The use of Concept Checking Questions in the EFL classroom: Reflections on the CELTA experience

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Applied Linguistics for Language Teaching

2016/2017

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List of abbreviations

CELTA – Certificate in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages

CCQs – Concept Checking Questions

PPP - Presentation Practice Production

IH - Interaction Hypothesis

IRF - Initiation – Response – Feedback

EFL – English as a Foreign Language

CLT - Communicative Language Teaching

SLA – Second Language Acquisition

L2 – Second Language

L1 – First Language

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Abstract

This study explored the use of Concept Checking Questions by CELTA trainers and trainees and the effects this technique has on the learning opportunities at pre-intermediate and upper-intermediate levels of English proficiency. The goal of such an exploration was to highlight the necessity for EFL teachers to decide when (and when not) to use Concept Checking Questions and to understand how different types of CCQs - display and referential questions – might affect learning opportunities of their students. It was hoped that the understanding of these issues would enable teachers to make better choices in terms of questions used in class; not only when (or when not) use them but also which type of CCQs should be selected for the benefit of learners. This research drew on the CELTA experience which included a reflective journal with CELTA documents enclosed, four interviews with trainee teachers and a CELTA trainer as well as the academic knowledge on the topic gained during the MA. The critical reflection revealed various circumstances when CCQs are necessary and when they are less vital. The views were mainly opposing in terms of relevance of CCQs to students at different levels. Such beliefs may have been different due to the academic backgrounds of interviewees, amounts of experience in terms of teaching English and their opinions on certain matters. Moreover, it was explored that negative aspects of asking CCQs could have been reduced by asking more referential questions which are proved to have a positive impact on learning a foreign language. Implications for professional practice are provided for trainee teachers, CELTA trainers and EFL teachers concerning the use of CCQs and the way they affect language acquisition.

1. Introduction

1.1 Why concept checking questions?

Interactions between teachers and students is an important factor in the process of teaching and learning. There are various aspects of classroom interaction which were encountered during CELTA; however, the asking of questions by teachers attracted the attention of the researcher as it is an inherent part of every language lesson. Concept checking questions, which are also known as CCQs, have become one of the fundamental parts of the CELTA training round the world. They are used to highlight the essence of the meaning of the target language taught during a lesson and verbally check students' understanding of new vocabulary, grammar points, communicative functions or even instructions presented in class. Trainers devote an extensive amount of time to familiarise trainees with the nature of concept checking questions regarding different types, stages during a lesson when they should be asked and various correct forms, but also poorly constructed ones in order to call trainees' attention to their importance and possible effects on students' language comprehension. It was surprising to me as a trainee that a pedagogical rationale of such an essential part of the training was never explained by the trainers. Moreover, when explicitly asked about it, they did not appear to know the answer. Nevertheless, they were very competent in terms of explaining the rules of designing CCQs. These are multiple, but perfectly understandable and clear; however, when it comes to practice, trainee teachers are faced with many obstacles which are not always obvious at first. Therefore, formulating effective concept checking questions turns into a challenge which is usually accompanied by the questioning of their effects in terms of learning a language and their use in general.

1.2 Background of the study

CCQs first appeared in the Presentation Practice Production (Anderson, 1982) method which was promoted by the CELTA trainers. The lessons I observed and the ones I prepared were always based on PPP teaching method. There are two main types of CCQs presented during the CELTA course: display questions and referential questions (Long and Sato, 1983) and these will be referred to in this study. With regard to the concepts checked by CCQs, lexis and grammar tend to be rather conceptual so the idea of abstract and concrete concepts will be explained as well due to the multiple theories about their nature and the way students acquire them.

The communicative approach (Nunan, 1987) is promoted by the CELTA trainers as the most appropriate for the acquirement of language in EFL contexts. The rationale behind this approach given by the trainers elaborates on the idea that language learning opportunities are enhanced through being directed to communicate real meaning. Learners are likely to activate their natural strategies which enable them to acquire and learn how to use the language. Moreover, students are likely to manipulate and modify the language so negotiate the meaning through communication. Nevertheless, negotiation for meaning seems to be highly restricted in student-teacher interactions as the interaction pattern Initiation – Response – Feedback (Sinclair and Coulthard, 1975) commonly occurring during the asking of concept checking questions by teachers is extremely teacher-centred and might expand teacher talking time which is criticised by supporters of the communicative approach. However, it may depend on the type of CCQs asked as referential questions are likely to stimulate genuine interactions between students and teachers. Yet, even in teacher–student interactions might arise signals of comprehension difficulty which call for confirmation and comprehension checks as well as clarification requests (Pica, 1987). Negotiation along with the teacher's

questioning might bring certain linguistic forms to learner's attention so the input becomes more salient and it stimulates students' output and checks their comprehension at the same time. Both these theories are overlaid by the Interaction Hypothesis (IH) (Long, 1996) which sees the language acquisition as possible through different interactions in the classroom and face-to-face communication. It is also in favour of negotiated interactions which are believed to promote language learning opportunities. Moreover, the concept of Comprehensible Output (Swain, 1985) will be focused on as a matter closely related to the Interaction Hypothesis and relevant to acquiring and producing language.

1.3 Research aims and data

In reference to the brief introduction of the relevant points in the literature which will be further reviewed in the Literature Review section, I will discuss several issues related to CCQs which I came across during my CELTA training and which seem to be confusing for me as a newly qualified teacher of EFL. First of all, I will examine the use of concept checking questions in class at pre-intermediate and upper-intermediate levels of English. I found this issue interesting as students at different levels would react differently to the teacher's concept checking questions and trainee teachers as well as the trainers had different views on when to use them and when to skip them. These problems draw on the other issue which is the impact of CCQs on learners and the learning opportunities in class.

The data in the form of critical reflections was collected during teaching practices when I and other trainee teachers taught lessons to pre-intermediate and upper-intermediate learners of English and from observations of experienced teachers teaching learners of the same levels. These reflections were also supported by relevant documents and knowledge gained during my MA. Moreover, interviews with three trainee teachers and one CELTA trainer were carried out a week after the CELTA course has finished.

1.4 Organisation of the dissertation

This study is composed of seven chapters in total. The aim of the first chapter is to introduce the study by outlining the chosen topic and describing key features of the CELTA course. Chapter two reviews relevant literature which involves theories, such as the Communicative Language Teaching and types of CCQs in relations to the IRF interaction pattern and genuine interactions. Interaction Hypothesis in connection with negotiation for meaning, Comprehensible Input and Comprehensible Output are discussed next. Later on, abstract and concrete concepts are presented. Another part of the literature review is dedicated to the relevant literature on reflective practice. Chapter three presents the research questions and chapter four describes and justifies the methodology employed to conduct the research concerning the collection of the data and analysis. Chapter five critically reflects on the chosen topic and research questions. Chapter six summarises the main points of the argument and the seventh chapter presents implications for professional practice and recommendations for EFL teachers, CELTA trainers and trainees.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to review the literature related to the major areas of the research in the present study. The first part will focus on the Communicative Language Teaching as the approach within which concept checking questions are used in the CELTA. The next sub-sections will review two interaction patterns which are accompanied by different types of CCQs. As the asking of questions requires interaction, the Interaction Hypothesis and related theories will be analysed in terms of SLA and CCQs. Finally, the last section will examine concrete and abstract concepts in relation to CCQs.

2.2 Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)

This approach, promoted by CELTA trainers, is organised on the basis of communicative functions which learners are to express through the use of grammatical structures in communication (Canale and Swain, 1980). It is characterised by the distinction between two competencies:

- *a communicative competence* which refers to the relationship between knowledge of grammatical rules and knowledge of the rules of language use.

- *a communicative performance* which is seen as the realisation of two types of knowledge mentioned above and the interaction when utterances are produced and comprehended (Campbell and Wales, 1970; Hymes, 1972).

If communicative competence, which is gained by learners first, is to lead to communicative performance, students have to be able to take part in meaningful communication in realistic L2 situations. The accomplishment of this principle poses a serious challenge to programme designers and teachers because activities and interactions must be of a communicative character to engage and motivate learners (Canale and Swain, 1980). Nunan in his study (1987a) examined patterns of interaction which appear within CLT and he revealed that the most frequently occurring was the traditional pattern of classroom interaction (non-communicative) rather than genuine interaction (communicative) which facilitates the acquisition of L2 and is characterised by social interaction, the unpredictability of utterances, creativity, purposefulness and authenticity (Morrow, 1977). These types of interaction pattern will be analysed further in connection with different kinds of concept checking question asked by teachers in class.

2.3 Patterns of interaction and Concept Checking Question types

EFL and ESL teachers are supposed to prepare their pupils to use the target language outside the classroom. According to Nunan (1987b), the language used in the classroom might seriously affect students' abilities to communicate in the real world. It is crucial for teachers of English to evaluate the classroom interaction patterns and assess their effectiveness in terms of learning opportunities. Even though CCQs are mainly used by teachers to check students' comprehension, the particular type of CCQs might have different effects on the classroom interactions and in a result, L2 learning (Hernandez Gonzalez and McDonough, 2015).

2.3.1 Initiation – Response – Feedback (IRF) in relation to display questions

According to Nunan (1987a), a traditional pattern of classroom interaction is thought to be non-communicative. This model was designed by Sinclair and Coulthard (1975, 1992) and it analyses the spoken discourse of the classroom which is different from other forms of spoken discourse as it is highly and formally structured and conducted by one dominant individual: the teacher. This model concentrates mainly on the interactions between individual students and the teacher. Speech acts discovered in the classroom were defined regarding their functions, and as a result, they were categorised. *Discourse Model* consists of four elements – *transaction, exchange, move and act*. The original model included also the fifth component of *lesson* which has been dismissed since. Only a part of this model is relevant to the character of this study; therefore, the focus will be put on the *teaching exchanges* which express the teacher's intent and can appear in the form of informing, checking, eliciting and directing. These exchanges include *initiation moves*, *response moves* and *follow-up moves*. It is a teacher-led interaction where the teacher asks a question, the student answers/reacts to it and the teacher evaluates this response. This basic exchange structure is thought to be non-communicative and is widely criticised by Wells (1999) and Ohta (2001) as the classroom

discourse is influenced by the teacher asking plenty of display questions (Long and Sato, 1983)

which request information already known. Different studies (e.g. White and Lightbown, 1984)

show that most of the questions asked by EFL teachers are display questions which require

short and mechanical responses, lack of meaningfulness in communication and hinder turn

taking so negotiation for meaning (Wright, 2016). In conclusion, these types of questions are

counterproductive and non-communicative (Thornbury, 2000). The next section analyses an

opposing type of interaction and different kind of CCQ which usually occur together.

2.3.2 Genuine interaction and referential questions

As mentioned before, there are different types of interaction patterns which happen in the

classroom, but the most relevant to this study is the interaction between teachers and

students. It is usually asymmetrical as the teacher is the one who is in charge and leads the

interaction. They are the arbiter of knowledge and uses dialogue as a tool for asking,

demonstrating, explaining or correcting. Most of the time, this takes the form of an IRF

structure. However, sometimes teachers can be engaged in more equitable types of dialogue

in which different views are considered and encountered. Such an interaction fosters student's

production of L2, negotiation for meaning and dialogic character of the open-class

communication. Teachers aim at asking genuine, stimulating and open-ended questions which

are meaningful to learners and similar to those asked in real-life situations (Mercer and Dawes,

2008). Asking more referential questions (Long and Sato, 1983), to which the questioner does

not know the answer, may promote stimulation as these types of CCQs are proved to generate

longer and more syntactically complex responses which are meaningful to the learners. Also,

the number of speaking turns is increased, and therefore, interactional restructuring takes

place (Brock, 1986). Referential questions might share some elements of authenticity as they

yield extended conversations and have communicative purposes (Thornbury and Slade, 2006;

Lei, 2009). However, their authenticity should be considered in terms of interaction in the classroom rather than outside (Cullen, 1998). It is worth acknowledging that there is a number of studies in which referential questions did not facilitate students' production whereas display questions engaged students in a meaningful discussion (Wu, 1993; Shomoossi, 2004; David, 2007). As the term "interaction" is the key word regarding CCQs, the Interaction Hypothesis and related concepts, such as Comprehensible Input, Comprehensible Output and Negotiation for Meaning will be discussed next.

2.4 Interaction Hypothesis and Learning Opportunities

Oral interactions in which the language learners participate are believed to be one of the main ways of being in touch with the target language and acquiring it at the same time. The role of interaction in classroom acquisition was called by Allwright (1984) 'the fundamental fact of pedagogy' (p.156) which leads to a view that teaching is considered as interactions which supply learners with learning opportunities. Interaction Hypothesis (Long, 1996) promotes two major claims regarding the role of interaction in second language acquisition:

1) Comprehensible input is essential for L2.

2) The interactional structure of conversation can be modified in case of a communication problem what helps to make the input comprehensible for language learners. (Ellis, 1991)

Comprehensible Output is closely related to Comprehensible Input; therefore, it is considered as an essential part of second language acquisition and has been included in this study.

2.4.1 Comprehensible Input and Concept Checking Questions

Input is the spoken language to which learners are exposed so in this study these are different types of CCQs. It refers to the Krashen's theory of Comprehensible Input (1977) which claims that learning may take place when students are exposed to language that is a bit more

advanced than their current level of language. One of the criticisms of this theory points out the difficulty of determining students' current levels of grammatical knowledge. Besides, it is always the input provider (teacher) who determines comprehensibility whereas the most important matter is whether the students comprehend the input. One of the most crucial characteristics of input to second language learning is that it differs from the input spoken to proficient speakers. The teacher's speech is slower, clearer, simpler in terms of grammar, vocabulary and delivery (Gass, 2015). It is essential for teachers to modify their speech so that is it appropriate for the interlocutors' level, especially at lower levels of English proficiency. Also, the teacher's input is related to the acquisition of incidental language. When asking display or referential questions, students are exposed to incidental language which is not meant to be taught explicitly but it is likely to be picked up by learners and used as a result of this action (Rodgers, 2015). Language used in class is usually planned by teachers in advance. However, this process is usually only thought through by experienced whereas inexperienced teachers are likely to write down what they are going to say (Griffey and Housner, 1991). Comprehensible Input is closely connected with the concept of output as it is usually affected by the former.

2.4.2 Comprehensible Output and Concept Checking Questions

Relying on the input as a reason for language learning is not sufficient. It calls for giving students opportunities to be actively engaged in producing the language in order to acquire it. To account for this, Swain proposed the Comprehensible Output Hypothesis (Swain, 1985) which claims that language production 'may force the learner to move from semantic processing to syntactic processing' (p. 249). Therefore, the output might have a significant role in the improvement of morphology and syntax (Swain, 1995). It is worth mentioning the pushed output which is a subset of output as it refers to language produced by students who

are pushed to deliver a message that is not simply transferred, but it is conveyed in a precise, coherent and appropriate way (Swain, 1985). Learners are pushed in output by cause of classroom exchanges with teachers. Interaction with teachers may force students to pay attention to the more accurate, precise and comprehensible use of the target language (Gass, 2015). However, teachers do not always exploit the chances they are given to push their learners' productive use of L2. As it was stated before, teachers tend to ask more display questions which cause short phrases or monosyllables whereas it is the referential questions which stimulate students' responses as they are longer and more complex (Brock, 1986; Nunan, 1987a). One of the controversies around referential questions might be the fact that at times they are too challenging for students to answer. Learners need the teacher's talk as a scaffolding tool which could be a form of meaning negotiation (McNeil, 2012). Moreover, students might not be creative enough to create their answers or be too shy to participate. These ideas lead to the next section which examines another important element of interaction in relation to CCQs and L2 learning.

2.4.3 Negotiation for Meaning and Concept Checking Questions

Teachers should promote situations which require information exchanges as these boost interactional restructuring which aids L2 acquisition and comprehension (Ellis, 1991). Clarification requests for assistance as well as confirmation and comprehension checks aim at modifying the interaction so the meaning of unfamiliar words or phrases within the participants' messages can be reworded or repeated to become understandable. Such understanding is believed to help incorporate the new linguistic material into the learners' L2 systems. Learners are also given opportunities to develop their productive capacities in L2 if they are forced to manipulate their present interlanguage system so that messages which were initially unclear become significant to the recipient (Foster and Ohta, 2005). These

changes can happen due to the appeal of one of the participants to clarify or confirm the message content or check on the comprehensibility in the communication process. Although there is no direct evidence that negotiation for meaning leads directly to language acquisition, there are plenty of theoretical claims which support the importance of interactional modifications in the process of language learning (Pica, 1987). One of the drawbacks in terms of negotiation for meaning which takes place between a teacher and students is that they do not share a symmetrical role relationship which does not give many opportunities for interactional restructuring (Ellis, 1991). Moreover, Long and Crookes (1987) argue that teachers ought to give their best efforts to decrease the use of display questions in class as these hinder the restructuring of interaction. On the contrary, it is the referential questions that promote interactional restructuring and boost L2 acquisition through comprehensible input (Wright, 2016).

2.5 Abstract and Concrete Concepts

Straying from the subject of communication and interaction, concept checking questions are used to check student's understanding of different concepts. There are two types of concepts which are distinguished in terms of the way they are acquired by learners. The concrete concepts are usually learnt through sensorimotor experiences while abstract concepts are largely learnt through linguistic experiences (Steyvers, 2010). These two types activate the brain areas differently, for instance, learning the word "pineapple" by looking at a picture and grasping the idea of "love" by giving oral examples. Many theories assume that the difference of these two concepts is more *quantitative* claiming that concrete concepts have both verbal (words or phrases) and non-verbal (pictures, actions, etc.) codes, whereas abstract concepts are represented by verbal coding only (Paivio, 1986). Others claim that concrete concepts are associated with more contextual information than abstract concepts (Schwanenflugel, et al,

1988) so it might be easier for teachers to contextualise a word "chair" than a grammatical structure, such as "Present Continuous". These models suggest that it is easier for learners to process and acquire concrete concepts than abstract ones as the previous are supported by more semantic features and are less complex (Plaut and Shallice, 1991). Therefore, the concepts have to be considered regarding their main elements and the degree of complexity and difficulty. After that, appropriate concept checking questions may be asked which check the understanding of particular elements of the concept (Scrivener, 2011).

2.6 Conclusions

In this chapter, the literature concerning the main areas of research crucial to this study has been reviewed. At first, it examined the communicative language teaching as the approach within which concept checking questions appear in the CELTA. As the approach is closely related to various interaction patterns, the IRF structure and genuine interaction were analysed in connection with display and referential questions. These lead to the examination of Interaction Hypothesis alongside with Comprehensible Input, Comprehensible Input, Negotiation for Meaning in relation to concept checking questions and their impact on second language acquisition. Finally, the idea of concepts was reviewed as CCQs are designed to check students' understanding in terms of concrete and abstract concepts. Regarding the research gaps, it was discovered that the use of concept checking questions has not been widely discussed as an academic matter in the existing literature.

2.7 Reflection Literature

There are many different ways of understanding reflection; however; the roots of the term reflection derives from Dewey (1933) who defines it as actions based on "the active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it" (p.9). Although Schon (1983), who is another key thinker, describes

reflection in the light of practice and presents the cycle of appreciation, action and re-appreciation. These two approaches to reflection together create a view of the professional reflection which is a mixture of practitioner-based intuition and scientific knowledge. Therefore, the mixed approach regarding critical reflection seems to be the most appropriate as reflection in the case of this study is related to two kinds of knowledge: the one gained as a direct result of practical actions and the other one based on scientific approaches (Akbari, 2007). Drawing on this conclusion, the aim of the reflection in this project is to focus on concept checking questions as an issue related to EFL teaching context and gain a better understanding of this technique through participation in the CELTA course and by reviewing relevant literature which was presented in the previous chapter.

In terms of models of reflection, it is Kolb's experiential learning cycle (1984) which was taken into consideration. Actions described in the reflective journal usually started after having experienced some negative or positives events. These were followed by thinking about what happened and so reviewing and recording the experiences. Afterward, a stage called Abstract Conceptualisation took place which meant to interpret the events and generate a hypothesis. The meaning of the experiences was defined in connection with the relevant literature/theories, but also previous practical occurrences. In the last stage, the adapted hypotheses were tested in new situations which resulted in challenging or supporting these hypotheses (Moon, 2013a).

Keeping a reflective journal during the CELTA was a challenge at times due to the intense nature of the course; however, it has become a valuable source of information for me as a trainee teacher and a researcher.

3. Research Questions

As stated before, the aim of this study is to explore the issue of concept checking questions as an essential part of the CELTA course and reach a better understanding of their usage by trainee teachers as well as experienced teachers of English as a foreign language and their impact on learning opportunities of pre-intermediate and upper-intermediate English learners. It is vital to clarify that by no means is this project attempting to instruct EFL teachers on how and when to use CCQs in class. The rationale for choosing CCQs as the main focus of this project has its roots in various areas, such as, the literature on communication and interactions in a classroom and their influence on language acquisition, reflections on how concept checking questions are presented and used in the CELTA course and my personal interest in the asking of questions by teachers in class and their effects on students and the learning opportunities. This study was designed as a result of all the above and it aims at answering the following questions:

1. How are concept checking questions used (or not) by trainee and experienced EFL teachers at pre-intermediate and upper-intermediate levels of English proficiency?

   1.1 In which situations should concept checking questions be used and when are they less vital according to CELTA trainers and trainees?

   1.2 In which circumstances do they hinder and when do they facilitate learning opportunities?

4. Methodology

4.1 Introduction

It is a small-scale research project of subjective character due to the small number of interview participants and the main data source that is a reflective journal written by the researcher. As the aim of the research is to explore the idea of using concept checking questions at different levels of English and investigating the situations when they facilitate and hinder learning opportunities, qualitative research methods were employed as appropriate to the exploratory nature of research questions and descriptive character of the gathered data (Silverman, 2009). Students – teacher interactions while using questions and the effects on language learning were of great interest for the researcher; therefore, concept checking questions were chosen due to their importance in the eyes of the CELTA trainers. It is worth mentioning that the topic and research problem were decided before the CELTA started, but developed during and after the course as the information received from trainers and further research allowed to define the research problem. To sum up, the research draws on the CELTA experience – a reflective journal with CELTA documents included, interviews with trainee teachers and a trainer as well as the academic knowledge on the topic gained during the MA.

4.2 Settings and Procedure

The data collection procedure started as the researcher began to attend the CELTA course which was held at one of the language schools in central London. Classroom observations took place every day from Monday to Friday for four weeks as English classes were given by trainee teachers to pre-intermediate and upper-intermediate English learners. The number of students varied from four to eight as the lessons were not obligatory. Observations of experienced teachers were attended as well. After the course, the researcher obtained permission from the interview participants and conducted four interviews with three trainee

teachers and a CELTA trainer. The field notes, documents, reflections and other relevant

information are stored in a reflective journal which serves as the main source of data for this

study.

4.2.1 Participants

There are two types of participants in this study: observation and interview participants.

Members of the first group were not reached directly by the researcher as observations and

interactions with them were parts of the CELTA course and all relevant notes and reflections

related to those are kept in a reflective journal. However, the interview participants, which

were reached directly by the researcher, include three trainee teachers and a CELTA trainer

from the first group.

Table 1: Information about participants

	Observation Participants	Interview Participants
Trainee Teachers	• Four native English speakers and one non-native speaker from Cyprus. • Majority between 23 and 45 years old with the oldest being 57 years old. • One trainee teacher has experience in teaching English and three of them have been studying the language.	• A 25 years old non-native speaker of English. She has experience in studying English as EFL (Karen). • A 57 years old native English speaker, a teacher of modern languages (Adam). • A 26 years old (Tom) native English speaker, who had no experience in teaching. • All successfully passed the CELTA course.
CELTA Teachers and Trainers	• All three of the experienced teachers are native speakers of English. • They have been teaching the	• A 35 years old CELTA trainer (Mark), who trained the five trainee teachers and gave lessons to pre-

	language for several years. • Some of them are CELTA trainers as well.	intermediate English learners. • He has been a teacher of English as a foreign language for 14 years. • He has worked in many different countries, such as Vietnam and Poland.
Learners	• Seven pre-intermediate students. • Eight upper-intermediate students. • The majority of Brazilian or Portuguese origins with the rest being from Spain, Syria, Turkey or Israel. • Age range varies from teenagers to middle-aged learners. • The purpose for learning English: to work or travel.	

4.3 Data Collection

The data was collected in two stages over a period of five weeks using various qualitative methods. First, the CELTA lessons and classroom observations took place which allowed the researcher to gather documents, field notes and record events relevant to the dissertation topic which were described, analysed in relation to the knowledge gained during MA and kept in a researcher's reflective journal throughout and after the course. After the CELTA course has finished, face-to-face interviews were conducted with selected trainee teachers and a trainer. The process of data collection and then analysis was not carried out in a linear manner so the reliability is thought to have no relevance in qualitative research (Stenbacka, 2001). Moreover,

the verification might be impossible in the qualitative research setting due to the subjective nature of qualitative data collection (Tsai, 2016). This data does not aim at establishing generalisations, but allows it to generate in-depth and detailed insights about particular phenomena which are the case in this study (Patton, 2002).

4.3.1   Reflective Journal

The main source of data regarding the CELTA content is the reflective journal which was kept during and after the course. Deeper research in terms of relevant literature, which was done after the course due to the intense nature of the CELTA, revealed new information and insights in terms of experienced events. The journal is of introspective character so the researcher reflects on her own teaching but also on the observations of experienced teachers and trainee teachers teaching two groups of English learners: pre-intermediate and upper-intermediate levels (Bailey and Ochsner, 1983). Not all the entries follow the exact sequence of the experiential learning cycle designed by Kolb (1984), but it is possible to recognise the elements which characterise these stages:

a) Concrete Experience – a positive or negative event which was encountered during the CELTA course.

b) Reflective Observation – reviewing or recording the event.

c) Abstract Conceptualisation – interpretation of the event in the light of academic knowledge and the CELTA experience -> generating a hypothesis.

d) Active Experimentation – planning the implementation of hypotheses and/or testing them in new situations.

Bearing in mind Hatton and Smith's four levels in the development of teacher reflection from teaching practice which are descriptive writing, descriptive reflective, dialogic reflection and critical reflection (1995, cited in Watton, Collings, and Moon, 2001, p. 5), the entries in the

reflective journal could be typically characterised as one of the above. Earlier entries were usually more of a descriptive writing, descriptive reflective or dialogic reflection, but these could be seen as stages which led to the most recent entries focused on critical reflection.

As stated earlier, two ways of reflecting were taken into account – the reflection as a result of practical actions and the other one based on scientific approaches so academic knowledge (Akbari, 2007). Therefore, the reflective journal contains different kinds of information relevant to the topic, such as documents handed out by CELTA trainers on the concept checking questions, sheets of field notes, descriptions and analyses of particular events observed or experienced during the CELTA course and references to the academic knowledge covered on MA which was used to analyse these events.

4.3.2 Semi-structured Interviews

The data gathered in the reflective journal was supplemented by the face-to-face semi-structured interviews which were audio recorded and transcribed. The transcription involves a rather basic coding, such as laughter, pauses or paralinguistic features due to the fact that in this research the focus was put on what was said and not how (Appendix A- transcription coding). Interviews collect spoken data in a more naturalistic way as they resemble a conversation between two participants. A natural flow of the conversation is not disturbed as supplementary questions can be asked according to the replies (Wilson and Sapsford, 2006). One of the benefits of this method is the fact that it helps the interviewer to reach a better understanding of the research topic, especially in terms of matters which cannot be observed (Patton, 1990). The questions were formed in consideration of the CELTA course content and process as well as the issues which are addressed in this study. The interview questions were carefully considered; however, the interviewer was aware that additional questions might be asked in order to reach in-depth information. The specialist terminology used in questions did

not need to be explained due to the fact that all the participants were familiar with the terms, having completed the course or being the trainer. The first questions were usually the introductory questions which aimed at initiating the conversation and making the participants think about the topic – the CELTA course and concept checking questions. Two sets of questions (Appendix B – interview questions) were prepared as two various groups of participants were approached – trainee teachers and the CELTA instructor. Questions for trainee teachers were mostly about their experiences and opinions on concept checking questions. Questions for the trainer were much more focused on the idea of using and validating concept checking questions as a teaching technique but still in connection with his own experiences and beliefs.

4.4 Data Analysis

All the data gathered is of qualitative character as mentioned above; however, the data collection method imposes the way that data will be analysed. It is an analysis based on textual data and the whole process is iterative as moving back and forth between collection, analysis and interpretation have happened (Dörnyei, 2007). In terms of the interviews and the journal, it was the emotionalism approach (as the approach favouring intimate contact with subjects and focusing on understanding their experiences) which was employed as the purpose was to focus on subjective experiences and opinions on the topic of concept checking questions (Silverman, 2011). The analysis started when the interviews were being transcribed and when the journal was still being written as certain pieces of information created patterns. Afterward, pre-coding took place so reading of the data, highlighting important information and writing reflections. That step led to the more formal descriptive coding (summarises the basic topic of a passage) of the data accompanied by memos in a form of comments which later were put into categories and themes (Saldaña, 2013). These helped with data interpretation and

drawing conclusions. The chosen themes and findings will be presented and discussed in the next chapter. Samples of how the data was analysed are available in Appendices C (interview analysis) and D (reflective journal analysis). In the Appendix E (categories and themes), it is possible to view the finale categories and themes which were concluded from the initial pre-coding, memos and descriptive codes.

4.5 Ethical Issues

This research follows the ethical guidelines stated by [university name] University to protect the participants' privacy and confidentiality. Before each interview, participants were informed about the main topic and the aims of the study. It was made clear from the very beginning by the researcher that participation in the research was voluntary and all the additional information requested by the subjects was provided immediately. They were also informed that they had the right to withdraw from the study at anytime without having to justify their decision. The interview participants were handed out Consent Forms on the day of the research and asked to complete them which was done willingly. Subjects were assured that their identities would be kept confidential and that their names would be converted into numbers for the use of this study. They were also informed that the data gathered would be used only for the needs of the research and the only people having access to information would be the tutors who would mark this study. All the ethical issues mentioned above were dealt with in relation to [university name] University forms and ethical guidelines.

5. Critical Reflection

5.1 Introduction

This chapter consists of discussion about findings based on the qualitative data in the form of interviews, the reflective journal expanded by relevant CELTA documents and knowledge gained during MA which are displayed in accordance with the most recurring themes and with

the research questions in mind. A sample transcription of interviews is available in Appendix F

and a reflective journal sample can be obtained in Appendix G. This chapter consists of five

sections. The first one presents and discusses how concept checking questions were

considered and introduced by the CELTA trainers. The next two parts of this chapter describe

and consider in which situations CCQs are essential and when they are less necessary. These

are followed by sections about circumstances when concept checking questions hinder or

facilitate learning opportunities.

5.2 Concept Checking Questions in the eyes of CELTA

The full-time CELTA course is a very intense experience, but it allows trainee teachers to gain

all the essential knowledge needed to start their careers as Teachers of English as a foreign

language. Among many different topics included in the timetable, the course dedicated one

unit of input sessions to the idea of checking student's understanding by asking CCQs, hence,

they are believed to be an important technique which trainee teachers must master as soon as

possible. Even though they are considered vital, the input session on them took place only in

the second week of the CELTA course (Appendix H – CELTA lesson plan). As they are an

inherent part of every planned and conducted lesson, some may think that it would be of

better value to present the CCQs much earlier in order to familiarise trainees with their nature

and let them practise the formulation of concept checking questions. The reason why they are

presented relatively late might be that the concept of CCQs emerges in relation with other

aspects of the CELTA programme, such as vocabulary, grammar or lesson staging.

During the lesson on CCQs, the first thing presented by the trainer was the types of concept

checking questions which can be found in Appendix I – CCQ types. These types follow the

distinction made by Long and Sato (1983) which highlights open and closed display questions

as well as referential questions named 'real'. It is possible to identify the main difference

between them, that is the (lack of) teacher's knowledge about students' answers. There are also many different examples of each question, for instance, *Did he run or walk?*, *Why do you usually creep?* or *When was the last time you crept?* These are extremely useful for students who train to be teachers as exemplifying helped to decide what is right and wrong.

Another step in introducing the CCQs was how to formulate them and highlight all aspects of the meaning which is the most important aspect and should always come first while teaching anything new to students according to CELTA trainers. These rules and examples are available in Appendix J. The main idea is to break down the meaning of the target word or structure and turn these aspects into questions. If answered correctly by students, the understanding is achieved. At first, display questions are asked which aim at pinning down the meaning. For instance, in the case of a word 'mumbled', display questions might be following: *Did he speak loudly or quietly?* (*quietly*), *Could the person hear him clearly*? (*no*), *Are you confident when you mumble*? (*no*). These questions might be followed by referential questions which goal is to consolidate and personalise, for instance, *When was the last time you mumbled? In which situation?* They foster the meaningful communication which is one of the main principles of CLT (Canale, Swain, 1980) promoted by CELTA.

Several guidelines, which are presented in Appendix K, were also to be followed by trainee teachers in order to create 'good' concept checking questions, such as a) avoid using the target language to check itself, b) grade the language used in questions, c) cover all areas of concept and potential confusion or d) limit the number of questions. These rules were helpful as formulating CCQs was a challenge for some trainee teachers as mentioned in the interview with Karen, "Yes, [formulating concept checking questions] was quite challenging…", but this will be discussed in the latter parts of this study.

To sum up, the CELTA trainers were incredibly clear and helpful when introducing and presenting the idea of CCQs. However, they did not make any reference to the controversies surrounding these two types of questions which are presented by Brock (1986), Shomoossi (2004) or Wright (2016) as the effects of the asking of display questions on learning opportunities are much different than the asking of referential questions and new teachers should be aware of such differences and make their own justifications. As later observed and experienced, the majority of concept questions asked by the trainee teachers and experienced teachers were display questions whereas only a few referential questions in the entire CELTA course were asked. The reason for this might be that the trainers treated both types of CCQs as equally relevant and they did not draw trainees' attention when they focused only on display questions and completely left out the referential ones. Besides, the interviewed CELTA trainer was not aware of the pedagogical rationale behind the asking of CCQs which might be the reason why this technique was not reflected on deeply.

5.3 Circumstances when Concept Checking Questions are necessary

The research shows that using concept checking questions is not a technique which is straightforward. There are various disputes surrounding this issue and people involved in teaching EFL have different views on using them, particularly when CCQs should be used.

5.3.1 Inexperienced Teachers

Teachers with various amounts of teaching experience handle CCQs in different manners. Yet, all trainee teachers interviewed view concept checking questions as an essential teaching technique and inherent part of every lesson, for instance, Tom said, "It's vital to have concept checking questions." Furthermore, it is a way to clarify the meaning of new words or grammatical structures and make sure students understand them. Most of the trainee teachers were able to summarise a few characteristics of concept checking questions, "… they

need to be as simple as possible, as clear as possible and not use the target language" as stated by Karen. Adam even added, "I don't think it's possible to teach without them" whereas Tom mentioned that they should be asked all the time during a lesson. Such views might be the result of presenting CCQs by trainers as an important and integral part of teaching English as a foreign language. Also, they were referred to almost every day of the course.

This technique was unknown to Adam and Tom as they learnt about it for the first time during the CELTA course, "It's not something I knew much about before doing the CELTA course" said Tom. Adam stated that "It wasn't too difficult for me [to formulate CCQs]. It took a bit of time to remember". A possible reason why he did not find them challenging was the fact that he had worked with a lot of people and as he admitted, "I was quite used to making sure I was understood". However for Karen, it was the hardest part of the entire course as they were challenging in terms of their formulation, especially CCQs which referred to vocabulary, "It was more difficult with words because with words you need to have a context". Such matter was also reflected on in the journal, "Designing a context which would include all of the target language items, be coherent and make sense to students was a real challenge. Target words had no connection with one another, such as *long distance relationship* and *shout*". Also, Tom admitted that he struggled with CCQs at first:

> Tom: I felt like I was trying to sort of force them into everything I said and they didn't always make sense. I didn't always ask questions which really checked that [students] understood.

Even if Tom still needs to spend time planning them before a lesson, he mentioned that after some time he had gotten better at this technique and he was starting to be able to ask CCQs naturally. "I'm starting to be naturally able to ask CCQs while I'm teaching…" added Tom as with practice it became easier to understand what kinds of questions should be asked. Tom

also claimed that it was useful to ask the same CCQs in different stages of a lesson, such as right after presenting the target language, in the middle and at the end of a lesson to make sure students understand the new information taught. By the end of the last concept checking stage, he was confident that learners comprehended the target language as "… they were responding chorally, not just one person…".

However, concept checking questions might sometimes pose a real problem for new teachers and result in uneasy moments. Adam referred to a situation, which was also observed by myself when he was teaching pre-intermediate English students and he happened to present a cake recipe with the ingredients written down on the board. One of the ingredients was a little bit of salt. The interviewee said he was sure that the students knew this word as it is quite common and it is usually encountered at an early stage of English language learning. Although, he said, "… one of them [students] looked a bit blank…" so Adam wanted to respond to this reaction and asked, "What is salt?" This question concerned the student even more as she looked surprised and could not find any words to describe the word. In the end, she just acted out the way salt is consumed to prove the teacher that she knew what salt meant. Similar questions appeared a few times in the beginning of CELTA which were mentioned in the reflective journal as "… *very hard for students to come up with an explanation to*…". This situation triggered a dispute after a teaching practice about badly constructed concept checking questions and the effects they have on students and their learning. The main conclusion drawn by trainers and trainees was the fact that CCQs have to be thought through and formulated in advance as mentioned by Griffey and Housner (1991). It was said to be particularly valid in the case of trainee teachers and new teachers of EFL.

According to the CELTA trainer Mark, CCQs are important:

Mark: because new teachers, trainee teachers tend not to be very good at reading

their students and understanding what students understand and don't understand.

Besides, they are still inexperienced and it is harder for them to find other ways of checking students' understanding without having to explicitly ask concept checking questions. Mark also added, "CELTA trainees tend to like formulaic yes/no questions" and they focus on testing the aspects of meaning which are not the most difficult and confusing for students. Commonly asked display question aims students' attention at the positive or negative character of a word whereas this aspect is usually obvious as it emerges from the context, for instance, a story recalled from one of the lessons created by one of the trainee teachers: *I went on holiday and I wanted to spend time outdoors but it was raining all the time so I couldn't and I was very disappointed*. Typical questions were: *Was I sad or happy?* or *Is it a positive or negative word?* According to Scrivener (2011), all aspects of the concept have to be analysed, but more complex aspects, such as the idea of expectations in a word 'disappointed', are not referred to with CCQs by inexperienced teachers, such as *Was I satisfied with the weather?* As Mark summed up, "… trainee teachers tend to oversimplify […] and to latch on to yes/no questions" as it is much easier to formulate simple, formulaic CCQs. Another issue mentioned by Mark is that new teachers might fail at using language in a way to signal to students what is a question and what is a statement. Students may be confused and not see a difference between the explanation, exemplifying and asking a question. Therefore, managing the language could be problematic and the input incomprehensible to learners in contrast to comprehensible input (Krashen, 1977).

These experiences and issues reveal a lot of information on how inexperienced teachers deal with CCQs. The truth is that mastering the asking of concept checking questions usually comes with practice as mentioned by many trainee teachers and the CELTA trainer. Even though the

experiences with CCQs were not always successful as revealed the situation mentioned by Adam, each mistake led to a reflection and a conclusion made by myself which influenced next choices in terms of CCQs use so followed the experiential learning cycle (Kolb, 1984).

5.3.2 Types of Information: Presented for the First Time or Revised?

First of all as mentioned by Tom and Adam, concept checking questions are vital when any new information is introduced to students. It can be either new vocabulary or grammatical structures; however, vocabulary needs CCQs more in Tom's opinion, "…I use CCQs any time I'm teaching any new information […] but particularly vocabulary". The reason behind this statement might be the fact that new vocabulary would appear in almost every lesson as there are always going to be some words which are unknown to all or some learners as observed during CELTA. Considering that, grammar is less common to be the focus of every lesson as it is much more complex and needs time to be explained. Besides, the set of grammatical structures is finite so the same tenses might appear more than once in a period of time. Nevertheless, Karen and Mark think that vocabulary should be checked by asking CCQs but grammar requires them more. Karen justifies the use of concept checking questions by pointing out that English grammar consists of "… many different tenses so it makes sense to use it [CCQs]" in order to clarify the differences between them to students. Mark also said that "Vocabulary often isn't that conceptual." The more abstract a concept is, the more CCQs are to be asked and grammatical structures are more likely to be abstract and complex in accordance with Plaut and Shallice's theory (1991) about concepts.

Secondly, concept checking questions are necessary to revise the new information introduced earlier. Karen said that they were quite useful when "I was doing a revision of the tenses". This lesson was observed and she revised Future Simple, 'Going to' structure, Present Continuous and Present Simple which were used to express the future at the upper-intermediate level of

English. She first used concept checking questions after the introduction of these tenses, but then she realised that students might benefit from the repetition of this stage at the end of the lesson. It was observed when she was teaching and recorded in the journal as well. As mentioned in the journal:

> *The truth is that students answered similar questions much more willingly and with confidence in their voices, giving the impression that they really understood the differences in usage between these structures.*

Also, Tom mentioned that he would use concept checking questions in terms of revision as it might help to consolidate the understanding of the target language. Moreover, some students might not comprehend particular concepts at first, but after the second or third round of CCQs, these concepts may become clearer. However, Tom said that he asked the same set of questions at every stage. It was a way to prove that as a teacher, "You've successfully actually taught it" and students understood the target language as their reactions in the form of coherent and precise output [as determined by Swain, (1985)] confirm this assumption.

5.3.3 Relevance of Concept Checking Questions at Pre-intermediate and Upper-intermediate Levels

According to Mark, concept checking questions are necessary at higher levels of English proficiency. In order to support this view, he referred to the notion of concepts. Upper-intermediate students are likely to deal with vocabulary or grammar which is often more conceptual and abstract so have less semantic features (Plaut and Shallice, 1991). Therefore, these concepts have to be checked with questions and "… higher levels are more likely to acquire CCQs…" said Mark. It leads to the conclusion that more CCQs should be asked at this higher level in comparison to the lower level of English. Words at higher levels, such as 'disappointed' or 'hasty' require the analysis in great detail as "differences between words are

becoming vague and ambiguous" which means that they might not be obvious to students and need to be picked out and addressed directly by asking concept checking questions by teachers. 'False friends' which are usually challenging to particular groups of students have to be considered in this regard as well. Also, grammatical structures are quite abstract and do not have an obvious meaning or visual representation (Paivio, 1986). The nuances have to be clear and the asking of CCQs is a popular way to do it but it is still one of the possibilities. As recorded in the reflective journal, in the case of Present Continuous, the typical questions to be asked are: *Is this the past, present or future*?, *Is it happening now? or Is it finished?* These questions are aimed at helping students reach the meaning. However, they do not apply to students' experiences or lives so these questions are not meaningful (Mercer and Dawes, 2008). Moreover, they require just one - word answer (Brock, 1986) which does not let them practice speaking skills. Referring to these claims about the abstract character of grammar, Mark said that it is also important to ask CCQs at the pre-intermediate level of English since these "… students are likely to be doing lessons on Present Continuous and Present Simple […] and they need concept checking of". Karen agreed that at a higher level of English certain words are complex but she came to the conclusion that CCQs are much more important to pre-intermediate students because this type of learners "familiarise themselves with the language" so questions might be treated as input given by the teacher. Many times, it is incidental language which students can pick up naturally while being exposed to certain words and structures used in questions (Rodgers, 2015).

According to the interviewees and the reflective journal, these are the situations when concept checking questions are essential. They focus on different aspects of learning and teaching a language like introducing new information, revisions, relevance to inexperienced EFL teachers and English students at pre-intermediate and upper-intermediate levels. As presented above, sometimes the views were opposing but disagreements were obvious

concerning the relevance of CCQs to English students at different levels. It might have happened due to the fact that people involved in EFL have different experiences, academic backgrounds or opinions.

5.4 Circumstances when Concept Checking Questions are less necessary

After reflecting on situations when CCQs are essential, attention should be paid to the other side of the argument. Circumstances, when concept checking question could be skipped or left out, are to be considered next. Also, in this case, the experiences and beliefs are quite often contrary.

5.4.1 Experienced Teachers

After the analysis of the interviews and reflective journal, it became apparent that experienced teachers of English handle CCQs differently than trainee teachers or new English teachers. One of the interviewees (Adam) mentioned that an expert teacher, who was observed teaching an upper-intermediate class, used distinctly fewer concept checking questions and the process of asking them was very quick. Moreover, Adam said, "He [the teacher] didn't need to repeat it [CCQs]" so they were understandable and the way they were formulated followed the guidelines and principles presented in the first part of this chapter. Adam also added that the experienced "[teacher] made sure that they [students] understood the context…" which facilitated the process of asking CCQs and therefore, checking students' comprehension of the target language. All in all, there was fewer CCQs needed at the higher level of English because the teacher knew how to cope well with this stage of the lesson. It might have happened due to the graded language (Gass, 2015) or questions planned in advance (Griffey and Housner, 1991).

In one of the lessons observed during CELTA, an experienced teacher was teaching students of a pre-intermediate level of English and the way he introduced his concept checking questions

was incredibly natural. They did not seem out of place or forced by the teacher. They were an inherent part of the language clarification as they referred closely to the context and the target language. By asking display questions:

> *Does this school have a lift?* or *Do we say hi or bye in the Departures?, the teacher checked whether or not his students understood new vocabulary by considering its complexity and focusing on the main elements of concepts regarding the target language (Scrivener, 2011)*

As mentioned in the reflective journal. It is worth mentioning that at this pre-intermediate English level the meaning of each new word was checked, making sure the target language was understood. However, no referential questions were asked which are thought to be much more meaningful to students (Mercer and Dawes, 2008).

The interview with the trainer (Mark) who is also an experienced teacher of EFL revealed that "[CCQs] are considered to be one of the most important assessment criteria" in terms of the CELTA course and it is the reason why trainers spend so much time talking about them and making sure the trainee teachers ask them and know how to do it well. Mark also mentioned a matter which he acknowledged as controversial because he admitted that " You'll find experienced teachers who do not use concept checking questions as much and they don't need to…" because they can read their students' reactions and react appropriately in terms of the input so the language used is comprehensible and adjusted to the learners (Gass, 2015). Besides, experienced teachers might find other ways to check their students' understanding.

One of such options was presented by Karen who, instead of asking CCQs, would instruct students to formulate some sentences using the target language, be it grammar or vocabulary, "Tell me a sentence with that target language". If they did it correctly, they understood what the teacher had taught them. As it was observed and reflected in the journal:

Students were eager to come up with their sentences, listen to each other and even comment. This way of checking comprehension allowed for more students' autonomy and freedom in terms of the output (Nunan, 1987a). It seemed to be more meaningful and memorable for them as well since they could relate the language to their experiences and interests (Canale and Swain 1980). These sentences stimulated conversation between students and the teacher so the meaning was negotiated by interaction restructuring (Brock, 1986).

This option was quite linguistically demanding so students should be a little more advanced to be able to benefit fully. In order to help less advanced learners, teachers might scaffold their output (McNeil, 2012). As observed during CELTA and recorded in the journal, "*Simple formulaic display questions did not foster that [such processes]*". This finding is supported by several authors, such as Wells (1999).

Nevertheless, after teaching English for fourteen years, Mark claimed that "I use concept checking questions all the time". According to him, they appeared more when a new grammatical structure is taught, rather than new vocabulary because he admitted that "… grammar is more likely to be abstract than vocabulary". One of the reasons might be that it is represented by verbal coding only (Paivio, 1986).

These observations and statements lead to conclusions that experienced teachers are much more proficient at asking concept checking questions, incorporating them naturally and using them effectively, even though the majority of CCQs are display questions.

5.4.2 Types of Information: already acquired knowledge

There are situations during a lesson when a teacher does not introduce new information, but instead they rely on the language which has already been acquired by learners. According to Tom, it is a sort of a condition which lets teachers skip CCQs as they might become repetitive

and bore students if asked constantly about every linguistic item. He said, "If they are just boring and repetitive, the students might just switch off…" losing interest in the topic or the entire lesson as it is not a communicative interaction (Canale and Swain, 1980). This view is related to the idea of being able to read students' reactions and understand what has been understood and what has not. As Karen mentioned, CCQs are not particularly necessary when it is obvious for the teacher that the target language is clear and well comprehended, "I would skip them [CCQs] if I see that they [students] get the meaning". However, in the case of inexperienced teachers, reaching this certainty can be a challenge as they might not be able to read the reactions correctly if at all and come to the wrong conclusions or just end up very confused. It is recorded in the journal that there were times during the CELTA course when:

> *asking concept checking questions felt incredibly unnatural and they were being forced by the teacher since students at that upper-intermediate level of English seemed to understand the target language and these simple display questions only left them confused.*

It is incredibly important for teachers to act appropriately to their students' reactions and adjust the input given as mentioned by Gass (2015).

5.4.3 Monolingual class

Sometimes a teacher gives lessons to a monolingual class where students speak the same language or at least a monolingual class with learners whose native tongues belong to the same language group. Concept checking questions might not be needed when that teacher knows the language spoken by his/her students. According to Mark:

> Mark: If I'm teaching a class in Spain and I can speak Spanish and I teach a new word and I hear that the students mutter that word to each other in Spanish, I know my teaching has been successful.

For instance, if a word 'love' was taught to Spanish students, the teacher can be satisfied with their learning when they hear 'amor' coming from the learners. "*When students switch to Spanish and start talking to each other […], I can understand it, come to conclusions and make choices in terms of CCQs…*" as mentioned in the reflective journal. Learning was successful so the concepts (abstract or concrete) were presented visually or verbally (Steyvers, 2010). This idea is probably controversial due to the debate about using students' L1 by students and teachers in English classes. In the case of this research, this issue is not considered positive or negative but the debate is taking place nowadays as the use of L1 in EFL classrooms is considered useful and teachers are starting to rely on it again (Pan and Pan, 2010). The matter of L1 use in EFL classes can be further consulted in "First Language Use in Second and Foreign Language Learning" by Miles Turnbull and Jennifer Dailey-O'Cain.

5.4.4 Irrelevance of Concept Checking Questions at Pre-intermediate and Upper-intermediate Levels

Another issue pertains to the English proficiency level and the relevance of concept checking questions. Tom said that they are not essential at pre-intermediate and even lower levels of English because these students might find it difficult to understand the input given by the teacher, "They might not understand a lot of what you're saying so it's hard to ask them [CCQs]." Even when the language is graded (Gass, 2015), it might pose problems to students who have problems understanding spoken language. He added that, "I would use more images to concept check." However, more abstract concepts do not have visual representations so it is impossible to use pictures (Paivio, 1986); therefore, this matter has to be taken into consideration. According to Mark, students at lower levels are not likely to handle very complex and abstract language so CCQs might not be needed as much as for higher levels of English proficiency. He agrees with Tom that some of the aspects, such as objects may be

presented through pictures and examples given in a context. These representations of meanings might be clear and obvious enough to skip CCQs. Nevertheless, "pre-intermediate learners are very likely to be doing lessons on Present Continuous or Present Simple in which case that is a concept and they need concept checking off" added Mark.

These views are contrasted with statements of Adam and Karen who said that CCQs are not vital at higher levels of English because students are able to understand much more of the spoken language, "As they've [students] got a higher level, it [CCQs] wasn't needed" claimed Adam and Karen added that, "I'd say they [CCQs] are definitely more important at lower levels". Therefore, the adjusted input in the form of explanations and examples (Gass, 2015) given by the teacher is likely to be well understood and further checking of the concepts might not be necessary. Besides, asking display questions was often a repetitive and unchallenging process to students at upper-intermediate English level so the types of CCQs asked should be considered.

The research showed that there are circumstances when concept checking questions could be skipped during a lesson. These include views on how relevant CCQs are for experienced teachers, but also moments when already acquired information is brought back by the teacher and the target language is understood. It is related to teacher's abilities to understand the learners and reacting appropriately regarding the input. There are also different ways of checking the comprehension which might be more (or less) effective than CCQs. Also, teachers who speak the same language as their students L1 can have the advantage of skipping concept checking questions because they can hear what was understood. Different views were also expressed in terms of CCQs and levels of English proficiency as some think they are less necessary at pre-intermediate levels whereas for others they are not essential for upper-intermediate students. As it was mentioned before, these views might be different due to the

academic backgrounds of interviewees, amounts of experience in teaching English and their subjective opinions.

5.5 When do Concept Checking Questions hinder learning opportunities?

As it was stated earlier, the analysis of the data revealed that concept checking questions is a complex idea which might arouse controversy at times. New and experienced teachers of English as a foreign language have different opinions and their experiences with CCQs are various and quite often lead to opposing views. This section focuses on negative effects of CCQs on learning opportunities.

5.5.1   Teacher-Centred Interactions, Lack of Communicativeness and Meaningfulness

First of all, concept checking questions which appear after eliciting the target language can be very time-consuming. Such a lengthy process was usually observed during lessons conducted by inexperienced or trainee teachers as they had problems keeping the track of the time and being flexible regarding the lesson plan. Data stored in the reflective journal says:

> *This stage ought to be quick and effective whereas some teachers would spend ten minutes asking simple display questions, which were not effective, and then explaining and exemplifying over and over again. In the end, students were confused and it was not sure whether or not they understood the target language.*

After such a long time of trying to convey the meaning, learners might have lost the point of the lesson and the will to learn more. Here comes the idea of planning CCQs before a lesson which allows teachers to run this phase smoothly. Such a lengthy process of asking CCQs results in the lesson dominated by the teacher which is against the communicative language teaching approach (Canale and Swain, 1980) promoted by CELTA. The lesson time, which could be used by students to communicate with each other or even with the teacher in a more

meaningful way, is spent on listening to the teacher's speech which is sometimes stopped by asking a display question that requires a one-word answer. These types of questions did not let learners push their output and expand the speaking skills as responding to yes/no questions was not challenging. Students needed more open-ended questions to be able to optimise communicative opportunities (Brock, 1986; Nunan, 1987a), even in terms of comprehension checking. Many times teachers unwittingly discouraged their students, which was mentioned in a journal, by responding in a negative way to their answers, for instance, *No, this is a wrong answer*. It is obvious that such a teacher was looking only for the correct answer and they did not want to spend time explaining why that response was wrong and just moved on. However:

> *It had had an impact on that student's behaviour since she did not try to answer any question that day because she might have felt intimidated and did not want to fail again. Teacher's responses, such as Okay, try again or you are close were much more encouraging and let students know that they should re-direct their thinking and keep trying,*

Even if it was still a part of a non-communicative IRF interaction pattern (Sinclair and Coulthard, 1975, 1992).

This consideration leads to interactions which took places when CCQs were asked by the teacher. Experiences recorded in the reflective journal allowed to state that, "*As most CCQs used were display questions*", it was usually an IRF pattern that appeared in class. It did not resemble real-life communication (Nunan, 1987a) which is one of the main principles of CLT as in response students were saying just one word. Besides, the answers to these questions were known to the teacher what made the whole situation unnatural and fake. Students did not have the chance to be fully engaged and communicate meaningfully with the teacher (White and Lightbown, 1984). On the other hand, there was a situation when a referential question

When did you feel exhausted? was asked to check the concept of 'exhausted' and a few students wished to answer it.

> *They seemed interested in each other's responses and even some negotiation for meaning took place [(Wright, 2016)] since they would ask for clarification (What do you mean by that?) if the answer was not fully clear.*

As it was mentioned in the journal. It was one of the rare moments when this phase was very successful as students understood the concept and practiced speaking in a meaningful way.

Another disadvantage of asking CCQs is that at times they might be repetitive and tiring for students if asked constantly. This view is supported by Tom who mentioned that "… the students might just switch off". The teacher has to know how to phrase the questions and find a way to do it as effectively and communicatively as possible to keep students' attention and interest (Thornbury and Slade, 2006; Lei, 2009). Furthermore, CCQs can have bad effects on students' learning when they are "poorly worded or phrased badly" as determined by Tom. Then, the input given is not correct and might be remembered by learners. Also, concept checking questions might confuse students as mentioned by Mark because even if they understood the meaning from the example in the context, a bad CCQ can make them question what they have understood:

> Mark: So the students think they understand the word [bacon] and then the teacher decides to check and says Is bacon a fish? or Is bacon a vegetable? […] so students no longer know the word.

The concrete concept of the meaning which has a visual representation (Paivio, 1986) was too obvious to be checked and the question only confused the learners.

5.5.2 Different Students and (Lack of) their Responses

Very often display questions asked by teachers were answered by one dominant student since they did not require a longer utterance, but a single word. As stated in the reflective journal:

> *That student is always ready to answer all the questions and does it every time a teacher asks a question to the whole class. He doesn't give any opportunities to other learners to think about possible answers because he always responds first. He is more advanced in terms of language than the rest and much more confident. The way he dominates the groups is becoming serious as it prevents learning and we, as teachers, can't exploit the tasks to the maximum.*

When the response occurred right after the question and there was no thinking time for the rest of the group, other students seemed discouraged and they stopped trying to answer the question correctly, if at all, since they realised that the dominant student would do it faster and the teacher would move on. One of the methods applied by teachers to prevent such situations to happen again was to nominate the students by using their names at the beginning of every question, for instance, *So Paulo, what do you think about…?* while trying to concept check a word in a more referential way. Reflections in the journal say:

> *It was quite successful but not perfect as it sometimes intimidated students who did not know the answer. Another method, which was used only a few times, was to ask a referential question.*

This required students to come up with a longer, more complex sentences (Brock, 1986), for instance, *What are you going to do tonight?* in checking the concept of 'going to' structure. Such questions were not easy to answer straight away and students took their time to think and utter longer sentences.

Another disadvantage of using concept checking question is the fact that they can seem childish and patronising so it is important to get to know the students and realise how they react to such questions and how much grading they require (Gass, 2015). It was observed and highlighted in the journal:

> *that some upper-intermediate students looked surprised and they were reluctant to answer them as display CCQs seemed very obvious and simple to these learners since they were able to conclude the meaning from the context previously given by the teacher.*

It was worth considering whether or not referential questions would be much more effective in the case of such learners. Concept checking questions might hinder learning opportunities in many ways as presented above. However, in many situations it is the wrong choice of CCQs which cause such negative effects. Not always, but quite often the learning could have been facilitated if referential questions were asked instead of display questions as examples mentioned so far prove.

5.6 When do Concept Checking Questions facilitate learning?

Situations when CCQs facilitate learning which came to light after the analysis are significantly fewer than circumstances when this technique hinder learning opportunities. However, it does not necessarily mean that this technique should not be used by teachers because it serves a few important functions which foster learning.

5.6.1 Clarification of Meanings and Engagement

First of all, concept checking questions serve an important role of checking students' understanding which was acknowledged by all of the interviewees, for instance by Tom, "I think they're vital" and mentioned in the reflective journal as well, "Concept checking

questions are essential because it is not enough to ask: Did you understand?". If questions are

formulated correctly according to the guidelines presented by the CELTA trainers, they are an

effective way of clearing the meaning of concepts (Steyvers, 2010) and as a result, helping

students discriminate differences between various grammatical tenses or vocabulary items.

There was a situation observed during CELTA when a teacher helped to clarify the meaning of

grammatical structures regarding the future and it was done incredibly fast and straight to the

point as she was able to engage students by choosing a topic which was interesting to them

(*Planning*), formulate correct and accurate CCQs and, as written in the journal, "*mix display*

and referential questions, for instance, Is this a plan or arrangement? What are your plans for

today?" All these actions made this phase very efficient and effective in a meaningful and

communicative way (Canale and Swain, 1980).

As recorded in the journal, referential concept checking questions were very engaging and

involved students in an active classroom participation. They would discuss certain issues

further which resolved in a vivid conversation between the teacher and students. Such

moments happened only when quite controversial concepts or matters were presented, such

as systems of punishments around the world. However, experienced teachers and trainee

teachers were doing their best to pick examples, build a context and ask CCQs which would be

memorable and enjoyable to students. If these conditions were fulfilled, learners were more

likely to participate and very often led to debate (Thornbury and Slade, 2006; Lei, 2009).

5.6.2 Helpful Input

Finally, concept checking questions could be seen as an input, namely incidental language

(Rodgers, 2015) to which students were exposed and which could have been picked up by

them even if it was not taught explicitly. In the reflective journal, it was mentioned that

"*[Students] were able to get chunks of the language and tried to understand how particular*

bits work as a part of a language system". This view is supported by Karen who said that learners, especially at lower levels of English proficiency, were able to "familiarise themselves with the language" in terms of the grammar rules but also regarding vocabulary. It might have let them acquire new structures and linguistic items or get rid of misunderstandings and confusions which are inherent parts of learning a new language.

These findings show that CCQs might have positive impacts on learning opportunities as they are likely to help teachers understand what was comprehended and what was not, in an easy way. Also, they can be engaging and lead to meaningful conversations between the teacher and students. Moreover, CCQs might be treated as an input given by the teacher which let students work out the language by themselves and understand it better.

5.7 Conclusions

The data analysed revealed a lot of information which was further discussed in this chapter. Teachers of EFL who were interviewed have different views on when CCQs should and should not be used as well as when they hinder and facilitate learning opportunities. It all leads to the conclusion that it is the teachers who have to come to their own justifications based on experiences in teaching English to various learners and academic or/and practical knowledge gained over time and make choices in terms of concept checking questions.

6. Conclusions

The aim of the research was to explore the issue of concept checking questions as a vital part of the CELTA course and reach a better understanding of their usage by trainee and experienced EFL teachers and their impact on learning opportunities of pre-intermediate and upper-intermediate English learners in EFL classroom contexts. In order to answer the research questions, the study drew on the CELTA experience – a reflective journal with CELTA

documents included, interviews with trainee teachers and a trainer as well as the academic knowledge on the topic gained during the MA.

The critical reflection revealed several interesting issues. First of all, it was mentioned that CELTA trainers introduced the concept of CCQs in a clear manner; however, they did not make any references to how referential and display questions are presented in the field and how differently they affect language learning. The interview revealed that the trainer was not aware of the pedagogical rationale behind CCQs so it might be the reason why this issue was not analysed deeply enough. It was observed that majority of CCQs asked by trainee teachers (and experienced teachers as well) were display questions.

Secondly, the following research question was answered: *In which situations concept checking questions should be used and when are they less vital?* In total, seven situations were presented. Three of them indicated circumstances when CCQs were necessary and the rest presented moments when this technique could be skipped or was less vital. Different views in this regard were mainly expressed in terms of CCQs relevance to experienced teachers and students at pre-intermediate and upper-intermediate levels of English. The views were mainly opposing in terms of relevance of CCQs to students at different levels. These views might be different due to the academic backgrounds of interviewees, amounts of experience in terms of teaching English and their opinions on certain matters. Data relevant to this research question was mainly acquired from the interviews as this matter was mentioned by interviewees quite frequently and extensively.

Finally, another research question was discussed: *In which circumstances do CCQs hinder and when do they facilitate learning opportunities?* The negative sides of asking CCQs exceeded the positive aspects of using this technique. However, it is important to bear in mind that most of the CCQs encountered in the data were display questions. Therefore, the research suggests

that negative aspects of asking CCQs could be reduced by asking more referential questions which have a positive impact on learning. In the case of this research question, most of the data was used from the reflective journal since most of the entries focused on this issue.

Further research regarding the use of CCQs in EFL contexts ought to be conveyed due to the fact that it was based on a highly subjective data and it involved a small number of participants who took part in interviews. Therefore, conclusions cannot be generalised to a wider population. Some of the issues which appeared in the research were not considered before doing it, such as the use of L1 by teachers mentioned by the CELTA trainer. Focusing on a wider context of using CCQs could be beneficial; however, due to the limited space and time, the theme had to be specified. The research would be enhanced if a bigger number of participants took part in it and if the interviews were conducted in various CELTA centres which would allow for diverse perspectives on the issue. Also, further research could be conducted in terms of professional preparations of CELTA trainers as it appeared that some of them are not aware of essential matters, such as the rationale behind applying CCQs. Yet, it is hoped that the research shed light on the idea of concept checking questions as a teaching technique, its usage in EFL classroom contexts and its impact on the learning opportunities.

7. Implications for Professional Practice

The findings which emerged from the study provide implications for professional practice for EFL teachers, CELTA trainers and trainees. First of all, CELTA trainers should encourage their trainees to seek additional information regarding teaching techniques presented in the course, such as concept checking questions. As CELTA is a very intense experience, it is understandable that there is no time to study all the matters in depth, but trainers could guide their trainees and aim their attention at the fact that certain issues might have advantages and disadvantages. As in the case of CCQs, there are various studies which present the positive but

also negative effects of using this technique. If trainees knew about different views on a particular matter, they would make better choices regarding their teaching. It is important to let trainees know that there are many ways of teaching the same thing and the decisions are theirs to make. However, they should be prepared to justify their choices.

As the research revealed, one of the CELTA trainers was not prepared to provide their trainees with specific information on particular issues, for instance, the pedagogical rationale behind asking CCQs. It was surprising that the trainer was not aware of such information as they should be prepared to answer all sorts of questions regarding their expertise in CELTA training. It could be beneficial for such trainers to deepen their knowledge so they are able to explain and justify what they are teaching in a more accurate and extensive way.

Also, CELTA trainees should be ready to continue their professional development and study teaching techniques presented in the course in more depth, considering different views and opinions as in the case of using CCQs. It is essential to be critical and use a teaching technique while being aware of all the sides of an argument presented in research.

In terms of EFL teachers, it is essential to realise the importance of the asking of questions in class as they usually appear a number of times during different stages of a lesson. It is also vital to consider whether to use concept checking questions as the only way of checking students' comprehension. As the study showed, it is possible to find other methods, such as asking learners to create sentences with the target language. If it is used correctly in the context, it was probably understood. Besides, students are able to construct longer utterances on themes relevant to them. Teachers should be creative and eager to design, test and improve ways of comprehension checking; however, these methods and techniques must suit learners' levels of English, preferred teaching ways, interests, personalities and expectations. Another issue is the constant focus on display questions. A lot of research and also this study state that referential

questions definitely have more positive effects on learning opportunities than display questions. Obviously, display questions are inevitable if there is no time left during a lesson and a teacher cannot allow students to create longer answers and the aim of checking their understanding needs to be achieved or if it is useful for students to be exposed to a certain linguistic structure. Nevertheless, they should not be the majority of questions asked by teachers as they do not resemble a real communication which is one of the negative sides of using this types of CCQs. Referential questions encourage students to be active as these type of CCQs make them think, productive since learners are to produce longer and usually more complex utterances, and creative because they might relate answers to their interests or use linguistic structures and vocabulary of their choice. These benefits may enhance the language acquisition which is the final aim of every language lesson.

As an EFL teacher and a former CELTA trainee, my plan is to follow all the guidelines stated above in order to become a better English teacher and convey the knowledge in a way that is more effective, accurate and suitable for my students. As being a teacher requires constant training and improvement, is it vital for me to think critically, question every technique, method or activity used, consider its advantages and disadvantages as well as possible effects on students' learning opportunities. This study has certainly helped to me understand the aspect of being a teacher.

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9. Appendices

Appendix A: Transcription Coding

@ - laughter

(2), (3) etc. – pauses - numbers of seconds

DOG BARKING etc. – paralinguistic features

[ ] – overlapping utterances

Appendix B: Interview Questions

Interview questions for trainee teachers:

1. Can you tell me about your CELTA experience?

2. What have you learnt from the CELTA course in terms of concept checking questions?

3. How important are CCQs for the language learning in your opinion?

4. How challenging was it for you to formulate your CCQs?

5. Were your CCQs successful or unsuccessful? Can you think of any examples?

6. In what case do you always ask CCQs in class and when do you skip them?

7. Were there any situations during your lessons when you skipped CCQs? What was the reason?

Interview questions for the CELTA trainer:

1. Can you tell me about the use of concept checking questions in teaching?

2. Why have they become a fundamental part of CELTA training?

3. Which type of concept checking questions is mostly asked by the CELTA trainees and what do you think the reason is?

4. What are the learning theories behind asking CCQs?

5. Do you think that CCQs are equally relevant for lower level English learners and higher level English learners? Why?

6. Do CCQs always promote language learning? Are there any situations when these hinder learning opportunities?

Appendix C: Interview Analysis Sample

Transcription

K: okay uhm so tell me about your CELTA experience.

N: ... my CELTA experience.. uhm I really liked it...

I think I've learnt a lot quite a lot and uhm...

... it wasn't like you know the rules the grammar rules that we know to know,

Not about that,

It was just basically the kind of methodology so the...

That it was so communicative you know with the pair work or the group work,

Or it's more student-centred...(2) and...(2)

... yeah the elicitation the different techniques of elicitation or the CCQs and...

What else... (2) yeah this sort of things,

Yeah I've learnt a lot basically.

K: okay

Uhm so what have you learnt from the CELTA course in terms of concept checking questions?   *trainee experience*

N: in terms of concept @@ I think actually the CCQs was the hardest part of the CELTA,

They are quite difficult to do uhm... (3)   *difficult to formulate*

I think they need to be as simple as possible,

As clear as possible and not use you know the target language,   *characteristics*

If you're just teaching I don't know... the past continuous like we did for example,

Uhm... don't use like you know the target language so past continuous in the CCQs,

Otherwise doesn't make sense uhm... (3) yeah...

K: do you think it's an important part of the lesson?   *CCQ, more necessary for grammar*

N:... I think so I think perhaps sometimes like with vocabulary I think sometimes it's not necessary I guess but other times I feel it's really necessary especially well hm... for grammar I think it's really necessary and for vocabulary as well uhm... it depends on the word,

I can't really... it's not just any word,

I think it depends on the word,

Like adjectives quite abstract words I think...   *concepts – abstract – vocabulary*

K: uhm... so how important are CCQs for the language learning in your opinion?

N: uhm...(5) I think they are quite important,

Yeah they are... really important yeah uhm... (3)   *importance of CCQs*

Because it sort of clarifies the meaning it's just yeah

I think the picture becomes more clearer in a way,

It's just especially... I don't know why I keep mentioning grammar but I think grammar especially with the tenses,   *necessary – grammar*

They have so many different tenses so... it makes sense to use it.

K: uhm how challenging was it for you to formulate your CCQs?   *trainee experience*

N: yes yes it was quite challenging... I think one of the things that I...(2) that I... (3) that I was told is that my CCQs are quite simple maybe I could reform them in a way uhm...(3) yeah... (5) uhm...(3)

Yeah I thought it was quite difficult,

I think it's just uhm... I think it was more difficult with words,   *CCQs and context*

Because with words you need to have a context so with context especially yeah you need to provide a context and basically use CCQs within that context uhm...

The same with tenses as well and grammar questions yeah

K: (COUGHING) so... were your CCQs successful or unsuccessful? Can you think of any examples?

N: uhm... (5) I should've brought my notes @ uhm...(2) successful... okay I think I remember I don't know I keep mentioning grammar and the tenses so that lesson with you know past tenses

1) The first day of the CELTA was very intense. At first, we went through an introduction and some organisational matters. We had a very interesting input lesson about class management where teacher started teaching us Irish language to remind us how it is to be taught something we didn't understand. The teacher was asking short questions in the target language, repeating them many times and revising them after some time. It helped me understand how important it is to repeat and revise the information we introduce in a lesson and that the questions have to be short, clearly pronounced and always repeated in the same way. After some time, we were able to get chunks of the language and tried to understand how particular bits work as a part of a language system.

questions as input facilitate learning

Later on, we observed two hours of language teaching. In the first stage of the lesson, the teacher was asking questions like: 'what is your name' or 'what are your interests' to get to know the students. The teacher also asked if the students knew each other in order to split the group. Some questions were asked during error corrections, for instance, 'is it he or she?' or 'how could we say ..... correctly?'. Another set of questions were asked by the teacher when he was introducing the topic so 'How do you travel? What is good and bad in airports?'. Sometimes the teacher would ask the concept checking questions such as 'Does this school have a gate? Does it have a lift? Do we say hi or bye in the Departures?'. Also, the questions were asked about the phonetics etc. How many syllables? Is it a long or a short 'i'?

CCQs experienced teacher

lesson stages

Different types of questions are asked at different stages of the lesson. It also depends if it is a lesson focused on language systems or skills. Students' level of English plays a role as well. In lower levels, questions have to be simple, short and straightforward. The teacher checked whether or not his students understood new vocabulary by considering its complexity and focusing on the main elements of concepts regarding the target language.

questions in lower levels

analyses of the concepts

2) Today we went through concept checking questions in terms of new vocabulary. These can be yes/no questions - 'he is arrested. Is he guilty or not?' or 'is this room a courtroom?'. Teachers mentioned that it is a good idea to contrast one concept with another, for instance, 'both - is it one person or two?'. I found it difficult to come up with the right question to ask on the spot, but I suppose it comes with practice.

CCQs types display questions

trainee teacher - CCQs

I had a chance to practise asking these questions today as I was teaching my first lesson. At first, I introduced my students to the topic and I asked some referential questions - how did you get to school today? have you ever travelled by plane? Later on, I asked comprehension questions about a text. After that, I had to come up with questions to check the concepts of new vocabulary - for example: is this a plan or just an idea?

CCQs - vocabulary

I observed my colleagues' teaching and they also asked concepts questions, but about grammar - is it a future plan? is it happening now?

CCQs - grammar

Concepts questions are essential because it is not enough to ask: did you understand? Students can agree even if they do not understand. By asking concept checking questions, we can find out if they understood the meaning or not.

relevance of CCQs

While introducing the new words, one of the techniques is to elicit the word from the students. We give them a context and then leave a blank space for them to come up with the right word - today after class I am going shopping. It is my.... (arrangement). It helps students remember new words because they are made to think about it and pronounce it. I had a chance to try this technique while teaching today. It went fine as I managed to elicit the answers.

importance of context

Categories:

- relevance of CCQs
- students' reactions
- experienced teachers and CCQs
- trainee/unexperienced teachers and CCQs
- concepts:
    - grammar
    - vocabulary
- other ways to check students' understanding
- stages of the lesson and CCQs
- CCQs and contexts
- circumstances when CCQs are necessary:
  - revision
  - new information
  - grammar and vocabulary
  - lower levels
  - higher levels
  - multilingual classes
  - inexperienced teachers
- circumstances when CCQs are unnecessary
  - lower levels
  - monolingual class
  - no new information
  - higher levels
  - obviously clear information

- circumstances when CCQs hinder learning:
  - badly designed questions
  - not checking the complex concepts
  - not engaging questions
  - not challenging
  - bad input
- circumstances when CCQs facilitate learning:
- input - accidental language
- clarification
- engaging

Themes:
- CCQs in the eyes of CELTA
- where do they facilitate learning?
- when do they hinder learning?
- when should they be used?
- when shouldn't they be used?

Appendix F: Interview Transcription Sample

Transcription Tom

Q: okay so… tell me about your CELTA experience in general.

T: in general? I'd say it was very good… uhm…

…very helpful…

…very intense… lots…(2)

I don't think you could learn that much… information and get so confident doing something in such a short time,

If it wasn't so intense…

But I'd say it was definitely a good experience and… it was full on.

Q: okay

Q: okay so… uhm what have you learnt from the CELTA course in terms of concept checking questions?

T: I've learnt how important they are uhm… (2) it's not something I knew much about before doing the CELTA course,

So I've never taught English and it's been a long time since I've studied the language… uhm…

So the biggest thing I've learnt about them is to ask them all the time … it's probably something I don't do quite enough of… but… I guess… ju… I've just learnt that they're… integral,

You don't really learn unless you… you can't teach something unless you're checking that people understand what you're teaching.

Q: so are there any specific stages during a lesson when you actually [ask]…

T: [yeah]

Any time when you're introducing… I mean… certainly any time when you're introducing new vocabulary…

It's vital to have concept checking questions…

…uhm and they need to be questions which don't… you need to check that they understand,

So you need… you're not looking for them to necessarily just say yes no,

Although yes no can be useful… you need to make sure that you're not using the words that you're trying to teach them…

Q: @

T: … when you're checking that they understand…

… and also I use concept checking questions… any time I'm teaching any new information, but also with grammatical form as well…

But particularly vocabulary.

Q: hm okay uhm… so I think you answered this question partially…

T: yeah ask me again

Q: how important are CCQs for the language learning in your opinion?

T: I think they're essential,

Because… it's it's for the teacher a way of checking @ it's obvious but checking that you have actually taught something and that you haven't just taught the students to mimic your word…

Q: hm

T: … and that they actually understand what that word means and uhm… (AMBULANCE SIRENS)

You've successfully actually taught it…

So I think they're vital

Q: okay and uhm… how challenging for it for you to formulate your CCQs?

T: I'd say it's something I've gotten better at,
I'm starting to be naturally able to ask CCQs while I'm teaching…
But I still need to spend time planning them if I want them to be good,
At first I struggled but… when you get more used to asking them,
It gets easier to plan so…
Q: so it comes with practice
T: yeah I think so
It comes with practising and asking them,
You get used to what kinds of questions you need to ask…
Q: hm
T: yeah
Q: so you said that it gets more natural…
T: I think [so]
Q: [so] at the beginning how did you feel?
T: … at the beginning I felt like… I was trying to sort of force them into everything I said,
And they didn't always make sense… and I think particularly at the beginning I didn't always ask questions which really checked that they understood…
Sometimes they weren't the best concept checking questions,
I think as I've got more used to asking them and got more used to teaching,
I can ask them more naturally and I think I can ask better ones…
And hopefully that'll continue @
Q: yeah what do you think are the effects on the learning when you ask bad CCQs?
T: I think when you ask bad concept checking questions… (2) uhm… I mean n nn numerous things,
The students won't be actually challenged of what they've learnt so they are not actually… so they're not… when you ask a good concept checking question you're forcing them to engage with what you've taught them…
Because they have to come up with an answer,
When you ask a bad one… depends what kind of bad question really…
Either you're going to…if it's phrased badly you might teach them something wrong…
You might teach them… uh they might answer your concept checking question if you've written it badly… poorly worded concept checking question that doesn't really check the right thing,
They might uhm learn something wrong or if they are just boring and repetitive, the students might just switch off…
Q: yeah
T: they are not really engaged with it necessarily and you're just asking questions at them unless they are really good to check if they understand
Q: hm uhm so… were your CCQs successful or unsuccessful? Can you think of any examples?
T: I'll try to think about something from today… uhm… (6) hm…@ my mind's gone completely blank…
Today I did lots of vocab so I had lots of CCQs and I'm trying to remember… I can't remember any of them…
Q: do you remember students' reactions?
T: yes… well I did for example I did a lesson on vocabulary around shopping today… (2) uhm… I asked lots I was teaching lots of words and did lots of concept checking questions and I did similar stage more than once,
I did a stage of concept checking right after having taught the words,
I did another stage of concept checking uhm in the middle and I did another one at the end
All with the same phrases,

None of them were too long,
I didn't go on and on and on of them,
Just checking that the understood them and certainly the by last concept checking,
Just at the end of the lesson I felt pretty confident that they did understand all the things I taught them because I could… they were responding chorally,
Not just one person,
All of them were saying
And I was saying teaching them,
you know same similar lesson I did on CELTA actually,
today I did the same lesson,
you know take something back changing rooms try something on
Q: ah
T: that stuff and I was you know so if I wanna wanna see if this shirt fits before I buy it,
Try something on and all of them knew it,
And I felt like it went well today,
I felt like it was successful
Q: okay uhm… in what case do you always ask CCQs and when do you skip them?
T: well, I always ask them with vocab teaching new vocabulary… (3) any time I am teaching new vocabulary I'll ask them,
I might skip them depends what's the focus on but I don't see… I'm sure they are always useful in every lesson but in a speaking lesson… (2) when I'm not teaching them something necessarily uh depends @@
Q: hm
T: I can't think of any situation when you would never use them,
I guess…
Q: do you think it depends on the level?
T: it depends on the level… yeah I guess so,
With elementary level and below I'd probably use them less
Q: oh okay
T: depending on what I was teaching
That just because with really low learners they don't… they might not understand a lot of what you're saying so it's hard to ask them…
I would still concept check but I don't know that I would do it in that way
Q: okay
T: I think I would use more imagines to concept check with lower levels,
With upper level learners I guess I'd concept check… (4) it's… depends @
Any time they're learning something new I guess you wanna do it,
If you're not teaching them something new I wouldn't feel the need to
Q: okay

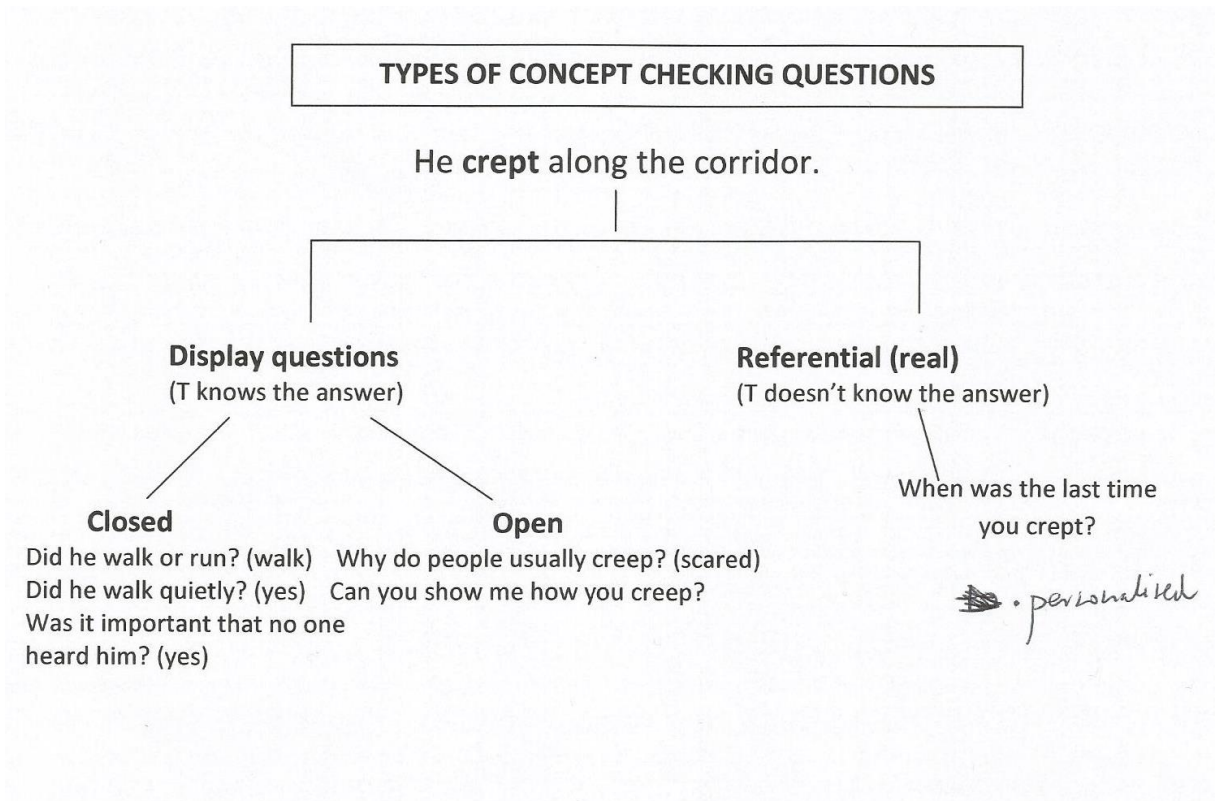**Appendix G: Sample of Reflective Journal**

18/05/17

Today I had some more time to think about my CELTA experience and relate it to the topic of my dissertation. I might focus on Concept Checking Questions as a teaching technique. Do concept checking questions always facilitate learning? What if they are poorly constructed and actually hinder learning opportunities? What if some teachers instead of checking the concept, just confuse their learners? - a teacher teaches a word 'bacon' and asks: Is this fish? as a CCQ. I have to check if asking concept checking questions is controversial at all so I would be able to support my views with relevant literature. I might also look at CCQa as a part of communication in the classroom so the communicative approach will play a major role. It may lead to the question: is the meaning negotiated in the class in this case? I think CCQs (display questions) are part of IRE model which is highly criticized by many researchers (Stubbs, 1983), yet it is commonly used by teachers all over the world. After hours of observations, I realised that most CCQs asked by trainees and experienced teachers were display questions. I asked them as well because I felt like they were required by tutors. Another thing which I noticed/experienced during classes of more advanced levels of ESL (upper-intermediate), was the fact that sometimes asking CCQs seemed strange and patronising. It was observed that some upper-intermediate students looked surprised and they were reluctant to answer them as display CCQs seemed very obvious and simple to these learners since they were able to conclude the meaning from the context previously given by the teacher. I wouldn't have asked them in many cases if I hadn't been under pressure and observed by the tutor. Sometimes asking concept checking questions felt incredibly unnatural and they were being forced by the teacher since students at that upper-intermediate level of English seemed to understand the target language and these simple display questions only left them confused. I just feel like concept checking questions are much more relevant to lower levels ESL learners, if at all. Besides, referential questions were much more communicative because they facilitated negotiation for meaning - students talked about what was exhausting for them and one of them asked for clarification: What do you mean? This types of CCQs also let students stretch their speaking skills and it is much more meaningful because they can talk about their interests and experiences. Simple formulaic display questions did not foster that.

Appendix H: CELTA Lesson Plan

Course Dates: 24 April – 19 May 2017

WEEK 2	Mon 6	Tue 7	Wed 8	Thu 9	Fri 10
9.30 - 10.50	Vocabulary 2: Inferring meaning from context and checking understanding -RS (2.3/3.1)	Observation 2 (from 9am) (Trainees must get back and be ready for Input by 10.20)	Phonology 1: Sounds and Transcriptions - RS (2.4)	Grammar 3: Modals - RS (2.2)	Observation 3 (from 9.30am)
10.50 –11.10			BREAK		
11.10 - 12.30	CCQs & Timelines & functions– RS (2.7)	Assignment 2 Guidance, 'Language Analysis' Due in Day 13 – RS	Skills 2: Listening - RS (3.2)	Skills 3: Speaking – RS (3.3)	Tutorials RS/COD
12.30 - 1.30			LUNCH		
1.30 – 2.15		Preparing for Teaching with a Tutor COD/RS from Thursday			
2.15 - 2.30			BREAK		
2.30 - 5.30		Teaching Practice and Feedback COD			
Notes	Monday week 2. No TP – bank holiday Monday.			Hand-in Portfolios and CELTA 5 with tutorials pages completed.. Tutorials will run from 10.20 to 1pm on Day 10. Each candidate will meet the tutors and have a 15min meeting about their progress so far.	**Hand in Assignment 1** **Focus on the Learner** TP Handover Return all coursebooks, teacher's books, etc.

TYPES OF CONCEPT CHECKING QUESTIONS

He **crept** along the corridor.

Display questions
(T knows the answer)

Referential (real)
(T doesn't know the answer)

When was the last time
you crept?

Closed
Did he walk or run? (walk)
Did he walk quietly? (yes)
Was it important that no one
heard him? (yes)

Open
Why do people usually creep? (scared)
Can you show me how you creep?

• personalised

Appendix J: Rules and Examples of CCQs

> ## Checking Meaning – Concept Questions

When you plan to clarify language, you need to plan to convey the meaning and then check that students understand the meaning. A very important technique is asking concept checking questions.

1. Choose an example of the target language from your context.
2. Break down the meaning of the target language (word/structures)
3. Turn those aspects of meaning into questions, which, if answered correctly, show understanding of the target language.

For example: Your TL is personality adjectives, including "shy". The context is a description of your friends. One of them is Sarah, who's a shy person.

Meaning:
- It's not easy for Sarah to talk to people
- She doesn't feel comfortable when she talks to new people
- Maybe she wants to talk to new people but can't
- She's not a bad person and she's not unfriendly

To check understanding of all aspects of the meaning, the teacher asks the questions:

- Is it easy for Sarah to talk to people? (no)
- Does she feel ok when she talks to new people? (no)
- Do you think she wants to talk to new people? (maybe)
- Is she a bad person? Is she unfriendly? (no)

These closed display questions pin down the meaning. The teacher then asks follow-up questions to consolidate and personalise, e.g.

- Do you know anyone who's shy? In which situations are they the most shy?
- Are you ever shy? In which situations?

Appendix K: Good Concept Checking Questions Guidelines

Good concept checking questions...

- shouldn't use the target language to check itself, especially if it's a tense/structure
- should be graded so that the language in the questions is simpler than the target language
- should just check the target language rather than something else in the sentence
- shouldn't become a guessing game
- should focus on the meaning of idioms/ phrasal verbs/ functional exponents, not break them up into individual components
- should cover all areas of concept and potential confusion
- should be limited in number (usually 2 or 3 is enough)
- should have clear answers (when using display questions) which you need to plan