INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES ON TEACHERS LIVING WITH CURRICULUM CHANGE

International Perspectives on English Language Teaching

Edited by
Martin Wedell and Laura Grassick

International Perspectives on English Language Teaching

Series Editors

Sue Garton
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"This is a valuable addition to research and practice in ELT curriculum change, with a refreshing approach to identifying problems and solutions. It has a broad international focus but concentrates on the individual lives of eleven teachers in ten different countries faced with implementation of secondary school curriculum change. The reality of the teachers' stories is filtered through interviews conducted by the writers of each chapter, teacher educators themselves. The writers provide a background to the teachers' contexts and are able to combine the teachers' accounts with their own knowledge of curriculum change. The result is a remarkable and effective combination of personal stories and their application to theories of curriculum change, avoiding both the dangers of personal anecdote and the sterility of theory divorced from practice. This is an excellent collection and will prove an indispensable resource to all those involved in curriculum innovation."

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"One of the worst kept secrets in TESOL, and perhaps in education generally, is that the intended impacts of national curriculum change projects are rarely achieved in practice. The reasons for this gap between the planned and enacted curriculum have been documented for many years, yet, frustratingly, these insights have not made much difference to the way educational authorities around the world approach curriculum innovation. This very timely and insightful collection provides further evidence of the challenges that curriculum change often raises for individual

teachers in several TESOL contexts around the world and portrays in a vivid manner the consequences for these teachers of the hurried, top-down, unclear, and non-consultative manner in which new curricula are often thrust upon practitioners. The narrative insights into teachers' thinking and actions that the volume provides make it a valuable addition to the literature on TESOL curriculum change."

—Simon Borg, *Western Norway University of Applied Sciences, Norway*

"This volume is essential reading for (language) curriculum policy makers and planners who all too often underestimate the effort required for curricula change to be successfully enacted in schools and classrooms. Context is everything as we know, but hearing the challenges from the teachers' perspectives is very powerful. It's an invaluable reminder of the importance of a multiple stakeholder approach which allows for a close consideration of local realities. Each chapter provides really useful lessons for curriculum planners summarised helpfully by the editors into three critical areas of temporal dissonance, contextual confusion and risk. I will definitely be encouraging my colleagues to read it!"

—Alison Barrett MBE, *Head of English for Education Systems, British Council, UK*

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International Perspectives on Teachers Living with Curriculum Change

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International Perspectives on English Language Teaching
ISBN 978-1-137-54308-0 ISBN 978-1-137-54309-7 (eBook)
https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-54309-7

Library of Congress Control Number: 2017948304

Printed on acid-free paper

This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by Springer Nature
The registered company is Macmillan Publishers Ltd.
The registered company address is: The Campus, 4 Crinan Street, London, N1 9XW, United Kingdom

Foreword

Change and innovation are a way of life for language teachers, and you can almost hear the groans every time a government announces yet another innovative curriculum aimed at producing a new generation of fluent English speakers. This reaction is not because language teachers are adverse to change—far from it. Many are active reflective practitioners, constantly focusing on how they can develop their practice to ensure their students have an excellent learning experience. But in this volume we are less concerned with the micro-changes that teachers can effect and more concerned with macro-changes at the level of policy. We think it is fair to say that English language teachers around the world have been plagued with more than their fair share: the introduction of communicative language teaching; an earlier start with the introduction of English in primary schools; English-only classrooms; the turn towards CLIL, to name just a few. However, what we find astonishing in the change implementation discourses is the absence of the main change agents: the teachers. Not only are their voices rarely heard in policy decision-making, but they are often also silent in research too.

Theoretical frameworks try to explain the impact and diffusion of innovation, with categories for change agents such as *innovator, early adopter, early majority, late majority* and *laggard* (Rogers 2003). However, such classifications imply that the adoption process itself is simple and one-dimensional and thus promote negative conceptualisations of those who fail to adopt change swiftly and full heartedly. Worryingly, they also fail to capture the complexity and challenges that language teachers face when trying to adapt to change and innovation in often challenging educational contexts where English might not be considered a subject of much importance.

This volume is therefore a very welcome addition to the *International Perspectives* series. In itself, it represents change and innovation, both in the field of studies into innovation and change in English language teaching and in the *International Perspectives* series. Unlike other volumes in the series, the chapters in this book do not report on previously carried out research projects. Instead, all chapters have been commissioned and they all follow broadly the same premise and pattern. Altogether, curriculum changes in ten different countries are explored. In each case, the chapter author is a teacher educator who has collected the story of an individual teacher coping with curriculum change. Each chapter begins by introducing the educational system in which the teacher works before giving the floor to the teacher to explore their understandings of the change, their efforts to implement it and their opinions of trying to do so. Each chapter concludes with the author's analysis of the teacher's experience in the light of existing ideas in the change and innovation literature.

What emerges is a rich and colourful tapestry illustrating the experiences of the teachers in their own words, as they struggle with, and succeed in, the implementation of curriculum change. Whilst each story is unique, the chapters together illustrate how universal the challenges that teachers face are, and therefore, each story is powerful in its potential to resonate across both geographical and educational contexts.

Birmingham, UK — Sue Garton
Stirling, UK — Fiona Copland

Preface

Who are the Editors?

Between the 1970s and the mid-2000s, we both spent over 20 years working as English teachers, trainers, materials writers and project managers in state education systems in Kenya, China, Vietnam, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Hungary. We have subsequently worked as members of the TESOL group at Leeds University, during which we have retained and expanded our international links and activities. We have noticed that in most of the international contexts which we know, many state school English teachers are still struggling to make sense of the classroom implications of the more or less explicitly communication-oriented curricula which most are now supposed to follow. Although as the following chapters show, such curricula may have first been introduced up to 25 years ago, the education systems in which English teachers work often seem either oblivious to their struggles or apparently unable to provide appropriate support.

When trying to understand why this state of affairs was so common in the countries in which we worked or had contacts, we like many others, first considered whether or how the problems that we had observed might be addressed through improving 'visible' aspects of curriculum change initiation and implementation of planning strategies and procedures. Over time it has, however, become clearer to us that if we wish to understand how change implementation strategies and procedures might be made more supportive of hoped-for change outcomes, we need to understand the experiences of the people who are expected to implement curriculum change. This has led us to the focus of this book—teachers' experiences of TESOL curriculum change.

What is This Book About?

This book is a response to the following quote which has appeared in all four editions of the book from which it comes. The first edition was published in 1981. The fact that the author finds it necessary to repeat it in his 2007 edition suggests that its message has still not been fully understood.

> Neglect of the phenomenology of change- that is how people actually experience change as distinct from how it might have been intended- is at the heart of the spectacular lack of success of most social reforms (Fullan 2007: 8).

The chapters that follow explore the change experiences of a handful of the millions of English teachers who currently teach English in state education systems. The teachers come from 10 different countries on every continent. In all their contexts, the goals of their English curricula have changed as their governments have (like the Japanese Ministry of Education in the following quote, though of course phrased differently) increasingly seen the teaching of English as essential, both for individual learners 'to acquire communication abilities in English as a common international language' and for the nation as a whole to be linked 'with the rest of the world, obtaining the world's understanding and trust, enhancing our international presence and further developing our nation' (Ministry of Education. Tokyo 31.03.2003). However, both in Japan and elsewhere, such national aspirations have rarely resulted in visible examples of state system teaching successfully enabling most learners to develop real English communication abilities during their years of in-school study.

Attempts to explain why this has been so in the existing literature on TESOL change (e.g. Hyland and Wong 2013; Markee 2007) focus largely on the macro, systems level of change—for example, different procedures and factors to be considered when making decisions about change planning, or the strategies for supporting change. Very little research has investigated the change process through exploring the experiences of the people on whom implementation ultimately depends: the teachers. Given the fundamental conservatism of most of the educational cultures in which state systems are situated (see discussion below), implementing a 'communication oriented' curriculum implies considerable adjustments to English teachers' and learners' behaviours and ways of thinking about teaching and learning. But what actually are these adjustments and how do teachers feel, as they attempt (or decide not) to make them? What influences whether they

make them, what support helps? This book explores questions such as these through stories of teachers' experiences of living through curriculum change. We hope that readers will find resonance in these stories in relation to their own teaching and learning contexts, and that the stories and analyses of their messages will contribute to the TESOL/educational change literature from the personal perspective that has so far, generally, been neglected.

Leeds, UK

Martin Wedell
Laura Grassick

Contents

1	**Living with Curriculum Change: An Overview** *Martin Wedell and Laura Grassick*	1
2	**Involving Teachers in the Change Process: One English Language Teacher's Account of Implementing Curricular Change in Philippine Basic Education** *Maria Luz C. Vilches*	15
3	**Making the Best of Continuous Change Initiatives: A Story of a Successful Korean English Teacher** *Hyoshin Lee*	39
4	**Balancing Change and Tradition: A Chinese English Teacher's Experiences of Curriculum Reform** *Chunmei Yan*	61
5	**Meeting the Demands of ELT Innovation in Vietnam: Teachers' Linguistic and Pedagogic Challenge** *Le Thi Quynh Tran*	83
6	**Coping with Curricular Change with Limited Support: An Indian English Teacher's Perspective** *Amol Padwad and Krishna Dixit*	103

7 An English Teacher's Perspective on Curriculum Change in West Bengal 125
Kuheli Mukherjee

8 Reconciling Conflicting Messages: English Language Curriculum Change in Kenyan Secondary Schools 147
Charles Ochieng' Ong'ondo

9 Giving English Teachers Autonomy and Choice: Coping with Curriculum Change in Poland 167
Małgorzata Tetiurka

10 Struggling to Implement Communicative Language Teaching: A Case Study from Senegal 187
Dame Diop

11 Imaginary Realities: Curriculum Change that Ignores Classroom Contexts 205
María Alejandra Soto

12 From Initial Rigidity to Greater Flexibility: The Changing Face of English Curriculum Change Implementation in Cuba 229
Islaura Tejeda Arencibia

13 Temporal Dissonance, Contextual Confusion and Risk: Learning from the Experiences of Teachers Living with Curriculum Change 247
Laura Grassick and Martin Wedell

Further Reading 271

Index 275

Notes on Contributors

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Abbreviations

CBI	Content Based Instruction
CEFR	Common European Framework of Reference
CHED	Commission on Higher Education
CLIL	Content and Language Integrated Learning
CLT	Communicative Language Teaching
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
CSAT	College Scholastic Aptitude Test
DEL.Ed	Diploma in Elementary Education
DepEd	Department of Education
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
EL	English Language
ELT	English Language Teaching
ELTE	English Language Teacher Education
ESL	English as a Second Language
ETC	English Teachers' Club
EPIK	English Programme in Korea
FA	Formative Assessment
GED	General Education Diploma
GCE	General Council of Education (Consejo General de Educación)
IATEFL	International Association of Teaching English as a Foreign Language
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IELTS	International English Language Testing System
IETTP	Intensive English Teacher Training Programme
ITE	Initial Teacher Education
KICD	Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development
KIE	Kenya Institute of Education

KNEC	Kenya National Examinations Council
KSCE	Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education
MOA	Memorandum of Agreement
MoE	Ministry of Education
MOET	Ministry of Education and Training
MT	Master Trainer
MSBE	Maharastra State Board of Secondary and Higher Secondary Education
MSCF	Maharastra State Curriculum Framework
NCERT	National Curriculum and Educational Research and Training
NCF	National Curriculum Framework
NEAT	National English Ability Test
NEST	Native English Speaking Teacher
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
SCI	Subject Content Integration
SETA	Seoul English Teachers Association
SMOE	Seoul Metropolitan Office of English
TBL	Task-Based Learning
TDP	Teacher Development Programme
TEE	Teaching English through English
TESOL	Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages
TOEFL	Test of English as a Foreign Language
TQC	Teachers' Quality Circle

List of Tables

Chapter 6	**Coping with Curricular Change with Limited Support: An Indian English Teacher's Perspective**	
Table 1	Major shifts in the curriculum framework	106
Chapter 8	**Reconciling Conflicting Messages: English Language Curriculum Change in Kenyan Secondary Schools**	
Table 1	Titles of education courses for ELTE students at one Kenyan University	152
Table 2	Course outline of the *methods of teaching English/literature* course	152
Chapter 13	**Temporal Dissonance, Contextual Confusion and Risk: Learning from the Experiences of Teachers Living with Curriculum Change**	
Table 1	Conceptions of knowledge and some implications for the roles of teachers and learners	250

1

Living with Curriculum Change: An Overview

Martin Wedell and Laura Grassick

1 Why Explore English Teachers' Experiences of Curriculum Change?

One of the greatest changes in education worldwide over the past 25 to 30 years has been the increasing role of English as a core school subject in state education curricula. Forty years ago, English as a subject was, in most countries, taught to a limited number of secondary school learners, if at all. Now, it is a compulsory subject at secondary level almost everywhere, with some countries requiring success in the English paper of a school leaving exam as a prerequisite for university entrance. More recently, English has increasingly become a core subject at primary school also. A recent global survey (Rixon 2013) shows that English is a subject from at least the third year of primary school in 49 of the 64 countries investigated. Although the exact number of school learners is difficult to establish, estimates suggest that there are 390 million school and university level learners in China alone (Wei and Su 2012), and between 1.5 and 2 billion learners globally, most of whom are learning English as a compulsory part of their basic state system education (Crystal 2000; Graddol 2006; TESOL 2014; Jenkins 2015). Such enormous numbers of learners of course require a huge number of teachers.

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M. Wedell and L. Grassick (eds.), *International Perspectives on Teachers Living with Curriculum Change*, International Perspectives on English Language Teaching,
https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-54309-7_1

Prince and Barrett (2014) give a sense of the scale when they report that there are 3.2 million English language teachers working in government and private schools across India alone.

Historically, the aims of most of today's English curricula have been strongly influenced by changing perspectives on language teaching and education more generally. The first change derives from ideas in Applied Linguistics in the 1970s which by clarifying that language proficiency entails more than linguistic competence encouraged the long and unfinished evolution of 'communicative language teaching' (see Savignon 1997; Nunan 1999). Attempts to try to teach language (now mostly English) for communication have more recently coincided with (and often been in the vanguard of) a second global educational change. This is the move, rhetorically at least, away from the 'teacher-centred', knowledge transmission, view of teaching and learning that has been (and remains) typical of many school systems worldwide since compulsory schooling for all began, towards a more 'learner-centred', 'interactive' and 'constructivist' conception of education (Schweisfurth 2011; 2013).

Today, therefore, state school education systems worldwide have increasingly, and now almost universally, introduced English curricula whose stated goal is to develop learners' ability to use/communicate in English. Two examples below from different continents illustrate how state school English curricula express their desired learner outcomes. Numerous similar examples can be found in the chapters that follow.

In Venezuela, the English curriculum goals are for learners to become able 'to use oral and written language as a means for communication with the rest of the world and as a means of accessing scientific and humanistic knowledge' (New National Curriculum 2007, as cited in Chacón 2012). In Nepal, they are expressed similarly, as becoming able 'To develop an understanding of and competence in spoken English; communicate fluently and accurately with other speakers of English' (Curriculum Development Centre 1995, as cited in Shrestha 2008: 195).

Such communication-oriented curricula usually recommend the use of interactive/learner-centred pedagogies.

> In response to the perceived global demand for communication in English, new TEYL curricula have generally emphasised communicative competence. In many countries, particularly in East Asia (Ho 2003), this has led to the introduction of some form of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) or Task-Based Learning and Teaching (TBLT). This is the case, for example, in Korea (Li 1998; Mitchell and Lee 2003), Hong Kong (Carless 2003; 2004), China (G. Hu 2002), Turkey (Kirkgöz 2009), and Thailand (de Segovia and Hardison 2009), to name just a few. (Garton et al. 2011: 5)

As will become clear in the chapters that follow, recommending the use of such teaching approaches is not limited to East Asian countries. English teachers in all countries reported on here are encouraged to establish classrooms in which, as well as providing knowledge about the language, they facilitate activities and tasks that provide opportunities for learners to try to use English language knowledge for meaningful interaction. While English teachers are almost universally explicitly recommended to adopt such approaches, in many contexts, the teaching of other subjects remains based around the transmission of factual knowledge. This is in spite of official rhetoric promoting 'learner centredness' across the education system.

In such circumstances, the classroom implementation of new English curricula espousing the adoption of more interactive pedagogies remains inconsistent with majority educational and cultural norms and expectations. This poses considerable challenges for English teachers. They are expected to make complex (Fullan 1992) changes to their classroom practice and their professional thinking in working contexts where the assumptions and behaviours underpinning most teaching and learning of other subjects remain unchanged.

Most national education systems in both developing and developed countries remain hierarchical and top down in their planning processes. Change planning strategies remain largely power coercive (Chin and Benne 1976), with change implementation still often viewed as 'a linear, sequentially ordered industrial production line' (Pettigrew and Whipp 1991: 32). Those responsible for curriculum implementation at local level (teachers, school heads or local educational administrators) are rarely informed or consulted about proposed curriculum changes, or involved in implementation planning. Many stories in this book confirm what the literature (Wedell 2013; Levin and Fullan 2008) suggests about the likely outcomes of such lack of communication. Firstly, lack of real communication with those working at local level results in change implementation planning proceeding without sufficient consideration of the existing cultural and material realities across the national context. Secondly, it contributes to a view of curriculum change as a discrete event, and a failure to consider what the curriculum changes imply for other parts of the English language system such as textbooks, examinations and teacher education, to make sure that they remain broadly consistent with new curriculum goals. Finally, lack of communication and involvement prior to implementation is likely to mean that when implementation officially begins, English teachers are confused about what exactly they are supposed to do. Their own local contexts can offer little guidance or support, since school and administrative leaders themselves often know

little about and/or are indifferent to the classroom implications of the new English curriculum. In such circumstances, where implementation planning fails to develop structures that enable the implementation process to be supported by the 'focused and sustained efforts by all parts of the education system and its partners' (Levin and Fullan 2008: 291), then implementation outcomes in terms of visible changes to 'teaching and learning practices in thousands and thousands of classrooms' (Levin and Fullan 2008: 291) are likely to be disappointing.

Of course, implementation planning does often include formal support for some English teachers and may include exhortations to adapt curriculum goals to the realities of their own local contexts. However, as most of the following chapters show, the support provided often takes the form of a one-off, off-site, 'training', using a lecture-based theory application approach (Malderez and Wedell 2007). Teachers are told about the rationale for the change, or about the content of the new textbook, but are not helped to develop ways of adjusting their existing familiar (usually transmission based) practices to become more consistent with the change goals. Moreover, especially in countries with large numbers of teachers, formal support is frequently available to only some teachers, who may then be expected to cascade training content to colleagues in their local context.

English teachers thus often receive minimal support to understand what new curriculum aims actually mean for their own classroom practices. Instead, they are often effectively left alone to work out how 'to stimulate learners' curiosity' (De Segovia and Hardison 2009: 160), 'employ constructivist teaching approaches' (Vavrus 2009: 304), 'adjust their views on language and language teaching and use a more student centred approach' (Wang and Wang 2000:8) and 'view themselves as facilitators who should provide opportunities for the students to practise and use the language' (Orafi 2008: 11).

They may face additional challenges resulting from the previously mentioned lack of consideration of the whole change context. Examples from the stories to come include frequent mismatches between the skills that communicative curricula aim to develop and what is actually assessed in tests and exams or between the classroom time needed to use interactive pedagogies and the pressure from local leaders to 'finish the book'.

An outcome of all the above can be English teachers who know that their teaching is not helping their learners to achieve hoped-for curriculum outcomes. They feel helpless to do more. This may be due to, for example, insufficient personal language proficiency and/or limited understanding of interactive pedagogical principles and procedures, and/or the implicit

or explicit messages they receive about the cultural inappropriacy of such principles from colleagues, leaders, learners and parents in their immediate working environment.

We are aware that the above rather gloomy picture is not true for all English teachers in all contexts at all times, and indeed, some of the following chapters provide a more positive picture. There is also literature evidencing ways in which individual English teachers, and some institutions, or groups of each, can, and are beginning to, develop locally relevant responses to national English curriculum change initiatives, with or without 'official' support. Some examples include the individual English teacher initiatives and local level collaborations from every continent reported during annual IATEFL presentations by Hornby scholars (IATEFL proceedings 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015), collaborative teacher-led initiatives to develop English teacher voice and agency in India (Padwad and Dixit 2015) and universities working together to jointly develop new initial teacher education curricula for English teachers in Chile (Abrahams and Farias 2010).

Nonetheless, despite the substantial human and financial investment allocated to supporting the teaching of English by governments on every continent, there is as yet little evidence of national English curriculum change initiatives, which aim to enable learners to develop their communication skills in English through a shift to a learner-centred mode of instruction (De Segovia and Hardison 2009: 155), achieving their goals.

Since we agree with Fullan that 'educational change depends on what teachers do and think, it is as simple and as complex as that' (2007: 129), this book explores teachers' stories of what they have done and thought as they participated in the implementation of English curriculum changes in their own contexts. We hope that getting a sense of their real-life experiences will help us and our readers to better understand the ways in which curriculum change is 'complex' for teachers, and what such complexity tells us about ways in which current and future TESOL change planning and implementation processes may become better able to meet their hoped-for goals.

2 Content and Methodology

The 11 chapters that constitute the core of the book each represent a single English teacher's experience of living through one or more of the TESOL curriculum changes that have occurred in their context. The teachers' stories have been gathered and told by the chapter authors representing a range of

countries. The chapters are ordered geographically from the Philippines in the East to Cuba in the West, via Korea, China, Vietnam, India (two chapters), Kenya, Poland, Senegal and Argentina. In the majority of contexts represented, English is unambiguously a foreign language. In two or three contexts, while it is officially a second language, it is questionable whether its use is truly a part of all citizens' daily lives. All the teachers except one work at state secondary schools within their countries, with one working in upper elementary with learners aged 11 upwards.

The chapter authors are all teacher educators in their own countries and are all known personally and professionally by the editors. Some are previously published, many are not. Chapter authors were free to choose whichever teachers they wished, bearing in mind the need for them to be sufficiently professionally qualified and experienced to be able to articulate and discuss their own experiences of curriculum change. These are then inevitably the stories of above averagely confident, competent and motivated English teachers, interpreted by researchers who are both professionally and emotionally close to their teacher's context.

The chapter structure, and the methodology for and focus of the data collection, was suggested by the editors, explicitly recognising that contexts across the countries represented would be different and that our suggestions should consequently be considered to be guidelines rather than prescriptions. The structure of each chapter broadly follows the three stages outlined below.

1. An introduction, in which the author briefly introduces state system English provision in their context.
2. The teacher and her story, gathered by one or more guided conversations, to include most of the following:

    (a) a brief factual introduction to the teacher.
    (b) the teacher's understanding of/sympathy for the curriculum aims and what they imply for practice.
    (c) the teacher's attempts to implement the curriculum and what has helped or hindered them in doing so.
    (d) the teacher's opinion about how/whether trying to implement the curriculum has benefited them or their learners.
    (e) the teacher's opinion about whether/how the curriculum implementation process might have been improved.
    (f) the teacher's overall reflections on/feelings experienced while 'coping with curriculum change'.

The conversations were transcribed and then used to create the story, using the teacher's words wherever possible.

3. Analysis of the story, and discussion of the main themes that emerge, using literature to support or contrast with the points being made.

For the research studies in each chapter to have any meaningful effect on policy and practice in English language curriculum planning and implementation, it is essential that the findings and concomitant discussions present 'insights and conclusions which ring true to readers, practitioners and other researchers' (Merriam 2009: 210). Each of the chapter authors was fastidious in ensuring the 'trustworthiness' (Lincoln and Guba 1985) of their data, following the procedures described below.

- The data for each chapter were gathered through semi-structured, audio-recorded interviews based on the themes set out above. The author of the Philippines case study also conducted and audio-recorded a classroom observation.
- These interviews varied in length from forty minutes to two hours and involved both initial face-to-face meetings and follow-up interviews, some of which were by telephone or online.
- The majority of the interviews were carried out in English with the agreement of the teacher. Where the teacher's mother tongue was used, the author translated the interview transcript during the analysis stage. While every effort was made to keep original meanings, nuances and subtleties, the reader may find some of the interview excerpts stilted. Considering the different contexts in which these studies took place, the reader will draw their own conclusions as to why this might be.
- The authors gained informed consent from the teachers, ensuring anonymity and confidentiality, according to their local contexts.
- The transcripts were analysed at both macro-level and micro-level, allowing the author to gain a holistic sense of the data. A thematic approach (Braun and Clarke 2006, 2013) was used to identify and code themes and emerging patterns.
- The emergent themes and relevant excerpts were shared with and agreed by the teacher through a process of member checking.

Each individual chapter provides an account and discussion of a teacher's curriculum change experience in a local context.

The book concludes with the editors' discussion of the wider implications of these stories. This is done by providing a meta-analysis of the stories and authors' analyses of these, to identify what messages they send and what these messages suggest about ways in which an understanding of implementers' lived experience of educational change might be reflected in the planning of future change in TESOL and education more broadly.

3 Engagement Priorities

The questions below reflect issues frequently mentioned by teachers in the chapters that follow. We invite you to consider their relevance to your own experiences of 'living with curriculum change'. We hope that through doing so you will notice that aspects of the stories that follow, which may appear to be dealing with purely local issues, are also relevant to you and other readers in TESOL contexts around the world.

The chapters show that any curriculum change process potentially affects a large number of people, within and outside an education system. Curriculum change planning and implementation is thus a very complex process, characterised by a high degree of interrelationship and interdependence between the many practical and human factors that contribute to its success or failure. Consequently, your 'answers' to any one set of questions below may well (partly) 'answer' other questions also.

1. Several cases in this volume mention the desirability of involving all those whom proposed curriculum changes will affect, in consultations about the nature of any such change and its implementation planning. This rarely seems to occur in practice.
   - Does it happen in your context?
   - Why might education systems find involving (representatives of) all levels of the educational hierarchy difficult?
   - Are barriers to such system-wide involvement purely logistical, or are they also 'cultural'?

2. The need to raise awareness of curriculum change is mentioned in many of the chapters. Do you agree that this important in your own context? If so why?
   - When during a curriculum change process should awareness raising activities take place?

- Whose awareness needs to be 'raised'?
- Will a single approach to such awareness raising be sufficient for all those concerned? If not, how might those affected be grouped for awareness raising purposes? What are the main points that different groups need to know?
- Who should be responsible for providing and disseminating appropriate information?

3. It is not unusual for decisions about the introduction of a new English curriculum and planning for its implementation to take place over quite short timescales.

   - Why do you think this happens?
   - Has this ever happened in your context?
   - Whether you have experienced this or not, what would you expect some outcome(s) of very rapid curriculum implementation to be? Why?

4. In several chapters, the English curriculum reforms aim to change both teaching approaches and assessment practices. The latter changes often emphasise the importance of introducing formative assessment.

   - Do you consider formative assessment to be consistent with more 'communicative' classroom approaches? If yes, Why?
   - How would the community outside the school in your context react to assessment changes that allocated a noticeable proportion of overall marks to formative assessment?
   - While in principle it is of course desirable for teaching goals and assessment practices to be consistent, what additional challenges might serious advocacy of formative assessment pose for teachers and the wider education system?
   - What could be done to help classroom teachers and their learners to meet such challenges?

5. The aims of almost all the curriculum changes mentioned here included reference to English teachers moving away from 'a grammar focus' in their teaching.

   - Do English teachers in your context have such a focus?
   - Why do you think that English teachers in many contexts continue to emphasise grammar teaching in their classrooms?
   - What new understandings and behaviours do a change of focus towards more interactive classroom approaches demand of teachers?

- Would teachers in your context find these difficult to develop? Why?
- How long would you expect the development of such understandings and behaviours to take?

6. In several contexts described here, new English textbooks were introduced at the same time as the curriculum changes.

   - Has this ever been the case in your context?
   - Have the new textbooks helped teachers to adapt their teaching approaches in ways that are consistent with curriculum aims?
   - If yes, in what ways have the textbooks been supportive?
   - If no, why not?

7. In some chapters, the English curriculum change aims urged teachers to stop rigidly following the textbook. Instead, they were encouraged to become more autonomous and/or flexible and make personal choices about how to adapt the textbook content to their own learners' needs.

   - How do you understand the term 'teacher autonomy'?
   - Does the way in which teachers are viewed in your context suggest that they are considered to be autonomous?
   - What aspects of becoming autonomous/flexible would they find difficult to understand or implement? Why?
   - What support would it be most useful to offer them?
   - Would you expect the development of teacher autonomy to be a long- or short-term process? Why?

8. Almost all teachers in this volume mention that the formal training support provided during change implementation was insufficient to enable them and/or their colleagues to understand the change and to develop the classroom skills and attitudes needed to implement it as intended.

   - What experience do you have of being a training provider and/or recipient?
   - What training experiences have you found most worthwhile? Why?
   - What does your previous answer suggest that it is important to consider, when planning training that hopes to support teachers' development of new professional skills and understandings?
   - In your experience, does training provision designed to support English curriculum change implementation consider the factors you have identified in your previous answer? If not, why not?

9. Many of the stories here suggest that although 'communicative' English curricula and 'communicative' teaching approaches were first introduced in national education systems in the 1990s or early 2000s, teachers still find it difficult to adopt these teaching approaches in their English classrooms.

   - What approaches are recommended for English teaching in your context?
   - How long ago were these approaches first introduced?
   - Would an outsider randomly observing an English lesson in a state school classroom see the recommended approaches being used? Occasionally? Most of the time?
   - If recommended teaching approaches are rarely used, why is this?
   - How do educational leaders (school principals–local educational administrators) react to teachers who do not adopt the recommended teaching approaches?

10. Several of the teachers in this book talk about how their experiences of trying to adapt to curriculum change have made them feel.

   - If you work as a teacher or teacher educator in a context where curriculum change has promoted interactive English language teaching approaches, how have you (or colleagues or teachers you work with) felt during the process of trying to adopt such approaches?
   - What are the reasons for these feelings?
   - Have these feelings ever affected your view of your personal and/or professional capacity to carry out your responsibilities? If, yes, in what way(s)?
   - Is there anything that school leaders, teacher educators or other members of the local context could have done, to make you feel better about your role in the change process?

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2

Involving Teachers in the Change Process: One English Language Teacher's Account of Implementing Curricular Change in Philippine Basic Education

Maria Luz C. Vilches

1 Introduction

In contrast to the many gloomy accounts of how curriculum change affects teachers reported in the literature (e.g. in Waters and Vilches 2008; Murray 2008; Karavas 2014; Song 2015), this chapter provides an example of an exceptional and dedicated teacher who is successfully dealing with a new curriculum and textbook. The case provides a particular example of some conditions that are likely to promote successful curriculum change implementation as noted in the literature (e.g. Markee 1997; Waters and Vilches 2013). It highlights how involving teachers in the change process (Kirk and MacDonald 2001; Priestley et al. 2012) through awareness-raising initiatives and textbook design appears to make a difference to how they make sense of the changes required of them. The chapter points to the importance of communication in the curriculum reform process as a way of empowering teachers to bring about change in the classroom. The teacher's story also raises issues of the importance of viewing national curriculum change as a process not an event and the concomitant need to provide ongoing support to those tasked with implementing change.

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M. Wedell and L. Grassick (eds.), *International Perspectives on Teachers Living with Curriculum Change*, International Perspectives on English Language Teaching,
https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-54309-7_2

1.1 English Language Policy in the Philippines

English in the Philippines was introduced with the establishment of the public school system and became the language of instruction during the American colonization, which began at the turn of the twentieth century and spanned almost five decades. Since then, in a country with over 170 languages, the role of English has frequently been at the centre of the medium of instruction debate resulting in a series of major policy changes: (a) bilingual education (1987–2009) mandating the use of English for English, maths and science subjects and Filipino for other subjects; (b) the 'English Only' legislation in 2003; (c) the 2009 Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTBMLE) policy advocating mother tongue medium of instruction from Grades 1 to 3 and English for English, maths, the sciences, technology, music, health, etc. from Grades 4 to 10; and more recently (d) the K-12 Reform as contained in the Enhanced Basic Education Act signed into law in 2013 (Republic Act No 10533 2013). This reform, the focus of this chapter, regards language as 'the basis of all communication and the primary instrument of thought', recognizing it as being a rule-governed system at the service of communicating meaning, and as:

> defin[ing] culture which is essential in understanding oneself (personal identity), forming interpersonal relationships (socialization), extending experiences, reflecting on thought and action, and contributing to a better society. (Department of Education 2013: 3)

1.2 The K-12 Curriculum Reform

One of the key objectives in the K-12 Reform (Alberto and Gabinete 2014) is to make Filipinos globally competitive, and consequently, the development of learners' English proficiency for international communication and professional opportunities is a salient feature in classroom teaching.

Communicative language teaching through the teaching of the four macro-skills was already an element of the old curriculum. In the new, it is better contextualized and delineated. The emphasis on English for communication is supported by new congruent assessment practices as described in the 'Policy Guidelines on Classroom Assessment for the K to 12 Basic Education Program' (2015). The guidelines discuss two kinds of assessment: formative (regular and mostly collaborative such as simulation activities) and summative (periodic and could be collaborative such as group performance

tasks). On formative assessment for oral communication in the classroom, the DepEd Chief of Curriculum and Implementation Division explains:

> The learner… designs and performs effective controlled and uncontrolled oral communication activities based on context. The teacher needs to come up with a situation, identify the audience and the relationship of the speaker to the listener and purpose. Then the teacher needs a rubric to rate the student. (Elizabeth Meneses, Personal Communication, 7 July 2016)

This extract highlights the role that the teacher is asked to play in implementing oral assessment.

In contrast to previous reforms, it seemed that the Department of Education had more proactive and forward-looking leaders at the helm of the K-12 reform. They initiated an extensive involvement of many stakeholders in providing relevant and appropriate input to curricular content and design—a way of supporting key players in the curriculum change process (Wedell 2003). The 'Briefer on the Enhanced K-12 Basic Education Program' (2010) specifically states: 'An open and consultative process will be adopted in the development and implementation of K to 12'. This might have been a result of learning from general criticisms in educational circles of previous educational reforms that lacked such consultation.

The spirit of multiple stakeholder collaboration was also evident in the involvement of teachers (such as the one in this case study) in the writing of the new textbooks. As a textbook writer, she also became part of the team of trainers that facilitated nationwide teacher training for the use of the new textbooks. This training had the full support of the school principals, who had been given prior orientation to the textbook and the curriculum.

While the K-12 Reform is generally considered a positive initiative, some resistance was expressed at a few of the public consultations attended by educators. This was perhaps understandable since the government presented implementation as urgent and compulsory for all schools despite the limited preparation time—a case of lack of grounding in the innovation context (Waters and Vilches 2013). Thus, at the fora, some stakeholders viewed the K-12 reform as overambitious and complex for the context. Others felt there had been a lack of information about the new curriculum despite the nationwide public consultations mentioned above. Such concerns were not entirely misplaced. Implementing the new curriculum is a challenge for many teachers, since the textbooks assume that teachers are able to flexibly interpret materials and approaches to the needs of their students. In addition, the curriculum challenges deep-rooted conceptions of 'language as

grammar' and requires teachers to experiment with methods, materials and activities with which many might be unfamiliar. There are also issues around the availability of the textbooks due to both logistic and financial aspects. The curriculum was implemented before the government was able to produce the required number of textbooks for all schools/learners as a result of a lengthy textbook-bidding process and a subsequent delay in the actual writing of the textbooks. Schools in the Manila area or other big urban centres were the first to receive the textbooks, while those located away from these areas received their copies later.

The next section describes the implementation experiences of a state English secondary school teacher with Grade 10 students. Firstly, it examines the teacher's background and understanding of the new curriculum. Secondly, it describes how the teacher deals with the challenges posed by the new textbook, and the support provided to help her.

2 Kathy and Her Story

Kathy (not her real name) is a master teacher whose role extends from classroom teaching to mentoring new teachers and facilitating teacher training workshops within the school and at inter-school seminars. Kathy belongs to a select group of master teachers who were chosen to take part in co-authoring a textbook that was designed for use in the K-12 reform. Kathy was chosen because she had been involved in preparing instructional materials for use in the DepEd schools in collaboration with other master teachers. The DepEd saw samples of her work and thought that they could effectively use her skills and knowledge in a bigger project.

2.1 Her Professional Role and School

Kathy is 38 and has 18-years experience of teaching English. She currently teaches English to students aged 14–16. Her school is successful and has over 4600 students from lower-middle-class families and below. Kathy says, 'Among all public schools in Pasig City, we rank second next to Science High School because of projects and support of parents'. Students win many competitions, and some are admitted to prestigious local universities, some even obtaining scholarships. The school principal is very proactive and enlists the support of parents and local government units for school projects such as the 'feeding program' (free breakfast) for graduating students when

they revise for the national achievement tests, in which the excellent ones get top scores. The school is also lucky in having the support of the town mayor who annually donates school supplies and uniforms, shoes and bags to all students.

On top of teaching five Grade 10 classes, Kathy's special role is academic supervision (teacher mentoring) for which post her good teaching skills and leadership are key qualifications. Kathy remarks:

> I think they [school authorities] have seen the passion of my teaching… You have to have demonstration teaching at the division level… where other head teachers in different schools observe your level teaching. And you show leadership.

Willingness to go the extra mile is another consideration: 'Attitude is very important. You always have to accept whatever task is given to you, even with difficulty in juggling schedules sometimes'. Professional development is important to Kathy and she is currently completing a Master's degree in education with specialization in language education.

Given this background, Kathy may be considered as belonging to a select group. Being involved in co-authoring the Grade 10 textbook has enabled her to understand how the reform ideals might be actualized through lesson designs—an experience that most English teachers in the country have not had. Kathy's story, therefore, illustrates congruence with and support for the reform and highlights what can be learnt about fostering successful curriculum change not just in the Philippines, but possibly in other similar contexts around the world.

2.2 Kathy's Understandings About the K-12 Curriculum

2.2.1 A Positive Attitude

Kathy has a generally positive disposition towards the new curriculum, possibly helped by the awareness-raising initiatives she was involved in. She comments 'I was part of the consultation. Parents, private sector, youth were consulted. A MOA was drafted between the DepEd, the CHED and TESDA'. Following the mandate from DepEd, her principal held an orientation meeting for the parents to discuss the curriculum content and to allay their anxiety about any possible additional expenses they might have to pay.

In class, according to Kathy, the teachers also explained the new curriculum to the students. This is perhaps not, on the surface, a particularly noteworthy action, but, as I will discuss later, it is significant as one aspect of the overall communication of the curriculum goals and principles.

Kathy believes in the vision and overall framework of the curriculum and locates the purpose of learning and teaching English comfortably in it 'so that students can face the world, ready to be employed … they [the DepEd] are setting a standard about the Filipino learners who are for the world'. She is happy that this curriculum has continued the previous focus on communicative competence and the use of literature[1] as the main reading material for meaning making in the lessons. For her, literature is 'an inspiration… a lesson to get from the story, to be connected to life'. It also has a role in language teaching since she is able to use literature texts as a springboard into language focus. As she puts it:

> using the lesson taken from literature for students to do a task… literature also as a motivation for language enrichment, e.g. focus on grammar in poetry to understand a line.

Her point here is that using literature as the basis for language teaching enables English to be seen as a language able to express real-life meanings, rather than just a subject in which certain rules have to be learnt by rote for assessment purposes.

2.2.2 A Move Away from a Grammar Focus

As Kathy understands it, one of the key differences in the new curriculum is that grammar is integrated in preparing students for the communicative tasks 'unlike before when the curriculum was grammar-focused'. The new curriculum framework does not emphasize the place of grammar in language teaching. Kathy notes that in the new Grade 10 textbook, the lessons are thematically arranged and centred on literary texts approximating the themes. Listening, speaking, reading, and writing activities are then built around these themes. How this integration of meaning and grammar

[1]Literature-based means that literature is the main reading material in the English textbooks classified as follows: Grade 7 (1st year HS) is Philippine Literature, Grade 8 (2nd year HS) is Afro–Asian Literature, Grade 9 (3rd year HS) is British–American Literature, Grade 10 (4th year HS) is World Literature.

is supposed to be carried out may be shown in the following description of a content standard for Grade 10 English:

> The learner demonstrates understanding of how world literature and other text types serve as ways of expressing and resolving personal conflicts, also how to use strategies in linking textual information, repairing, enhancing communication, public speaking, emphasis markers in persuasive texts, different forms of modals, reflexive and intensive pronouns. (Department of Education 2013: 146)

Here, it can be seen that the focus of grammar or language in the syllabus is very much as a vehicle to express ideas and carry out tasks. In practice, grammar (e.g. modals, reflexive and intensive pronouns) is taught beginning with awareness-raising and ending with some practice, for example, the teacher calls attention to the grammatical form as used in the literary text; discussion ensues; practice exercise follows.

Kathy also realizes that while the new curriculum's expectation is that students have mastered their grammar in the primary grades, the reality of the situation in the classroom is that this is often not the case, 'you still have to deal with that … they should learn grammar for them to express themselves'. One senses the tone of frustration here and suggests that Kathy still needs to spend time on explicit grammar focus.

Kathy remarks that at one of the training workshops which she facilitated, the teachers were anxious about the 'absence' of grammar in the lessons indicating that the new curriculum does not seem to reflect the reality of the teaching context: 'What about grammar? Students haven't even mastered it!' As English teachers, they expect to teach grammar; it has always been part of students' achievement tests. Even students, while perhaps relieved that grammar (taught the traditional way) is 'lost' in the new curriculum, might still feel insecure about their test performance without a proper focus on grammar in the lessons. The teachers' objections seem to indicate an understanding that learning English is equated with learning grammar, specifically, the rules of grammar. This reflects a wider educational culture that still sees learning as mostly factual knowledge and assessment as a way of gauging if students know the 'right' answers. Thus, although the new curriculum espouses a move away from overt grammar teaching, in reality, many teachers continue to teach in ways that they are familiar with and feel more comfortable with. Kathy suggests that teachers' insecurity about dealing with grammar is influenced by the learners' own conceptions of language learning and their range of language proficiency.

Although Kathy is not worried about the grammar tests as, in the current curriculum, the tests are congruent with the curriculum 'based on the desired learning competencies per grade level', she remarks that other teachers feel worried about such tests. This concern partly relates to the learners who are still worried about the 'lack' of grammar teaching because the idea of 'language as grammar' is ingrained in their language learning belief system. Learning the rules formally gives them more confidence than just applying these in practice where they are left to discover grammar use in a 'messy' way. This is especially the case with those whose English proficiency is in reality fairly basic.

Teachers are expected to implement the new curriculum in mixed ability classrooms. Classes are not grouped according to English proficiency, so even when teachers are open to the idea of teaching grammar using a communicative approach, they worry about how to deal with students who need to learn the basics of grammar before they are able to use it in practice. This is a likely challenge for most teachers, and although Kathy's classes are similar, she is able to deal with students' mixed ability by adjusting how she allocates her weekly class time to address students' grammar concerns, as she describes below.

> If they didn't get it [grammar] I won't jump into the next lesson but go back – repetition. It's not bad to repeat. Test it first. How can you master the other lessons if the basics you haven't mastered?

Kathy also does a grammar review lesson, using her own material, separate from the normal English class hours—a free service appreciated by both students and parents because through these extra lessons on the basics of grammar, the students are able to catch up with the normal lessons that demand for them to apply grammar in communication.

Kathy's responses exemplify how teachers everywhere 'exert considerable influence on instructional policies. They adapt, combine, shift, and adopt policy to fit with their workplace constraints' (Song 2015: 7). While the move away from grammar has been a struggle for many teachers who tend to resort to previous practices and behaviours, Kathy emphasizes the importance of addressing the greater curriculum goal of preparing students for the world outside the classroom. This, she feels, is important for her learners' future careers and aspirations. As she puts it:

> 'real world' has greater expectations of the students. The emphasis [in the real world] is performance, you see. They have to be ready for employment and when they apply for jobs they can be ready to write a letter of application.

Kathy acknowledges that regardless of whether other teachers believe in the curriculum aims, they have little choice but to try to implement it.

> Okay for them. Besides there's nothing they can do about it. Change is inevitable. No choice. If you are not happy with the system, go out of the system. But you don't tell them that of course!

She implicitly notes here that education in the Philippines has experienced many previous reforms which teachers have, somehow, coped with. In addition, teachers toe the line because holding on to their teaching job is of prime importance in a country with a high rate of unemployment. Nevertheless, Kathy's words perhaps suggest a lack of recognition of the challenge that the new curriculum poses for teachers who are 'less special' than she is. Her words also highlight the lack of agency teachers have in the change process—with too small a voice to be heard by the powers that be. The teacher continues to be seen as an unquestioning implementer of curriculum change.

It seems that for Kathy, the move away from the norm that language teaching should be centred on grammar does not pose the same challenges as it does for other teachers. She appears to have the confidence, experience and perhaps status within her school to implement what she considers to be the overall goals of the curriculum in her own way.

2.2.3 A Different Role for Teachers

While the old curriculum mandated classroom interaction, it rarely occurred because the textbooks were input-oriented and heavily grammar-based. Kathy thus believes that the implementation of the new curriculum requires teachers to change their classroom role in a number of ways. Firstly, she frequently emphasizes the importance of teachers taking responsibility for adjusting the curriculum to the needs of their learners. As she says, 'this is now the teacher's strategy. The teacher knows her students best and knows what's best for them'.

Secondly, the role of the teacher is also linked to the teaching method, and as Kathy points out, the enhanced English curriculum promotes a more genuinely interactive approach to teaching/learning. Teachers are expected to engage the students through cooperative learning techniques to promote the spiral development of thinking skills, especially higher-level learning competencies. She explains that here, language learning is triggered by

'teacher input, cooperative learning, pair work…[and] language is learned through other people…through output, application….'. She recognizes that for such approaches, teachers need to know how to facilitate and monitor learning through different forms of classroom interaction so that, as she puts it, learners are 'engaged…in active participation so that they learn. Sometimes pair work can be a form of a buddy system for slow learners. It's up to the teacher to strategise these…'. However, unsurprisingly given its complexity, Kathy points out that what the teachers actually do is far from this ideal, even though facilitating and monitoring learning are stressed in teacher training sessions.

The activities suggested in the textbooks and curriculum also give students the opportunity to 'evaluate themselves on what they learn' so suggesting that they share responsibility for assessment, a key component of the teacher's role in the previous curriculum. Many of the communicative tasks in the textbooks simulate real-world concerns, for example, argumentative and persuasive oral presentations on conflict resolution and a research report on a sociocultural issue. Kathy feels these are good catalysts for critical thinking but that students should be well prepared both in ideas and language for such tasks to be meaningful and successful. This implies that teachers also need to be prepared for managing such tasks and to understand what they might involve in terms of the teacher's role in the classroom.

2.3 Support for Teachers in Implementing the Curriculum

As Kathy's understanding of the K-12 curriculum has highlighted, with the move away from a grammar-focused curriculum, teachers (and learners) are required to take on new roles in the classroom and adopt an interactive approach to teaching. This raises the issue of teacher support through both the curriculum materials (textbooks) and training.

2.3.1 Textbooks

As a co-author of the Grade 10 textbook and a trainer, Kathy feels that this textbook has a lot more to offer the teachers than previous ones, and 'the teacher doesn't need to do much in terms of material preparation'. However, while the textbooks contain plenty of material, the onus is on the teacher to decide how best to use these materials. Kathy comments that the lesson modules in the book are 'only suggestions… the strategies only suggestions'. By strategies, she means both the activities/tasks and the manner by which

these are carried out. Hence, the teachers, she says, need to have hands-on experience of teaching the lesson modules for them to understand how to use the suggested strategies in the book. They need to know:

> how to choose the competencies suited to their students –e.g. higher level competences as emphasized in the curriculum. The learning competencies should be non-negotiable, but the strategies can be different from what's suggested in the module…strategies that would match better with the students of a particular teacher.

For example, she says, 'The tasks might be simple but considering the number of students in the class—45 to 50 students—pair work and group work would be better'. For Kathy, choosing approaches and strategies for particular tasks does not seem to be a problem, but considering her previous comments about teachers' struggles with the move away from a grammar focus, it is likely that other teachers may find it difficult to deal with this new autonomy. It seems that the textbooks do not provide such teachers with support in deciding how to carry out activities.

Kathy is concerned about the lack of availability of teaching material nationwide (see earlier section), since access to the new textbooks is key for change implementation (Hutchinson and Torres 1994). She believes that a lack of textbooks in an English class can have a negative influence on learning since, as she puts it, 'Sometimes the students are not interested in the lesson if they have no text to read'. Kathy expresses a sense of helplessness when talking about this overwhelming system-wide issue. However, she finds comfort in the initiative taken by the Parents-Teachers Association (PTA) in her school to set up a photocopying fund, as a fallback measure to produce material for students' use, paid for by a monthly cash contribution from its members. For her class, when necessary, Kathy resorts to 'power point slides or… provide photocopies of several pages shared by a group of students. The buddy-buddy system'. These are her ways of illustrating how teachers simply have to make do with the constraints beyond their control regarding textbooks.

2.3.2 Training

To support teachers in implementing the K-12 curriculum, the DepEd organized nationwide one-week, free, residential training courses based on using the new textbook. Teachers had the opportunity to work together and support each other, something that rarely happens in their schools where they are always busy with large classes, full teaching loads and other multiple tasks.

While much emphasis was put on the new textbook in this training, only photocopies of lesson modules were available to the teachers in the training seminars because the first run of the textbook was riddled with errors.

Kathy was a participant in the training as a teacher trainer by virtue of her having co-authored the Grade 10 textbook and being a master teacher (a role which has involved training teachers as part of her school duties). As a trainer in the K-12 workshops, Kathy's account suggests that she emphasized experiential learning whereby the teachers, as students, participated in some of the textbook activities. This was followed by a discussion of the experience and insights gained. Kathy views these training workshops as positive in terms of the delivery approach and aims. She highlights the difference between training to support teachers in the old curriculum and in the new one: 'We had that before in the old curriculum. But this is more task-oriented, outcome based, product oriented'. Kathy comments that the teachers 'are eager in trying to learn. We had a very successful training'. She believes that the teachers were able to modify some of the textbook lessons based on their own classroom and school contexts, as she describes below:

> According to the teachers, at the outset [of the training], everything is the same as in the old curriculum; only the terms have changed. But when they presented their output, they got feedback and then they learned the strategies better.

Although Kathy seems to report that the training workshops had a positive outcome overall, the long-term effect is unlikely to be sufficient unless the support is sustained and not just a one-off activity (Waters 2005; Waters and Vilches 2012). This is particularly pertinent in the case here where many teachers seemed to be struggling to move away from a grammar-teaching approach and to deal with new interactive classroom roles. Kathy does mention attempts to provide continuing support through non-evaluative developmental mentoring in schools where master teachers will give support feedback and guidance to teachers. Kathy explains this below:

> And we also observe them. They're given feedback. When the Head Teacher observes a class, there's a grade attached to it. If the Master Teacher observes, he/she just gives suggestion. We have to help.

As a master teacher, Kathy has the responsibility of mentoring other English teachers in her school; however, this is not an easy role for Kathy. As her words above show, the head teacher also has a role in teacher support, but

this is evaluative. Kathy's non-evaluative feedback role is challenging in her cultural context, where losing face is a major sensitivity, and where hierarchy (age included) needs to be closely observed. As Kathy puts it:

> Sometimes the teacher is older than I am. It's hard to give feedback but it must be done. I need to be diplomatic.

In addition to this in-school support, Kathy describes how teachers attend monthly Teacher's Quality Circle (TQC) meetings. The TQCs, patterned after the Quality Learning Circle (Lovett and Gilmore 2003), are part of the regular master teacher-led development activities in the state schools, attended by all teachers. At these meetings, teachers share best teaching practices, raise issues and find solutions to concerns. Kathy reports how one TQC tackled some feedback on the new textbook where teachers discussed how to adapt activities to fit into the time frame of their lessons. For many teachers, these provide a kind of contextualized follow-up to the training workshops and from Kathy's conversation, they appear to be useful. However, it is not clear whether every meeting is as useful for the new curriculum and as Kathy remarks in the excerpt above, it can be challenging for her to guide and support older, more experienced teachers.

Overall, from Kathy's story, it would seem that support for many teachers in implementing the new curriculum has been limited. The new textbooks encourage teacher choice and autonomy without really providing concrete guidance on how to do this. While many teachers have been able to attend some one-off workshops, these have not always been followed up through in-school support, and so the immediate 'success' of the training that Kathy attests may not be sustainable. Where there are master teachers with a supportive role in schools, they may, like Kathy, struggle to deal with the sensitivities of giving feedback to senior colleagues.

So what of Kathy's own experiences of implementing the K-12 curriculum? The next section discusses what Kathy reports about her own classroom practice using the new textbooks and curriculum.

2.4 Kathy's Attempt at Implementing the K-12 Curriculum

As mentioned in Sect. 2.1, Kathy is generally enthusiastic about the new curriculum and feels that it fits with her own understanding of what she should be doing in the classroom. Through her talk, she shows how she

manages to implement the curriculum changes by taking account of her learners' needs and adapting the content and textbook activities accordingly.

In her school, Kathy is always given groups of learners who are 'extremes' in terms of the best and worst in language proficiency. To deal with this, she teaches with 'the same content but the approach is different'. She can challenge the best group of students to carry out as many activities as are found in the textbook. For the weaker students, she chooses one or two activities that can be maximized according to the students' learning pace. She explains how she motivates her students by connecting with their world even when there are no suggestions in the textbook:

> Before, it was simple; now I use technology and be trendy for the students. For example, the use of Facebook. Sometimes you mention it for the students. I use Facebook. Say, 'What do you feel right now? How many have Facebook at home? What do you post there? Now tell me your feelings. Give your status today through writing. In your notebook, so pass it to the next and give comment on what you write.

Kathy explains how engaging her learners through Facebook and other technology, as she mentions above, makes the lesson and task more motivating for the students. Kathy shows a strong awareness of the need to adapt the textbook to suit her learners. This was also evident in my observation of one of her classes where she spent time doing preliminary work on an 'energizer' not found in the textbook, where students volunteered to present a graphic poster to the class and classmates were supposed to guess the English idiomatic expression it represented. On this strategy, she remarks:

> I start my class with an energizer…not the usual energizer that you are going to move [physical]. I want them to think. I'm asking them to be more responsible by researching. The students share, two to three minutes, 5-10 items… sharing time; it's up to them what they want to share. It can be vocabulary, spelling, idioms. In the lower level [section], the sharing of the higher sections, I share with them. To model to them on what to do.

Her approach here shows that she is keen to make every activity an English-learning/thinking experience, modifying it as necessary depending on the class level. This is in contrast to the normal warm up activities seen in many state schools, which tend to be songs.

Kathy adapts the textbook in other ways. For example, in a task where students had to react to certain situations, the book suggested that answers

be written in the thought bubbles provided. However instead, Kathy asked the students to identify their reactions through emoticons. Her rationale for this is expressed below:

> I didn't follow what's in the book. It's hard for me to check the sentences so I asked them to draw and show to the class.

Her change of strategy was primarily to address the constraint posed by the physical set-up of a small classroom with 40 students cramped in it, which made it difficult for her to move around checking individual work. Secondly, it was to make the task more engaging, as she puts it, 'The kids like it. They are more visual. They don't like much of the writing. Some of the tasks I change into oral communication'.

Similar adaptation to suit her learners can be seen in her use of literature. Kathy uses many stories in her lessons and believes that the classics of World Literature can be relevant to students. Kathy tries to motivate her learners by supplementing and adapting activities. 'They [the classics] are just enhanced. I just use current examples. Students are still interested in a good story'. She also uses other media to supplement the reading material and states that 'For example, *Les Miserables*. There's a movie of that now. There's also a play and I ask them to watch it. I ask them to do it as assignment'.

Although it is evident that Kathy readily adapts the set textbooks, she is aware of the need to focus on the competencies and learning outcomes expected by the new curriculum and feels that her adaptations are appropriate as long as she is achieving that bigger goal. As she states, 'the learning competency that's the rule. As long as you touch the competency it's okay to change strategies'.

Adapting materials and approaches to suit the students and develop their communicative competence often means that activities take more time. She tends to spend more time on form-focused instruction in lower-level classes, something she finds frustrating as it takes away the intended content of the lesson. This sense of frustration can be seen in her words below:

> Before I used to get upset because what I can do in the higher level classes, I can't in the lower level sections – just extremes! But now I am able to handle it better. I pace myself and have more patience.

However, Kathy also confesses that since the textbook is still new '…it took us a very long time to finish one unit'. This slow-paced lesson coverage was,

Kathy says, a common complaint raised at one of their monthly Teacher's Quality Circle (TQC) meetings. According to Kathy, the teachers remarked that in previous textbooks, a lesson unit and activities could be finished within the allotted time frame. In the new textbook, the lesson units are lengthy as they cover a range of suggested activities for a set of learning competencies. As Kathy has shown in this section, she is able to make choices about which activities to use suited to the needs of her learners, yet still following the curriculum aims. Such freedom of choice is likely to be a challenge for other teachers who are familiar with 'doing everything' in the previous book.

Kathy's role and experience in the development of the new textbook seem to have helped her to understand the thrust of the new curriculum and the principles underpinning it and in implementing it in her classroom. While she is generally positive about the K-12 curriculum, she is also aware of challenges that come with the change process, and the need for teachers to adapt the textbooks to suit different proficiency levels of learners. For Kathy, the big incentive for the teacher is:

> when students become active and engaged [as a result of teaching]…the results of the test too when you see the impact of your teaching on the students… you see their improvement.

In her own classes, she can see this improvement—sometimes sporadic, sometimes steady.

3 Conclusion: Making Change Happen

Kathy's story portrays a teacher who believes in the new curriculum and who wants to make it work in her classroom and for other teachers in the system. While Kathy seems to be coping well in implementing the new curriculum, she is aware of the challenges faced by other teachers in terms of what the new curriculum is asking them to do in the classroom and the kind of support they have had (or not had) to be able to understand and make these changes. These challenges can be identified as the changing role of the teacher, the mismatch between the new curriculum goals and the reality of state school teaching and learning contexts, and the flow of communication between different people and levels of the education system.

3.1 The Changing Role of the Teacher

The new curriculum and accompanying textbooks require teachers to be flexible and adaptive and to have the confidence and ability to make decisions about what approaches and tasks suit their learners. This autonomous and adaptive role of the teacher is different from what was expected before where teachers tended to follow everything in the textbook. While this does not seem to be difficult for Kathy, without suitable support and training, other teachers are likely to struggle in using the new textbook. Lee and Yin (2011) report a similar situation in their study of teachers in China where changes to the textbooks left the teachers feeling a loss of control and uncertain how to use or adapt the materials. Without adequate support, teachers found that they 'could not keep a balance between their sense of identity and expectations of reform mandates' (Lee and Yin 2011: 36). Humphries and Burns (2015) provide similar findings in a study of new English language textbooks introduced into a higher education institution in Japan.

Philippine English teachers have had to deal with continuous curriculum changes over the years (Waters and Vilches 2013) and so coping with change has become an expected aspect of the teachers' role. New textbooks and the concomitant autonomy and choice afforded the teacher seem to be viewed by planners as something fairly straightforward, and the extent of the change required of teachers and the emotional risks involved seem to have been overlooked or underestimated.

Kathy is in many ways a non-typical teacher who has had the chance to make sense of the new curriculum through co-authoring a textbook and being involved in supporting other teachers to make sense of it too. These roles have helped her to cope with the new curriculum in the context of having to teach students with a range of language proficiency levels. Because she is special, Kathy's case provides a good example of how involving teachers in the curriculum-planning process can have a positive effect on its implementation and the significance of communication. Kathy's experience of actually designing the materials to support the change process is likely to help embed teachers' beliefs in the materials. This ought to make the materials more accessible to all teachers, since they have been written by a teacher very much like themselves. However, without accompanying involvement through training and support, this contextual relevance of the textbooks is not sufficient to help teachers implement change. Indeed, Lee and Yin (2011) suggest that many teachers in their study in China were 'drifter

followers' who felt no engagement or involvement in the reform process and although they tried to implement mandated changes, their detachment and distance from the planning process and support structures did little to foster a positive attitude to change. Kathy's story suggests that many of the teachers she describes may be 'drifter followers'.

3.2 Mismatch Between Curriculum Goals and Local Context

Kathy reports how the curriculum goals did not seem to be designed bearing actual Philippine classroom contexts in mind, particularly given the language level of the learners. Thus, while Kathy is aware of the need to develop her learners' communicative competence in English, she is also faced with the dilemma of deciding whether to stick to the curriculum goals or to address the immediate needs of her learners. This seemed to be a challenge for Kathy, albeit one that she seems to be coping with, but if we consider that she is a 'special' teacher, then other more typical teachers are likely to be struggling even more with this mismatch. Teachers' decisions are largely influenced by the compelling conditions of their actual teaching–learning situation and not just by the general framework and ideals that inform the new curriculum. Therefore, if curriculum reform is to be successful, it is not enough for a teacher to 'understand' new curriculum ideals if prevailing teaching and learning conceptions and conditions remain unchanged. This is not only relevant to the Philippines context, but is evident in research from a range of educational systems (e.g. Hallinger and Lee 2011; Altinyelken 2010; Song 2015; Park and Sung 2013).

In the context of an education system awash with reforms and initiatives over a long period, what seems to be apparent from Kathy's story is that the emphasis of planners has been on introducing change rather than considering ways to sustain it (Fullan 2000). This suggests the importance of communication in the curriculum reform process (see Markee 1997; Fullan 2007; Wedell 2009; Karavas 2014).

3.3 Communication and Engagement

Although curricular reforms are usually top-down initiatives, where the classroom teacher is seen as a passive implementer, ultimately it is the classroom teacher who has the 'power' to make such reforms succeed or fail. As Kennedy (1983: ix) puts it, teachers are crucial because 'it is the successful

application of curriculum and syllabus plans in the classroom … that will affect the realisation of national level planning'.

This reality has important implications for policy making and teacher development initiatives. Kathy's case shows a teacher coping well with a new curriculum partly because she has been involved in the change process through her roles as teacher, trainer, master teacher and textbook writer. Indeed, bringing teachers into the realm of discussions at the initiation stage of a new initiative is likely to help ensure that their concerns at classroom level are taken into consideration in change planning, and so make implementation more likely to succeed (Waters and Vilches 2008). This fits Basica and Hargreaves' (2000) argument that rather than viewing teachers as the objects of change, they need to be brought into the change process as early as possible through such engagement activities as training, dissemination of plans, etc.

The meetings Kathy attended at the start of the implementation process seemed to have a positive effect on her attitude to and understanding of the new curriculum. This suggests that opportunities for involvement in such consultation need to be provided for as wide a range of teachers, and of those involved in implementing the curriculum at the school level, as possible. This was the experience of curriculum change in Greece (Karavas 2014) where teachers and other stakeholders were consulted and involved at all stages of the planning and implementation process of a new primary English language curriculum, leading to what Karavas argues was successful implementation. However, the mechanics for enabling such consultations to be representative are bound to be particularly complex in a country like the Philippines, with a huge number of teachers, and with geographical divisions into island groups that make mobility, communication and dissemination difficult. Al-Daami and Wallace (2007) found that English teachers in Jordan wanted to be part of curriculum change consultations, but those charged with planning felt that teachers' involvement was not necessary. While this may not be the case in the Philippines, it does highlight the need for all stakeholders to see the benefits of teacher involvement and to ensure teachers' voices are heard.

Linked to the idea of communication and engagement is the provision of teacher training. Well-tailored (e.g. reflective, see Vilches 2009) formal teacher training, supporting the use of the new textbook, seems to be a necessary aspect of the planning of any new initiative (Wedell 2003; Kirkgöz 2008). The initial training for the K-12 curriculum was nationwide but was very much a one-off event. Kathy seemed satisfied with the outcome of this training, but acknowledged that there were many teachers for whom the

new roles proposed by the curriculum remained unclear. Similar concerns are raised in a study of teachers and training in Pakistan (Mohammad and Harlech-Jones 2008: 48) which argue that:

> too often the professional development of teachers is restricted rather than extended, and fragmentary rather than coherent; too often, they feel isolated and constrained; too often, the in-service course is no more than a one-shot experience that has few meaningful benefits.

Considering this quotation, it would seem that curriculum change implementation, whether in the Philippines or elsewhere, is likely to be a medium to long-term process during which teachers will develop new understandings at different times in different places, rather than an event which is completed once all teachers have been 'trained'. If this is so, then implementation planning needs to include not only initial training, but also consideration of and planning for ways of providing access to ongoing, locally relevant, training support for teachers (e.g. school-based as a supplement for seminar-based training—see Waters and Vilches 2000; Waters 2006), over time. As experience of an earlier Philippine project shows (see Vilches 2005), teacher learning and learning to cope with curriculum change do not happen overnight. This fits with much of the recent curriculum change literature which highlights the failings on one-off workshops and the need for a sustained, school-based development programme to help teachers contextualize new pedagogical practices (Power et al. 2012). Although teachers in Kathy's story do appear to attend a monthly TQC meeting, it is not clear how much these focus on the new curriculum and provide teachers with hands-on practical support and whether this support was enough at the initial stages of implementation.

Kathy's story has provided the reader with a picture of a special teacher, getting to grip with a new English language curriculum fairly successfully. However, it has also highlighted that without similar opportunities to those that Kathy has been given, in terms of her engagement and involvement in the change process, it is unlikely that other teachers will be able to cope with the new classroom practices and behaviours required of them.

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3

Making the Best of Continuous Change Initiatives: A Story of a Successful Korean English Teacher

Hyoshin Lee

1 Introduction

This chapter provides an account of a highly motivated English language teacher who appears to be coping well with the most recent English language curriculum change initiatives in Korea. As the chapter highlights, this is all the more remarkable in an educational context where innovations in English language teaching and learning have been happening more or less continuously for the last 25 years. I begin by setting out the general picture of ELT in Korea and then introduce the participant teacher, analysing her experiences of change and highlighting what might be learnt from this 'successful' story.

1.1 Background to ELT in Korea

English was first introduced as a foreign language in 1945 when Korea was liberated from Japanese imperial rule. It was adopted as an elective subject in secondary education in the first National Curriculum in 1955, becoming a compulsory subject in 1963. English in primary school became com-

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M. Wedell and L. Grassick (eds.), *International Perspectives on Teachers Living with Curriculum Change*, International Perspectives on English Language Teaching,
https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-54309-7_3

pulsory in 1997 when the Korean government initiated policies focused on globalisation. Since then, English has been taught throughout the school system, beginning in third grade with one 40-minute class a week, rising to two classes a week at Grades 5 and 6 (Kwon and Kim 2010).

The sixth National Curriculum introduced in 1992 replaced the previous grammar-focused syllabus with one that was more communication focused. Numerous national change initiatives have been introduced ever since, in response to ongoing societal criticism that the communication-oriented curriculum goals were not being met by state school provision. For example, the Kyunghyang Shinmun newspaper (2008) reported in 2008 that 60% of English teachers were against the current English education policies. The frequency of these initiatives has increased in recent years. Examples include the following, several of which will be discussed further in the light of one teacher's experience below.

- 1992 English Programme in Korea (EPIK). This policy allows state primary and secondary schools to recruit native English teachers and help strengthen the provision of communicative English education.
- 2000 Teaching English through English (TEE) policy. Teachers are encouraged to develop their language proficiency to be able to use English for their classroom teaching.
- 2007 7th Revision of the National Curriculum. This is a part of the national 'Five-year Comprehensive English Education Policies (2006–2010)'. It aims to improve the general quality of English education in state schools, in particular, assessment, teacher quality, and the education environment (Lee 2010), through strengthening practical (oral) English and reducing private tutoring.
- 2008 Reinforcement of a Practical English Policy. This policy introduced a variety of initiatives such as an increase in teacher training, further revision of the National Curriculum, and the development of an English-friendly classroom environment. It aimed to improve students' communicative competence and narrow the gap in provision between different socio-economic regions and families (MEST 2008).
- 2009 Revision of the National Curriculum (MEST 2011b). This again aimed to improve assessment, increase the provision of teachers and promote an English-friendly classroom environment.
- 2010–2015 National English Ability Test (NEAT) Project. This was an attempt to change the nature of assessment throughout all levels of education. Its particular aim was to replace the powerful College Scholastic Aptitude Test (CSAT) which governs entry to university and whose wash

back thus strongly influences the teaching and learning of English at all levels of the school system.

While most of the above have been national change initiatives, implementation may be locally interpreted. Thus schools, teachers, and learners in the Korean capital, Seoul, have also had to respond to plans initiated by the Seoul Metropolitan Office of Education (SMOE), which developed its own 'SMOE English Education Development Plan' (SMOE 2011) to reflect the goals of the above national policy agendas. This plan developed its own policy initiatives for English education in the capital. These related particularly to increase educational equity across all social groups (in response to societal concerns over growing differences between those who could and could not afford private English tuition for their children) through the provision of low-cost or free English learning opportunities, and to supporting the development of the TEE (Teaching English through English) programme in Seoul schools (SMOE 2012).

The Korean National Curriculum goal of developing English learners' communicative competence has thus remained broadly consistent for over 25 years (since 1992). However, as the difficulty of developing such competence among most learners in the majority of classrooms has become more apparent, Korean English teachers have faced a continuous stream of national and/or local English language policy interventions, attempting to help them bridge the gap between curriculum goals and classroom realities. This chapter tells the story of one teacher's journey through this English language policy landscape.

2 The Case

Chang is a female secondary school teacher with 25 years of teaching experience as of 2017. I have known her since 2006. I taught English at schools run by SMOE for about 19 years before I moved to university in 2008 and, during this time, was involved in a variety of activities. In many of these, I had opportunities to work with Chang in a number of roles such as a teacher trainer, a member of a teacher research group, and a member of task force teams. I see her as an example of a Korean teacher of English who has experienced the frequent changes to the details of the National Curriculum outlined above. I feel that her story shows how it can be possible for Korean teachers of English to cope with such frequent changes in their working life.

2.1 Chang's Background

Chang majored in English education at a private university and obtained her teacher certification after completing the required courses at the university. Since then, she has always worked in the Seoul area as a secondary school English teacher: first at four different middle schools (junior secondary schools with learners aged 13–15) and since 2012 at a high school (learners aged 16–18).

Chang's experience at diverse schools is not unusual, since state school teachers in Korea work four or five years in one school before transferring to another. This system has been introduced to give state school teachers equal opportunities to work. With each change of school, she had to become accustomed to a new institutional environment. The school where she now works is an autonomous state high school which has extended autonomy in management and curriculum development. The students take the College Scholastic Aptitude Test (CSAT) at the end of their schooling. It is located in a socio-economically disadvantaged area with a significant number of students from low-income families.

Chang began to consciously focus on her own professional development after completing a one-month English teacher training programme in Melbourne, Australia, in 1998. This programme encouraged her to begin to make efforts to change her teaching practice. Between 2004 and 2007, she focused on exploring possible solutions to the problems posed by the reading texts in the middle school textbooks that she was expected to use. This is exemplified in her words below.

> The readings in the textbooks in middle schools were uninteresting and had outdated context. I didn't think I could achieve the curriculum goals using the textbooks. Hence, I attempted to develop teaching materials using film clips for authentic and practical English input. I used them in regular classes in my school.

Chang also enrolled in a master's programme in education, during which she conducted a study of how films could be used to develop teaching materials for writing and speaking. She received a prize in recognition of her efforts and achievements in improving English teaching in schools. She continued to expand her own professional development and contribute to that of others through a wide range of experiences including writing a textbook, working as a teacher trainer, obtaining the TEE advanced level certificate, taking an intensive six-month English teacher training programme (IETTP), and supporting other teachers' teaching as a member of a consulting team organised by the SMOE.

When the national Master Teacher (MT) system was introduced in 2012, to establish learning communities of practice among teachers in their schools and improve teaching practice, she was one of the first to be appointed. This meant she taught 9 to 10 hours less a week and was expected to use that time supporting colleagues in her own and neighbouring schools to develop their teaching and research capacities. Since becoming an MT, she has had more time to prepare and systematically share her ideas and practice with other teachers in Seoul and elsewhere through teacher training programmes, expert teacher group activities, and developing teaching materials.

2.2 Her Experiences

As an educator who began teaching English in 1992, she has experienced all of the changes in English educational policy mentioned in the introduction. She identifies three interconnected challenges which she believes explain why the change process continues to be so challenging. These are introduced here and discussed more fully below.

Firstly, she notes the additional difficulties encountered by teachers trying to implement curriculum change, when their immediate school context is not supportive. As Chang puts it:

> Not all those affected by change understood and supported it. For example, management supported changes, but teachers of English and other subjects as well as learners' parents did not.

One possible reason for such lack of support, as suggested in the excerpt above, is the mismatch between English curriculum goals and existing societal conceptions of teaching and learning. This is supported by another issue she raised: policymakers' underestimation of the challenges that the goals of the 1992 curriculum reform posed (and continue to pose) for existing educational norms. The multiple attempts that continue to be made to enable implementation suggest that these challenges remain profound and are hence likely to be long-standing. This can be seen in Chang's response below.

> Changes required adjustment to teaching methods. It was a big challenge for many teachers and learners' parents as it demanded autonomous students and communicative language teaching. These changes also were not in harmony with Korean educational culture. Teachers of other subjects also had the same

> problems. However, teachers of English had bigger pressure because of the high interest in English teaching in Korea.

The above challenges that Chang reports remain today, meaning that so far policy attempts to nudge implementation further towards more communication-oriented and learner-centred classrooms have not brought about the desired changes because, as Chang puts it,

> Even when the government tried initiatives such as TEE and NEAT, teachers and learners changed the ideas to make them fit practices they were familiar with.

Finally, exacerbating the slow implementation of classroom change is the continuing mismatch between curriculum goals and the format and content of the CSAT English exam. This exam acts as an important gatekeeper for university entrance, and the influence of its content weighting (almost 80% reading comprehension and formal features of the language) and format (almost all multiple-choice questions) 'washes back' from high schools to influence teaching and forms of assessment in lower secondary and primary school classrooms.

She expands on each of these three main areas below.

2.2.1 Understanding and Acceptance of English Education Policy

Chang first of all considers the extent to which stakeholders within the school system share an understanding of and a commitment to implementing changes.

She points out that despite several changes of government since 1992, policy support for the English curriculum change at the national level has been consistent. For example, based on the 'Reinforcement of a Practical English Policy' (MEST 2008), the recent Lee Myung Bak government (2008–2013) continued to push for English education innovation aiming to improve students' communicative competence. It also tried to narrow the gap in state school English provision between more and less prosperous regions and families. The current Korean government policy direction continues to emphasise these aims.

A survey (Jin 2009) administered to 1100 respondents including teachers, parents, and English education experts showed that while 92% of respondents agreed that the development of learners' ability to communicate was important for the future, there was a widespread belief that government ini-

tiatives to enable such abilities were not sufficient. For example, only 31.1% of respondents stated that they were satisfied or very satisfied with teachers' command of English, and only a third of respondents reported that they were satisfied or very satisfied with the current number of English teaching hours in state schools. This suggests that in these stakeholders' eyes, policy implementation remains problematic.

Chang does seem to understand and accept the direction of the English education policy, as suggested in her words below.

> The goals of English education should be set to educate global leaders who can acquire more information and confidently express their opinions by improving their communicative competence. I agree with the government's policy as it is in the right direction.

However, she recognises that other stakeholders in Korea continue to have different opinions. While she believed that school management (usually in agreement with national policy and teachers of other subjects) were indifferent, many students and parents appeared to continue to have doubts about the appropriacy of the recommended communicative approaches. As well as a reluctance to address the cultural challenges that such approaches pose for familiar teacher–learner roles, she considers societal responses to be strongly influenced by the examination system, as she suggests below.

> English teaching in high schools has to prepare students for the CSAT that is highly based on reading comprehension, grammar, and vocabulary.

The influence of the examination system is discussed further in Sect. 2.2.3. What Chang's talk seems to highlight is that different points of view about the nature and/or value of the change may therefore exist in a single school among various stakeholders, increasing the difficulty of implementing change consistently across the whole country. This suggests that policy makers' starting point for any such culturally complex change should be to consider how to get all of those whom a change affects, thinking in a broadly similar and policy-supporting way.

2.2.2 Norms of Education

A lively discussion of proposals regarding what to teach in English education in primary and secondary schools took place from 2008 to 2012 when the government paid particular attention to English education. The arguments

reflected two distinctive views. One maintained that it is necessary to focus on trying to help learners to improve their communicative competence. The other believed that the priority should be placed on shaping global minds through helping them to understand other cultures. The big difference between the two sides is the degree of emphasis that each wishes to give to teaching and learning practical English. So, for example, the culture-focus view emphasises using a teacher-centred approach to develop learners' reading ability in a manner that is more consistent with existing educational norms. In contrast, existing English education policies emphasise the development of learners' communicative ability, using pedagogies that require a dramatic change to the cultural conventions regarding teacher and learner roles and behaviours. Chang acknowledges the desirability of maintaining a balance between these two points of view in Korean English classrooms.

The '2012 SMOE English Education Plan' promotes 'cultural' change by interpreting the national policy as

> Teach less! Learn more!' English education needs to be changed from a teacher-centred towards student-centred approach through continuous upgrade. (SMOE 2012:1)

Chang agrees with this policy direction in terms of teaching methodology and attempts to practice it with both her learners and colleagues at school, as she mentions below.

> In the early days of my teaching career, I thought that teachers had to lead students with powerful lectureship. But my view has changed. I think that the teachers' role lies in helping students find out their own competence and talents. This was the same as my view of a good teacher trainer. I thought that I should introduce good teaching models to my colleagues and have them do as I showed, but now I believe that I should be a facilitator to help them find out their own merits and reflect them on their daily teaching practice.

While committed to such change herself, she understands how difficult it is to realise the principles underlying the 2012 Education Plan in all schools. This is particularly true in high schools where teachers' and students' focus continues to be on preparing for the multiple-choice question-based CSAT. As Chang remarks,

> High school teachers seem to believe that teacher-centred teaching is the most effective way to prepare for such kind of exam, hence it is really difficult to change the way of teaching from teacher-centred to learner-centred.

She is clear that teachers will feel unable to change their teaching approach if the message that they receive from learners and parents is that exam results matter most, and the exams have not changed. The Korean government does recognise that the ELT 'system' needs to demonstrate some consistency between curriculum and assessment if teachers and the wider society are to begin to feel that change implementation is essential. The past few years have thus seen official attempts to change the English examination system, particularly the CSAT.

2.2.3 Assessment: The National English Ability Test (NEAT)

Since 1992, the Korean government has pushed ahead with an attempt to encourage classroom English teaching to move from teaching mainly listening and reading to teaching all four language skills including speaking and writing. The NEAT project (2010–2014) represented the latest attempt to finally make assessment consistent with these teaching emphases. The project aimed to develop tests for all four skills at the three different school levels to replace the high stakes CSAT with a form of assessment that would encourage the teaching of all skills throughout the learners' English learning experience at school. NEAT was conceived as an IBT (Internet-based Test). Listening and reading were to be automatically scored as soon as the test taker answered the questions, while speaking and writing were to be graded by two assessors based on the rubrics (e.g. task completion, fluency, organisation, language use, and pronunciation for speaking test). The potential importance of such a change across the English education system could be seen by the speed with which some in-service teacher education programmes began to provide a variety of new training programs for teaching speaking and writing, in anticipation of this new test.

However, given societal, particularly parental, perceptions of the critical importance of passing the high school exit exams for learners' future success, it was essential that any replacement of the CSAT was seen to be fair to all. The fairness of NEAT was questioned on two counts. Firstly, it was believed that including the assessment of productive skills in the CSAT would decrease educational equity, since it would favour learners able to obtain private test preparation in those skills outside school. Secondly, there was scepticism about the capacity and security of the computer-based NEAT system, in particular its ability to provide a reliable (objective) assessment of learners' oral and written performance. In response to such societal concerns, NEAT was abandoned in 2015, and CSAT remains as a unviersity entrance exam.

Instead, the government tried to introduce more formative types of assessment at all levels of schooling. However, as Chang points out below, this too has been difficult to implement.

> Recently the current government has emphasised process-oriented assessment and formative assessment methods. I think this is a right direction but in reality it gives much burden to the teachers. Therefore, it is common for teachers to have students memorize some dialogue parts of the textbook or to take vocabulary tests rather than to take proper performance tests including speaking or writing.

Such inappropriate teacher responses occurred, Chang believes, because while the policy might be desirable, policy makers had again not fully considered what classroom implementation of formative assessment entails for teachers. Firstly, they do not have enough classroom time to be able to carry out genuine formative assessment procedures. Secondly, they have not been provided with sufficient support and guidance to develop the necessary skills and understandings. English assessment therefore continues to be inconsistent with national curriculum aims. Nonetheless, other initiatives to support the development of more 'communication-oriented' classrooms continue to be promoted. Chang's experiences of involvement in some of these are outlined below.

2.3 Chang's Experiences of Other Initiatives

2.3.1 Teaching English Through English (TEE)

The SMOE, for whom Chang has been working since she started teaching in 1992, has both responded to national initiatives, and introduced various local measures to improve English teaching and learning. One national initiative is the TEE policy introduced to encourage English teachers to use English (rather than Korean) in their lessons, and to expose students to more examples of English-use in their classroom environment. A variety of TEE lesson models were developed to demonstrate what TEE might look like in practice (MEST 2009).

A TEE certification system was introduced by the government to reinforce the TEE strategy, although it was not compulsory. Beginning in 2009, SMOE developed a two-level (basic and advanced) certification scheme for teachers to establish standards for teachers' ability to use English

in the classroom. This was disseminated to other regions thereafter (Lee 2012, 2013). Basic-level certification is now compulsory for all teachers of English with three or more years of teaching experience in SMOE. Advanced level, which Chang has reached, indicates the holder's high level of competence as a teacher of English in Korea and is optional for teachers who hope to further their careers (Choi and Andon 2014).

Again, the implementation of TEE has been controversial, with some teachers and researchers expressing concern about the concept of TEE, and particularly about the amount of use of English expected in classrooms, for instance, English-Only or English-Please (Jo 2011). Such concerns seem to be centred on difficulties that students might have in understanding what teachers say in English. As she indicates below, Chang acknowledges the potential benefits of the TEE, but is clear that Korean teachers of English need to receive sufficient appropriate training if TEE is to be widely implemented.

> TEE has contributed to encouraging teachers to improve their English competency although it has put a lot of pressure on us. It is time for the government to provide specialized teacher training programmes for TEE.

Currently, recognising that implementation needs to match contextual realities, it is suggested that the degree of TEE expected should take the level of students into account and that TEE certification needs to acknowledge the situation of each regional office of education.

2.3.2 Provision of Teaching Assistants

Another way in which Korean educational planners have tried to enable Korean learners to have access to spoken English in their English classrooms is through providing teaching assistants specifically for this purpose. These assistants take two forms. Native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) who have been recruited by EPIK since 1992 and more latterly Korean English conversation specialist teachers, of whom there were 6104 as of 2012. Most of these teaching assistants hold an English teaching certificate, and their role is mainly to teach English conversation classes.

This initiative has also led to arguments that have originated from the very different teaching approaches adopted by mainstream and conversation teachers, and also job allotment within society and the profession. This has led to conflicts between mainstream English teachers and English conversation specialist teachers about roles and responsibilities.

While acknowledging that the NESTS in particular vary greatly in their teaching experience and ability, Chang believes that their intervention has had largely positive results, particularly in providing practical classroom examples of different teaching approaches. As she puts it,

> I think the NESTs have a positive role in helping not only teachers and students improve their English ability but also to introduce western teaching and learning styles. Although there has been an issue raised by a huge gap in their quality, we need to accept the positive outcomes of their roles. If the budget allows, EPIK should be continued.

2.3.3 Teacher Training Programmes and Other Professional Activities to Support Curriculum Change

Chang was profoundly affected by the opportunity to participate in the six-month intensive English teacher training programme (IETTP) in 2008–2009. This was provided by the SMOE, with the support of the central government for school English teachers, and centred on language competence improvement, teaching methodology, and other social activities. The focus was on raising teachers' awareness of how to adjust their classroom roles to become consistent with implementing student-centred teaching and learning policies. Chang believes, as she says below, that both the programme content and the time it provided for reflection were valuable in enabling her to consider how teaching practices could be used or adapted for use in her own classroom.

> The IETTP allowed me to have an opportunity to think of only teaching English by reducing the workload. In particular, learning how to write essays and teaching listening, which I had not learned properly before, was really useful. After the training programme, I tried to develop teaching ideas by applying what I learned to my class or modifying them.

Her words here suggest that the influence of in-service provision depends not only on its content and process, but also on the extent to which teachers are freed from other responsibilities while participating.

After completing the IETTP and obtaining the TEE Advanced Level Certificate, Chang was selected as an expert in teaching and has since been involved in diverse teacher development activities. She reports below that

she has found this very rewarding, especially when it has clearly resulted in positive changes for other teachers.

> A teacher who came back to school after four-year maternity leave gave me feedback that my lecture about English teaching practice had freed her from concern and made her flutter with new hope. I was so happy and felt rewarded.

This highlights how her simultaneous roles as a classroom teacher and teacher trainer have enabled her to play an important role in supporting the implementation of English education policy in schools in both Seoul and other regions. Her particular focus has been on the teaching of speaking and writing, both in terms of reconstructing the syllabus and developing teaching and learning materials.

Examples of Chang's 'output' are manuals for TEE certification and the assessment of speaking and writing for an English education consulting team working to help less confident English teachers, and teaching materials for slow learners and self-directed learners. She has also shared her experiences and ideas as a member of professional societies such as SETA (Seoul English Teachers Association), national English education policy groups such as the Steering Committee for the 2009 National Curriculum, and of a team that develops teacher training programmes organised by the MEST and SMOE.

Chang's professional success in the context is clear. It has however been at the expense of aspects of her family and personal life. The pressure on her time and the demands on her energy have only increased since she was appointed a master teacher in 2012. As Chang expresses below, her professional success has affected her both as a mother and as a person who is gradually growing older.

> Not being able to take care of my own children properly is most difficult. Lack of time and reduction of stamina are also difficulties.

2.3.4 Reflections on Her Experiences

The widespread activities in which Chang has been involved show that both local and national governments have made continuous efforts over decades to try and support teachers' implementation of more communication-oriented English provision in Korean schools.

Chang asserted that the expansion of activities for speaking and writing and the moves towards more performance-based assessment have increased students' classroom participation and collaboration. However, she notes that there are now signs that the abandonment of the NEAT (MOE 2015) has once again decreased the proportion of classroom teaching practices that emphasise communication in English. There is thus concern about the short-lived impact of many of these initiatives.

Chang's example shows that it is possible for a highly motivated and committed Korean English teacher to adapt materials and techniques to be contextually appropriate and to teach English using a more interactive and 'communicative' approach. She has experienced being a Korean teacher of English as a rewarding job which gives opportunities to enable students to understand other cultures and prepare them to work in the global world. Nonetheless, she indicates a number of difficulties that most Korean teachers continue to face, all of which reflect many of the different aspects of the discussion so far.

> The biggest difficulty is the fact that they are non-native English speaking teachers who lack confidence in language competence. Moreover, too much change too quickly is even harder for teachers to absorb. The high demand on change in English education for communication has also caused difficulties such as heavy workload for operating level-differentiated teaching and performance tests. A more significant one lies in the big gap between the teaching in practice and the CSAT, which leads to the dilemma in emphasis.

Despite these difficulties above, she believes that the ongoing investment in policy initiatives relating to English education over the past decades has provided Korean teachers of English with multiple potential opportunities for development. But, as mentioned in the above quote, she notes the need to recognise that introducing too many initiatives too quickly makes teachers experience difficulties to get accustomed to.

3 Lessons and Suggestions from Her Experiences

As Li (1998) discussing English curriculum change in Korea pointed out almost twenty years ago, teachers' understanding of a change is central to whether its implementation is successful. The adoption of communicative

language learning in EFL countries like South Korea implies fundamental changes to existing approaches to education, and so to the thinking of all main stakeholders. As this chapter indicates, enabling and supporting such changes is easier said than done, and requires careful consideration about how principles may be modified to local realities.

Chang's experiences demonstrate how a committed and enthusiastic Korean teacher has been able to cope with the challenges posed by English curriculum change, and the effort that this has involved. However, it is questionable whether it is reasonable to expect such dedication from all teachers.

Chang's experiences will now be analysed using an adaptation of Woodbury and Gess-Newsome's three-level framework (2002). It suggests ways in which interconnections between teachers' personal thinking and attitude (personal level), the 'atmosphere' in the organisational environment in which they work (school level), and the wider cultural and policy context (national and regional level), may influence the implementation of educational reforms. The discussion now considers how each level has influenced Chang's change experience.

3.1 Personal Level

Chang has made changes to her teaching practice by responding positively to the many challenges posed by the government's initiatives for improving English education. Her positive response appears to be based on having high aspirations for her own teaching development and so being motivated to make continuous efforts to improve her professional skills and understandings. Similar positive attitudes and perceptions have been reported in other studies of English language curriculum reform (e.g. Canh and Chi 2012). Chang's motivation seems to have been enhanced by the various in-service teacher training programmes that she has participated in. As her words indicated below, she believes that her positive personality and good communicative skills have enabled her to take full advantage of these.

> I think I have a special ability to utilize what I learn and transmit it to other people. Almost all training programmes, even though many teachers complain of the quality, are very useful to me and I can find good points to put them into practice. Also I make efforts to share what I have learned with students and other teachers when I deliver what I learned from the programmes. This has worked and I am very confident in and proud of being an English teacher and master teacher.

However, it is worth noting here that in many ways, Chang is an exceptional teacher. For many more 'ordinary' teachers in Korea and in other contexts, perceptions and attitudes to educational change are not so positive (e.g. Park and Sung 2013; Lee and Yin 2011). For example, Park and Sung (2013), in a recent study of Korean elementary teachers' experiences of English language curriculum change, found that most teachers in their research had low motivation to implement change and harboured feelings of resentment and mistrust towards new pedagogical approaches. This, they suggest, is partly due to the fact that many lacked the kind of opportunities of support that Chang experienced and were left on their own to struggle to make sense of the changes.

3.2 School Level

As well as accepting challenges and seeking ways of dealing with them on a personal level, Chang's school context also played an important role in supporting her capacity for self-development and in so doing also establishing self-efficacy. Chang works in an autonomous state high school in which, due to its location in a socio-economically disadvantaged area, with a significant number of students from low-income families, she is allowed to plan curriculum implementation in ways that are considered appropriate for its teaching and learning context. It is natural that many students in such a school will demonstrate low aspiration for learning and have low expectations of their academic achievements. Implementing the English curriculum changes in such a context is thus likely to require more time and effort from teachers.

Supportive school leadership has enabled Chang to develop in an apparently unpromising environment. Leaders have encouraged her desire to utilise as many of the local and national support opportunities as possible. Participation in these provided opportunities to actively collaborate with native English-speaking teachers and English conversation specialist teachers, to teach in English-specialised classrooms where there are fewer constraints on teaching approaches, and to interact with others in workshops and teacher training programmes. All these have provided opportunities to acquire and disseminate good practice. Again, this picture of school level support is in many ways exceptional. It is unlikely that most teachers in Korea or in other contexts have such positive experiences.

School leaders have also encouraged her to innovate and try out different teaching approaches and materials to see if they 'work' in her own classroom, and to share her experiences of what has been effective with other

teachers. At the same time, ironically, she has also been 'supported' by the fact that most parents at her current school are uninterested in English education, since this has meant they have not protested when she has taught in ways more consistent with the curriculum, rather than focusing her teaching on the exam.

Again, this picture of school level support is in many ways exceptional. It is unlikely that many teachers in Korea, or in other contexts, have such positive support from their school leaders (Park and Sung 2013; Zheng and Davidson 2008; Ouyang 2000). Indeed, as Ouyang (2000) reports in an account of one teacher's journey through curriculum change in China, the lack of support and understanding that school leaders showed in regard to the pedagogical changes the teacher was required to make helped to exacerbate the stress the teacher already felt in trying to make sense of the new curriculum. Although perhaps untypical, Chang's story can go some way in demonstrating the importance of support at school level and the positive affect it can have on teachers' attitudes and willingness to implement change.

3.3 National and Regional Level

The frequent and rapid changes in Korean education policy, particularly during the years between 2008 and 2012 (Lee 2010), made many demands on teachers. The government responded, albeit with varying degrees of success, by providing diverse means of support for English education, particularly through the provision of a variety of teacher training programmes in which Chang was able to participate.

While she believes that she did benefit from these due to her positive attitude and high motivation, this has not been true for many other teachers. Consequently, the impact of the available teacher education programmes has not fully satisfied the actual needs of the student body and society. Some of the reasons for this include lack of shared commitment to the proposed curriculum changes among stakeholders, at least partly due to the ongoing mismatch between English curriculum goals and English assessment as discussed in Sects. 2.2.2 and 2.2.3.

Critical awareness of the overall ineffectiveness of the many policies that have tried to bring about teacher development has led the Korean government to pay more attention to the initial English teacher education system and the quality of provision for teachers' continuous professional development (MEST 2011a). Evidence suggests that the in-service teacher training

programmes have failed to contribute to improvement in job satisfaction levels or the self-efficacy of Korean teachers. An OECD report (2009) covering 23 countries ranked Korean teachers' job satisfaction 13th and their level of self-efficacy 23rd.

To try to address this problem, the Korean government once again reacted by developing new policy initiatives, enacting 'Measures to Advance Professional Development for Korean Teachers' in 2011 (MEST 2011a), and is now driving the policy on teacher development based on the proposal in 2012 (MEST 2012). Diverse intensive teacher training programmes such as a teaching practice course, an English competence course, and a testing specialist course have been introduced. Chang's experience suggests that such policies will need to fully acknowledge existing teacher attitudes and school realities, if they are to positively affect participating teachers.

While Chang's story shows what it is possible for an exceptional Korean teacher of English who is supported by her personal and her working contexts to achieve, national initiatives have so far not enabled many Korean English teachers to address the challenges that curriculum changes have posed. A recent survey of 185 Korean secondary school teachers (Lee 2015) suggests some hope for the future. The survey found that respondents had positive attitudes towards the objectives of the English education policy. For example, they agreed with the need for teachers to improve their own communicative competence in English (Mean = 4.23 out of 5), for greater student autonomy in learning (Mean = 4.06 out of 5), and for the expansion of English classes to strengthen the learners' skills of expression (Mean = 4.15 out of 5). Such responses suggest that the extent of these Korean English teachers' adherence to existing educational norms may slowly be changing, to become more consistent with some aspects of a student-centred approach, and so with the English curriculum.

4 Conclusion

The analysis of Chang's experience highlights facilitating and inhibiting factors which have influenced the shaping of her perceptions and teaching practices. Above all, personal factors such as high motivation and a strong desire to continue her professional development have played an important role in enabling her to address challenges. However, to date, it seems that her experiences are not typical of Korean English teachers more widely.

Chang also seems to have been fortunate in the schools in which she has worked. Support from management, learners, and other stakeholders,

together with the encouragement of a collaborative teaching community, have all contributed to supporting her capacity for self-development, which strengthened her self-efficacy.

However, while Chang viewed the stream of government initiatives for English education over almost two decades as supportive, and made use of them for her own development, they seem to have had far less influence on the thinking and behaviours of many Korean English teachers.

There seem to be two main reasons for their relative ineffectiveness. The first reason is the degree of mismatch between the classroom behaviours and practices promoted by the various initiatives and existing educational and cultural norms within the wider society. Such mismatches have been widely noted in the literature exploring the many attempts to introduce more learner-centred approaches to teaching and learning into education systems worldwide (Schweisfurth 2011, 2015; Tabulawa 2013).

The second reason (arguably an outcome of the above) is the ongoing inconsistency between the 'parts' (Wedell 2013) of the English language teaching system. In Korea, this is most evident in the lack of 'fit' between the curriculum aims of developing learners' ability to communicate and the CSAT which mostly continues to assess learner's knowledge of English. As the failure of the NEAT initiative shows, where success in English is a criterion for access to higher education, and so needs to be assessed in a manner that society considers to be fair, it remains difficult for any government to make communication-oriented curriculum goals and their assessment consistent.

Considering the complexity of factors influencing teachers' personal thinking and attitudes, we can understand how much effort Chang needed to make to overcome the demands that the national curriculum aims made on her professional development. I met her recently, and we talked about her latest challenges. She has just moved to a new high school, this time located in a socio-economically advantaged area. She has been struggling to get accustomed to the new environment and developing professional strategies there too. Her story is to be continued.

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4

Balancing Change and Tradition: A Chinese English Teacher's Experiences of Curriculum Reform

Chunmei Yan

1 Introduction

In the ten years between 1999 and 2009, China witnessed considerable efforts in the implementation of Basic Education Curriculum Reform. The aim of this curriculum reform was to improve the quality of education through the development of a range of skills and personal attributes to meet the challenges of global competition, including cognitive, non-cognitive, interpersonal, intrapersonal skills and capabilities, moral values and creativity (Kipnis 2006). 'Guidelines for Basic Education Curriculum Reform (pilot)' issued in 2001 and 2003 stipulated objectives for 15 subjects, related to learning content, pedagogical approaches and school management. These guidelines also emphasised a reduction in student workload, the cultivation of higher-order skills, and the broadening of students' learning experiences (Zhong 2005). This nationwide curriculum reform was implemented in two phases: initially piloted in September 2004 in four selected provinces (Guangdong, Shandong, Hainan and Ningxia), and then extended to other provinces including Jiangsu, Fujian, Liaoning and Zhejiang. Implementation in the final few provinces was carried out in 2009.

In line with the general curriculum goals, the curriculum reform for English language, one of the main subjects which started at primary

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M. Wedell and L. Grassick (eds.), *International Perspectives on Teachers Living with Curriculum Change*, International Perspectives on English Language Teaching,
https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-54309-7_4

three levels, mandated 5 parallel goals to foster students' cognitive and personal growth to enable them to access global scientific knowledge as members of society and the world. These goals included language skills, language knowledge, affect (emotional attitude), learning strategies and cross-cultural awareness and competence (Yeung 2009; Wang and Lam 2009; Zhu 2007).

To develop the ability to use English for authentic communication and personal growth, the new English curriculum stipulated a transformation from the traditional approach to language teaching (that relies heavily on systematic and detailed study of grammar, extensive use of cross-linguistic comparison and translation, memorisation of structural patterns and vocabulary, painstaking effort to form good verbal habits, an emphasis on written language and a preference for literary classics) to constructivist pedagogies (such as inquiry-based learning and task-based instruction) and formative assessments. These expectations called for a major cognitive shift in how teaching is conceptualised and valued. It called on teachers to engage in a deliberate and ongoing process of unlearning, learning and relearning to meet the curriculum reform requirements in their classrooms (Qian and Walker 2013).

Nationwide initiatives to reform curricular materials and pedagogies were carried out. Textbooks were revised to be more engaging, more interactive and more relevant to students' lives. Teachers were called upon to boldly experiment with new innovative approaches. Heavy investment was made in teacher training to provide teachers with pedagogical support. Additionally, research and teaching activities were organised on a monthly basis to facilitate teachers' knowledge and application of the new curriculum, which were generally delivered by an expert from the local education bureau, who was either a textbook compiler, or a university-based teacher educator, or an instructional and research fellow from the Teaching and Research Department of the local education bureau. At the district and school levels, workshops and seminars were organised to enhance teachers' knowledge of and implementation of the new curriculum. As well as teacher training activities, self-directed professional learning for teachers (to be done in their own time) was mandated. To help with this, online teacher training modules were delivered nationwide to create more learning opportunities and resources for teachers en masse.

However, while there has been an enormous investment in the reform process, implementation has not matched the curriculum goals, despite various policies and initiatives. Reports of limited success seem

to outweigh those of success. Teacher-centred didactic teaching remains prevalent in classrooms in both developed urban and less developed rural areas (Starr 2011; OCED 2010; Xu and Wong 2011; Yan 2012; Yan and He 2012). Various interrelated contextual factors, such as the nature of assessment, teacher resistance and pedagogical struggles, student resistance and limited school support have been found to contribute to the lack of change in different schools in both urban and rural areas. Teachers find themselves in a dilemma. They exert considerable effort to implement the new curriculum's aims, yet these aims are incongruent with the aims of the student assessments. Formative assessment was conducted as a mere formality. As Qian and Walker (2013) observed, the damaging effect of an almost exclusive focus on examination performance still pervades.

Previous research in a range of contexts (e.g. Wang 2011; Zhang and Liu 2014; Riazi and Razavipour 2011; Hardman and A-Rahman 2014) reveals a plethora of attention to teachers' pedagogical dilemmas caused by social external obstacles in the curriculum reform. However, there seems to be a paucity of research on *rural* school teachers' professional and emotional well-being, which deserves equal, if not more attention because it may constitute crucial obstacles to curriculum reform and teacher development. Therefore, the case study that follows aims to provide a nuanced depiction of one rural senior secondary English language teacher's perceptions of the tensions between the new curriculum goals and the national college entry examinations (Gaokao). The case highlights the teacher's process of behavioural and emotional adjustments she finds herself making as a way of coping with the dilemma of trying to be a good, dedicated teacher to her students and meeting the educational aims of the new curriculum. I believe that examining the rural teacher's life story and experiences in the recent English curriculum reform may help to shed light on other professionally dedicated senior school teachers' experiences and feelings. In doing so, it aims to highlight the tensions experienced by those rural school teachers who have been exceptionally hard working to achieve both public and personal educational goals, but have negative emotions about their work due to the overwhelming pressure of the national high-stakes exam. I believe that such rural teacher experiences, feelings and responses to change deserve attention from all parties involved in the curriculum reform in China to narrow the urban–rural divide, the essence of curriculum reform. The case may also resonate with the experiences of rural teachers in other curriculum change contexts beyond China.

2 A Senior Rural School English Teacher's Experience of Implementing the Curriculum Reform

To gain a close-up view of the curriculum reform, Yao (pseudonym), a 40-year-old senior secondary English teacher's perceptions and experiences were investigated. She works in a school in the suburb of a provincial capital city in Central China and teaches English classes for students aged 16–18. Before 1995, this suburb fell outside the official boundary of the provincial capital and was located in a rural area. However, since the boundary changes this suburb has been part of a new province, but can be considered 'rural' in the sense that it still lags behind other districts due to its location far from the city and its previous more rural status. There are only two schools in Yao's district, and she and her colleagues find it difficult to travel to training events in the city due to the distance and local geography.

Yao is regarded as an exemplary teacher in her school based on her students' remarkable achievements in the university entry examinations over the years of her career. She completed a part-time MEd between 2008 and 2014 and was under my supervision for her dissertation writing. I was deeply struck by her thirst for learning and yearning for quality-oriented education and her frustration with her career which she perceived as a failure.

2.1 Yao's Professional Life

Yao has been endowed with teacher attributes, such as interest, passion, diligence and a sense of responsibility, since she became an English teacher in 1997 at a secondary vocational school after her graduation from a second-tiered university as a history major.

After graduation, she became an English teacher because there was no history subject in the secondary vocational school. Her life during this time was stress-free without any specific demands or uniform examinations. However, she felt stigmatised because of her non-English major background and the low status of vocational schools at that time. Her sense of inferiority drove her to pursue a bachelor's degree in English Language and Literature through a correspondence course. The poor quality and low academic status of the certificate pushed her to work hard to obtain recognition in that school. She achieved this recognition within

the school, but since vocational schools continued to have a low status, she decided to move to a more prestigious senior secondary school. She secured an offer in one of the top suburban schools in the region located in the outskirts of the capital city. Her students performed impressively in the English test of the Gaokao, which enabled her to win a promotion to Senior-Level Teacher (*gaoji jiaoshi*) in 2005, the highest professional title in schools, which was an unusual achievement at her age. However, despite her remarkable professional performance, she has never felt herself to be a qualified English teacher.

In 2005, she decided to take the MEd examination to achieve her ambition of obtaining a formally recognised qualification in English to further her academic development. As she says,

> My dream has always been entering a good university. I always longed to receive systematic training in English because I didn't major in English but history. I want to improve my professional skills, upgrade and systematise my teaching ideas and methods through systematic academic studies in a reputable university.

Another reason for doing a MEd was her eagerness to get herself out of the rut of routinised teaching and recharge her batteries after working for over ten years. Although she gained admission to a nationally prestigious teacher education university, she had to postpone her entry for several years because her school was short-staffed. While she waited to be given a chance to start her MEd course, she continued to work hard at the school and her persistence and diligence were rewarded in 2010 with a 20-day trip to the UK. This was a rare opportunity which nobody else had ever obtained. In the same year, she eventually got approval from her school to undertake her MEd studies. This course gave her the opportunity to stop and think about what she had been doing in the classroom, something that a heavy teaching workload does not always allow for day-to-day teaching. Yao comments that:

> I was a busy teacher who was worn out every day fighting for students' scores. I was so occupied with heavy workload that I seldom stopped to think of some basic questions such as what, why and how. I only followed the conventions and never thought to explore a way that belonged to me. Through half a year's study I begin to think like an educator with a thinking brain, which is the greatest benefit I have gained here.

2.2 Yao's Perceptions and Experiences of Curriculum Reform

The previous section described how Yao is a hard-working and dedicated English language teacher who clearly wants to develop her own skills and expertise in teaching. From the conversations with Yao, it became apparent that this dedicated teacher encountered many struggles with coming to terms with the new curriculum. This section presents two sub-sections, representing two stages of Yao's interpretation of and reaction to the curriculum reform. The first stage was characterised by her full endorsement of the educational goals mandated by the curriculum reform and her ensuing resistance to the existing exam-oriented education. The second stage was a transition from resistance to acceptance of the prevailing exam-oriented education. These two stages truthfully reflect her professional development trajectory and changed the state of mind influenced by the Gaokao-driven education environment. Her attitudinal change was both influenced by and resulted in the success of her students in the exams, a higher professional and social status as well as improved sense of self-efficacy.

2.2.1 Stage One: Embracing the Curriculum Reform and Resisting the Prevailing Exam-Oriented Education

Over a 10-year period, Yao experienced a change in her perception about her role as an English teacher in the curriculum reform climate. Initially, she fully embraced the goals of the new curriculum reforms to transform the exam-focused education to quality-oriented education in order to develop students' practical problem-solving ability. She believed that the goal of education was 'to cultivate physically and mentally healthy persons'. She challenged the exam-oriented education system that seemed to fail to cultivate students' competence, as can be seen in her words below.

> Why can't our education cultivate first-class talents, say, Nobel Prize winners? Until today, our education and classroom practice still serve examination. Students in this education system have rich textbook knowledge but lack practical competence. They can't fit in this changing society which needs all-round talents with rich knowledge, problem-solving ability, pioneering spirit and creative thinking. Obviously, our education system needs reforms and innovations.

She used a series of strategies to motivate students' interest in English learning, such as using English as the main medium of instruction to

increase students' exposure to English and arranging group work to create students' teamwork spirit. However, the failure of her school's experimentation with student-centred learning and formative assessment in response to the curriculum reform mandate caused her to think and waiver. Student-centred pedagogies were implemented as a pretence only in cases of school and teaching inspections conducted by education management. Inspectors tended to be concerned only with the superficial technical elements of quality-oriented pedagogies, talking lightly of the rationality of the objectives, procedures and learning activities. The formative assessment also turned out to be a pretence. It has never been carried out for those students whose final year is devoted to preparing for the Gaokao. In reality, the students gave themselves a mark with their teachers' approval to contribute to their quality assessment results required by the local education bureau.

According to Yao, the pedagogical reforms tended to be flimsy and ephemeral 'gimmicks' that could not become normalised routine instructional procedures because of the irreconcilable conflict between the two educational philosophies, i.e. exam- and quality- oriented education. As Yao puts it:

> Theoretically, quality- and exam-oriented education can be mutually integrated and facilitative. Theory experts (curriculum developers and university-based teacher educators) firmly believe that if students' overall qualities and competence are raised, their exam competence should not be too bad. However, in reality exam-oriented education is prevalent. The pragmatic exam-oriented teaching is the norm in my school.

Yao acknowledged a number of hurdles in implementing the new curriculum including teachers' limited professional competence (language proficiency and instructional skills), limited time to apply the theories on which the new curriculum goals were based, students' reluctance to develop self-regulatory skills and their preference for the didactic information-transmission teaching.

Yao participated in many training courses. However, as she reports below, they were merely provided to meet administrative obligations and were unable to serve teachers' real needs.

> The training is carried out more through administrative orders than through teachers' intrinsic needs and desires, so it's weak, superficial and powerless. Under the orders from the above as a show of management competence, teachers are passively involved, running after a programme after another, and achieve little but feeling exhausted with such burdens and extra work.

Added to this, the training courses were discrete, unsystematic, theoretical and idealistic, lacking in practical suggestions on how to contextualise the theories and new teaching approaches in schools. This seemed to be because of either the time allocated for training or the teacher trainers' superficial understanding and limited practice of those theories. Yao notes that

> we participate in many training courses that introduce new ideas and methods, such as giving more time to students for them to engage in autonomous learning, exploratory learning and cooperative learning. However, their impact is minimal. I don't have the competence to balance quality- and exam-oriented education. I don't have the time, energy and courage to take this challenge. We still use cramming for fear of missing one language point that might be tested. So we lecture all the time including in the evening self-study sessions.

The need to cover syllabus content for the exams considerably hindered teachers in carrying out skills practice and development which require more classroom and syllabus time, especially speaking. Her school tried innovations by duplicating instructional models of more successful schools. However, these failed to take root owing to tissue rejection (Holliday 1994) derived from a series of mismatches between the reform and school conditions.

> After their visit to some successful schools, our principals required us to make detailed plans to implement their student-centred pedagogies, such as five-step instruction that requires students to self-teach the learning contents before class, and raise questions in class for teachers to give answers. However, after less than one month's implementation, all teachers gave up because of its limited effect, only on good students, and other students can't be actively involved.

Therefore, as Yao comments above, teachers' experiments with new pedagogies were short-lived and superficial as a result of limited teacher expertise and time.

However, more significantly, it was the lack of instant improvement in exam results which led to Yao and her colleagues returning to their previous practices in which they had been expert. As Yao states,

> we have to go back to our old ways because we can't afford to fail. If we are allowed to fail, we would likely continue our experimentations.

She pointed out that the crucial reason for the 'old wine in new bottles' phenomenon was the washback of Gaokao-based school evaluation. As she revealed in her reflective journal,

> In reality, few effective solutions have emerged to reduce examination pressures. On the contrary, the examination competition is becoming fiercer and fiercer. Up till now the curriculum reform's quality-oriented education has been a mere formality in my school.

In addition, the absence of any fundamental change in the contents of Gaokao and the Gaokao-based school evaluation spurred the nationwide frenzy of schools ranking competitions and strongly hindered any attempts at quality-oriented education, as Yao explains below.

> There remains a considerable gap between the Gaokao and the New Curriculum Standards. The New curriculum standards cover several dimensions of student development as persons, but the Gaokao just covers the knowledge and skills dimensions. We focus on the Gaokao standards because students' Gaokao results mean everything.

The Gaokao results determine the level of support from the educational management to schools, which in turn determine schools' resources (teachers and educational facilities) and students' learning outcomes. Yao's description of the competition-driven education pervading in China is given below.

> The more education reforms, the more students and teachers suffer. The predominant problem is the huge population and limited educational resources that have led to great regional disparity among different schools. Advanced facilities, high quality teachers and highly-caliber students are concentrated in the key schools, which is the source of fierce competition and unfair education. In order to be admitted to key schools, children begin to prepare for public examinations when they are in the kindergarten.

Thus, it would seem that a series of irrational and demoralising Gaokao-driven practices have been modelling the school culture. As Yao's experiences suggest, working hard for students' good exam performance and conformity to school administrators' instructions remain the two caveats in teachers' professional life. With the ethos that Gaokao results depend on the investment in time and sweat (*shijian jia hanshui*), the school schedule is crammed with classes, assignments and tests as incentives, leaving teachers, students and administrators with very little time for entertainment and relaxation. Added to this, many of the teacher training programmes were concerned with new trends of Gaokao and preparation guidelines.

Gaokao not only means a heavy work schedule, but also a lot of anxiety and stress. Yao explained how teachers and students are ranked after each

test. Each teacher is accountable for their students' results. Low-performing teachers and students feel stigmatised, and high-performing ones feel more pressured to maintain and excel the achieved standards. This -invoking practice was in turn a result of the pressure the school principals were under to fulfil the targets set by the different hierarchies above the school level. Thus, ignoring the Gaokao would be impossible. As Yao remarks:

> Exam results is the sole indicator of a teacher's and a student's quality. We have exams every month, followed by students' and teachers' rankings, showing top 5, top 10, top 20, top 30, average marks. The results are announced at staff meetings, and put up on the wall outside the study affairs director's office. The results determine our bonuses. This practice exerts great pressure on each student and teacher because they all want to do well.

Therefore, Yao spends the whole year of Senior 3 on Gaokao preparation, leaving no time for instructional reform. Fostering students' competence is commonly regarded by school teachers as unrealistic because 'cultivating competence is a long process. Exams are imminent and allow little time for cultivation'. Yao felt that the reliance on cramming and exercise tactics resulted from a need to achieve instant results, particularly since staff performance assessment is based on students' test results and teachers' biannual evaluation. Despite her desire to follow the aims of the new curriculum, she reports below how she has very little choice but to stick to the prevailing exam-oriented methods.

> The mastery of a language shouldn't be quantified by superficial scores, but this is the case in our country. We learn English to pass the exam instead of mastering and using it. What's the best way to help students get high scores in exams? Intensive paper exercises and knowledge bombarding. So, even reform-oriented teachers have no choice but to use the seemingly effective way—traditional transmission, because it can guarantee "squeezing" more knowledge into students' brain in limited time.

As she describes, in the centralised school environment, 'the principal has the trump card to deal with teachers, who live for their face!' That means he knows that the common fear of loss in the ranking competitions will drive teachers to choose to conform to whatever demands come from the school and beyond. A number of Yao's colleagues who were initially enthusiastic about teaching towards curriculum goals were laid off or gave up their effort because of their dissatisfaction with the school climate. Yao expresses her powerlessness and helplessness about this lack of autonomy in the first few years of her career.

> Teachers are constrained by their schools' educational philosophies and goals. My school's only goal is to fulfill the university admission rate, that's an absolute goal for teachers and students. Our teaching is totally determined by my school's educational philosophy and goals. (University) Admission rate is our absolute goal, so our teaching revolves around how to enable our students to improve their scores in the shortest time. High scores mean high teacher competence. This is the rule of the game unless you have good personal relationship with the headmaster or have important connections.

Over time, Yao gradually became aware that she had to compromise to 'survive'. She acquiesced despite her strong aversion to this new employment policy along with her colleagues. She explains that,

> We are the lowest-ranked. How can we question the system? How can we change the system from the bottom level? Our voice will fall into oblivion. Nobody can afford to lose their job. My school is over-staffed now because of the dramatic decrease of student numbers (resulting from the one child policy). Teachers are under control and live under great pressure, bewildered. That is where the fundamental problem lies.

2.2.2 Stage 2: Reaching a Compromise—Perceiving Gaokao as a Critical Opportunity for Rural Students

After years of futile resistance to the demands and requirements of the exams, Yao gradually perceived her role as positive. She was a teacher who could help rural students gain access to better life chances through their exam results and so more likely to be on an equal footing with their urban counterparts. She had come to terms with the reality that it was possible to have a 'positive' attitude towards some intrinsically good elements of the exam-oriented education. Yao saw that an exam approach to education could develop students' foundational knowledge, including reading comprehension, vocabulary and translation, which prepares them well for their future development. The hard work and effort that students invested towards their exams could develop the kind of well-rounded qualities needed for their future development.

> We found that high-performing students enjoy apparent advantages, such as solid foundation knowledge, attentiveness and concentration, persistence and patience, high learning motivation and clear goals. All these features are extremely beneficial to their future academic pursuits. Many of them stand a high chance of becoming high-achieving talents in scientific research.

In addition, Gaokao-based education could provide an equal opportunity for the talented but less privileged rural students, who have been able to enter good schools such as Yao's, to potentially have access to a bright future through their academic endeavours. As Yao said,

> Chinese parents are the most responsible parents for their children's education. Many of my students don't come from affluent family. Most parents' money, time and energy are spent on their children's education because education is the determinant of children's and family's future. Rural students can enter big cities and the world through their Gaokao success.

It became clear that over time, Yao started to empathise with the pressure her school was under and to better understand the super-human working style required of teachers and students, the endless examinations, and the streaming of teachers and students into different levels. She expresses this concern below.

> As top 1 school in our district, my school determines the Gaokao outcomes of our district. We are under the scrutiny of the people, the education bureau, and the district management. Our school headmaster is under the greatest pressure. He has to prove to his superiors his achievements and his ability.

She also came to see her role as a 'holy mission', as she exemplifies below, to enable her aspiring students from humble origins to be admitted to a prestigious university.

> Student's only hope is entering a university because they don't have a good family background to support them. My 'holy mission' is to help them to be admitted to universities. This is a sense of mission, professional ethics, a sense of achievement. If my students failed in the Gaokao, their prospects might be jeopardised as well as my own reputation (although it is not a serious concern to me). Everyone is struggling for the goal and if I didn't take my responsibility, I would be a culprit. Every coin has two sides, why not look on the bright side?

She decided to try to make her teaching as Gaokao effective as possible through using three critical strategies: (1) comprehensively summarising the knowledge system in the textbooks based on the syllabus and Gaokao guidelines provided by the provincial education commission, (2) collecting the common problems of previous students in English tests and (3) checking and ensuring each student's mastery of every likely test point in each unit against the system. To enhance students' learning, she compiled a set of supplemen-

tary learning materials for her students. Her class had a relaxed and lively atmosphere, but was generally knowledge focused, and she had little time for the development of skills, learning strategies or cultural awareness and competence, as stipulated in the new curriculum. To save time, she mainly highlighted test points and left the practice to students after class. She explains,

> We have only one class every day, so we can only focus on what is to be tested, i.e. vocabulary, reading, writing, and grammar in our teaching, practice and assignment. We have no time for oral practice and assignment. Six subjects all have a lot of homework.

Her test-oriented tactic was rewarded with her students' outstanding exam performance. However, she did not feel a sense of achievement because of the ever-increasing requirements to fulfil the annual targets set by the district governments and education bureau. These annual targets meant that all her students were expected to be admitted to high-ranking universities and one or two students to the two top universities (Tsinghua and Beijing Universities). She felt her life to be 'as bitter as a cup of black coffee', denied a chance of having a spiritually and emotionally relaxed professional and personal life, and the freedom to express her opinions about school policies. As 'a slave of the exams', she was burdened with anxiety and burnout, which she described as 'professional monotonous inertia'. Her stress is evident in the following email message.

> I feel very tired. On coming back home, I can't wait to flop onto the bed, not wanting to do anything or saying anything. This is my life and I've been accustomed to it and accepted it unconditionally. Life is more about repetition than surprise and challenge lies behind the repetition, which I think is the essence of life. (2 September 2012, 23:05)

She found herself in an ever-present dilemma because of the unresolved conflict between her preferred teaching and her compromised practice. As she explains below, she felt that the practice of making 'exam machines' was going increasingly further away from the initial purpose of education, depriving both students and teachers of their happiness and dignity.

> Striving for exam results has spelled enormous pressure on me and students because you can't guarantee good results all the time. This assessment mechanism is really unfair to students, and to teachers. You can't think too much about it because it will make you depressed. Good exam results not necessarily truly reflect students' real competence, but we can do nothing about it.

Yao felt like a failure because of the sharp contrast between her students' test results and competence. 'After so many years' hard work, few students can speak English, even though most of them can get high scores in all kinds of English exams'. She acknowledged that teachers were apparently responsible for this situation because of their general low English-speaking proficiency and pedagogical inadequacy. At the same time, she emphasised that the exam-oriented education system was the root of the problem, and teachers were victims of the system. This view can be seen in her words below.

> Today's English teachers are the victims of traditional education. When they realise the serious problem and want to make some change, they find they are restricted by their own limited ability and competence, they don't have confidence in themselves and are afraid of making mistakes. To save face, they would rather choose a secure way. They copy their own teacher's traditional grammar translation way. They still focus on the transmission of knowledge of language instead of the development of language skills. So generation after generation, our English teachers teach English without speaking good English. How ridiculous!

With the emphasis on traditional, exam-oriented teaching approaches, she felt depressed about the dramatic decline in her own professional standards. She felt handicapped by her lack of English way of thinking and limited listening proficiency, which she considered as requisites in implementing communicative English teaching. She tried to improve her English, but was unable to persist owing to her heavy workload and the stress of ensuring her students' successful academic performance.

> Being a teacher is the hardest thing in the world, especially in a country where the education system has great conflict with your principles. If I don't obey, I'll ruin my students' future; but if I obey, I'll put too much pressure on my students and deprive them of their interest and pleasure in studies. It's a dilemma and the irreconcilable contradiction makes us very painful.

Yao's words above highlight the emotional dilemma she faced and how in private her emotions experienced frequent oscillation. However, in the classroom, she always appeared cheerful because she enjoyed being with her students and supporting them, and she felt obliged to appear positive in front of them.

Yao's professional life carried on with these mixed experiences and feelings. She felt that changing teachers' beliefs alone would not suffice in

helping to implement the new curriculum goals, and the key step was to transform the contents of the Gaokao exam and the assessment practices. She believed that only such a policy change would bring about a fundamental change of teachers' attitude towards teaching and their professional development, and ultimately the overall quality of school education in China. She was confident that in a genuine reform environment she, along with other teachers, would actively upgrade her teaching and learning as she had always hoped for.

> I'm sure teachers will adapt if the Gaokao-based assessment of schools, teachers and students is abolished. Learning quality-oriented teaching methods may take a few years, but after that period teachers will develop quickly.

3 The Educational Landscape Mirrored Through Yao's Curriculum Reform Experience

Yao's curriculum reform experience is not a heartening scenario. Similar to the situations documented elsewhere in both China and beyond (e.g. Yan 2015; Tan 2013; Elliott 2014; Hardman and A-Rahman 2014; Song 2015), while there have been considerable signs of whole-hearted receptiveness to quality-oriented education, there have also been insurmountable hurdles in the process of fully implementing it in teaching. Yao's case shows how the obstacles do not seem to stem directly from the teacher, but from the environment in which she is working where the Gaokao ethos pervades. Three propositions have surfaced from Yao's personal experience of curriculum reform: 'teaching to the test' ought to be a teacher's main responsibility; 'teaching to the test' is an undermining experience; and most importantly of all, 'teaching to the test' is a manifestation of a utilitarian philosophy and epistemology that permeates across the education system.

3.1 'Teaching to the Test' Ought to Be a Teacher's Main Responsibility

Yao underwent a change of attitude towards the Gaokao-driven teaching, which represents an individual teacher's compromise to the cultural norms and expectations, i.e. the pervading inescapable pressure of Gaokao-based evaluation of schools, teachers and students. Her characteristics (kindness,

conscientiousness and docility) and professional diligence led to her changed perception of Gaokao as a fair opportunity for her students to access higher education.

'Teaching to the test' is an externally imposed obligation and a norm over which teachers have little choice to help students achieve positive outcomes in Gaokao. As Bandura (1993: 31) points out

> behaviour is regulated by social sanctions. […] The interpersonal influences operating within one's immediate social network claim a stronger regulatory function than do general normative sanctions, which are more distal and applied more sporadically.

Yao's compromised perception embodies school teachers' confined professionalism, which has been documented elsewhere in China, including more developed cosmopolitans like Hong Kong and Shanghai (Lai and Lo 2007). Her compromise results from the highly centralised nature of the Chinese education system where teachers generally adhere to common curriculum standards and use formally required textbooks (Fan et al. 2004) and follow a knowledge transmission approach to learning and teaching (Ye 2004).

It is noticeable that Yao possesses many features of inspiring teachers defined by educational researchers (e.g. Erwin 2010; Bowman 2007; Lamb and Wedell 2015), such as being good-natured, having a passion for her subject and loving her students. Her public image shows her enthusiasm, dedication and commitment to supporting and developing her students. She has clear goals for her students and builds positive relationships with them through socio-emotional learning and approaches. She maintains a positive attitude towards her work despite being unable to carry out more meaningful and creative teaching.

However, her teaching does not count as inspiring, the characteristic feature of which challenges an assessment-driven policy context (Hayes 2006). Her work is still limited to the small circle of exam preparation routines, a more direct route than inquiry-based learning to achieve desired exam results although she tries to infuse student-centred elements within her capacity in her teaching. Her choice of conformity is a compromise to the centralised system where the work ethic is underpinned by collectivism, large power distance, strong uncertainty avoidance and masculinity (Hofstede 1991). Her lack of opportunity and space and time to use innovative pedagogies has gradually impaired her pedagogical competence. Her lived experiences are consistent with the picture painted previously in different contexts over the last ten years (e.g. Qi 2005; Li 2012; Wang 2011;

Lamb and Wedell 2015; Thompson and Harbaugh 2013; Lee et al. 2011; Riazi and Razavipour 2011), pointing to the prevalence of kiasuism (fear of loss) in schools under the pressure of the gruelling, ultra-competitive Gaokao and an absence of collective efficacy to realise new curriculum goals. Yao's experiences also reflect similar pressures and a lack of efficacy that have been reported regarding teachers working in contexts outside China (Song 2015; Kirkgoz 2008; Orafi and Borg 2009).

3.2 Teaching to the Test as an Undermining Experience

Yao is representative of many frontline Kiasu school teachers in China who succumb to the overwhelming pressure from working with a marginalised status between two conflicting worlds of educational policy ideals and school reality. Considering the local sociocultural environment where governments across the region use examinations as gatekeepers of access to schooling and as a means of quality control (Hill 2010), her compromised teaching can to a great extent be seen as 'culturally appropriate' pedagogical choices for motivating her students in the short-term (because their future long-term aspirations are far beyond her capacity).

Echoing Chinese teachers' professional state previously depicted elsewhere (Zhao and Poulson 2006; Zhang and Liu 2014; Lo et al. 2013), the current exam-centric education and assessment regime posed as an oppressive force to Yao's academic and social lives and largely reduced her enjoyment of English teaching and learning. The incongruence between her professional outlook, which is intimately linked to student academic achievement, and the dictates of state reform measures caused enduring anxiety. Despite feeling happy about the school's recognition of her students' Gaokao success, Yao suffers ongoing physical and emotional stress caused by several contradictions, for example, between her visceral aspirations and work values and her compromises; between her perceived ever declining professional competence (English proficiency, pedagogical conservatism) and lack of intrinsic working incentive and teaching satisfaction; and between the desire for more time and freedom and the enormous pressure of her teaching load. The limited opportunity for her to express her feelings has severely undermined her sense of efficacy. She refrained from disclosing her feelings to her colleagues for the fear of causing disharmony with colleagues, however, her 'surface acting strategies' (Yin and Lee 2012) of suppressing her emotions could not help her achieve 'emotional harmony' and 'psychological well-being' (Rafaeli and Sutton 1987). Her neg-

ative emotions were aggravated because of little time to enjoy her personal life and fulfil her family responsibilities as a wife and a mother. Similar accounts of vulnerability and emotional disharmony have been reported in other studies of curriculum reform (Gao 2008; Lee and Yin 2011), yet as Yao's case highlights, there still seems to be a widespread lack of acknowledgement by planners that the curriculum change process is inherently emotional; 'It's as if teachers think and act; but never really feel' (Hargreaves 2005: 279).

3.3 'Teaching to the Test' Is a Utilitarianism-Driven Practice

The conflicts and forces operating in Yao's navigation of the dilemmas she faces between implementing the new curriculum and sticking to the existing examination-oriented teaching practices do not suggest a need to abolish the Gaokao. Instead, she considers Gaokao as having the potential to be a relatively fair assessment tool which can benefit children in less resourced regions. As she suggested, 'Scores are not a sin. They are an essential tool to evaluate students' performance. The problem is that we use it in a wrong way'. Yao's case suggests that the present Gaokao-based school competition has resulted in an increasingly stratified education system and equity issues for rural schools, as previously documented (Postiglione 2006; Zhao 2007; Zhao et al. 2008; Liu and Dunne 2009), specifically marginalised status of rural schools and its adverse consequences, such as students' social and cultural capital, teachers' financial status and limited access to professional development opportunities and most importantly the equal opportunity to access higher education for a better life. Meanwhile, it also suggests that to fulfil Gaokao's envisaged functions of 'selecting talents and promoting pedagogical change' (Fan and Jin 2013), there is an urgency to address the lack of alignment between the government's curriculum goals and the English Gaokao contents, as Cheng (2008) noted. This would seem to be true for not only Yao's situation, but also in many other teaching and learning contexts (Wedell 2009; Orafi and Borg 2009; Chen and Brown 2013). This suggests a need to develop teacher trainers' professional standards and to train test developers.

Yao's case confirms that the experiences, perceptions and emotions of curriculum reform are the results of a dialectical relationship between the individuals and their professional and wider environment (Edmond and Hayler 2013). To enhance teachers' sense of agency and efficacy in the curriculum reform climate, undeniably there is a need for individual teachers

to make meaning of their pedagogical reform experiences through critically examining the mismatch between their ideals and reality. But more importantly, resonant with Schweisfurth's (2013) argument, sustained and coherent support (e.g. through genuine encouragement of more autonomy and the provision of on-the-job time to engage in systematic personalised job-embedded professional development) may have the potential of helping rural teachers rethink their practice and adapt their behaviours accordingly to be more accomplished and skilled educators for students in need of quality learning experience. Yao's story tells us that for teachers like Yao, professional growth, sense of efficacy and psychological well-being could be enhanced if assessment reforms were to be widely carried out to genuinely take account of new curriculum goals.

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5

Meeting the Demands of ELT Innovation in Vietnam: Teachers' Linguistic and Pedagogic Challenge

Le Thi Quynh Tran

1 Introduction

This chapter provides an account of one teacher's experiences of a recent nationwide curriculum reform in Vietnam which focused on both language and pedagogical change for English language teachers. The chapter begins with an overview of ELT and context of the curriculum change. It then provides a detailed picture of his teacher living with change and discusses what we might learn from her story.

1.1 English Language Teaching Innovation

English language was first introduced to Vietnam as a subject at lower- and upper-secondary levels in the 1970s (Wright 2002). However, it was not until the socio-economic reform or *Doi moi* in 1986, that the demand for English grew and English became the main foreign language, taking the place of Russian whose status was seriously impacted after the dismantling of the former Soviet Union (Hoang 2010; Wright 2002). The surge in English from the early 1990s onwards reflected the regional trend where English was seen as a panacea by national governments in Asian-Pacific

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M. Wedell and L. Grassick (eds.), *International Perspectives on Teachers Living with Curriculum Change*, International Perspectives on English Language Teaching,
https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-54309-7_5

countries, such as Vietnam, for national economic and social development (see, e.g., Nunan 2003; Baldauf et al. 2011). Indeed, within the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), of which Vietnam is a member country, English has been confirmed as the official working language to be used as a means of economic, business and social communication (Kirkpatrick 2008). In recognition of this growing demand for English, both globally and within the Asia-Pacific region, the Ministry of Education and Training of Vietnam (MOET) has made considerable changes to foreign language policies. In 1996, English was first introduced as an elective subject in Grade 3—primary level. It then became a core curriculum subject in Grade 6 through to Grade 12 and constituted one examination in the national examinations towards the general education diploma (GED) in 2000. In 2010, it was decided that English would be a compulsory subject nationwide from Grade 3 to Grade 12. These changes have encouraged the perception of English as 'the language of educational opportunities and employment prospects' (Phan et al. 2014: 238).

1.2 The Revised Language Curriculum

The most recent innovation in Vietnam is the revised foreign language curriculum (also mentioned in this chapter as the new or renewed curriculum), which was launched in 2006, marking a period of substantial changes in English Language Teaching (ELT). First and foremost, there was a marked shift from the traditional grammar-focused, textbook-bound and teacher-centred instruction (Le 2007) towards communicative language teaching that adopts a learner-centred and task-based learning approach (MOET 2006). In this reform, the overall goal of English language teaching was the development of communicative skills. The ten-year national plan for *'Teaching and Learning Foreign Languages in the National Formal Educational System in the period of 2008–2020'* states that:

> …by 2020, most Vietnamese students […] will be able to use English with certain confidence in their daily communication, work and study in an integrated, multi-cultural and multi-lingual environment. (The Government of Vietnam 2008 :1)

In particular, the renewed English curriculum (MOET 2006: 5) stipulates the aims of English language teaching at secondary schools as enabling students:

- to use English as a means for basic communication at certain level of proficiency both in spoken and written channels;
- to master basic formal knowledge of English equivalent to their levels of proficiency and ages;
- to possess some general understanding of the people and cultures of some English-speaking countries and build up a positive attitude toward the people, cultures and languages of these countries.

The second major change as part of this innovation was the adoption of the new textbook, starting from 2007, which was to pave the way for the realisation of communicative language teaching. The new textbook series, mandated by the MOET, comprised the standard level set—which a vast majority learners use—and the advanced level set. These were replacement for the previous two sets of textbooks, namely the three—book series *(Tieng Anh he ba nam)*—and the seven—book series *(Tieng Anh he bay nam)*. While the old textbooks reflected the traditional grammar-based and reading-skill-building approach (Hoang 2010; Nguyen 2007), the new series claimed to underpin communicative language teaching methodology (Hoang et al. 2006).

Perhaps most significantly, the new curriculum mandated for the first time a language proficiency policy for both students and teachers. According to this, secondary pupils must obtain an English level proficiency equivalent to Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) level B1 upon completing secondary education, and teachers of English at upper-secondary levels have to attain level C1.

While teachers have concerns over the curriculum and textbooks, the new language proficiency requirement appears to have created considerable tension among teachers.

1.3 English Teacher Education

English teacher education seems to lag behind the recent developments in English language curriculum change. Many teachers of English are inadequately qualified (Hoang 2010; Le 2007; Nguyen 2011; Nguyen and Nguyen 2007). This situation is believed to be caused by a number of shortcomings in pre-service education, namely inadequate English language teacher education curricula that neglect teaching skills development, the absence of connections between training and teaching realities, as well as limited faculty capability (Do 2014; Le 2004, 2014; Nguyen 2013a).

In addition, there are a considerable number of teachers who did not undergo official training in ELT but became teachers of English after attending 'instant', and usually poor quality, short teacher training courses run by many universities or colleges including those who are officially accredited (see more in Le 2007; Le and Barnard 2009; Pham 2001).

To support teachers in the innovation process, the MOET has provided in-service teacher training (or INSET) opportunities both to improve instructional practice and to upgrade the English competence of English language teachers. While teachers attend both types of courses, it is the language upgrade course that causes them most anxiety. At the end of the course, teachers are required to sit a language examination which tests four language skills and structures and grades them according to the CEFR levels. Before 2015, these test papers took the formats of multiple standardised tests: while the speaking and writing tests resembled those of The International English Language Testing System (IELTS) speaking and writing tests, the listening, reading and structure tests followed the format of the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL).

Indeed, these courses have had limited success. From my experience as a teacher trainer and an academic manager, the reasons for this failure largely lie in: (1) the poor level of English teachers have on entry, which is due to the low quality of language instruction and pre-service education (see aforementioned discussion) and notably the fact that a considerable number of teachers originally majored in Russian, and who were retrained to teach English from 1990s onwards (see more in Le and Barnard 2009); (2) the high level of difficulty of the language test papers, partly being on account of the mixed format of the test papers. Among the four test papers, it is the listening comprehension test which challenges teacher candidates the most; and (3) the ineffective organisation of INSET courses. Initially, the instructional improvement and upgrade INSET courses took place simultaneously, which placed a huge load on teachers (I will discuss this further in the next section). Normally, teachers sit the language examination immediately after finishing the upgrade course. If they are not successful, they will have to retake it until they pass the required benchmarking examination.

The media in Vietnam have reported how, despite the language upgrade courses, only a small number of upper-secondary English teachers are able to reach the required C1 standard[1]. An investigation between 2011 and 2012

[1]See *English teachers necessarily need to meet international standards? on* Vietnamnet dated16 August 2012 or *English teaching in Vietnam: Teacher 're-education'* on TuoiTre online, dated 27 March 2013

revealed that as many as 92% of upper-secondary school teachers of English were disqualified in terms of language competence (Nguyen 2013b).

It can be seen then that the new curriculum presents three major changes, namely a shift in teaching methodology to a more communicative approach, the introduction of new textbooks and the focus on increasing teacher capacity particularly in terms of their language proficiency. Together these pose a significant challenge to teachers of English.

The rest of this chapter presents the story of an upper-secondary teacher of English, showing how she has experienced these challenges and the implications for curriculum innovation planning. While it is not possible to make generalisations from the experiences of one teacher, the case aims to highlight details of a particular context and situation from which others in Vietnam and further afield may be able to learn from.

2 The Story

This is a narrative of a teacher of English who has experienced the English language curriculum innovation for over nine years.

The next section provides a detailed analysis of the teacher's experience of change under the identified themes.

2.1 Professional Background

Lan, a woman now in her mid-thirties, was born in a mountainous province in the north of Vietnam. She started learning English from Grade 8. After an unsuccessful attempt in the university entrance examination, she enrolled at an extension English programme or *'tại chức'* (see more in Le 2007), majoring in translation. This five-year course rewarded her with a degree with distinction. Upon graduation, Lan took a two-month pedagogy course from the same university to be certified as a teacher of English, although this university did not have ELT training programme. She then obtained a teaching post at an upper-secondary state school on the outskirts of the capital city where she has been for ten years. The way Lan became an English instructor is similar to that of many other teachers who graduated from non-formal training courses, which were offered by non-ELT-majored colleges or universities and the quality of which is questioned in a number of studies, as previously mentioned.

2.2 An Ambitious English Curriculum

Lan began teaching one year before the revised English curriculum and the new textbook series were implemented. She learned about this renewed curriculum when taking part in an INSET course at the outset of the innovation. According to her, this English curriculum aims to help pupils 'not only to get hold of the knowledge of English but also employ it in real-life communication'. This differs from the former curriculum which, as Lan put it, focused on 'equipping pupils with the knowledge of English that enabled them to pass examinations and which emphasised grammatical knowledge'. Therefore, as far as Lan is concerned, both curricula have their goal as the knowledge of the language but differ in how the language is employed.

Commenting on the new curriculum goal, Lan said:

> Indeed, it is very ideal, (…) well, it is good to have a new one yet it is hard to say it is suitable (..) this book is too challenging for both teachers and pupils (…) too ideal to be realised even for pupils who started learning English at grade 6.

She reasoned that:

> …the content requirement is not relevant to the current level of the pupils because they did not care much to practise English in lower classes (..) and so in my class only half of the pupils are responsible to the learning content or, are able to do what the teacher asks them to (…) and the time frame for doing so is very limited as there is not enough time, really, a shortage of time because there are too many exercises to complete in a lesson (…).

She further noted that:

> We are told by the trainers that we have to go to the end of the book section because this *(the production part)* is very very important (…) but in reality we do not have time and capability to cover the prescribed schedule.

As regarding examination system, Lan observed:

> With the former curriculum, students only had objective tests but when the new curriculum takes effect, there are writing test, either sentence or

> paragraph writing. And then there is a short listening test part added to the continual assessment. Not much change to the graduation test, though.

It can be seen that although a few alterations had been made to the existing examination system, objective tests still dominated and no speaking and listening tests existed in the high-stake examinations, such as the national GEP (I come back to this point in the section that follows). This implies a clash between the renewed curriculum, which centres on a communicative approach, and the testing system that has remained highly lexico-grammar knowledge based. Consequently, she found it challenging to balance between 'teaching for the test' and 'accomplishing teaching contents as required'.

Lan also perceives the new curriculum to be ambitious because of her limited English competence, which makes it hard for her to deliver some topics in the textbook:

> I feel like I have some weaknesses… there are parts that I feel I could not be able to do myself, while I still have to teach a lesson like that...

However, when mentioning the English proficiency requirements, Lan was strongly opposed to it saying that it was 'unnecessarily demanding'. The teacher trainer whom I interviewed also confirmed that disapproval was a common reaction among many of her trainees:

> They say if they could choose, they would go for the methodology course rather than this /language course/…

This suggests that Lan and other teachers did not fully comprehend the necessity of acquiring better English competency. She in fact had quite a negative attitude towards the change required of her, as discussed in more detail later.

2.3 Coping with the Ambitious Curriculum

In an attempt to make sense of the new curriculum in this context, Lan felt that she had to 'lower' the overall aims of the curriculum in order to

> help the pupils master the grammar knowledge, at a certain level that they can perform in the examinations; as for communicative skills, only a minority of pupils can develop them. Yes, only a small number can do these.

She justified her adaptation decision by arguing that:

> …it is good to have high aim, but if the input content is too high above their level, they will not get hold of it, nor apply it in anyway, so if the knowledge input is within their reach, they can understand, thus it is better for them, I think.

It can be understood from the above that by adapting the curriculum aims, Lan is able to continue to teach what she feels confident about teaching, which happens to be what the exams test. This approach lessens the risk of her losing face in front of students, parents and others in her school because of her own perception of her limited language proficiency.

This section shows how Lan perceives the new curriculum to be ambitious considering the English language level of her students, her own language proficiency and the requirements of the exams. Lan's reported adaptation of the curriculum and syllabus to suit the examination and the level of her students suggests a pragmatic move to allow her to maintain her preferred way of teaching in an effort to save face. This seems to be a particular concern for her and is linked to her own perceptions of her English language proficiency.

2.4 A Shift to Communicative, Learner-Centred Teaching

Lan appeared to welcome the shift to communicative, learner-centred teaching approach:

> With this new curriculum, teachers are only facilitators (..) who guide students the skills and how to perform tasks in the textbook, unlike previously (..) teachers act as if they are model providers for students to imitate…

As for students, Lan shared that:

> Students are the centre of class, they have to take initiatives and be creative and proactive during the lesson (..) students have to prepare very carefully before class by looking up all new words appearing in the lesson or studying requirements of tasks for in class teachers only introduce key words, and there

> are a lot more, which unless they learn in advance, they cannot understand them.

This shows how she interpreted the 'communicative' concepts according to her existing belief framework and got the students to be 'active' in ways that were culturally and normatively familiar to her but not in tune with the curriculum goals.

During class time, Lan provides guidance on the tasks and gets the pupils to conduct them. This is, for example, how Lan describes how she helps pupils in speaking skills:

> I provided them with a speech sample and some structures that they could 'borrow' in their own practice. Usually I split the tasks into 'bite-sized' pieces and assign them to learners, for instance, slower pupils would get the easy pieces and quicker pupils more difficult ones.

This shows that the way Lan supports her students in oral development (i.e. giving model speech) is to both scaffold and control their production. This is likely to be another version of the 'teachers-as-model-providers' formula and contradicts the 'teachers-as-facilitators' belief that she mentioned earlier.

When it came to teaching grammar, Lan chose an inductive teaching method to help make the students 'encouraged to think more during the lesson':

> I had the pupils work out rules from given examples instead of telling them explicitly myself like I used to.

Despite Lan's efforts, her teaching, as she admits, largely remained conventional:

> Until now, I still have to exercise traditional teacher-dictating-and-pupils-taking-notes practice, because unless otherwise many pupils would end up having blank pages on their notebook at the end of the lesson. They do not understand the lesson, so do not take any notes.

It is worth noting from Lan's account that she tends to associate learner-centred teaching with learners' readiness, which is made possible by careful preparation. This shows her limited understanding of the principles that underlie learner-centred pedagogy (Lee 2014; Segovia and Hardison 2009). Also, it seems that most of the learning activities are led by the teacher and

that her attempts to assist the students in doing the tasks are, to a large extent, different ways of getting them to reproduce fixed language (Nguyen 2007). In addition, it seems that letting students go home with blank notebooks is still something that worries her because in Vietnam culture this is deemed inappropriate culturally and contextually.

The above shows that Lan was, to a great extent, conscious of the changes expected of her and actually took appropriate action to create more communicative opportunities in her lessons, for example, in adapting her techniques in teaching grammar. On the other hand, her beliefs about learning and teaching remain unchanged in that she seems to believe that learning is about acquiring knowledge through the mastering of all new vocabulary and that learning is via imitating given models. These beliefs are also notable through her desire to avoid students having blank notebooks. It is possible that these conceptions persist because the curriculum principles are not in harmony with social expectations of other stakeholders such as her students, colleagues, principal and parents, who still hold that learning equals well-noted inputs, and that teacher has the responsibility of preparing the students with a lot of vocabulary and grammar rules in order for them to achieve high examination results. This also suggests that there has not been sufficient awareness raising among this group of stakeholders about what the goals of the new curriculum are and what these means for what happens in the classroom.

The following section looks at how Lan was assisted in the implementation of the changes by examining different support mechanisms for teachers.

2.5 Support for Change Implementation

2.5.1 English Language Proficiency Requirement

Lan was informed of the English language proficiency requirement several years ago. As noted earlier, her reaction to this policy was quite unfavourable at first:

> I do not see much reason in the urgency of upgrading my English competence. Without it [Level C1 certificate], my teaching was still alright.

In order to prepare for C1 level test, she underwent two intensive language upgrade courses, each lasting nearly three months during the summer. Yet, her three attempts in the benchmarking tests upon completing the courses

only yielded her English level B2. Lan felt under pressure to reach C1 level because, as she put it:

> a local education officer warned that after October 2015, those who have not achieved Level C1 might be appointed to do a different job.

Lan confided that pressure came from her colleagues who had all somehow achieved a C1 level certificate. She also suggested that her motivation to complete the language courses was simply about 'professional survival', rather than an attempt to develop her professional capacity:

> Not all teachers who pass the proficiency test can apply what they have learned in their instruction. They just consider it as a prerequisite to their survival on the job. Afterward they will exercise teaching the way what is familiar to them, following the well-trodden path.

Perhaps Lan's view is unsurprising given her attitude to language improvement and her fears of loss of face with students and others. In the end, Lan decided to go through the 'side gate' by sitting a test coordinated by a provincial university instead of the one by a major university. Although in theory, all examination papers, regardless of the service provider, are supposed to be of the same format and level of difficulty, the perception among teachers like Lan is that more provincial universities offer easier tests, (albeit certainly with much higher examination fees) and indeed Lan eventually got the desired certificate. Interestingly, Lan also told me that she was capable of applying a number of good ideas from the language upgrade course in her daily English instruction despite being resentful at first:

> I did not expect my teaching to be benefited from the course, but it was, though not very much.

It can be seen that Lan was not fully aware of the necessity of having a better command of English in order to be able to deal with the unpredictability of language and interaction that is likely to arise in a more communicative teaching and learning classroom environment. Yet this also points to a lack of communication by policy makers and planners of the rationale behind the English language proficiency policy to those stakeholders (such as teachers) who would be affected by it. The proficiency policy, initially being intended as a means to support teachers in the change process, consequently turned out to be 'a nightmare' for many teachers. This suggests that language

policy planners may not have had a good sense of the current English proficiency level of teachers and so set the desired level too high. It also suggests that they possibly failed to understand that language improvement takes a long time (Kaplan et al. 2011) and is a continual process.

2.5.2 New Textbooks and Learning Resources

The change in the textbooks which accompanied the new curriculum also posed a challenge to Lan. The new textbook claims to follow the communicative approach (Hoang et al. 2006) and is skill based and theme based. Each unit centres on one theme and is organised into four language skill sections plus a language focus one with each section being allocated a 45-minute period. A lesson is comprised of two to three tasks, excluding pre- and post-activities.

While praising the communicativeness of this textbook over its predecessor, Lan admitted 'most of us felt very discouraged' in the beginning, as the new textbook had 'longer passages compared with the former one', which means 'far more new vocabulary to be covered'. Again, this discloses a way of thinking about teaching and learning consistent with the prevailing conceptions of language as knowledge.

Lan identified one of the biggest problems in using the book as being:

> … short of time, really short of time: only one skill but there are many tasks in the while-activity part and also post-task…I usually guide the pupils how to do post task and give it as homework so that next class I can check it, or even I almost skip it, well, just skip it or take homework for granted.

By leaving out the communicative part in the lesson, Lan actually missed out on the most important part of the lesson, as she acknowledged. This seems to point, again, to the lack of awareness by curriculum writers and policy makers that a communicative approach requires more time for teachers and students.

Another obstacle Lan encountered when teaching the new textbook was the shortage of learning resources. Like elsewhere in the country, the classrooms are basically equipped with fixed student desks and a blackboard. Regarding English learning facilities, this school has two functional classrooms installed with computers and projectors to which all subject teachers have free access. Notably, she said:

> …and support is just the minimum learning facilities for the teaching, such as cassette players… but in fact, it was not enough (…) we have nearly 40 classes and nine teachers of English but only two cassette players.

This shows a severe lack of 'minimum learning facilities' which apparently influenced the delivery of the curriculum, as she indicated:

> I cannot say that it /the number of cassette players/ is enough… If I do not manage to have one /cassette player/ for this listening lesson, I would have to skip it for one or two periods and go back to it in a later class. Otherwise, I have to act as the cassette player, reading out that audio transcript (…) This very much limits the exposure of my students.

She talked about the poorly equipped school library:

> .. library is very limited as regarding books, most of the books are intended for students, (..) so each teacher must find her own way to have access to information she needs (..) usually from the internet.

Although Lan was attempting to cope with the new curriculum, the added obstacles of a lack of resources did little build her confidence in adopting a communicative approach and in many ways probably reinforced her view that the curriculum was too ambitious.

2.5.3 INSET Courses

In the introduction, I mention that external support was available for teachers in the form of INSET courses. The purpose of these training courses was either to introduce teachers to the new textbook (or textbook briefing), to update and enhance their teaching skills, or to improve their English proficiency (as I have discussed in a previous section).

Lan recalled that soon after the innovation was in place, she participated in INSET courses with instructors being textbook writers.

> During the first two years, there was a training event every summer, each lasting three to four days or so.

In one of these courses, she was briefly informed of the new curriculum. Most of the training time, however, was devoted to the technical

introduction of the new textbook, its underpinning theories and steps for how to 'teach it'. She described it as having to do with 'mostly administrative documents and theories'. From then on, she attended several longer INSET courses during summer time. Her overall feeling of these courses was that they were 'not so practical and useful'. Some of the main reasons suggested by Lan included:

> …they [trainers/ do not understand the students and teachers …
>
> .. content only mentions methodology in terms of theory, generally, and not a particular matter…
>
> they /trainers] do not take into consideration the varied levels of us, the teacher participants.
>
> …no one followed us after the course to guide us further so that we can use the things we learn in our own classes

There are a number of points arising from Lan's account. First, INSET course instructors were people who did not have direct connections or relationships with secondary education. Thus, they were likely to have very little knowledge and awareness of the secondary curriculum or the context in which it was to be implemented. Second, training courses reflected the prevailing cultural and normative views on education in which knowledge can be learnt through transmission, which is at odds with the communicative and learner-centred approach that teachers are encouraged to adopt. This, too, shows that the course instructors had not engaged in the change themselves and indeed that perhaps those planning teacher support initiatives have not considered that trainers may also need support to be able to help teachers in the change process. The lack of follow-up in school was another factor that prevented teachers from applying what they had learned in their own classroom.

2.5.4 Examination Systems

As mentioned earlier, although the new curriculum with its communicative orientation has been launched for nearly ten years, Lan points out that the old testing system is still in use with only a few changes, one of which was made quite recently:

> From 2014 onward, the graduation exam paper consists of, beside the objective test section with 64 objective questions, a writing test section, that is paragraph writing of about 150 words…

It seems that although skills (albeit with the absence of speaking and listening skills in high-stake examinations) are tested, the emphasis is on the testing of discrete items and knowledge rather than assessing the communicative aspect of writing, reading and listening.

Lan's talk about the support she has been provided with to implement the new curriculum highlights the inconsistencies in the information teachers are given (or not given) through curriculum materials and support and the kinds of changes they are being asked to do in the classroom.

3 Changing to Change: Pain, but Little Gain

The case of Lan provides a picture of an experienced teacher struggling to deal with both new teaching approaches and new language proficiency requirements, with limited support and with little perceived gain.

The revised English curriculum of Vietnam entails three substantial changes namely in instructional practice, adoption of new textbook and teacher capacity improvement. Yet, the case of Lan reveals that all of these have apparently not taken firm root in her classroom.

At the outset, Lan was given little opportunity to learn about the new curriculum and to understand the overall goals of a communicative approach and how this relates to the need for better English language proficiency for teachers. Her negative attitude to the language improvement policy and some of her misconceptions of communicative teaching partly stem from this. What arises from this is the issue of the communication of vision between the designers of change and change implementers (Hallinger 2010). If the goal of change is not properly communicated to relevant stakeholders, for example, INSET instructors, test designers and teachers, it is unlikely that desired outcomes will be achieved. Poor communication is a phenomenon commonly observed in education reform in many countries in Asia, like Vietnam, where there is 'relatively little participation from the teachers and principals' (Hallinger 2010: 408) in change initiation.

Lan was trying to implement the new curriculum but was also struggling with the risk and fear associated with loss of face and the notion that she may be perceived as a 'bad' teacher. This fits with Hutchinson (1991: 3) who points that resistance may occur due to 'fear of the disturbance of key meanings […]or isolation from a group'. She chose to adopt a pragmatic approach reflecting the 'transmission-based nature of the existing educational culture'(Wedell 2011: 15) where the teaching and learning of discrete language items in order to pass a test, and teacher-fronted and textbook-bound teaching were still viewed as signs of a good teacher (Le and Barnard 2009).

This implies that to make change happen, all stakeholders operating in the educational culture and system need to develop a change mentality because, without change at all levels of the educational system, large-scale innovation will certainly fail (Wedell 2009). Given the present context of Vietnam, it is apparent that for a 'culture' change to take place, numerous challenges need to be overcome. The time frame set for this change, i.e. the year 2020, therefore, appears to be unfeasible.

Of the changes that the renewed English curriculum presents to the current educational norms, the introduction of the language skills standard that applies to teachers of English is the most radical. For the first time ever, this policy puts forwards the idea of standardising teachers. In a Confucian culture like Vietnam, teachers are considered the 'guru' in their area whose knowledge is not to be questioned (To 2010). The policy of improving language proficiency, therefore, touches upon a sensitive spot regarding the qualification of teachers of English: English competency.

Lan's case suggests that her concern with the C1 level test was related to concepts of normativity and professional vulnerability, which, Gao (2008) points out, can add to teachers' burden. As observed by Wedell (2011: 5), 'n[N]o professional likes to feel that their existing knowledge and skills are no longer sufficient'. He cites a publication by Van Veen and Sleegers (2006), in which Dutch teachers are vulnerable when their professional competence falls short of educational change. We, therefore, are inclined to share with the 'desperate' feelings Lan (and perhaps many teachers of English in Vietnam) used to experience. It may be that the requirement of a C1 level of English language proficiency reinforces a perceived need for near native competence which is likely to make teachers like Lan feel insecure about their own level of English, as (Garton 2014) suggests is the case with primary English language teachers in South Korea. These feelings of insecurity, vulnerability and inadequacy seem to be exacerbated for Lan by the pressure from those above her for her to pass the test quickly. However, planners need to be aware that innovation takes time and requires sustained effort over a certain duration (Levin and Fullan 2008). If teachers are simultaneously required to advance language proficiency and improve English instruction on top of everything they normally do, they are likely to become exhausted and demotivated in making changes. This overloading might result in surface changes rather than longer-term desired changes, as warned by Hallinger (2010).

One of the challenges Lan faces is with the mixed messages that the textbooks and testing system send out. Although the new textbook is said to support a communicative approach, it has been criticised for not adopting a

communicative approach to the skill sections and for having an overloaded teaching content based on language items (Nguyen 2007). If these criticisms are rational, and it is very probable that they are viewed from my perspective of a teacher trainer and mentor to ELT students in their school-based teaching practicum over the last ten years, then this could be another obstacle to teachers in realising learner-centred and communicative language teaching as mandated by the curriculum (Kaplan et al. 2011; Nguyen 2011). Similarly, Lan's case highlights how the English language assessment does not match the new curriculum communicative rhetoric, which is a situation found elsewhere (Baldauf et al. 2011; Jacobs and Farrell 2001). This incompatibility is bound to cause a negative backwash effect on relevant stakeholders in preventing them from taking on board changes. As Wedell (2009: 25) observed:

> If people in a change context (parents, learners, teachers, institutional leaders) see an obvious lack of harmony between the behaviours/practices underlying the proposed changes and those that are perceived to help learners pass high stakes exams, it is the practices that support success in assessment that will 'win'.

Despite the fact that numerous INSET opportunities have been offered to Lan, their impact on her instructional practice and language competence seems to have been quite limited. Previous studies, such as those conducted by Lamb (1995), Park and Sung (2013), mention multiple reasons for the inefficiency of in-service teacher training, which have to do with instructors, content and session organisation. Most of these issues have rightly been identified by Lan. However, one additional factor is that teachers were not sought for advice on the design of the training courses. This suggests a top-down approach to change by planners (Hayes 2012), which may eliminate chances for teachers' needs being catered for. While it is unlikely that a true bottom-up approach could be adopted in the foreseeable future, it might be a good suggestion to reinforce the connection between grass-roots teachers with their immediate 'level above', i.e. local ELT specialists, who could, on behalf of the teachers, inform course designers of teachers' professional demands. Furthermore, to ensure long-term improvement of instructional quality, INSET training should be regarded as a lifelong process (Hayes 2008) rather than a short-term event or examination (in the case of the language upgrade examination), since teachers need time to process the new phenomenon and deal with multiple contextual constraints after they leave the training room.

4 Conclusion

Overall, Lan's experience reveals a marked gap between the hoped-for curriculum for ELT education and the classroom realities at an upper-secondary school. This fact has been identified earlier in Vietnam (Hoang 2010; Le and Barnard 2009) and in other countries (Hallinger 2010; Hallinger and Lee 2011; Nunan 2003; Orafi and Borg 2009; Park and Sung 2013; Sakui 2004; Waters and Vilches 2008), suggesting that there is nothing startling in Lan's story. However, what makes her case interesting and perhaps unique to change stories in other contexts is the struggle she has faced with having to both change her teaching approach and at the same time improve her English language proficiency to reach a mandated standard. Almost a decade has passed since the new English curriculum was introduced, and Lan's case shows that the picture of the ELT classroom continues to feature teacher-fronted instruction, knowledge-based transmission and a textbook-coverage teaching approach. The study reveals that, in order to have some hope in achieving desired changes of the new curriculum, the incongruence evident in different parts of the change process at different levels need to be considered. While a more bottom-up approach to change policy and planning is unlikely to be a workable solution in Vietnam, focusing on addressing the inconsistencies in teacher support, curriculum materials, communication flow with stakeholders at school level, and having a better understanding of exactly what change means for those who have to implement it, would be a significant start in helping teachers like Lan successfully cope with curriculum change.

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6

Coping with Curricular Change with Limited Support: An Indian English Teacher's Perspective

Amol Padwad and Krishna Dixit

1 Introduction

The history of English language teaching in India has been marked by a series of changes, innovations and experimentation. Krishnaswamy and Sriraman (1995: 37) remark that, 'the story of English teaching in independent India has been one of commissions and omissions!' Several commissions and committees have formulated and reformulated ELT policies since independence in 1947, leading to periodic changes in syllabuses and course content all over the country. The aim of this chapter is to explore how teachers currently working in an Indian ELT context experience change in curriculum through the personal narrative of a teacher working in a secondary school in the state of Maharashtra. The change in consideration was triggered by the adoption of the Maharashtra State Curriculum Framework (MSCF) (2010) based on National Curriculum Framework (NCF) (2005) for primary and secondary education. The chapter begins with a brief description of the general ELT context and the curricular change in question, followed by an overview of the teacher's story. Then, it analyses data

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M. Wedell and L. Grassick (eds.), *International Perspectives on Teachers Living with Curriculum Change*, International Perspectives on English Language Teaching,
https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-54309-7_6

from the teacher's story and concludes with the presentation of some emergent issues.

1.1 ELT in India

The scale of English language education in India is quite enormous and complex, with over 227 million students and 2 million English teachers, according to the Eighth All India Education Survey (NCERT, n.d.). English Language Teaching (ELT) in India is the world's largest public educational enterprise (Krishnaswamy and Burde 1998), and English is the second largest medium of instruction moving ahead rapidly towards becoming the largest medium of instruction in the Indian education system (Times of India 2012).

The importance of English in the curriculum is rapidly rising. In most states of India, English is a compulsory element in the curriculum from primary to the undergraduate level, and learners must pass English examinations for progression to the next class. National Council and Educational Research and Training (NCERT) reports that English is a symbol of people's aspiration for quality in education and a fuller participation in national and international life (NCERT 2006: 1). English is increasingly looked upon as a basic educational skill, often perceived by parents as being at par with literacy and numeracy. National Knowledge Commission (2009) observes that proficiency in English is one of the key skills essential in the twenty-first century. Its recommendation of introducing English from Class I has been implemented across the country. However, the outcomes of teaching and learning English remain poor in spite of an onslaught of change and innovation in ELT methods and materials. In a recent report, the Planning Commission of India states that students are not proficient in language use and that 'the children in grade 5 are unable to read a grade 2 text' (2011: 96).

The situation in the state of Maharashtra, to which the teacher in this study belongs, is not very different from the overall national scenario. The state has the autonomy to design its own curriculum and syllabuses following the broad guidelines of the NCF. The norms of teacher qualifications, recruitment, workload and in-service training are also independently decided by the state within the broad national policy guidelines. In Maharashtra, secondary English teachers are typically graduates or postgraduates in English with a one-year professional teaching qualification in the form of a BEd, which consists mostly of general educational content with a small compo-

nent specifically related to ELT. In-service training initiatives are normally linked to specific changes in curriculum, textbooks, policies or assessment systems, or provided as a ritualistic requirement for career advancement once every twelve years.

1.2 Curricular Change

The curricular change at the root of this study was brought about by the MSCF (DSE 2010), which in turn was based on the NCF (NCERT 2005). The NCF signalled a significant policy shift in the recommended approach to teaching and learning from the long-prevalent transmission mode to constructivism. It entailed changes in teaching-learning in terms of learner centred pedagogy, learner autonomy, multidisciplinary focus, lifelong learning and ongoing evaluation of learning. The major shifts in the curriculum are summarised in the following Table 1.

The Maharashtra MSCF (2010), introduced in tune with the general guidelines of the NCF, identified some key areas of school curriculums that required change, which included:

- Developing competencies for lifelong learning.
- Adoption of the constructivist approach.
- Shifting from textbooks to sets of teaching-learning materials.
- Evaluation of the learning process, not of the subject content.
- Restructuring the curriculum for inclusive education.

(DSE 2010: 14–18)

The MSCF does not list specific objectives of teaching-learning English, but these can be found in the new textbooks. These were produced by the state textbook production bureau and written by a small committee of textbook writers, which consisted of some secondary teachers and some university teachers. The textbooks were mandatory across the state, and all teachers and students had to use them. For teachers, the new textbooks *were* the new curriculum, because they never got/were required to see the actual curriculum document.

Class IX textbook lists the following objectives of teaching English in terms of enabling students to:

- Learn to use English appropriately.
- Understand spoken English, used inside and outside the school.

Table 1 Major shifts in the curriculum framework

From	To
· Teacher centric, stable designs	· Learner centric, flexible process
· Teacher direction and decisions	· Learner autonomy
· Teacher guidance and monitoring learning	· Facilitates, supports and encourages
· Passive reception in learning	· Active participation in learning
· Learning within four walls of the classroom	· Learning in the wider social context
· Knowledge as 'given' and fixed	· Knowledge as it evolves and is created
· Disciplinary focus	· Multidisciplinary, educational focus
· Linear exposure	· Multiple and divergent exposure
· Appraisal, short, few	· Multifarious, continuous

(NCERT, 2005: 110)

- Speak with confidence using appropriate vocabulary, grammatical forms and acceptable pronunciation.
- Comprehend written texts in English (both textual and non-textual).
- Write in simple and acceptable and reasonably correct English.
- Acquire the necessary communication skills required for their day-to-day social interaction.
- Cultivate a broad, human and cultural outlook.
- Facilitate self-learning.

(MSBE 2012: introductory pages, not numbered)

The textbook also includes 'skill wise specific objectives' which essentially are lists of listening, speaking, reading and writing competencies. A small note for teachers reminds them of their changed role with multiple responsibilities as planners, guides, learners, creators, facilitators, diagnosticians, artists and dramatists, and administrators. Another note exhorts learners to be active participants, listeners, speakers, writers, planners, 'creators' and 'dreamers' (MSBE 2012: introductory pages). The Class X textbook has an additional note for parents, who are expected to 'provide material, motivate to learn, monitor activities at home, not to interfere in learning and be a friend, adviser and guide' (MBSE 2013: xii). All these roles are quite challenging for teachers, learners and parents, for at least two reasons. Firstly, they do not bear much resemblance to the existing reality and perceptions of the nature of education, or teacher–learner relationship, in Maharashtra. Secondly, the textbook does not support and develop these roles systematically, and the overall context offers little scope for such roles to evolve.

The key changes in the new textbook include fewer and shorter texts in thematically grouped units, more activities specifically nominated for pre-, while and post- stages of teaching texts, colourful and meaningful illustrations and a few links to websites and online resources for further learning, though it remains doubtful how far teachers and learners actually access these resources. The activities, mostly pair or group work, relate to developing language skills and vocabulary. Throughout, the textbook directly addresses the learner and not the teacher.

The rationale underpinning the perceptions of the role of English, and of the teacher and the learner, in the MSCF, and the new textbooks seem to partly reflect what Wedell (2009) considers to be a tendency to justify ELT curriculum change in terms associated with the technological and economic effects of globalisation. These, he suggests, imply the world where:

> knowledge is continuously being expanded, and in which citizens will need to know how to continuously update their knowledge, and how to 'use' what they know flexibly in a range of different work environments. Educational change in such a context may be seen as an important means of enabling the nation to 'keep up' with other external changes that are taking place worldwide. (Wedell 2009: 15)

2 The Teacher's Tale

LD, the teacher interviewed for the study, is a 41-year-old male teacher with 15 years of teaching experience at the secondary level. He works in a state-aided school run by a private trust, affiliated to the Maharashtra State Board of Secondary and Higher Secondary Education (MSBE). He has a post-graduate degree in English literature with a one-year professional degree in teaching (BEd). He has no other formal professional qualification, though he has been active in teacher training, self-study and continuing professional development (CPD) activities. He has been a long-standing member of Bhandara English Teachers' Club (ETC), a small and voluntary teacher development self-help group launched in 2001. (See Padwad 2005; Dixit 2007; Padwad and Dixit 2008; Padwad and Dixit 2015 for more about ETCs). As a member of the Bhandara ETC, he has attended several workshops and conferences, and participated in discussions and self-development activities. He also underwent two rounds of training and cascading as a Master Trainer in the Maharashtra State–British Council partnered English Language Initiative for Secondary Schools (ELISS), a massive statewide

teacher training project aimed at preparing teachers for the delivery of the new curriculum, referred to hereafter by its popular name 'RMSA training' (after *Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan* or National Secondary Education Mission, the national scheme spearheading it). It involves three cycles of training nearly 1000 master trainers and then using them to cascade to about 80,000 teachers over two years. Two cycles were completed at the time of LD's interview.

His school caters mostly to children from underprivileged sections of the society with mostly self-employed and unemployed, illiterate or poorly literate, parents. The medium of instruction is Marathi, though an option of 'semi-English' medium (with sciences and mathematics taught in English) is available from Class V onwards. In his interview, LD rued the fact that during the last few years he has been unable to find a single child of salaried parents, who are normally more alert about and willing to spend on their children's education, in any of his classes. The English language competence of most students is very poor, while their motivation to study is also perceived to be very low by LD and other teachers of his school. The average class size is about 50. The typical teaching-learning resources in the classroom are a blackboard and pieces of chalk, and a few charts and maps, apart from the textbook and the teacher. The school does have a small computer centre, but it is used rarely and only by a few resourceful teachers.

LD's first encounter with the curricular change was when the new textbook for Class IX was introduced in 2012. He was not aware of any change of curriculum behind it and looked at the change of the textbook as another periodic and routine event. He found the new textbook somewhat different from the previous one, but since there was no orientation about the changes, he and his colleagues continued to teach it in the old way for the first year. The first tangible sense of change came the next year with the roll-out of Class X textbook and the new assessment pattern (see details below) with it.

> So, in the first year teachers taught 'in the dark'. Even I was at a loss about how to teach. When Class X textbook arrived, and along with that the [end-of-the-year] question paper pattern also arrived, only then we got some idea of how to teach.

However, this understanding of change was only limited to preparing students for a different kind of 'question paper pattern'. Much greater awareness of the change came with the first round of RMSA training in 2014, two years after the new textbook was introduced. The training programme was more elaborate and longer than earlier programmes.

> We taught in the first year in Class IX just following the old ways. And so teachers were not happy at first with this change. Our routine way was to read out the lessons to the students, simplify the text for them and dictate questions and answers to them. But this [new] textbook was not like that. It was only when we attended RMSA training that we understood how to teach this. At least I had not understood until then.

It was at this training that LD was first introduced to a few quotations from the NCF, while there was no mention of the MSCF. He reports being able to make only a vague link between them and the new textbook. The old and the new textbooks both have introductory sections explaining the curricular approaches behind them, the objectives of teaching-learning English and the expected roles of teachers. But LD has not read these pages and adds that teachers rarely read these things. Thus, when asked about his understanding of the objectives of learning English, he frankly confesses that:

> we usually give a very general response to this question. For example, English has become very important nowadays, and they [learners] should be able to survive in the highly competitive world today. In their study of English they should be able to do good conversation in English; they should be able to write. In short, they should get an idea of the world and survive in the world. This may be the objective perhaps.

LD similarly expresses his inability to say anything about the notion of learning or teaching implicit in the new textbook. He has not looked at the descriptions of the teacher's or the learner's roles given in the preface of the textbook. In terms of its expectations from teachers, LD is aware that the new textbook places a greater emphasis on developing oral skills, doing a lot of activities involving students and in general giving them opportunities to use the language. Unlike most other teachers in his school, he does conduct a lot of activities in his classes and tries to follow the textbook more conscientiously than his colleagues. But he also points to the need to meet expectations from the school like preparing the students for summative written examinations (see details below), developing their writing skills, 'completing the syllabus' and meeting the monthly targets of 'covering' a certain number of lessons by the month end.

After three years of teaching and two cycles of training, LD can list many important changes in the new textbook. The textbook addresses itself to students and instructs them to do various activities in each unit. There are lots of activities before, during and after reading given texts. Activities are well

described, and the teacher finds it quite easy to conduct them. The old textbook had only a few activities, which were not described well. The number and variety of activities are also quite large in the new textbook. There is more emphasis on developing oral skills and several activities require students to speak.

> I find this book very helpful, because before this such points were not given. So, 'why this activity' has been given. … There is so much variety [of activities] given here. Earlier teachers like me just could not design exercises for our students, because I did not have any education – any training – about that. But now everything has been given readymade; I just don't need to design any exercise for my students… and you asked if we can find out how their [speaking] skills are developed … I think their skills do increase through these [activities].

The new year-end written examination also contains some activity-like tasks, unlike the old one with conventional content-based questions. The new question paper also depends less on familiar texts from the textbook and requires students to work with unfamiliar texts. It is also much less predictable than the old one that had every question and sub-question strictly adhering to a pre-defined format. Students now need to depend less on memorisation and more on acquired skills.

> There is this quite different new textbook; they [students] don't need to study for the examination from the textbook … because there are two seen passages and two unseen passages in the examination. So they don't need to memorise anything. In the old ways they had to memorise a lot. Now that is not necessary…

However, LD points out that since the final examinations are written tests, the teaching focus is always more on writing.

> Well, we are anyway examination-oriented. We are concerned mostly with our students passing the examination. Hence we mostly teach writing skills. Ultimately about 30-35 marks worth questions in the paper are on writing skills […] even speech they have to give in writing. That is why we spend maximum efforts on developing writing skills.

LD rues the fact that though the textbook provides numerous activities to promote oral skills, they are not done in the class. He and a couple of other teachers do some of them, 'maybe because we are connected with [the English Teachers'] club or because we have undergone the training',

while most other teachers simply ignore them. This is probably due to the stiff challenges teachers face when the new textbook calls upon them to play various new roles in a school system that expects them to just 'finish the textbook' and also be accountable for the outcomes of teaching in terms of examination results. These teachers manage to teach the textbook much faster by sticking to the old ways, while LD lags behind because activities take a lot of time. But he can see that his students benefit from the activities and remembers happily telling a colleague that his 'boys have started using more English'.

He is not happy with the approach of the head teacher and many of his colleagues. While the textbook requires him to regularly engage students in group or pair work and collaborative tasks, the head teacher often entered in LD's observation log critical remarks like 'the students were talking', 'the teacher should pay attention to the students' or 'the textbooks were open while teaching'. In other words, she expected more discipline, control and silence in the classroom, though it went against the methodological expectations of the new textbook. She also wanted LD to keep pace with other teachers in 'completing the syllabus'. LD's experience shows that if school heads are not sufficiently made aware of the curricular change, it becomes even harder for teachers to implement the change as expected.

LD narrates his own experience of some positive change in his approach and practice. The new textbook is quite helpful in offering ready-made activities, getting students to work with texts and making them work together. Consequently, he too has changed his ways of teaching.

> Now I conduct pre and post reading activities, primarily because they are given ready and it's easy for me to carry them out. Had there been no ready-made activities I don't think I would have been able to develop my own. […] I have also started involving students. I never remember having done any pair or group work earlier. This is since I got the training. The training helped me to understand how this can be done.

At many places throughout the interview, LD reiterated the significant contribution of the training he underwent in enabling him to make some changes.

> The biggest support has been the RMSA training. I underwent it and also cascaded it to others, and I am much better off. Earlier trainings were not connected with the changed textbooks, but very general and theoretical. This one was specifically based on the textbook.

Thanks to the training, he not only got over his worries about having a noisy classroom and 'losing discipline', but also learnt about ways of addressing his practical concerns. He now conducts many more activities, pairs up 'smarter' boys with 'silent' ones to involve the latter, manages to form groups in a room with fixed furniture and modifies textbook activities as necessary. He feels that both he and his students are making gains from the changes.

> Earlier I had no knowledge how English could be taught. The old ways were somewhat frustrating because I didn't feel students were learning anything or their skills were being developed. Now this is much better, I won't say best, but students do get a chance to use the language and develop their skills.

But while describing the changes in his practice LD also occasionally reveals the lingering influence of prior norms and practices.

> The new textbook doesn't require me to read, everywhere it tells students to read texts and do things. But I won't feel like having taught if I don't read lessons aloud in the class. I also believe my students won't understand the meanings of words unless I tell them.

Thus, his teaching is a mix of old and new ways. He conducts lots of pre- and post-reading activities which he never did before, but also observes that 'while teaching textual part I think I often teach the old way that I followed with the old textbook'.

LD lists several difficulties in making changes in his practice. He cannot do some activities, partly because he hasn't fully understood them and partly because he is not confident if could handle them properly.

> I often feel like taking some activities, but I can't. For example, there is one activity [which I would like to do], but I doubt if I can do it. It's a jig-saw activity. … [P]robably I haven't completely understood it, or maybe I have understood, but I very much doubt if I can conduct it. … I am still not confident myself.

He regrets that he is able to share professional concerns and interests only with the two colleagues who are also ETC members. Some of the others argue that 'any teaching is teaching', don't see any need to change their practice, and don't see much value in LD's efforts to introduce change. In fact, he occasionally faces soft complaints from some colleagues that he 'keeps teaching a lot'.

> It's not possible to discuss with others. … Even [my colleague] R is also like "Hey pal, after all any teaching is teaching. Why should you bother about all these things?" … Then there is this N, my friend. We are on good terms. But he has still not developed any interest in these things.
> I got support since I had my colleagues like S and D … and since we are associated with the [English Teachers] Club. In case of other teachers … perhaps … they live in their own world … or they hold the old ideas of what a teacher should be and what he should do.

He is also worried about his own competence in English, though he feels more confident now.

> I had been teaching Marathi medium classes. I had never done any English speaking. Only recently the head teacher asked me to teach English medium classes. One lady teacher went on a year-long medical leave, so her class was given to me. Otherwise they had not trusted me till then [with teaching English medium classes]. The difficulty was that my English was poor. I think I don't have good speaking skills. But it's not a big difficulty now, because I have started speaking in English.

Perhaps the biggest difficulty in his opinion is managing time, since it is difficult to conduct the suggested activities in the available time. He reports some ways in which he tries to address this, like taking extra classes, dropping some activities and not teaching some lessons from the textbook, but regrets that the school does not provide any guidance. He also regrets the lack of support from the school in terms of resources or facilities.

> But there is no support from the school …Like I have to take my own chart papers, pens, stationery. I have to plan at home, carry everything to school, and sometimes it's difficult to carry things. There is no space to keep things, no cupboards … that's a problem too.
> I cannot form groups … I may only go for pair work. … Students are already seated in their places and it is easier for me to conduct pair work. The benches are not moveable. … Even if a group activity is prescribed I may not do it. I may go for pair work.

All the above suggests that the overall school context does not really understand what he is trying to do and how it is connected with the change, and so leaves it to an individual teacher like LD to do his best in dealing with the change, with little support or encouragement. Such a scenario is a common outcome of change policies that rely almost exclusively on teachers for implementation

and do not recognise that teachers are more likely to be willing and able to make the efforts needed to implement any change, if their school context is supportive.

3 Unpicking the Teacher's Story

The narrative of LD's experience of going through the first three years of a significant curricular change contains interesting insights and lessons. In this section, we attempt to generalise some key insights and points of learning about how a curricular change is perceived and experienced by teachers. We shall do so in three broad sections—understanding the curricular change, implementing it and the impact of the experience on the teacher.

3.1 Understanding the Curricular Change

Usually, the defining documents of change like the NCF and the MSCF provide a broad framework of the change, while the syllabuses and textbooks that follow from them are responsible for more specific and concrete formulations of the change. Bolitho (2012: 38) mentions four common take-off points for curriculum change: methodology, textbooks, materials and examinations. It is the textbook in the present case. Like LD, most teachers do not normally have access to or interest in the 'macro' level curricular documents or formulations. The curricular change seems to reach teachers almost exclusively through the textbook, which presents the rationale for change, the goals of change and the implications of change for the teacher, mostly indirectly and inadequately, and through its manifestation in the changed content and structure. In this regard, the following key issues about understanding curricular change seem to emerge from LD's experience:

- Teachers' understanding of curricular changes is almost exclusively shaped by the textbook in this context. Thus, how well a teacher understands these changes depends on how well the textbook manages to present them. Teachers do not often find the curricular framework documents accessible, either physically or conceptually.
- Even if the rationale, objectives or professional implications of curricular changes are presented to teachers through the textbook, they do not necessarily reach them. They need to be interpreted to teachers. As LD observes, teachers do not read the explanatory notes on curricular changes given

in the textbook, and even when they do, they may need help to understand the jargon in which the essence of change is usually couched. It is also doubtful if teachers are able to extract this essence from the content and structure of the textbook. Thus, even after getting the new textbook in their hands, LD and his colleagues continued to teach in the old way until the RMSA training oriented them about the change. In most cases, training is the only source of interpretation of change available to teachers, though in exceptional cases like LD's, a teacher development group or more enlightened colleagues can provide additional support in understanding the change. Teachers like LD seem to be at an advantage in knowing and understanding educational change, as their association with teacher development groups contributes to a heightened awareness of curriculum change, and they can tap the group for orientation and support.

- The understanding of curricular changes revolves around more practical and concrete aspects of teachers' work lives like classroom practice and examinations. More general and abstract aspects like changed notions of teaching-learning, curricular goals or overall approach are understood in a very indirect and restricted way, if at all. This may be so because teachers are likely to be primarily interested in understanding how change operates in their schools and classrooms. It may be so also because the change is presented through textbooks and interpreted at training. In both cases, the practical operational side of the change is more important to teachers than the approach, notions or goals. In the present case, changes in practice seem to precede any changes in perception, perhaps implying an expectation that the latter would naturally emerge from the former. This seems to deviate from the widespread view in curriculum change literature that any change in practice follows from the change in perceptions. In this connection, it is interesting to note that the previous training LD underwent focused on orienting teachers about the rationale, goals, approaches and philosophy of the curricular change, expecting this reorientation to lead to a change in practice. In contrast, the current RMSA training focused on how to practically implement the change in practice, with very limited orientation on rationale, approach or philosophy of the change, seemingly expecting the change in the practice to lead to changed perceptions.
- A teacher's understanding of curricular change is pitted against the understanding of others and is often shaped by it. The kind of wavering and dilemmas noticed in LD's thinking about the change is an indicator of this. His head teacher insists on following the old routines and practices of teaching, not recognising the need to modify them prompted

by the new curriculum. Some other colleagues also do not see any need to change and focus more on 'completing the syllabus'. LD mentions feeling under pressure from both quarters. Looking at his colleagues making rapid progress with the textbook units, and being periodically chased by the head teacher to complete weekly and monthly teaching targets, he is not only worried about his lagging behind, but also occasionally unsure whether he is right in taking the change seriously and spending time on recommended activities. Confusion and self-doubt seem to mark LD's efforts at understanding and implementing the curricular change, primarily because of the inconsistency between the messages and expectations coming from the RMSA training and the messages and expectations he daily comes across from his school context.

- LD, however, seems to be considerably courageous, since he is trying to introduce the change in an environment of apathy and resistance without much support from the administration and peers. A possible source of this courage may be a growing inner conviction about the usefulness of the change and growing personal satisfaction, as he notices its positive impact on his students. This may be an example of how perception change follows changes in his practice. The courage may also partly stem from his own motivation and the sense of agency he seems to have developed through his long association with the ETC.
- On a personal level, LD seems unsure of what to prioritise—developing the communicative skills of his learners or preparing them to pass the year-end examinations well—since unfortunately the two do not go together. LD seems aware that the curricular goals and the interest of his students and the society are aligned with the former. He also states that teachers need to change their practice and approach accordingly. This may be described as his 'espoused theory' (Argyris and Schön 1974). However, while actually handling the new textbook in the classroom, he sometimes deviates from this espoused theory and prioritises preparing students for the examination over developing their communicative competence, thus reflecting a different 'theory of action' (Argyris and Schön 1974). The opposing pulls of the two 'theories' is a potential source of constant discomfort and confusion for teachers like him. This seems to be an inevitable result of the inconsistent messages coming from the curriculum and the training and his immediate working environment.

3.2 Implementing the Curricular Change

Existing literature on educational change (Kennedy 1987; Palmer 1993; Whitaker 1993; Hargreaves 1994) concludes that a curricular change may be located along a continuum between needs-driven bottom-up optional change and policy-driven top-down obligatory change. The curricular change in this study largely inclines towards 'obligatory change' (Palmer 1993), is policy driven and is uniformly mandated for all teachers. Kennedy (1987: 164) views such change as a power-coercive strategy (Chin and Benne 1984) which forces 'people to change or act in certain ways'. The implementation of such obligatory changes faces a stronger challenge in enabling teachers to feel that they own the change and to minimise their resistance than in case of bottom-up needs-driven changes. In the present case, while LD seems more open to the change, some of his colleagues show a stiff resistance to become involved. LD's narrative of his personal experience in this regard seems to point to the following issues:

- Training seems to be a key support in the implementation of change, especially if it shows teachers practical ways of implementing it in their classrooms. LD compares training during the previous textbook change with the current RMSA training and finds the latter more effective and leading to actual change in his practice. The earlier training was theoretical and general and did not suggest ways of translating change into practice. Such training focused on orienting teachers about the philosophy and theoretical principles behind the change, hoping that their understanding of these would translate into (expected) changes in their practice. They seemed to assume that a change in beliefs was the prerequisite for a change in practice. In the current change implementation, the RMSA training seems to take the opposite route—training teachers in changing their practice, hoping that this will also cause some change in their beliefs as their understanding of the philosophy and theoretical principles behind the change evolves. It is also plausible that as teachers see evidence of a positive impact of their changed practice on learners and learning, they come to rethink their current practice and consequently change their beliefs and perceptions. This approach seems more productive, because even if teachers may not fully grasp the thinking behind the change, their practice is more likely to undergo some change. This route also has the advantage of addressing teachers' immediate concern about knowing what to *do* with the new textbook.

- Though LD and some of his colleagues have undergone the RMSA training, LD is more positive about the change and tries to implement it, while some colleagues continue their practice unchanged in spite of the training This does not necessarily negate the usefulness of RMSA training, since there may be other possible explanations of this difference. LD has a background of a long association with ETC, which has led to a greater sense of personal agency, confidence and autonomy (Padwad and Dixit 2008, 2015). So he may be more willing than his colleagues to move beyond his settled routines. He also mentions having discussions with other ETC members, which may have led him to a better idea and stronger conviction of the value of trying out the new things. He may also have much greater personal motivation than others. The content and format of training may also have played some role here. The RMSA training manuals contain elaborate discussion of what teachers may change in their classroom practice and how to do so, but not much about why (British Council 2013a, b). While LD may have found partial answers to 'why' through his participation in the ETC, in discussions with others and in his subsequent role as a trainer, other colleagues may be more resistant because they lack similar opportunities to understand the change rationale. Change implementation usually entails teachers stepping out of their comfort zones. Doing so demands considerable energy, stamina and involvement. Knowing the 'why' of the change may help motivate such personal investment, and encourage adaptation of practices to the dynamics of the context. Enabling teachers to understand the rationale behind the change, in terms that make sense within their working context, is an important aspect of implementation support and is, therefore, crucial in an educational change process.

3.3 Challenges

The initial challenge in implementing the change, as LD reports, was making a practical sense of it, as he was 'groping in the dark' with the new textbook. However, the RMSA training helped him get much clearer ideas of what changes there were, and how he could handle them in the classroom. Since he started trying out some change in his practice he has faced various challenges, which have included:

- Coping with a sense of isolation when the head teacher and colleagues show little sympathy for or interest in one's efforts for change implementation.

- Coping with concerns about one's competence, including the language competence, and the correctness of one's position.
- No or limited support from the school by way of resources, time, facilities and freedom to experiment.
- Dealing with the norms and demands of the administration, which are not always supportive of the change.

These are fairly common challenges found in many change implementation situations, like the one being discussed here, where teacher is conceived only as a mechanical implementer of change. What differs from situation to situation is how teachers handle such challenges. LD deals with the lack of resources by adapting what is available or spending personal money to supplement them, he manages to find alternative ways to counter the sense of isolation, he compromises either with the systemic norms or change implementation as convenient and candidly confesses helplessness where nothing can be done. He also admits that he has so far been able to bring about only a small amount of change, though more is possible. This suggests that teachers often also have to struggle against change planners' unrealistic, short-range timescales, with curricular changes typically needing a much longer time than initially planned for, for proper implementation. Educational change involves long-term commitment and is inherently a complex process (Wedell 2009, 2013).

However, LD does suggest that the implementation of change can be much more effective if dealing with such challenges is not left to individual teachers' resourcefulness alone. He hints at the need for other aspects of the system also to change accordingly, because, as Sarason (1995: 84) notes, 'changing one aspect of the education system is extraordinarily difficult, both conceptually and practically'. Wedell (2009: 26) highlights the role of communicating need for change involving:

> [R]epresentatives of people from all affected levels of the education system from the very beginning of the initiation process. The wider the range of representatives involved at this stage, the easier it will be to communicate the change appropriately at different levels.

Support and sympathy of others are considered to be an important variable in the success of educational change (Fullan 1992). The support of the head teacher, being the authority in the institution and teachers being accountable to her, is crucial for teachers. LD sums this up in a crisp comment—'the head teacher should also change if the school culture has to change'. Zeng

(2000 in Wedell 2009: 22) argues that 'educational leaders need to modify their beliefs so that they could accept the new teaching and learning ways' proposed by the change. Nias (1998) shows that support from colleagues is essential as during change implementation teachers can experience disturbing emotions and practical difficulties. In implementing change, teachers are often expected to reconfigure themselves, and in this process, they often suffer frustration and loss of self-esteem. They learn a great deal from talking to colleagues who are accessible and non-judgemental. She categorically notes that 'collegial talk is seen as much an essential aspect of professional learning' (Nias 1998: 1261). How the presence or absence of supportive colleagues may affect the teacher's efforts to change can be seen in the contrastive examples of LD and his unchanged peers.

The present curriculum change apparently remains restricted to the textbook and relies only on the teacher to implement it, without corresponding changes in, for example, assessment, administration or institutional policies. Preparing only teachers for change, without corresponding awareness raising of administration and management and changes in related aspects of the system, will not only result in lack of support for teachers in change implementation, but also mire teachers in inconsistencies of messages from the new curriculum, the administration, school policies and so on.

The systemic and complex nature of educational change, the need for change to occur across the system, rather than targeting only one or a few parts of the system, the importance of involving all stakeholders in the change process, and the need to recognise the teacher as only one among many factors in the system have all been pointed out by numerous writers (Kennedy 1987; Fullan and Hargreaves 1992; Fullan 1992, 2007; Hoban 2002; or more recently Wedell 2010, 2013; Wedell and Malderez 2013). Fullan (1992) also asserts how it is essential to consider 'the total teacher', i.e. the person located in and conditioned by a real-world context, both personal and professional. But it seems that educational change initiatives still largely remain lop-sided, short term and selective of stakeholders, explained away in terms of political compulsions and practical-pragmatic demands. This suggests that change initiators still find it very difficult to grasp and implement the crucial recommendations of these studies.

3.4 Impact of Change on the Teacher

The process of trying to make sense of the change and implement it in the classroom has led to some positive changes in LD by his own admission. His

way of teaching has considerably changed with greater student involvement, more activities, more speaking opportunities for students and greater use of supplementary resources like pictures and charts. More importantly, he finds that his students are learning better, their skills are actually developing and he himself feels that something meaningful happens in the class. He finds much greater satisfaction in teaching now and believes that he is able to make some contribution to his students' learning. Besides, he has also gained in confidence in managing the new textbook. However, there are also areas of confusion or conflict between some of his old beliefs or practices and the new thinking promoted by the curricular change. For example, student performance in written examinations still remains a high concern and a crucial measure of achievement for him, while he simultaneously tries to change his practice and bring improvement in student learning. Or, while the textbook activities require students to read the texts on their own, he feels that it is his duty to read passages out to them, or that they will not understand difficult words unless he explains them.

4 Conclusion—Key Change Issues

LD's story appears to be the story of a motivated teacher willing and trying to implement curricular change. His energy is maintained in part by the perceived benefits to his learners, which in turn over time gradually lead to some changes in his professional perceptions. It is also the story of a struggle to implement change in practice against strong constraints and challenges coming not only from external factors like an unsupportive environment and restrictive work conditions, but also from internal factors like self-doubt and the continuing influence of long-standing personal beliefs or values. He seems to be engaged in a process of reconsidering his values, attitude and beliefs about teaching and learning and his work. If schools are seen as 'cultural ecologies' (Sirotnik 1998: 186), then he may be seen as representing organisms that struggle both to survive and to evolve. From a 'worm's eye view' of an individual's experience of a curricular change this case study seems to offer the following general insights and lessons. Some gap between the policy makers' and the teacher's understanding of curricular change seems inevitable in a large-scale change initiative. The macro-level formulations of change in curricular frameworks and policies are usually not accessible to teachers and need some kind of mediation and interpretation for teachers to understand them. Often these formulations reach teachers mediated through textbooks and interpreted at training in terms of classroom practice, as in the present case, focusing more

on 'how' to change rather than 'why'. Hence, their impact seems more visible and direct in the classroom practice than on teachers' beliefs and perceptions, which may change only slowly and in a limited way. However, focusing on 'how' rather than 'why' of implementing change seems more productive, as the teacher in this study shows considerable changes in his practice and reports gains in satisfaction, confidence and motivation, in spite of limited awareness of the ideas and approaches behind the curricular change. Secondly, curricular change is unlikely to succeed in a true sense by targeting only teachers for change implementation, without corresponding changes across the system and without involvement of all key stakeholders, especially school leaders. Thirdly, in the absence of support from the system and a conducive environment, teachers may be left to rely on their individual resourcefulness, motivation and alternate sources of support, if any, to cope with the demanding process of change implementation. Consequently, teachers who lack these are not likely to try implementing change.

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7

An English Teacher's Perspective on Curriculum Change in West Bengal

Kuheli Mukherjee

1 Introduction

English has achieved a special status in the multilingual Indian context, where it has become 'a' if not 'the' national lingua franca. The National Curriculum Framework 2005 (NCF), the latest national level document on the Indian school curriculum, posits that, in the multilingual context of India, English is a global language and 'is a symbol of people's aspirations for quality in education and a fuller participation in national and international life' (NCERT 2005a: 1). It further states that 'The aim of English teaching is the creation of multilinguals who can enrich all our languages; this has been an abiding national vision' (NCERT 2005b Sec. III: 4).

In the twenty-first century India, learning English has thus acquired a special significance to many citizens as a means of 'social empowerment' (Sarkar Report 1998: 35) or 'a pathway out of poverty and oppression' (Graddol 2010: 124). Increasing social demand for English provision within the state education sector means that 'the level of introduction of English is now a matter of political response to people's aspirations' (NCERT 2005b: 4) rather than primarily an academic or feasibility issue. This chapter illuminates some of the issues that can arise when the political imperative to provide English for everyone is prioritised over contextual feasibility.

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M. Wedell and L. Grassick (eds.), *International Perspectives on Teachers Living with Curriculum Change*, International Perspectives on English Language Teaching,
https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-54309-7_7

In the state of West Bengal, English as a Second Language (ESL) is taught as a compulsory subject from the first class of primary school. This chapter explores a teacher's perspective on a recent English curriculum change at the upper elementary level (grades V-VIII) from learners aged 9 to 12, immediately following a change of government.

This chapter starts by introducing the change context and then provides one teacher's story of some of her experiences of change implementation. Finally, this chapter discusses what her story suggests for how the change process might be experienced by other local practitioners and tries to identify steps that would contribute to the more successful implementation of this change in West Bengal, and perhaps similar global contexts.

2 Context of the Change

2.1 Status of English in the State

West Bengal is a state in the eastern part of India with a population of 91, 276,115 (as per census 2011). Bengali is the official language of the state. However, English is also used for all official purposes. Students of this state, whose first language is Bengali, need to learn English to compete at the national level for entry to higher education (entrance examinations must be completed in either Hindi or English) as well as for access to the wider range of employment opportunities in which English proficiency is expected.

The 2011 census showed that the number of students enroled for upper elementary level education was 8,926,624 studying at 7052 government run schools. As mentioned previously, in West Bengal, as across India, the state government is sensitive to the importance that the majority of parents ascribe to their children having access to learning English. In reality, however, in many, especially rural, areas it is a fact that often students do not need to be able to use English in their daily life outside of school. Consequently, although officially West Bengal calls itself an ESL context, for most learners English remains a completely foreign language.

2.2 Second Language Teacher Education

Since there is no university in the state offering a masters programme in English Language Teaching (ELT) or TESOL, there are very few teachers of English with specialised training in ELT working at any level of the school

system. At the upper elementary level teachers must now have either a BEd (offering a single elective module on teaching ESL) or a two-year DEl. Ed (Diploma in Elementary Education), which includes one compulsory 'methodology of teaching English' module. Previously, untrained teachers at this level were allowed to enrol for a BEd after appointment, but since the passage of the Right to Free and Compulsory Education Act in 2009, the Indian National Council of Teacher Education has made it mandatory to recruit trained teachers only, in order to improve teacher quality.

2.3 A Brief Chronology of Upper Elementary Level English Curriculum Change in West Bengal

The teaching and learning of English at the elementary level (I–IV) was abolished in West Bengal from 1984 until 2000, when it was reintroduced mainly due to public demand (Sarkar Report 1998). In 2007, the West Bengal Board of Primary Education collaborated with the British Council to initiate changes in the English curriculum, methodology, teacher training and materials development to bring them more closely into line with the recommendations of NCF 2005. Most tangibly, a new series of textbooks were developed and introduced in grade I in 2008, reaching grade V in 2012. The guiding principle of these new textbooks was that children will naturally learn to communicate in a foreign language if they are presented with examples of that language in contexts which they understand (Krashen in NCF 2005). Listening and speaking skills were emphasised in the first two grades.

A challenge posed by these textbooks was expecting elementary level teachers (who are not specialists and teach all subjects from Grades I–IV) to speak English in the classroom. In acknowledgement of this reality, comprehensive teachers' books were developed to support the implementation of the new textbook. These provided detailed guidelines, including examples of the language to be used at each stage of the lesson, to help teachers teach the textbook page by page. In addition, at least some teachers from every primary school participated in the regular teacher training workshops that were organised during 2008–2011.

In May 2011, a new government was elected in West Bengal. It represented a different political orientation for the first time in over three decades, and immediately proposed changes to the entire school curriculum. On 20 July 2011, the new government stated that they would re-examine the existing syllabus and curriculum for all subjects at all school levels to 'make them

in conformity with the National Curriculum Framework 2005, RTE Act 2009 and modern developments in pedagogy' (notification no. 849-SE(S)/ES/S/10 M-64/11 dt. 20/07/2011, GoWB). A committee was appointed to recommend changes to the curriculum, the textbooks and teacher education across the state. However, unlike the other Indian States such as Rajasthan (Meganathan 2013), which also initiated curriculum revisions to become more consistent with NCF 2005, the West Bengali Expert Committee on School Curriculum and Syllabus did not draw on any national level expertise. The English committee members were either college English literature lecturers with no experience of school level ESL or school teachers with no qualification in ELT or in linguistics. None of the members had experience of, or training for, materials writing.

2.4 The Change and Its Rationale

The rationale for introducing change as stated in the 'Recommendations of the Expert Committee On School Curriculum and Syllabus, GoWB' (2011: 14–15) highlighted the disappointing performance of West Bengal over the last three decades in the national rankings established by the Education Development of India (EDI). It noted too much dependence on rote learning in schools, parents' growing dissatisfaction with the state system, and so an increasing dependence on private tuition among those who could afford it. Above all, they identified the lack of a properly developed curriculum that incorporated the latest developments in pedagogy and national level educational policies.

Commenting on English provision, the report noted that changes to incorporate certain proposals of NCF 2005 had been introduced in the English textbooks at the elementary level (classes I–V). However, they considered that the English curriculum at the upper elementary and secondary levels remained unchanged. Overall, they found that there had been no qualitative change in the school level English curriculum since 2003.

In the light of the above, and based on the recommendations of the newly appointed Expert Committee on School Curriculum and Syllabus, changes were initiated in curriculum, textbooks and assessment system for all school subjects.

English continued to be taught as a compulsory school subject. However, whereas previously children up to grade V had been automatically promoted to the next grade regardless of exam results, to meet the demands of the national Right to Education Act of 2009, this policy was

now extended to grade VIII. From grade IX onwards learners would have to score qualifying marks in English to progress to the next grade. A proportion of learners leave school at this point, but for those who remain, the policy causes potential problems for grade IX teachers, who have to try to help learners with very varied English proficiency to pass the school leaving exam (including English), which determines progress to higher secondary school.

2.5 The Changes in English

Each of the three aspects of the change mentioned above will now be discussed in turn. The focus is on the upper elementary level at which Atari, the teacher introduced below, currently works.

2.5.1 The New English Curriculum

The aims of the new upper elementary level English curriculum in West Bengal as outlined in the 'Recommendations of the Expert Committee on School Curriculum and Syllabus' (2011: 81) are:

> Developing basic proficiency in language for communicative purposes
> Developing competency in language acquisition
> Developing higher order language skills for meeting the challenges of life

The curriculum also mentions a number of competencies to be developed in the learners. These are:

- Observing and identifying,
- Listening and speaking,
- Reading,
- Writing,
- Noticing grammar and developing vocabulary

The document does not explain either the aims or the competencies more fully. It does though give limited examples of language experiences that should be provided to develop these competencies. Thus, in order to develop the competency of 'Speaking' in grade VI, learners should tell 'a story to peers' (Recommendations of the Expert Committee on School Curriculum and Syllabus 2011: 81).

This upper elementary English curriculum differs from its predecessor in two main ways. Firstly, the development of 'higher order skills in language to face challenges in life' was not an objective of the former curriculum. Secondly, the previous curriculum explicitly recommended that English teachers follow a communicative language-teaching approach. The new one makes no recommendation regarding the language learning approach to be followed, other than that, as for all subjects, it should be 'constructivist', to be consistent with the expectations of NCF 2005.

2.5.2 Textbook

The current series of textbooks developed by the Expert Committee was introduced in 2013, for grades I, III, V and VII, and in 2014, for grades II, IV, VI and VIII. This meant that some English teachers, for example, those teaching grade V, experienced two changes of both curriculum and textbook in consecutive years, 2012 and 2013.

The guidelines in the Teachers' book for Grade VI describe the content as an 'assortment of prose and poetry' focusing on 'softening of the boundaries of the disciplines'. The objective is to develop the four major skills of language learning along with the learners' skills of comprehension, analysis and synthesis. It also aims to develop learners' competence in grammar through inductive learning (WBBSE 2013: Blossoms VI, p.122). The book also claims to emphasise life centric experiences by which it seems to mean situations that relate closely to learners' daily lives.

2.5.3 Assessment

The new curriculum introduced continuous comprehensive evaluation (CCE) on the basis of the systemic reforms recommended by NCF 2005. In place of the existing (prior to 2013) five written unit tests at the upper elementary level, the changed curriculum introduced formative and summative assessments. An online booklet (CCE-Peacock model) on assessment was provided for all upper elementary teachers by the board of education. Given the limited internet access in many rural areas, teachers depended on their school heads to print the booklet out for them. Some did, some did not.

The academic year was divided into three terms of four months each. The booklet states that during each term teachers should use formative assessment, for diagnostic purposes, while still having summative tests at the end of each term. Debates, projects, group discussions, experimentation, cultural

programmes in school, social work, drawing and wall magazines were suggested as means of introducing formative assessment. Five indicators were prescribed for assessing learners:

- Participation,
- Questioning and Experimentation,
- Interpretation,
- Empathy and Cooperation
- Creativity and Sense of Aesthetics

Teachers were expected to keep a record of learners' performance in each individual subject on the basis of these indicators and to provide additional individual support accordingly. The booklet gave only a brief explanation of each indicator, and although some workshops were eventually provided, they made little attempt to make links with teachers' actual classroom situations. In the summative tests in each subject, questions would now be in objective and short answer formats instead of the traditional essay type questions. The Expert Committee also recommended that there must be thirty percent open-ended questions in each question paper.

Upper elementary English teachers in West Bengal (together with colleagues at other levels) were thus faced with a set of changes affecting most aspects of their daily professional practice. With these changes in mind, I interviewed a practising upper elementary English teacher to explore her perspective of these changes and their implementation in real classrooms. My objective was to investigate how they impacted on her regular classroom teaching and, in the light of what I found, to consider what further planning might support the implementation process.

3 A Teacher's Change Experience

Atari has been teaching English in a rural school in West Bengal since 1994. At the time of the interview, she was teaching 9–12-year-olds. She has functioned as a teacher educator for in-service trainees and received a scholarship from the US Department of State to participate in a teacher exchange programme in 2006. Consequently, she is unusual in her context in terms of her own English language proficiency, her range of experience and her access to professional information.

I start with Atari's view of the new curriculum and the extent to which it differs from the previous one. I then explore her view of the textbooks and

their impact on her students' language learning. Next, I present her comments about the new assessment pattern and the change that this implies for her. This will be followed by her view of the support provided to implement classroom change. Finally, I will present Atari's perception about the differences between what the curriculum aimed to change and the change in reality.

3.1 The Curriculum

As will become evident, Atari's answers to my questions suggest that she is not very clear about the objectives of the new curriculum. She is merely echoing what she read as objectives in the guideline to the teachers. I began by asking Atari what she considered the purpose and scope of learning English for her learners to be:

> …they should know how to communicate…their feelings…through English. … There is no scope for learning English outside the classroom. Whatever they learn they can learn only in their confined classroom… *(IntA/June 2015).*

She seemed to view the aim of the present curriculum as consistent with the above:

> I think the aim …. of learning English is to prepare the students as if they can use English in their real life situation at present or in their future life also *(IntA/June 2015).*

Asked for her understanding of the goal of the current curriculum in more detail, Atari responded at length, often using official-sounding curriculum language and suggesting that for her the new curriculum became visible through the textbook:

> …the present syllabus, it gives an integrated approach to learning. The various areas of learning are used in the combined way as resources for the holistic development of a child …life centric experiences are given optimum emphasis so that the child is able to correlate, synthesize, analyse and differentiate his or her experiential learning by coordinating this with the lessons in the text book.
> Language which is used in real life situation is used. Such as in class V, the first lesson is about a cricket match. Cricket is a popular game for the students, so they can easily grasp up the language of this lesson. That's why I

> think that language which is used in real life situation is used in our curriculum.

I then asked if she perceived any gap between other English teachers' concept of teaching and learning and latest curriculum expectations she said:

> Yes, there is a gap. Other people think that the students should be taught in a… didactive (sic.) way. [Q: Okay, what do you mean by didactive (sic.) way?] They want that students should know the grammatical rules first. [okay]…and then they introduce the rules in their writing or they can find out the rules in their story or in their reading portion. But often is their situation so different. The teachers teach them in inductive way, the stories … the teachers first taught the lessons and from the lessons the students can find out the rules of the grammatical (sic.) …er…formula

While the curriculum claims to promote a broadly learner-centred pedagogy, in practice Atari did not feel this required any need to change her teaching approach:

> I think that curriculum is not so much different with previous …er…time because the functional communicative approach has been introduced since …er…1989 and that was learner centred also and after 2005…the approach is always learner centred, activity based, but the situation is different… that the difference with the textbook, with the items of the textbook. I think that approach has already been changed after grammar translation method

Here she suggests that English teachers have worked with curricula that officially advocated more interactive or communicative approaches to English teaching for more than 25 years. However, it seems that identifying and implementing context-appropriate practices consistent with such approaches remain challenging.

3.2 The Textbooks

Initially, Atari said that she considered the latest textbooks appropriate for the purpose of implementing the changed curriculum:

> It helps me in many ways; the subject matter of every piece, of every class, of every text book is interesting, true to life. The text book is full of interesting

> pictures also. [Q: Does that satisfy the curriculum aim of the present makers?] Sometimes.

She considered that the textbooks provided useful guidance in terms of what the curriculum was trying to achieve.

> …in every text book there is a guideline towards the end of the textbook and in teachers' guideline I can find the words.

To begin with, therefore, she gave the impression that she found the new curriculum goals broadly consistent with her own views regarding the usefulness of learning English for her learners, and considered the new textbooks to be consistent with those goals. However, as seen below, she contradicted herself when responding to further questions about actually using the textbooks in her classrooms.

When asked about the appropriacy of textbook content for her learners she said:

> … sometimes the vocabulary is not at par, it may be difficult for the students and the construction of the sentences are also not at par … One thing is to be noted that the text, or the story, or the poem these are … er… filled up with large stock of vocabulary, very harder words, harder sentence structures but when as a teacher I find the tasks, the task is at par. The task can easily attract the student for their communication …er … communicative skills.

Here, although finding the vocabulary and sentence patterns too complex for her learners, Atari seemed to view the task types as suitable for developing communicative skills. However, when I asked her whether all language skills were represented she said:

> No not always four. In this present textbook the writing and reading skills are emphasized …That is the problem … I think that if there is no importance of listening and speaking skills their aims will not be complete because they will not gain fluency.

I then asked whether she used interactive approaches in her classroom to enable such skill development, and she responded 'The classroom is normally learner centric, but sometimes it is teacher-centric'.

She said she could only use learner-centred activity-based approaches in her classroom sometimes because the texts in the books were very long and the topics were often unfamiliar.

> every text is so long … as a teacher I can explain the theme to the students because almost all the students are unaware of the themes, themes are so much new to them, and as a teacher I have to explain all those. That's why I have to spend a long time.

To explain what she meant by unfamiliar theme, she referred to the textbook of class V (learners aged 9–10)

> I think that in class V, there are some lessons such as "Memory in Marble" (on the topic of the Taj Mahal) […] The students did never go to Agra and did not see Taj Mahal. […] So, it is not their real life experience.

Asked whether the current textbooks do have tasks focusing on speaking skills, Atari replied:

> I have to invent such tasks! The students can see the picture and tell them. Suppose in this chapter there is a picture of monkey or there is a picture of king of them. Lesson 2 in class V -A feat on feet… there is a picture of Mount Everest and students can describe this picture and in class V there is talk about two monkeys and they can imagine themselves as the two monkeys.

While Atari might be confident and expert enough to be able to 'invent' tasks, I wondered whether that would be true for most English teachers. Her first response was:

> Always not … Not always. [Q: Why do you think so?] … I think because the lack of time is one point. The textbook is so large that it is not manageable for the teachers to finish it in due times and so all the communicative tasks cannot be completed in classes.

She seemed confused when I asked her about whether the way the textbook deals with grammar differs from the previous textbook.

> The difference is … er… a large difference. The traditional set up wants the teachers will at first define the grammatical rules i.e. when it is the role of the teachers who can explain the grammatical rules… the present curriculum wants that students can find out the rules.

She seems to understand the textbook as requiring an inductive approach to the teaching of grammar. In fact, each unit in the textbook has a section called 'Let's Learn'. In this section, first, a few sentences are given with certain grammatical feature and the students are then explicitly told the related grammatical rule.

3.3 Changes to Assessment

Atari seemed more aware of how the current curriculum is different from the previous one, and so of a need to change aspects of her role when describing the changes in assessment weighting and the introduction of formative assessment practices.

She first highlighted the new curriculum's lack of emphasis on the assessment of oral skills.

> In previous textbook there was an emphasis on oral test. It carried a large marks…for class VI it was 40 marks out of 100 and for VII and VIII it was 30 marks … but in present curriculum reading and writing skills are emphasised but listening and speaking skills are neglected.

I then asked her about whether the introduction of formative assessment required her to adjust her role as a teacher in any way.

> I think that in new curriculum there is a formative portion. [okay] …In each class in formative portion I have to change my role. [Q: Why?] Sometimes I want to be their friend, sometimes I er…erm… acted myself as a gardener… [Q: So do you mean that you didn't do… you didn't find yourself in these roles earlier?] No. (*IntA/June 2015*).

She pointed out that earlier, there was no option for formative assessment and so such 'friend' and 'gardener' roles were not necessary. However, the new activities recommended for formative assessment are very different from traditional written tests and require role adjustments for both teacher and learners.

> Formative is the student's development during the span of two summative evaluations. It can measure the student's gradual development and the teacher can get a scope of rectifying the student's lacunae… it is not always through written test… it is through survey, clay modelling and so on.

While it was unclear how she viewed the above assessment changes, she again expressed concern that, unlike the earlier curriculum, the current version did not accord importance to the assessment of listening and speaking skills.

> I consider that if there is no evaluation or assessment process of any activity the students cannot give and the teacher cannot give so much importance on these activities […] So though we have some listening and speaking activities there is no scope for assessment or evaluating them.

In my own experience, it is frequently the case that in spite of having tasks to develop speaking skills in the text book, if these are not assessed, students, as well as teachers, skip or ignore them. I asked if she thought this was the case here, with teachers omitting them because they felt they had to teach to the exams. Atari pointed out that since there is little emphasis on oral skills in the textbooks and no oral component to the summative assessment, it was hard to include it in formative assessment:

> If the syllabus designer may give importance on formative class about the speaking and listening skills, the students will be benefitted (*IntA/June2015*).

Since coping with both the new textbooks and the introduction of formative assessment were potentially challenging for teachers, I was curious to know what support she had received to implement the new curriculum.

3.4 Experience of Support Provided

Atari said that the most recent formal support that she had received was before the introduction of the previous curriculum. In response to my question about support to implement the latest changes Atari said, 'After introducing this new curriculum no support at all'. She had been coping with the new curriculum from her 'general awareness'. She contrasted this with her experience of the previous curriculum change: 'Previously, I noticed that when there was a change immediately there was workshop, a training for the in- service teachers'.

According to her, this was not so for the latest change, and while she believed some teachers had been trained, many (like herself) remain untrained to date.

In addition to the new expectations implicit in changes to textbook and assessment practices, the curriculum also recommended that upper elementary-level learning should reflect the across the curriculum approach recommended by NCF 2005. Such an approach implies contact and collaboration between English teachers and colleagues teaching other subjects. When asked, Atari also mentioned the lack of school-level support from school heads for the provision of the less formal support needed to encourage such contact:

> I need collaborative teaching because in content based subjects, if I get support from my colleagues, the lessons will be easier and joyful to my students.

Both formal in-service training and encouragement and guidance to support collaboration between teachers within their schools seem lacking.

3.5 Atari's View of the Gap Between the Intended Change and Reality

In elaborating on why there was such a high proportion of unknown vocabulary in the textbook making it difficult to implement learner-centred approaches and activities, Atari revealed an important example of a gap between 'how people actually experience change' and 'how it might have been intended' (Fullan 2007: 8). She said:

> … it is uttered by the syllabus designers that up to class IV they have learned all these things and so in class V they can easily grasp the meaning but er…you should know the true picture of our society that up to class IV in our primary section they cannot learn anything […] because they come from downtrodden family, backward class […] so from class I to class IV the syllabus is very good but teachers and students cannot cope up with the syllabus of the primary section […] Primary section lacks teachers who can teach ELT properly.

While the curriculum assumed that learners would enter grade V, able to cope with language at the level in the textbook, in reality, this was not so. This was because primary teachers (grades I–IV) were not subject specialists, not trained in ELT and had too many non-academic responsibilities to find time to develop their own English or improve their teaching of English.

> …The primary teachers have to teach all the subjects….A teacher cannot teach English, mathematics, science, Bengali at the same time, with

> same attention, same expertise. […] So I think that syllabus designer should remember that in primary section also […] only the ELT trained teachers can teach in primary sections.

Unaware of these contextual realities, syllabus designers had planned textbook content assuming that learners coming into Grade V would be at a certain level. Their inappropriate assumptions contributed greatly to many of the problems that teachers like Atari faced when using these textbooks.

If children are to genuinely begin to learn English from grade 1, there need to be properly trained English teachers in primary school, and the initial teacher education curriculum needs to be adjusted to meet the expectations of the curriculum. Pointing out the gap between existing teacher education curriculum (which as mentioned previously provides little practical training) and the demands of the new English curriculum, Atari said:

> …there is a slight gap between present syllabus and the designing of BEd syllabus. I think the newcomers students… though they have been trained in BEd, they cannot teach proper English. Until and unless the teachers can be trained in ELT, they cannot teach English in secondary section also.

Here Atari referred to grades V–X as the secondary section because in West Bengal the same teachers teach in upper elementary and secondary. Atasi was quite confident that with sufficient appropriate support for teachers, implementation of the present curriculum would be beneficial for students. However, the rigid class routine, too much textbook material to cover in the time available, and the lack of institutional, local level support, all meant that she had not been able to initiate either teaching and assessment, or collaboration with colleagues to facilitate learning across the curriculum, as envisaged by the change planners.

Assessing herself as a teacher now, after many years' experience Atari said:

> Previously I have […] idealism but now I think that sometimes I should be more lenient, sometime I use mother tongue in my classes according to the students need. I can realize that there is an emotional level of every student. Sometimes they are afraid of me. Previously I was not aware of this. […] but now I can realize that when they come on their own to school, they have borrowed some feelings with them […] now I think that I should be friendly with them, more friendly with them. And informal and friendly way of teaching makes my class more successful.

Whereas once she believed that she should and could implement the idealised approaches promoted by various English curricula, now she has begun to realise the need to be more flexible and to adapt to the context of her learners. She has learnt the need to accept her students as they are, as individuals with social identity, feelings and emotions and to adjust her teaching accordingly.

The following section considers some implications of Atari's experience.

4 Implications of the Teacher's Perspective

The rationale for change, (the relatively poor ranking of West Bengali educational achievement within India as a whole), suggests that a change in the school curriculum and textbooks was needed. The recommendations of the newly appointed committee, if properly implemented, have the potential to contribute to the qualitative improvement of school education in West Bengal. However, Atari's experience of, and apparent confusion about, change implementation illustrates some issues that may become apparent to teachers when an 'externally initiated' (Wedell and Malderez 2013) change attempt is experienced in reality, and so how difficult it can be for the aims of the change to be translated into the desired practices in real classrooms. In the following sections, I discuss the extent to which desired changes in teaching and learning, assessment and textbooks seem to have been achieved.

4.1 Teaching and Learning

The new curriculum planners hoped to enable the spread of learner-centred, activity-based approaches in line with a constructivist paradigm of learning. The incongruity between these declared aims and what was happening in classrooms became evident from Atari's responses. A number of reasons suggest themselves.

Firstly, the curriculum planners and textbook writers ignored the existence of the large number of untrained grade I–IV school English teachers, and so the reality of the language level reached by learners prior to their entry to upper elementary in class V. This led to assumptions regarding prior learning that made it difficult to teach the textbook from Grade V upwards.

Secondly, there seems to have been a misplaced assumption that teachers would be able to adjust to the new approaches with ease. An experi-

enced English teacher like Atari, with more than two decades of exposure to broadly interactive approaches, did not perceive any real need to change her approach. Her references to many English teachers continuing to have belief in traditional concepts of teaching and learning, despite over 25 years of encouragement to use more interactive approaches suggest that teachers' 'understanding about methods of teaching-learning of ESL still seemed problematic' (Meganathan 2013: 6). They suggest an ongoing mismatch between the principles espoused by the curriculum and teachers' existing beliefs and practices (Orafi 2013), and that planners seriously underestimate the challenges that moving away from historically embedded teaching approaches entail.

Thirdly, there were inconsistencies between curriculum planners' rationale for change and the English teaching change that they proposed. They claimed to be led by NCF's (2005) view that an integrated approach to the teaching of different skills in language is extremely important to enable the development of some level of communicative competence. However, as Atari pointed out, the lack of emphasis on listening and speaking skills in both the new textbooks and the content of assessment was likely to lead to these skills being neglected by teachers and learners. The curriculum also promoted the maximisation of possibilities for integration across subject boundaries. However, as Atari reported, neither state level planners nor local educational leaders made efforts to develop school contexts that would encourage the collaboration that might enable such cross-subject integration.

4.2 Assessment

Assessment is likely to be an essential part of any substantial educational reform (Fullan 1998). The latest curriculum change in West Bengal also tried to make the modes of assessment more consistent with the aims of the change (Bolitho 2012). Along with traditional pen and paper tests, it introduced alternative means for formative assessment. This was entirely new to all teachers in West Bengal. Atari's earlier references to 'nature survey' or 'clay modelling' and to her need to develop a role as 'friend' or 'gardener' in the classroom when trying to implement formative assessment, revealed a potentially important aspect of the assessment change process. If implemented as anticipated, formative assessment offered a means of helping teachers to begin to take on the role of facilitators, a role that is consistent with the constructivist curriculum rhetoric.

However, Atari showed no recognition of this sort of change in her teacher role, and when referring to an alternative mode of assessment (e.g. nature survey), she made no mention of possible assessment indicators. All of the above suggests that despite her considerable professional experience and expertise, she had little understanding of the latest developments in assessment. This left her (and probably most of her upper elementary colleagues) expected to implement change, which they do not fully understand.

4.3 New Textbooks

In a resource-deprived context like rural West Bengal textbooks play a very significant role in implementing any curriculum. Atari's view of the new textbooks revealed several mismatches between curriculum aims and the suitability of the textbook to attain them. Her mixed and sometimes contradictory-seeming responses while describing the suitability of the textbooks might reflect her confusion over the lack of fit between what the new textbooks stated as their characteristics and her classroom experience of trying to use them in practice.

One reason for the apparent lack of coherence between the declared goals of the curriculum and the textbook content might be that textbook writers had had to write eight textbooks in two years. This reflects the speed with which the new incoming government initiated and implemented the whole change process. Such haste is not unusual in contexts where one implicit reason for the educational change is to demonstrate political change (Wedell and Malderez 2013).

4.4 Support

Wedell (2009: 187)suggests that along with professional in-service training, a supportive atmosphere in teachers' immediate working environment is also important for widespread implementation of new education policies and curriculum reforms. Factors contributing to the provision of such a supportive environment may include:

i. provision of 'appropriate and timely in-service training' of teachers in the use of 'the materials and teaching-learning approaches',
ii. provision of 'adequate in-school advisory support to teachers' and
iii. making educational administrators, in-service trainers and school principals aware of change concepts and their responsibilities in implementing the change'. (Hayes 2012: 52)

It is evident from Atari's example that teacher training workshops arranged so far had not reached all teachers. Besides, my own interactions with teachers who had attended such in-service training revealed that though they were aware of the theoretical concepts of change, they were not confident about how to interpret those concepts for their own classroom situation. Some formal training support for the new approaches to evaluation has also been provided, but again, my personal interaction with colleagues has made me aware that most English teachers are not yet clear in their understanding of formative assessment. The available training did not therefore help teachers to understand and reflect on how to adapt the reform to their classrooms (Hayes 2012: 56). Their experiences clearly showed the need for in-school follow up after the external training sessions (Bolitho 2012) and suggested a need for a thorough review of training content, training process and trainer training.

In addition to training opportunities for teachers being inadequate, there was minimal awareness-raising activity aimed at the other stakeholders whose behaviours and attitudes strongly influence the environment in which classroom teachers work. Stakeholders such as inspectors, head teachers and administrative personnel thus remain unaware of their responsibility to provide support to the main agents of change, the teachers. Teachers' local working contexts offered little formal or informal support or encouragement for their attempts to try and implement curriculum goals.

5 Conclusion

West Bengali change planners have taken a number of steps, (e.g. attempting to make an assessment and pedagogic principles more consistent) to try and support the implementation of the curriculum change. However, due to the speed of implementation, they have also ignored a range of factors that, if acknowledged and acted on, might help to make ELT change implementation more successful in both West Bengal and similar global contexts. I conclude this chapter by highlighting five key support factors that I believe the West Bengal experience shows need considering in any context of complex change (Fullan 1992).

1. Professional awareness programmes, using clear and concrete language and providing plenty of practical illustrations (based on any new textbooks), must be arranged for all English teachers, to help them understand both the rationale for and the details/examples of expected classroom practice (Orafi 2013: 19).

2. The training methods used in such programmes should model the (probably) activity-based and learner-centred approach that teachers are being asked to adopt, to help them relate their training to the 'innovative practice they are being asked to implement in the classroom' (Hayes 2012: 56).
3. Formal out of school in-service provision should be followed by ongoing in-school support over time or at the very least by officially supported opportunities for teachers in local areas to meet up regularly in working time to help each other with implementation issues. (Malderez and Wedell 2007)
4. Appropriately scripted awareness-raising programmes for all important stakeholder to help them receive 'similar messages about the new curriculum and what it implies for them' (Wedell 2009: 147), need to be arranged before widespread implementation is expected to begin. School leaders and change-monitoring agents need to understand the rationale for the change and be clear about the implications for classroom pedagogy. In addition, any monitoring agents (inspectors/supervisors) need be trained in providing supportive feedback to teachers, 'minimising disparaging comments and recognising what is realistically achievable' (Wedell 2009: 149) by a teacher in a particular context.
5. Any new English textbooks need to be designed keeping curriculum objectives in mind, but also honestly acknowledging likely differences in learners' language level and other aspects of classroom reality across the state, and so the likelihood that not all learners will complete all the content.

Any change implementation process hoping for the sustained improvement in student outcomes requires sustained effort to change practices of teaching and learning in thousands and thousands of classrooms (Levin and Fullan 2008: 291). Consequently, even if all the above are recognised, planned for and provided, seeing the change actually 'happening' in all those varied classrooms is still likely to take many years.

Postscript It may be worth mentioning here that the process for orienting school leaders has now started in West Bengal.

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8

Reconciling Conflicting Messages: English Language Curriculum Change in Kenyan Secondary Schools

Charles Ochieng' Ong'ondo

1 Introduction

This chapter sets out to introduce an English teaching context in which there is policy incoherence and poor communication between the various partners responsible for the provision and assessment of English in Kenya. What follows is a brief account of the English language teaching context, showing, through the case study of one English language teacher, how the teacher copes with change in this context.

1.1 English Language in Kenya

There are two official languages in the Republic of Kenya—English and Kiswahili. Up to 2010, all official government documents were written in English, and all official transactions took place in English. Since 2010, there has been an ongoing process of developing Kiswahili versions of all official documents. English is spoken at different levels of competence by almost all Kenyans who have completed a primary level of education. The two languages are compulsory subjects in Kenyan schools from the first year of primary school, but English is also the medium of instruction from year 4 in

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M. Wedell and L. Grassick (eds.), *International Perspectives on Teachers Living with Curriculum Change*, International Perspectives on English Language Teaching,
https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-54309-7_8

all the subjects except Kiswahili and other languages. In urban schools, it is common to find schools where English is the medium of instruction from year 1.

Kenya follows the 8-4-4 system of education where learners study at primary school level for eight years, those who proceed to secondary school study for four years and those who proceed to university take various professional courses with the shortest being four years. Between each stage, there is a national examination which learners must pass before they can proceed to the next level (KIE 2002). Normally, learners would be expected to have passed English with above average marks in these exams to be able to proceed to the next level of education. For university entry, in particular, a good grade (usually grade B and above) is a requirement for admission into many programmes. Therefore, English is a high stakes subject within education and also a very significant language for official interaction in Kenya.

1.2 English Language Teaching (ELT) Context in Kenya

According to the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD) (the institute within the Kenyan Ministry of Education (MoE) responsible for designing the curriculum and syllabuses for schools in Kenya), the main goal of ELT at the secondary school level is to enable school leavers to be competent communicators in the English language (KIE 2002). Accordingly, the MoE recommends that English language be taught using Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). The MoE explains that the emphasis must be on communication because:

> English is the official language of communication in Kenya…It is also the pre-eminent language of international communication. Consequently, those who master English reap many academic, social and professional benefits. (KIE 2002: 6)

The emphasis on communication is also reflected in the objectives of *The Secondary English Syllabus* which state that on leaving secondary school learners should be able to:

- Listen attentively for comprehension and respond appropriately
- Speak accurately, fluently, confidently and appropriately in a variety of contexts

- Read fluently and efficiently and appreciate the importance of reading for a variety of purposes
- Make an efficient use of a range of sources of information including libraries, dictionaries and the Internet
- Use a variety of sentence structures and vocabulary correctly
- Communicate appropriately in functional and creative writing
- Think creatively and critically.

(KIE 2002: viii)

At secondary school, English is taught in eight lessons of 40 minutes each—the highest number for any subject. English Language and Literature are supposed to be integrated (see below) and lessons include Reading, Writing, Grammar, Listening and Speaking, Poetry, Oral Literature and the study of between three and five set books, including at least a novel, a play and an anthology of short stories.

During the last twenty years, there have been two major changes in Kenyan ELT. One took place in 2002 with the merging of the formerly separate language and literature curricula into a single integrated subject. The MoE currently stipulates that English language (EL) at secondary school level must be taught using the *Integrated Approach*. The *Kenya Secondary School Syllabus* explains the issue of integration as follows:

> This syllabus adopts an *integrated approach* to the teaching of English language. Integration means merging two autonomous but related entities in order to strengthen and enrich both. Through exposure to literature the learner will improve their language skills. They will not only enrich their vocabulary but also learn to use language in a variety of ways. Similarly, an improved knowledge of the language will enhance the learner's appreciation of literary material. On yet another scale, integration means that no language skill should be taught in isolation. Listening, speaking, reading and writing skills should complement each other… It has been established that teaching language structures in isolation is not only boring, but it also tends to produce learners who lack communicative competence. (KIE 2002: 3)

The above change required all English teachers to link their teaching of the two areas. However, the *Secondary English Teachers Handbook*, a key MoE document, gives few examples of how such integration could be implemented in practice. It says only that:

> while teaching reading, the teacher may reinforce the mastery of grammar by pointing out instances of effective use of grammatical items already taught.

> The teacher may also generate writing tasks and debates from the reading material. (KIE 2006: 3)

Actual implementation of integrated teaching was thus left very much to individual English teachers.

The second change took place during 2010/2011, and its main focus was to expand the above-integrated approach to teaching into the content and format of the national secondary school leaving exams. Each of the three English exam papers now includes aspects of the skills of English language (reading, writing and grammar) and also literature (Poetry, oral literature and the set books) (KNEC 2006). In addition, the testing of oral skills through writing was also introduced for the first time.

The above changes have required English teachers to make a further adjustment. Whereas pre-2002, when English and Literature examination papers were set and done separately, so that teachers who only taught English language did not have to master the content of the set books, now all the teachers need to be familiar with the 'set books'. Every three to four years, the MoE prescribes five new books which include two novels, two plays and one anthology of short stories, effectively changing the content of the literature part of the curriculum.

English teachers are expected to teach the plot, themes, characters and style of all these books to learners during their last two years of high school. Learners are expected to answer questions on three of the five set texts, whose literary and linguistic content also, since 2010, serve as the source of test items for both literature and English language skills (KNEC 2006). The set books at the time of the interview which follows were

1. Play: *Betrayal in the City* by Francis Imbuga.
2. Play: *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* by Bertolt Breach.
3. Novel: *The River and the Source* by Margaret Ogolla.
4. Novel: *The Whale Rider by With Chimaera*.
5. Short stories: *When the sun goes down and other stories from Africa and Beyond.*

In actual classroom teaching, teachers use both English-language-specific textbooks—with content focusing on the four skills and grammar—and the set books, from which teachers are expected to identify aspects of plot, character and style, that can also support the development of learners' English language skills. Since testing also draws on these books, teachers' familiarity with all dimensions of their content is extremely important. The combina-

tion of the above changes represents a huge challenge for teachers of English in secondary schools in Kenya.

Another issue regarding ELT in Kenya (as in many other settings) is that the school contexts in which teachers operate are very diverse, in terms of learners' English language competencies. The proficiency of secondary learners in most schools ranges from very competent and/or average to very weak, depending on factors such as whether their primary education was in a rural or urban area. Most teachers thus have classes with widely mixed abilities, and MoE gives no clear guidance on how to deal with this diversity. Research into the challenges that Kenyan English teachers face is limited, however, some have been described by Kenyan and international researchers.

Kembo-Sure (2003) and Barasa (2005) reiterate that one of the key challenges facing English teachers in Kenya is how to deal with the cultural diversity in most of their classes. That is, in many classes, it is possible to find learners from various ethnic and linguistic backgrounds with various attitudes to and backgrounds in language use generally and English in particular. Kembo-Sure (2003) points out that teachers find it especially difficult to motivate learners with lower English proficiency to use the language in class, while also appropriately encouraging those who enter their classes with better competencies. Trudell and Schroeder (2007) note that English language teachers are usually trained in Western approaches and methods of language teaching, some of which are not appropriate for the contexts of the classes they teach. Barasa (2005) suggests that neither the MoE curriculum policies nor the English Language Teacher Education (ELTE) providers' curricula acknowledge the classroom contexts in which most secondary English teachers work.

1.3 English Language Teacher Education in Kenya

Pre-service English Language Teacher Education (ELTE) for secondary school teachers normally takes place in universities where trainees study for a Bachelor of Education (BEd) degree. The ELTE curriculum is generally the same across all public universities and is taught by faculty from different schools: School of Education (SoE) and School of Arts and Social Sciences (SASS). Usually, content courses are offered by the SASS, while courses on pedagogy are offered by the SoE. As shown in Table 1 below, the ELTE curriculum offers student teachers only two *(italicised)* courses in ELT Pedagogy.

Table 1 Titles of education courses for ELTE students at one Kenyan University

First year	
First semester:	***Second semester:***
Introduction to education 1	Introduction to education 2
Second year	
First semester:	***Second semester***
General education psychology	Educational media and resources
Philosophy of education	History of education
General methods of teaching	Curriculum development
Third year	
First semester	***Second semester***
Human growth and development	Educational measurement evaluan
Economics and planning of education	Public speaking skills
Methods of teaching literature	*Methods of teaching english*
Fourth year	
First semester	***Second semester***
Sociology of education and comparative Ed.	Ed. media practicals & micro-tch
Environmental education	Human behaviour and learning
Educational administration and management	Advanced research and writing
Teaching practice (12 weeks)	

Table 2 Course outline of the *methods of teaching English/literature* course

- Objectives of teaching English/Literature
- Theories of teaching English/Literature
- Teaching and learning activities in English/Literature
- Teaching listening and speaking skills/teaching poetry
- Teaching reading and writing skills/teaching oral literature
- Teaching grammar/teaching the novel, short stories and drama
- Assessment in English/literature
- Integration of English and literature
- Teaching resources in English/literature
- Lesson planning and writing the scheme of work for English/literature

Source Course outline obtained from one teacher educator

It is noticeable that despite the move towards integration in the English curriculum outlined above, these two 'methods' courses remain completely separate, reflecting a pre-2002 classroom reality. Each of these ELT-specific courses lasts for only one semester of about twelve weeks, during which it is supposed to cover all aspects listed in Table 2.

It would seem that the initial teacher education makes little or no effort to prepare trainee teachers for working in mixed ability ELT classrooms, in

which they are supposed to integrate the learners' development of English language skills with and through the study of Literature in English. Against this background, I interviewed a teacher on her experiences of coping with English curriculum change in Kenya. The teacher's story is presented below.

2 Florence's Story

Florence (hereafter, Flo) has been an English teacher in Kenyan secondary schools, teaching learners aged 15–18, since early 2002. She is a graduate of Moi University, where I am based as a teacher educator; hence, she experienced the ELTE curriculum outlined above. I have known Flo since her student days at university. Since then, we have interacted regularly during the Kenya National Drama Festival in which her students participate and for which I often act as adjudicator. Flo has taught English without any major break since graduation and has hence had to cope with the changes outlined above.

The main change, she has experienced, is the 2010–2011 shift to integrate both skills and literature in English examinations. In addition, she has experienced several changes of the set books and so has had to familiarise herself with new content and new ways of integrating these with her teaching of language skills. Flo's story is presented under four main headings: her understanding of the current national curriculum aims and their implications for practice, her experiences of implementing the curriculum, her views on the benefits of the curriculum to her/learners, and her views on possible improvements.

2.1 Flo's Understanding of the Current National Curriculum Aims and Its Implications for Practice

Flo understands the current national English curriculum for secondary schools mainly in terms of the skills that it aims to develop. She states that it aims at enabling learners to interact competently with other speakers of English and also to become able to operate effectively in all skill areas. Flo adds that the curriculum also aims at enabling learners to appreciate the possibilities of using the language:

> The intention is to make them [learners] appreciate that other than the various languages that we have in the country, they are also able to speak fluently

> in English, and at the same time they can apply the skills they have learnt in the various areas of the subject in form of maybe writing, expressing themselves in speech and so on.

She sees the implications for her practice of such skill-development-related aims, as being able to provide learners with teaching which will help them to develop proficiency in the four skills of English: listening, speaking, writing, and reading and in grammar. She states that:

> The English language curriculum for high school implies that we emphasise four basic areas in teaching: the oral skills, the ability of the students to express themselves in speech, language comprehension. This is supposed to be the ability of the student to read a comprehension passage, interpret it and appropriately respond correctly to the questions asked after the passage, … writing…. and grammar, and in grammar we are talking about the simple mistakes that students make.

She recognises that the achievement of the above aim (stipulated by the Kenyan Ministry of Education (MoE), that by the time the student sits for the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Examination (KCSE), she will be able to interact competently in the English language, is in reality not the sole aim. In addition, English teachers and learners also need to consider the expectations of the Kenya National Examinations Council (KNEC). She understands these expectations to be 'that at the end of it all, the student is able to respond to the questions effectively and correctly'.

Flo sees inconsistencies between the aims of the MoE and of the KNEC for ELT at the secondary school level and recognises the effects that this has on classroom practice. Firstly, the two contrasting aims put pressure on the learning time available, as captured in the following excerpt:

> At the moment, the Ministry has given guidelines as to working times for the child to be in a classroom. They feel that the child should be in a classroom comfortably between 7:15 am to 3:30 pm after which the child should be left to rest and play. […]. The examination curriculum is so stiff so that when the teacher looks at it it's such a small amount of time so they must create more time to teach … The Ministry feels the child should have enough time to rest but then again the curriculum is this big and the curriculum implementers feel that the time given is so small…. So that is why there is that friction between the Ministry and the institutions.

Flo perceives differences between curriculum expectations and contextual realities. She indicates that in reality, the dominant aim of ELT among stu-

dents, teachers and even parents is for learners to pass the examinations. This means that it is the KNEC aims that guide her practice in ELT.

> As it is right now, it is more of the Kenya national examinations curriculum aims that are being followed … You see, the expectation of the Ministry is that, the teacher should stop teaching today [the end of the last term of the four- year secondary school period], and tomorrow that child should get into the exam room and comfortably answer the questions. […] But because of exam expectation, the schools have worked it so that the Ministry's curriculum is even done away with by first term of form 4. So that they have time left for revision, revision and examination. What we call in the profession as drilling, drilling the child towards passing of exam.

To fulfil examination expectations, schools therefore normally abandon the MoE curriculum in the final year of school in order to concentrate on the KNEC curriculum. Flo points out that this emphasis on testing has become the norm, not only in ELT but also in other subjects. It is considered as the best preparation for the KCSE examinations, and quality of teaching and learning is judged by exam results.

> Basically it is assumed, because that is where we are all geared to. Has the child passed the exams at the end of the day? And you see it becomes irrelevant whether you are dying to let the child become independent in using English as long as the child passes. If you struggle to implement the Ministry's guidelines as it is and the child ends up not passing the exams, it is assumed you never taught, it is as good as you never did anything, so for me it is through exams.

The next issue of interest in this case study then was to explore Flo's views on how appropriate the curriculum aims are for her learners. Generally, she feels that the MoE curriculum aims are appropriate, but the KNEC curriculum aims are less so. She indicates that in her current school where there is more attempt to follow the MoE curriculum than in her former school, the learners show clear improvement in their development of English language skills. She singles out improvement in the oral skills as being the most evident.

> For me, the curriculum as anticipated could make them better and better speakers of the language of English … In my present school, you know you'd hear the students attempt correct pronunciation … So for me, the child is leaving high school into the tertiary level knowing that this language is spoken this way, that when I'm speaking mother tongue it's different from when I'm speaking English.

The above excerpt suggests that Flo deems the MoE curriculum feasible and helpful to the learners, although the implementation is challenging due to the mixed abilities of the learners, the large class sizes and the focus on examinations. Flo observes that for the MoE curriculum aims to be attained, teachers need to do a lot of work. She notes that:

> the objective is good because it aims to make them competent users of the language, though there are challenges of the huge amount of work that is expected because if you look at English, it is a compulsory subject … we are dealing with various sections and very many students… to an extent it is appropriate but achievable with challenges.

2.2 Flo's Experiences in Implementing the Curriculum

A teacher's ability to implement a curriculum starts with the ability to explain what the curriculum entails and to distinguish it from older curricula. I thus sought to explore what Flo knew about the current English curriculum and how it differed from what had gone before. The powerful influence of the exam system is again evident in her response.

> You know initially, before the curriculum changed to the current one, English entailed three areas: Writing, involving composition where basically the student writes three compositions. One testing the formatted composition, the functional writing, and then the other two were narratives; the student was allowed to narrate a story at their own comfort of course with guidelines. The second area was grammar and comprehension and then the third area was basically literature. But now the new integrated curriculum entails that you can find literature in comprehension so you must have read set books because you may find a text extracted from a set book and they may even set questions outside that particular text for the grammar part and you must have read that set book. So that has confused students a lot. In fact, right now, this is the time that I would say that teachers are settling into understanding the aspect of integration … this change came around 2010, it should be 5 years ago.

As mentioned earlier, her experience is that the new curriculum translates into a fairly heavy workload for teachers and is premised on fully understanding many set books. Flo explained that:

> the expected workload for a teacher of English is around 28 lessons in a week of 40 minutes each. … So it means in a day, a teacher of English like me,

> you'll find that you're walking into different classes at least 6 to 7 of the 9 scheduled lessons in a day. Now, having done the 7 lessons in a day and then you're expected to do one or two extra hours in the evening or sometimes earlier in the morning drilling students for exams, it's too much.

Flo explains that English is assigned six lessons (each lasting 40 minute) per week in the lower classes at the secondary school level (Form 1 and 2) and eight lessons per week for upper classes (Forms 3 and 4). She points to the Ministry recommendations about how to distribute the various skills across the lessons:

> According to the Ministry, the 6 lessons in the lower classes should be 4 for English language and two for oral literature and poetry because at the lower level we teach oral literature up to form two so that the student should be ready to tackle literature set books. Form 3 and 4, they've begun literature set books and because literature is a subject on its own that is integrated into the English language, it is assumed that 4 lessons are meant for literature and 4 lessons are meant for English language.

Flo reiterates the point that in practice the time allocated for ELT, though seemingly a lot, still does not allow for adequate and comfortable coverage of all the language skills and literature. She indicates that in view of this, teachers normally:

> create extra time for the syllabus to be covered … the extra time will last one hour a day, which amounts to 5 h in a week which is more than what is stipulated.

She explained that this extra time is normally created by shortening the lunch break, asking students to come to school earlier than usual in the morning or 'stealing' some time from the games hour (see further details below).

For Flo, a critical aspect of the current secondary ELT curriculum, to which she kept returning, is the issue of literature set books. The frequent change in these set books has a direct bearing on the implementation of the curriculum:

> A set book will last for maybe 3 to 4 years […] It also affects the teacher in that you have three years to internalize the content of each set book, so every year your teaching approach becomes better because you have a better grasp of a text but by the time you feel very comfortable … it is already changed.

> So you are fighting trying to get familiar with the new set book and you have students waiting for you, it becomes a big challenge. …

In terms of support for this ongoing process of change, Flo identified the MoE, Parents' Associations (PAs) and the School administration, as offering different forms of support for varied reasons. The MoE provides support by 'trying to correct this over-reliance on exams'. One way in which they do this is by trying to insist that the syllabus coverage is spread equally over the four years that learners spend in secondary schools, and that it extends to the last week before the examination. In this way, the MoE aims to prevent the rush to cover the four-year syllabus in three or three-and-a-half years, so as to have time in the final year to concentrate on drilling learners for the exams. In addition, the MoE has stopped the ranking of schools and students according to their performance in the KCSE, to try to take public attention away from examination results.

In contrast, the Parents' Associations appear to have aims that are in direct opposition to what the MoE is trying to do. While MoE tries to limit the school day and emphasises completion of the curriculum over all four years, parents support efforts by the school to have the learners come to school earlier and leave later than usual, in order to do extra work to prepare for the examinations. She explains that it is now common in many day schools in Kenya for children to leave their homes at 5 am to be in class by 6 am. This is done with the support of the parents. Flo identifies two reasons why parents support such initiatives, one to do with examinations, and the other with parents' views of school as a 'safe space' for their children to spend time when the adults are not at home to keep an eye on them:

> [First], they want as minimum time with the children as possible so that they can go to work or their own business. … they want the children in school so that the teachers can take care of them. Of course, when a child is in school you know it's the safest place to be in. Then, they still want to celebrate good examination results by their … probably they feel that the more you teach, the more the probability of the child passing the exams.

Although MoE has officially abandoned national league tables, at local level they still exist in various forms. School administrators (particularly the head teachers) therefore collaborate with the Parents Associations to offer support in relation to the passing of exams. They motivate teachers by offering

them lunch at school and other rewards such as sponsored trips. Flo offers an interesting explanation for the administrators' apparent generosity:

> Teachers are offered lunch but of course that goes hand in hand with the time. You see the Ministry's time is one-hour lunch break for the teacher; the examination's curriculum is too tight so that [the school administrators] consider one hour as too much for a teacher to be out for lunch. So they come up with, "okay fine, for us to meet the examination needs, we need to use 40 minutes of this one hour, so let's go for 20 minutes lunch." So how do you manage to have everyone out for 20 minutes and back? You provide them with lunch; they don't have to go out. They can take 20 minutes having their lunch and spend the rest of the time on extra teaching.

Other forms of support also associated with support for the exam focus include:

> seminars for teachers and students, motivational speakers for the students, providing a good menu for the teachers and even students, so all that comes in form of motivation.

Thus, the Ministry's efforts to support the implementation of a skills-based curriculum for all, seem not to resonate with schools and the wider community for whom it is exam success that counts. Flo also mentioned some other barriers, hindrances or challenges to implementation of the MoE curriculum. The main one repeatedly cited was the heavy workload. Another was the effect of the emphasis on passing examinations on how learners view learning. The exam focus puts the learners under pressure to please the school administrators, teachers and parents by passing. This hinders their concentration on 'true learning of the type expected by the MoE' as all their attention shifts to what will be of immediate relevance to the exams. She says:

> when a teacher goes to class with any question and tells them this is the exam, and you'll get their attention because they are expecting that, that will make them pass. So I think that it is the exam pressure that is a major challenge.

Finally, Flo identifies teachers' lack of understanding of the concept of integration, resulting from inappropriate pre-service and lack of in-service training, as another major barrier to implementation of the curriculum.

2.3 Flo's Views on the Benefits of the Curriculum to Her and Her Learners

The challenges associated with the coping with change notwithstanding, Flo feels that the greater emphasis on oral proficiency and the exposure to the set books have enabled both teacher and learner learning. For herself, she identified an improvement in her pronunciation of a wider range of words, resulting from the current curriculum emphasis on the teaching of oral skills; hence, the greater need for the teacher to be able to model correct pronunciation. She noted that:

> As a teacher, to avoid making mistakes, it takes you actually back to research, you have to go back to learn the correct pronunciation … before that, nobody cared about how you pronounced words, but right now it's very important because there are some words that are pronounced the same way, but written totally differently. Yeah, like in high school, I didn't know that the word flower and flour is the same but you know with change in curriculum, you realize that you need to emphasize on the pronunciation of words and you need to teach it correctly for the child not to make a mistake.

It is notable here that the teacher focuses more on what could be called mechanical aspects of oral proficiency than on assisting students to gain fluency across a range of relevant interactions. This could however again be attributed to the need to bear in mind what is likely to be tested in the examinations, which emphasise formal features of oral English over fluency.

In addition to having more opportunities to develop their oral skills, which were not covered in the previous curriculum, Flo pointed out further benefits for student learning arising from the implementation of the new curriculum:

> There is more emphasis on functional writing, oral literature, etiquette and more. Students are able to practice and integrate these skills. They also tend to have a better attitude towards comprehension while in the past students were a bit lazy towards reading…They also tend to do better in exams generally because they're sure of what they're expecting in what paper. They know, "I'm going to sit for paper one and I'm supposed to prepare for functional writing or oral skills … they're able to predict, even poetry. They know that poems in paper one will test nothing but sound patterns. So they're able to go an exam room comfortably knowing that this is what I'm going to tackle.

Although the above quote again suggests the learning of 'exam skills', Flo believes that the curriculum change and the classroom practices that it has introduced have helped raised learners' awareness of English as a language rather than just a subject, and so of the importance of developing their ability to use the language.

Flo also mentioned personal learning resulting from the need, as an English teacher, to read the frequently changing set books. She noted that an English teacher now 'has an experience with different set books by different authors every 3–4 years to appreciate their writings'. This was not so previously, when teachers tended to specialise either in the language skills or literature. The new curriculum has therefore 'forced' English teachers to master both aspects of language study, since they both now need to be taught and examined in an integrated manner.

2.4 Teacher's Views on Possible Improvements and Overall Reflections

Flo identified the need to offer a curriculum that does not put teachers and learners under pressure to complete the syllabus quickly in order to 'drill' for exams.

> I'd like to see a situation where a child is given the opportunity to enjoy the subject, not look at it as an examination subject but as a language that will be of importance to them so that we will not have a situation where they do form four and while out there looking for jobs, when they're told to write an application letter' they call me, "madam, I've got an opportunity to attend an interview, I'm supposed to be submitting my curriculum vitae and I'm supposed to send it through an email, what do I do? … So for me, I'd appreciate a situation where the child is able to practically express themselves.

In the above statement, Flo appears to suggest that despite its focus on communication, the current EL curriculum as implemented in schools does not effectively prepare students for the communicative tasks that they are likely to encounter after school and for using English in their later lives. She pointed out that MoE curriculum aims were well intended. However, they were overshadowed by too much emphasis on examinations, which in turn contributes to the numbers dropping out of school. Her statement is captured in the excerpt below:

> My general feeling is that at the end of the day even though it is very difficult, the Ministry curriculum should prevail. It should prevail because at the very end of the day, my very genuine opinion is that we're dealing with students at different levels with very different intelligence capabilities and therefore we should treat them as such, so that we are not scrambling for one particular exam … the exam pressure needs to be reduced for the curriculum to be effectively implemented so that the child benefits… then our children will not run away from school, we will have more in these institutions.

Overall, Flo gave a passionate and candid account of her experiences in coping with the English curriculum change in Kenyan secondary schools. Several pertinent themes can be discerned from this story, which may also be relevant to ELT curriculum change in other contexts, as analysed further below.

3 Discussion

Four interconnected themes emerge from Flo's story of coping with the curriculum change in ELT as presented above. These are: teachers' confusion about the concept of integration emphasised in the new curriculum, the centrality of set books in the new curriculum, the inconsistency between the MoE curriculum aims and the contextual realities, and the issues of examination pressure. Two further linked questions emerge. Firstly, whether/how opportunities could be provided for teachers' voices to be heard before final decisions about English curriculum change and implementation planning are made. Secondly, whether/how the teacher is supported, at both pre- and in-service stages of teacher education, to cope with the process of curriculum implementation. In the rest of this discussion, I briefly discuss these themes with reference to relevant literature.

The concept of integration appears to be a major challenge to English teachers in Kenya. As clearly stated by Flo, during the interview, 'it is quite confusing'. The gist of this concept as captured by KIE (2002: 3) is that 'Integration means merging two autonomous but related entities in order to strengthen and enrich both', and however, almost 15 years later, KIE have still failed to elaborate on its classroom implications and how these might be carried out in practice.

The *Integrated approach* has some similarities with what Richards and Rodgers (2001: 109) call the Whole Language Approach. They define this as 'an approach based on key principles about language (language is a whole)

and the skills (writing, reading, listening and speaking) should be integrated in learning'.

Some Kenyan writers have also written in support of the integrated approach as conceived in Kenya. For example, Gathumbi and Masembe (2005) argue that the:

> integrated approach to language teaching considers language and literature as integral parts of a single subject matter in which Literature is treated as an integral part of English language usage; while language is reinforced, sensitised and enriched meaningfully by good literature. (p. 145)

The confusion referred to by Flo appears to be that, while in the ELT literature, *integration* (a whole language approach) is conceived as involving the integrated teaching of different language skills (Richards and Rogers 2014), in the Kenyan context, the integrated approach has been interpreted to mean enabling the above through integrating both language and literature. Such an approach represents a complex starting point for any English teacher, and it is discernible that Flo and other Kenyan teachers have not been clearly inducted into this concept either during their initial ELTE or through appropriate in-service support. Thus, they continue to find its implementation problematic.

This exemplifies a wider national picture in which the content and process of ELTE fails to prepare trainee English teachers for what the ELT curriculum expects them to be able to do once they are appointed. Clearly, greater 'fit' between curriculum aims and initial English language teacher education is necessary if new teachers are to become able to implement the Kenyan version of an integrated curriculum. Better and more regular communication between MoE and university ELTE providers might enable such 'fit' to begin to occur. In addition, where curriculum change poses new demands on classroom practice that teachers may not have been prepared for during their initial ELTE, in-service provision, appropriate induction into the changes is extremely crucial (Ong'ondo 2010). This was not provided after the curriculum change in 2010–2011.

Related to the concept of integration is the centrality of set books in the ELT curriculum. This set-book-based approach to teaching and examining English has not featured very prominently in ELT literature. Nevertheless, it appears to draw from the general tenets of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), especially the emphasis on including materials and procedures (for writing and/or reading) which use authentic language (literature), as a means of supporting the development of learners' communicative

competence (Savignon 2002). The challenge for teachers, as previously mentioned, is that neither their initial training nor any in-service provision provides opportunities for them to discuss the rationale for this approach, or to understand how to use the set texts as sources of authentic language use from which they can develop activities for classroom skill learning.

Two key issues around the set books pose further challenges for the teacher. Firstly, since they are changed regularly, teachers must read a set of five new books every three to four years and master them both in term of content and literary features and in terms of the kind of language skills that might be tested from them. This probably explains why the teachers, as Flo points out, consider the frequent change in set books as a kind of regular curriculum change and as an addition to their workload.

The second issue in relation to set books is that every examination paper in the KCSE is directly or indirectly based on them. The exam draws questions from all five texts, but the students are free to answer questions based on three of them—two (compulsory in every exam as stated in advance) and one more from the other three. The teachers coping strategy is to gear their teaching of the set books closely to this reality by teaching only the two compulsory texts and one optional one.

This appears to distort the intentions of the MoE curriculum, since the aim of exposing secondary EL students to five set texts is not really achieved. The inconsistency between the MoE aims for the new curriculum and her local teaching and learning context, which emphasises exam success, features prominently in Flo's story. It seems that in any context where examination results exert strong pressure on learners, teachers, heads and examination administrators, and are taken as the measure of successful teaching, national curriculum change planning needs to actively involve the bodies that preside over exams, so that curriculum and assessment aims can be discussed and aligned to be consistent with one another. Here too therefore it seems that the communication systems between MoE and KNEC need to be reconsidered, in order to begin to minimise the conflicting messages about the purpose of learning English that they currently send to teachers and their local communities in Kenya.

4 Conclusion

The overarching issue emerging from Flo's story is the lack of connectedness and communication between the semi-autonomous partners within the MoE, responsible for the provision and assessment of English in Kenya.

At national level, these include the curriculum developers (KICD) within the MOE, those responsible for examinations (KNEC), and those responsible for supervising the performance of Teacher Education institutions. In addition, national policies which mean that English examination results are important 'gatekeepers' for progress through each level of the education system, put community pressure on teachers to prepare students to pass.

The outcome is that practising teachers have to negotiate a set of conflicting pressures and inconsistent messages. Despite the lack of modelling or preparation either during their ELTE or later, they are expected to implement a curriculum which aims to enhance learners' communicative competence, through integrating skills development and literature teaching. They are expected to cope with changes to part of the curriculum content every few years as the set books change. Meanwhile, if they wish to be considered 'good teachers' and successfully earn their promotion, they have also to consider the expectations of those in their schools and community who urge them to emphasise preparation of students to pass a KCSE exam whose content and format is not fully consistent with the curriculum aims.

In such circumstances, Flo and similar secondary level English teachers seem to have little alternative but to struggle to cope as best as they can with the situation that exists, making it unlikely that the communication-based goals of the curriculum will be fully achieved. Until there is greater coherence, dialogue and shared purpose between the various national 'partners' whose policies determine the national ELT landscape, the inconsistency between the 'parts' of that landscape (Wedell 2013) will continue to make Kenyan English teachers' daily working lives more pressured and complex than they need to be.

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9

Giving English Teachers Autonomy and Choice: Coping with Curriculum Change in Poland

Małgorzata Tetiurka

This chapter begins by discussing the main changes to English language teaching that have taken place in Poland since 1998. The second section tells the story of one Polish teacher's experiences of trying to implement the most recent of these changes. The chapter concludes with a discussion of what her experiences suggest about factors which may help or hinder English teachers' attempts to implement curriculum change.

The tradition of foreign language teaching in Poland has been a long-standing one (Komorowska 2013) riddled with frequent policy changes over many decades. One of the most significant changes was the introduction in 1998 of a whole comprehensive programme of radical school system reforms called Nowa Szkoła (New School), in anticipation of Poland becoming a member of the European Union. It aimed at decentralising the school system (Szymański 2001) and promoted a completely new philosophy of teaching, with learners being partners in the process of planning and implementation of the new paradigm. There were also changes in the number of years of compulsory primary education and assessment.

The new Core Curriculum provided a very general outline for foreign languages but highlighted speaking and listening as crucial language skills and emphasised the role of motivation in the language learning process. For the first time, teachers could choose their own course books rather than follow

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M. Wedell and L. Grassick (eds.), *International Perspectives on Teachers Living with Curriculum Change*, International Perspectives on English Language Teaching,
https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-54309-7_9

the single one approved by the Ministry of Education. There was also a pool of ministry-approved syllabi which teachers could choose from and new externally graded national secondary school leaving examinations (matura) replaced the previous entrance examinations to universities.

Alexander (2003), who researched teachers' attitudes to the above reform, identified a number of concerns teachers felt. They reported lack of information about the reform, lack of support from school authorities, strong concern about the new approach to assessment, focusing on what pupils could do rather than what they could not, for which teachers felt they were not prepared and the new external examination (matura) which, in a way, was also a test of their success as teachers. They also felt lost in the sudden abundance of course books and syllabi to choose from (Alexander 2003; Komorowska 2007). Many English teachers were requalifying former teachers of Russian who had to embrace new methods and approaches, making a switch from focus on form formalised teaching to focus on meaning communicative approach. For a number of others, newly qualified teachers of English, often graduates of Teacher Training Colleges (Fisiak 1992; Komorowska 2012), long years of learning Russian following grammar-translation method threatened to outweigh the impact of pre-service communicative training (Fives and Buehl 2010, 2012; Gabryś-Baker 2010).

Gradually, however, with the help of training, provided mainly through national INSETT Project run jointly by the Ministry of Education and the British Council, teachers started to embrace the change (Gorzelak 2002; Szyszkowiak 1998).

Ten years later, in 2008, another school reform was announced, with another Core curriculum, which, to avoid confusion, is now often referred to as the New Core Curriculum. One of the main differences between the old and new curricula was that the learning outcomes at secondary levels were integrated so as to minimise repetition across school grades and reduce content overload. Learning outcomes are formulated jointly for the two stages of secondary education (lower-secondary and upper-secondary). On completion of secondary education students should have:

- acquired a body of knowledge covering facts, rules, theories and practices
- acquired the ability to use the knowledge gained to carry out tasks and solve problems
- developed attitudes which are necessary for efficient and responsible functioning in the modern world

(Podstawa programowa z komentarzami. 2008. Tom 3. Języki obce w szkole podstawowej, gimnazjum i liceum:16)

An important argument justifying this reform just ten years after the previous one was that the percentage of young people continuing their education at tertiary level had risen so dramatically (which was one of the aims of the previous reform) that it must be reflected in the teaching programmes, which had originally been prepared with only 50% of the most able learners in mind (Marciniak 2009).

The skills that learners are expected to acquire during their secondary education reflect the key competencies for lifelong learning recommended by the European Parliament and the Council of Europe (cf. Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of Europe on key competences for lifelong learning 2006).

The 2008 reform introduced mandatory foreign language from grade 1 of primary education (at 6 years of age), with a second foreign language introduced at lower secondary level (at the age of 11). The language introduced first should be continued throughout the whole education (The System of Education in Poland 2014), which means 12 years of continuous instruction. The latest regulation (Rozporządzenie Ministra Edukacji Narodowej 2014) announces the introduction of a compulsory foreign language at a kindergarten level from the age of 3, which places Poland among the avant-garde of state sponsored foreign language teaching in Europe, with only the German-speaking Community of Belgium and 10 out of 17 Autonomous Communities of Spain starting a foreign language at such an early age (Baidak et al. 2012).

The new Core Curriculum for English refers to the levels described in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Rada Europy 2003). Students are expected to understand spoken and written language, to produce spoken and written texts, to react appropriately, both orally and in writing, to communicative situations and to change the oral form of a text into a written one and vice versa. (*Podstawa programowa z komentarzami. Tom 3. Języki obce w szkole podstawowej, gimnazjum i lyceum: 35)* The curriculum also mentions less measurable aims, such as self-assessment, teamwork, using foreign language resources and information technology, using communicative strategies and developing language awareness (*Podstawa programowa z komentarzami. Tom 3. Języki obce w szkole podstawowej, gimnazjum i liceum: 41).*

The reform has given teachers unprecedented freedom and autonomy (Komorowska 2000). They are free to choose the textbook from an extensive list approved by the Ministry of Education. They can also choose not to follow any particular course book. They can decide teaching and internal assessment methods and are free to introduce innovative teaching methods and choose whatever syllabi they find suitable, to be approved by the school head.

This brief overview of the transformations that the recent reform entailed indicates the scope of change regarding the system, the pupils, the teachers, the teaching and the exams, that all players in the game have had to undergo. McIntyre and Jones (2014) claim that 'within language teaching, change is a constant' (p. 26). But change is also a very complex notion: for a change in practices to become stable, it requires a change in beliefs, both conscious (explicit) and implicit or tacit (Fives and Buehl 2012: 471). Change also takes time. Birzea in Polyzoi et al. (2003) suggests that it may take a generation or more to really begin to feel comfortable with 'personal autonomy'. Change is 'a process and not just a product' (Bolitho 2012) and teachers, who are often 'the target' and 'front-line change agents […] need to be involved in the project from the earliest possible stage and inspired to take ownership of the change' (Bolitho 2012: 44). This was not the case in Poland. A top-down (Wedell 2009), power-coercive approach (Chin and Benne 1969) to change was adopted.

In the next section, I describe how one English language teacher from a school in an average-sized town perceives the New Core Curriculum reform and how she copes with its demands on a daily basis. Through this case study, I aim to highlight how the lack of support this teacher has experienced has influenced how she has dealt with the new Curriculum. It is hoped that this focus on one teacher will provide a particular picture of change in a particular context and may resonate with the change experience of teachers in other contexts both in Poland and elsewhere.

1 The Case Study

The teacher for the study has been selected to be a typical representative (Duff in Mackey and Guss 2012) of the teaching profession at a secondary level in Poland. A typical secondary teacher of English is female, in her late thirties, with an MA degree in English (Zarębska 2011).

1.1 Coping with the Change: A Teacher's Perspective

Michalina (pseudonym) is a teacher of English with over 20 years of teaching experience. She obtained a university diploma having completed a 5-year MA programme, the only way into a teaching profession at that time. She has been teaching learners aged 15–18 in two different secondary schools in her career, both non-profit and fee-paying institutions, which started mushrooming after 1989 and soon became a popular option for parents

concerned about their children's education and prepared to pay a monthly fee in return for a smaller class size or more hours of a foreign language. She is also an examiner for lower- and upper-secondary school leaving exams.

1.2 The Reality of Greater Autonomy for Teachers

Michalina admits that when she first saw the New Core Curriculum she felt relieved as she considered it 'easier' than the previous one. She saw it as being less prescriptive and giving the teacher more freedom. 'I thought: not bad. Not prescriptive. Not grammar based. No lists of grammar points to cover. Fine'.

She welcomed the fact that the New Curriculum listed a set of skills or key competencies to be achieved, leaving to the teacher the selection of the teaching content, the method and the choice of the teaching programme appropriate for any particular group of students. It was a big change, which she saw as positive as it gave the teacher more agency.

Soon, however, as she puts it, she realised it was 'a trap'. More freedom meant more responsibility and more work for the teacher.

> Then, to my horror, I realised that it was a trap. Now I have to flesh out the syllabus with the content. And then someone will come and check how well I did it. My first impression of the New Curriculum was wrong.

What she means is that although the new reform gave the teachers the freedom and choice as far as materials and methods are concerned, at the end of the day all students have to take the same standardised, external, national and high-stake test. Michalina admits that with her workload and no specific training in the area, despite her 20-year teaching experience, she feels neither confident enough nor capable of designing her own syllabus.

> I have never written a syllabus. I wouldn't know where to start. Ok, it's not really true, I've been teaching for so many years that I probably would manage… but where one finds the time? With all these hours I teach…

In her day-to-day teaching, she is guided by the course book she uses and matura (the school leaving exam) requirements, which are listed in a separate document available on Central Examination Board's website.

> They [course books] are written by experts and they know their job. And they are in agreement with the Core Curriculum, so I don't have to worry I'm missing something.

Michalina supposes most of the other teachers do the same, one reason being the very general character of the language used to describe the required competencies and a lack of examples clarifying them. She understands the rationale behind the lack of examples: the danger of being too prescriptive. However, she finds the lack of specificity and precision of the current Curriculum fairly disturbing as she does not feel competent enough, even given her teaching expertise, to fill it up with content.

> It (Core Curriculum) sounds very nice: 'A pupil produces short, simple, comprehensible oral utterances'. But what does it really mean? Everybody can understand it differently. But they (pupils) all have to take matura exam.

Relying on published course books seems much less risky and is definitely less time consuming. She can hardly be blamed for this. It is understandable that without getting any support teachers feel anxious about the creative freedom afforded them in the new Curriculum. Following prescribed content in textbooks reduces risk and anxiety caused by the responsibility for the final results they feel.

Michalina recollects that in the past she used to introduce a lot of 'outside the protocol' forms, e.g. nursery rhymes, to teach the language, the culture and the phonetics. Nowadays, she feels the new Core Curriculum does not allow for such luxury of 'messing around'. Paradoxically, although the curriculum aims are based around the idea of communication, in reality the strict competency framework seems to foster tight, prescriptive teaching and learning focused on memorising set phrases needed for the exam.

A very unwelcome result of the reform which Michalina mentions is a massive increase in school bureaucracy, which leaves teachers with very little time and energy for creative approach to teaching.

> We're flooded by paperwork. Writing plans for the semester, for the year, assessment criteria, action plans for failing students, differentiation schemes, CPD plans, opinions, reports …it's much worse than it used to be. It saps your energy.

1.3 The Reality of Greater Autonomy for Students

Michalina states that the new Core Curriculum requires students to be more independent autonomous learners. It is a teacher's role to prepare them to be so. However, she sees two problems here, neither of which is of linguistic nature. Firstly, a lot of secondary students do not seem to be ready

for independence. They expect to be told what to do rather than explore learning on their own. This might be due to home upbringing, with over-protective parents making up for lack of time for family life by solving problems for their children or by the Polish system of education with its long tradition of prescriptive teaching. It appears that there is a lack of recognition by policy makers of the reality of the Polish classroom and school context. As this emphasis in the curriculum on autonomy is present for all subjects, not only English, teachers of other subjects are also confronted with this problem. Michalina says:

> I can see some light in the tunnel. But it takes time and a lot of work to spark a change in student's attitude.

The attempts to develop more autonomous learners are made more difficult, Michalina believes, by the fact that a number of young teachers who have entered the profession recently are not independent thinkers themselves. These new teachers seem to be victims of the very same system they have become part of now, but on the other side of the barricade.

> For new young teachers, who come to schools having been educated according to the new system, because I come across such teachers as well, language does not function as a rich whole, they have fragmented view of the language. I can't help thinking that they won't be able to teach how to use the language independently.

The Bologna process rendered English studies fragmented: what used to be a 5-year programme is now divided into a 3-year BA course and a 2-year MA programme. The last year of both programmes is mainly devoted to writing a thesis. Besides, universities make their own autonomous decisions about the content of their programmes and often ignore current changes to the Polish education system on the grounds that changes happen so often there is no guarantee the same rules will be in place when student–teachers start their teaching careers. Thus, many young teachers find out about current curricula, syllabi and exams on the job. Michalina believes that young teachers' preparation for their job currently leaves much to be desired.

> I know I sound awful, but we were much better prepared for the job than they are. We could see the language as a system, with all its intricacies. They can't. They're happy with the bare minimum, they take the path of least resistance. If, while brainstorming, they have two options, that's enough for them.

Although research into the impact of pre-service language teacher education is inconclusive (cf. Borg 2014), understandably, it takes novice teachers time to absorb new concepts while struggling with a new working environment at the same time.

Old habits die hard and thus, point nine of the Core Curriculum for foreign languages at secondary level which says 'a student (…) uses techniques of independent language work (e.g. using a dictionary, self-correcting mistakes, making notes, remembering new vocabulary, using culture texts in a foreign language)' (*Podstawa programowa z komentarzami. Tom 3. Języki obce w szkole podstawowej, gimnazjum i liceum: 54*) remains mainly a piece of paper. 'I fight my daily battle to encourage them to be independent, but it's not just because of the new reform. This is what I've always been doing. But it's getting harder and harder now'.

Michalina also noticed that training students to self-assess (point nine of the Core Curriculum, *Podstawa programowa z komentarzami. Tom 3. Języki obce w szkole podstawowej, gimnazjum i lyceum: 54)* is also a demanding task for the teacher because learners nowadays do not like to take the risk connected with giving the wrong answer. They prefer to leave the task unanswered, possibly for fear of losing face. They seem to see learning being 'right or wrong', which resembles the old system rather than open and creative learning as the curriculum suggests. Michalina says:

> I keep telling them that such behaviour can lead to poor matura results, where every point matters. They should always give an answer; the chances are this will be the correct one.

1.4 Lack of Familiarity with the Curriculum

Michalina also confesses, with slight embarrassment, that she is not as familiar with the Core Curriculum as she thinks she should be.

> I'm ashamed to admit that I saw the Core Curriculum, first thought it was an easy one, but then when I realised it's so general that it can't be practical, I slightly ignored it.

According to the ministerial regulations, the Core Curriculum is the main document that should lead every teacher's teaching. It is every teacher's responsibility to ensure that all the students achieve all the requirements listed in it. While planning their teaching, teachers are obliged to make detailed references to the Core Curriculum requirements. However, the high

level of generality of the Core Curriculum statements makes it hardly useful in day-to-day school planning and teaching. Therefore, Michalina chooses to trust the course books, which nowadays provide references to the Core Curriculum in the list of contents, a book map or even next to individual activities.

It is not only Michalina who lacks knowledge about the curriculum but also students and parents seem to be unaware of what the documents guiding learning include. While running in-service teacher training sessions soon after the Core Curriculum was introduced, I asked nearly 60 teachers present at different workshops if they had read the Core Curriculum to their pupils or informed the parents about its content. None of the teachers had seen it necessary or appropriate, but on my suggestion agreed that it could be a good idea to share the content of the document guiding education process with pupils and parents who should be partners in this process.

1.5 Little Change Despite the Curriculum Rhetoric

The current teaching leaves learners with a very fragmented view of the language. Despite the fact that nowadays many learners enter secondary education having studied English for nine years, they do not see it as a system governed by principles but rather as a set of separate 'blocks' which they are supposed to manipulate.

> They start learning English younger and younger … when they are in their best years to learn it …but they don't have the perception of the whole language. They learn whole lists of words by heart, they shoot these words at the teacher but they don't feel the language.

The fact that the Core Curriculum is written in a form of a checklist of skills to master creates the danger of students ticking off items on their lists. She gives an example of the Core Curriculum requirement 'a learner can react in writing in a typical situation (…) expressing emotions (e.g. joy, dissatisfaction, surprise)' (*Podstawa programowa z komentarzami. Tom 3. Języki obce w szkole podstawowej, gimnazjum i lyceum: 46*). Learners usually know one or two phrases 'matching' the requirement, which they use each time they need to express joy or satisfaction. This renders learning a foreign language far from creative. It resembles more regurgitation of prefabricated elements rather than independent language use.

> I have no opportunity to explain the difference, for example between *It's kind of you* and *It's my pleasure*. I can't explain why we use the passive voice. English is such a social language. Little nuances matter. But the course books stopped being English-oriented, they're multiculture…they're global …it's fine, but we're not immersed in real language.

1.6 The Influence of the Matura Exam

Michalina has no doubt that the matura exam is to be blamed for the above approach to learning. Students know what the minimal requirements to pass the exam are and are often not bothered to learn more.

> They (pupils) know they can't fail. When they know they've learnt the bare minimum necessary to pass, lots of them lose interest.

To pass the matura at standard level, students need to get 30 per cent, which is really not demanding, bearing in mind they have studied English for at least 6 years. Extended level, which is optional, is chosen by 20 to 50 per cent of student population according to Central Examination Board reports (CKE 2014).

English remains yet another subject on the timetable rather than a life skill. Even though the communicative approach is the declared mode of instruction, the output is not much different to what used to be the case in a more grammar-translation context—students knew how to respond using learned forms, but if they were asked to use language in a 'natural' uncontrolled way, they could not.

When it comes to the matura, Michalina admits that this is what influences her teaching the most. 'I know it's my responsibility to make sure they pass the matura well'.

Good matura results are in everybody's interest. Obviously, the main stakeholders are students and their parents, but school authorities and local educational authorities also judge teachers by their results, meaning that the final year in upper-secondary school is usually devoted to Matura preparation.

Michalina says that this is the point where the Core Curriculum and the Matura preparation go separate ways. The Core Curriculum (2008:63) advocates fluency over accuracy:

> The main aim of language instruction is the ability to communicate effectively in a foreign language, both orally and in writing. The emphasis then is on

> the ability to achieve different communicative aims; and accuracy, however important, is not the primary educational aim.

It does not mention teaching grammar overtly. All it says is 'a student uses language means (lexical, grammatical, orthographic and phonetic) enabling him/her to achieve other requirements within thematic units' (*Podstawa programowa z komentarzami. Tom 3. Języki obce w szkole podstawowej, gimnazjum i lyceum: 47*). However, *Informator o egzaminie maturalnym z języka angielskiego,* a document published yearly by Central Examination Board, describing the matura exam, contains a long list of grammar points, typical of B2 level. As an in-service teacher trainer, I am frequently asked about where to find this list as it is not easy to locate. Teachers' requests suggest that they welcome such lists. Since many of them have not been offered any help or support in implementing the paradigm recommended by the New Core Curriculum, it should not be surprising if some are keen to revert to an educational culture of transmission-based knowledge.

Michalina agrees that sound grammar knowledge is a prerequisite to successful accomplishment of matura tasks, especially the written part, where accuracy does matter.

> How can they understand a written text if they don't know grammar? At a higher level they need to be able to understand the subtle differences to get the meaning.

As an example, she gives a sentence 'She must be joking'. If students do not understand the function of 'must' in this sentence, they will not be able to answer a multiple choice comprehension question correctly. Closed questions (multiple choice, gap fill and matching) constitute most of the matura exam.

Even though nowadays students take an external exam at the end of each educational stage (at the age of 11, 14 and 17) and all these three exams have a relatively similar format, exam strategies still pose a huge challenge for students. Teaching exam strategies, though not included in the Core Curriculum, is thus something Michalina spends quite a lot of time doing. She supposes learners need such training because of their shrinking attention span and inability to concentrate on any one task for a longer period of time.

> They read very carelessly. They notice one word, which seems to be suggesting a certain answer and they go for it. They can't be bothered to read the rest of the text. I spend hours telling them about distractors in tests.

She sees it as the price the younger generation pays for growing up in a modern, technology-driven world. Trying to address this spreading deficiency, exam writers prepare ever shorter reading texts and divide what used to be one longer task into several shorter ones. However, Michalina claims that for some students even concentrating on reading a task instruction seems too demanding. As a result, she spends quite a lot of lesson time finding ways to address the issue of exam strategies. 'I have the feeling this time is in a way wasted. I can't see how test solving strategies can help in real life. But I owe it to them, don't I?'

Michalina realises, she and her students are victims of the incoherence between the different parts of the ELT system (i.e. exams and the curriculum) but she cannot see a way out.

1.7 Dependence on Course Books

As has already been mentioned, Michalina trusts her course books to lead her. She usually uses British rather than Polish course books. Before choosing a course book, she checks carefully that the book is written in agreement with the new Core Curriculum, and it promises to prepare for the success in matura exam. Afterwards, she follows the book to the letter, supplementing it with extra grammar and vocabulary exercises when she sees appropriate. Having a course book not only gives her a sense of security but also creates pressure to 'cover' the book within a school year.

> Course books are a trap in a way, too. You feel you need to cover everything that's in it. They're so expensive that if you skip some material, it feels like money down the drain.

This is also a remnant of the old system in which there was just one book available, and everybody was supposed to complete it within an academic year. Nowadays, books have a different amount of content, students have different numbers of hours per week, classes are bigger or smaller and students are more or less able, yet there remains this deeply rooted conviction that a course book must be done in a year. Old habits die hard.

1.8 Influence of Parents

Polish parents usually have very firm views on what good teaching of a foreign language should look like, and they do not hesitate to share these insights with teachers.

> They come to you and they tell you how you should teach. They know all about it because they were learning a language once too. It doesn't matter that it didn't really work for them. Had they studied more, it would have worked. Especially if you're a young teacher, you are offered advice or told what to do.

Many parents still think of language learning as being a tangible accumulation of knowledge rather than an ongoing process of skill development through practice over time. Compared to teachers of other subjects, parents seem to feel freer to criticise teachers of English for their methods and/or offer advice on how to teach English best based on their own experiences as language learners. The existing educational culture combined with a national demographic decline (which means that a student and his parents are increasingly seen as precious customers) puts teachers under a lot of pressure. To avoid repercussions, they may choose to conform to parental pressure, even if it means acting against their convictions. While on the one hand parents expect long wordlists to be learnt by heart, they also have great faith in modern technology. Even parents with modest budgets are prepared to invest in new technological tools, which supposedly should enable better language learning.

> They buy computers, tablets, programmes. They themselves didn't have such tools when they were young, so in a way, they want to give their children all the best things possible. But just having a computer doesn't make you a better speaker of a foreign language. You need to make some effort to use it for learning.

When their investment in their children shows no visible results, parents put the blame on the teacher, her methods and the teaching programme.

1.9 Support Provided for Teachers

Michalina cannot recollect any particular professional training connected with the introduction of the Core Curriculum. She does report though that all meetings with publishers had been dominated by the reform long before it started.

> Publishers were preparing us for the changes for a long time. We knew from them rather than from schools that changes are coming and that the New Core Curriculum would be introduced.

The main purpose of such meetings was to illustrate to what extent a new (or renovated) title was compatible with the Core Curriculum. When asked, Michalina could not think what support she would have benefitted from when the reform was being introduced. 'What training was I expecting? I've never really thought about it …'

This response suggests that Michalina, similarly to other teachers, is used to being left on her own with new regulations, reforms and changes and that, apart from the provision of new course books, she was left to muddle through the reform on her own.

The following section discusses the case of Michalina in the broader perspective of curriculum change, highlighting the conditions which have helped and hindered Michalina's implementation of the New Core Curriculum.

2 Coping with Change

Michalina is definitely not an average teacher, and there must be teachers who are finding coping with the reform much harder than Michalina (Paczuska and Szpotowicz 2014). There are probably also others who have embraced the reform more successfully: teaching less for the exam, more for real life, motivating students more efficiently and getting better results. However, Michalina's comments provide a very revealing insight into the post-reform Polish school reality.

Her attitude towards the reform is probably quite typical. She did not know much about the reform to start with, since the decision to introduce the New Core Curriculum was made with only minimal consultation. She must have attended (though she cannot remember it) at least one conference before the reform started because the Ministry of Education did organise a nationwide campaign, to provide local training for all Polish teachers.

However, these conferences were prepared in haste, and all the presenters (trainers from local in-service teacher training institutions) were given the same centrally prepared slides to base their training on. The timing coincided with the busiest time at the end of a school year when teachers have a lot of paperwork, writing up certificates and reports. The conferences, which lasted 4 or 5 hours, were attended by all the teachers working in a given school and hence were not subject specific. They only addressed very general, procedural issues.

The fact that Michalina did not even remember attending such a conference suggests that the Ministry of Education, by failing to make this limited

initial support relevant to teachers' subject-specific needs, lost the chance of attracting teachers to the idea of the reform. Head teachers, intermediaries between the Ministry of Education and school teachers, were also mainly concerned with the technical aspects of implementing such a big reform and had not been prepared to provide all teachers with the support they needed.

Similarly, no effort was made to communicate the reform rationale to other key stakeholders, namely parents. Karavas (2014) sees parents' role as crucial in shaping learners' attitudes and describes an awareness-raising campaign for parents as an important step contributing to the success of educational reform in Greece.

Hard copies of the Core Curriculum for each subject were sent to all schools. Electronic versions were available on the ministerial website. Teachers were told what to do but not how to do it. The ministry focused on 'product development, legislation and other on-paper changes' (Fullan 2001: 70) but not on 'what people did or did not do' (Fullan 2001: 70). There was no attempt at 'reculturing' (Fullan 2007) any of the people involved in the reform (such as teachers, students and parents), towards developing expectations about (language) education that were more consistent with curriculum aims). No atmosphere was built among teachers for 'cooperation and collaboration in order to create a sense of ownership such that all members feel that they are contributing to the innovative process' (De Lano et al. 1994: 491).

Unsurprisingly, many teachers, like Michalina, showed little enthusiasm for the changes that were imposed on them. Possibly, they still had not quite recovered from the previous, much more, revolutionary reform in 1998 (Alexander 2003).

It seems surprising that Michalina, with so much teaching experience and in such a high position, relied heavily on course books to guide her change implementation. Although over-reliance on course books is sometimes criticised for creating 'dependency culture' (Hutchinson and Torres 1996: 315) and reducing 'the teacher's role to one of managing or overseeing a preplanned event' (Littlejohn in Hutchinson and Torres 1996, Swan 1992), others see course books as supportive 'agents of change' (Hutchinson and Torres 1996: 323). They not only save teachers from having to design new materials on a daily basis but also introduce changes gradually in a structured way and provide a complete picture of what a change will look like, so relieving teachers of the burden of responsibility for introducing changes they may not yet be comfortable with themselves.

Interestingly, apart from this initial ministerial information campaign, no other initiatives were undertaken centrally to familiarise teachers with the

new requirements. The 1998 reform had been accompanied by more support initiatives, extending long after the introduction of the reform.

Research suggests a number of possible reasons for this lack of support (see for example De Lano et al. 1994; Waters 2009; Wedell 2003; Woods 2012). One might be that policy makers and change planners were not fully aware of the extent of behaviour change that the reform implementation entailed, for teachers and their students, and so little understanding that substantial support was actually needed. Alternatively, there may have been insufficient funding for ongoing professional support. As often reported (Bolitho 2012; Leather 2012; Wall 1996; Woods 2012), shortage of funding will complicate the process of change, may prolong it and can lead to abandoning part or all of it.

Volume 3 of the new Core Curriculum, which is devoted to foreign languages, sensibly recommends that teachers become familiar not only with the curriculum for the level they teach but also the level below and the level above. This is to guarantee that teachers are aware what they can expect from students who enter their level and, similarly, that they know what will be expected of their students at the level above. Michalina (and presumably many other teachers) had never read the curriculum document, suggesting that if the government really wanted teachers to take this broader perspective, it needed to provide leadership and guidance to show them why and how. Such curriculum implementation-supportive leadership was missing at all levels of the system, contributing to inconsistency between curriculum goals and the matura, insufficient awareness raising among stakeholders in and outside the education system and poorly conceived and provided support for teachers, all of which contributed to making Michalina's curriculum change implementation experiences unnecessarily confusing and stressful.

Having said that, the results of the matura exam are, on the whole, very satisfactory, with the results from English exceeding other subjects (Sprawozdanie z egzaminu maturalnego. Język angielski 2015). Poland also does well in numerous PISA studies, improving its results slowly but steadily (ECA Knowledge Brief 2010, European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2012, 2015, TNS Global). Polish secondary students take part in many pupil and teacher exchanges and cross-border collaboration projects, enabling them to put their language abilities to the test to see if they really can communicate in English, and enabling them to realise that often English is the only means of communication, and so boost motivation and encourage harder work. Despite the difficulties, it seems that many teachers do find ways of making their teaching effective in the changed situation.

To sum up, Michalina feels quite lonely in her attempts to implement the principles of the New Core Curriculum. First of all, she does not feel she was consulted about the reform. The initial support she got (the ministerial conference) she did not find helpful, to the point of forgetting all about it. Feeling unconfident herself, she did not cascade information about the changes to her students or their parents. There was no further support on the local level from INSET institutions, and her perception based on observing new teachers suggested that initial language teacher education was not providing reform-focused training.

The existing teacher-centred and knowledge transmission-based educational culture was not conducive to reform implementation. The lack of coherence between the prescriptive matura exam and the autonomy implied by the New Core Curriculum, together with time constraints and work overload led Michalina to a reliance on a course book, in the hope that 'experts' know better, even though before the reform, she was a creative teacher, supplementing her teaching with lots of additional, varied materials.

At the very core of these hurdles lies a lack of understanding of what the change implies at all levels of the education system, from the decision makers to teacher trainers to school heads and so to teachers.

2.1 Post Scriptum

The new Polish government, which was elected while I was writing this text, announced the reform of the school structure system as one of its first reforms. The current system will be replaced by the previous system structure that was in place pre-1998. A new Core Curriculum will be introduced. This will entail a change in all the exams, including the matura.

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10

Struggling to Implement Communicative Language Teaching: A Case Study from Senegal

Dame Diop

1 Introduction

This chapter begins by introducing the English Language Teaching (ELT) context in Senegal. It then presents an English teacher's story of issues encountered while trying to work towards teaching English in accordance with the general principles of the officially recommended Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach. This chapter then analyses some issues emerging from the teacher interviews, particularly considering those which hindered his attempts to implement CLT, and ends with a personal consideration of the appropriateness of a CLT-based curriculum that emphasises the development of oral skills for the Senegalese English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context.

1.1 The Senegalese Educational Context

Senegal is a multilingual country. Local languages are used in the home and at social gatherings, with Wolof acting as a lingua franca in most of those settings. Arabic is used for most religious matters, and French is the language

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M. Wedell and L. Grassick (eds.), *International Perspectives on Teachers Living with Curriculum Change*, International Perspectives on English Language Teaching,
https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-54309-7_10

of instruction in all public schools from preschool to university. It is also the language officially used in all public offices and in many private services.

Much of the structure of the Senegalese education system has been inherited from colonial times. For instance, the number of years allocated to each level of the system, the names of the various stages and of university degrees are all based on the French educational system. Education is considered a national priority with more than a third of the national budget spent on it annually over the past decade and schools exist across the country. However, there are wide differences in terms of resources between schools located in urban settings and those in rural areas, with many of the latter lacking basic facilities such as proper classrooms and electricity.

Traditionally, Senegalese culture has seen the purpose of education as the transmission of factual knowledge and learning mostly as memorisation of that knowledge. Today, this view still prevails in many people's minds. However, the stated aims of our national education provision promote a different view, which is to enable citizens to develop themselves and the country in a sustainable way and for individuals to become culturally well-rooted and open-minded enough to be able to work and/or live anywhere in the world (Thiam 2013). Studying English is increasingly seen as one of the prerequisites to achieve such aims.

1.2 The Senegalese English Language Teaching (ELT) Context

English is studied by all secondary school pupils, but its importance in terms of assessment weight varies according to the stream of study. For example, its weighting is twice as great for those following a language stream as it is for those focusing on science subjects. The national syllabus states:

> *l'anglais y est considéré comme une importante langue de communication internationale et figure, pour cette raison, parmi les principales matières d'enseignement.* English is considered an important language for international communication and it is, for that reason, among the main subjects of study (own translation). (Programme National d'Anglais 2006: 4)

Apart from French, which is the language of instruction, English is the most studied foreign language and the educational authorities are currently considering its introduction at primary level (Report of the Commission National d'Anglais-CNA—meeting held on 20 November 2014).

Ever since English was introduced during colonial times, educational authorities have searched for the best ways to teach it effectively. Senghor (2003), when examining the methodological approaches used in teaching English as a foreign language in French Speaking African countries such as Benin, Mali, Senegal, Burkina and Madagascar, views the shift from a structural approach based on the principles of the Audio-lingual method to a more communicative one as a purposeful and useful change. This view is based on the contention that CLT 'is more functional and so more able to lead to the satisfaction of the pedagogical objectives' (own translation) (Senghor 2003: 80). He suggests that one of the strong points of this approach is that it makes learners more active in acquiring linguistic knowledge and increasing their communicative skills. This view is shared by Thiam (2011) from Senegal when he says that 'the teaching of English as a foreign language has evolved from erudition to communication through interaction' (p. 69) (own translation). As outlined below, these views reflect what the Senegalese syllabus (officially printed in 1994 to serve as a reference for teachers regarding what and how to teach) advocates,

> it is recommended to use a student-centred methodological approach in order to permit learners to do genuine communication exercises through group activities (own translation). (Programme National d'Anglais 2006: 7)

This syllabus, while encouraging the provision of opportunities for learners to interact and communicate in English, does also emphasise that teachers have the freedom to use any other approach and any materials that they feel can help them to achieve their teaching objectives. In practice, most classroom teaching remains textbook based. Today, five sets of English textbooks, containing communicative activities and considered to be appropriate for the Senegalese context, are officially recognised for use in public schools.

The officially promoted approach, which advocates language learning through communication, is not compatible with a conception of education and learning which views teaching as transmission of knowledge. The latter view, which sees English as just another subject, with a body of knowledge to be learned, remains shared by many learners, teachers, school heads and parents. In addition, many parents judge their children's learning capacities solely through their exam scores. Consequently, teachers who do want to try to teach English communicatively find themselves in a dilemma, as they are simultaneously under pressure from important stakeholders in their contexts (e.g. parents and school leaders) to help students achieve good marks in

school progress tests. The national 'BFEM' and 'Baccalaureat' exams at the end of middle and higher secondary school are rarely as 'communicative' as they claim to be. While success in the English papers is not always essential for future educational progress, obtaining high marks is given much importance by teachers, students, school authorities and many parents.

Given the wide socio-economic disparities that exist in the country, many English teachers also work in under-resourced schools, which again makes it difficult to implement communicative approaches. To try to help teachers cope with the practical teaching challenges that CLT poses in the Senegalese context, in-service teacher training structures (Pedagogical cells), at which teachers meet once weekly within working hours to share issues and/or gain support from teacher educators, have been created nationwide. However, the types of teacher support and development that pedagogical cells can provide are of course influenced by the above context.

Bearing these contextual realities in mind, it is not surprising that, although Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has been the officially recommended approach for over twenty years (personal communication with Dr Mbaye from FASTEF in June 2015), many teachers continue to use other more culturally familiar teaching methods and techniques, particularly by focusing on the acquisition of linguistic knowledge such as grammar and vocabulary. Later in this chapter, I discuss whether, in the existing Senegalese EFL context, advocating the use of communicative approaches with a focus on the development of oral proficiency is appropriate.

In the next section, I explore the situation further through the story of an experienced Senegalese English teacher.

2 Introducing Ndoya

Ndoya (pseudonym), the participant of this study, is a man in his fifties. He began his teaching career as a primary school teacher in a rural area using French as the language of instruction. Later, he obtained a BA in English and a Secondary school teaching degree and started teaching English at a high school where he worked for three years. He came to Dakar in 2003, and since then he has been teaching English to learners aged 13–21 at a secondary school in the city. Ndoya is an active participant in his local pedagogical cell, where teachers meet for INSET purposes, and is familiar with many of the teaching issues (e.g. how to deal with mixed proficiency learners, ways of implementing active learning, and ways of teaching with minimal resources) dealt with at such meetings.

While having taught in both rural and urban contexts is not unusual, the fact that he has moved from teaching at a rural primary school to teaching secondary level in the capital city makes him atypical.

The context in which he works is also not typical of those in which most Senegalese English teachers work. Schools in the capital city, Dakar, are relatively better resourced, and teachers are generally trained and qualified. There is also some access to English outside the classroom. It may thus be considered as the Senegalese context most likely to support teachers' attempts to implement a communication oriented curriculum.

3 Ndoya's Story

3.1 Ndoya's Views About Language Learning/Teaching

With a copy of the national syllabus in his hands during the interview, Ndoya claims to have a clear understanding of the current national curriculum aims, which he considers as good ones. He believes that encouraging students to become able to communicate in English is a positive goal in today's world, as English is the language of international communication. 'If you don't know how to use English […] when you go somewhere, not far from Senegal, you may belong to the uneducated people'.

He sees the national syllabus as a good document, as it allows teachers all around the country to have a common reference in terms of goals and teaching methodology. However, he argues that 'in each school we should design another syllabus from this one', which would take into account the local social and environmental specificities, so as to better help students learn the target language within their own context.

It is noteworthy that despite apparent official encouragement to do so, he and his colleagues have not yet attempted to develop their own contextually appropriate syllabus. This may reflect unfamiliarity with seeing syllabus design as part of their role within a centralised and hierarchical education system that has previously only expected them to respond to top-down instructions. They have also had no training in syllabus design and so may feel professional uncertainty about how to begin.

Ndoya understands language learning as a process that happens mostly through exposure to the language, particularly in meaningful communicative situations. Hence, he tries to include that dimension of language

learning in his way of teaching English. For him, the purpose of language learning is to be able to communicate. He thinks that teachers 'have to use authentic language. …today', and notes that 'with the internet, we can have any material we want', so enabling learners to have opportunities to listen to authentic language and putting them in situations in which they are likely to speak. He believes that learners should be encouraged to discover the language themselves through their attempts to use it, and that this is better than the teacher transmitting linguistic knowledge since what they discover is more likely to stay 'known'. He recognises that such an approach to teaching and learning requires a clear understanding of the different roles that both the teacher and the students should play in the classroom, and that this shift in roles has to be clearly explained to, and fully understood by, students if there is to be motivated involvement.

3.2 Teachers' Misunderstanding of the CLT Approach

Ndoya states that the meaning of teaching English in accordance with the principles of the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach, as outlined by him above, is not always fully understood by the various stakeholders in the education system. For him, this misunderstanding is still particularly noticeable among teachers of English, since 'still today many teachers base their teaching on content', focusing on linguistic and factual knowledge, rather than on the communicative skills, which are officially recommended. He has talked to many teachers who he believes have a limited and partial understanding of the main principles of the approach. For example, he worked with a trainee (teacher of English) who had already completed his teacher training, and who wrote in a lesson plan that 'at the end the lesson students will be able to use these words in sentences'. This, Ndoya believes, shows that his trainee was still struggling to put theory into practice since communication means much more than just using newly learned words in sentences.

He is, however, aware that his current context is not typical, and that when he worked in a rural setting 'it was harder to try to implement CLT than it is here in Dakar', and that therefore teachers working in different settings with differing access to materials, should be encouraged to develop their own locally appropriate teaching techniques. However, given that, as mentioned above, even his school has not yet managed to begin to design their own English syllabus, it seems likely that teachers elsewhere will also find developing context-appropriate techniques extremely challenging.

3.3 Obstacles Encountered Due to Other Stakeholder's Misunderstanding of Communicative Approaches

Throughout his English teaching career, Ndoya claims to have always tried to cater for his learners' needs, though it was sometimes difficult because he did not get much support from other stakeholders. He recognises that his teaching has changed over time. At the beginning of his career, he used to stick rigidly to what was in the textbook, but in the past decade, his confidence has increased enough to allow himself to have more freedom in making choices in his teaching. He recognises the value of participating in INSET activities. For him, 'teachers should also attend seminars, pedagogical cells' meetings; I have learnt a lot from pedagogical cells' and he believes that participation has helped him to develop a deeper understanding of teaching approaches. For example, he has focused more on encouraging active student participation, which he sees as central to language teaching and learning that aims to enable learners begin to use the language. Over the past two years, he has encouraged his learners to write short stories in English, with the objective of promoting their creativity and autonomy.

Even in his privileged capital city setting, and despite CLT having been the recommended approach for more than 20 years, obstacles to trying to teaching English communicatively remain. Obstacles are mostly due to the other stakeholders in his working context having insufficient understanding of the principles underpinning a communicative approach. With beginner classes, putting learners in groups and asking them to interact are synonymous with the classroom being noisy. This does not matter for him as long as students are using the target language since interactions make the classroom atmosphere livelier, which can in turn make learners more motivated. However, others within the school such as invigilators (personnel in charge of administrative duties in schools) and even some teachers of other subjects have misunderstood his way of teaching, since

> every day when I am in class, the invigilators, they come to my class to check if the teacher is here because I make a lot noise.

Ndoya's head teacher also seems not to understand the kinds of teaching practices and classroom behaviour that a more communicative approach requires. On one occasion, when the learners were interacting (noisily) in the classroom, Ndoya was surprised to see the head appear to check whether

he was actually present in the classroom, but Ndoya told him 'Ok, this the way we teach a language'.

Misunderstanding of the principles underlying a communicative approach may also account for his school authorities' unhelpful reactions towards his creative short-story-writing project. He believed that this was valuable for his students since

> through that process of production, not only do they increase their linguistic knowledge of the English language but they also develop their communicative skills.

He then asked for support to print the learners' stories

> I made them write nine short stories in class, […] I showed this to the administration of the school, and asked them to print it and why not sell it for a reasonable price to support our English club? But there was no response.

He believes the school had the resources to print and buy a few copies of those short stories and that this would have boosted students' motivation to produce more. Instead, the administration's lack of response suggests to him that lack of understanding among other influential actors in his school negatively influences the extent to which he can fully engage his learners in an active learning process. He points out that responsibility for implementing change cannot be limited only to teachers. If he is to be supported, then those in his setting who influence his decision-making also need to understand what trying to implement the curriculum implies for teacher and learner behaviour.

Despite his earlier reference to the potential of the Internet, Ndoya did not refer to using it himself and also reported the lack of resources in many Senegalese schools, especially outside the capital. He believes teachers need to be given the means to do their job in a way that allows the expected outcomes to be achieved. However well-trained English teachers may be, for example, they will not be able to provide students with opportunities to develop their listening skills if the school lacks adequate listening equipment. The outcome for students is that 'most of them who go abroad, their main problem is speaking and listening. They can write and read but they have problem in listening and speaking'. Lack of materials to develop oral skills is a particularly serious issue since it further encourages teachers' existing tendencies to emphasise teaching of the reading and writing skills that are the main focus of exams.

3.4 Ndoya's Opinion About the Personal and Professional Benefits of His Efforts

Ndoya has not regretted his attempts to implement a more communicative language teaching approach despite it requiring a lot of effort, time and materials to guide learners through the whole process. After the recorded interview he told me that, through trying to introduce new ways of learning, he has realised that learners are able to do great things. Learners, he believes just need to be trusted, provided with good learning conditions and given responsibilities in the teaching–learning process. His satisfaction with his students' achievements is all the more rewarding when he sees their pride in their own outcomes. The experience of writing stories in English was enriching both for him as a teacher and for the students who discovered that it is possible to write stories in the target language. He also claims that such projects can help students to significantly improve their speaking through the many different interactions they often have at the various stages of the shared short-story-writing process.

3.5 Ndoya's Views About Implementing CLT

On the whole, Ndoya is positive about teaching English in accordance with the principles of CLT and believes that using this approach can help him to achieve the stated curriculum objectives to some extent 'because communicative teaching is just using English normally, to communicate'. He strongly defends the idea that students should be taught through exposure to all the four skills, as they are all used in real-life communication. Nevertheless, he does not exclude the use of older methods, such as the Grammar Translation Method, and is quite happy to use French in the English classroom as long as it allows him to achieve his teaching objectives. As he says 'we learn English […] from French. We cannot rule out French in our teaching. It's out of question'.

Ndoya believes that there are many things which need to be done to support teachers and learners to achieve the national English curriculum goals. Although teachers may be willing to find teaching materials and to think about ways and means to improve their learners' communicative skills, they are limited by the dearth of resources. If teachers are asked to do a job without being provided with the necessary tools, they cannot be blamed if they fail to achieve their goal. This often seems to be the case if one considers the generally noticed low achievement level of many students in all school subjects, including English. For Ndoya, education is a shared-roles enterprise.

Each stakeholder, and above all the state, has to play its part. He advocates that the government has 'to provide schools with means… they have to help schools'.

However, he recognises that these difficulties, while needing to be acknowledged, should not prevent teachers from trying to help their learners as much as possible through the difficult journey of learning a foreign language. Teachers remain accountable to their learners, and while *they* may know how important good communicative skills in English are for their learners' future success, this may not be true for learners and many parents. Teachers therefore need to try to explain the potential importance of English in their lives to learners and help them to understand that 'language is no longer a subject' and 'English is a must' in today's world.

4 Some Issues in Senegalese ELT Arising from Ndoya's Experiences

Ndoya, with all his experience, and working in a seemingly fairly well-resourced and well-informed professional context in the capital, still finds it difficult to gain acceptance when trying to implement a communicative approach. This suggests that challenges are likely to be far greater for the majority of teachers working in less favourable material and professional contexts. Through close study of the data collected from the interviews with Ndoya, I have identified four themes for further discussion. These are: insufficient understanding of CLT among educational stakeholders, the lack of adequate materials in schools, the influence of and use of French (L1) in our EFL context and, in the light of these, the appropriacy of CLT for our context.

4.1 The Lack of Clear Understanding of CLT

In Senegal, recent discussions about ELT have been mostly based on the need to implement a communicative approach. As a facilitator of teacher discussions during pedagogical cell meetings, I have noticed that teachers may refer to principles of CLT as arguments to support their point of view. Most trainers encourage this, since providing opportunities for teachers to debate issues is one of the rationales for holding such meetings. However, while such discussions suggest that teachers may have been trained to use this approach at the pre-service stage or may have participated in in-service sessions about CLT, up to the present, many teachers have not even begun to change the way they teach.

In the past five years, in my role as an in-service teacher trainer, I have had the opportunity to observe about two hundred English lessons. Very few of these showed any signs of a more communication-oriented, learner-centred approach. Many Senegalese English teachers therefore seem to remain in a state of 'false clarity' (Fullan and Stiegelbauer 1991: 35), thinking that they have changed through using the language of CLT, but with little understanding of what it means for classroom practice.

For Ndoya, the lack of a common understanding of what implementation implies for practice is not limited to teachers, but exists across the different roles and levels of the education system, including his immediate school context. This suggests that attempts to introduce educational change needs 'parallel learning' (Wedell and Malderez 2013). Wedell and Malderez argue that for successful implementation of change, all actors in the education system who influence teachers' classroom practice, particularly those at local level with whom teachers interact on a regular basis, need at least a general understanding of the principles underlying the curriculum and the kinds of teaching practices and behaviours that are likely to result.

Ndoya's experiences with his head teacher and invigilators at his school in the capital show what happens when such understanding is absent. Their expectation of teaching and learning continues to be that the teacher stands in front of the class, and the students sit listening carefully to whatever is being said. Taking this as the norm, they could not understand why Ndoya's classes were so noisy—for them, it could only be a sign that the teacher was either not present, or not 'teaching properly'. Only a confident teacher like Ndoya is likely to continue to teach in a manner that, while it may be consistent with curriculum goals, is regarded as inappropriate by colleagues and leaders in the immediate school environment.

If a more communicative curriculum is ever to be widely implemented in Senegal, there needs to be a change in the way most people understand the teaching-learning process. This is not a small change to make. Until now, the belief that teaching means the transmission of knowledge from teachers to learners is widely shared across all levels of society. Until a majority begins to see learning as an active process, in which the learners' task is 'no longer to parrot but to create an answer' (Lee and Vanpatten 2003: 11), and in which teachers see themselves not only as knowledge providers but also as facilitators of students' learning 'charged with providing students with opportunities for communication, that is using the language to interpret and express real-life messages' (Lee and Vanpatten 2003: 10), efforts made to implement CLT are unlikely to have a great impact. As Ndoya reported, the above teacher and learner roles are not consistent with long established Senegalese educational norms. Even after 25 years of official support for

CLT, the changes that the above quotes imply for existing understandings and classroom behaviours remain difficult for educational stakeholders to absorb and implement.

4.2 Learning Resources and Assessment

Although the Senegalese education system's ambition is clear, some educational beliefs that militate against implementing CLT still exist. In addition to that, a number of obstacles need to be overcomed for its full implemention. A 'communicative classroom' requires a minimum in terms of teaching equipment and also a realistic recognition of contextual differences. It is undeniable that there is a huge gap between Senegalese schools in terms of learning facilities, with many schools, particularly in rural areas, having insufficient text books and inadequate teaching rooms or access to electricity, let alone additional teaching resources such as CD players or video projectors. Such contexts increase the challenge of teaching English through all four skills as the syllabus advocates and implicitly encourage teachers to continue to focus on reading and writing.

The emphasis on examinations is also unhelpful. All Senegalese students sit for the same national middle-school exams. While these test Reading, Writing and Speaking, (Speaking is optional in final high school exams) Listening is not yet assessed at all. The focus on written language in national exams, together with the limited resources for, and teachers partial understanding of, helping learners to develop spoken language skills means that many students study English for seven years with very few listening (or speaking) opportunities.

The consequences of this extend to university level and are noticeable even among postgraduate students who have studied English for at least eleven years. These days it is common to encounter MA students in the English department with good mastery of English language grammar and vocabulary, but very limited speaking and listening comprehension ability.

4.3 The Influence of French on the Teaching of English

French is the language that students in Senegal use to learn almost everything at school. It represents a second language for almost all learners. Generally, students from urban areas tend to be more proficient in French than those from rural areas, perhaps because they are more exposed to the language from an early age through its use in the media and for official purposes.

A longstanding feature of learning French at secondary school is its emphasis on the teaching and assessment of literacy skills (reading and writing). This widespread assumption, that learning a second language entails an emphasis on developing literacy skills, may be a further reason why both the notion of, and the practices recommended for, interactive classrooms remain unclear for most stakeholders at all levels of education.

A further issue, the use of French in English lessons, has often been discussed among teachers in pedagogical cell meetings. Some think that it should not be used at all or they should resort to it only when necessary, while for others, it is a positive resource that can be effectively used to support English learning. This division reflects a broader disagreement within the ELT community about the use of L1/L2 in EFL teaching. On the one hand, some teachers and researchers believe that using an L1/L2 (which is French in this context) will logically lead to 'undue emphasis on reading and writing and artificial cross checking of words at the expense of listening and speaking and less exposure to the Target Language' (Thiam 2011: 31). On the other hand, are those who see the use of L1/L2 as a good thing because the reference to the already mastered language (L1 or L2) can bring a clearer understanding of the new language and may also allow the teacher to save time. Such a view echoes that of Garton (2014: 215) in another context who states that 'there is also a need for a change in emphasis away from a focus on English-only classrooms to focus on how to use the L1 effectively'.

In the Senegalese English classroom, students do regularly switch to French or/and other local languages (such as Wolof, Pulaar, Sereer and Joola) in which they are more proficient. This was mentioned by Ndoya, and I have noticed this occurring in many of the lessons I observed. It seems logical and beneficial to use those languages at whatever points we feel they can support our teaching or to support students who are having trouble keeping up with a whole lesson done entirely in English. As pointed out by Thiam (2011: 30),

> tapping 'judiciously and prudently' the vast linguistic resources readily in the classroom is an invaluable asset; ignoring them for the sake of methodological integrity can be a liability bordering on pedagogical fundamentalism'.

4.4 The Appropriacy of CLT for the Senegalese EFL Context

The principles underpinning communicative approaches to language teaching, as explained by Richards and Rodgers (2001), transcend geographical and linguistic barriers. CLT's global acceptance can be seen as sensible, since

> one of the most characteristic features of communicative language teaching is that it pays systematic attention to functional as well as structural aspects of language, combining these into a more fully communicative view. (Littlewood 1981: 1)

From such a perspective, one could argue that teaching English according to this approach should be a good thing in an EFL context such as ours, whose stated curriculum goal is to help students develop the ability to communicate. However, to provide a setting to develop such (particularly oral) proficiency, the classroom in an EFL context like ours needs to stand in for society in miniature and act as a place where real-life language use situations can be 'rehearsed' prior to students taking their skills outside the classroom. Since English in Senegal is still a foreign language in its true sense, and hardly used in common people's daily life, generating such a social environment in the classroom is often impossible. Outside the classroom people either use French or the other local languages, and most types of communicative tasks learners of English might be asked to do in class are not possible once they are outside (Walt 2006). It is only the very few who happen to live or work in places where English is used as the language of communication, who will ever have opportunities to use spoken English for real purposes. The educational value of encouraging all teachers across the country to spend limited class time trying to develop their learners' capacity to interact in English thus becomes questionable.

If English teaching is trying to cater for Senegalese learners' needs, I think that we should not forget that our students need to understand the forms of the English language and how they work very well so as to be able to decipher any message encoded in it. This view is shared by Walt (2006), when she claims that a good number of African students who learn English aim not only to communicate in an English speaking social context, but also to continue their studies in English. This being so, she advocates, without totally minimising the importance of oral proficiency, that 'in such a context, the English class should focus on developing academic literacy above all' (Walt 2006: 170). This view seems to be appropriate in our context also. In addition, when examining foreign language teaching in Africa, Walt (2006: 167) points out that 'the trappings that go with typical Western education, such as solid structures for classrooms, desks, books, not to mention electricity, photocopying machines and internet access, simply do not exist'. These realities in many Senegalese learning environments also need to be acknowledged.

Though the national educational authorities believe that all Senegalese pupils need to learn English due to its international status, it seems obvious that learners in different places and from different backgrounds will have very different needs. Currently, only a relatively small number may really need to use it for communication. Coleman (2013) in his survey of English in Francophone Africa suggests that these might include people working in multinational companies, West African regional economic cooperation organisations and banks or international development agencies, where English is used as an important means of communication. He suggests that for such learners

> The English skills needed can be analysed in the conventional terms of workplace English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and language training can be designed precisely to match the requirements of the context. If tuition in the necessary language skills is provided for people who are already working (or are about to start work) in these contexts the level of motivation among participants will probably be high and they should have a clear understanding of why they need the language. These factors normally ensure a good degree of receptivity towards the language training. (Coleman 2013: 200)

Given the current dominance of academic literature written in English in global higher education, others, university students and lecturers, will need to read and write academic texts in English, and for these, and those wishing to study abroad in Anglophone settings, for Coleman (2013) more focussed English for Academic Purposes (EAP) training might be provided.

For the many Senegalese learners who will never, or hardly ever, have reasons to use English in their daily lives, it is important to consider what their English needs might be or even whether learning English for communication helps meet any of their life needs at all.

5 Conclusion

This chapter used the experiences of one Senegalese teacher (Ndoya), who has been trying to implement CLT for many years, to identify some of the issues affecting the extent to which English curriculum goals are being achieved in most Senegalese classrooms. Ndoya's experiences as a teacher, and my own as an in-service teacher trainer, suggest that introducing a 'complex change' (Fullan 1993) such as CLT, which challenges not only existing

beliefs about language learning, but also teacher and learner classroom behaviours, in Senegal, or similar EFL settings, is not a simple process.

After approximately 25 years, the change has yet to become embedded in Senegalese English classrooms. The preceding discussion questions whether, in a Senegalese setting, where most citizens continue to understand learning as knowledge acquisition, where established practices for the learning of French emphasise literacy learning development, and where most learners have, and will probably always have, minimal exposure to English in use outside the classroom, attempts to emphasise the development of all English skills across all classrooms make the best use of limited educational resources.

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11

Imaginary Realities: Curriculum Change that Ignores Classroom Contexts

María Alejandra Soto

1 Introduction

In this chapter, I focus on English Language Teaching (ELT) curriculum change implementation at secondary state schools in my province Entre Ríos, Argentina. I explore how a teacher's cognitions (Borg 2006), her beliefs, attitudes and knowledge about the intended change, combine with visible and invisible components of her working context (Wedell and Malderez 2013), to shape her interpretation and uptake of the new curriculum principles and mandates.

I begin by contextualising the change and then introduce an English teacher and her experiences of participating in the change process. I conclude by discussing some of the reasons for her story in the light of existing change initiation and implementation literature.

1.1 The Jurisdictional Change (2008–Present)

The spread of English as a global, international language of communication has had a powerful impact on mainstream English language teaching over the last 30 years or so (Crystal 2003; Graddol 2006; McKay 2002, 2003).

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M. Wedell and L. Grassick (eds.), *International Perspectives on Teachers Living with Curriculum Change*, International Perspectives on English Language Teaching,
https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-54309-7_11

In Argentina, as in many other countries around the world, English has become a compulsory subject in most secondary schools and is increasingly becoming so at the primary level.

The latest curriculum change in Entre Ríos was initiated in 2008 and involved the whole secondary school system, at its both basic level and higher specialised levels, in which students follow different tracks, such as art or communication. The release of a first official document provided stakeholders with an initial rationale and a general framework for the intended change, named *Resignificación de la Escuela Secundaria Entrerriana*. The stated purpose for initiating a change was to remodel secondary school education to

> […] foster analysis and research, while eradicating accurate recall of knowledge and cumulative routines, that stimulates scientific curiosity, experimentation, abstract thinking, creativity and invention through changes at scientific, technical and technological levels […] to facilitate the constitution of new identities and new forms of employability and social integration […]. (Document 1, CGE, 2008a) [My translation.]

A second stage in the change process involved engaging with the main stakeholders, through the production of Document 2. In line with the recommendations of relevant literature on curriculum change (Fullan 2007; Markee 1997; Waters 2009), in October 2008, members of the curricular team and secondary school teachers grouped by disciplines, participated in consultations (asistencias técnicas, in Spanish), which were held in different towns across the province. These consultations aimed at gathering data on three main areas: teachers' views on the principles underlying their pedagogical practices, the most relevant aspects facilitating or hindering the implementation of English in their contexts and the key concepts that they would want to include in the new curriculum design. Each of the 130 participating schools sent discipline representatives to these consultation meetings, and these participants were expected to cascade the circulated information to their colleagues at school and to ask them to send back written answers to the above three questions.

The data collected via email or post were analysed by the curricular team, and the consultation report became the main body of Document 2. English teachers' responses stressed the need to revise and update the current curriculum, not only in terms of what to teach but also in relation to the methodology implemented, and to facilitate teachers' integration of the FL and other subject content by providing concrete examples. Also, they highlighted

both the need to help teachers develop strategies and skills to allow them to improve their classroom practices and the need to provide schools with an adequate infrastructure and appropriate teaching materials to promote effective teaching and meaningful learning (Document 2 Report, GCE 2008b).

The preliminary FL curriculum for the secondary school was released in 2009 and piloted in 2010 in 43 volunteer schools around the province. The final design and province-wide implementation of the curriculum took place as of 2011. Despite giving teachers a chance to voice their concerns and opinions about the innovation, the final version of the curriculum for FLs ignored a number of important points that teachers had raised in their answers to the survey. Specifically, the new curriculum failed to address the principles underpinning teachers' practices, issues related to context and infrastructure, and teachers' request for a long-awaited plan for sustained teacher development. As is often the case with so-called participatory curriculum designs, reality showed that the consultation was merely cosmetic, or rather a

> […] space(s) in which the proposal was given a 'varnish' of democratic consultation in an attempt to legitimate the steps which had already been taken […]. (Levinson et al. 2013)

1.2 The English Language Curriculum for the Secondary School in Entre Ríos: A Snapshot

In the region where this study took place, the official timetable for state schools offers three 40-minute blocks of English per week and typical classes have 25–40 students. English teachers generally teach around 30–40 teaching periods a week in 2–3 different schools (the so-called *taxi-teachers*), work alone and have no mentors or supervisors. Usually, the materials, equipment and other teaching resources are scarce and often need to be provided by the teachers themselves. The context for English teaching and learning is thus challenging.

At first sight, the changes introduced by the 2011 implementation of the EFL curriculum seem not to represent much difference from the previous curriculum, since the basic tenets still emphasise a Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) orientation, cognitive skills development and macro-skills development and integration.

To ease learner transition between secondary and higher education, the curricular aims set for the higher secondary level stress recognition and

production of written texts, and the use of materials with varying degrees of difficulty and including different genres and registers, to develop English reading skills like those required at university,

> […] heavy emphasis will be placed on tasks that foster the comprehension of written texts, such as the recognition of paratextual elements, the identification of different genres, the global comprehension of texts […], an analysis of the semantic dimension of texts […] and the recognition of the pragmatic dimension […]. It is also worth mentioning that the texts selected will correspond to topics related to the specific contents of each track. (CGE 2009. FL Curriculum: 35) [My translation.]

There were, however, two main changes in what was expected of teachers. The first was the expectation that teachers would, independently, interpret the above broad curriculum mandates to develop their own local-context-responsive syllabuses. Part of doing so would entail the selection of content relevant to their school's specific elective track (arts, communication, natural sciences, social sciences and humanities, economics and administration, or tourism). Such an expectation contrasted strongly with a status quo in which, while initial teacher training includes syllabus design, most English teaching tended to be coursebook-driven, and the practice of *teaching the book* was widespread (Banegas 2011). While teachers are used to selecting coursebooks and tend to choose those from well-known international publishers, which are supportive of a CLT methodology, they do not expect to have to adapt them to meet the needs of learners following different subject 'tracks' (Banegas 2011; Helale et al. 2009; López et al. 2011; Soto 2014).

The second important modification introduced in the curriculum was the recommendation that teachers should use formative assessment practices, like self- and peer-assessment or the implementation of assessment rubrics and portfolios (CGE 2009. Document 4). This posed a challenge for teachers and learners in an educational system where written summative examinations evaluating textbook content knowledge rather than learning processes remain the norm. This is evident in the fact that teachers assess learners' performance throughout the three school terms, implementing as many tests and test formats as they deem necessary. The students' grades in progress summative tests make up the final grade they get per term, which is recorded on the learners' report card. Learners must achieve a final score of 60% or more in each subject to be promoted to the next year. If learners fail more than two subjects, they must sit exams during special examination boards in December or February. If they do not pass these tests, they must repeat the

course (CGE, Resolución 1582, 2011). Such a system does not appear to lend itself to the promulgated formative assessment approach.

The new curriculum thus expected teachers to develop both their own contextually relevant syllabuses and their capacity to assess learners (in)formatively. They were prepared for neither, the change thus demonstrating '[…] a clear imbalance between the education that teachers receive and the increasing complexity that practice demands from them' (Gvirtz 2007: 14) [My translation.] This imbalance was not mitigated by the minimal support provided, as will be exemplified in the story of one teacher's experiences below.

2 Case Study: María

María (pseudonym) is in her early thirties and in her tenth year of teaching. She, like most EFL teachers in our context, has experience of teaching English at both state and private secondary schools as well as some experience of private English language schools. At the time of the interview, she was teaching in the 4th, 5th and 6th years (ages 15–17) of the higher secondary school cycle at a state secondary school. She had also just started teaching an English course on an Initial Teacher Education Programme, where I first met her.

The themes that emerged from the interview data are presented below; however, although they are arranged as discrete concepts, in reality, they are very much interconnected.

2.1 Implementing the Change: Reality Bites

As her response below indicates, María seems to hold strong views about the feasibility of change implementation, given the micro-context of the classrooms and the organisational culture of each school she works at.

When first asked about her experience of the changes, she replied, 'The changes? Yes, I know what they are. The thing is how to implement them'

2.1.1 Contextualising the Syllabus

María explained that she is well acquainted with the new curriculum, since at the initial stages of the curriculum change teachers at her school were asked to examine it at 'día institucional' [obligatory institutional staff meetings arranged by the local MoE] where they had 'to study' a number of

official documents issued by both the national MoE and the local education authority. She seems to be aware of the main tenets underpinning the conception of both language learning and language teaching as established in the official documents, although her description is rather confusing:

> I think they [Curriculum planners] intend to [Hesitation] I don't know how to say it […] they intend to change the lessons, the language lessons, into something natural. […] they want children to be […] exposed to the language as much as they can and to learn, to acquire the language […] not to learn […] to acquire the language er… in a natural way and er to, to perform well at school.

María above emphasises the idea of 'natural' as a way for her students to acquire language. However, she found this is difficult to do in practice as her students tend to see English as just another school subject. As she puts it:

> […] but there is a problem with attitude. They [students] see English as a subject … It's not a language, it's a subject. So they want the formulas, and they want … er … to pass. […] So, you just have to give them [the students] the topic and the explanation and how they should study that.

With such an attitude from the learners, it is difficult to establish a classroom setting in which learners can acquire English through exposure to English. As María's words below exemplify, learners want practical knowledge which relates to grammatical patterns that they need to be successful in their exams.

> […] students want practical things. They don't want a text, for example, or a listening activity. They want practical things: what do I have to do? What is the tense and where should I add the -s?

The curriculum expected English teachers to develop a contextually appropriate syllabus for their own learners. This is made more difficult since English teachers generally work in isolation in several different schools and decisions about the selection of content and material are left to teachers individually. María remarks that there is little opportunity for collaboration since she is the sole English teacher in her school.

> In my school I am the only English teacher. So, I am on my own because I have no choice. But I have worked in many other schools and the teachers

> only give you the planning. […] This is the list of items you should teach and try to finish this before the end of the year, and that's it. Then you can evaluate students the way you want. And teach the way you want.

This sense of isolation is exacerbated by the fact that there are no mentors or coordinating teachers, and that even when such a figure does exist, María comments that they 'don't give you specifications as regards your subject'.

With little interest from learners and limited collegial support in making sense of the new curriculum, implementation of the syllabuses as intended rarely takes place. Instead, as María states below, aspects of the textbook content or certain types of activities are omitted in response to contextual realities.

> I start with the textbook and they [students] have to go on with all the activities. Sometimes I don't give them the listening activities because we don't have plugs, or … sometimes we don't have electricity … So, no listenings. And they [the students] don't want to listen to English. They want to listen to ME because I'm clear. That's what they say. And because I speak slowly for them to understand. So, no listening, no readings because they have to read with ME working as a walking dictionary [laughs].

María's interpretation of the new curriculum is that there should be an integration of four skills rather than an emphasis on grammar or vocabulary. However, she also claims that in reality grammar teaching is central to the English curriculum at most schools, despite the mandates of the curricular documents. María admits that this overt focus on language structure is something that she also does, since she bases her syllabus on the chosen textbook, and this is mainly grammar oriented. As she puts it:

> Teachers are only teaching structures. […] Despite the documents [emphatic]. We don't see the documents. At least at the schools where I have worked. Er … we see the documents, we answer the questions for *'día institucional'* [obligatory institutional staff meetings], and then we go home, and we plan whatever we want, and we teach the way we want. So this is just a formality.

María's last claim in the above quotation is significant. She seems to confirm that despite the existence of curricular guidelines, these are more often than not overlooked by practising teachers.

This idea that the curriculum guidelines are just a formality is also evident in how María approaches reading comprehension. Although, as she

states below, she intends to encourage more extensive reading, because of the needs of her learners, she ends up focusing on deliberate vocabulary instruction through translation.

> [Using texts] For presenting the topic of the lesson, yes. Well, I give them the reading activity. They read it, they try to understand, and then they usually have a […] True/False activity, something like that. And they try to do it, but they don't have the … the knowledge! So they don't know. […] there are maybe 2 or 3 students who can more or less produce or attempt an answer. So I try to work with them. And then I say, OK, let's look at the highlighted words and let's see if you can guess what they mean. Well, if they can, I teach them the new topic. If they can't, I give them the translation and then I explain.

María emphasises that working in English and trying to use the language communicatively was out of the question, not only due to the given students' disinterest but also due to their inability to follow her. In the case of grammar, for example, María explains below that she tends to resort to Spanish in most of her lessons:

> I write the structure or whatever I want … the vocabulary I want to teach and explain that in Spanish. It's a subject, it's not a language that they are acquiring. They don't know the verbs, they don't know an adjective. So I say *'OK. Esta palabrita que está acá, viene a ser la persona. OK. ¿Qué le pasó a esta persona? ¿Por qué yo al verbo le puse una -s? Tratemos de pensar …',* they don't know so I say: *'OK. Cuando tengamos un HE o un SHE, otra persona que no sea YO, no sean Uds, el verbo va a tener una –s'* - and I keep explaining that until December and I am explaining that in the 6th year. […] Never ending.

The introduction of vocabulary seems to follow similar stages. María explained that her approach to vocabulary involves using pictures and associations between the picture and the written word. She then also tests her students using a similar method, with no actual meaningful production or skills integration taking place. As she puts it:

> No production, no communication. It's only like I said before: fill in the blanks, and match, answer questions but … always with mistakes…

María's answers in the interview all seemed to confirm the existence of a gap between the official rhetoric's emphasis on natural acquisition and

actual teaching practices—in this case, the almost exclusive focus on formal transmission of the structure of the language.

2.1.2 Integrating Language, Content and Skills

The 2011 curriculum emphasised skills integration, reading comprehension and linking language to the subject matter of the specialist track followed by a given school. María expresses her concern about implementing these directives and argues that the reading expectations seem more suitable for university than for secondary students:

> They remind me of what I'm doing at university. […]. In the case of … er … they [secondary students] don't read even in Spanish. So, if you give them a reading activity er … they don't like it and it's a waste of time because they spend the whole er … period doing that, […] or they don't read because they don't understand the words, they don't have dictionaries. So, it's like … you have to translate all the time for them to understand a sentence. So reading is … [thinks] writing is impossible because they don't read and they don't process the information in their heads so they don't know how to make a sentence. So they're only prepared for filling the blanks or match

Similarly, she feels that trying to implement any form of CLIL-oriented methodology in her teaching context is out of the question. She looked quite disappointed when discussing this and explained:

> I cannot do anything. I try … I have tried, I have tried [sighs]. Last year I … no, no … 2012 maybe, I tried to make a joint lesson together with History. It was June, so we were talking about Belgrano [a national political figure], so I tried to make a lesson focus on Belgrano's life because we were seeing the simple past. It was awful … a failure!

Reflecting on why she thought her lesson did not go well, María commented:

> Because they don't like history, they don't like the history teachers so they asked me 'why are we talking about Belgrano? We don't like history', 'we don't know who he is', "why do we have to know this" […] There was no motivation. And then the language itself: 'Why in English if Belgrano was born here in Argentina' […] I've tried many things, many things …

This seems to link back to the attitudes of learners mentioned in Sect. 2.1.1 and how this influences what María is able to do in the classroom. Implementing CLIL in the way María describes above involves a certain amount of collaboration with other teachers, not just in her school but from other areas. However, María commented that there were few opportunities to engage in joint activities with teachers from other areas, again stressing the isolated nature of her working context and her teaching practices.

2.1.3 Formative Assessment

The curriculum documents recommended the use of formative assessment, and María described how she had tried to implement self- and peer-assessment by setting up a small class project:

> [In] the 4th year, I was teaching the simple past. And I said, OK now let's choose your favourite actor or musician and find a biography in Spanish on the Internet at home, bring it to the class and here you're going to translate it. Well, they did it, with me. […] when they finished their translations they had to make a video. […] And they didn't know how to make it, so I had to study first to teach them […]. They had to present their videos and they included music, the blind student recorded himself reading, it was great. And then I asked them, what grade do you think you deserve? And they were honest, because they saw the different presentations and then they could compare and they said, OK, 'she should get a 10 because her presentation was …' but 'He didn't do anything, he did it with the Google translator' … and they evaluated themselves. Then I decided on the final mark. But they could do it.

Despite the success such an activity seemed to have, María reports that it did not help much in terms of motivating learners or enhancing their learning:

> They did it and they liked it. Now they are in the 5th year and they still don't know the past. And you say, how can I do it? How can I make them study consciously? Or acquire the language, not learn it. They learnt it and then they forgot. I don't know where the problem is, in order to find a solution. Wow! [sighs, looking tired] […] they want their … sheets of paper, and the 'formula' on the board [emphatic], not even in a, in a projector, on the board, they want to copy that, study that and be tested on that. […] Formulas. Yes.

Thus although María has tried to implement new ways of assessing her learners in keeping with the curriculum guidelines, such assessment practices

pose a challenge for her learners since they are more familiar with fact-based, rote-learning, summative assessment tradition used in the schools where she works.

So far María's story suggests that attempting to work, alone, with her students in the spirit of the new curriculum has been very challenging and largely unsuccessful. One reason noted was teachers' isolation and apparent lack of access to formal or informal support. In the next section, María comments on this.

2.2 Change Implementation and Teacher Support

María reports that although teachers were given a number of guidelines pertaining to methodological options, content selection and assessment strategies, these were insufficient. She comments that 'Yes, they give you guidelines, they give you ideas but they are not practical *[…]*'. She believes that the guidelines are too broad and focus mainly on the theoretical underpinnings of the change, rather than providing practical examples of how the guidelines might be used in classrooms.

María did not have the chance to attend any of the debriefing sessions that were available during the curriculum initiation stage, as she was not one of the teachers selected by the school. This added to her sense of being at a loss. Even when the colleagues who had attended the meetings cascaded the information shared, she found that participating in the ensuing discussions was not helpful either. As she mentions below, these sessions consisted mainly of reading official documents and then giving their thoughts about them in the form of written questions.

> The … the headmaster explained what we were supposed to do and then she gave a list of questions for us to answer, so […] she separated us into areas, and languages were all in one group and we had to read the part related to languages and then we had to answer questions. We answered the questions but then we were looking at the clock and then we … wanted to leave, yes!

In my experience, what María says above is an accurate depiction of what happens when teachers are asked to read and discuss official documents in order to provide answers to questions that—more often than not—will be ignored. Such meetings are obligatory and take place during school hours, yet despite this formality, teachers believe that their views will not be taken into consideration. Thus, María's comment about 'looking at the clock'

and wanting to leave exemplifies the redundancy she feels about the whole debriefing process. Other than attending these kinds of meetings, teachers received little support with change implementation. María comments below how she and other teachers have had no development programmes explicitly related to the new curriculum, and although there are specialists appointed at school level, they are not trained to help English teachers:

> […] we have those *'asesores pedagógicos'* [counsellors] They are just interested in behaviour. So they focus on problematic students and they work on that. But not the plannings. They ask you for the plannings, you have to hand them in, but then it's a formality - it's only a formality that you … hand in.

María's words above reinforce her experience of working in isolation and unsupervised. Any supervision that does take place is carried out mainly for administrative purposes by counsellors who are not ELT specialists.

2.3 María's Feelings Towards the Change

María appears to be aware of the relevance of the changes suggested in the curriculum and views them as interesting but rather impractical. She shows concern that the intended change seems to ignore important visible aspects of the context such as the large class size, limited access to resources (e.g. textbooks and ICT resources) and reduced length and frequency of English classes, as well as the less visible features such as learner motivations and attitudes. One of her strongest concerns seemed to be related to the latter point of learner motivation, as already mentioned in Sect. 2.1.1. She comments that:

> […] it's not only the students' attitude towards English or towards any language. It's towards school. They don't want to be there and they don't study. Teachers don't update their practice so they [students] feel [hesitates] as if they were in prison. So it's an obligation for them to be there to do what we ask them to do and they do it just because they want to pass the subject.

María feels that there is nothing essentially wrong with the theoretical background underpinning the curriculum. However, the contextual reality of low student motivation and classroom management challenges related to this means that it is difficult to implement it as intended. She sums this up below:

> […] I don't think this is wrong [pointing at documents on the table] I agree with what this says. The problem is how to implement it with our reality. […] it's a social problem. It's not er … not because of these documents, or because of the language we're teaching. […] Maybe they are not acquainted with reality. Maybe they don't know what a real school looks like or what real lessons are like. […] I don't have behaviour problems but sometimes you can't give a lesson because you have 3 or 4 problematic students and you're there, you greet the students, you start fighting with them and then you leave. And you couldn't teach a word.

Although María acknowledges that the context above might be the particular reality at her school, she believes that the situation is probably not very different elsewhere:

> It goes beyond [our local context]. It's something national as regards education. The educational system is failing in something and I don't know what it is … er … something is failing and the students don't want to be part of it. And how to engage them is … almost impossible. You try and you try but [long pause] it's never ending and exhausting.

This sense of failure of the education system that María suggests in her words above has also been acknowledged by others (e.g. Croce 2014; Pozzo 2009). María goes on to suggest that this dissatisfaction with the education system in general appears to also affect learners' views of teachers.

> It's because of … erm … the prestige schools have. Schools are no longer seen as the place where they're going to learn. They learn from the computer at home. They don't learn from teachers. Teachers are there to be like a role model, model of what they don't want to be. They don't want to be like that person sitting there, who's poorly paid, and has no motivation to be there because most teachers are like that. So, they see us as losers […] They don't want to be like us. It's like that.

Such feelings and responses are not helped by parents' apparent indifference to their children's education, which María explains below.

> Parents don't care [about school]. And if it is English, they are er … even less interested. When the students have to graduate and the only subject they have to sit is English, parents come to schools, get to know me […] parents don't care. And authorities and colleagues are acquainted with this and they take it naturally. That's the problem.

With little support from parents, and in the face of her students' low motivation compounded with relatively few opportunities to share with and learn from other colleagues, María feels disillusioned by the whole change process. She expresses this strongly below.

> I don't think that there are … other people apart from me thinking about this. And it's frustrating [emphatic]. If you're really into what you're doing, it's really frustrating. Time-consuming, it demands a lot of energy, and frustrating - when you see that they [learners] don't know the numbers, or they don't know how to conjugate the verb to be, you say, "what am I doing here"?

These feelings of frustration and disillusionment perhaps also stem from the fact that few of the stakeholders in the English language learning process seem to view learning English as particularly worthwhile. María's response to the feelings was to suggest a change in 'people'. Although her words below seem quite emphatic, they highlight that perhaps in María's context, there has been a neglect of the role that people play in successful curriculum implication—that it is not just about textbooks and a new syllabus.

> I would change everything, from the headmaster up to the people who clean schools. I would … because I see, I see teachers who are there for the salary or the newcomers [novice teachers] who are there because it's the only school where no teacher went to the '*concurso*' [teachers' recruitment system]. So I see them and I would like to fire all of them and to hire new people with my ideas and my will for change [emphatic]. But it's impossible. And I find it frustrating.

María's story provides a fairly bleak picture of a teacher living with curriculum change, and it was perhaps significant that she found the telling of it a positive experience. Her last words in the interview were 'I felt GREAT doing this!', suggesting perhaps that she has had very little opportunity to voice her concerns and struggles.

3 Discussion

> Educational change depends on what teachers do and think it is as simple and complex as that (Fullan 2007: 129).

The outcomes of this case study seem to support Fullan's deceptively simple words, showing an implementation gap between the hoped-for

outcomes of the new curriculum and María's classroom practices, despite her endorsement of the curriculum principles. The subsections below will consider and try to explain mismatches between the intended change and teachers' situated practices at state-run schools in the provincial context.

3.1 The Intended Change and Classroom Reality

Studies exploring EFL curriculum design, planning and implementation processes in Argentina are not abundant. In one of the few available, Zappa-Hollman claims that in terms of implementation of change in Argentina:

> […] not enough consideration seems to have been given to the human and material resources available to implement the policy, curricular and instructional modifications, thus imposing on the teachers the formidable task of operationalizing these changes while leaving them to grapple with a number of challenges, some of which revealed deeply rooted structural problems in the social fabric of the country (2007: 620).

As María relates, such deeply rooted problems greatly influenced her capacity to implement the curriculum as intended.

The literature on curricular change provides ample evidence that for an education innovation to succeed, the decisions made at the initiation stage play a crucial role (Fullan 2007; Wedell 2009). It is during this initial phase that decisions concerning the rationale for the innovation and the characteristics of the hoped-for change are delineated. Issues related to the context, the roles of those involved in the change, the degree of cultural and professional shift that the change implies (Wedell 2003), how change goals will be communicated, and the availability of funding for sustained support of the change and its implementers, all need to be considered at this first stage.

Whereas the previously mentioned Document 2 (2008c) intended to inquire into the existing situations at schools, prior to change implementation, this initial attempt to identify contextual realities died young. No serious effort was made to use the information gained to inform the development of plans to support teachers' uptake.

In the case described here, stakeholders' real understanding of the intended change was limited. The debriefing sessions organised were few and for a few—excluding María. These briefings dealt only with facts and information about the change. Dissemination relied on those attending the briefings cascading content to their colleagues at school. Briefings did not thus help teachers (and other local stakeholders such as school leaders

and parents) to understand (through concrete examples) what the changes implied for classroom practices.

The change was thus implemented with little understanding, and so little consideration, of existing contextual features of secondary school classrooms. It was unlikely that implementers (teachers) would view the change as compatible with their existing practices, and so approach implementation positively (Markee 1997).

Findings from this study are consistent with those of other research into change implementation that pinpoint the existence of a rhetoric-practice gap between the documented and the realised curriculum (Park and Sung 2013; Orafi and Borg 2009; Sakui 2004). In particular, these findings are similar to the outcomes of two small-scale studies I conducted on the same topic when the implementation stage of the curriculum change had just started (Soto 2011, 2012). Outcomes from all these studies suggest that teachers' pedagogical decisions are based on their beliefs about what is appropriate for their learners in the specific situated context of their school and classroom realities. Such beliefs may be in conflict with the aims and principles underlying a new more communicative curriculum.

Contrary to the popularly espoused perception in Argentina that the main language teaching approach implemented in schools is of a communicative nature (perhaps leading policy makers to believe that the changes introduced were more or less consistent with teachers' existing practice), research has shown that this is not so. Actual classroom practices continue to place a heavy emphasis on traditional grammar and vocabulary activities (Soto 2011, 2012).

Although María agrees that the intended changes are relevant, her classroom behaviour largely reflected traditional practices due to contextual influences, some of which relate to the learners themselves. The learners' low language proficiency level and their clear disengagement from and disinterest in learning English make it difficult to develop a classroom atmosphere that promotes an anxiety-free, cooperative, learning environment, conducive to developing fluency through natural learning and meaningful interaction. In addition, the development of fluency requires extensive input and interaction opportunities over time. Both were very limited. This would suggest that curriculum planners need to take into account current levels of language proficiency and the rationale for learning English. Similar concerns regarding the lack of relevance of the curriculum and its limited ability to engage learners were found among teachers in a study of English language curriculum reform in Jordan (Al-Daami and Wallace 2007).

In Entre Ríos, there are no high-stakes English examinations and teachers are free to decide what to assess and how. María seems to be fully aware of the possibilities that alternative forms of assessment might mean for learners and how 'changes in examinations can promote parallel changes in pedagogic practices' (Orafi and Borg 2009: 251–252). She attempted to adopt assessment strategies of a more formative nature, but with limited success, since in her classroom contexts learners wanted to be tested *to the book* in a manner consistent with the long-standing cultural tradition of rote-learning and summative tests. In response, María seems to have adopted a 'student-based teaching' approach, which shaped her pedagogical decisions and which encompassed decisions 'based primarily on factors related to the particular group of students in the classroom at that particular moment' (Woods 1991: 9).

3.2 The Intended Change and Teachers' Feelings

Research supports the view that teachers' instructional decisions and curriculum enactment are influenced by their existing beliefs, whether these are explicit or not (Borg 2006). In this sense, research findings show that translating any hoped-for curriculum innovation promoting new pedagogical approaches into classroom practices is not a simple enterprise, since '(…) most teachers will probably only be able to see the reform goals through the lenses of their existing beliefs and understandings' (Wedell 2009: 34). Changing such beliefs and understandings takes time and needs support over time.

Asking teachers to change their existing behaviours and practices in the classroom can also be an emotional upheaval (Zembylas 2003).

Change implementation in the classroom is 'shaped by a wide range of interacting and often conflicting factors' (Borg 2003: 91), including scarcely addressed 'affective, moral and emotional factors' (p.93) or, as Wedell argues, 'planning and implementing educational change (…) needs to take people's feelings into account' (2009: 19). María's story has shown the feelings of frustration and disillusionment that she felt with the change imposed on her. If a change is externally imposed, with insufficient recognition of the extent to which the practices it promotes differ from existing norms, teachers may view it as a threat (Gao 2008). Attempting to implement it can undermine their confidence and feeling of self-efficacy—something which María's account seems to illustrate.

María's experiences suggest that despite unfruitful attempts to expose learners to a range of communicative approaches such as CLT, TBL, CLIL and CBI, in Entre Rios province most secondary school English learners' (and probably their parents' as well) expectations of teaching and learning remain firmly situated in a transmission—memorisation paradigm, which shares little with the educational principles underpinning the curriculum changes that policy makers have introduced. The expectation that María and other teachers should work alone to try to alter their existing beliefs and practices suggests a lack of awareness by curriculum planners of the extent of the change required and the emotional effort it requires (Zembylas 2003; Hargreaves 1998). Indeed, in attempting to change classroom behaviours and practices, teachers like María are likely to be exposed to criticism for challenging existing educational norms. Such conflict between the new curriculum aims and existing practices and behaviour has also been found in other change contexts (e.g. see Ouyang 2000; Curdt-Christiansen and Silver 2012).

3.3 Support for Change

Although the main tenets of a communicative methodology are not unknown to teachers in Argentina, the shift into CBI or CLIL or even to reading comprehension activities that go beyond *True-False* questions asks teachers to display a set of skills that may be unfamiliar to them, or in the case of María, perhaps also asks new skills and roles of learners that they are unfamiliar with. Small-scale local research findings suggest that in such circumstances teachers tend to stick to what they feel confident about doing and what matches existing expectations, rather than trying to meet curriculum specifications (Soto 2012, 2014).

Teachers' attitudes to and advocacy of any curriculum change are likely to be shaped by the opportunities they are given to (re)educate themselves, in the light of the proposed changes and of their local classroom realities (Wedell and Malderez 2013). If misconceptions are to be avoided, support provision needs to both communicate the rationale behind the change clearly and give teachers first-hand chances, ideally with colleagues, to make sense of it for their classrooms. Smith and Sutherland claim:

> Teachers require scaffolded opportunities over time, with other teachers who are focusing on the same issues, and with the specific content they are teaching (…) to directly wrestle with the messages of these documents and to work

> through the implications of these reforms for their own teaching practices. (2007: 418)

For teachers like María, with heavy workloads, and working in isolation—not only from other curricular areas, but also from other English teachers—the cascaded debriefing sessions were completely insufficient to meet ambitious change demands such as identifying and selecting suitable material or content to develop a syllabus appropriate to their learners' needs (Banegas 2012, 2014). Indeed, research (Bax 2002; Hayes 2000; Wedell 2005) suggests that when introducing a change that entails the adoption of new teaching practices, such a cascade strategy is often insufficient to ensure that the training aims will actually materialise in classrooms

As Freeman (2013: 127) points out, 'the change process involves making sense of the new (however it is understood); basically it is a process of professional learning'. In this change context, as María's experiences showed, teachers, working in isolation, had little opportunity for such sense making or professional learning. In such unsupported circumstances, María is unlikely to be the only teacher feeling frustration and distress (Chacón 2005; Kennedy 2013).

4 Conclusion

The findings of this study have again confirmed the complexity of change initiation and implementation planning. Farrell and Kun highlight

> […] how vitally important it is for language policy strategists to understand the crucial role that teachers play in the enactment of language policy and that therefore they should be recognised as an integral part of any government language policy efforts. (2008: 399)

In this case only token efforts appear to have been made to ask teachers about the context of change implementation, leading to the proposed changes being based on a series of invalid assumptions about existing English language classroom contexts. Two of these seem particularly important in explaining the difficulties that María reported. Firstly, a belief that prior changes, which had introduced communicative approaches to school language education, were already being implemented and so the associated practices were very familiar to teachers and learners. Secondly, the assumption that secondary school learners were interested in and motivated to learn

English. Since neither of these was true, the challenges that the changes posed for teachers were considerable. Invalid assumptions contributed to inadequate planning for teacher support, as Armendariz (2009:51) suggests:

> […] professional growth and deep conviction can only come from bottom up rather than top down processes. It is only in this way that the new professional will be able to construct, reconstruct and evaluate their teaching.

Implementation planners seemed to have overlooked the need for such bottom-up professional growth. The limited support was theory-driven and transmission-oriented and failed to provide teachers with clear examples of how to integrate the new curriculum principles into their day-to-day practice or with supported opportunities to do so. María and her colleagues in other schools were essentially left to make their pedagogical adjustments to meet the new curriculum goals alone. For her at least, the curriculum changes led to little classroom change.

Given the above invalid assumptions, it is reasonable to question whether borrowed, off-the-shelf approaches to ELT, introduced with little or no attempt to adjust them to the local context, are a viable option. A deeper analysis of the motivation to learn English in the context where this study took place, and in other contexts, might help redirect the goals of future curricular innovations. Communicative approaches might have the potential to enhance meaningful communication and improve comprehension, skills development, learner motivation, cultural awareness and teacher autonomy (Banegas 2014; Kiely 2011; Ravelo 2014). However, future policy initiatives in contexts such as the one in this study should perhaps reassess the appropriacy of encouraging unadapted implementation of communicative approaches where existing perceptions of the importance of grammar and vocabulary remain a strong influence on classroom practice, and there is less emphasis on language skills development, especially listening and speaking (Bax 2003; Hiep 2007; Sakui 2004). While this case study has focused on one teacher in Argentina, it is hoped that there is much which can be learnt from María's experiences by researchers and practitioners operating in other similar contexts.

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12

From Initial Rigidity to Greater Flexibility: The Changing Face of English Curriculum Change Implementation in Cuba

Islaura Tejeda Arencibia

1 Introduction

As Cuba becomes ever more open to the wider world, the role of English in the country continues to develop. I could find no research evidence to attest to citizens' attitudes to the teaching and learning of English in Cuba. However, as a parent and a teacher educator who is involved in some of the changes discussed below, I sense that people in Cuba are very enthusiastic about learning English. They support the importance given to the subject, because of the opportunities they perceive it as providing for career choices, job opportunities and the development of small businesses in the current evolving national socio-economic environment.

This chapter begins by briefly introducing the Cuban education system and the role of English within it, together with the curriculum changes introduced during the past 15 years in junior high school English. The following section focuses on one teacher's experiences of this curriculum change process, and the chapter concludes with a discussion of what these experiences suggest about factors that it is important for the Cuban approach to English curriculum change to consider.

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M. Wedell and L. Grassick (eds.), *International Perspectives on Teachers Living with Curriculum Change*, International Perspectives on English Language Teaching,
https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-54309-7_12

1.1 Education and ELT in Cuba

All schools in Cuba are part of the state system. Education has always been a government priority and the overall quality and successful outcomes of Cuban education have been internationally recognised (UNESCO 2010). There is a constitutional right to free education at all levels (elementary to tertiary), and all citizens must complete basic secondary education up to year nine (Gaceta Oficial de la República de Cuba 2002).

The Ministry of Education has given the English curriculum an increasingly important role in general education, and today English, together with Mathematics, Spanish and History, is one of the core curriculum subjects across the country. It is now taught from the third year of elementary school to the first two or three years of university studies.

Since English is a core curriculum subject, the training of English teachers has high priority. Teachers of English are trained at universities through the Foreign Language Teacher Education Programs that are offered in every province for 12th-grade graduates and for workers who decide to take on university studies. The status of these programmes is quite high, and so most accepted applicants have achieved good (or above average) results in 12th grade and passed the University Entrance Exam. Recently, the Ministry of Education also introduced a new form of training for English language teachers for elementary education. This takes place at the Pedagogical Schools of the country, for students who have completed their ninth grade.

In 2000–2001, there was a major national change in Cuban education with the introduction of the Audiovisual Program, which emphasised the appropriate and extensive use of television and video for the teaching of all subjects at all levels of schooling. In response to these changes, English syllabus designers redesigned the English curriculum, to try to match the use of audiovisual aids with international perspectives on ELT that supported a more communicative methodology. The aims of the new English curriculum for junior high schools were to contribute to the formation of students as responsible and revolutionary citizens, through the development of their knowledge, habits and skills to communicate in the foreign language, and to understand oral and written information through meaningful, risk-taking and communicative tasks (Enríquez et al. 2006).

These aims represented a move away from existing approaches to language teaching all over the country that prioritised rote learning and mastery of grammar and vocabulary. They also influenced the approach to foreign language assessment. Students' progress in learning was no longer to be assessed

only through summative comprehension tests, but also through ongoing, more formative assessment, using a combination of role-plays, interviews, project work and presentations, midterm tests and self- and peer-assessment procedures, which were consistent with the new curriculum aims.

To begin with, the implementation of this new English curriculum was inflexible. It was entirely based on TV lessons as the main source for learning. These had had to be watched by all teachers and learners across the whole country at the same time. This decision was prompted both by a pragmatic response to the then-existing shortage of qualified English teachers and by a desire to utilise the possibility of using TV sets and video recorders at schools (Font 2006). Over time, in the light of changing perspectives about the use of audiovisual aids, the steady increase of graduate English teachers, and increasing recognition of teachers' roles as professional educators and mediators of the learning process (Castellanos et al. 2005), TV lessons were replaced by video lessons. These allowed for other forms of learning input and gave teachers greater freedom to manage their own classrooms, since they could now select the best video sequences for their lesson aims.

Nowadays, the aims, content, rationale and suggested assessment of the English curricula remain the same, but the use of TV lessons and video lessons has been greatly reduced. With growth in the availability of printed course books and qualified English teachers, it is now a common practice for English teachers to use excerpts of these video lessons as just one form of supplementary material, together with the use of other educative software and Internet resources, whenever possible. This increasingly flexible view of curriculum implementation has freed teachers to use different strategies to plan, execute and manage teaching and learning bearing in mind students' needs and interests, as well as school and curriculum demands. Besides, it has had a positive impact on assessment since teachers are free to decide on the content of formative and summative assessment (oral or written) that is appropriate for their students at a specific moment of the course.

In other words, in principle, over time, teachers and schools have been given increasing scope to participate in decision-making, and to implement the curriculum flexibly in ways they believe will improve the quality of English learning and teaching in their own contexts. However, the extent of understanding of how such opportunities to adapt curriculum implementation to local contexts can actually be carried out in practice, varies across the country. Consequently, while some teachers may understand curriculum expectations and work consistently towards fulfilling the aims for their

own learners, others still overemphasise grammar learning, prefer written exercises, or assign project work that is above students' level. The following section explores one teacher's experience of the above curriculum implementation process.

2 A Teacher's Perspective on the English Curriculum Change Process

Carmen Rosa teaches 13–15 year-old learners at Capitán San Luis Junior High School, a typical secondary school at Amancio, a southern municipality of Las Tunas province in the eastern part of the country. It has a population of about half a million people living in eight municipalities. There are 631 schools, including 52 junior high schools (Seventh to Ninth grades) and 18 senior high schools (10th to 12th grades) to cover the educational needs of children, teenagers and adults.

Carmen Rosa holds a Master's Degree in Education. During her career, she has been a junior high school English teacher, ELT advisor/consultant in her municipality and mentor of foreign language teacher trainees placed in her school. She has participated in professional development opportunities and been engaged in a range of different activities and tasks to develop learners' whole personality, including holding teacher—parent meetings, working on class profiles, discussing students' progress and visiting communities. These responsibilities have extended her experience and helped her to develop an understanding of different issues related to foreign language teaching and learning in Cuba. She has a very good command of English; however, during the interviews she sometimes referred to an official English booklet outlining the curriculum objectives to support her responses. Some of her reflections on the ELT change process in her context follow.

2.1 Carmen Rosa's Understandings of the New English Curriculum

Carmen Rosa begins by explaining her understanding of some of the current English curriculum's formal characteristics.

> So the curriculum framework has different components; it describes what is taught as well as how this body of knowledge is best taught […] to ensure that current pupils' learning is supported.

She explains that the communicative nature of this new curriculum is expressed in its main aims, which she summarises, based on official documents (Enríquez 2000, Enríquez et al. 2006: 16–17), in the following way:

> To foster in the students a variety of learning strategies that will enable them to interact orally in meaningful ways and comprehend written and spoken English; to enable students […] to complete tasks according to students' school and life environment and projects involving communication in English […] to contribute to the political and ideological formation of students as they learn to use English as a means of communication and social interaction in classroom activities and outside the school environment […] to increase students' general knowledge by using English as a vehicle for supporting learning across the curriculum and for demonstrating understanding of priority subjects such as Spanish, History and Mathematics, and other cross-curriculum contents that include sexual education and environmental issues […] to stimulate understanding of cultural similarities and differences between the culture of English speaking countries and the Cuban culture.

Despite the range and complexity of the above aims, Carmen Rosa believes teachers in her school do have a clear understanding of both the aims and the curriculum content. This is due to the efforts made by change planners to present them clearly not to just teachers, but also to other stakeholders, such as school administrators, methodologists and even parents, if they request the information. She especially acknowledges the important role played by the different professional development opportunities available to her and colleagues in the municipality, to help them become aware of curriculum expectations.

> […] The teachers are conscious and they are aware of the content of these objectives for ensuring the students' progression […] As I said before, all the teachers are clear and aware of these objectives so for this […] some professional sessions were developed and in those professional sessions […] they had the possibility to exchange ideas about the objectives of this curriculum.

I think her opinion is based on her own experience of working with colleagues in her school, their participation in PD sessions, and their daily informal discussions. My experience as a teacher educator suggests that it is unlikely that all teachers everywhere are actually as fully aware of curriculum aims or what they imply as she is.

She recognises 'the appropriateness of aims to meet the students' needs, to develop communicative competence and to achieve students' progression

in communication'. She considers the new English curriculum to be consistent with the general goals of education in Cuba which stress that attention should also be given to the 'development of values, attitudes and behaviours' relevant to the socio-economic demands of our society and worldwide issues.

The above wide-ranging curriculum aims have implications for both the content and the process of English language learning. In terms of the content of English classes, she understands that in order to achieve the aims 'language learning does not only imply learning and practice of micro-skills; it also implies knowing about language and how to use language in meaningful contexts'. She explains that language learning should be understood as an 'open, dynamic and evolving process' and that such a view implies teachers recognising both the importance of grammar, pronunciation and vocabulary and of getting students engaged in proper communication.

> And then when teachers have this wide and expanded view of language learning […] students can benefit from this language in a better way. So, teachers need to know how language is used to create and represent meaning, and how to communicate with others, and to engage in communication […] teachers should not see language as just a simple code of acquiring grammar, pronunciation or vocabulary […] Language development and language acquisition is more than that.

English lessons, like all other school subjects in Cuba, have to take into account the cross-curricular themes like sexual education, health education, culture, moral values, ideology and environmental issues, which are part of the core curriculum for basic secondary education. Successfully implementing the above English curriculum aims, thus entails the use of a range of different content, some of which is often updated.

> English teachers make great contributions to the development of sexual education, health education and environmental issues […] English teachers are always updated about the current national, international, and local events and then with this updated information they are able to develop the lesson […] we prepare some debates to exchange ideas with our students…

In addition to identifying appropriate content covering the above topics, teachers also need to make decisions about how to introduce cultural elements in the classroom, to provide learners with opportunities to reflect on and compare both universal values and those that are shared in particular contexts.

> Culture is an important aspect in the English curriculum. We may establish differences and similarities between the Cuban culture and the culture of some English-speaking countries […] another important aspect is the development of moral values through the English lesson so we take into account important contents and prioritise the development of these values. We may work with responsibility, honesty…

To become able to achieve such wide-ranging curriculum goals for their own learners, it is now recognised that teachers need the professional competence and confidence to do more than just follow a predetermined audiovisual method or 'teach a book'. They need to be creative in order to adapt language teaching to the changing reality and needs of their particular classrooms (Enríquez et al. 2006; Font 2006).

In terms of the process of teaching and learning, Carmen highlights two noticeable changes that have become visible in language classrooms since the implementation of the present curriculum framework. Firstly, she says that a much wider range of interactional patterns is now found in English classrooms as, in order to meet current curriculum aims, teachers increasingly try to promote active learning through interactive and cooperative activities.

> Teachers develop different interactional patterns within the classroom environment. For example, it may […] be whole-class patterns or students may work in groups, in teams, in pairs to accomplish different learning tasks.

Secondly, she believes that there is far more explicit attention paid to the teaching of learning strategies (i.e. using dictionaries, creating vocabulary lists, repetition, reading for detail…), and to how learners can benefit from their use in classroom settings (Enríquez et al. 2006). Carmen Rosa states that 'students succeed best when they are able to use different learning strategies'. For her, it is also necessary for teachers to use different instructional strategies (i.e. scaffolding learning, training students to process information or solve problems…) especially if they expect students to be involved in the range of different communicative tasks mentioned below.

> I may also add that language learning occurs in a wide variety of settings […] Then in the classroom they practice the communicative functions, oral reports about suggested topics of the unit syllabus […] the students write descriptions and they describe orally […] The students have the possibility to use role-play in different situations and also they present project works at the end of units […] They listen to authentic materials, write texts, read texts…

The introduction of the new English curriculum was matched by major changes to the recommended approaches to assessment. Carmen Rosa is very aware of the importance of using ongoing assessment procedures to monitor students' progress and to make appropriate planning decisions. In practice, as Carmen Rosa says below, teachers ought to make professional judgments on students' performance in every lesson, in order to make appropriate planning decisions for subsequent lessons and to provide feedback.

> Assessment of students' ongoing language development is vital to ensure relevant planning, to be aware of the progress they are making at any particular point […] it allows teachers to make decisions about students' learning and also how to meet students' needs […] feedback is an important fact for improving the quality of students' performance…

The general curriculum in Cuba fosters formative assessment to assess students' intellectual activity, as well as how their learning process has contributed to their motivation, feelings, attitudes and values (Castellanos et al. 2005). Such an approach to assessment is potentially very challenging for teachers, in terms of both the time and the professional skills needed to be able to carry it out appropriately. Carmen Rosa's comments remind me, as a teacher educator, of the need for greater focus on formative assessment in professional development workshops or courses.

2.2 Carmen's Views on the Curriculum Implementation Process

Recognition of the need for flexibility in curriculum content and the need to adopt new teaching and assessment practices both pose challenges, not only to those within education such as teachers, learners, school leaders and teacher educators, but also to those outside schools with an interest in what happens in school classrooms, such as parents. Carmen Rosa acknowledges this when she raises the issue of the need for shared values in order to help students to succeed better within the current curriculum framework.

> Students benefit most when the school environment and the environment they find at home have or establish similar values; similar expectations for their learning, for their behaviour and also for their well-being, so important things have been achieved in recent years but parents are not fully informed about and do not feel involved in many aspects of students' school life.

In her opinion, the school, the community and the family should ideally share educational values and understandings because students sometimes need parental understanding and even community support to complete tasks like project work, a task-type new to the Cuban educational context. Despite her above comments on the extent to which planners try to provide information about changes, my experience suggests there is a need for further awareness-raising activity, to more closely align school and community understandings of what the English curriculum is trying to achieve.

Carmen Rosa recalls the beginning of the implementation process of the communicative curriculum in Cuba in the academic year 2001–2002 as being 'compulsory for all English teachers along the country'. This suggests that to begin with Cuban English teachers were faced with a top–down 'rational' (Wise 1977) change initiative, aiming to improve general education through the introduction of educational TV channels, the Audiovisual Program and TV courses, and video lessons. To support the change, the Ministry of Education guaranteed new resources [TV, VCR, computers…] for each school. ELT advisors and teachers were given guidelines and trained on the methodology to work with them. The guidelines were then used by school boards to monitor the implementation process, mainly through classroom observation.

In Carmen Rosa's opinion, teachers' first experiences of the new English curriculum were challenging, due to the quantity and complexity of the initial materials and the inflexibility of their presentation.

> Teachers on TV and classroom teachers themselves did their best to make [content] accessible to the students since the contents presented were really complex for junior high students. In addition, their previous knowledge did not ease content assimilation for the majority of students […] In each TV lesson the teachers just had 15 minutes to practice, to make some reflections or to clear out any possible doubt…

In order to follow TV instructions and at the same time meet students' learning needs, teachers had to reappraise their teaching practice and their roles in the classroom. In her reflections, Carmen Rosa suggests that in order to cope with the new curriculum, teachers needed to develop a new 'philosophy of education'. She states that she did her best 'to change […] in those conditions' but in her opinion not all teachers were ready to make such changes. Even her commitment to her students' learning did not prevent her from sometimes feeling reluctant to adopt changes, especially because of the requirement for teachers to exactly follow the TV lessons and video lessons.

> [During] video lessons teachers did not have the possibility to stop the video sequence; they were not allowed to stop the video sequence to explain some important aspects to the students; teachers did not have the possibility to interact directly with students and […] I was against that, I did not like that.

She points out however, that there were also positive aspects to these inflexible early approaches to implementation in terms of teacher training and support. The TV lessons firstly provided more varied input for learners than was available in most schools (e.g. songs, conversational extracts, pictures and films). Secondly, they acted as models for teachers in how to use more varied materials in their own classrooms, and enabled them to see examples of how they might update their own professional skills and knowledge in relation to ELT methodology, language skills, communicative tasks and the culture of English-speaking countries. These lessons remain available to support teaching at elementary level up to the present.

2.3 Implementation Support

While the TV lessons provided some initial support for the new curriculum, Carmen Rosa adds that over time a great deal of further support was provided for all English teachers to try to ensure their awareness of, and clarity about, curriculum expectations, and what these implied for practice. Support has taken and continues to take various forms.

> There were different sources of support to develop the English curriculum […] We can refer to some professional sessions; I mean, in these professional sessions different topics regarding syllabus contents and the guidelines of this curriculum were discussed and were presented by experienced teachers for a better exchange of ideas to get into agreements to develop the English curriculum.

Over time, there has been increasing awareness among national and provincial educational leaders that teachers needed to have some flexibility to interpret the curriculum in ways that are appropriate for the needs of their own learners. Considerable support is available for such development of teachers' professional role. Cuba has a well-developed teacher support system with each municipality having a municipal methodologist and each province a provincial methodologist. Teachers therefore continue to have access to regular support, with subject teachers holding weekly meetings within each school, and monthly meetings within each municipality with other teachers of their subject, to discuss local issues related to the practical implementation

of syllabus content and/or associated methodological approaches. These meetings, which happen within teachers' working hours, are generally led by experienced teachers or the municipal methodologist, and provide opportunities to share ideas and materials and to observe demonstrations of/try out practices that are relevant to the English curriculum aims.

As well as school and municipal level support, teachers have access to university-provided ELT courses or those provided by joint projects, for example, courses with the British Columbia Teachers' Federation of Canada and the British Council (TKT Course). For university-offered courses, teachers can suggest topics that they feel they want/need via contact with their municipal methodologist. These then meet the provincial methodologist to agree what courses to ask the universities to offer.

There is no empirical evidence to show the extent to which all teachers fully understand the theoretical principles underlying curriculum goal and how to put them into practice. My own experience as a teacher educator suggests that the regular meetings do help most of them to arrive at a shared understanding of what the curriculum intentions are, and of how they may begin to be achieved in their local settings. However, in Carmen Rosa's opinion, while such professional sessions have helped her improve her practice, they have not always sufficiently considered teachers' existing professional skills and knowledge. She thinks that more 'listening to teachers' voices' during the PD sessions would have helped teachers face changes in a more positive way.

> Teachers had to consult; well, in my case I consulted new bibliography for my training […] to face the students' learning needs and syllabus demands […] The contents presented were really complex for the students' level of assimilation, and then we teachers had to do our best to cope with that, to understand what was really happening in the classroom environment and to solve that situation.

Being told about, or reading about, ideas underpinning the change was not enough. It seems she wanted opportunities during PD sessions to share her ideas about and experiences of implementation with other teachers.

2.4 The Move to More Flexible Implementation

Carmen Rosa explains that the accumulated experiences and feedback from teachers to curriculum designers and policy makers on the implementation of the new English curriculum over the past fifteen years have led to more flexibility in current ELT practices.

> Teachers nowadays have the possibility to use those video lessons as teaching aids […] Teachers have the possibility to present just a video excerpt from the video lesson and this video excerpt is selected by the teacher taking into account the content of the unit of study and also the class profile.

Where once all teachers were expected to follow the audiovisual materials rigidly, they are now trusted to make decisions that they feel are appropriate for their classes. She feels that teacher development and teacher training has been enriched by its recognition of the need to support such evolving teacher autonomy. When she compares current language skills development to the reality before these changes, she concludes that students and teachers have evolved significantly and have benefitted 'academically, culturally, and socially'.

> Language learning has been developed in a new context […] If we compare the current language development and language development ten or twelve years ago, now I think we are in a better position [repetition] to face the demands of teaching English, not only in junior high education but also in elementary education and also in tertiary contexts too.

This encouragement for teachers to be more flexible has in turn enabled them to help students to learn to communicate in a more active way in meaningful contexts that are relevant to their lives. In her case, she feels she has learned from both the negative and the positive aspects during this period of curriculum change but reflects on the need for teachers to be committed and open to further professional learning in order to face the ever changing reality of our classrooms nowadays:

> We need committed teachers to develop language learning; […] committed teachers to students; committed teachers to the proper act of teaching; committed teachers for the development of society because these students in the course of years will be active in different spheres of society.

For her, teaching and educating are not technical exercises. Teachers' responsibilities extend beyond the classroom into the communities in which schools are situated. Teacher learning needs to be constantly evolving to try to ensure that teaching practices and activities remain appropriate for the context in which they work and live.

> We also need trained teachers […] for facing any kind of classroom situation […] situations outside the classroom; situations that have to do with

> behavioural problems; also situations that students face in different communities […] teachers should know the situation in the students' communities […] home environment, and also what is the learning situation at school…

She sees curriculum implementation as a complex process and points out that there are factors that continue to create challenges for all participants, and so need to be given appropriate attention by policy makers, curriculum designers and evaluators:

> Well, there are some factors that create challenges for that implementation […] we may refer to guidelines for implementation, large classes, shortage of teachers to face that implementation, content complexity and also content accessibility, […] parental involvement because parents were not aware of the roles they should play to help their children […] Besides, classroom conditions were not favourable as such and so many teachers had to adapt, modify and differentiate their teaching to cope with the students' learning needs and to ensure learners' progression…

She seems to be aware of many of the connections between the more material and personal affective factors that can influence change implementation. She states that 'language learning and language teaching should be an art [laugh] and the language teacher should be an artist'. In addition, when reflecting on her own learning during these years of curriculum changes, she states that she has experienced growth, both professionally and personally.

> I have become a better teacher and I have improved my teaching practice. I have been aware of students' needs to communicate, to develop different […] skills and also […] to face behavioural problems […] And also my parent—teacher relationship has also improved and has been better as a result of all this curriculum implementation. I have been in a better position to understand [pause] parents' viewpoints regarding the way teachers deal with their children…

While referring to herself above, she concluded by generalising that in order to be able to implement curriculum changes, English teachers have to be conscious of the changes they are supposed to introduce, do their best to fit into those changes and think about the benefits that their students will gain from them.

3 Discussion

Despite Carmen Rosa's experience of feeling officially encouraged to become more autonomous, I feel that overall, change processes in Cuba continue to have what Bolitho (2012: 34) calls 'a centralised and top-down management structure'. The curriculum implementation process clearly did have positive aspects for a dedicated teacher like her. She reports that in her context change planners attempted to inform not just teachers, but also local teacher educators and administrators and wider society (parents) about the new learning content and teaching practices introduced by 2001 curriculum. While the initial implementation planning was top down, inflexible and ignored differences in classroom contexts, the TV lessons did show how new materials and teaching approaches might be used in Cuban classrooms. The teacher support system at regional, local and school levels provided her with a certain amount of relevant professional development, and the cross-curricular themes that were part of the new curriculum (e.g. sex and health education and environmental issues) helped provide her with potentially relevant topics for stimulating classroom interaction.

Two main points for discussion emerge from Carmen Rosa's story. The first relates to the information available to national planners to inform curriculum implementation planning. In Sect. 2.1, Carmen Rosa outlined the range and complexity of the curriculum aims, which hoped to achieve a shift in the culture of learning in Cuban schools. Such a shift represents what Fullan (1992) calls a complex change—one that requires changes to both the thinking and behaviours of stakeholders across the education system. National change planners would, in such circumstances, ideally have based their detailed implementation plans on a clear understanding of how learning, not only of a foreign language but also of all curriculum subjects, is currently conceived by classroom teachers, school leaders and the wider society (parents). However here, although Carmen Rosa reports official attempts to raise awareness of change at local level, initial implementation was not preceded by any systematic exploration of the *'deeper culture of the educational system'* (Bolitho 2012: 41), as manifested through its existing classroom practices, materials and examination procedures. Consequently, initial implementation planning did not appropriately acknowledge the challenges that the changes would pose for the existing educational norms, assumptions and practices among 'front-line change agents' (Bolitho 2012: 44) and the wider communities in which they worked.

Although insufficient effort seems to have been made to gather such information about existing contexts prior to beginning curriculum implementation, the Cuban Ministry of Education does today encourage '*consultation with educators right from the base, in the organization of teacher preparation, in drawing up proposals, in discussing school program plans…*' (Velázquez 2015: 7). It is therefore now a common practice to provide stakeholders with opportunities to express their opinions whenever a curriculum change is proposed. Meetings are held with the board of directors from each province, municipality and school to explain and gather opinions about any new change that needs to be introduced. First drafts of plans for change are usually sent to the different educational levels for analysis and discussion and, once a consensus has been reached, the final documents or regulations to begin the implementation process are developed.

However, this greater consideration of national and local contexts prior to implementation planning still rarely extends to teachers, most of whom continue to be informed about rather than involved in change decisions. Educational leaders and school heads are responsible for raising awareness of the goals, content and implementation processes of new initiatives at the local level among classroom teachers, students, families and community organisations. As is likely to be true anywhere, the extent to which this happens is not consistent, since not all responsible stakeholders take the opportunities to be involved and become informed themselves.

The continuing lack of real teacher involvement noted above, is important when considering the second issue emerging from Carmen Rosa's story. Over time, national curriculum planners, perhaps due to implementation feedback emerging from the above consultations, have become more aware of the need to acknowledge contextual differences. As Carmen Rosa reports, teachers' practices need to be appropriate for the context in which they work and live, and teachers need ongoing encouragement and support in order to become more autonomous and capable of developing context-relevant pedagogies and materials. The need to understand teaching—learning contexts and contextualise appropriately—has been a recurrent theme in the ELT literature for several decades (Willis and Willis 1996; Richards and Rodgers 2001; Finney 2002; Kumaravadivelu 2003, 2006; Richards 2008, Wedell and Malderez 2013), and awareness is now growing among official circles in Cuba too. For example, Castellanos et al. (2005) explain the need to balance unity in our educational system with attention to the diversity of individual needs, wants, contexts and resources, a view recently confirmed by

Velázquez (2015), who also stresses the importance of contextualising the general curriculum in every school to achieve the objectives of education.

While it is easy to call for flexible curriculum frameworks, interpreting what these imply for educational practices and responsibilities for stakeholders playing different roles within the system is much more difficult. Nowadays, therefore the term 'flexibility' is under scrutiny in Cuba and needs to be properly systematised (Velázquez 2015), so that a shared awareness of what it implies for the various levels of the educational system is attained. For example, some aspects of flexibility that need clarifying for English curriculum implementation in Cuba include defining:

1. How the central structure will encourage and enable teachers to participate in making curriculum aims, contents, methods, materials/resources and forms of assessment relevant to their contexts;
2. To what extent the central structure will allow teachers to think and act flexibly in their classrooms during curriculum implementation; and,
3. How to evaluate whether enabling a flexible framework contributes to the attainment of the expected curriculum goals.

Expecting teachers to actively participate in developing local versions of the curriculum, which are appropriate for classrooms with differing class sizes, resources and learner backgrounds, represents a major extension of most (Cuban) teachers' existing roles. If they are to feel able to expand their roles in these ways, they will need systematic provision of appropriate training and development support over time. This challenge is acknowledged by the Cuban educational authorities. Velázquez (2015: 7) states that:

> The keystone of every effort aiming at improving the quality of education is the preparation and professional development of the teaching personnel; with their intelligence, sensitivity, humanism and commitment they are directing the complicated process of instruction and education.

As a teacher who takes her own professional development seriously, Carmen Rosa utilised whatever opportunities were available to better understand curriculum aims and content, and the changes to methodology and assessment that they implied. However, the challenges that she continued to face (e.g. trying to understand unclear implementation guidelines and/or to help learners understand complex curriculum content) were faced by other teachers also, especially those less experienced and/or dedicated than her. Appropriate decisions about pre-service provision and professional

development will determine whether future support better enables teachers to understand and carry out their role as change managers of a flexible curriculum. For Crookes (2007: 197), change in social systems like schools takes place because of *'networks, movements, collectives, and the force of men and women who undertake to work together for change'*. In Cuba, local networks for teacher support at school and municipal level already exist. Regular teacher development is part of each teacher's timetable. There are established municipal level experts to facilitate teachers' meetings. However, if there is genuine national commitment to more flexible curriculum implementation, it is now time for those responsible for professional development at all levels to heed Carmen Rosa's request for greater 'listening to the teachers' voices', and the active inclusion of such voices in decision-making about the design, content and process of future teacher support.

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13

Temporal Dissonance, Contextual Confusion and Risk: Learning from the Experiences of Teachers Living with Curriculum Change

Laura Grassick and Martin Wedell

> Neglect of the phenomenology of change – that is how people actually experience change as distinct from how it might have been intended – is at the heart of the spectacular lack of success of most social reforms (Fullan 2007: 8).

The opening chapter of this book made a case for the need to explore teachers' experiences of English language curriculum change in order to better understand factors influencing 'the spectacular lack of success' that Fullan refers to. The preceding chapters have focused on the change experiences of 11 teachers working in ten very different countries, which are all trying to introduce similar changes (development of interactive classroom teaching and learning approaches that will increase learners' English language 'competence', however locally defined). Teacher stories report that years and sometimes decades after implementation began, most contexts have had, at best, limited success in bringing such changes about. These teachers' experiences thus reflect accounts of attempts to introduce more 'student centred' or 'learner centred' approaches over the past few decades in the wider educational change literature, which are also 'riddled with stories of failures grand and small' (Schweisfurth 2011: 425).

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M. Wedell and L. Grassick (eds.), *International Perspectives on Teachers Living with Curriculum Change*, International Perspectives on English Language Teaching,
https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-54309-7_13

While most chapters describe an initial enthusiasm for and openness to change on the part of the teacher, their actual experiences of the implementation process seem to have acted as a counterbalance, pulling them towards a continuation of existing teaching practices and behaviours. So, rather than being able to make the paradigm shift that a move from existing practices to those expected by the curriculum change usually implies (see below), many teachers in preceding chapters have felt able only to begin to make a 'paradigm shuffle' (Grassick 2016). Such a shuffle suggests that teachers are trying to cope with the new ideas and practices which a more communication-oriented curriculum requires, while at the same time making pragmatic decisions to continue with previous ways of working, due to the constraints imposed by their largely unchanged working contexts.

Many of the case studies highlight familiar 'technical' failures of implementation such as a lack of resources (e.g. Argentina, Philippines, Senegal), ineffective textbooks (e.g. Poland, Maharashtra), limited teacher capacity (e.g. Vietnam, Kenya, West Bengal). However, such technical aspects of curriculum change implementation alone do not provide the whole picture of teachers' experiences within the chapter stories. Indeed, it is this assumption that the change process consists of and can be broken down into technical, isolated, discrete parts independent of each other (Radford 2006) that has contributed to the tendency to overlook the phenomenology of change.

What is noticeable about the teachers' stories in this book is that they 'probe beneath the technical aspects of reform' (Bascia and Hargreaves 2000: 15) to reveal a more holistic and relational view of their experiences of ELT change implementation, which we base around three interconnected themes of *time*, *contextual confusion* and *risk*.

In the majority of the cases, planners and policy makers seem to have inappropriate understandings of the nature of the change they are requiring teachers and others to make, and thus the effort and challenge it represents for everyone involved. This seems to indicate an overarching lack of understanding of **time;** what we have termed 'temporal dissonance'. Such dissonance stems from inappropriate understandings by planners and policy makers of

- historical time—the existing educational norms and assumptions within their own cultural contexts at the point in time at which the particular English language curriculum changes are being introduced
- time for planning—the time needed to plan and implement coherent and appropriate English language curriculum changes, which are usually based on very different norms and assumptions

- time for learning—the time and space needed for implementers to absorb and adjust to the changes required and the implementation process itself.

Such temporal dissonance contributes greatly to **contextual confusion** which in turn contributes to the incoherence of implementation planning. The experience of the conflicting messages emerging from such incoherence leads many teachers to see the implementation of English curriculum change as representing an unacceptably high degree of personal and professional **risk**.

The above dimensions of temporal dissonance are of course not discrete but interlinked, as we try to show in the discussion that follows.

1 Time

1.1 Historical Time

In the majority of the case studies, policy makers seem unaware of (or unwilling to acknowledge) existing conceptions of education in their own cultural context. They are therefore unable to judge (or uninterested in judging) the degree of challenge that national classroom implementation of the statements in their English curriculum documents represents. For example, Mukherjee reports that the aims of the new curriculum in West Bengal focus on:

> developing basic proficiency in language for communicative purposes, developing competency in language acquisition and developing higher order language skills for meeting the challenges of life.

Such aims constitute a significant pedagogical change for teachers in that context, and change planners and policy makers 'seriously underestimated the challenges that moving away from historically embedded teaching approaches entail' (Mukherjee: 23).

The teacher from Poland similarly reports that curriculum reform:

> promoted a completely new philosophy of teaching, with learners being partners in the process of planning and implementation of the new paradigm.

This underestimation of the challenges is apparent in all other chapters also, with the aims of the English curriculum statements representing a view of

education that is very different from existing majority educational beliefs and assumptions both within the education system and beyond it

The implementation of the communicative, learner-centred approaches advocated by the curricula across the ten countries described in this book requires not only a pedagogical paradigm shift (Tabulawa 2013) by teachers, but also a fundamental cultural shift in existing attitudes to knowledge and teaching and learning by others within and beyond the education system. Ballard and Clanchy (1991: 13), discussing the extent of the challenges that some overseas students faced when studying in Anglophone academic contexts, identified what they term a continuum of attitudes to knowledge within different educational cultures. The endpoints represent conceptions of knowledge which they call 'conserving' and 'extending', and they suggest that where a particular context situates itself on this continuum will also affect its members' beliefs about and expectations of appropriate learning approaches and teacher and learner roles. We believe this framework can help illuminate the challenges of TESOL curriculum change also. A simplified version of their table in Coleman (1996: 151) is provided below (Table 1).

In contexts with a 'conserving' view of knowledge, they suggest that education may be seen as a didactic process of transmitting a more or less finite body of tangible, mostly factual, knowledge from teacher to learner and assessing the success of the process through tests which principally evaluate learners' abilities to memorise and replicate what has been taught. A good teacher in such a context is likely to be similar to Hu's (2002: 99) example from China, where she or he will be someone who can:

> make class events fully predictable, guarantee the smooth delivery of carefully planned content, and give a sense of security to both the teacher and students.

Table 1 Conceptions of knowledge and some implications for the roles of teachers and learners

View of knowledge	Conserving		Extending
Learning approaches	Reproductive	Analytical	Speculative
Role of teacher	Source of knowledge. Directs and assesses learning.	Coordinator / Facilitator of learning. questioner.	Collaborator advisor critic
Learning strategies promoted	Memorisation Imitation	Analytical and critical thinking	Speculating hypothesising

In contrast to the above, the curricula introduced in all of the contexts represented here aim to develop learners' critical thinking, creativity and independence. They imply views of knowledge more towards the 'extending' end of the continuum, and the adoption of more analytical and speculative learning strategies. The recommended teaching approaches in most contexts also imply some version of a more interactive, communication-oriented, flexibly grouped, learner-centred and linguistically uncontrolled classroom, with corresponding changes in classroom roles and behaviours. In addition, in a number of chapters (Philippines, Poland, Argentina, Cuba and Senegal), the change included a move away from a rigidly prescribed syllabus towards one where teachers had more choice in both materials and approaches. As most teachers' stories show, the curriculum expectations of such very different teacher behaviours and responsibilities continue to pose great challenges for teachers who are more used to working in a manner similar to that described by Hu (2002) above.

The existing educational norms in any context are largely invisible. They reflect deeply embedded, and not necessarily consciously articulated, shared beliefs and assumptions. Policy makers and planners in each of the contexts represented here seem to have overlooked the:

> dominant tendencies within cultures about socially appropriate attitudes to knowledge. It is these traditional attitudes… that gradually shape the preferred educational process within different societies at different moments in their history (Ballard 1996: 152; citing Ballard and Clanchy 1991).

Implementation of the statements in the TESOL curriculum documents, evidenced in all the countries covered by the chapters, thus represents a profound change to existing cultural conceptions of education. The statements also represent a significant change to expectations of what teachers and learners ought to be doing in their classrooms to demonstrate that 'education' is taking place. Insufficient acknowledgement of this 'gap' between existing educational norms within the change context, and those implicit in English curriculum change documents, helps to account for the second feature of temporal dissonance identified in most chapters: the insufficient recognition that implementation will require a great deal of 'hard, patient, unrelenting effort [and support] over a period of time' (Levin and Fullan 2008: 300).

It is interesting to note in this regard that many of the stories (e.g. in Cuba, India, Korea, China and Senegal) are not tales of teachers' experiences of new/current curriculum change, but instead of experiences over

decades of ongoing attempts to implement more communicative-oriented and interactive curricula. For example, in the case of Senegal 'after approximately 25 years, CLT has yet to become embedded in Senegalese classrooms'. Teacher and societal understanding have at best reached what Fullan (2001) refers to as 'false clarity', which 'occurs when change is interpreted in an oversimplified way; that is, the proposed change has more to it than people realise' (p. 77). Most teachers' experiences suggest varying degrees of such 'false clarity' in their contexts. The issue of historical time thus suggests that Birzea and Fartusnic's (2003) assertion (when considering educational change in Eastern Europe during the Post-Communist era) that complex educational change requiring great adjustments to existing norms and practices can take 'generations' to become visible in classrooms, holds true more widely.

1.2 Time for Planning

In addition to embarking on change implementation planning with unsufficient understanding (or acknowledgement) of existing educational norms, planning for many of the initiatives described was rushed, and hyper rational (Wise 1977). The assumption seemed to be that the reform process would begin on a particular day and be implemented uniformly across the country. Vilches, for example, mentions how the government in the Philippines:

> presented the urgency of implementing K-12 and the schools were left without any choice but to implement it, despite the limited period of time in which they had to prepare for it.

Teachers' concerns about being rushed into implementing changes in the classroom are not of course unique to TESOL change contexts in non-Anglophone contexts. Referring to experience of a recent study of curriculum change in the USA (Porter et al. 2015: 131–132), one teacher remarks that 'I feel like the school district is flying the plane as it is being built'.

While lack of recognition of the time needed for implementation is likely to be linked to policy makers' and planners' limited awareness of the nature and consequent challenge of the changes at hand (as discussed in Sect. 1.1), there may also be other reasons. For example, Mukherjee's chapter suggests that the rush to implement change in West Bengal was political, with a newly elected government wanting to be seen to be doing something/making changes. The lack of long-term planning may also be a more general

feature of our current point in historical time, in which the inevitability of rapid change often seems to be assumed and accepted as normal.

In Sect. 1.1, we have discussed policy makers' apparent lack of awareness of the largely invisible existing educational norms and beliefs (Wedell and Malderez 2013), which affect the complexity of any proposed change implementation process. However, a rushed approach to change implementation also allows less time for consideration of more visible features of the context. Such features include the variable material realities across different regions or schools, and the degree of consistency between the goals of curriculum change and existing elements of the English subject system such as assessment, teacher development provision and textbooks (issues which we discuss further under the interrelated theme of 'contextual confusion'). A comment by the teacher in Argentina sums up the frustration that she and many teachers in other chapters feel about implementation planners' apparent lack of awareness of the actual teaching and learning contexts in which teachers work:

> The problem is how to implement it with our reality…maybe they [the planners] don't know what a real school looks like or what real lessons are like…

For the teachers from Argentina and Senegal, this limited awareness of contextual reality extends to policy makers' understanding of the real role of English (or lack of one) in their wider society, and so the motivation to learn it and the rationale for teaching it. In Senegal, this relates to a lack of awareness by planners of the impact of learning French, which has a strong literary focus, on teachers' and learners' conceptions of what language learning is. In Argentina, the teacher questions whether English has any real role in the lives of learners, who are more interested in learning Portuguese.

In other accounts, teachers report on the mismatch between different parts of the subject system and the stated aims and approaches in the new curricula. In Vietnam, the teacher worries that the new textbooks do not reflect the communicative approach set out in the curriculum. In China, the embeddedness of the high-stakes exam in the education system and the 'Gaokao' ethos which pervades much of society, seem to have been largely ignored by policy makers and planners promoting implementation of a curriculum which attempts to foster a communicative, learner-centred pedagogy. The teacher's story from Kenya highlights how inconsistent messages sent by different key parts of the education system (curriculum design and planning, high-stakes national assessment and teacher education) interfere with teachers' attempts to implement the curriculum.

The temporal dissonance resulting from inadequate consideration of both invisible and the visible features of the change contexts contributes to the many examples given by Fink (2001) of 'two solitudes', with policy makers and policy implementers apparently inhabiting different 'universes', and having little understanding of the contexts of the others' worlds, or of where they may be starting from (in terms of their historically embedded attitudes to education). The chapters provide occasional examples of attempts by policy makers and planners to 'break out of their solitude' and make the new curriculum change more coherent, as in Vietnam where attempts were made to lift teachers' language levels to a point where their proficiency would enable them to teach as intended in a communication-oriented curriculum. However, while no doubt well intended, this attempt at increasing coherence seems only to have made the curriculum implementation process messier, again because of issues of TIME—with changes in expected language proficiency being rushed, and too much change being expected of teachers all at once.

As teachers try to implement new curricula in contexts which are often neither materially nor conceptually prepared for what successful implementation implies, it is unsurprising that they have difficulties. Some of these are expressed by the teacher from Maharashtra in India, where the opposing 'pull' of the need to prepare students for the high-stakes exams and the desire to develop their communicative competence causes tension and confusion.

> This seems to be the inevitable result of the inconsistent messages coming from the curriculum and the training and his immediate working environment.

These kinds of dilemmas, and the workplace tensions that result, are not helped by the hierarchical leadership and management structures that remain characteristic of most education systems (Wedell 2009). These mean that few change initiatives involve genuine consultation with people who do understand (and represent) the local context (e.g. school leaders, local educational officials and parents) about the proposed changes, and how their implementation might best be introduced and supported. Zheng and Davidson (2008: 61) found that, in China, involving different groups in the process of change was crucial for effective classroom change since:

> [i]f the principal [or educational official etc.] does not gain some understanding of the dimensions of change, that is, the beliefs, teaching behaviour and

> curriculum materials, he or she will not be able to understand teachers' concerns – that is, will not be able to provide support for implementation.

A further outcome of not involving and raising awareness of change among influential others can be seen in Poland, where the teacher is under intense pressure from parents to stick to the existing ways of teaching and learning.

> Many parents think of language learning as being tangible accumulation of knowledge rather than an ongoing process of skill development through practice over time. Nobody told them otherwise, so the new core curriculum in fact seems not to be in tune with prevailing educational ideas in the society for which it has been developed.

Similarly, the teacher's story from China provides a rich account of the difficulties that result from failure to consider the prevailing 'gaokao' ethos, and the problems that such an ethos creates in the relationships between the teachers, students, parents, school principals and educational officers. In this case, rushing implementation, apparently ignoring existing cultural attitudes to education and the desirability of involving local stakeholders in identifying what the change implies for teaching and learning and so how best it might be implemented, again resulted in high levels of teacher discomfort and anxiety.

Noticeable throughout all the chapters, concomitant with temporal dissonance, is the 'positionality' (Goodson 2014) of the teachers and those others involved in implementation. Whatever the underlying reasons, in the rush for change, the change agents on the ground (i.e. the teachers and others working with them) tend to be viewed as reactive and compliant (Goodson 2014: 771), rather than as proactive participants. Few if any communication channels existed in most contexts to enable teachers to voice their concerns in a way that may have an impact. Indeed, the teacher from China has now accepted her role of conformity and powerlessness in the face of change. This reflects findings from a study of English language curriculum change in Jordan (Al-Daami and Wallace 2007) where it was reported that educational officials did not involve teachers in curriculum planning because they felt there was no reason to do so, even though they agreed with the idea of inclusion of stakeholders in successful curriculum planning. Such a 'crisis of positionality' (Goodson 2014) will be discussed again in the section on **risk** below.

The frequent rush to complete curriculum change implementation means the actual TIME for planning, thinking through and trying out

new ways of 'doing', is also likely to be rushed. The outcome seems to be that individual implementers, within most of the different change contexts described, find themselves struggling to make sense of the changes required of them on their own. Temporal dissonance in the change process influences the availability, duration and appropriacy of content and delivery of any formal support that teachers receive through workshops and in-service training programmes. For example, in Vietnam, the teacher reports how the initial INSET support was 'not so practical and useful'. Much of the time in workshops was spent on technical and procedural information and administration about the new textbooks with little reference to how to apply the new pedagogy to the actual classroom teaching and learning contexts that the teachers face. Other chapters from Poland and Argentina mention the almost non-existent formal support provision for teachers, as though in the rush to implement the technical aspects of curriculum change, the very people on whom the success of change will ultimately depend have been forgotten about. The teacher in Poland cannot recall any training support provided by the education authority in the wake of the new curriculum. An initial training-based conference organised at the start of the reform which she did attend had little impact on her because 'these conferences were prepared in haste' with little thought and planning put into ensuring that the content addressed the needs of the participants and went beyond procedural administration.

In Argentina, initial INSET support for teachers at the beginning of the reform process used a cascade approach, which meant that the teacher in the case study (and many others nationwide) was unable to attend because she had not been officially selected. The follow-up cascade delivered in her school by her headmaster consisted of a debriefing of the general curriculum guidelines, rather than any kind of 'operationalising of the framework in the real context of the classroom', which was exactly what this teacher found difficult and needed support in. Similarly, in China, the many training courses that the teacher, Yao, participated in seemed to be organised to meet administrative obligations rather than to meet the real needs of teachers. The fact that so much of the formal INSET provision described in the chapters consisted of short, one-off courses also suggests that the TIME needed for teachers to make sense of pedagogical change has not been fully recognised by implementation planners. More positively, where, as in Cuba, South Korea and Maharashtra, India, teachers perceived at least some of the official support for teachers as appropriate in terms of both length and quality, their increased professional confidence, understanding of and positive attitude to the reform were noticeable. For example, the teacher in Maharashtra, India,

expresses how his positive experience of change has been partly shaped by the training he received. What is significant (and unusual) in this case is that the official support provision had taken the time to consider the contextual needs of the teachers and to address their practical concerns about the curriculum change.

Insufficient time to consider the implications of desired curriculum goals for classroom practices is also reflected in the continuing pressure on teachers, by those in authority and in the wider social community, to cover the syllabus within a set time frame. Such an expectation is inconsistent with simultaneously requiring teachers to try to incorporate more communicative activities into lessons, which by their very nature tend to be more time-consuming. The chapter from Maharashtra reports how, although the new textbook used by the teacher in their case study provides numerous communicative activities, the majority of teachers do not use them in class, due to:

> … the stiff challenges teachers face when the new textbook calls upon them to play various new roles in a school system that expects them to just 'finish the textbook' and also be accountable for the outcomes of teaching in terms of exam results.

This situation can be seen in many of the other teachers' stories where there is also pressure to cover the required syllabus in order to reach a uniform point for testing purposes. For example, the teacher in China did attempt to try out new activities and approaches in line with the new curriculum. However, the pressure she felt under to meet the requirements of the high-stakes exams meant that when this new pedagogy did not produce immediate, positive exam results, she felt obliged to return to her previous ways of carrying out classroom teaching. The pressure of syllabus coverage in Kenya meant that students were obliged to come to school earlier and teachers felt the need to '"steal" time from the games hour', all of which added to the workload of teachers in Kenya.

This particular dilemma of time is not unique to TESOL curriculum change contexts, and is reflected in reports of many other curricular reform situations where changes in pedagogy require greater classroom interaction and student-focused activities (e.g. see Le Fevre 2015; Wang 2011). Curricula continue to espouse the use of communicative (learner-centred) classroom activities and approaches, without a concomitant understanding by planners that their adoption implies the need for additional teaching and learning time.

1.3 Time for Learning

The third dimension of temporal dissonance emerging from analysis of the teachers' stories highlights the lack of sufficient personal time to think about, reflect on and engage with the change process they are going through. This notion of 'personal time' is similar to Spillane and Zeuli's (1999) 'zones of enactment', where, in order for teachers to make sense of change, they need 'spaces' to be able to think about and question their existing teaching beliefs and practices, both on their own and in interaction with others. These 'spaces' provide an opportunity for change participants to unsettle their own conceptions of teaching and learning and begin to make the pedagogical shift that new curricula may require. However, with 'rushed' INSET provision and very little informal support provided at the school level, teachers in the case studies seemed to have minimal space and time for such personal thinking. For example, the teacher in China had little or no opportunity to take stock of her own teaching since:

> with the ethos that Gaokao results depend on the investment in time and sweat (shijian jia hanshui), the school schedule is crammed with classes, assignments and tests...

A similar picture emerges from Poland, where increased school bureaucracy has left teachers with very little personal time to reflect on what they are doing in the classroom. In situations where little opportunity for time or space for reflection exists in teachers' working environments, spaces within INSET become all the more important. The South Korean chapter provides a rare example of INSET provision that did provide such opportunities. Here the teacher, Chang, attended a six-month intensive training programme that took her out of her school environment and 'allowed [her] to have an opportunity to think only of teaching English by reducing the workload'. This, combined with her personal commitment over many years, seemed to have a strong influence on the extent to which she was able to consider her own teaching in the light of the curriculum's new pedagogical requirements, and begin to identify how she might be able to make adaptations to her classroom practice.

In most cases, the issues arising from the temporal dissonance discussed above seem to result in change implementation occurring in a state of **contextual confusion**. This in turn leads many implementers to perceive change as representing a **risk**.

2 Contextual Confusion

Contextual confusion is by definition uncomfortable for those whom it affects. Here, we highlight two main aspects that emerged particularly clearly from the teachers' experiences.

2.1 Change Planning that Focuses Solely on 'Changing Teachers'

The speed of much of the curriculum change implementation described in the chapters and also the many different change initiatives experienced over a short timescale by, for example, teachers in Poland, Korea and West Bengal, have meant that there has often been insufficient attention given to the need to raise awareness among all those involved in the change process. As has been touched on in Sect. 1.2, those who most strongly affect or influence teachers' professional lives (e.g. head teachers, parents, supervisors) often failed to fully understand the 'why and what' of change in relation to the new curriculum content, approach, roles and outcomes. They continued to expect teachers' classroom behaviour to meet existing norms and did little to support teachers' implementation attempts. For example, the teachers in Senegal and Maharashtra both remarked on the tensions that emerged when they attempted to carry out the collaborative tasks that the curriculum promotes, only to find their head teachers responding with concerns about the noise levels and their seeming lack of control in their lessons. This fits with Fullan's (2001: 83) argument that the psychological and sociological challenges of change (the risks involved) are not only experienced by teachers, but also by others involved in change implementation, such as school principals.

> The subjective world of principals is such that many of them suffer from the same problem in 'implementing a new role as facilitator of change' as do teachers in implementing new teaching roles: What the principal should do specifically to manage change at the school level is a complex affair for which the principal has little preparation. The psychological and sociological problems of change that confront a principal are at least as great as those that confront teachers. Without this sociological sympathy, many principals feel exactly the same as teachers do: Other people simply do not seem to understand the problems they face.

These relationships of support go beyond the school and include the wider community. The story from Kenya mirrors many of the others in the constant pressure and anxiety experienced by the teacher, as she tried to balance the expectations of the wider community (focus on exam preparation) with the demands of the Ministry of Education to teach a curriculum which aims to develop learners' communicative competence. In Vietnam, the expectations of students, their parents and the school principal, that learning is about knowledge input related to the exams, again suggest that there has been insufficient awareness-raising, about what the new curriculum means for teachers and teaching and learning pedagogy, across society at large. The teacher thus continues to dictate grammatical notes for her learners because of concerns about the loss of face that might result if the students were to go home with empty exercise books. Similar tensions can be seen in Poland, where 'parents usually have very firm views on what good teaching of a foreign language should look like' and English teachers feel under pressure to meet parental expectations. Even in contexts such as the Philippines where mentors/supervisors exist to provide ongoing support to teachers in schools, unless *they* are supported in making sense of the new, they are likely to continue to promote existing classroom practices and behaviours and teachers will continue to struggle with the dilemma of what is expected of them (Coburn and Russell 2008). Where the implementation planning focus remains solely on the teacher, and there is insufficient awareness-raising among others involved in implementation, teachers will not only be largely unsupported in their change efforts, but may also have to struggle with conflicting messages from the new curriculum and those tasked with guiding them in using it.

In most cases, there seems to have been insufficient consideration of *the role of others* in providing formal support for teachers, alongside what content and delivery styles would be appropriate and where and for how long it will be needed. The teachers' stories suggest that where support was provided it was limited in terms of time and content and often perceived as inappropriate due to its insufficient practical relevance. In some cases (e.g. Vietnam, Kenya, India), inadequate support seems to stem from the minimal extent to which the trainers themselves have been helped to make sense of the new curriculum and their role in the change process. The relationship of support between trainers and teachers is crucial since whatever sense they *both* make of any pedagogical change will influence the nature and outcomes of any in-service provision. Kirkgöz (2008), in a study of 32 teachers in Turkey, found that in-service trainers' understanding of the new English language curriculum had a significant influence on how teachers were able to implement

the new pedagogical practices. The story from Vietnam suggests the same, highlighting how in-service or INSET trainers in the Vietnam context 'were people who did not have direct connections or relationships with secondary education' and so were unlikely to have much awareness of either the existing or new English language curriculum, or the context in which teachers were trying to implement it. Such trainers may find it difficult to provide appropriate examples and models for teacher learning, and so, like teachers, may decide to avoid the risk of losing face by resorting to what they know best—theoretical input delivered in transmission mode. Indeed, as Schweisfurth (2013: 66) points out (citing Harber 2002 and Haser and Star 2009), 'teacher education is itself rarely learner-centred and therefore creates and perpetuates models of authoritarianism'. This only adds to the contextual confusion that teachers have to grapple with.

2.2 Systemic Incoherence

Across the cases, there is evidence that contextual confusion is exacerbated by insufficient consideration of the whole interconnected English subject system before the implementation planning stage. Lack of concern for coherence leads to the continuing presence of textbooks, and/or exams and initial and in-service teacher education courses that remain inconsistent with the pedagogy and outcomes promoted by new curricula. Teachers' relationships with the professional conflicts which arise as they try to negotiate the various parts of incoherent systems, pose further dilemmas. For example, many teachers are trying to comply with the requirements of a more communicative pedagogy and to fulfil needs and expectations arising from (largely unchanged) high-stakes national English exams. In the case from China, the pressure that teachers are under becomes clear in the teacher's remarks that 'exam results [are] the sole indicator of a teacher's and student's quality'. To abandon prevailing teaching practices which ensure exam success in favour of new pedagogy, which may not achieve the same results in the same time frame, represents a huge risk for any teacher's professional self-image and status (something we discuss further in Sect. 3). The influences of the inconsistency between curriculum and national high-stakes exams are particularly complex and do not only affect teachers. As the China case shows, school leaders and local education authorities are also likely to be fearful of responses from their superiors at higher levels of the education system and also from parents, if desired exam scores are not achieved.

Similar risks associated with exams are reported in Poland where, although the new curriculum has brought freedom of choice to the teacher in terms of syllabus and approach, the content of the national Matura exams has not changed. Rather than risk being judged a bad teacher by students, parents and school authorities by adopting new teaching practices and behaviours that may not lead to exam success or meet the expectations of others, the teacher feels compelled to resort to familiar and less risky pedagogical choices. In Argentina, Poland, West Bengal and Korea, the teachers report that formative assessment approaches have been introduced in an attempt to align examinations with curriculum goals. However, with almost no support or training for teachers, as Chang in Korea remarks, these have been 'too difficult to implement'. In a context like Argentina, where there are no high-stakes exams in English, one might expect the teacher to have more opportunities to experiment with formative assessment. Here, though, the teacher was constrained by the learners' desire to continue with familiar normative practices of language learning through memorisation of set grammatical knowledge, and traditional assessment of the same. These examples show that while policy makers may have consciously (or unconsciously) extended more freedom to teachers through choices in syllabus and teaching approach and new assessment practices, in reality, the teachers do not appear to experience more freedom. Similar to responses reported in a study of school reform in Norway (Mellegård and Petterson, 2016: 187), increased freedom seems to add to teachers' burden with more 'decision making, responsibility, anxiety about not doing things the right way…'.

Further contextual confusion arises from apparent lack of 'fit' between new textbooks and the goals of the curriculum they were supposed to support. Since most teachers in most contexts do not have access to the official curriculum documents, the textbook becomes 'the change', and in that sense, will influence how teachers make sense of any new pedagogical practices. This was particularly evident in the context of the teacher working in Maharashtra in India. Where support to interpret the textbook is limited, it is perhaps unsurprising that most teachers report sticking to familiar activities. This fits with findings from a recent study in Japan (Humphries 2014; Humphries and Burns 2015) where teachers' struggles to implement a new English language course book at tertiary level were exacerbated by a lack of any formal training. As previously mentioned, the teachers in Poland, Cuba, Argentina and Senegal were encouraged to choose and adapt their materials/textbooks/syllabus, yet with limited support or training, this initiative appeared little more than a 'superficial decentralization'. Indeed, the teacher in Poland remarked that despite freedom that the new

curriculum afforded her in designing her own syllabus, with insufficient support, the risks of such freedom were too great and so she relied on more traditional textbooks as a kind of comfort.

Rushed implementation has, in many contexts, led to incoherent in-service provision for teachers, as discussed previously, and also a failure to consider the need to review and adapt the curricular content of initial pre-service teacher education modules. These remain as they were before curriculum change, potentially adding to (future) teachers' feelings of confusion and anxiety about the inconsistent messages they are getting from different 'official' sources. For example, the Kenyan case reports that:

> the content and process of ELTE [English language teacher education] fails to prepare trainee teachers for what the ELT curriculum expects them to be able to do once they are appointed.

3 Risk

The sense of risk associated with implementation evident in many of the stories in this volume is closely linked to aspects of temporal dissonance and consequent contextual confusion discussed above. Due to the interrelated nature of our three themes, aspects of risk have already been touched on; however, in this section, we discuss this issue in greater depth. The pedagogical shift implicit in the new curricula described in the case studies, asks teachers to abandon many of the classroom practices and behaviours they are familiar with for new approaches that are less familiar, and which pose a potential threat to their professional self-perceptions and their professional relationships with others, or what Blacker and Shinim (1984) term their 'key meanings'. In the rush to implement national change, most of the teachers felt a sense of compulsion to try to integrate the new pedagogical practices into their classroom teaching, despite the fact that they were usually still trying to make sense of what was expected of them. Many of the narratives expressed feelings of uncertainty and anxiety as the teachers tried to balance the challenges of existing normative conceptions of a good teacher with the changes to these conceptions implied by curriculum change goals. The resulting feelings of vulnerability, arising from a fear of public failure and/or losing control over what happens in the classroom, are consistent with the findings in other studies of educational curriculum change from around the world (e.g. Porter et al. 2015; Le Fevre 2015; van Veen and Sleegers 2006; Zembylas 2010).

The teachers' stories suggest that the relationships they have with others, who are tasked with supporting implementation, are rarely built on trust, support or collaboration, but are rather relationships of compliance—change being something that has to be done in order to follow policy directives. In a 'culture of compliance' (Yin et al. 2014), emotional empathy can be difficult to foster. In the hierarchical structure typical of most education systems, such a culture of compliance is encouraged from top to bottom. Many of the teachers' mixed emotions about curriculum change thus emanate from their 'crisis of positionality' (Goodson 2014), their lack of agency and their inability to get their voices heard within the school and/or wider educational system. The teacher in China exemplifies this clearly.

> We are the lowest-ranked. How can we question the system? How can we change the system from the bottom level? Our voice will fall into oblivion.

Many of the teachers' stories in this volume reflect the exclusion from any meaningful participation in curriculum planning also experienced by teachers in another study in Jordan (Al-Daami and Wallace 2007).

Feelings of loss and concern about declining professional self-efficacy were evident in many of the teachers' stories, again similar to accounts from the wider educational change literature (Kelchtermans 2005, 2009; Gao 2008). Most teachers in this volume were required to make changes to normative values and attitudes to teaching and learning unsupported, and felt a strong sense of isolation (e.g. Maharashtra, Argentina, Senegal, Poland). Isolation also extends to feeling unable to express negative emotions about the changes teachers are obliged to implement and the inconsistencies in messages that they are receiving. This was particularly noticeable in the account from China where Yan comments that:

> the limited opportunity for her [the teacher] to express her feelings has severely undermined her sense of efficacy. She refrained from disclosing her feelings to her colleagues for fear of causing disharmony with colleagues.

The ensuing uncertainty surrounding feelings of loss, isolation and professional efficacy can lead teachers to question their own professional identity, in terms of their continuing capacity to know and do what a good teacher should know and do (Gao 2008), and/or to feel that their capacity is being questioned by those around them (colleagues, school heads, parents). The feelings of risk and vulnerability that can result, perhaps inevitably, push teachers, as in the Vietnamese example, towards teaching in familiar ways that they feel confident about, and which match contextual norms of good teaching.

Perceptions of risk and concomitant negative emotions associated with making changes to long-standing classroom practices and behaviours are not confined to teachers. The cases from China, Poland, Korea, Kenya, Argentina suggest that learners too may feel uncomfortable with new ways of working and new classroom learning and teaching roles, particularly if they share their teacher's anxieties about apparent mismatches between practices promoted by a new curriculum and those needed to succeed in high-stakes exams.

Issues of time, the resultant contextual confusion, and the consequent sense of personal risk, place teachers very much on the front line of a more or less explicit 'conflict' between the existing 'cultural ecology' (Padwad and Dixit Chap. 6) and the new, largely unknown 'culture' of curriculum change. Thus, while teachers might express a desire to change their pedagogical practices in line with the requirements of a new curriculum, (and a few teachers may be making a 'shuffle' (Grassick 2016) towards more communicative teaching and learning), in reality the professional and emotional struggles and risks involved in adjusting classroom behaviours to curriculum goals are considerable. It is therefore unsurprising that teachers continue to teach according to pre-existing norms, thereby fitting into their surrounding 'ecology' more comfortably.

Only those teachers who have the confidence and courage to take risks appear to attempt to resist the pull of the status quo. The stories of change in this volume describe many such teachers. Their confidence is perhaps due to their greater understanding of the changes as a result of involvement over time in initial implementation planning, materials writing and training design and/or their personal access to particularly effective formal and/or informal support. Yet what their stories also highlight is that even these 'special' teachers are struggling with change and so it is likely that for the vast majority of other English teachers who are perhaps 'less special', the struggle is even greater.

4 What Messages Emerge from the Teachers' Stories?

The stories in this volume have helped to foreground accounts of teachers coping with TESOL curriculum change; what change means for them, what sense they see others around them making of the change process and how the extent and types of understanding that they experience from those in different layers of the system help (or hinder) their attempts to cope with the pedagogical shift required of them. Their stories have helped us better understand some of the systemic factors that help to explain why teachers

see change as risky and thus why, often decades after TESOL curriculum changes have been introduced, it is still so rare to see visible evidence of successful curriculum change, in the form of the hoped-for new 'teaching and learning practices, in thousands and thousands of classrooms' (Levin and Fullan 2008: 291).

The teachers' stories demonstrate how insufficient understanding of, and so support for, the challenges that the changes pose, result from temporal dissonance which contributes to contextual confusion, which in turn generates and increases teachers' feelings of risk. However, the stories are not all of doom and gloom, and we are not advocating a continuation of the 'misery research' (McLaughlin 2006) prevalent in the curriculum change literature over the last 30 years. The story from the Philippines, in contrast to most other cases, highlights strategies related to effective communication across, and supportive relationships within, the various layers of their education system which helped to mitigate some of the negative effects mentioned above. The story from Cuba suggests an education system that is also working towards system-wide communication. Similar successful strategies have been mentioned by Karavas (2014) in her report on primary ELT innovation in Greece.

National level, state system, curriculum innovation is a complex process, largely because its success depends on the coordinated responses of such a large number of people. If parents are included, the people directly or indirectly affected may represent a majority of any given population. 'Learning' about what the changes are, why they are desirable and what they may imply for how one performs one's role is thus necessary not only for teachers, but also for everyone else who is affected across the system (and to a more limited extent beyond it).

Wedell and Malderez (2013) assert that any change initiative requires 'parallel learning' across stakeholders at all levels of an education system, throughout the planning and implementation stages in order to maximise support and minimise contextual confusion. Davis and Sumara (2006; and with D'Amour, 2012) suggest that successful education systems are 'nested learning systems', systems which enable a flow of information between their layers, through multidirectional channels of communication. For large-scale national change programmes, the teachers' experiences here suggest that it would be worthwhile for planners and policy makers to make efforts to 'learn' from local stakeholder representatives (teachers, school heads, teacher educators, parents) at the change initiation stage for two main reasons. Firstly, such 'learning' would raise their awareness of existing cultural and material realities in the many local contexts in which they hope

to implement their change, and so become able to plan and time implementation in a manner that limits contextual confusion. Secondly, it would begin to develop the sense of stakeholder involvement in, understanding of, and perhaps even commitment to the change process, that will be needed if implementation is to lead to classroom change.

For example, the teacher in the Philippines' change context feels that she is coping because 'she has been involved IN the change process through her roles as a teacher, teacher trainer and textbook writer'. Vilches argues that genuinely involving teachers in discussions at the initial stages of an innovation is likely to ensure that their concerns at the classroom level are taken into consideration.

Similarly, in Greece, Karavas (2014) found that part of the success of the new primary English curriculum could be attributed to the conscious attempts made by the programme planners to involve teachers in the curriculum development process and 'to set up efficient communication and support networks with all stakeholders' (p. 247).

The case from Cuba also suggests a move towards more system-wide thinking, since it is now national policy to provide opportunities for stakeholders at different levels to voice their thoughts and opinions about any new educational initiative that is being introduced,

> meetings are held with the board of directors from each province, municipality and school to explain and gather opinions about any new change that needs to be introduced.

As yet teachers' voices remain under-represented.

However, as the Argentinian case warns, such consultation is only worthwhile if it is more than tokenistic. Policy makers and planners need to clearly demonstrate that they understand the importance of learning from and about those who will (in various roles) be responsible for implementation.

Of course, given the large numbers of more and less central stakeholders in any education system, it will never to be practical to actively consult everyone whom the change affects. There thus needs to be careful planning of the mechanics and logistics of initial stakeholder consultations, especially in geographical contexts such as the Philippines where there is:

> …a huge population of teachers, … whose geographical divisions into island groups can impinge on resources for communication dissemination and people mobility.

Time spent on shared learning, prior to making final decisions about implementation planning, has the potential to lessen the temporal dissonance we refer to above, through bringing planners and policy makers more clearly face-to-face with the challenges that a proposed change represents for stakeholders in different parts of the country. Greater understanding of these challenges potentially allows for (more) realistic implementation planning timetables, which are able to lessen contextual incoherence and include (more) appropriate national and local awareness-raising and support provision for stakeholder groups in different areas.

Making the development of structures and communication systems to enable shared learning a normal part of curriculum change planning would itself represent a complex change for most education systems. It would require radical adjustment to the current top-down stance of those responsible for leading education systems at national and local level. However, given the enormous global financial and human investment over decades on largely unsuccessful attempts to enable state system learners to obtain tangible benefit from their time spent in TESOL classrooms, increased investment in developing systems to support shared learning would surely be time and money well spent.

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Further Reading

Although each chapter has a comprehensive list of references, we thought it would be helpful to those readers, interested in exploring and engaging with the themes that emerged from the teachers' stories more deeply, to suggest some key literature.

Curriculum Change Planning

- Fullan, M. (2007). *The new meaning of educational change* (4th edition). London and New York. Routledge.

Fullan is one of the key authors on curriculum change and a useful starting point would be this book which provides an accessible account of the stages involved in bringing about change from initiation through to institutionalisation. Fullan identifies some of the reasons why curriculum change might not succeed as intended and calls for more focus on the people involved in the change process. One of his key points is the need to recognise that educational change involves 'reculturing'; learning new ways of doing and thinking and behaving. It is interesting that he first made this call in the first edition of this book in the 1980s and thirty years later, it remains a key argument in this fourth edition.

- Levin, B. and Fullan, M. (2008). Learning about systems renewal. *Educational Management Administration and Leadership*, 36(2): 289–303.

M. Wedell and L. Grassick (eds.), *International Perspectives on Teachers Living with Curriculum Change*, International Perspectives on English Language Teaching,
https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-54309-7

This article argues that successful educational change requires considerable effort over time. It also emphasises the need for coherence across the different parts/levels/people operating within an educational system. They argue that unless all these parts and people share, as much as possible, the same goals and purpose, educational change is unlikely to happen as intended.

- Wedell, M. (2009). *Planning for educational change*. London: Continuum.

Wedell's book provides an interesting overview of curriculum change planning in English language teaching and learning contexts. It starts with an analysis of the stages of curriculum change planning and implementation and the kinds of issues that are likely to arise. The latter part of the book provides case studies of English language curriculum innovation which have been less successful, with a discussion as to why this might be.

Three themes that emerged from the teachers' stories in this volume are *time, contextual confusion* and *risk.*

Time

Both Fullan and Wedell (above) mention the importance of the recognition of the time and effort involved in any curriculum change. The titles below provide more specific reading on some of the issue related to time.

- Wang, D. (2011). The dilemma of time: Student-centred teaching in the rural classroom in China. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 27: 157–164.

In this article, Wang describes how a move to more learner-centred pedagogy in general education in China created significant pressures of time for the teachers. Many of the struggles faced by the teachers in this study (increased work load/ pressure to cover the syllabus/lack of understanding by planners about what the changes might mean for teachers and learners) are likely to resonate with readers around the world.

- Alexander, R. (2000). *Culture and pedagogy*. Oxford and Malden: Blackwell Publishers Ltd.

Alexander provides a different take on the issue of time in relation to learner-centred pedagogy. His book describes and analyses teaching and learning at primary level in three different cultural contexts—England, France, India, Russia and the USA. He highlights the role that culture plays

in existing practices and behaviours in the classroom in terms of student–teacher interaction and the overall pace of the lesson. His account of primary teaching in India shows the dilemma that a teacher may have in trying to incorporate more time-consuming learner-centred approaches into a tightly packed and fast-paced lesson.

Contextual Confusion

Our discussion around contextual confusion highlighted the mismatch and systemic inconsistencies that often exist between new 'communicative' curricula and the existing conceptions of teaching and learning held by those working in education and within the broader society. There are numerous studies from around the world which provide evidence and interesting reading of such contextual confusion, many of which have been referred to in the chapters in this volume. One article that might be a useful starting point is listed below. From this, you may be able to identify particular case studies from the reference list to explore further.

- Schweisfurth, M. (2011). Learner-centred education in developing country contexts: From solution to problem? *International Journal of Educational Development*, 31: 425–435.

This article provides a systematic review of 72 articles on curriculum change from the *International Journal of Educational Change*. Schweisfurth highlights the issues reported in implementing more learner-centred pedagogies in various contexts and discusses some of the implications. Although most of the studies Schweisfurth analyses are not focused on English language education, the issues and challenges that arise from them clearly relate to many English language curriculum change contexts.

Risk

There is relatively little in the curriculum change literature that focuses on the idea of risk and emotions, despite the widespread recognition of the role of teachers in the change process. As Hargreaves (a key author on teacher emotions) has attested, this continues to be an area that is under-researched and this is particularly true in the context of English language education.

- Le Fevre, D.M. (2015). Barriers to implementing pedagogical change: The role of teachers' perceptions of risk. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 38: 56–64.

This article provides a fascinating account of the kinds of risks teachers are exposed to during a pedagogical change, why these might be risks, and how teachers deal with them. Le Fevre's study looks at teachers in the USA, but what she discusses has implications for most teacher change contexts around the world.

- C. Day and Lee, J. C-K. (Eds) (2011). *New understandings of teacher's work: Emotions and educational change.* Dordrecht, Heidelberg, London and New York: Springer.

This edited volume provides a number of interesting chapters on the emotional side of curriculum change. One of the chapters authored by Zembylas is particularly noteworthy.

Index

A

Adaptation of curriculum policy. *See* Local realities

Agency. *See* Teacher agency

Anxiety 19, 69, 73, 77, 86, 172, 220, 255, 260, 262, 263. *See also* Risk

Assessment 9, 16, 17, 20, 21, 24, 40, 44, 47, 48, 51, 52, 55, 57, 62, 63, 67, 70, 73, 75–79, 89, 99, 105, 108, 120, 128, 130–132, 136, 198, 236, 244, 253, 262
- and curriculum 24, 27, 42, 142, 221, 231, 244, 255
- formative 9, 16, 17, 48, 62, 63, 67, 130, 131, 136, 137, 141, 143, 208, 209, 214, 221, 231, 236
- summative 16, 109, 130, 131, 136, 137, 208, 215, 221, 231
- teaching to the test 75–78

Attitudes 10, 53–57, 143, 151, 168, 181, 205, 214, 216, 222, 229, 234, 236, 250, 251, 254, 255, 264
- to learning English 1, 21, 87, 104, 105, 109, 125, 126, 132, 134, 164, 175, 201, 218, 220, 229
- to the new curriculum 3, 4, 15, 17–23, 27, 29–32, 34, 55, 62, 63, 66, 67, 69, 70, 75, 77, 79, 85, 87–90, 92, 94–97, 99, 100, 105, 108, 116, 120, 130–132, 134, 136, 137, 140, 144, 156, 160–162, 164, 170–172, 206, 207, 209, 211, 215, 216, 222, 224, 233, 238, 249, 256, 259, 260, 263, 265

Autonomy 10, 25, 27, 31, 42, 56, 70, 79, 104–106, 118, 170, 173, 183, 193, 224, 240. *See also* Changes and teacher role

Awareness-raising 8, 9, 92, 120, 182. *See also* Communicating changes

C

Centralised education system 70, 76, 191, 242

Change
- and learner role 45, 46, 197, 250
- and parent role 5, 18, 19, 25, 43, 44, 47, 90, 92, 106, 108, 126, 128, 155, 158, 170, 173, 175, 176, 178, 179, 181, 183, 217, 218, 220, 222, 229, 232, 233, 241, 242, 255, 259–261, 264, 266

M. Wedell and L. Grassick (eds.), *International Perspectives on Teachers Living with Curriculum Change*, International Perspectives on English Language Teaching,
https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-54309-7

and school culture 69, 119
and teacher role 1, 3–7, 9, 10, 15, 23, 132–144, 150, 151, 153, 156, 162, 165, 167, 170–173, 180–183, 197, 205, 215, 218–224, 233, 240–243, 245, 247–249, 253, 255, 256, 260, 261, 263–267
Change agents. *See* Teacher agency
Choice. *See* Change and teacher role
Communicating changes 16, 119. *See also* Awareness raising
Communicative approach 94, 95, 97, 99, 133, 176, 193, 194, 253. *See also* Teaching approaches
Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) 2, 16, 84, 85, 99, 148, 163, 187, 190, 192, 195, 207
Content Language Integrated learning (CLIL) 213, 214, 222
Complex change 45, 143, 201, 242, 268
Conceptions of knowledge 250
Conceptions of language 21, 94
Conceptions of learning 32, 43, 253
Constructivist pedagogies 62
Context. *See* Local realities
Contextual confusion 248, 249, 253, 258, 259, 261–263, 265–267
Course books. *See* Textbooks
Curriculum aims (goals) 6, 10, 23, 30, 48, 88, 142, 155, 156, 162, 165, 172, 181, 191, 231, 233–235, 239, 242, 244
Curriculum fit with local contexts 3, 4, 7, 231, 243, 254, 266
Curriculum principles vs. social expectations 92, 205, 219, 224. *See also* Change and school culture

E

Emotions. *See* Anxiety; Risk
English as a second language (ESL) 126–128, 141
Exam focus. *See* Assessment
Exceptions of others 54, 115. *See also* Stakeholders; Parental influence
Existing educational culture 97, 179. *See also* Conceptions of knowledge; Conceptions of language; Conceptions of learning
Expectations of teachers 3, 109, 222, 262. *See also* Attitudes; change and teacher role

F

Formal support for teachers 4, 137, 138, 143, 256, 260
Freedom. *See* Change and teacher role

G

Grammar-Translation method 133, 168, 195

H

Heavy workload 52, 65, 74, 156, 159, 223. *See also* Time
Historical time 248, 249, 252, 253. *See also* Time

I

Implementation planning 3, 4, 8, 34, 162, 223, 242, 243, 249, 260, 261, 265, 268
Initial support at the start of implementation 180
In-school support 27, 144
mentoring 18, 19, 26
INSET. *See* Teacher training/education
Isolation 97, 118, 149, 210, 211, 215, 216, 223, 264. *See also* Anxiety; Risk

L

Language proficiency

of learners 1, 16, 28, 30, 44, 46, 47, 129, 163, 208, 214, 222, 253
of teachers 4, 9, 17, 23, 31, 33, 99, 142, 208, 231, 248, 256, 257, 265. *See also* Teacher quality proficiency in English
Learning through literature 3, 4, 168, 201, 206, 243, 264, 266
Limited teacher support 68–70, 74, 77, 130, 192, 195, 197, 198, 200, 264. *See also* Teacher support
Local realities 3, 4, 41, 49, 53, 139, 154, 200
Losing face 27, 90, 174, 261. *See also* Anxiety; Risk

M
Materials. *See* Textbooks; Resources
Mixed ability 22, 152
Mixed messages. *See* Curriculum fit with local contexts
Motivation 216. *See also* Attitudes

N
Need for curriculum change 218, 220, 222, 224, 229, 240, 241, 247, 248, 251, 253, 255, 256

O
Opportunities for collaboration 54, 210. *See also* Implementation planning; Teacher support
Oral skills 109, 110, 136, 137, 150, 154, 155, 160, 187, 194

P
Parental expectations 260. *See also* Expectations of others
Peer assessment. *See* Assessment
Planning strategies
power coercive 3
teachers as objects of change 5, 11, 267. *See also* Positionality
top down/hierarchical 3, 224, 242
Positionality 255, 264
Pre-service teacher education 263. *See also* Teacher training

R
Resistance to change 17, 63, 66, 97, 117. *See also* Anxiety; Risk
Resources 62, 69, 94, 95, 107, 108, 119, 121, 169, 190, 195, 198, 207, 237, 244, 267
Risk 31, 90, 97, 172, 174, 249, 255, 258, 259, 261–266. *See also* Anxiety
Role of English as L2 1, 16, 107, 229, 253. *See also* Attitudes
Role of other languages 148, 260. *See also* Use of L1
Rural contexts 131, 142
Rush to implement change 31, 54, 55, 121, 142, 252. *See also* Time

S
School support
Colleagues 4, 11, 43, 64, 68, 70, 71, 77, 92, 93, 108, 109, 111, 112, 115–118, 120, 138, 139, 143, 191, 197, 215, 218, 222, 233, 264
Inspectors 67, 143, 144
principals/heads 3, 11, 17, 68, 70, 111, 130, 138, 142, 164, 183, 189, 243, 255, 259, 266
Self-assessment. *See* Assessment
Set books. *See* Textbooks
Space for learning. *See* Time for learning
Stakeholders 17, 33, 44, 45, 53, 55, 56, 92, 93, 97–100, 120, 122, 143, 255, 266–268

influence of 44, 45, 50, 112, 121, 156, 196
Syllabus coverage 29, 100, 157, 158, 257. *See also* Time

T
Teacher agency
teachers as change implementers 8, 97, 219, 220, 249, 254, 256, 258
teacher voices 33, 162, 239, 245, 264, 267
Teacher involvement/participation 24, 33, 52, 54, 97, 104, 118, 125, 131, 193, 243, 264
Teacher quality
qualifications 19, 65, 98, 104, 107, 128
proficiency in English 2, 4, 16, 21, 22, 31, 40, 67, 74, 77, 89, 90, 92, 94, 95, 97, 98, 100, 104, 129, 151, 160. *See also* Language proficiency of teachers
Teacher support
appropriacy of content 5, 45, 134, 196, 199, 224, 256
appropriacy of design 15, 19, 23, 99, 104, 110, 139, 144, 181, 191, 192, 206–208, 219, 245, 265
appropriacy of process 15, 17, 18, 31–34, 43, 50, 62, 63, 75, 86, 94, 99, 105, 131, 141, 143, 167, 170, 175, 182, 191, 194, 195, 197, 202, 205, 208, 218, 223, 232, 234, 235, 237, 241, 243, 244, 248, 249, 254–256, 259, 263, 266, 267
on-going 15, 34, 40, 52, 55, 57, 77, 105, 141, 144, 147, 158, 179, 182, 231, 236, 243, 252, 260
talking with colleagues 27, 111, 113, 118, 120, 264
Teacher training/education 17, 18, 24, 33, 40, 42, 49–51, 53–55, 62, 69, 86, 99, 107, 108, 127, 143, 175, 192
INSET 86, 88, 95–97, 99, 183, 190, 193, 256, 258
pre-service 85, 86, 151, 159, 168, 174, 196, 244, 263
Teaching approaches
communicative. *See* Communicative approaches
learner/student-centred approaches 2, 3, 105–107, 133, 134, 160, 194, 202, 216, 244
transmission-based 97, 177, 183. *See also* Traditional approaches
Textbooks 3, 10, 17, 18, 24, 25, 27, 29–31, 42, 62, 72, 85, 98, 105, 107, 111, 114, 115, 127, 131, 134, 135, 137, 140–142, 144, 150, 189, 216, 218, 248, 253, 256, 261–263
availability 18, 25, 219, 231, 256
as curriculum 216, 218–222, 230–239, 242–244, 248, 249, 251, 252, 254, 259, 260, 262
textbook inadequacies 74, 98
Time
for implementation 3, 5–7, 9, 10, 17, 18, 31, 33, 34, 259, 263, 266, 267
for learning 54, 64, 179, 231, 249, 258
for planning 248, 252, 255
since communicative goals first introduced 11
Traditional teaching approaches 21, 62, 68, 70, 74, 84, 85, 97, 131, 136,

141, 193, 220, 251, 263. *See also* Teaching approaches
Trainers 17, 68, 78, 88, 96, 108, 142, 180, 183, 196, 260, 261. *See also* Teacher support; Teacher training

U
Understanding of curriculum 24, 27, 33, 48, 114–116, 121, 153, 191, 231, 232, 260
Use of L1 199

V
Vulnerability 78, 98, 263, 264. *See also* Anxiety; Risk