# MATCHES AND MISMATCHES: PRE-SERVICE ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF SCHOOL-BASED TUTORS' FEEDBACK VERSUS THE ACTUAL DISCOURSE OF FEEDBACK

*MAURICIO VÉLIZ CAMPOS*
*Docente Magíster en Enseñanza del Inglés como Segunda Lengua*
*Universidad Andrés Bello*

*ANDREA LUCI ALARCÓN*
*Universidad Católica Silva Henríquez*

## *Abstract*

The aim of this study is to describe English language Pre-Service Teachers' (PST) perceptions of feedback provided by school-based tutors during a practicum course in the context of an English teacher initial education programme, in Chile. Also, the study seeks to contrast the perceptions gathered with the actual delivery of the feedback provided. The participants in this study are three English language PSTs taking their second and final practicum course, together with their corresponding school-based tutors. The data collection methods used comprise (i) analysis of post lesson observation conference between the PSTs and the school tutors; and (ii) individual structured interviews with the PSTs. The results were analysed under five pre-established categories of analysis, namely: (i) the existence of identification of strengths and weaknesses, (ii) aspects of the lesson referred to, (iii) promotion of pre-service teacher opinions, (iv) expressions of sympathy, and (v) suggestions and recommendations. The results show that there are high levels of congruence between pre-service teachers' perceptions of the feedback. However, some mismatches were identified which relate to the identification of weaknesses in PSTs' classroom teaching, the degree of PSTs' active participation within the feedback conference, and in the expressions of sympathy provided by the school-based tutors.

**Key words**: EFL Pre-service teacher, feedback, school-based tutor, perceptions.

## *Resumen*

El objetivo de este estudio es describir las percepciones de estudiantes de Pedagogía en Inglés en su periodo de práctica profesional (profesor de inglés en práctica), en relación a la retroalimentación que reciben por parte de sus profesores tutores de aula. El estudio procura, además, contrastar las percepciones recogidas de los participantes con la estructura de la retroalimentación entregada. Los

participantes de este estudio son tres profesores de inglés en práctica de una universidad de Santiago de Chile, que se encuentran cursando su segundo y último semestre de práctica profesional docente en un aula escolar, junto con sus profesores tutores. Los métodos de recolección de datos son (i) análisis de contenido de las conferencias que tuvieron lugar entre el profesor de inglés en práctica y el profesor tutor de aula, luego de una observación de sus clases y (ii) entrevistas estructuradas e individuales con los profesores en práctica. Los resultados han sido analizados bajo cinco categorías preestablecidas de análisis, a saber: (i) la existencia de identificación de fortalezas y debilidades, (ii) aspecto de la clase mencionados, (iii) promoción de las opiniones de los profesores en práctica, (iv) expresiones de empatía y (v) sugerencias y recomendaciones. Los resultados muestran que existe un alto porcentaje de congruencia entre las percepciones de los profesores en práctica respecto de la retroalimentación y la estructura real de dicha retroalimentación. Sin embargo, se han identificado algunas incongruencias en relación a la identificación de debilidades en las prácticas docentes del profesor en práctica, el grado de participación del profesor en práctica durante las conferencia y en las expresiones de empatía por parte del profesor tutor de aula.

**Palabras claves**: Profesor en práctica de inglés, retroalimentación, profesor tutor de aula, percepciones.

# INTRODUCTION

A vital element in the process of improving the quality of education necessarily involves improving the quality of teachers and their classroom teaching practices (Barber & Mourshed, 2008). Indeed, the OECD states that a decisive ingredient to improve school outcomes - which still lag behind if compared to the other OECD countries - for all Chilean children is to upgrade teaching quality (OECD, 2010). In this respect, Hammerness (2006) states that 'the quality of teachers determines the impact of educational programmes' (p.9). In addition, 'teachers are the single most important input into education' (OECD, 2010, p.10); teachers act as facilitators and a resource for students to draw on, as well as playing the role of controller, organizer, assessor, prompter, participant, resource, tutor observer (Harmer, 2001).

In the case of language teaching, the teacher is also a language model and a provider of language input (Harmer, 2001). According to Richards (2001), 'it is teachers themselves who ultimately determine the success of a [language /

educational] programme'; he further adds that 'good teachers can often compensate for inefficiencies in the curriculum' (p.209).

Due to the many roles that teachers need to carry out in order for effective teaching to result in learning, teaching can become a very complex process where teachers may find the first years of teaching very stressful, and many of those who remain in the profession after those years, will find their original confidence and optimism significantly undermined (Ur, 1991). Malderez and Bodóczky (1999) claim that many novice teachers are not initially equipped with the ability to construct a personal understanding of teaching which is necessary for teacher development. Also, Gordon and Maxey (2000) posit that many of the difficulties teachers encounter during this stage are grounded in the culture of the teaching profession and the conditions of the school as a work place.

In view of the difficulties that teachers encounter, it is vital for initial education programmes to provide teacher development support from the moment pre-service teachers begin teaching in the practicum course. In this respect, Malderez and Bodóczky (1999) argue that 'in this view of initial teacher education, where the central link is classroom practice, the carefully designed practicum has a vital part to play and can no longer be viewed as a luxury add-on' (p.14).

One of the factors that could contribute to a smoother novice teacher transition phase into the profession, as well as preventing teachers from leaving the profession, is to provide pre-service and novice teachers with the necessary support from the person who has the main responsibility of guiding their process of gradual insertion into the profession, the school-based tutor.

This research study originated from one of the authors' experience as an English language teacher supervisor of pre-service teachers at the initial teacher education programme where this study took place.

## 1. AIMS OF THE STUDY

This study aims at describing pre-service English teacher perceptions regarding the post-observation feedback they receive from the school-based tutor. The assumption being that the way in which pre-service teachers perceive post observation feedback, influences their process of reflective thinking about classroom practice (Bailey, 2006), which in turn, paves the way to professional development (Wallace, 1991). The way in which this feedback is perceived seems crucial as it will only be effective if teachers perceive it to be useful (Bubb, 2005). When the feedback is perceived as useful, it can help engage teachers in reflection about their own teaching practices. If the pre-service teacher perceives the feedback to be useless, then its effects can be negative, can cause 'great problems and can damage teachers' confidence' (Bubb, 2005). In addition, the study seeks to contrast the perceptions gathered with the actual delivery of the feedback provided, using five pre-established categories of analysis.

## 2. THE CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

The initial English teacher education programme where this study was conducted is part of a private Salesian university located in the capital city of Chile, Santiago. This University has a tradition of 30 years in the educational field and has recently successfully completed an accreditation process for the third time.

During this practicum course, the pre-service teachers are accompanied and guided by a school-based tutor who is a teacher of English with at least two years of teaching experience at the school.

## 3. LITERATURE REVIEW

**3.1 The role of the teacher**

The literature widely acknowledges the importance of teachers in the learning and teaching process. Indeed, as mentioned earlier, Hammerness (2006) states that 'the quality of teachers determines the impact of educational programmes' (p.9). In the case of language teaching, the teacher is also a language model and a provider of language input.

Since the importance of teachers in the success of educational programmes is undeniable, investing in upgrading the quality of teachers would seem to be an obvious course of action. However, this is no easy task since teaching can become a very complex process and takes teachers 'considerable and varied amounts of time to develop expertise in the complex skill of teaching' (Malderez and Bodóczky, 1999, p.17).

**3.2 Practicum students and beginner teachers**

Most practicum students and novice teachers show a great deal of enthusiasm for experiencing classroom interaction and beginning the teaching profession. Some of these teachers tend to feel very anxious about confronting their first experiences of classroom teaching (Gordon and Maxie, 2000).

Teachers in practicum courses and in their first few years teaching are considered to be at the initial stage of professional development, (Véliz, 2005). At this stage of development teachers tend to envision themselves dedicated solemnly to tasks related to student learning; however, they early on find that teaching involves a wide range of non-academic duties such as completing administrative paper work, collecting money, etc. (Gordon and Maxey, 2000)

During the practicum course and the first year of teaching, teachers tend to view themselves as less happy, less relaxed, less confident, less perceptive, and more controlled than they were before they started teaching (Wright and

Tuska, 1967, as cited in Gordon and Maxie, 2000). In a study conducted by Wright and Tuska, beginner teachers reported that they become more impulsive, less inspiring, louder, less responsive, more reserved, and made school more boring as a result of their early teaching experiences (1968 cited by Gordon and Maxie, 2000). Gordon and Maxie believe that some of these changes are the result of beginners' frustration with the teaching not seeming to result in student learning.

The literature acknowledges that during this transition period in the initial stage of development, novice teachers are faced with particular difficulties when teaching (Bubb, 2005; Gordon and Maxey, 2000; Ur, 1991). Thus, supporting life-long teacher development and providing 'the skills, tools and processes for continuing their own learning of teaching throughout their professional lives' (Malderez and Bodóczky, 1999, p.17) is one way to take care of teachers. Since ways of supporting teacher development is a relevant issue here, it will be discussed later in greater detail.

**3.3 The role of feedback**

In the context of this study feedback refers to the conversations that take place between a pre-service teacher and a school-based tutor after they have both experienced the same lesson from their corresponding perspectives. Normally the pre-service teacher teaches the lesson and the tutor observes, although there might be some co-teaching taking place during the lesson, too. After the lesson the tutor and the pre-service teacher have a conversation about the lesson, which is generally referred to as the post observation conference. Bubb (2005) argues that 'the dialogue that takes place after a lesson observation is vital' (p.42). According to Bailey (2006), this post observation conference is 'predicated on the concept that teachers can improve by gaining feedback' (p.141).

Improving teaching means changing aspects of our teaching that are not working well. Sometimes teachers can become aware of the aspects that are not working well in their teaching and can make changes to improve upon them. Other times, teachers are unaware of these aspects and make no effort to change what may be lacking in their classroom teaching. As Bailey (2006) points out 'knowledge of the results of one's actions is necessary to change those actions. This simple principle underpins the post-observation conference between teachers and supervisors' (p.142).

Although observation feedback can be effective for increasing awareness in teachers as well as engaging them in reflection about their teaching practices, the skill of observation and giving feedback is a very difficult skill to acquire naturally. Therefore, it should not be taken for granted that school-based tutors who have no formal training on observation feedback skills, should know how to provide effective feedback for (pre-service) teachers.

As for the complexities associated with the provision of feedback, Bubb (2005, p.47) argues that 'observation and giving feedback are very complex skills which need training and practice and the important thing to remember is that the whole process needs to be seen in the context of raising pupil achievement, and thus it needs to be useful for the teacher'.

The lack of effectiveness in observation and delivering feedback that is not perceived as helpful by the (pre-service) teachers can result in teachers not engaging in reflection about classroom practice to improve their teaching and impede the awareness process that leads teachers to make changes to improve their teaching. Bubb (2005) warns about this issue by stating that 'bad practice in observing causes great problems and can damage teachers' confidence' (p.47).

How should school-based tutors provide feedback so that it is effective and supports pre-service teacher development? Bubb (2005) has suggested that

good post-observation discussion should meet the following requirements. It should be helpful, prompt, accurate, balanced, related to objectives set for review and directly actionable by the teacher, and conducted in a quiet and private space.

In 1995 in a study conducted by Blase and Blase, successful and unsuccessful post-observation conferences in general education were analysed. Successful conferences were those that both participants reported as non-threatening and growth oriented, that provided opportunities for teachers to talk about their work in a non-threatening context, where suggestions were offered in a positive manner, and mutual goals were emphasized (Blase and Blase, as cited in Bailey, 2006). Such conference procedure produced discussions that were 'more collaborative, non-evaluative, and reflective than did the less successful conferences' (Bailey, ibid p.146).

## 4. METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is immersed in the interpretivist paradigm in that the researchers rely on the participants' views of the phenomenon studied and thinks of the world as a highly complex and ambiguous reality, where multiple individual realities coexist, (Cresswell, 2003). As far as methodology is concerned, this study seems to be more readily aligned with a qualitative methodology since it aims at gaining a deeper understanding of the phenomenon through the analysis of the participants' feedback conferences and structured interviews.

**4.1 Methods**

In this study the instruments used were the structured interview and conference observation. The structured interview was preferred on the grounds that the instrument gathers data using a common format, which simplifies the process of analysis, coding and comparison of the data. Although this type of interview introduces some rigidity to the interview, the aim is for all interviewees to be given exactly the same context of questioning.

It is important to note that the interview questions were based on suggestions made by Bailey (2006) in her book Language Teacher Supervision on how language teacher supervisors might offer more effective feedback to practicum students. The orientating questions were:

1. Does the feedback your school-based tutor gives you help you identify your strengths and weaknesses as a teacher?

2. Do you find the feedback conferences focus on aspects of the lesson that are important to you?

3. Do you often get a chance to express your opinions and feelings about the lessons you teach with your tutor?

4. Do you feel your tutor understands you when you feel insecure about your teaching?

5. Do you go away with a clear perspective of what you need to change in your teaching, after the feedback conference?

**4.2 Procedure**

The interview was conducted by the lead researcher with each of the three pre-service teachers that collaborated in this study. The data were collected on

three different occasions in three secondary schools in Santiago. One of them was a private bilingual school, the other was a subsidized school, and the third was a state-run school. The data were gathered over the course of a month in October of 2012 in the locations where the pre-service teachers were undertaking their final practicum course which was due to end by December of the same year.

It is important to note that a few minutes before the interviews took place, the pre-service teachers had received feedback from their school-based tutors regarding a lesson they had just taught and that the tutor had observed. Pre-service teachers were asked, when answering the interview questions, to refer to the specific feedback that they had just received as well as to the feedback they normally received from their school-based tutors. For the purpose of this research, the feedback conferences that took place between the pre-service teacher and the tutor, prior to the interviews, were audio recorded and analyzed using a content analysis procedure.

## 4.3 Objectives and Research questions

The general objective that this study seeks to achieve is to explore possible matches and mismatches between English language pre-service teacher perceptions of feedback provided by school-based tutors and the structure of the feedback. The specific objectives that derive from the main objective are (i) to analyse how pre-service teachers perceive school-based tutor feedback; (ii) to analyse how school-based tutors structure their discourse during observation feedback conferences; (iii) to contrast pre-service teachers' perceptions of school-based tutor feedback with the feedback provided, hence to identify possible matches and mismatches.

The research questions that derive from the overall objective of the study are the following:

1. What are pre-service English language teachers' perceptions of school-based tutor feedback?

2. How do school-based tutors structure their discourse to pre-service English language teachers in post observation feedback conferences?

3. What is the degree of congruence between pre-service teacher perceptions of feedback and the manner in which school-based tutors structure the feedback?

## 4.4 Sampling

The sample of participants in this study corresponds to a non-probabilistic type of sample as participants were selected by the lead researcher rather than using a random selection criteria. Within the subsidiary types of non-probabilistic samples, the type of sample used in this study is a convenience one. This sampling procedure was opted for since pre-service teachers undertaking a practicum course were under the lead researcher's supervision.

## 4.5 Participants

As far as the specific sample is concerned, the three pre-service teachers were two females and a male. The three of them had been undertaking the practicum course for almost two semesters. For the purpose of the research the participants will be referred to as Practicum Student (PST 1, PST 2, and PST 3, henceforth) and the school-based tutors will be referred to as Tutor 1, Tutor 2 and Tutor 3, henceforth.

Regarding the school-based tutors, all three of them were females. Tutor 1 was a twenty six year old who studied English language teaching at a private university in Chile. Tutor 2 was thirty-six years old and had studied English Language teaching at a state University in Chile; she had eleven years' experience teaching English and five years' experience as a practicum student

school-based tutor. Tutor 3 studied English language teaching at a Language Institute; she was forty-five years old and had seven years' experience teaching English and one year experience as a school-based tutor for English language practicum students.

**4.6 Ethical issues**

As far as the ethical issues involved in the study are concerned, all the participants were duly informed about the nature of the study. They were reassured of the confidentiality of the information provided and that it would be used for strictly research purposes. The participants voluntarily agreed to take part in the research and were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time and for any reason. Participants signed a consent form stating their willingness to participate in the study.

**4.7 Data analysis**

As a means of analysing the data gathered in the feedback conference observations in this study, a content analysis procedure was applied. This procedure was applied in order to analyse the data in this qualitative study as it seemed the most pertinent because it enables the categorization of the data and simplifies the process of handling the information.

The first step was reading the feedback conference data to identify categories based on the five questions in the structured interview. The second step was to read the data again and classify each statement made under one of the categories of analysis. Most of the data were incorporated into one of the categories; however, there were statements that were not included as they did not seem to correspond to any of the pre-established categories.

## 5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this section the data gathered is analysed and discussed based on five categories of analysis that largely stemmed from the specific objectives. The five categories of analysis that intend to ultimately respond the research questions of this study are: (i) the existence of identification of strengths and weaknesses (ii) aspects of the lesson referred to (iii) promotion of pre-service teacher opinions (iv) expressions of sympathy (v) suggestions and recommendations.

The analysis of the data consists of three levels of analysis: (i) a discussion of the analysis concerning the perceptions of pre-service teachers of school-tutor feedback in relation to the five categories; (ii) a discussion of what  the school-based tutor stated in the post-observation conference in relation to the above mentioned categories of analysis; and (iii) a discussion contrasting the results of the previous two analyses, thus establishing matches and mismatches between how pre-service teachers perceive school-tutor feedback and how school-based tutors structure the discourse when delivering feedback.

In this section, the analysis and discussion revolve around the results obtained from the administration of the structured interviews conducted to pre-service English language teachers concerning their perceptions about the post-observation feedback they received from the school-based tutors.

### 5.1 Perceptions of pre-service teachers of school-based tutor feedback

*5.1.1 The existence of identification of strengths and weaknesses*

With respect to whether or not there is an identification of PSTs' strengths and weaknesses in relation to classroom teaching in tutor feedback, it is interesting to note that all three participants unanimously stated that the identification of strengths and weaknesses in feedback exists. PST 1 mentioned that, in

feedback, the tutor always mentioned aspects of her classroom teaching that were effective, as well as aspects that needed improvement. PST 2 mentioned that the feedback she received from her tutor helped her perceive a continuous improvement in her teaching. PST 3 pointed out that, on many occasions, he had become aware of his weaknesses as a classroom teacher as a result of tutor feedback.

*5.1.2 Aspects of the lesson referred to in the conference*

As for this category, two out of the three pre-service teachers perceive that the feedback focuses on aspects of the lesson that they find are important to them. However, PST 1 points out that the feedback does not focus on aspects of the lesson, but rather, on the PST's particular performance during classroom teaching and further adds that although she would like to receive specific feedback on warm-up activities for example, this does not occur in the conferences.

*5.1.3 Promotion of pre-service teacher opinions and feelings*

On this plane it must be noted that PSTs 1 and 2 stated that they often get a chance to express their opinions and feelings about the lessons they teach in feedback conferences; however, PST 3 points out that in his case, he does not express his opinions or feelings about aspects of the lesson that did not work well because of fear of receiving negative feedback from his tutor. In this respect, PST 3 states the following: 'I guess it's normal not to want to open up to dialogue because of fear of receiving negative comments'.

*5.1.4 Expressions of sympathy during the conference*

PST 1 perceived that her tutor definitely understood her when she felt insecure about her teaching because she believed they both shared the same opinions about classroom management, an area where they both had

difficulties dealing with student behaviour. PST 2, on the other hand, perceived that her tutor understood her because she and the tutor practised a kind of co-teaching style in the classroom where they jointly made decisions about the teaching procedures in the class. PST 3 did not give a definite answer to the question as to whether or not the tutor understood him when he felt insecure about his teaching. Instead, he made efforts to justify the tutor's behaviour. When referring to whether the tutor understood him when he felt insecure about his teaching, PST 3 mentioned that 'she can't be aware of what I'm doing all the time. She can't realize if I'm insecure or not'.

*5.1.5 Suggestions and recommendations during the conference*

Finally, as for the perceived existence of suggestions and recommendations in the conferences, it must be pointed out that all three PSTs believed to have a clear perspective of what they needed to change in their teaching after having received feedback. PST 2 mentioned, for example, that although receiving feedback can be stressful, it is nevertheless useful; PST 2, on the other hand, believed that her own attitude towards receiving feedback gave her a better perspective of aspects of her teaching she needed to change. In this respect she mentioned the following: 'I have prepared myself to follow all kinds of advice from all the teachers'.

It is interesting to note that a great majority of the answers from the PSTs indicate positive perceptions towards school-based tutor feedback. Although the PSTs perceived the feedback around the five categories of analysis to be mainly positive, the elements in the structure of tutor feedback that nurture these perceptions are still to be discussed.

**5.2 Analysis of school-based tutor feedback**

In this section the discussion focuses on how school-based tutors structured their discourse, with a particular focus on the pre-established categories of analysis. The discussion revolves around the same five categories mentioned.

*5.2.1 The existence of identification of strengths and weaknesses*

Regarding the first category of analysis it can be observed that although the words strengths and weaknesses were not explicitly mentioned in the discourse, all three tutors did make reference to what pre-service teachers did well during the lesson, as well as aspects of the lesson that pre-service teachers did not manage sufficiently well. None of the tutors assigned a section of the conference to establishing strengths and weaknesses; rather, references to them were made as they appeared fairly naturally in the conversation. All in all, all three tutors made reference to positive aspects of teacher performance during the conferences.

As to what pre-service teachers did well during the lesson, all tutors made reference to positive aspects of teacher performance. Tutor 1 referred to how well the pre-service teacher had executed the stages of the lesson and how well classroom management had been conducted. Tutor 2 also made reference to how well the pre-service teacher had executed the stages of the lesson, and added: good use of the board, good explanation of language points, reference to students' previous experiences, effective instructions for students. Tutor 3 made more comments than the other two about what the pre-service teacher had done well during the lesson. It is interesting to note how Tutor 3 explained to the PST how his actions had affected student behaviour, which points to a metacognitive awareness process that the tutor leads the pre-service teacher into. The tutor made the pre-service teacher aware of what he had done well and the effects of his actions on students. An example of this is when tutor 3 remarked: 'when you make students aware of the differences [in

the structures of language] without telling them, you are letting them discover' or when the tutor said 'you are starting to help students that you know don't do well … you have demonstrated to yourself that it is possible for all students to learn…'. In addition, Tutor 3 highlighted one of the pre-service teacher's strengths by congratulating him on his tolerant and patient attitude towards students.

In relation to the pointing out of weaknesses of PST performance during the lesson, Tutor 1 mentioned that the pre-service teacher should keep in mind that students learn in different ways and some will require more attention from the teacher than others. It is important to mention that Tutor 1 made this comment only after the pre-service teacher asked for feedback about what aspects of her performance needed improvement. If the PST had not asked for this feedback, the tutor would have probably omitted the comment. Tutor 2 dedicated a section of the conference to dealing with aspects of the pre-service teacher performance that needed improvement and commented on two aspects; (i) how the pre-service teacher should improve error correction techniques on students' spoken language; and (ii) spoken language mistakes from the pre-service teacher. Although the two comments were clearly stated, the discourse used by the tutor when giving this negative feedback was insecure and hesitant and lacked directness. This can be observed as the tutor said 'Mm, there were a couple of things when [pause]… I need to [pause]… I, I cannot let it pass, yeah, something that we cannot forget. One is that…Er, [pause] Mm… somehow, I know that it's difficult to correct, or to say that something is wrong when students are in front of the class, but it's necessary …'. Tutor 3 referred to aspects that needed improvement at different times during the conference making reference to errors in the use of language and the need to give instructions in English. In this respect, Tutor 3 was direct and referred straight to the point when delivering negative feedback showing no hesitation or doubt. This can be observed when the tutor said 'a sentence

mentioned the word 'tired' and you said 'this is a verb in past form'; it's an adjective' or when she stated '… I insist that you give instructions in English. Start with a few, even if you translate it afterwards'.

*5.2.2 Aspects of the lesson referred to*

In relation to the second category, during the conference school-based tutors made reference to aspects of the lesson such as student behaviour, students' previous knowledge, classroom management, timing, student engagement, teaching pronunciation, seating arrangement, teacher questioning students and giving instructions. Interestingly, all three tutors in their conferences referred to the aspect of identifying and supporting weak students during the lessons. Tutors 2 and 3 commented on students having a kinaesthetic learning style and how teachers should provide for it when preparing activities. In addition, two out of three tutors mentioned aspects of EFL methodology such as teaching grammar implicitly.

*5.2.3 Promotion of pre-service teacher opinions*

Regarding the third category of analysis related to promotion of pre-service teacher opinions, it is interesting to note that there was absence of tutor questioning PSTs about the lesson. In all three conferences PSTs' interventions were limited to comments like: 'OK', 'sure', 'right', 'yes'. Although they did make several attempts at contributing to the conversation with their opinions, tutors seemed to ignore these comments and continued developing their own ideas. In the case of tutor 3, however, in several occasions PSTs expressed opinions about the lesson and in some cases the tutor listened carefully often making follow-up comments and agreeing with the PST by saying 'yes', 'Mm', 'exactly' and 'sure'.

*5.2.4 Expressions of sympathy*

Expressions of sympathy is the fourth category of analysis and is understood as the act of placing oneself in the place of another, in this case, the tutor placing himself/herself in the place of the PST.

Although there were numerous expressions of tutors 'liking' aspects of what PST did during class, there were few expressions of sympathy found in their discourse. On one occasion, after giving negative feedback, Tutor 2 mentioned that like the PST, she also had the same difficulty when it came to dealing with correcting mistakes. In this respect she said: 'I know that correcting mistakes is difficult because it's difficult for me, too'. On a couple of occasions Tutor 2 tended to sympathize with the PST by reassuring team work and making her feel that she was not alone and that she could count on her support. In this respect the tutor said: 'we need to encourage him' and 'we need to check'. In the case of Tutor 3, there was some listening to PST opinions about the lesson and delivering expressions of agreement with those opinions.

*5.2.5 Suggestions and recommendations*

In respect to the fifth category of analysis, there were remarkable differences in the way tutors approached this issue. Tutor 1 made a general statement that can be associated with this category about how teachers should not forget about those students who have slower learning rhythms than the rest of the class. However, there is total absence of suggestions in terms of how and when to deal with these students in class, and it is unclear whether the PST is lacking this behaviour or not since the statement is a general truth and therefore may not be intended directly to the PST's performance.

After delivering negative feedback about how the PST managed error correction in a speaking exercise with students, Tutor 2 suggested a technique for correcting errors advising the PST on how to deal with that situation by

explicitly explaining the technique of paraphrasing. In respect to this the tutor indicated: 'repeat the same sentence, using the correct words'. Tutor 2 also suggested the future recycling of a procedure conducted by the PST. In addition, the tutor reinforced a positive aspect of PST performance and suggested the repetition of that behaviour. This can be noted when the tutor said: 'I encourage you to continue doing it'.

As far as suggestions and recommendations are concerned, on a couple of occasions Tutor 3 gave suggestions by expressing how she would have proceeded with the situation in question herself. In so doing, the tutor offered the PST an alternative choice or a different perspective on how to deal with that issue. However, in other aspects of the lesson where teacher performance was considered weak by the tutor, there seemed to be no negotiation and the tutor's discourse was rather direct in this respect. On two occasions Tutor 3 made strong recommendations on how the PST ought to proceed in relation to giving instructions in English during class and dedicating time to new vocabulary every lesson. Indeed, the tutor used a modal verb to say: 'I think you must …' and was even more direct when stating 'I insist you give instructions in English'.

The discussion of the analysis of the results so far has dealt with how PSTs perceive school-tutor feedback on the one hand,  and, on the other, how school-based tutors structure their feedback. These two dimensions have been based on five categories of analysis that emerged from the interview questions. The discussion that follows intends to reveal, on the basis of the five categories of analysis, matches and mismatches between pre-service teachers' perceptions of the feedback and the presence or absence of indicators in tutor discourse that may underpin these perceptions. It attempts to contrast the information and suggest possible implications.

## 5.3 Contrastive analysis of the PSTs' perception of feedback and feedback structure

*5.3.1 The existence of identification of strengths and weaknesses*

In the feedback conference data gathered, tutors referred to actions that the PSTs performed during classroom teaching that, according to them, were effective for student learning. In other words, they referred to things that the PSTs did right in the classroom. It seems that all three PSTs perceived receiving this information as helpful for identifying their strengths as classroom teachers.

Moreover, tutors referred to actions that the PSTs performed during classroom teaching that, according to them, were not effective for student learning. In other words, they referred to things that the PSTs did not do right in the classroom. It seems that receiving this information was perceived by PSTs as helpful in identifying weaknesses or aspects of their teaching that needed improvement. All three PSTs perceived that the feedback they received from their tutors helped them identify their weaknesses as classroom teachers. However, in the case of PST 1, there seems to be a mismatch since PST 1 perceived the feedback to be helpful for identifying her weaknesses as a classroom teacher, yet in the feedback delivered, there is absence of reference to aspects PST 1 needed to improve. This might be an indication that the PSTs are able to identify their weaknesses not only through tutor feedback but also through classroom teaching experience.

In general terms, as hinted earlier, PSTs perceived feedback to be helpful as a means to identify their strengths and weaknesses as classroom teachers. However, in the analysis of the feedback conferences there is evidence that tutors referred to aspects of teaching that are considered strengths more than to those considered as weaknesses. This may suggest that tutors could be having difficulties at the time of delivering negative feedback (Bailey 2007). In

addition, it is interesting to note that Tutor 1 was the only one to avoid giving negative feedback. This might indicate that less experienced tutors could have more difficulty in delivering negative feedback than more experienced tutors (Bailey, 2007).

*5.3.2 Aspects of the lesson referred to*

During the feedback conferences school-based tutors focused on a wide range of aspects of the lesson they had observed and PST 2 and 3 perceived that the feedback conferences focused on aspects of the lesson that were important to them. PST 1, however, perceived that the feedback did not always focus on aspects of the lesson that were important to her since she had a special interest for warm-up activities and these were never discussed in the conferences.

Although there seems to be no mismatches in this category of analysis, the information above may indicate that in general, all aspects of the lesson are important for PSTs at this stage of development. It may also indicate that tutors may not necessarily be aware of which aspects of the lesson PSTs are interested in, in which case, it would be advisable for PSTs to be able to manifest which aspects of the lesson they wish to refer to in feedback conferencing.

*5.3.3 Promotion of pre-service teacher opinions*

In respect to this category, there seems to be a mismatch between what PSTs perceive and tutor feedback. On one hand, PSTs 1 and 2 perceive that they often get a chance to share their opinions and feelings about the lessons they teach with their tutors, yet in the data gathered, there is absence of PST active participation in the conferences in relation to how they experience the teaching situation. PST participation in the conference was mainly as active listeners since there was absence of tutor listening or questioning to promote PST opinions. Moreover, when PSTs made attempts to express opinions about the

lesson, they were disregarded by the tutor. The perceptions of PSTs 1 and 2 may be grounded on the belief that the possibility of sharing their opinions and feeling about the lesson with their Tutors exists outside formal conferencing.

On the other hand, PST 3 perceived that he did not often get a chance to express opinions and feelings about the lessons; however, during feedback conferencing PST 3 expressed opinions about the lesson he taught in several occasions. In some cases the tutor listened actively, allowing for PST talk often making follow-up comments and agreeing with PST opinions. This perception could be based on the belief that there are not enough opportunities to express opinions about the lesson during conferencing. This may indicate a need for a more interactive type of conferencing where tutor's active listening and questioning skills could help PSTs engage in reflective talk about the lessons they teach.

*5.3.4 Expressions of sympathy*

Yet again there seems to be a mismatch here between what PSTs perceive and the evidence in feedback data. PSTs perceived that their tutors understood them when they felt insecure about their teaching. However, in the data gathered there were few expressions of sympathy found in tutor discourse. This perception could be based on the assumption that because Tutors were once pre-service teachers themselves, they are able to understand how insecure PSTs may feel about teaching. An implication of this could be that tutors do not necessarily understand PSTs' insecurities about teaching just because they were once a PST themselves. Understanding and sympathizing with the feelings of PSTs when first experiencing classroom teaching may require some degree of tutor reflection on their own experience as PSTs and their role as supporter and guide in the process of pre-service teacher development.

*5.3.5 Suggestions and recommendations*

All three PSTs perceived that after feedback conferencing they had a clear perspective of aspects of their teaching that needed change. In the data gathered, Tutors 2 and 3 made some suggestions about how to modify teaching that was in need of improvement. In the case of PST1, however, there seems to be a mismatch since there was an absence of suggestions and recommendations on behalf of Tutor1 on how to deal with aspects of teaching that needed improvement, yet PST1 perceived to get a clear idea of how to modify these aspects of her teaching. This perception could be based on the belief that introducing modifications and changes to improve teaching should be done on the PSTs' own account based on his or her experience without the support of the tutor. An implication of this may be that modifying aspects of teaching that need improvement may occur not only as a result of tutor suggestions and recommendations, but also as a result of PSTs own reflection on the teaching situations they experience.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

A crucial element in the process of improving the quality of education involves the quality of teachers and their classroom teaching practices, since they play a vital role in the learning process of school children. In particular, this study focuses on the teacher at the final stage of the initial teaching training process, or seen from another perspective, on the teacher as a beginner teacher, since research into teacher education has shown that the first year of professional life is a critical stage for new teachers. The literature suggests that reflective thinking about classroom practice can serve as one of several initiatives towards professional competence in classroom teaching and that feedback from school-based tutors can support the process of reflective

thinking of the first experiences of classroom practice and support teacher development.

The findings show that the degree of congruence between the feedback delivered by school-based tutors and the perceptions of PSTs of the feedback being useful is for the most part high. However, some mismatches were found in relation to the identification of weaknesses in PSTs' classroom teachings, the degree of the PSTs' active participation within the feedback conference, and the expressions of sympathy provided by the school-based tutors. The implications of these findings could suggest that the feedback process could benefit from tutors developing skills in the areas of giving negative feedback, active listening and questioning, and sympathizing with PSTs.

The findings of this study suggest that tutors are able to offer effective feedback based on their own initiative; however, the effectiveness of that feedback could be enhanced by tutors developing and applying specific techniques and skills designed to better support PST's reflective thinking about classroom practice and help pave the way towards professional development. In light of the results of this research it seems sensible to suggest future studies involving school-based tutors undertaking the development of educational mentoring skills focused primarily on the aspects mentioned above in order to enhance the process of professional development both for PSTs and school-based tutors.

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