

## CURRICULUM INNOVATION AND ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE (EFL) TEACHER DEVELOPMENT

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### *Abstract*

*Few of the numerous studies of innovation in the field of education report on innovations that have been successful. After an extensive study of educational change programmes, Parish and Arrends (1983) conclude that educational innovations had approximately a twenty per cent success rate. This is not surprising when we consider the complex nature of innovation. Not only do we need to consider the forces operating both outside and within the organisation implementing change, but also the situations of those who are most affected by the change. More recently, the management of change has become the focus for researchers interested in curriculum implementation. There is now an increasing body of knowledge and expertise about the change process itself and this article documents the steps in affective educational change, as well as outlining a professional development programme for Thai EFL teachers.*

**Keywords:** curriculum innovation; teacher development; English as a foreign language; curriculum.

### **Introduction**

Many studies show that professional development programmes often fail to assist teachers to bring about changes in their practice which will create innovative classrooms. Simons, Linden and Duffy, (2000) demonstrate in their study that many teachers fail to adopt innovation because of mismatches between the proposed changes and their beliefs, understandings and commitment to established routines.

Teachers usually believe they are doing a good job in the current context and that the proposed changes will threaten their professionalism and the quality of their work. Other factors which contribute to low rates of success are often reported in a range of cultural contexts where teachers feel insecure and lack the confidence to change, due to a lack of practical support in the classroom

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(Marris, 1975; Parish & Arrends, 1983; Berman & McLaughlin, 1977; Fullan, 1992; Galton & Williamson, 1992; Williamson, 1995).

As described by Fullan (1992), the implementation of curriculum change is about translating an idea into practice in the classroom. Significant changes are those that address current needs and trends, these must fit well with the teacher's situation, they will be focussed and include practical procedures which will contribute to the successful implementation of change. The principles advocated here include clarity and need. Workability is an important element in implementation that assists in determining the innovation's relevance for individuals. The importance of an implementation plan is seen by White (1988) as one that allows for careful monitoring of the process and is one which is flexible enough to respond quickly to issues as they arise. Fullan (1992) proposes a plan, which is not only flexible and adaptable, but one which encourages people to take risks and learn by their actions.

The Thai National Education Act of 1999, provided impetus for schools throughout the nation to become involved in a raft of educational innovations. Among these innovations were such far reaching and fundamental changes as school-based management; parental involvement in school decision making, a change in the pedagogical approach from teacher-centred to student-centred learning, and the introduction of information technology for learning support.

Thai teachers were expected to carry out government policies as directed. The changes flowing from these policies posed immediate demands on teachers. They were required to change their traditional concept

of their role, to perform in new ways, and to acquire a new range of skills in their workplace. The long-established climate of centralised and hierarchical decision-making in the Thai education system has created a culture of dependency in schools (Hallinger, 2000). A basic element here is that teachers do not believe for the most part that they can initiate change.

Thailand, like countries elsewhere, has adopted a professional development programme (PDP) model as the main means of preparing schools and teachers to introduce educational change. The typical and traditional Thai means of providing teacher professional development is through in-service training programmes or workshops. However, this traditional PDP approach has been questioned recently regarding its practical outcomes, as teachers usually fail to apply the new skills in their classrooms.

### **Key Features of Successful Professional Development**

The success of an innovation and its implementation requires the application of a number of key features (Marsh, 1988; Wilson & Corcoran, 1988; Louis & Miles, 1990; Fullan, 1992; Markee, 1997; Williamson & Cowley, 1998). Research on successful professional development programmes has indicated key elements which contribute to the success of the programmes which include a clearly stated educational rationale for the change, a process of coaching of teachers involved in the change and a direct link to the particular curriculum change. Fullan (1992) has revealed six features of effective professional development. These features should be incorporated into the design of an

effective Professional Development Program (PDP). The six features are:

### 1. Perceived need

Perception of a particular need for innovation is an influential factor in the success of any innovation. Fullan describes the need for change as being either internal or external, or a combination of both of these factors. External need for change can come from such influences as economic, social and political change. In applying this principle to Thailand for example, the consequences of the far reaching changes in the economy following the 1997 economic downturn created imperatives for change to the education system. Many of the causes of the economic problems which beset the nation were external. At the same time it is possible to state that internal factors are also pushing educational change in the nation. People are not satisfied with the current situation in regard to the school curriculum (Fullan, 1992: 69). In Thailand educators are seeking new ways to introduce innovative language teaching methods into the school system. The introduction of a radical change in the language teaching provides an example of an internal need for change.

Many official government documents and policies provide the motivation for the concept to be built into the PDP. In the case of Thailand, the Office of the National Education Commission provides the impetus for curriculum change with its 'big picture' view of educational reform in the nation. The Office of the National Education Commission represents the official government policy on reform. Other influences come from senior educators and media reports on the nation's education system. These factors created a

climate of acceptance of the need for curriculum change and were reinforced by the widespread belief in the community that change is needed in the education system.

### 2. Clarity

The second of Fullan's principles, clarity, relates to changes in pedagogy, it also relates to the relationship between teacher and learner, as well as the practical role played by materials used in teaching and of the assessment processes used to determine learning outcomes. Teachers must therefore be well aware of the reasons for the curriculum change – without this they are unable to authentically satisfy the requirements of this principle. If for example, the curriculum change requires student centred learning activities such as group work, or individual exhibitions, and the teacher has no fundamental belief or knowledge of such pedagogies or assessment methods, these teaching and learning processes will be challenged by teachers. Where these challenges occur without the clarity suggested by Fullan, they have the potential to inhibit curriculum change.

The thoughtful introduction of curriculum change will provide a number of strategies which will enable the clarity concept to be built into the Professional Development Programme (PDP). Some of these strategies could include:

1. The provision of the reasons for change provided through seminars for leaders and middle managers

2. Intensive training workshops for teachers, particularly those who will be most directly affected by the change – such workshops should be well planned and as well as providing direction for change, they

must acknowledge the work of teachers as they work in the current paradigm.

### 3. Practical exercises such as:

- videotaping various teachers' lessons in order to evaluate their present classroom practice and to provide a foundation for discussion of changes in pedagogy.

- using a classroom observation checklist for feedback

- professional discussions among collegial groups of supervisors and teachers

- demonstration and modelling the new teaching methods under simulated conditions.

### 3. Complexity

The involvement of teachers in the development of flexible plans for implementation of the change is crucial to the success of these plans. The work of Berman & McLaughlin (1976) and White (1988) emphasise the critical importance of involving teachers in decision making at all stages of the implementation of curriculum change. Such involvement develops commitment to change as well as ownership of the new directions that are being sought.

The complexity principle emphasises the importance of ensuring that teachers are involved in every stage of the development of the PDP with the knowledge that a wide range of processes is included in the plan. The PDP takes account of Fullan's principle of complexity in a variety of ways. For example:

- The plan is adaptable and flexible, so that it takes account of the particular capabilities of the individual teacher. The plan is opened for each teacher to make their

own decision on what and how they would like to do in response to their students' needs.

- The use of coaching in aspects of the new curriculum requirements is deemed appropriate as it provides a monitoring and support role to supervisors.

### 4. Workability

The fourth principle described by Fullan (1992) is "workability". He regards this as an attribute of changes "that fit in well with the teacher's situation, that are focused and include how-to-do-it possibilities" (1992: 72). Fullan's concept of workability is about the management aspects of change which are concerned with such things as planning, the human and physical resources, and practices used when individuals are involved in change. The success of the innovation is directly related to these elements. It is, therefore, extremely important that these practical considerations are taken into account in the context of the proposed change.

A variety of approaches can be used to develop and implement this concept in the PDP. It is well acknowledged that teacher talk is critical in the implementation of change – in this case, the consideration of the specific needs and expectations of teachers in a school can be developed through professional discussions and meeting time should be made available to allow for this discussion.

Another useful approach is to provide the opportunity to draw on the professional skills of teachers in providing their experience as input into practical suggestions for change in the various aspects of curriculum change canvassed above.

The senior staff of the school can encourage openness in a range of group processes, including peer appraisal and collegial reflection on various aspects of practice.

#### 5. Implementation support

Any change in professional practice brings with it certain inherent emotional responses which can be anticipated in any change process. Among these are grief, anger, insecurity and relief. Teachers who are doing a good job in the teaching and learning process and who are regarded as being successful in their profession may react with anger or grief in their interpretation of curriculum change. They need time to assimilate the rationale for change, they need support in the period of change and to they need to know that the changes are not due to any deficiencies real or perceived on their part. The role of the teacher in a time of great change can be isolating. This fifth principle enunciated by Fullan (1992) relates directly to the need to provide support to teachers during the implementation phase. Ongoing support from administrators and skilled teachers promoting change is important to teachers' continuing commitment to the change

The concept of support during the implementation phase can be built into a PDP in a variety of ways. One way is to develop a network of stakeholders in the change process – such a network could include people at a range of levels – from superintendent, to supervisors, principals and teachers. As well as such networks various approaches can be taken towards building collaboration and mutual support between teachers, and between teachers and the different levels of supervisors.

School leaders can help develop a climate of experimentation and enquiry rather than one of judgement or blame. In such a climate, teachers will be prepared to take professional risks and be open to sharing the results of such risks and experimentation.

#### 6. Advocacy

An advocate or consultant provides vital assistance in successful implementation. It is accepted that individuals find it difficult to carry out the implementation of the innovation alone, so good consultants can help the change proceed smoothly and effectively by providing concrete, practical advice either in the classroom or in professional development workshops. Fullan (1992) emphasises that strong advocacy at the administrative level is essential for change, while Bottomley, Dalto, Corbel & Brindley (1994: 27) demonstrate that teacher advocacy builds peer networks that impact positively on the capacity for change.

A range of different approaches can be used to ensure that advocacy or consultancy is applied to a PDP. One approach would be to provide a mentoring role to supervisors. Such a role requires adequate resourcing for mentor and mentee as well as recognition of the value of such work. Failure to provide adequate resources in will lead to the failure of such a programme. Research circles of groups of professionals regardless of their rank can be very supportive of the advocacy principle and provide opportunities for professionals to work together in promoting the change in practice.

### **The Professional Development Programme and Thai EFL Contexts**

There are many challenges posed by moving to Communicative Language Teaching Approach (CLT) and moving away from traditional approaches in EFL. Bringing about these changes can be very difficult to achieve, but this is not a reason for not setting out to implement such changes. Several studies have indicated that attempting to do this in many Asian countries has proved difficult (Defeng, 1984; Sano, Takahashi & Yoneyama, 1984; Burnaby & Sun, 1989; Ellis, 1994; Shamin, 1996). These studies highlight many of the major problems faced when introducing a curriculum innovation such as CLT. Such problems include for example, large classes, teachers' lack of proficiency in the target language, and difficulty in accessing suitable materials and equipment. Even when systems, schools and teachers are committed to this language teaching method, making the transition to CLT methods remains a challenge. The challenge centres on the difficulty of making major changes in practice, and also moving the paradigm from traditionally accepted educational practices to new ways of educational thinking (Smith, 1982).

The programme proposed here is related to successful models of curriculum change implemented elsewhere in the world, although in this case it has been applied to the unique circumstances of EFL in Thailand. The recommended PDP plan is expressed in a way that will generate confidence among participants in terms of their role in the PDP. The programme remains flexible at the classroom level in order to enable teachers and supervisors to participate in making decisions concerning their own situations. In

order to bring about a major change in pedagogical practices in an education system and to ensure the success of any paradigm shift in pedagogical theory and practice, much more is required of its instigators than a mental map of the new territory.

Such a change requires an effective process of implementation, with assistance for teachers as they find their way into unfamiliar and at times hazardous, terrain. A coaching approach has been found to be valuable in supporting teachers through the challenge of innovation (Joyce & Showers, 1980; Galton & Williamson, 1992). Coaching can be effective for developing implementation skills in teachers by providing clear guidance on what to do and how to do it. It has also been shown to have the flexibility to assist individual teachers in dealing with the specific difficulties they encounter, to assist them gain the management skills to cope with the complexities of change, and to provide this support directly when it is most needed (Galton & Williamson, 1992).

Bearing in mind the lack of success of the traditional Thai programmes and responding to these recommendations, Iemjinda (2003) conducted a PDP for Thai EFL teacher development, which included the following components:

1. *The use of the coaching approach*

The coaching used in the PDP allowed the supervisors and the teachers participating in the PDP to discuss the development of the teachers' performance. The discussion was conducted in a private room (free from distraction) immediately after the lesson. The supervisor initiated the discussion with the teacher by giving feedback from the classroom observation

checklist which focused on positive teaching performance. The supervisor initially, points out the development of the teacher in areas of constructive change since the last/previous visit. At the meeting, the teacher raised issues and difficulties she had encountered both in the observed lesson and previous lessons she recorded in her diary. The researcher took the role of observer, taking notes, audiotape –recording the conversation and mentoring for both the supervisor and the teacher on technical issues, such as Task-based learning (TBL).

#### *2. Giving a monitoring and support role to supervisors*

A supervisor is highly regarded as the person with a key role in supporting curriculum implementation. A support role to supervisors in the PDP started from a process of selecting teachers to participate in the PDP. The supervisors carefully selected the teachers whom they expected to become a key teacher to assist colleagues in schools with curriculum implementation. By considering the teachers' capacities, attitudes and motivation, the supervisors expected these teachers to develop their capacity as teaching professionals which was a direct benefit from participation in the PDP.

In terms of a monitoring role in the PDP, the supervisor took this role from the beginning, when watching the teachers' lesson videotapes, and gave advice and set goals for teachers to achieve. The monitoring role of the supervisors occurred during regular classroom visits to provide comments drawn from the classroom observation checklist used in the post-lesson discussion.

#### *3. Consideration of the specific needs and expectations of the teachers*

A consideration of the specific needs and expectations of the teachers involved in the PDP began when the supervisors and teachers together viewed the videotapes of individual lessons during the intensive teacher training workshop. The viewing of the lesson videotapes allowed the supervisors and teachers to identify for each teacher the strengths and weaknesses of their teaching performance. The teachers themselves identified their need to develop their teaching towards CLT. Teachers' expectations varied based on their teaching skill, knowledge and experience.

#### *4. Drawing on the professional skills of teachers as input to the programme*

The PDP respected teachers' knowledge and their teaching experience in relation to classroom organization, students' learning style and assessment. The teachers were encouraged to explore their own situation, e.g., students' need and ability and left it open for them to design their own lesson which suited their own teaching style. The PDP respected the teacher's role as a skilful practitioner of a complex art and encouraged them to become more independent as a classroom curriculum developer.

#### *5. Building collaboration and mutual support between teachers, and between teachers and supervisors*

The PDP encouraged collaboration and mutual support between teachers, and teachers and supervisors through a variety of activities such as a regular fortnightly school visit for each teacher, a monthly meeting among teachers and supervisors to share experiences in their using the new teaching method, both positive and negative, as well as sharing materials and lesson plans. In fact,

the teachers' and supervisors' collaboration began from the beginning of the programme when the supervisors selected teachers who the supervisors expected to be key teachers to work in their schools.

6. *Liaising closely with personnel at different levels – including superintendent, supervisor, principal and teacher – in order to develop a network of stakeholders*

The PDP worked closely with local educational authorities at different levels in order to develop a network of stakeholders. The liaising activities involved a process of selection schools /sites, supervisors and teachers for the PDP which decided by superintendents. The superintendents also selected supervisors to work in the programme as they considered those supervisors as well qualified and experienced enough to take this role. The superintendent, principals and the supervisors together, then, chose teachers to participate in the PDP. The superintendents also supported a meeting room for a seminar and intensive training workshop, and a technician for videotaping teachers' lessons both before and after the PDP.

7. *Encouraging openness in group appraisal and reflection*

The PDP encouraged openness in group appraisal and reflection through different kinds of activities such as:

- At the workshop, teachers were asked to self-evaluate their teaching performance from their lesson videotapes taken.

- During discussion after the lesson, teachers opened with the supervisors and the researcher to raise their issues concerning both positive and negative experiences about the new teaching method, and

- A monthly meeting, sharing experiences about the use of the new teaching method, both negative and positive among supervisors and teachers.

This openness was achieved because of the PDP focus on each teachers' development and pointed out their benefit from the PDP

8. *Establishing a climate of experimentation and enquiry rather than judgment or blame;*

A challenge of the PDP was to establish a climate of experimentation by encouraging teachers to change their teaching behaviors. These included:

- being independent from using only textbooks as a main teaching/learning resource.

- experimentation of a new role of teacher as a learning facilitator.

- experimentation in a new way of assessment which focuses on the development of students' learning, rather than achievement. and

- experimentation in students' involvement in the learning process.

9. *Responding to the constraints of specific contexts, especially those arising from the radical nature of the CLT in traditional classrooms*

The adoption of CLT was challenging for teachers when they applied this teaching of method in their classrooms. The PDP responded to the constraints of using the CLT in traditional classrooms, especially those arising in specific contexts. For example, one teacher found difficulty in using a whole class activity in a large class because of a noise problem affecting other classes. To avoid this problem, it was suggested to use a pair or small group activities instead. In contrast, a teacher from a small class had a problem that



activities finished too quickly because of the small number of students. It was recommended in this case that whole class activities would be appropriate.

The particular aspects of this PDP emanate from these components. The components give this programme its specific character, locating it in the context of change in the Thai education system. For these reasons, the researcher saw a coaching approach as an important element in enabling the content of a professional development programme to be delivered and absorbed, and then to be adapted for use in the teachers' own classroom practice.

The combination of TBL and a coaching approach held out to the researcher the hope of finding a possible means to tackle a problem in the devising of EFL teacher development, one that had been shown in the experience of many education systems in Asia and elsewhere as being most intractable (Hallinger, 2000). One of the significant factors involved in the failure of efforts to implement major curriculum change would appear to be the lack of continuing support for teachers at a practical school level, leaving them feeling insecure and lacking the confidence to implement the innovation individually in their schools. It was essential to the framing of this present study that educational change and its implementation be recognised as a complex process and that teachers require continuing support during it.

## Conclusion

This article has examined the different approaches to developing a professional development programme. The paper has focussed on a range of recommendations for the use of a PDP in curriculum innovation and,

in particular, the use of the communicative language teaching approach as one of the educational innovations available to teachers to use in the transition to new curriculum directions.

It is evident that certain key features are important in developing a PDP for teachers involved in curriculum change. Among these key features are that no one element of a PDP will lead to satisfactory involvement in curriculum change – any plan must contain a range of elements as proposed in this paper. Another element is the critical importance of assuring teachers that curriculum change does not necessarily mean that they are not doing a good job under the current circumstances and that the curriculum change need not be based on a deficit model of their current work. Rather, it is a different approach to achieving their goal of effective EFL teaching.

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“Life is not a bed of roses”