

# 1 Teacher education courses: challenges and solutions

The opening chapter in this volume addresses formal approaches to training in ELT. First, **Elizabeth Davies** examines whether CELTA training affects teachers' pre-existing beliefs about teaching; this theme is continued in **Karla Leal Castañeda's** paper. Next, **Joanna Stansfield and Emma Meade-Flynn** report on a modification to the CELTA in which explicit language instruction was removed, while **Willy Cardoso** outlines suggested improvements to initial training courses. Moving on to master's courses, **Teti Dragas and Lesley Kendall** describe the use of reflective practice among a group of international trainees with varying degrees of experience, and **Laxman Gnawali** describes problems and solutions in a master's-level training programme in Nepal. **Daniel Monaghan and Tessa Woodward** then look for common ground between experienced and inexperienced users of technology. Finally, **Ross Thorburn** reminds us of the non-academic training that overseas teachers require in order to adapt to their new life.

## 1.1 Four weeks of pain: is the CELTA worth it?

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### Introduction

My own role as a teacher educator has led to a genuine interest in the different ways in which individuals respond to and interpret input received during teacher education programmes. Although teacher learning is now widely accepted as a domain of empirical investigation, in comparison to mainstream teaching relatively little attention has been paid to L2 teacher education and there remains a 'dearth of research' (Ferguson and Donno 2003: 26) into the impact of entry-level courses such as the CELTA. Learning to teach in ELT, in particular the effect of language teacher education on pre-service teachers' beliefs and practices, remains an emergent domain of inquiry which merits further empirical attention.

### Aim of study

The aim of the study was to examine the development of four trainees' beliefs and practices over the four-week period of an intensive CELTA course and to posit reasons for the occurrence or non-occurrence of changes in thinking and behaviour. In addition, congruence and divergence between stated beliefs and instructional choices made during teaching practice were investigated.

## Data collection and analysis

A multiple case study approach was taken. Reflecting current thinking in qualitative inquiry, data from interviews, observation and questionnaires were triangulated to yield rich, in-depth data, and an iterative analysis procedure was employed.

## Findings

The findings suggest the relationship between the participants' thinking and behaviour to be idiosyncratic, multi-faceted and complex, and examples of both congruence and divergence between stated beliefs and actual instructional practices were found. The data further demonstrate the occurrence of both cognitive and behavioural change.

## Reasons for differences between beliefs and practices

Although some examples of convergence between stated beliefs and practices were found, the data revealed more instances of divergence. The following reasons were hypothesised:

- falling back on previous learning experience;
- core beliefs outweighing less strongly held or newly acquired ones; and
- the effect of external factors such as teaching practice being assessed and the observing tutor's perceived preferences.

## Changes in beliefs

The most significant change in thinking was specific to one individual; other participants reported minimal impact on their pre-existing beliefs. However, there was evidence of the emergence of new beliefs explicitly related to L2 teaching and other pre-existing beliefs were strengthened across participants. (See Table 1.1.1.)

New beliefs	Strengthened beliefs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Give clear instructions and check understanding of them.</li><li>• Ask concept checking questions.</li><li>• Adjust your own use of language as appropriate to the level of the students.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Plan thoroughly.</li><li>• Ensure lessons are relevant to your learners' needs.</li><li>• Adapt and supplement materials appropriately.</li></ul>

Table 1.1.1: *New and strengthened beliefs*

## Changes in practices

Collective changes in behaviour were also reported and corroborated through observation, and these were aligned with the self-reported new or changed beliefs above. However, as with changes in beliefs, the most noticeable behavioural change was an individual one and there was evidence that, for this particular trainee, it was necessary for cognitive change to precede behavioural change.

### **Limitations and recommendations for further research**

A cautious view should be taken of the findings given the small sample size and the limitations of the data gathered. Further empirical attention is required to bring a more thorough understanding of the complex interrelationship between beliefs, classroom practice and teacher education, specifically within the context of the CELTA. Recommendations include:

- tracking candidates post-CELTA as they embark on their ELT careers to further explore cognitive and behavioural change;
- investigating other CELTA courses in order to compare the experiences of candidates across courses;
- comparing and contrasting the experiences of candidates on part-time or online courses with those on full-time intensives; and
- focusing explicitly on experiences of the practicum.

### **Implications for CELTA**

A failing of teacher education programmes in general, and the CELTA in particular, may be that trainees are expected to adopt certain techniques without considering their own beliefs or opinion of them. To overcome this, CELTA courses should:

- raise awareness of beliefs pre-course by encouraging trainees to think about and understand their existing beliefs and their origins;
- provide opportunities for trainees to reflect on their beliefs and relate them to input received during-course; and
- encourage examination and review of beliefs and practices through video-recording teaching practice, allowing trainees to observe any discrepancies between beliefs and practices and reflect on possible reasons for this. Development can be tracked by observing changes in practices as the course progresses and comparing these with changes in beliefs.

If trainees' beliefs are made visible through awareness raising, examination and reflection on them and opportunities to assess the interrelationship between beliefs and practices provided, it is hoped that learning will be enhanced and the impact of the CELTA increased.

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Ferguson, G. and S. Donno. 2003. 'One-month teacher training courses: time for a change?' *ELT Journal* 57/1: 26–33.

## 1.2 The development of cognition and beliefs on CELTA courses

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### Research background

General education research and language teaching research for second language teacher education have conventionally given little attention to classroom practice and the thinking processes that teachers undergo as part of their formal teacher education (Borg 2006). Research advances in cognitive psychology from the early 1970s put forward the influence of thinking on behaviour, with Lortie (1975) introducing the concept of the *apprenticeship of observation*. He explains that by the time novice teachers start serving they will have had around 16 years of continuous contact with educators. This, in turn, can be perceived as passive observation which has consequences beyond the students' (consequently teachers') learning years. Since the CELTA course works around the idea that in-training teachers learn by imitating experts' techniques (Wallace 1991), the apprenticeship of observation and newly acquired input during the course start conflicting with each other. I therefore carried out a research project which focused on highlighting in-training teachers' beliefs and how these affect the way their thinking develops and readapts during the CELTA course in relation to the input received, in the light of the demands of the course criteria and the teaching practice element.

### Method

This qualitative research project was a multiple or collective case study focusing on eight CELTA candidates. It was conducted over a period of three consecutive CELTA courses, and it included observations on both teaching practice and input sessions. Additionally, I included personal narratives in the form of semi-structured interviews conducted at the beginning and end of the course. The first interview was conducted on the first or second day of the course (only one interview was conducted on the fourth day). The second interview was conducted once the candidates had taught their final lesson. Both interviews were recorded and transcribed; they focused on the trainees' previous teaching and learning experiences, how they perceived teaching and learning in terms of teachers' qualities and their perceptions of teaching language in contrast to teaching other subjects. Recurrent themes highlighted during interviews were identified and analysed. A systematic observation scheme was developed which focused on what happened during teaching practice and input and also on what happened afterwards, i.e. at the end of the sessions. The notes obtained from observations were then compared to what was said during interviews in order to identify changes in cognition and beliefs.

### Findings

The data obtained and analysed for this study showed that the apprenticeship of observation proved to be a highly influential factor among trainees during the CELTA course. One of the clearest changes in trainees' perception of teaching was that it should be student-centred as opposed to teacher-centred. It goes without saying, however, that trainees became aware of the importance of conducting teaching this

way and yet constantly struggled to let go. Since their own learning experience dictated that teaching should be a display of knowledge regardless of how much students were engaged, they thought that by conducting inductive learning and other student-centred activities, they would appear unprofessional to the extent that they were not doing their job properly (some even mentioned that it was not worth paying teachers if the students are doing all the work).

Another interesting finding in this project was that despite having negative learning experiences and associating language learning with dull lessons, trainees were convinced from the beginning that language learning should be fun. One of the main reasons mentioned was that languages lend themselves to communication and opportunities for communicative interaction between teachers and learners.

Although trainees are expected to fulfil a set of criteria to pass the course and there is a strong focus on practical skills, the study shows that trainees are constantly evaluating their experiences and, in some cases, even challenging their tutors' advice. It seems evident from the data that trainees' thinking changed in various ways. Individual changes occurred and were determined by a complex combination of their apprenticeships of observation, their interpretation of new input and their teaching practice experiences.

## Conclusions

Various studies criticise the course for its heavy focus on practical skills but very few show the effect the course has on newly qualified teachers, especially those who pursue a serious career in the field. Considering the worldwide status the CELTA course holds and the number of candidates who take the course each year, it is highly surprising how little research has been conducted and how the 'learning how to teach' process has been neglected.

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## 1.3 The natural CELTA: a farewell to language?

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### Introduction

The CELTA course is stressful for trainees for a number of reasons, and language analysis is paramount among the causes of this stress. The fear that follows often affects other aspects of their training and the development of teaching skills suffers

as a result. Too much emphasis is placed on this one dominant criterion and often language research is encouraged in such a way that doesn't really reflect how qualified teachers approach teaching. We decided to remove explicit language instruction from the timetable, replacing it with guided reflection that would hopefully allow trainees to *notice* key aspects of teaching, learning and, indeed, language.

### **The teaching practice schedule**

Teaching practice is a 1-hour 40-minute lesson every day divided into three parts, with each part taught by a different trainee. This leaves 20 minutes of unassessed time in which the trainees discuss the lesson with the students themselves, to receive immediate feedback from those who will be both their customers and their judges in the future.

### **The timetable**

As at most institutions, input is divided into shorter and longer input sessions. Longer input sessions are all built around a demo lesson given by a trainer with the trainees as learners; this takes place on the Monday of each week. The demo is a language-from-text presentation of a grammatical structure; in length and in cohesion it is a direct example of what the trainees need to do in their teaching practice.

Shorter input sessions are dedicated to reflection on the previous day's teaching: what has been learnt in terms of skills, activities, student needs and preferences—and also language. These sessions are structured and focused and also take into account the discussions with students.

### **The lesson plan**

The trainees are required to analyse not language but *task*. For accuracy-based tasks, they have to ensure that they have the correct answers ready for feedback. They are then required to think about *why* the answer is correct and come up with strategies to help and guide students towards these answers, such as leading questions, pictures, displaying and underlining relevant aspects of text. For fluency-based tasks, trainees are asked to predict language or ideas they would expect the students to produce, think about *why* those ideas are suitable and, again, come up with strategies to help and guide them.

### **The assignments**

All the assignments are integrated into the timetable in an attempt to reduce trainee workload. The language-related tasks assignment is based on the task analysis sheets from lessons they have already taught. They must select analysis from a text-based lesson, from a language clarification section and from a productive task, and seek to improve the analysis using what they now know, having taught the lesson and having observed student difficulties. In this way, the trainees have a clear context for and some experience of the language being analysed. This is, we feel, what qualified language teachers do on a daily basis and how we improve our language knowledge—we very rarely look at discrete item examples outside a classroom context. Having refined these examples retrospectively, trainees are then required to do a similar analysis in advance of their final 60-minute lessons, which is checked by the trainer before it is taught.

## Conclusions

Trainee language awareness developed through the need and desire to help the students, whom they saw as people rather than objects; experimenting and discovering, rather than being *told* to do something; noticing gaps in coursebooks, materials and in students themselves; and focusing on contextualised examples through texts and controlled practice. As a result, language became demystified and *just another task* rather than something to be afraid of, and trainees felt freer to concentrate and develop a high level of competency in task design, staging and planning. Unexpectedly, they became much more effective at dealing with both anticipated and emerging language, and they began to realise that pre-lesson research actually hindered teaching rather than enhanced it. Although the course requires a high level of processing which in turn produces a great deal of stress of its own (and so stress is still not removed from a CELTA course), *all* trainees were able to demonstrate effective and reflective practice that they can carry with them into the real world of English language teaching.

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## 1.4 Initial teacher training: challenges and innovations in course design

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### Introduction

This presentation aimed to address the following issues:

- How can we provide more opportunities for experiential and reflective practice in initial qualifications?
- How can we offer pre-service trainees more than a survival kit in TEFL?

Frequent criticism of initial teacher training in the form of four-week courses (for example, Brandt 2006) highlights the fact that trainees often have insufficient opportunities to experiment and reflect without being constantly assessed, and to address the specific needs of their learners. These courses also perpetuate a performance-based philosophy of teacher education which dichotomises theory and practice.

In a nutshell, the criticism is that some well-established practices run counter to the idea that the development of language teachers is idiosyncratic, teachers' beliefs are shaped by prior experience, and their practice is influenced by the sociocultural contexts they have been and are part of.

### Challenges

A view of teacher learning informed by a sociocultural perspective poses the following challenges (based on Johnson 2006), which I will briefly consider in relation to four-week courses.

- 1 To move away from the theory/practice dichotomy and towards praxis. Teaching knowledge would be understood as emerging in the practices that teachers engage

in and their dialogic relationship with theory. The focus shifts to the experience of the teacher.

- 2 To position teachers' ways of knowing as legitimate so that these become part of professional knowledge. The first element of this challenge could be to put reflective practice in a more central role by acknowledging (i.e. giving more weight to) the learning which derives from feedback sessions and reflection journals and by incorporating reflection on practice into each written assignment.
- 3 To redraw the boundaries of professional development. To seek and evaluate alternative structures to facilitate trainee development. Alternatives could be to reduce the number of trainer-led workshops in order to free some space for peer coaching, lesson study, video-stimulated recall and reflection.
- 4 To take into account that teachers' learning and development are highly dependent on their local social, political, economic and cultural contexts. Not giving attention to this fact sends a message to trainees that the methodology should remain static regardless of who/where/why they are teaching.

In sum, if we agree that teachers' knowledge is socially constructed out of their classroom experiences, we need to always be critical about the sort of experiences we are providing them with.

### **Designing a new course**

Two years ago I started to design a new teacher training qualification for Instill Education, the Cert TEALS (Certificate in Teaching English as a Life Skill), which is a training course (160 hours of guided learning) designed to be at the same level as Cambridge CELTA and Trinity CertTESOL.

In the presentation, I highlighted some design features of the Cert TEALS, such as

- a higher number of teaching practice hours;
- a focus on 'learning opportunities' and 'life skills' over the more established 'teaching points';
- a push for approaches such as task-based learning, project-based learning and teaching unplugged over coursebook-driven and product-based syllabi; and
- learning materials and lesson aims driven by the life goals of students; the focus goes beyond English as a subject—it becomes a life skill.

Because of space constraints I will report only two of these features.

### **Teaching practice**

To place experiential practice at the core, trainees need to teach more than is usually required in these qualifications (6 hours minimum). The Cert TEALS was designed to provide each trainee with a minimum of 12 hours of teaching practice, which includes unobserved lessons and team teaching. As a consequence, they also have more feedback sessions, thus reinforcing the importance of reflection on action.

### **Learning opportunity**

Lessons are designed around 'learning opportunities' (Allwright 2005); this argues for the decentralisation of the 'teaching point' as the prime unit of planning, thus reinforcing that:



- teachers and learners co-construct their lessons;
- it is necessary to be flexible to and appreciative of incidental learning, which a focus on ‘teaching points’ can overshadow; and
- teaching points might give trainees the idea that learning should or can ‘directly’ follow from teaching—and we know this is not the case.

## Conclusion

Overall, while acknowledging that these short intensive courses are not enough to form a proficient teacher, we should also move beyond the idea that they are basic ‘survival kits’. In sum, we should aim at having trainees ‘think’ like a teacher and not only operate materials like a teacher. To achieve that we need to constantly revisit and question the principles which inform the design of these courses.

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## 1.5 Training international teachers on master’s programmes: a reflective approach

**Teti Dragas and Lesley Kendall** *University of Durham, UK*

This presentation explored and reflected on the success of a teacher development module designed for a group of experienced, international teachers on a UK-based MA TESOL programme; the module focused on fostering teachers’ reflective practice, with reflective writing forming the basis of teacher assessment.

### Background

Reflective practice has been long established in the field of ELT and has been used in a variety of contexts as a tool for teacher development. Nevertheless, when it comes to assessing teachers’ practice particularly on established teacher training/development courses run in western contexts, reflective practice rarely dominates. Instead, teachers are often assessed against a set of predetermined criteria (largely based on a CLT approach) that seek to identify ‘good’ practice. However, in an increasingly global world where a growing number of international teachers (NESTs and NNESTs) are seeking teacher development and training in the UK, developing teacher training courses which follow traditional assessment-based models might not be appropriate nor effective, particularly given the variety of different contexts, methodological approaches and learning cultures that characterise the backgrounds of current trainee teachers.

## Why a reflective practice approach?

This understanding of trainees' needs was one of the driving forces for our own course development for a core module on a master's in TESOL at a UK university that focused on teacher development. Precisely because our trainee teachers came from a variety of international contexts (for example, China, Thailand, Japan, India, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, the UK, Ireland, Saudi Arabia and Spain) and had varying experience and varying degrees of previous training, we felt that assessing teaching was inappropriate on a number of levels. Primarily, not all our teachers would be familiar with, nor find useful or applicable to their context, the underlying CLT approach which assessed teaching criteria often tests; taking such an approach would be not only difficult to assess but also unfair.

We therefore decided that *developing* teachers' practice through *reflection on teaching* would be more beneficial to them in the long term. We hoped this approach would allow teachers to learn at their own pace and begin from their level of experience in a non-competitive, supportive environment rather than performance-orientated one. The focus on reflection as opposed to the 'lesson' would promote sound professional behaviour and also support 'growth competence: the ability to continue to develop professionally on the basis of internally directed learning' (Korthagen and Vasalos 2005: 48). Moreover, it would give trainees a skill which would aid them in their long-term continuing professional development.

## Teacher training context and course development

Trying to train teachers to be reflective practitioners while adhering to the constraints of an MA module was a challenging aspect of the course development. In our presentation we identified issues we had in developing the module, presenting our solutions and the justifications for these. Two of the most important needs were to

- maximise opportunities for reflection on teaching, and
- meet assessment needs.

The first need was particularly difficult because we wanted to fit teaching practice (TP), observation, input, feedback and research-informed discussion time into a constrained timetable. The second need required us to fulfil master's-level criteria (draw on research *and* practice) and adhere to specific module learning outcomes (i.e. assessing what students had learnt/done throughout the course) while also mapping their development as teachers in terms of reflective practice.

The solutions we came up with which we used to specifically foster our approach to *teaching and practicing* reflection (Gün 2011) included the following:

- Allocating four hours a week to the module: two for TP, two for feedback, discussion and reflection.
- Creating a two-part assessment, which involved trainees writing a reflective diary mapping their experiences on the module (TP, observation, feedback, discussion, blogs) with selections and further commentary forming the basis of the final assignment.
- Providing an observation booklet to focus peer observations.
- Using the VLE to create a TP blog for trainees and tutors to direct feedback and observations to.

- Recording and putting weekly TP videos on a VLE allowing trainees to re-watch lessons observing both themselves and their peers teaching, allowing more opportunities to reflect on practice.
- Asking trainees to do further reading in areas identified in post-lesson feedback and to bring insights drawn from reading into the discussion sessions.

### Conclusions

At the end of the module we reflected on the course, collecting evidence from trainees' reflective diaries, module evaluation questionnaires and a focus group in order to ascertain how successful our aims had been. Feedback from the trainees was overwhelmingly positive: by focusing on the learning that had *come out of* the teaching practice, input and discussion sessions rather than on the actual teaching itself, by taking away the pressure to perform, and by the practice of oral and written reflection (Richards and Ho 1998) through reflective diary writing, they had reached the 'depth' of learning and fostered the long-term skill of being able to take control of their own self-development.

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## 1.6 Pairing the unpaired

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### The context

The pedagogical knowledge that trainee teachers receive from their pre-service training will make sense if they get adequate exposure to classroom realities during the training (Gebhard 2009). However, the mainstream EFL teacher training courses in Nepal are largely theory-laden and practical components are hardly realised. The courses are delivered through lectures, and assessment is through three-hour closed paper-and-pencil tests. The only exposure to real-world classrooms during the two-year master's programme is the six-week practicum, which is poorly supervised. As the number of student teachers is disproportionately large compared to the number of cooperating schools, they have no opportunities to identify problems and try out solutions in real classrooms. Practically, the student teachers' exposure to the classroom realities begins when they enter the teaching profession.

### Intervention through action research

With the above in mind, we designed a new master's-level EFL teacher training programme at the university where I work. The two-year programme includes, in

addition to theoretical and research components, a two-semester practicum at local schools. During the practicum, student teachers are paired with working teachers; they collaborate to design and implement an action research project. It should be noted that action research as part of training is otherwise non-existent; working teachers and student teachers barely collaborate. We are actually experimenting by pairing the hitherto unpaired teachers.

Once paired, the student teacher and the working teacher collaboratively diagnose a classroom problem, devise an action plan and implement it (Burns 2010). The minimum duration for the implementation of the action plan is 12 weeks. During this process, the student teachers share what they have learnt at the university: the contemporary pedagogy presented in the methodology course. The working teachers share their experiences of working in a real classroom: what works and what does not. They negotiate the problem that they can collaboratively address and devise their action plan. Usually, the diagnosed problem is related to the methodology of teaching. In planning and preparation of the materials, the working teachers usually make bigger contributions, but in the implementation and documentation of the process the student teachers do more as they have to submit a formal report to their tutor. After each lesson, they reflect together on the process and revise the plan if necessary. At the end of the semester, the student teacher presents a report at the university for assessment. A dissemination session is organised for all student teachers to share the reports and exchange experiences of working in real EFL classrooms.

### **Outcomes**

The reflections in the action research reports and the sharing at the dissemination sessions showed that the working teachers' practical classroom experiences complemented the students teachers' freshly gathered theoretical knowledge, and both parties benefited from the collaboration process. The student teachers reported feeling ready to join the teaching profession with confidence, while the working teachers reported having gained fresh ideas on classroom pedagogy; they said they were updated with what is going on in the field of EFL.

In some cases, this modality of research did not work as described above, as there were issues with the pairings. When the cooperating teacher was much senior in age and did not feel comfortable with new ideas, and the student teacher appeared smart and very proficient in the English language, the former found some excuse not to be available. In such cases, the student teachers had to design and implement the action research on their own. Wherever the pairing worked, the outcomes were positive.

### **Conclusion**

From the outcomes we concluded that this pairing had two-tier outcomes. The action research component in the practicum is instrumental in giving exposure to trainee teachers; they can see the classroom intricacies which may be different from the idealised classrooms discussed in training. They also get an opportunity to try out the EFL pedagogical knowledge from the methodology course. Collaboration with the working teachers helps them to learn ideas which may take a long time to discover on

their own. The working teacher can also be updated with new insights coming from academic programmes. The pairing benefits both sides.

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## 1.7 Bridging the technophobe-technophile gap in teacher training and development

**Daniel Monaghan and Tessa Woodward** *Hilderstone College, Broadstairs, UK*

### Background puzzle

This workshop started with a puzzle. How do you work as a teacher trainer with a group of competent language teachers from all over the world who have very different attitudes towards using newer technology in their classes and on their training course? A real group, in the UK for a two-week refresher course, were the stimulus for this workshop. Some of the teachers came from low-resourced settings and were eager to experience YouTube videos, electronic dictionaries, apps and all. Others came from well-resourced settings and were sick of fighting for their students' attention when heads dipped to check mobile phones or use laptops. Some teachers had had the good fortune to be involved in the choice of interactive whiteboard (IWB) and related software used in their schools and had copies of the software at home so they could prepare there. They were positive about IWBs. Others had returned from holiday to find their normal whiteboard ripped out and an IWB in its place. They had to start work with little training, and their attitude was different!

### A unifying framework

Our solution to this puzzle was to adopt a unifying framework called Stimulus-Based Learning and Teaching (Woodward 2001, 2002). A stimulus is anything that engages a student's attention. Thus a stimulus could be a group of new words, a text, a tweet, a picture, an email, an object, a listening task, a chunk of language, a visitor, a song, a YouTube video or a map. Whatever the stimulus, students need to encounter it, then to analyse, personalise, adapt or alter it and then create something useful for themselves from it. There are many ways of performing these five categories of teaching or learning moves.

We used a diagram on a handout to explain these five categories of teaching moves, with example activities and reasons for use. (See Table 1.7.1.)