

# Reflective practice

## *The perceptions of a situated learning experience mediated by novice teachers' autonomy*

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### Abstract

With the development of online language learning comes a growing need for courses in language teaching to incorporate educational technologies into course content. The challenge this development poses is how to incorporate educational technologies in teacher education programmes to prepare teachers for online language teaching. This study explores the way in which an authentic environment of English online and at a distance is facilitated by novice teachers and how their perceptions of the experience influence their own autonomy. The article presents how novice teachers cope with the complexity of the design of online materials, their pedagogy and their expectations. Data were collected via semi-structured interviews and novice teachers' own evaluations of the course. The study found the opportunities and challenges for novice teachers in materials design, more complex roles and course expectations as they self-direct themselves in terms of both their learning and pedagogical skills. These findings suggest that teachers' perceptions of situated learning can be shaped by their own teacher autonomy.

**Keywords:** Situated learning, autonomy, teacher education.

### 1. Introduction

The context of this study is a master's degree programme based at a university in Greater London in which mostly novice teachers design and put online English language learning tasks for French learners of English based at a university in Lyon, France. The study was designed to enable language teacher educators to get a better understanding of novice teachers as they facilitate language learning in an online environment and how situated learning impacts on teachers' autonomy. The aim is to put the novice teachers in a situated language teaching environment and for them to reflect on their experiences to develop their own schemas of pedagogy from authentic teaching. The significance of this study is that insights into how novice teachers grapple with facilitating CALL for their students in France are analysed in light of language teacher autonomy (Smith & Erdoğlan 2008) of professional practice and cognition.

Situated learning is well suited to teacher education as authentic examples help novice teachers to reflect on their practice (Korthagen, 2010). Reflective analysis has also been used in online teaching for novice teachers to understand the core competences when teaching language at a distance (Guichon, 2009). This study argues how novice teachers' perceptions of online CALL are shaped by their own degree of teacher autonomy.

Data for this study was collected from the trainee teachers' own self-evaluations of their effectiveness as online facilitators. Semi-structured interviews were also obtained to corroborate data from the evaluations. This study analyses teachers' perceptions of themselves, their tasks and their online language teaching experience in light of their own teacher autonomy. The perceptions help us to understand how novice teachers readjust to online language teaching and how this pedagogy is perceived.

## **2. Theoretical and empirical perspectives**

Online language teaching has been well documented over several decades and in particular the challenges language learners face in this type of context e.g. O'Dowd & Ritter (2006), Lai, Zhao, Li (2008). The challenges novice language teachers face has also been extensively researched (Compton, 2009; Egbert, 2006; Guichon, 2009; Lai, Zhao & Li, 2008; McNeil, 2013; O'Dowd, 2015; Slaouti, 2007; Smith & Erdoğan, 2008; and Stickler & Hampel, 2015). However, Egbert (2006) argues that most language teacher education programmes work on the assumption that teachers can apply what they have learnt during the course training for CALL and then apply this knowledge in order to teach well. Egbert highlights that preparation of computer assisted language learning occurs in the confines of an education course. The problem is the lack of availability of extensive access to learners and authentic materials which means that many teachers find themselves unprepared for the challenges and realities of an instructional role (Egbert 2006, p.169). One way around this problem, Egbert suggests, is to situate the language teacher learning in CALL in an authentic problem-solving online context in which distance education gives novice teachers the opportunity to use educational technology with authentic language learners. Teachers who can analyse and understand the many different situations that may arise in technology-enhanced ESL classrooms will be more effective in helping their students to learn.

## **3. Situated Learning**

Situated learning theory as Brown, Collins and Duguid (1989, p.41) explain, is when activity leads to perception and that both, moreover, are necessary precursors to the conceptualisation of ideas. This approach to teaching turns much traditional education upside-down in that conceptualisation; i.e., the formation of schemas needs to grow out of problem-solving activity. Knowledge, Brown et al. (1989) argue, is embedded in the situation and it is the circumstances that provide essential structure and meaning to learning. This approach to learning demands what Evans (2014) calls "a deep approach"; i.e., to see knowledge as complex, evolving, effortful, tentative and evidence-based (Evans, 2014, p. 187). Evans describes student teachers who manage to cross boundaries as those who transfer and adapt from what they have learnt from one context to another (Evans, 2014, p. 203). In our situated learning context, student teachers were required to transfer knowledge gained from the workshops on educational technologies for English language teaching to becoming facilitators in an online English language learning context for students based in Lyon.

The problem has been that trainee teachers' comments tend not to refer back to instructional theory which highlights a difficulty of linking theory to practice in synchronous online teaching (Guichon, 2009, p. 181). The aim of this study is to put novice teachers in a situated language teaching environment for them to reflect on their experiences and to develop their own schemas of pedagogy which are analysed from a teacher autonomy perspective.

#### **4. Situated learning in teacher education**

Korthagen (2010, p. 104) argues for teacher education to encourage a pedagogy which combines experiences that help form the relevant *gestalts*. A *gestalt* is a combination of images, feelings, notions, values, needs or behavioural inclinations that form a whole (Korthagen 2010, p. 101). Korthagen (2010) explains that early teaching experiences tend to trigger *gestalts* in student teachers which tend to be related to classroom-based survival skills. What is needed in teacher education programmes is the further development of *gestalts* through suitable experience and subsequent reflection which is a process of schematization which the teacher educators wish to develop. This schematization would be a network of concepts, characteristics, and principles which are pertinent to the student teachers' needs (Korthagen, 2010, p. 104). Our study uses novice teachers' perceptions of their experiences after they have had time to reflect on their practice.

Huang, Lubin & Ge's (2011) qualitative study compared a situated learning environment in an educational technology course with a traditional learning environment. Their study indicated that some pre-service teachers in the situated learning environment would prefer to be told what to do rather than to explore what to do on their own (Huang et al. pp. 2011-1209). Some of the participants appreciated the messy nature of their tasks and their own autonomy whilst others felt uncomfortable and frustrated (Huang et al. pp. 2011-1210). This dichotomy chimes with our own study in that some of the novice teachers seemed to flourish in an authentic learning environment whilst others wanted to be told what to do in certain situations. The degree to which pre-service teachers are autonomous may be an important factor in how they perceive situated learning. Huang et al. (2011) warn that educators must pay attention to pre-service teachers' feelings.

The role of the instructor is important as well. Egbert (2006, p.176) highlighted that the role of the instructor was crucial in a situated language teacher web-based course on CALL which focuses on technology to support student language learning. In particular, Egbert highlights the need for instructors to know when to intervene to help student teachers and when to ask for authentic examples to enhance the situated learning experience. Egbert warns that there is the danger that student teachers can flounder in a mass of technological tools and so the instructor needs to scaffold the student teachers in order for student teachers to construct knowledge for real teaching contexts.

Situated language teaching in an online environment highlights the complexity teachers face in synchronous online tutoring. Guichon's (2009, p.180) study of a teacher training programme for postgraduate students teaching French via a desktop videoconferencing platform showed that there were differences in participants' accounts of critical episodes. Some participants merely described them whilst others identified the difficulty and examined their own pedagogy in a critical manner. So how novice teachers critically reflect is important to understanding their perceptions. O'Dowd's (2015) study of telecollaborative exchanges also highlighted the need for information on the educational culture of the different countries involved.

#### **5. Teacher Autonomy**

How teachers reflect on their situated learning experience could be related to their teacher-learner autonomy. Autonomy is defined as the feeling of volition and choice in contrast to feeling pressured or coerced into action (Lynch, 2013, p.302). Smith & Erdoğan (2008) classify dimensions of teacher autonomy as two broad dimensions: professional action and professional development. In other words, as a bi-polar dimension: practice and cognition. The idea that practice and cognition are differentiated is important. As Borg (2009, p.166) explains, there is a strong relationship between practice and cognition in language teaching. Professional action relates to 'the doing' and as having three domains: the self, the capacity and the freedom (e.g. from one's institution). Professional development relates to 'the cognition'

and as having three domains: the self, the capacity and the freedom. Smith & Erdoğan (2008, p. 87) argue that what needs to be developed in teacher education is how to develop teachers' capacity to self-direct their own learning. If novice teachers lack autonomy in their learning then they may lack autonomy in their teaching. In a language teacher education setting, Xu (2015) looked at teacher autonomy in collaborative lesson preparation and found that it is the type of collaboration which has a greater impact on novice teachers' autonomy. Novice teachers' professional development depends on synergies between their level of anxiety and the type of collaboration, therefore they should be given "more concrete help to scaffold their initial development, but not be offered ready-made resources to be directly used in their teaching. It is better for them to feel supported without being overly anxious and at the same time moderately challenged so as to promote their autonomy" (Xu 2015, pp 146–7).

The overall aim of the current study was to investigate novice teachers' evaluations of their situated learning experience of online language teaching in relation to their teacher-learner autonomy. The emphasis on teacher-learner autonomy highlights the need to provide a rounded picture of the impact of teacher-learner autonomy on situated learning and its importance in designing teacher education courses in educational technologies for language learning and teaching. The study was designed to explore perspectives and experiences of novice teachers facilitating online CALL and the impact on their learning, pedagogy and freedom in course design.

## **6. Method**

### *6.1. Background*

Links were formed with a university in Lyon, France, and it was agreed with the tutor in France that the Lyon students studying for a Master's degree in pedagogy would be recruited to complete the online language tasks and provide feedback to the London-based novice teachers on those tasks via a questionnaire. The Lyon-based students were all enrolled in the MEEF (1) course (Master in Teaching, Education and Training). From 2010, a Master's degree is required in France in order to qualify as a primary school teacher. Students not only have to obtain this postgraduate degree but they also have to pass the national competitive exam allowing them to be employed. As the French primary school curriculum includes taking a foreign language, we decided to focus on the learning of foreign languages. Students cannot obtain their master's degree unless they reach a B2 level in English (or any other foreign language). Moreover, most French students of English are not confident about their proficiency in English so it is challenging for them to initiate French primary children in the learning of English. This is why the ISPEF (2) Teacher Education Institute decided to set up a partnership with the university in London.

### *6.2. Participants*

A total of 19 postgraduate novice teachers studying at a university in Greater London, were recruited from a module in educational technologies for language teaching which lasted one semester. The participants on this course had a range of L1 backgrounds: nine had English as a second or third language, whilst ten were native speakers of English. Thirteen had some sort of language teaching experience ranging from one-to-one to teaching groups. Prior to the course, online journals showed that their use of educational technologies included programmes such as PowerPoint, MSWord, DVDs, e-Podiums, interactive whiteboards and all of them had experience in using computers.

The MA module was comprised of eleven face-to-face 3-hour workshops. The workshops were highly interactive and were facilitated by two tutors who are both authors of the study. The topics covered on the course were: needs analysis and language level, planning tasks for language learning, distance learning and educational technology, designing tasks for online workshops, distance learning and student and teacher perspectives, peer and tutor feedback of students' online tasks, reflection on own online

teaching, theoretical frameworks for evaluating teaching, learning and autonomy. During the course, the students published their own tasks on the Internet for the French students to complete within a period of four weeks.

### 6.3. The Virtual Learning Environment

The online language learning was delivered through the London university's virtual learning environment (VLE). The system hosts teaching and learning materials for all of its courses. Students can download PowerPoint presentations, Word documents and PDF files, as well as contribute to discussion forums. For this particular course, a workshop platform (space on the university VLE) was used for participants to upload their online workshops. These mainly consisted of newly discovered technology artefacts like links to YouTube clips, images, interactive games, and video recordings and Word files that allowed them to design tasks to achieve specific language learning outcomes.

The London-based participants were given the role of online language facilitators. They were responsible for the content and the facilitation of language learning. The online workshops were constructed as part of the module assignment and the London-based tutors were there to give help and guidance to the MA students during the design and facilitation stages. The UK module workshops took place face-to-face once a week during one semester. The Lyon-based tutor was in direct face-to-face contact with the Lyon students to explain the rationale for the online course and actually took part in the course herself to gain first-hand knowledge of what was involved. Both the Lyon tutor and London-based tutors were in contact with each other via email.

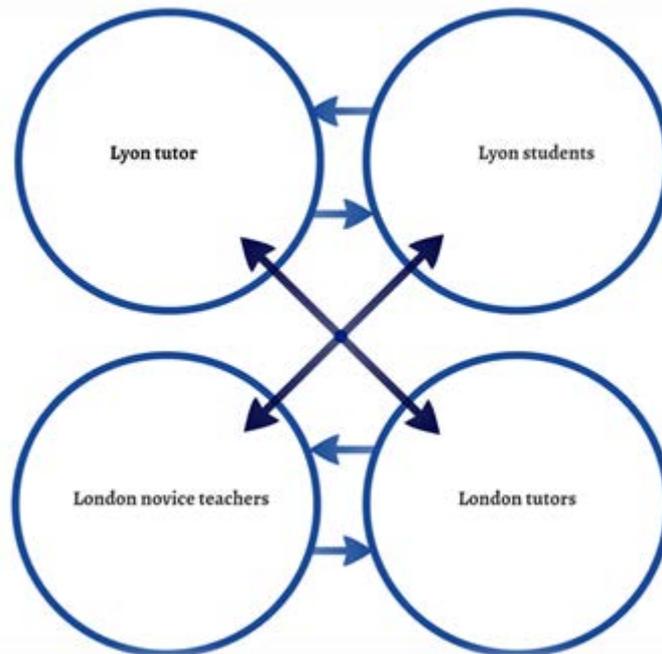


Figure 1. The communication pathways.

### 6.4. Products from the learning environment

Each of the 19 UK-based novice teachers created an online distance workshop comprising of three online language learning tasks designed to last one hour. Their language groups consisted of either two or three French students who were grouped by English language ability using the Common European Framework Reference for Languages (CEFRL). Their language level was judged by their English teacher at their home university. The French students and UK participants were matched by the more experienced UK-based novice teachers facilitating the more advanced language students. The French students were encouraged by their French tutor to complete the

tasks outside of class but they were not obliged to do so. Below is an example a workshop for the French students.

The screenshot shows a Blackboard v9.1 interface with a navigation bar containing 'Content', 'One Community', 'Module Catalogue', 'Organisations', and 'Support'. Below the navigation bar, there is a list of tasks: 'TASK 1', 'TASK 2', and 'TASK 3'. Below the tasks, there is a video resource titled '"Why Should We Hire You?" How to Answer this Interview Question'. The video has a duration of 6:25 and was added by user 'fisherosu' on 3/6/12. Below the video, there is a 'Watch Video' button and a text prompt: 'Watch the video clip about 'why I should hire you? Write down as many positive personality adjectives that you hear. Then pretend you went to an interview for the teaching job in task 2 write why this school should hire you for the teaching job. Use as many positive personality adjectives as possible. You can use the ones from the table to help you or from the video clip.'

Figure 2. The initial task to orientate the French learners to job interviews.

**Topic: Employment**

**Getting a Job**

**Task 1**

Language knowledge: Vocabulary  
Language skill: Reading

Learning aim: To learn words that is specifically related to the process of writing a job application.

English has the largest vocabulary in the world. Vocabulary is very important because it helps you to communicate properly by using the right words in the right context. Some words are grouped in context, for example, words for work. The words in the table below are vocabulary related to applying for work.

Words	Meaning
Requirement	Something you must have or be able to do for a particular job.
Achievement	Things you have done in a work situation or while studying which have been very successful
Qualifications	A document such as a certificate or diploma with details of examinations or courses you have passed.
Interview	A meeting with a prospective employer.
Resume	This is also called a CV. A document which sets out your work history, qualifications, skills and abilities.
Personal Qualities	Good things about you that is important to employers.
Skill	Something you do very well.
Reference	A written document about your work history, personal qualities and abilities by a previous employer or teacher.
Application Form	A form you fill in for a job.

Figure 3. A vocabulary building task.

**Topic : Getting a Job**  
**Lesson 2: Applying for a Job**  
**Aim: To practice using the present tense and past in writing a job application.**  
**Language Focus: Grammar**  
**Language Skill: Reading and Writing**

It is important to use the correct tense when writing a job application. Both the present and the past tense are used.  
The present tense is used to talk about what you are doing now. For example, **I am** a student at the Kingston University.  
The past tense is used things that have happened in the past or when you are talking about your experiences. For example, **I worked** for 2 years in Amesbury School as a year 3 teacher.



**Task 2: Read the job application letter below. Put in **bold** the present tense and underline the past tense. An example is done for you.**

**Katya Pivorava**  
10 Sample Street  
Sampletown  
Warwickshire  
Tel: 01125468793

Mr David Albert  
Principal  
St James Primary School  
1 Sample Avenue  
Sampletown

01 May 2012

Dear Mr Albert,

It is with great pleasure that I **am** writing this letter to seek a position of primary school teacher. As a teacher, I believe that my strong interpersonal skills and teaching skills will be helpful for the students of your school.

I passed the High School Examination in 2005, First Division. I got my Science graduate diploma at the West Thames College in 2007. I have an Education Degree (Primary) from ABC University and I worked at Lawencia Primary School in Perth for 2 years.

I am highly experienced and will be helpful for the students of your school. I have an excellent record of student and parent satisfaction with my approach to teaching. I have also received glowing praise from the Principal and fellow teachers.

As a teacher, I understand that my responsibility is to motivate and inspire the students by crediting their creativity. I am good at understanding the potential within each student and encouraging them to pursue their dreams.

*I am confident that my experience and qualifications make me the ideal match for St*

Figure 4. The next task focuses on the grammar of letter writing or job hunting.

**Look at the following job advert and write your own application letter for the job.**  
**Don't forget to use the present tense and past tense. Use the letter above to help you with the structure.**

ARE YOU GOOD WITH CHILDREN?  
THEN WE NEED YOU!  
Hackney Down Primary School welcomes applications for the position of a classroom teacher for year 4.  
Interested candidates please email a copy of your application letter to Marie Sands at mariesands@staff-hackneydownprimary.org

Figure 5. A job advertisement for the learners to apply to.

**Topic : Getting a Job**

**Lesson 3: Why Should I Hire You?**

**Aim:** To practice using the present tense and past in writing a job application.

**Language Focus:** Grammar

**Language Skill:** Listening and Writing

When we go on an interview it is very important that we describe ourselves as the best person for the job. We use positive personality adjectives and examples of these adjectives are shown in the table below.

Positive Personality Adjectives	Meaning
<b>Confident</b>	Having belief in yourself and your abilities
<b>Ambitious</b>	Someone who is keen to get on at work
<b>Hardworking</b>	Someone who works very hard
<b>Honest</b>	Someone who is truthful, and who does not lie or steal
<b>Motivated</b>	A person who is enthusiastic about their work
<b>Enthusiastic</b>	Having or showing interest in your work
<b>Team-player</b>	Someone who works well with other people
<b>Passionate</b>	Showing strong feelings or belief about or in your work
<b>Organised</b>	Being able to put things in order
<b>Resourceful</b>	Having the ability to find quick and clever ways to overcome difficulties.

**TASK:** Watch the video clip about 'why I should hire you?' And write down as many positive personality adjectives that you hear. Then pretend you went to an interview for the teaching job in task 2 write why this school should hire you for the teaching job. Use as many positive personality adjectives as possible. You can use the ones from the table to help you or

Figure 6. The final task of the workshop is to explain why they are suitable candidates for the job.

The UK-based facilitators had access to a range of technologies and were encouraged to use multimodal teaching tools, including the use of video, image, sound and discussion forums. They were not required to create multimedia objects but were encouraged to find and utilise appropriate existing resources like YouTube and other video repositories, image databases, games and simulations. Some did create their own video or used Skype or social networking sites to communicate with the French learners but this was not a requirement.

6.5. Data sources

The data sources were designed to obtain insights into the novice teachers' self-assessment of their own pedagogical and technological skills, and the situated learning environment in the context of teacher-learner autonomy. Following a qualitative research design, data was collected through two sources.

The first source was the novice teachers' written self-assessment in acting as online language facilitators during a four-week period. They had to assess themselves according to five criteria: (i) the effectiveness of the tasks, including the use of technology in achieving the learning objectives; (ii) the quality of the teaching and learning taking place in the online workshop; (iii) the pedagogical choices made and how these impacted on learning; (iv) the challenges and limitations of facilitating a workshop in the online distance learning environment; (v) the implications for future practice.

The second source consisted of the semi-structured interviews conducted with five of the UK-based participants. The interviews were conducted at the end of the course and were audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis. The participants who were interviewed were reassured that their responses to the questions would not affect their final grades. Some example interview questions were:

- *When you understood what was required of you for this module, what were your expectations of the workshops?*
- *What impact did this online learning and teaching experience have on you as a teacher?*

- *What do you think are the advantages and limitations of online courses – both from pedagogical and technical perspectives?*
- *What do you think are the advantages and limitations of what we have done in the module?*
- *How will this experience change your professional outlook?*

The actual tasks which the student teachers produced helped to show us how they developed language learning materials. The interviews were conducted by the researchers, who were also the tutors of this course, which helped us gain insights into the UK-based participants' perspectives.

In order for the novice teachers to gain an understanding of how they facilitated online language learning, each novice teacher sent out an online questionnaire to her/his students in France. The questionnaire was written in both languages and the responses were gained from 35 Lyon students via five open-ended questions (see Appendix below).

#### 6.6. Data analysis

The novice teachers' evaluations of themselves and the interviews were analysed according to Thomas' (2009) constant comparative method whereby evaluations are repeatedly compared for themes to emerge, which became the basis for analysis of the data. In addition, all of the data from the recorded interviews were transcribed and analysed for themes. The themes from the evaluations and interview transcriptions were combined and connections were drawn between them to create three overarching themes in relation to teacher-learner autonomy.

### 7. Results

The thematic analysis revealed three superordinate themes: *self-directed learning as a teacher*, which focused on areas such as creativity and task design; *teacher-learner experience* in relation to professional development, which focused on areas such as learner and teacher autonomy, time-management, experience, roles and misunderstandings; *freedom to self-direct one's teaching*, which focused on areas such as expectations and complexity. Each of these will be discussed in turn.

#### 7.1. Self-directed learning as a teacher

**Creativity.** The experience of authentic online teaching gave some of the participants a sense of freedom for them to experiment with different technology in order to foster language learning. There were creative uses of YouTube, for example, in the workshops that gave the participants the inspiration to experiment and to develop tasks which they had never done beforehand in an online environment. Participant 7: "So it [online tools] definitely helped me in that sense, being creative and being innovative with what I can use in the classroom". Here, the online setting is felt to offer novice teachers more opportunities to use technology in innovative ways and that creative use of computers demands creativity and commitment from the facilitator, as participant 14 commented: "I think that making use of computers to enhance learning is also related to the creativity and commitment of the facilitator with his or her teaching career". Here we can see that the more self-directed novice teachers embrace technology because it offers a way for them to express their creativity and that they are not daunted by their lack of experience.

**Task design: freedom and boredom.** Along with the perceived creativity came the idea of freedom to make their own choices based, partly, on a needs analysis which they were encouraged to produce and send to their students in Lyon.

*From a teacher's perspective, an advantage is the level of freedom even though I had to stick with the needs analysis questionnaire, that still gave me a variety of things to choose from and to work towards and I think even creating the materials it helped me improve my skills as a teacher cause not only the pedagogical side to it, unless materials development is the pedagogical side, but I feel like that really*

*helped me to think of different ways... to think how to use a simple thing like movie and base my lesson on that or at least make it the beginning of the lesson. So I think it pushed me as a teacher and there was pressure but I feel like it helped me develop as a teacher. (Participant 11)*

This participant is starting to think about materials development and how this process makes her reflect more deeply on pedagogy. Materials design for this participant could be the springboard to schematise her own pedagogy.

*Whether you are online or in a classroom I feel like I'm more analytical in my work. I'm analysing it more in terms of thinking of the students more. Before, I used to plan lessons and it was like you know ...but now you need to consider so many things, especially because you introduced the concept of needs analysis. Because normally when you're sent to a school or college or university you go straight into a classroom so you don't need to do a needs analysis because it's already been done. But this really made it personal. And it really made you think critically about the way you plan lessons and staging everything. (Participant 12)*

This participant starts to be more analytical. Moreover, she is starting to understand the greater responsibilities placed upon her as she can no longer expect to be given a syllabus as part of a language learning programme. She also expressed the need for more technological variety in order to encourage her learners to return to the tasks each week.

However, along with the freedom, participant 2 started to find negative consequences in the design of his own tasks.

*However, as I was new to adapting materials on a digital platform, I designed tasks that may not have been appropriate in terms of linguistics and usability. However, such practice exposed me to the idea that there is always a possibility that educators will encounter all sorts of difficulties and that they should be ready to find alternative solutions. While I was introduced to the exciting possibilities of online teaching, I also became all too familiar with the challenges both teachers and students face in a digital age. (Participant 2)*

This participant sees the challenges of materials design and their suitability. For example, in the feedback from one of his students, the tasks were perceived as being the same as pen and paper exercises. This negative feedback highlights how for one of the novice teachers he did not experiment with different ways of using online technology and did not design meaningful tasks.

#### *7.2. Teacher-learner experience: professional action*

**Learner and teacher autonomy.** Two of the participants interviewed expressed the idea that online learning encourages learner autonomy.

*It makes it easier for the learner because there is a bit more autonomy for them because they can kind of go at their own pace or they can get in contact with you when they want to without being pushed like they are in a classroom. (Participant 7)*

Likewise, participant 12 puts forward the idea that learner autonomy could feed into teacher autonomy.

*It definitely encourages learning autonomy. By doing online learning, distant learning you are learning about your own strategies of learning and I think that helps a lot, because I've learnt a lot about myself... learning to teach online. Just my time management, in terms of sending out emails, communicating with my students... am I thinking for myself or do I get help. Little things like peer support; you know getting my friends to help me do something or figuring it out. I found that I actually prefer to figure things out myself to understand it. Or just asking my friend teach me, I'd rather just do it myself because I feel that's the only way*

*you are going to learn. So I felt that had an effect on the learners as well. They were doing the same thing. Because there were a lot of technical problems and that's one of the disadvantages.* (Participant 12)

This teacher starts to reject peer support in favour of relying on her own ways of dealing with students and starts to become more self-sufficient and understand that learning starts from the self. However, participant 12 who had taught English in Saudi Arabia could draw upon her own experience in solving problems which were usually technical in nature; e.g. Lyon students not being able to log on to the VLE.

**Lack of experience.** One participant was particularly at a disadvantage as she lacked experience preparing language courses. This course had a negative impact on her as she felt that she was under-prepared to take on the role of an online language learning facilitator.

*Given this experience is the first lesson I have created as a teacher, by doing this workshop it really challenged my job as a teacher in the future and hinted the areas I need to immensely improve for my career as a successful teacher in the future. This task was a big eye-opener for me and taught me a completely different aspect of a role of a teacher I never have been exposed to back home.* (Participant 5)

Her thoughts highlight the need for language teacher educators to take into account the individual support that some participants may need compared to others. Clearly if novice teachers do not feel as though they have enough experience to cope with a situated learning environment then this approach can have negative consequences. If, however, novice teachers perceive themselves as having the capabilities to learn in this type of environment then this type of experience will help them to flourish.

**Time-management.** The pedagogy of online language teaching highlighted the amount of time the online workshops took to prepare. Time-management was highlighted by two participants (13 and 18) as an important skill to develop. Coupled with the fact that these participants did not have experience of online teaching, meant that they did not have a repertoire of tasks to draw upon. The time-consuming nature of task preparation made them realise that they needed to schedule in more time for task preparation than perhaps anticipated.

**Complexity of online management.** The time-consuming nature of task design, the issue of "not being in 'direct' supervision by the teachers, and the freedom to carry out tasks independently" (participant 14) increases the probability of misunderstandings in communication between the language learners and the novice teachers. This quote shows how some of the novice teachers felt under pressure. The complexity of online management was also commented upon by another participant who saw that her role needed to be highlighted to a particular learner.

*I was a motivator also in that I encouraged the participants to regard the workshop as a platform for improving their L2 proficiency and not to prove this. For instance, the A2 participant was nervous as she tried to produce the language 'perfectly' although she was a false beginner. Assurance was a necessary psychological calming tool in assisting her to produce language.* (Participant 3)

This novice teacher starts to take on the role of calming the student; to think of the tasks as improving rather than perfecting language.

### 7.3. Freedom to self-direct one's teaching

**Expectations.** Throughout the online workshops, novice teachers had the freedom to self-direct their own teaching. This was seen by most of the participants as positive in that teacher action was not constrained by a pre-set syllabus and that novice teachers could develop their own teaching practice. However, there was another side to this freedom in that it was seen by one participant as indicating lack of direction.

*And I think that got a tiny bit frustrating because obviously there was times when tutor 1 and tutor 2 were not in the same room at the same time so she [tutor 1] would say something and you [tutor 2] would say something different and we were like which one shall we do, which direction shall we go in? Because again this is completely new for us and I really sympathise with the students that I've never taught before. Those that have a teaching background know how to pick up on these problems. But some of us who have never taught, I don't know what they were going through. They were completely puzzled at some point. I don't know. (Participant 12)*

This participant seems to expect to be told what to do when a problem arises in a situated learning experience, which she felt to be frustrating. Some of the novice teachers may have wanted definite answers to their problems when faced with online teaching. This particular participant did not appreciate the different perspectives of her tutors, which she thought would confuse students with little or no experience. There was also confusion in terms of expectations from the students in Lyon as some of them were not apparently aware of the goals of the online workshops.

*I think a lack of knowing the situation in terms of we were told that the students had to do this course but after speaking to the students I felt like they were as confused as we were in terms of how important this English course actually was. Because I kept getting questions like 'I don't understand why I'm doing this', 'what's going on?' Things like that so that made it difficult for me because I thought I had to deal with the administration and learning how to do this thing that I'd never done before so that was one thing. So I felt that maybe there was a miscommunication between the significance of this course for them. And that had an effect on us giving them these lessons. (Participant 12)*

Clearly, miscommunication was perceived regarding why the online course was taking place and the teacher felt that it was not her role to explain the rationale for the course to her students. She thought that her role was simply to design tasks and facilitate online language learning. In a situated learning environment novice teachers may not comprehend the complexities involved until the course is running. When problems occur, as they clearly did, some of the novice teachers immediately turn to the tutors and expect the 'right' answer to solve their problems. If they do not get a straightforward answer to a complex problem then they may criticise the pedagogical approach and misunderstand the greater demands placed on them in terms of responsibilities.

## **8. Discussion**

### *8.1. Teaching experience and reflection*

Several themes have emerged from this study which can inform teacher educators. The study revealed that when given responsibility, novice teachers react in different ways. Teachers with less experience sometimes tend to feel at a loss. This reaction is in line with Guichon (2009, p. 179) who argues that the capacity to infer from teaching practice might depend on former experience, amongst other variables. Those with more experience were able to reflect on their practice and offer insights into how they would change as a result of that experience. Therefore, although situated learning may present opportunities for critical reflection, teacher educators need to balance situated learning with the backgrounds of the trainees and provide more scaffolding for reflection to those with little or no experience.

### *8.2. Greater responsibility*

The price paid for the partnership between the two institutions translated into greater complexity in terms of there being more responsibility for the novice teachers and their learners. This complexity tended to be more acutely felt by the facilitators who had relatively little teaching experience. Some of the novice teachers were not comfortable

having to solve problems by themselves. When they asked their tutors for help and advice on how to deal with lack of cooperation from their online students, they were perplexed when they did not get straightforward answers to their problems. However, complexity also initiated peer-supported learning outside of class.

The London-based teachers described themselves as having a greater degree of autonomy than they had perhaps previously experienced on other courses. Autonomy was expressed both for themselves as facilitators and for the language learners in France. Critical evaluations from trainees who reflected on what they could have done differently in the workshop to improve communication and learning tended to show more autonomy, whereas the trainees who tended to highlight the limitations of the technology rather than reflecting on their own practice, feeling powerless to affect change in this teaching environment, showed less autonomy.

Banegas and Busleimán (2014) found that autonomy, i.e. studying alone, managing deadlines and one's own learning pace had the biggest impact on motivation in an online pre-service language teacher education programme. This whole aspect of self-management can be seen as empowering for novice teachers who wish to pursue a career in teaching as it gives a sense of freedom but it comes with responsibility. In this current study there was a need for the Lyon students to participate as the London-based teachers had an assignment to write which would depend on the Lyon students' engagement with the course. This dual role which the London-based participants experienced as both learners on a master's course and online facilitators is essential for a deep approach to learning to teach (Evans, 2014).

### *8.3. Schematisation*

One aspect that teachers reflected upon was their freedom to design their own language learning materials. This shows that teachers are starting to schematise, i.e. link theory to practice. Tomlinson (2013, p. 482) supports the notion that in order to cater for students' needs in language learning, teachers need to develop language learning materials and the process of creating these materials helps teachers to engage with the ideas and theories of second language acquisition. Moreover, McNeil's (2013) study showed the importance of the freedom for teachers to create activities of their own for their learners. Therefore, materials design could be one of the triggers to help schematisation of novice teachers.

There are several ways to aid teacher autonomy in a professional environment. One way, as we have seen, is for novice teachers to write reflective journals on what they have experienced. Smith & Erdoğan (2008, p. 89) highlight this approach; however, they also highlight the danger that if these journals are assessed, novice teachers may only be writing what they think their tutors want to read. The processes that the assignment encourages may be more important in terms of fostering deep learning than the product itself (Gibbs and Simpson, 2004-5, p.15). Another theme which became important for teacher autonomy was the freedom to design their language learning tasks. Materials design encourages teachers to reflect on second language acquisition and, thus, develop their own schemas of knowledge. Finally, the results have shown that teachers need the freedom of the institution to solve problems for themselves. This can develop deep learning but may come at a cost as not all novice teachers thrive in this type of situation and so may need extra help and scaffolding techniques.

## **9. Conclusions and implications**

A situated context throws into perspective how important it is for both facilitators and learners to be engaged in the course from the beginning. From a pedagogical perspective, this means novice teachers become acutely aware of their perceived lack of experience and their lack of technological understanding. The more autonomous facilitators found that they engaged more profoundly with their own understanding of language teaching. In this respect, situated learning was beneficial. When a facilitator was not able to draw upon theory and reflect upon his or her own schemas of

pedagogy, the frustration tended to be directed toward dissatisfaction with the course or the technology. The cost of situated learning was the increased complexity of the language facilitation for language learning.

One possible solution to this difficulty is to engage novice teachers in greater reflection. Although reflection through learning diaries is well established, reflection is not entirely obvious to all students. A reflective cycle (e.g. Dewey 1910 in Roberts, 1998) model can be made explicit which focuses attention on 'critical moments'. These crucial moments, which can arise from problems, may focus reflection. Subsequently, problems are seen as inevitable and an opportunity to move from the factual and apportioning of blame to understanding the problem as a pathway into theoretical explanations. As Teasdale (1993) argued, deeper understanding is gained not through a focus on the factual but through implicit understanding of our relationship with factual knowledge.

Online teachers and learners have deep-rooted expectations about the nature of the course. From the facilitators' point of view, explicit explanations regarding what the course entails is necessary. One of the fears novice teachers have is their lack of proficiency with technology. In fact, no expert knowledge of technology was required and yet this was highlighted by one interviewee. The point is that there may be all manner of misunderstandings which can vary from cohort to cohort. However, explicit and upfront explanations of what the course is and is not can help dispel fears. As the online course is supplemented by a face-to-face course in France, there needs to be greater co-ordination between the two institutions. In other words, better links need to be made between online language learning and face-to-face teaching and learning.

This study sheds light on how important the social aspect is for engagement and for communication, which is in line with Compton's (2009) community building and socialisation strategies. Without meaningful interaction between student and facilitator, the tasks may seem like any other exercise. When there is a genuine desire or need to communicate then student output is 'pushed' (Swain 1995). This communication is essential for second language development. When communication is formulaic or when the French learners do not feel that they need to express themselves then engagement tended to drift away. A possible solution to develop links between the two cohorts is to give a personal presentation at the start. With subsequent groups of learners and facilitators, a Skype or recorded presentation was made by the London group of facilitators and some of the Lyon students reciprocated either by email or by Skype.

On an assessment level, the French students need marks to be evaluated for the English course. There needs to be a balance between formative feedback from the facilitators and summative assessment for the French education system. We came to understand how important the possible washback effect is from assessment and how appropriate assessment strategies need to be fully addressed in building professional skills in teaching and language learning. This is of course a fundamental reason for creating a situated learning environment and, despite the difficulties outlined above, our students generally spoke positively about their experience in this module.

## **Notes**

[1] MEEF: Master de l'Enseignement, de l'Education et de la Formation.

[2] ISPEF: Institute des Sciences et des Pratiques d'Education et de Formation.

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#### **Appendix: The questionnaire given to the Lyon based students**

1. L'atelier atteint les objectifs pédagogiques? Expliquez votre réponse.

[Does the workshop achieve the stated learning objectives?]

2. L'atelier faciliter l'apprentissage de la langue anglaise?

[Does the workshop facilitate second language acquisition?]

3. Les matériaux multimédia sont utilisés efficacement pour aider à améliorer et consolider l'apprentissage de la langue ?

[Are the multimedia materials used effectively to foster and consolidate language learning?]

4. Les matériaux engagent l'apprenant?

[Do the materials engage the learner?]

5. Les matériaux pédagogiques donnent-ils l'opportunité à l'étudiant d'apprendre l'anglais par un processus cognitif profond ?

[Do the materials encourage deep cognitive processing of the learner?]

Answers to these questions were not included in the analysis but fed into the novice teachers' own evaluations.