Teacher training through the Regression Model in foreign language education

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Abstract

In the last few years, Spain has seen dramatic changes in its educational system. Many of these changes have been rejected by most teachers after their implementation (LOGSE) while others have found potential drawbacks even before starting operating (LOCE, LOE). To face these changes, schools need well qualified instructors. Given this need, and also considering that, although all the schools want the best teachers but, as teachers' salaries are regulated by the state, few schools can actually offer incentives to their teachers and consequently schools never have the instructors they wish. Apart from this, state schools have a fixed salary for their teachers and private institutions offer no additional bonuses for things like additional training or diplomas (for example, masters or post-degree courses) and, therefore, teachers are rarely interested in pursuing any further studies in methodology or any other related fields such as education or applied linguistics. Although many teachers acknowledge their love to teaching, the current situation in schools (school violence, bad salaries, depression, social desprestige, legal changes and so) has made the teaching job one of the most complicated and undevoted in Spain. It is not unusual to have a couple of instructors ill due to depression and other psychological sicknesses. This paper deals with the development and implementation of a training program based on regressive visualizations of one's experience both as a teacher as well as a learner.

Keywords: Regression; experiences; visualization; trauma; re-conceptualization.

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1 Introduction

In the last few years, Spain has seen dramatic changes in its educational system. Many of these changes have been rejected by most teachers after their implementation (LOGSE) while others have found potential drawbacks even before starting operating (LOCE, LOE). To face these changes, schools need well qualified instructors. Given this need, and also considering that, although all the schools want the best teachers but, as teachers' salaries are regulated by the state, few schools can actually offer incentives to their teachers and consequently schools never have the instructors they wish. Apart from this, state schools have a fixed salary for their teachers and private institutions offer no additional bonuses for things like additional training or diplomas (for example, masters or post-degree courses) and, therefore, teachers are rarely interested in pursuing any further studies in methodology or any other related fields such as education or applied linguistics. Although many teachers acknowledge their love to teaching, the current situation in schools (school violence, bad salaries, depression, social discredit, legal changes and so) has made the teaching job one of the most complicated and undesired in Spain. It is not unusual to have a couple of instructors ill due to depression and other psychological sicknesses. At this point, it seems difficult to solve these teachers' problems; however solutions may come from a variety of sources:

> *Social recognition:* Campaigns to promote teachers' respect have begun to take part in the national television as small sketches in the end of 2010;
>
> *Parents' awareness:* Newspapers and educational studies report that part of the problem is due to parents' attitudes towards the school and educational system. This aspects requires immediate attention.
>
> *Teachers' assemblies*: Teachers may not work as comparatively and cooperatively. Since teachers do denounce mistreat cases hardly ever, the problems continue unsolved.
>
> *The office of the defence of the teacher (http://www.defensordelprofesor.com/)*: is a new idea by the trade unions of teachers. Its main mission is to carry personal situations and even address legal matters related to many of the problems mentioned hereby.
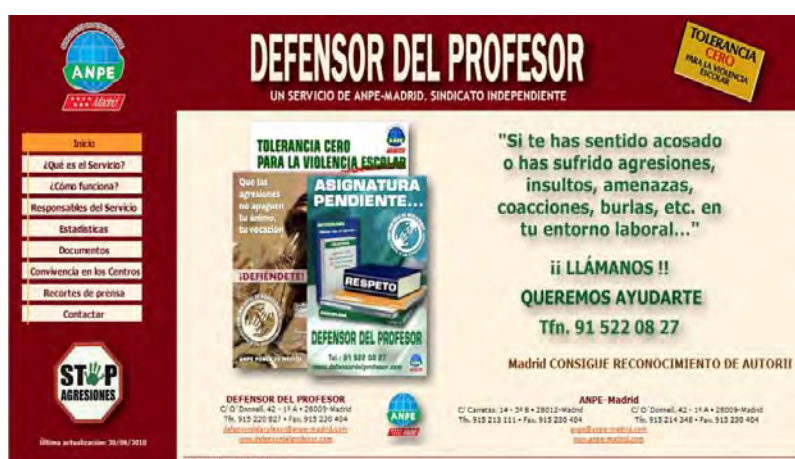
Figure 1: *The office of the defence of the teacher* website

This paper deals with the development and implementation of a training program based on regressive visualizations of one's experience both as a teacher as well as a learner. In so doing, this paper will begin by explaining what the Regression model construct and foundations are; then,the paper will present a qualitative based research done in two Spanish cities using the method. The study proposes that using the Regression method has affects in the teacher's well being, motivation and, in the end, in their teaching. In the last section, the paper gives some recommendations to implement the Regression method in the English Language classroom.

1.1 The Regression – Experiential model

While in the 80's attitudinal studies were centred in the students' preferences towards foreign language learning, in the 90's a large number of papers supported the importance of language attitudes towards foreign language teaching. In 2000 García Laborda made a large study comparing 341 students and 87 teachers. Through a quantitative analysis (namely Chi-Square and using Likert scales), he found that teachers and students share almost totally their thoughts about what they consider the most beneficial issues for language teaching and learning (García Laborda, 2001; García Laborda, 2002). Moreover, García Laborda found that teachers relay more in their experience as learners than as practitioner teachers. Based in this fact, it was clear that if attitudes and teaching skills are to be under revision and, possibly, subject to change, it is necessary to begin the exploration from the basics as a learner. Thus, this course was approached from an emotional and experiential introspective

approach. The teachers named this methodology the Regression – Experiential model whose principles are described below.
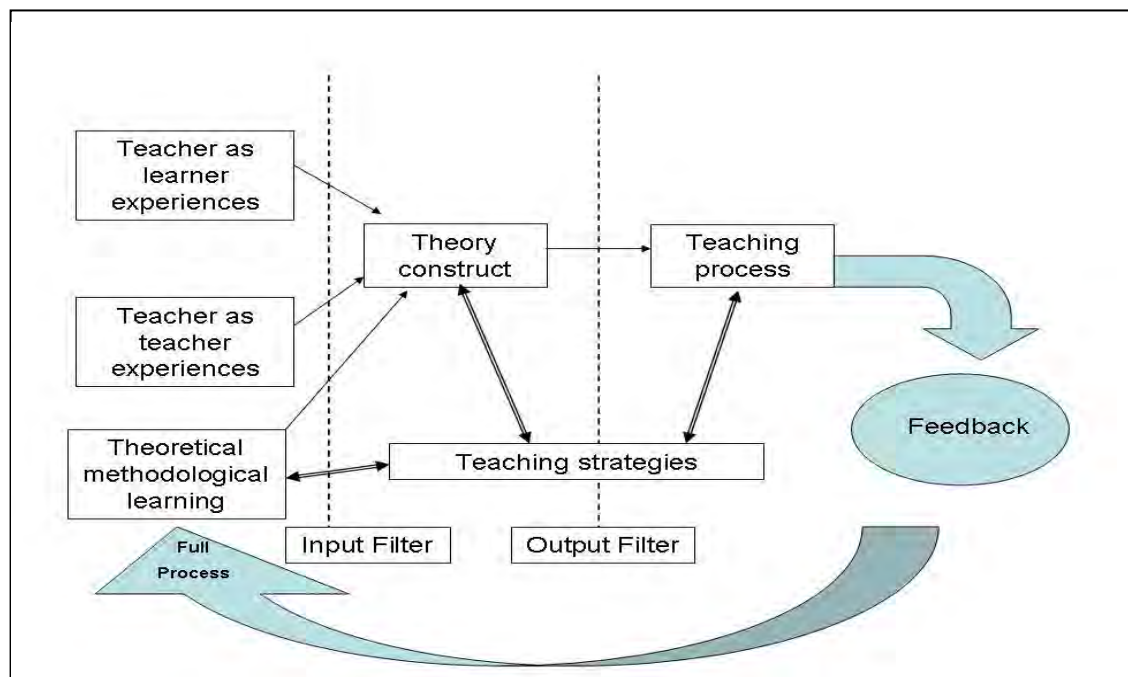

Figure 2: The Regression – Experiential model

As mentioned above, the main teacher trainer (who is also the teacher mentor in the program) assumed that there are three main ways in which teachers acquire their theoretical construct: through their experience as learner, through their experience as teachers and through methodology classes or courses. Their conscious and subconscious ideas have to cross an input filter. This filter is based in their own resistance to new ideas, their social reality (namely, type of school, orientation, social and ideological ideas – for instance, respect to democracy or hierarchical order in the classroom – , personality – innovative, conservative, etc. -, and observation capacity). These three sources of theory knowledge and experience form a great part of the Theory Construct. This theory construct is both a conscious and subconscious nucleus. For example, when sometimes a teacher takes the decision of teaching grammar in his class it may be due to the fact that he believes this is the only way to master a language (subconscious knowledge) although he is not going to emphasize or devote very much its formal teaching because not a few linguists have said that its value is quite limited to just another source of input (conscious knowledge (Krashen,

1979)). At the same time, theoretical methodology learning has a definite effect in teaching strategies. Again some of these strategies are acquired through conscious annotation but also by subconscious continuous trialling (as for when a teacher knows that certain strategies will almost invariably work favourably with a group of students). As it can be seen, strategies are sometimes incorporated to the teacher's inner theoretical construct and sometimes immediately put into action. This is probably why recipe books are valuable for many experienced and inexperienced teachers when they lack the necessary methodological own resources. However, the teaching construct and skills usually go through an output filter that affects performance. This is filter is formed by the current classroom situation ('Is this the right time to do it?'), physical conditions and settings ('Do I have all the materials and spaces necessary to do it?'), mood, and expected reaction from students. Once he has taken his decisions and reacted according to the inner construct, the teacher will perform. After that the teacher will collect his own and his students' feedback in different ways as the final consequence or achievement of the teaching decition.

2. The research

2.1 Study Hypothesis

Through qualitative analysis including individual and group interviews, class observation (through a diary) and a final debate the researcher intended to verify the following main hypothesis:

> The use of a Regression language training method facilitates the experience to innovate and incorporate new experiences into the daily L2 teaching style and schema.

To better address this hypothesis, it has been subdivided into the following ones:

> 1st. The Regression / Experiential teacher training model allows teachers to balance their experience as L2 learners and their observational skills as instructors.
> 2nd. Skilled – elite training favours low dropout rate,
> 3rd. Teacher trainees can transfer their skills to their colleagues in their own schools,

4th. As a consequence of the previous hypothesis change in the teaching styles in the schools can improve teaching quality as well (or change, at least, in schools in short periods of time).

2.2 Defining the subjects

Before the beginning of the course, following García Laborda's attitudinal model (2001) an attitude survey was conducted to see what the teacher trainees feelings towards language and methodology was. The subjects were distributed as followed:

Location➔	Valencia	Alicante
Primary	24	
Primary		40
Secondary	36	
Secondary		9
Total	**60**	**49**

Table 1: Initial participants in the program

The dropout rate in Valencia secondary was 25% while attendance in the other three groups was between 10 and 15% from the beginning to the end of the first year.

2.2.1 Specific conditions of the program

Being a publisher's sponsored program in cooperation with a semi-public institution, it was important to eradicate all signs of open promotion of any commercial product in order to avoid what could be understood as covered advertising. Of course, trainees received small things as pens or folders but no other gifts or samples that they could not get in their own schools with just a phone call.

Apart from this significant condition the program's conditions were:
- Nine 2-hour sessions,
- At least, a two hour reading or follow up exercises after each session(mostly as homework),

- Most exercises were based on debates although they were also combined with written and questionnaire initiated exercises (and also some peer and individual work but not as time consuming),

- English was almost the only language for Primary teachers while Secondary teachers used a combination of L1 (for theoretical aspects) and L2 (for practice and classroom dynamics).

2.3 Training sessions

As mentioned before, the total number of 2-hour sessions was 9. They addressed three main areas:

- *Teaching methodology*: techniques, history of teaching methodology…

- *In action research preparation*: after a short 45-minute talk, students were assigned tasks based on their own experience and their feeling about what their colleagues in each school would answer. Topics were behaviour, language acquisition in general and elite schools, testing, experimental learning,

- *Use of information technologies*: use of computers, online lesson plans development, etc…

These sessions were held following a new introspective model. The model was called the Regression-Experiential Model.

2.4 The Regression – Experiential model effects in the program

From Freud's psychoanalysis, the idea of Regression in psychology has proved to be very influential in changing attitudes in patients (Changingminds, 2005). As some other authors say:

> "The focus in reflective staff development and reflective teaching is on problem setting and problem solving, employing an understanding of theory, thoughtful and informed analysis, and critical evaluation. Reflection can be accomplished interpersonally, in written form, or through interaction with colleagues. The result of reflection is that it causes one to slow down and pay attention, to observe critically oneself and one's effect on students, and to listen. In the process the professional is

able to develop and test ideas over time. Critical to the process is the fact that reflective staff development emanates from the personal observations and needs of the teacher" (Levine and Jacobs, 1986).

However, the course mentor strongly believed that Regression, as opposed to the traditional idea in psychoanalysis, only has a limited effect if it can facilitate a rapid transition from the ideas in the past to the present. Thus, although the first session devoted a great deal of time to have trainees to explore their own experiences as learner, by the end of that first session students were dealing with their current situations. Consequently, past in the Regression – Experiential model serves as a balance point between the teachers own inner ideas (as learners) and their own present (as teachers). An example of this point of view could be the importance of grammar in second language instruction as seen in the previous section. Trainees can evaluate if they liked or if their students like to be taught grammar and how.

2.4.1 Putting Regression into practice

The course mentor decided to do the Regression sessions and exercises in the trainees' first language as usually introspection exercises take place in difficult circumstances where he believed the use of L2 could make it difficult to express their own feelings. Some exercises can be found in the appendix of this article. The basic idea is that to exploit the trainee full potential, he should be able not only to refresh and, somehow, live his own experiences again but to communicate these experiences to the other participants. Diagram 2 shows how each one's experience is communicated to the group in progressive steps. At each step each trainee receives his own, his peer and group feedback. That feedback is sometimes lost (or teachers cannot transform their ideas into action) but the other part can affect daily situations and being a powerful means of trainees transformation.
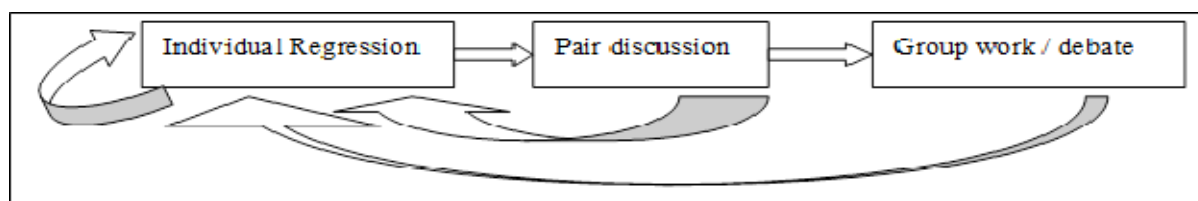

Figure 3: Process of application of the Regression model in teacher training

2.5 Conclusions: Effects of application of the Regression – Experiential Model

After the first year we gave a questionnaire and had a full session devoted to self and group evaluation, and, of course, mentor evaluation. The session gave the following results:

- Trainees evaluated better their attitudes in the L2 classroom. Thus, their own image and self esteem increased through the sessions,

- They acknowledged that they could understand their own ways of doing in the classroom and change them whenever necessary,

- Methods varied and they could understand their textbooks' procedures better. Their class exploitation also improved,

- They were very happy to learn from their own and their colleagues,

- They could recommend ways of action to other colleagues,

- Critical thinking and openness to change became a central interest in their teaching,

- The mentor reputation's was reinforced (this also happens in the Freudian Regressions where the psychologist becomes the passive motor of change),

- Mental Regression serves to overcome bad experiences and celebrate the good ones. Some trainees also said that this method helped to their mood in the classroom (we should not forget that depression is a very common issue among secondary teachers al over the world),

- Trainees' dropout (despite the fact that the course was absolutely free and volunteer) was between 12% to 25% which can be considered extremely positive according to costs and trainees acknowledged effects,

- Their teaching interest also increased (one even said that these sessions were the best thing that had happened to her after finishing university).

This research shows that teachers as trainees obtained great personal advantages in their teaching internal processes and, according to their own words, their daily performance improved and, most likely, their teaching quality and will increase in the future. The regression factor seems to have a relaxing effect which seems to be a far more influential factor (and method) in teacher training than the other typical approaches to language

teaching (recipe and theoretical courses). Additionally, the Regression model allows students to be critical from the perspective of "someone for whom this (that) method was (was not) beneficial).

However, among the various cons for this method that still need to be reviewed are if the positive affect has to be with the especial groups with which it was used or the nature itself of their own students (private schools usually with much better behaviors than their counterpart state schools). It would also be interesting to find out about the teachers' degree of internal motivation, will to learn, desire to experience, personality in relation to change, extro/introversion, and some other teaching and personal factors.

Another future issue is whether students noticed significant changes in their own teachers or increased the student participation or motivation, and, more than anything else, if this training approach has any effects in the trainees' schools of origin. So far, research supports the idea that teacher's motivation affects positively language learning but more empirical data is necessary.

In conclusion, through the first year of training, the researcher observed that the main hypothesis worked in all secondary groups according to the teachers. We also observed that the Regression model affects positively the teachers role as teachers and learners, and facilitates an in-depth approach to the process of language learning. The fact that they were elite teachers also provided the opportunity to obtain great feedback sessions with lots of well accepted criticism and also a great number of ideas to improve language teaching. The new challenge is to know what the effect on the long term will be and if trainees will be able to transfer all the new learning techniques and experiences into their schools.

2.6 Future impact and recommendations of the Regression programs

Trainees are now required to try to put into practice and, more than anything, become teacher trainers and real head of departments not only from the academic and administrative sides but also as leaders and moderators in the language courses of their schools. Thus, to ensure this forward step the following measures will be recommended:

García Laborda, J. (2011). Teacher training through the Regression Model in foreign language education. *International Journal of Human Sciences* [Online]. 8:1. Available: http://www.insanbilimleri.com/en

1. Make teachers aware of their own image in the school and classroom. It is intended that this will motive their colleagues to develop their own teaching skills in order to make their schools better places to learn languages (and the rest of the subject as well).

2. Organise periodical meetings with their colleagues to review their work, problems and classroom techniques in groups. They will also be recommended to give and receive advice, feedback and criticism.

3. To continue their own training during the second year with new topics and become action researchers in their own schools.

4. Work out a common action plan for all the schools cooperating in the program for the foreign language class improvement.

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Appendix I: Introspective materials

This exercise is preceded by a case study in which an alien visits The Earth 30 years before.

Mi mejor profesor del colegio hacía……………………………………………………

Mi mejor profesor del colegio era …………………………………………………..

Mi trabajo con otros compañeros era…………………………………………………

Creo que aprendía más cuando ………………………………………………….

Lo que no me gustaba de las clases era ………………………………………….

Una canción que definía mi forma de ser era …………………………………

Lo que más me gustaba hacer en ……………………………………………………….

Lo que más me desagradaba de mis clases de inglés era ……………………………………………………….

Mi libro de texto era ……………………………… y tenía ……………………………………………………