slovak schools" as the major obstacles.

Reflecting on a background article on learner autonomy in her feedback, Erika provides the following image of teaching in a state school system:

> [I realised that] it is really a very good idea to teach students to be more responsible for their learning and that very often they are able to do a lot of things alone, we, the teachers, just don't give them many opportunities. Our school system is so weak because of it. We teachers are waiters. Not paid a lot, but we do everything for our students . . .. Not to mention that very often the teachers are waiters in the restaurant of the worst category and don't have so many opportunities and good conditions and equipment.

It appears, therefore, that the extent to which teachers respond to innovative practices may not entirely depend on individual psychological factors, but is also shaped by the "micropolitics of the school organization" (van den Berg, 2002, p. 595). Research evidence suggests that such contextual factors may impede language teachers' efforts to adopt practices that are in line with their beliefs (Borg, 2003). Essentially, then, even though the research participants enthusiastically endorsed the course input as meaningful and valid and may have begun to reconceptualise their beliefs about teaching, many found that these were in stark contrast with the political, cultural, and social structures within their schools. As a result, they did not attempt to adopt the practice they considered meaningful.

Curiously, two of the three teachers who have demonstrated that some 'seeds might have been sown', were the ones who decided to set up their own English language school during the course of the project in which they could 'teach the way they wanted'. For them, it seems, the only way to adopt a motivational teaching practice and thus practise what they had gradually come to believe in was to break free from what they perceived as unsupportive school system.

Thus, apart from "asking how schools as socio-cultural environments mediate and transform what and how teachers learn" (Freeman, 2002, p. 12), inquiry into how they *hinder* what and how teachers learn is equally important. How, if at all, in-service teacher development can be encouraged *despite* such adverse effects, seems to be a crucial part of that question.

Conclusion

Although, as the quantitative data demonstrated, training-induced change did not occur at the level that would have impacted students' perceptions of their classroom environment, it is not fair to claim that no change took place as a result of the TD initiative. There are, in fact, some promising tendencies in the qualitative data of several research participants that will need further exploration. However, even in their cases such tendencies were scarce and they were completely absent from the data of other research participants.

Thus, the picture painted by the results of the current research study is somewhat depressing. Having received quality training, a self-selected group of teachers who were highly motivated to pursue their professional development, not only did not change significantly, but, for most of them, the process of change did not even begin. My data suggest that aspects underlying motivation to pursue a teaching career and further professional development initiatives which are shaped by broader macro-contextual influences deserve careful scrutiny as they may be predictive of the kind of change an in-service TD programme can bring about in EFL contexts.

Still, the unavoidable question remains: What is needed to promote change in the teaching practice of in-service non-native speaking EFL teachers in environments that, for various historical, geographical, linguistic and socio-cultural reasons, do not offer a firm ground on which to encourage deliberate reflection and critical inquiry (K. E. Johnson, 1999) and in which teachers' initial enthusiasm is effectively stifled by continuous exposure to images sharply contradicting

previously endorsed ideas? A particularly relevant starting point in this respect could be in considering what K. E. Johnson (2006) terms "located L2 teacher education" which "begins by recognizing why L2 teachers do what they do within the social, historical, and cultural contexts within which they work and from there works to co-construct with L2 teachers locally appropriate responses to their professional development needs" (p. 246). I believe the findings of this study contribute to some extent to this understanding. Thus, after a truly exciting period of emerging understandings of how teachers learn and the subsequent reconceptualisation of the language teacher knowledge-base, the time is ripe to start addressing the issue of how teacher learning can be facilitated in contexts that do not encourage development.

One speculative conclusion, which warrants further exploration in future studies is that the possibility of adopting a motivational teaching practice may be diminished until the very content of such TD initiative, that is the commitment to students' learning, becomes a primary motive of L2 teachers to teach and develop professionally. Raising awareness of this commitment must become the focus of both in-service and, perhaps even more emphatically so, pre-service teacher education in Slovakia. Raising awareness, however, may not be sufficient, unless education system on all levels, including pre-service, in-service and school levels enable, encourage, and model such commitment.

Note

[1]To avoid easy identification and thus secure anonymity, all research participants are referred to by female pseudonyms in this study. To the same end, the demographic information provided in Table 1 is not matched with pseudonyms but instead presented as a summary.

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About the Author

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Appendix: A Summary of the Instrument Scales

Scale Characteristics with pre-/post-test Cronbach α	Description and Sample Items
Group cohesiveness ($\alpha = .81 / .84$) 10 items Items adapted from Clément et al.'s (1994) scale of 'Perceived Group Cohesion' and Moos's (1979) scale of 'Affiliation'	Students' perception of the 'we' feeling of the class group. Examples of items include *"A lot of friendships have been made in this class"* and *"Compared to other groups like mine, I feel my group is better than most."*
Group goal-oriented norms ($\alpha = .86 / .87$) 13 items Items combined from Moos's (1979) scales of 'Involvement', 'Task Orientation' and 'Order and Organisation'	Group's orientation towards task-related goals and the group's tendency to engage in classroom tasks in an autonomous manner. Sample items include *"Students put a lot of energy into what they do here"* and *"This class is more a social hour than a place to learn something."*
Attitudes towards teacher: Competence and Teaching Style ($\alpha = .73 / .77$) 13 items Some items from the Moos's (1979) scale *Innovation*.	Student perception of teacher competence as well as of supportive aspects of the teaching style (Tumer et al., 2002). Sample items include *"Students have very little to say about how class time is spent".*
Attitudes towards teacher: Commitment and Rapport ($\alpha = .69 / .79$) 8 items Items adopted from Moos's (1979) *Teacher Support* scale.	Perceived teacher commitment and rapport. An example of this scale's items include *"The teacher takes a personal interest in students."*
Attitudes towards class/course: Useful/ Attractive ($\alpha = .84 / .84$)	Student perceptions of the usefulness of the class as well as the extent to which they find it

9 items Items combined from the instruments used in Clément et al. (1994) and Kormos & Dörnyei (2004).	enjoyable. Sample items include *"We learn things in the English classes that will be useful in the future"* and *"Learning English is an exciting activity"*.
Attitudes towards class/course: Difficult ($\alpha = .76 / .79$) 2 items	Student perceptions of the English course difficulty, e.g., *"Sometimes I feel I can hardly cope with the materials in this course."*
Linguistic self-confidence ($\alpha = .78 / .81$) 6 items Items adapted from the *Linguistic Self-Confidence* scale in Kormos & Dörnyei (2004).	Students' belief to perform competently and the degree of anxiety inhibiting them from doing so. Sample items include *"I am sure that I'll be able to learn English"*.
The Norms of Acceptance and Cooperation ($\alpha = .67 / .76$) 12 items Some items adopted from Moos's (1979) *Competition*	Classroom social norms that facilitate productive groups, such as *"Students in this class don't laugh when somebody makes a mistake in English"* or *"Students don't feel pressured to compete here"*.