

## Novice-Teacher Challenges in Materials Selection, Development, and Use

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Article information	
<b>Abstract</b>	This study investigated the factors that lead the Novice Teacher (NT) towards selection, development, and use of learning-teaching materials for classroom use. The participant in this study was a teacher trainee who had completed four years of the teacher training program in the university. She was randomly selected. The researcher (supervisor, evaluator, and mentor) was a participant in this qualitative study. The study first aimed to evaluate NT's role as critical and creative needs analyst, materials developer, and monitor and assessor of student learning. Then the study went on to examine if criticality and creativity were evident in the decisions of the novice teacher during preparation and teaching. The study concluded that while NT fulfilled most of her teacher-roles admirably, one factor; experience, let her down on crucial decisions. Likewise, the lack of experience and factors such as the mix-up between disciplinary knowledge and classroom practice expectations affected the effectiveness of creativity and criticality in decision-making.
<b>Keywords</b>	novice teacher, teaching practice, creativity, criticality, teaching materials
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### Introduction

There has been much written about on the challenges Novice Teachers (NTs) face while teaching. Some NTs seem to find their way into their roles (Astuti, 2016), while others prioritize immediate responsibilities or prefer to develop coping strategies (Clark & Byrnes, 2012). NTs, defined in the literature as those under five years of teaching (Kim & Roth, 2011), or under three years of teaching (Huang et al., 2019), undergo the pressures of forces associated to the roles they perform within

the school setting. Astuti (2016), in her single-subject study in the Indonesian context, found that, in essence, her novice teacher-subject identified herself in four main roles (Harmer, 1991): teacher as facilitator of learning and classroom manager, teacher with special roles, teacher as negotiator, and teacher as peer. Of these four roles, the one she found of great interest to her was the fourth and final role, which was “teacher as peer” (p. 60). The small difference in age between the learner and the novice teacher was the reason, the writer says, the subject “could earn the students’ trust” (p. 61), and this was considered an asset in her early years of teaching as she felt student-teacher rapport was of the utmost importance.

While the literature seems inundated with studies categorizing roles perceived by NTs (Astuti, 2016; Harmer, 1991), the types of challenges they face (Karataş & Karaman, 2013,) and differences in the way novice and experienced teachers perform or react to challenges (Akbari & Tajik, 2009; Farrell & Bennis, 2013; Gatbonton, 2008; Hosseini et al., 2017; Mehrpour & Moghaddam, 2018), not much has been written about how creativity and criticality would play important roles in decisions NTs make when preparing for lessons: the materials they select and develop, and the teaching procedures they deploy. Conceptual papers describing lessons that were inspired by criticality and creativity have however been published (Waterman, 2020). The decisions that NTs make would eventually lead to success or failure of lessons. While lesson failure is to be accepted in the context of NTs, there must be ways for NTs to be mentored effectively so that they can be more aware of mistakes and can learn quickly from them. The main role of teaching practice supervisors or teacher mentors would then be to maximize learning of the novice teacher.

Feedback is an important element in teacher supervision, and this research specifically addresses the effects of immediate and delayed feedback, just as in some previous studies (Gurkan, 2018). It is always difficult to provide immediate feedback to a novice teacher after he or she has performed unsatisfactorily. There is a fine line between the provision of positive feedback and what may be considered demoralizing, something detrimental to the psychological well-being of NTs. Some things that go wrong in classrooms can be the consequence of an ineffective curriculum, or how we as teacher trainers teach them. Sometimes it is also the result of how the limited reasoning capacities of the novice teacher lack time to visualize in-depth aspects, such as the principles, theories, approaches, or methodologies in learning-teaching, and as such these NTs move towards conclusions prematurely.

This was quite clearly observed in this study, where there was confusion in relation to what is considered creative and critical from the perspective of the novice teacher and what actually these two terms actually mean in pedagogic sense.

Two research questions (RQs) will be responded to in this study:

1. From the materials perspective, how effective was the novice teacher in her role as critical and creative needs analyst, materials developer, and monitor and assessor of student learning?

2. To what effect was criticality and creativity evident in the teaching of the novice teacher during the mentorship process?

Research Question 1 will be focused on the teacher roles that were fulfilled by the NT and evaluated to reveal the effectiveness of those roles, while Research Question 2 will seek answers to the degree of criticality and creativity within the thoughts of the NT while at one-on-one conferences with the Supervisor/Mentor, and in the revision processes during mentorship.

### **The Literature on NTS Creativity and Criticality in Teaching**

Bailey (2006) discussed the importance of the socialization of NTs “into their professional discourse” (p. 244), which is also regarded as the crucially important transfer of “values and norms of a certain group” to those who intend to join it (Kim & Roth, 2011, p.11) through “observation, imitation, and practice” (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 2004, p. 55). Teacher training institutions must realize, however, that knowledge from lecture halls, while it can be considered a part of the socialization process, would never be enough. It is therefore also necessary to stress upon the Language Teaching Community, or LTC (Arikan, 2019), the importance of considering pre-service intervention in teacher education to be just as important. Learning by NTs is considered “a slow and complicated process” (Jin et al., 2021), so while they have undergone teacher training, some NTs still lack confidence, so they try to reflect on how they were taught by their teachers, and imitate them, thus revealing they still “need help with general pedagogical knowledge” (p.11). There has been much written about the unpreparedness of NTs and the excessive amount of responsibilities they hold, with researchers like Halford (1998) referring to teaching as “the profession that eats its young” (p. 34). Lack of concern for the psychological well-being of NTs is well documented. Fantilli and McDougall (2009), in their study, revealed that NTs

were often let down by the school and system as they were assigned mentors who lacked experience.

In the United States, mentoring systems for beginner teachers are not well designed and even beginner teachers (with less than three years' experience) are required to mentor the new ones, and as such, teacher attrition is severe (Watkins, 2005), with around 20-25% leaving the profession within the first three years of teaching. Merrow (1999) did not mince words when he claimed that the reality of the situation is that “we train teachers poorly and then treat them badly” (p.10). Worse than attrition could be the dire consequences of those who stay, despite the fact that they have lost all motivation to teach. This could potentially have terrible consequences on the learner and learning.

The present study was conducted on a trainee who had completed all coursework at the university and was undergoing teaching practice prior to graduation. She will be considered as Novice Teacher (NT) in this research. In many countries, mentorship after graduation (during the first three years of teaching) would be considered mandatory. This is a relatively new development as mentorship after job placement was only introduced in the United States in the 1980s (Clark & Byrnes, 2012). Research on NTs has revealed that many consider themselves to be in “survival mode” (Astuti, 2016, p. 47) and that they benefitted most from “mentoring which helps meet immediate needs” (Clark & Byrnes, 2012, p.15) rather than on time spent on reflections and analysis. The demands that come from rapid changes to ELT eco-systems (Karataş & Karaman, 2013) will add to the pressures that could build on under-prepared NTs, hence the tendencies of NTs to focus purely on immediate needs.

Research has moved away (indicating a paradigm shift), from the 1970s, from researching teachers' behaviors, to researching teachers' thinking (Erkmen, 2014), indicating that “reducing teaching to a set of discrete, observable behaviors that could be characterized as effective teaching left unanswered questions” (p.100). Researchers now believe that successful mentoring or supervision can help NTs think better, which in turn will be crucial for their mental lives (Walberg, 1977). Present-day research has attempted to pinpoint some reasons as to the problems NTs face and what they do to cope with these challenges, by way of analyzing their thinking.

Teachers' beliefs are known to have been established long before they even start teaching. Some teachers respond positively to the horrors of learning under bad teachers, with Farrell (2019) stating that he “would never teach the way many of my grade-school teachers went about teaching me” (p. 32). But others may take the negative route under duress and desperation and seek solace in the warmth of old but inappropriate ways (such as those they experienced as learners). Student expectations (they want to learn grammar the traditional rule-based way) and the syllabus (they want to study for the exam) (Erkmen, 2014) can lead the enthusiastic teacher away from consolidating on their beliefs built in lecture halls (which are right) and lead them into short-cuts which are pedagogically flawed and only achieve short-term gain.

Some of the teacher roles discussed in the literature suggest that teachers fulfill the following: Role as motivator (Dörnyei, 2001), needs analyst, materials developer, and monitor and assessor of student learning (Brown, 1995; Richards & Lockhart, 1994), and as controller, prompter, participant, and resource (Harmer, 2007). This research will limit the investigation of the subject's performance in roles within the framework defined by Brown (1995) and Richards and Lockhart (1994).

Criticality and creativity, as they are an integral part of the investigations, will be defined within the context of this study. The term criticality (Banegas & de Castro, 2016) is fairly new in use, and has traditionally been linked to “critical thinking” and “critical pedagogy” (p. 455). In the context of the novice teacher, critical thinking would refer to “a complex processes of deliberation which involves a wide range of skills and attitudes” (Cottrell, 2005, p. 2), where decisions on what to believe in or do are made. Critical thinking is linked to critical pedagogy, where the aim of the teacher (in this case, the NT) would be to move beyond just thinking and proceed to the “creation of possibilities for action” (Banegas & de Castro, 2016, p. 456). Criticality would refer to reflection and evaluation which involves considering issues from multiple perspectives and where self-critique is important. In the context of this study, that would refer to the ability of the novice teacher to evaluate options that lead to decisions.

Creativity, is still difficult to define because “detailed articulation of the process” (Amabile, 1996, p. 33) is still not discovered yet. However, limited definitions have been derived, with Maley and Bolitho (2015) describing creativity as a process

in which something new is discovered, or something new is seen in old ways, or simply when new connections are discovered. From the perspective of pedagogy and in the context of this research, that would raise some important questions like: 1) Was the decision that led to selection of material whimsical, based on impulse (under the influence of trends) or, 2) was it due to immature thought? An added dimension to an illustration of creativity within the classroom context would be that by Stevick (1980, p. 20) when he says, “we should judge creativity in the classroom by what the teacher makes possible for the student to do, not just by what the teacher does.” This would define what creativity is and differentiate it from gimmickry from the pedagogical context. NTs, usually being young of age, could have a fascination for new developments (like applications which can be used to enhance teaching, video material extracted from YouTube, songs, or games which can be utilized for language learning) that would stir their imaginations and make them consider these for teaching. Sometimes their decisions in selection, based on intuitions, may be flawed, and cannot engage learners.

Past research focused almost exclusively on describing role fulfillment and the anxieties and challenges of NTs. This study will address the gaps in the literature by giving in-depth focus on exploring the roles of the novice teacher from her role as creative and critical developer and user of materials, and how this eventually affected her teaching. The critical and creative thoughts of the NT during mentoring conferences and the consequent revision and improvement of the lesson (something never described in past literature) will also be reported.

## **Method**

Qualitative methods were used in this study. Details of the participant, the instruments used, data collection methods, and data analysis are described below. The researcher was participant (Probst, 2016) in this qualitative enquiry. The researcher (faculty member) was also mentor and evaluator to the subject in his role in this research. The establishment of trust between the researcher and a participant completing teacher pre-service training from the same university would be advantageous to this study. This type of research would build essential bridges between the relatively theoretical world of teacher preparation and the practical world of learners and classrooms (D'Souza, 2014).

## **Participant**

This is a single-subject study and selection was random. The researcher (in his role as Teaching Practice Supervisor – Mentor and Evaluator) selected randomly, one of his 14 supervisees as participant. All his supervisees were of the same age (average 23 years) and had undergone eight semesters (four years) of study on the B.Ed. TESL program. All the supervisees never had any exposure to teaching practicum within the four years as this only took place after the completion of the four-year course. However, some courses with a pedagogical slant like the Teaching of Writing or the Teaching of Listening and Speaking had micro-teaching components where students practice-taught in front of their peers. The trainees (labeled NTs in this study) were attached to secondary schools for 12 weeks.

## **Instruments and Materials**

The Framework for Posing Questions to Support and Challenge (Nevers & Melrose, 2016) was used as a guide by the researcher to stimulate thought of the subject at post-lesson conferences and interviews. Another instrument would be the framework which would be used to investigate the roles the subject performed; as needs analyst, materials developer, and monitor and assessor of student learning (Brown, 1995; Richards & Lockhart, 1994)

The unpublished Analytic Score Sheet and Comment Sheet produced by the Faculty of Educational Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia, which were the standard instruments used by Teaching Practice Supervisors, were also used, and completed forms analyzed. Student Post-lesson reflection forms and supervisor field notes were also sources for data collection. For the interviews, a semi-structured interview protocol was used for data collection. The main materials used by the subject, the lesson plans, and teaching materials were also analyzed.

## **Data Collection**

Data collection was done through content analysis of lesson plans and teaching material, data from semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, supervisor evaluation and comment sheets, post-lesson conferences, as well as from student post-lesson reflection forms and stimulated recall interviews.

Classroom observations were done twice a week, 80 minutes each time over 12 weeks. The subject submitted copies of lesson plans and reflection forms after

each lesson. Semi-structured interviews were carried out throughout the 12 weeks (at least ten minutes before and after the lesson). Stimulated recall interviews were used when direct intervention which would lead to revision in another class was carried out. The Framework for Posing Questions to Support and Challenge (Nevers & Melrose, 2016) was used to help the researcher retrieve the best possible data from the semi-structured interviews, post-lesson conferences, and stimulated recall interviews.

### **Data Analysis**

Data were analyzed using content analysis, inductive thematic analysis, and deductive thematic analysis. Content analysis and deductive thematic analysis were used to respond to Research Question 1 (RQ1), the emergent themes categorized based on the framework proposed by Brown (1995) and Richards and Lockhart (1994).

Data for Research Question 2 (RQ2) were analyzed through inductive thematic analysis. The major themes were fleshed out from the data, particularly from the Stimulated Recall Interviews (SRI) and then analyzed.

### **Findings and Discussion**

**RQ 1:** From the materials perspective, how effective was the novice teacher in her role as critical and creative needs analyst, materials developer, and monitor and assessor of student learning?

Data gathered to respond to RQ 1 were analyzed through deductive thematic analysis based on the framework by Richards and Lockhart (1994) and Brown (1995). This framework is best suited to the present study as it has the potential to support the intense focus on teaching materials, from the conceptualizing aspects by the Novice Teacher (NT) to its use in classrooms. Therefore, the three major aspects of teacher roles (analyzed in terms of creativity and criticality) derived from the abovementioned framework will feature: 1) the teacher as needs analyst, 2) the teacher as materials developer, and 3) the teacher as monitor and assessor of student learning. Data were retrieved from the following sources: i) Lesson Plans (LP) and teaching materials (TM); ii) Supervisor Evaluation and Comment sheets



(SES); iii) Student Post lesson reflection forms (SPLRF); iv) Supervisor field notes (SFN); and v) semi-structured interviews (SSI).

In the following section, the findings and discussion of these three roles will be discussed:

### **1) The Novice Teacher as Needs Analyst**

The discussion on this will not be based on the overt types of needs analysis but rather NTs inert awareness of the needs of the context surrounding her, based on elements which are more covert, such as instincts. From the 24 lesson plans of which content analysis was carried out, it was found that there were several sections of the lesson plans like the background of students, behavioral objectives, rationale for action (which appeared within sections like the set induction, lesson development, and conclusion) that revealed to the researcher that the awareness of intuitive needs analysis was evident:

i) Throughout the 24 lesson plans the phrase “students are pre-intermediate level in proficiency” (LP) was evident in the “background” section.

ii) In four of the 24 lesson plans, in the rational section, NT had indicated why open-ended responses were avoided in comprehension questions – by using justifications like “students will take too much time in completing the exercises as they would struggle to piece together a grammatically correct response” (LP).

From the perspective of “criticality,” this was an interesting revelation. The researcher assumed that there was evidence of reflection and evaluation, where NT seemed to have viewed issues from multiple perspectives (Banegas & de Castro, 2016). NT seemed to have analyzed her learners’ preferences when she said that she believed the selection of the song *Paradise* by *ColdPlay* was done because she believed young adults loved this song and she “has heard them sing it while passing by groups of them at recess time” (SPLRF). This was backed by her assertion that she (when she was a secondary school student) was thoroughly engaged when her Form Four teacher used a pop song in class. She said she even “sang it after class and was so happy that day” (SSI).

There was, however, one instance out of the 24 lesson plans where she failed as needs analyst – she “allowed emotions to overcome good sense” (SPLRF). NT was an ardent supporter of the Aston Villa Football Club and as the theme was on Famous Sports Personalities, she brought in realia (a jersey of the Aston Villa Club) for set

induction and asked if anyone knew of the club. There was “absolute silence” (SFN). NT described this as “absolutely embarrassing” as she “assumed that even if students were fans of other clubs, they would still know of hers” (SPLRF). She was wrong. As there was no response, she named the club and then moved on to a reading passage on one of the players. Because she had already planned the entire lesson on this theme (and there was no chance of an aborted lesson plan), NT and the students “plodded through the entire lesson” (SFN) as there seemed no motivation on the part of students to take part in discussions. NT thought that this was one of her worst moments in class as she admitted “one wrong move and I was staring at defeat, after only three minutes in class” (SSI). The supervisor evaluation showed a B- and in the comments he had written “know your students better – obviously at this age they only follow their clubs and the other big ones in the league” (SES). The researcher felt that this was the only occasion where “NT had let her emotions takeover” (SFN) and fared badly as needs analyst.

Although still a novice teacher, the overall evaluation of NT as needs analyst shows that NT was aware of this crucial role and fulfilled it satisfactorily on most occasions.

## **2) The Teacher as Materials Developer**

The subject fulfilled this role admirably, stating that “exposure to lectures and workshops on materials development while at university” convinced her that “textbooks may not always work, and some materials in them cannot stimulate students” (SSI). NT revealed that she lacked confidence in the use of textbooks as she “cannot visualize a teaching flow within the lesson” (SSI). This was echoed by Pulverness (1999, p. 5) when he said teachers, especially novice ones, will find it difficult to reanimate “texts which are dead on page.”

The Form Two Textbook was not appropriate as “the activities were boring and there were too many exercises” (SSI). NT used words/phrases like “cannot motivate learners,” “out of date,” “uninteresting,” and “too many exercises” (SSI), and this convinced the researcher that NT was able to discriminate between options available, which was important in her role as materials evaluator. In this instance, NT was thinking like the expert teachers in the Mukundan et al.’s (2020) study who explicitly stated their confidence in alternatives (DIY materials) rather than in textbooks.

The next part of the investigation led to NT's role as selector and developer of materials. The evidence on this reveals that the NT is generally inexperienced as selector and developer. The following details reveal evidence on two instances of classroom teaching which suggest this:

i) For the theme Pets at Home, NT had downloads of very colorful photographs of dogs and cats of various types (enlarged and mounted on A4 boards). As this was for Set Induction activity (five minutes or less), there was only one question from her: What type of cats and dogs are these? (Even the researcher only knew two – the dog was a German Shepherd, while the cat was Persian). None of the students responded, so NT wrote their breeds (e.g., German Shepherd) on the board. NT later records: "I wish I had actually used dogs which were actors in movies or on TV" (SPLRF) and later, at the post lesson interviews confided that she actually had "plans to download unusual pets (like newts) but thought it would be even more difficult." The supervisor had viewed this as "unfortunate as unusual pets like snakes and newts would make better discussion" (SFN). The supervisor elaborated at post-lesson interview that pictures of dogs "photographed as security dogs at the airport or as guides leading the blind might have helped trigger discussion" (SSI).

ii) The Internet was also NT's biggest resource for materials and for one lesson (Listening and Speaking) which had focus on *Saying Sorry*, she had an entire six-minute clip extracted from a sit-com. The students watched the entire episode, only to view one instance where an apology was made by one of the actors. The supervisor's comments stated: "interesting maybe, but more of a gimmick, lacks practicality" (SES), while the reaction of NT at post lesson interview was "I didn't realize that the clip was more than five minutes; I should have checked" (SSI). The supervisor then suggested that she have "various shorter clips of people apologizing in different contexts, but this would be time-consuming to produce" (SSI).

While NT thought it was selection of material which was wrong, the researcher on the other hand thought that it was satisfactory but "the development of the material from plan to teaching was flawed because of inexperience" (SFN). Having dogs as visuals (as in case (i) above) for set induction was good, but getting learners to name the dogs was a bad strategy – it seemed like a test on knowledge! German Shepherds have been seen at airports and on television accompanying police raiding parties (and most students know about this) – this should have been "exploited by NT" (SFN).

### **3) The Teacher as Monitor and Assessor of Student Learning**

In this research, monitoring would refer to the informal prompts, revisit of things learned, etc., while assessing would refer to the feedback on performance which comes in the form of tasks.

The evidence, especially from the 24 lesson plans, shows that the biggest concern of NT was in ensuring there was assessment carried out throughout the lesson:

i) All the 24 lesson plans analyzed had an average of three developmental stages and almost every stage comprised a task which was on a hand-out.

ii) The analysis of tasks (for the developmental stages of the lesson) revealed that there were at least 10 items, usually multiple choice, or Yes/No.

The interviews revealed that NT's perception of tasks for each developmental stage was influenced by her concerns and anxieties of "not fulfilling the behavioral objectives of the lesson" (SSI). This was reflected in her comments in the SPLRF where she stated "The lesson objectives have been fulfilled as students have successfully completed the tasks" (SPLRF). NT seemed to have the notion that explicit assessment was mandatory for each development stage (so as to fulfill the corresponding behavioral objective). This of course came at the expense of her role as monitor – "there were very little use of prompts, cues, and revisits of things covered previously – teaching proceeded in linear fashion towards task completion – assessment" (SFN). The classroom observations confirmed this. In many of the SES, there were frequent comments made on the obsession of NT towards worksheets – "reduce the number of tasks," "this could have been done orally and informally," and "try not to make assessment bigger than learning-teaching" (SES).

**RQ2:** To what effect was criticality and creativity evident in the teaching of the novice teacher during the mentorship process?

An intense focus on lessons and NT's performances in them would be better at concluding to what extent criticality and creativity was evident when she performed in class. NT would have been considered to have high levels of criticality if decisions were made after considering options from multiple perspectives and if self-critique was evident before decisions were made. From the perspective of creativity, NT would have achieved high levels if whatever she did resulted in her learners performing remarkably well. This of course would refer to the ability of NT to distinguish between that which is glitzy-gimmickry with that of creativity from the

perspective of pedagogy (which means creativity that leads to positive outcomes in students' learning).

RQ 2, utilized data from all sources: i) Lesson Plans (LP) and teaching material (TM); ii) Supervisor Evaluation and Comment sheets (SES); iii) Student Post lesson reflection forms (SPLRF); iv) Supervisor field notes (SFN); and v) semi-structured interviews (SSI). In addition, the researcher added another data gathering strategy, the Stimulated Recall Interview (SRI). The SRI was essentially something similar to inquiry which has deconstruction influences. The researcher believes that, like the commonly used deconstruction processes used in literature and art, teacher training can similarly benefit from this. The researcher attempted to find out how lesson plans were created, what thoughts evolved through the process of creation, and also how the sum of parts created the whole. For the purpose of responding to RQ2, data from the two lessons observed (Class 1 – original lesson and Class 2 – revised lesson), both taught by the subject in this study were dealt with in-depth. The supervisor's comments for revision from observation of the lesson in Class 1 were used to revise the plan for Class 2.

The background of the lesson would be useful to the reader before findings are discussed. The NT had intentions to teach listening comprehension, and she used a song as main material. As NT taught two classes at the same level, she taught Class 1 first, then had consultation on revisions before teaching the same lesson in Class 2. The lesson framework for Class 1 is outlined below:

#### Summary of the Lesson Framework:

- Aim: To teach listening
- Objectives: 1. Students are able to identify missing words in songs  
2. Students are able to discuss the message behind the song
- Set induction: Teacher brings pictures of girls looking very unhappy. Teacher probes learners on what problems these girls could be having  
(NT has extracted Photos of kids in distress from the Internet)
- Stage 1: Students get Handout 1 – Song Lyrics, and then the song is played (audio version), students listen  
Teacher asks general questions like: Who sang the song? What's the title?

Stage 2: Students fill in blanks with missing words (There are ten blanked-out words in the lyrics)

Stage 3: Song is played again

Students get Handout 2 and answer the Questions:

- i) Can you relate to the person in the song?
- ii) Is this a boy or a girl?
- iii) Is there a problem this person is facing?
- iv) What is the paradise that this person is seeking?
- v) Have you ever been in such a situation?

Conclusion: Teacher finishes by asking students what advice they would give to a person like this.

Immediately after class, post-lesson, a Stimulated-Recall Interview (SRI) was carried out with NT. The Researcher's questions and NT's responses were as follows:

Researcher: I liked your set induction. Where did you get those visuals (photos of girls in despair) and what guided selection?

NT: Thanks. I got it free from istockphotos.com. I wanted the set induction to connect them to young adult problems (like the feeling of a lack of freedom).

Researcher: What were your reasons for selecting this song?

NT: The song I selected was very popular among the students – they seem to sing it in school even. So I thought that it would be good, something familiar, something they like – it would be good for motivation, also good for discussion later – it would engage my teenaged learners.

Researcher: Did you have a look at the lyrics? Would your learners be at ease with ideas such as this? Don't you think the ideas are far too abstract for Form 2 learners although they are able to sing it? Don't you think this contributed to the lack of participation for the second task? I quizzed her about the song (the central idea)

NT: Yes, this is about a girl who is unhappy and is seeking Paradise (mostly in her sleep and in her dreams). Yes I think it is too abstract. Yes the second task failed because of this. Also I had too many questions on the handout.

Researcher: What were your reasons for removing the ten words in the lyrics for listening comprehension (Handout 1)?

- NT: No particular reason for selecting these words. This was just a listening task. If they got it wrong they may not be listening.
- Researcher: Why did you play the song after the first Handout was given out to learners?
- NT: I thought it would be a positive move. Learners can familiarize with the task at hand. I was thinking of time constraints all the time. They needed to work on two task sheets.
- Researcher: But what about the element of surprise, the pleasure in finding out after it is played? Aren't songs made for entertainment? Why push the task instead of allowing them to enjoy it first?
- NT: (She nods). I was only worried about time
- Researcher: Are you aware that there is a video version of the song? Did you consider that as an option?
- NT: Yes, I am aware of it – it doesn't seem to reflect the seriousness of the girl's dilemma and it's rather childish – the elephant running away from the zoo, etc.

The findings from data (as above) and Stimulated Recall Interview (SRI) and Student Post-Lesson Reflection Forms (SPLRF) indicated the following:

i) The NT can sometimes confuse the glitzy-gimmickry effects of materials with creativity. As was emphasized by Stevick (1980), a creative moment is when a teacher uses something that gets students working on a creative response. In this case the song was selected by the teacher. While it has positives (NT's students loved the song and were humming it), it cannot be exploited much in terms of tasks (the students were unresponsive at Task 2, Stage 3). This was because "Paradise in this song is rather abstract" (SFN). NT liked the song and knew her students liked it, but never really delved deeply into it (nor studied the lyrics in depth) to see if it was workable in a class of fourteen-year-old pre-intermediate level learners. But while she erred in the decision (confusion set in as she could not differentiate between what was creative and what was creative and workable), she was spot-on in another decision-making process. When asked if she was aware of the song in video version she replies, "Yes, it is about an elephant (someone inside an elephant suit escaping from a zoo and using public transport, etc. and finding his friends. A bit childish, definitely is not suitable for my young adult students" (SRI). The researcher believed this was important, as it indicated NT's sense of criticality; she was at a very important stage of planning for the lesson and weighing the options: video or audio

version of the song, and she decided against the video version because it would derail the effect she wanted to create as “the video version was childish” (SRI) and would take away the focus on the “intense feeling of hopelessness which young adults sometimes go through” (SPLRF). NT wanted “Paradise as evoking thoughts of young adult learners so that they can share some similar feelings within them” (SRI). The researcher believed that using the video version of the song “would have completely derailed the core themes NT was trying to exploit” (SFN). The associations would have been weak (song and themes).

ii) NTs’ knowledge gathered from lecture halls at university had become a hindrance when within classroom settings. Confusion arose because some knowledge needed to be tested; others needed to be revisited as often as possible so that there would be awareness that book knowledge does not supply rules to everything. In the context of the above lesson, NT’s strategy of distributing the worksheet before playing the song was because she believed, according to what she learnt, that “allowing for task familiarity can help learners respond to tasks better” (SRI). NT had never considered the element of surprise as important.

iii) NTs sometimes forget to prioritize; something which the researcher believes is an important aspect of criticality and which can negatively affect creativity. This inadequacy (lacking in ability to prioritize) could possibly be linked to adherence to conventions or past experiences which are obstructions to thinking. When asked why she had ten blanks for students to fill, she said “I usually have ten items in a task” (SRI) and when pressed further on this, the reasons for selecting the particular words she said she had “no particular reason for selecting these words. This was just a listening task. If they got it wrong, they may not be listening.” When the researcher asked if this could be the reason why she lacked time in class, she said “it could be the reason. I always felt uneasy if I had only five words omitted in listening tasks, but I believe now that ten maybe too many, because even after listening they were anxious and trying to remember some words that they missed while listening” (SRI).

The next step within the procedure of this study led NT and the Researcher (in the role of Supervisor/mentor) into conference. The objective of this would be to bring about behavioral changes in NT that could possibly lead to more consolidation of learning, in a new setting, and in another class. The following is the summary of the one-to-one conference that was held post Stimulated Recall Interview (SRI). NT, after the conference, agreed to the following:



- i) She said she'll keep her SET INDUCTION
- ii) Stage 1: She will dim the lights of the classroom, tell her students to just relax, and play the audio.
- iii) She will switch on the lights and then ask students about the title and the singer/band and discuss the main themes of the song (without handout).
- iv) Stage 2: She will distribute the lyrics (Handout 1) with only five words removed (these words would very strongly relate to the story), and they listen again.
- v) She will then get students to check the answers.
- vi) Stage 3: She will play the video version of the song and ask learners to sing along.

NT performed in the other class the same week and the results showed a greater awareness towards criticality and creativity.

While she had kept the set induction, she changed the procedures: she played the song after dimming the lights of the classroom. As soon as this was done, the students “had smiles on their faces and some even clapped!” (SRI). NT was able to critically examine these new procedures. “Unlike the previous class, the students had no handout to look at, and they were already humming to the song” (SRI). NT had only five words removed from the lyrics for the students to fill, and this was easily done by the students. “I ensured that the missing words were not too close together, and they were less anxious and finished the task in half the time (as compared to the previous class” (SRI). Then NT surprised the class by playing the video version of the song. They sang along. In NT’s Lesson Plan, she had written under rationale for action, “It is hoped that with the use of the video version, it will be another way of surprising the students and engage them, as well as provide more input on themes” (LP). This action of NT using the video version of the song not only indicated movement from being less critical to being more critical (she wanted something to reinforce gaps in meaning/themes that some learners may have been experiencing), but she also showed that creativity can come with greater versatility in material use. When asked about her overall feelings about the lesson, NT said that she “could see the importance of decision making, even a slight change makes a huge difference” (SRI). She stated that because of the limited use of worksheets, she was “able to exploit the activities more, be more relaxed on time, and be more confident” (SRI). She also said that “the video version of the song, although originally thought to be

“silly” (SSI), was useful in this pre-intermediate class as it helped in meaning making – seeking paradise, the theme in the song maybe (sic) a bit too abstract” (SRI).

### **Conclusions and Implications**

The processes of socialization of NTs (Hall, 2018; Mellow, 1999; Watkins, 2005) into their community should take place soon after they finish university, as early as in the period called the practicum. It is advantageous for supervisors/mentors at practicum to reinforce the idea in NTs that disciplinary knowledge (discipline-specific skills taught in lecture halls) cannot be cast in stone (Maley, 2019). Findings from RQ1 clearly revealed that while NT was considerably effective as needs analyst, materials developer, and monitor and assessor of student learning, there were instances when creativity and criticality were compromised. The inexperience of NT and her over-reliance on emotions, intuitions, and impulsive behavior were not helpful in decision making.

Another conclusion that can be made from this research is that the novice teacher (NT) is in “survival mode” like Astuti’s subject in the Indonesian context (2016, p. 47). Perhaps critical decision-making processes of NTs are severely affected by this sense of helplessness. Decision making is an important aspect of the teacher’s practice. In the early years, as seen in the decision-making processes of this novice teacher, there is a tendency to be drawn towards the glitzy-gimmickry lure of materials on the Internet and confuse it with what is expected of materials which are creative, and which should lead to positive outcomes in classroom learning-teaching.

Another revelation in this research that is interesting is that knowledge derived in lecture halls does not necessarily contribute to effective practice in the early years. It would take years of hypothesis-testing of classroom teaching materials and procedures to prepare the teacher for robustness in thinking that leads to appropriate decisions. In fact, as revealed in this research, the lack of criticality involved in decision making can sometimes come about from the destructive intrusions of disciplinary knowledge acquired in lecture halls. Thus, while NT in this study was aware that songs entertain, she nevertheless believed task familiarity that was often emphasized in pedagogic-based courses was more important. As a result, she distributed the hand-out (song lyrics) before the song was played to *familiarize* her learners to the task. Unfortunately, this took away the element of surprise (students

knew what was going to be played) and therefore, surprise was sacrificed for task familiarity. Disciplinary knowledge can come in the way of critical decisions; therefore, mentors need to correct this in the early years.

### About the Author

Jayakaran Mukundan, Ph.D., retired as professor at Universiti Putra Malaysia where he served for 29 years and is currently Honorary Professor. He also supervises doctoral students at Taylor's University, Malaysia. He has won several awards at university level for teaching. In 2013, he won the highest award, The National Award for Academic Excellence in the Teaching Category. As a researcher, he works mainly on ELT materials investigations. His research on Teaching Materials (Textbook Evaluation software) has won him Gold Medals at the British Invention Show, London (2009) and at IENA, Nuremberg, Germany (2010).

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