The cases: Implementation

Case 9:
Making it work: A case study of a teacher training programme in China

Lin Hong

The project

For quite a long time English was not a required subject in the national curriculum in China, although it was offered at primary level from the early 1990s at grade 4 or 5 (ages 9–11). Schools could choose to offer English to students, if they felt it necessary and if they had the teachers. However, in 2001, as a result of the global expansion of programmes in English Teaching to Young Learners, as well as of China's rapid social and economic change, the Ministry of Education of China initiated a curriculum innovation: the promotion of English as a foreign language in primary schools, from grade 3 (ages 8–9).

The overall goals of primary English in China are to 'develop students' comprehensive language competence by making learning a process during which students can develop language proficiency, form positive attitudes, improve thinking skills, increase cross-cultural awareness, and learn to use learning strategies so as to gradually become independent learners' (Ministry of Education 2001: 7). The framework of strands in the English curriculum for the primary phase is designed with specific can-do statements for each strand. The performance descriptors indicate a change in methodology which encourages an activity-based approach designed to involve students in the learning and make it an enjoyable experience. Thus, the training of primary English teachers was seen as crucial to the success of this nationwide English teaching reform.

The Primary English Teacher Training Project (PETT) was launched in Guangdong province in 2001 against this background. The aim was to train as many primary English teachers as possible to adapt to learner-centred communicative activities. PETT was co-ordinated by the British Council and Guangdong Department of Education, and was conducted by the University of Leeds and Guangdong Teachers College of Foreign Languages and Arts (GTCFLA). In three years, a total of 102 local trainers were trained, first at GTCFLA and then at the University of Leeds. These in turn cascaded to 4,800 primary English teachers in the province. Although the British Council's involvement ended in 2005, the cascade training is still taking place at the time of writing (2011).

PETT has been regarded as the most successful in-service primary English teacher training programme ever in Guangdong and has earned a good reputation across the country. At about the same time, similar projects sponsored by the British Council were also carried out in Shanghai and Chongqing, but none of them perhaps had such a significant effect as PETT.

Stage – implementation

Localisation is the priority for a foreign training project. Usually, at least in China, it is foreign trainers who design the whats and hows of a programme on the basis of their understanding of the local situation and context, after a brief survey. However, such an approach has been shown to be problematic, in terms of gaining the full appreciation and engagement of local stakeholders. Thus, instead of concentrating its efforts on localising foreign trainers, PETT shifted its approach to training local trainers, using a cascade approach.

In PETT, there were three levels of trainers: the first level covered trainers who had attended the University of Leeds training; the second level, local teachers who received both GTCFLA and University of Leeds training; and the third level, those local teachers who underwent GTCFLA training only. The first level participated mainly in training the second level, and in supervising and evaluating the cascade training. The second level was responsible for designing the whole training package and training the third level. The third level acted as assistants, organisers, or trainers in the cascade training.

What is especially noteworthy about PETT is that it produced a large number of beneficiaries and had a high level of sustainability. The credit for this must go to the cascade training. However, if both the Shanghai and the Chongqing projects also used this model, why was it that PETT in Guangdong stood out, in terms of its impact? Let us look into the implementation of the Guangdong project.

Story

How to select the second-level trainers?

The plan was that four cohorts of trainers would receive training at GTCFLA for two weeks and then some of them, having been recommended by their local governments, would go to the University of Leeds for an additional three months' training. Previously, it had been very rare for a primary school teacher in China to get the chance to study abroad. Thus, the issue of who would be on the trainer list was tricky and complicated. The list of recommended candidates initially appeared anomalous, in that it included some teachers who had not attended the early training at GTCFLA and some who had very poor English. In order to ensure that the later cascade training was implemented to a high standard, GTCFLA consulted with the Guangdong Department of Education and was granted the final say on the choice of candidates for the programme in Leeds. Those who could not pass the special test in teaching methodology and English proficiency set by the University of Leeds and those whose candidature was clearly irrelevant were removed from the trainer list. Thus, a high-level team of trainers was built up. These 102 trainers went on to play a very important role in PETT. They have been referred to as the 'seeds' of PETT and many of them are now well known in the field of teacher training in China.

How to improve the project's coverage with a limited budget?

There are 21 prefecture-level cities in Guangdong province. Except for the six Pearl River Delta cities, the rest, 15 cities, mostly in remote or mountainous areas, are underdeveloped. The provincial government subsidised PETT, contributing 10,000,000 yuan, which covered training fees, but not travelling and accommodation costs. A provincial programme is usually expected to run in the provincial capital, and GTCFLA is located in Guangzhou, the capital of Guangdong province. For the sake of training quality and convenience, in the early days of PETT the cascade training sessions were always based at GTCFLA. Teachers outside the Pearl River Delta are usually of a relatively low professional level and require a good deal of training. As the project went on, however, quite a number of them were to give up what was for them a rare chance for training. It was found that teachers were hesitant to commit if their local government or schools could not pay for their travel costs and their accommodation expenses in Guangzhou.

The question of how to enable more teachers, especially those in remote and mountainous areas, to benefit from PETT was raised. As a result, a major change was made: in order to ease the financial burden on a municipal government, the cascade training would be held locally. Instead of having trainees travel to Guangzhou, the trainers moved from city to city. Afterwards, the provincial training held at GTCFLA was mainly focused on preparing qualified trainers to implement more training. In order to ensure a city had enough trainers, a provincial quota was assigned to each city. In addition, all teachers from underdeveloped areas were given full financial support from the provincial government for their training at GTCFLA or the University of Leeds. As a result, PETT was able to achieve the widest possible coverage of all primary English teacher training projects in Guangdong.

How to sustain the project?

The answer was to make full use of *JIAOYANYUAN*. There is no exact English translation for this. They are teaching and research fellows, and are key people for the success of education reform. They have three roles to play: as teachers, researchers, and administrators. One of their duties is to organise and provide training for teachers in their districts. If they are not involved in a project or take no interest in it, the project is likely to fail. In PETT, all *JIAOYANYUAN* were given priority when it came to attending the provincial training at GTCFLA or going to the University of Leeds for further training. In this way, they automatically became PETT trainers and were under an obligation to help in organising cascade training. For example, Ms Ling, a researcher in Guangzhou city, was among the first cohort of trainers to go to the University of Leeds. She became an advocate of PETT. After she returned from the United Kingdom, she participated as a trainer in six PETT cascade trainings for three consecutive years. When PETT officially stopped in 2005, she continued to organise similar training herself in her district and actively participated in those organised by her counterparts around the province. Statistics show that more than 3,000 primary English teachers received post-PETT training from their district researchers.

Lessons

1. The commitment of all participants in a project should be clearly established before the project starts. For example, if a trainer cannot take part in cascade training, he or she should not be trained as a trainer in the first place. In PETT, all of the trainers joined in the cascade training held at GTCFLA immediately after their return from the training in Leeds. But for some of them, this was the only time they carried out their duty as trainers. Perhaps the trainers should be asked to sign a contract to make their duty clear and ensure their participation.

2. Consider adapting a training package for cascade training according to the local context. China is a huge country and, even within a province, there are great differences from city to city. For example, in a developed area, like Dongguan city, where local teachers had better English and were more open to new ideas, our module *Using drama in language teaching in primary schools* was appropriate and the training courses could be given in English. However, in a less developed area, like Meixian city, where many teachers were not English specialists and held qualifications in other disciplines such as Chinese language, maths, or physical education, the *TPR* (Total Physical Response) module seemed to be a better choice, and the course was given mostly in Chinese. Similarly, the period of training was not fixed and could be varied according to the budget available.

3. Leave the hard nuts to your Chinese counterpart to crack. In PETT, the British Council and Guangdong Department of Education were funding providers and policy makers, while the University of Leeds and GTCFLA were supervisors and executives. So, in dealing with a local government, it was wise for the British Council to act as a funding provider and Guangdong Department of Education as a policy maker. For the same reason, in coping with a tough situation in training, it was advisable for the University of Leeds to act as a supervisor, rather than as an executive.

4. Group trainers operated in a combination that consisted of one trainer from a teacher training college, one from an education bureau, and one from a primary school. This tripartite structure has been proved to work best, because each of them plays an irreplaceable role in the training. In PETT, those from teacher training colleges (teacher trainers) had a superior command of English and knowledge of ELT theory. They took the lead in the cascade training. Those from education bureaux *(JIAOYANYUAN)* had a great impact on classroom teaching and were in charge of local teacher training. Those from primary schools (known as 'backbone' English teachers) were experienced in teaching primary English and practised the teaching ideas promoted in PETT in their classes, as examples for fellow teachers.

5. The lesson is: make sure you get support from local governments at all levels and do not take it for granted that a provincial project can be carried out smoothly in smaller cities or town without the right conditions.

6. It is true that even with sound policy and a well-designed plan, a project may not work successfully if the implementation is flawed or goes wrong. PETT, a successful Sino-British teacher training project, has provided us with valuable experience.

Case 10:
The Teacher Training Colleges Project in Poland

Hanna Komorowska

The project

A new national project, undertaken as part of the 1990 reform, aimed to establish a dense network of three-year colleges which would, in a relatively short time, offer teaching qualifications to secondary school students with intermediate language skills. The training programme focused on language proficiency, teaching skills, and skills that would enable students to function as agents of change in the process of democratising Polish education. The length of study was decided on the basis of research data showing that the language skills of students in Polish language departments plateaued after the third year of studies (Wysocka 1989). The six-term course (around 2,000 hours) consisted of four basic components designed to develop practical language skills, pedagogical competences, and language teaching skills, and to prepare graduates for follow-up MA courses through background studies in literature and linguistics. The course also included a period of teaching practice.

The project was a response to an urgent need to promote foreign languages in Poland after the fall of communism. Before this, Russian was mandatory in schools of all levels from grade IV of primary onwards, but was taught as a political message of dependence, rather than an instrument of communication. A second foreign language was part of the curriculum only in lycée-type schools. As only 14 per cent of learners aged 15–19 attended this type of school, and English and German enjoyed equal status in mass education, English was available to no more than seven per cent of Polish school learners, in spite of the huge demand that could be seen in the large market for private lessons.

The main educational reform introduced by the first democratic government abolished the mandatory status of Russian, introduced equal status of foreign languages taught in the school system, and encouraged the earlier start for the teaching of two foreign languages in schools.

With 18,000 Russian teachers and only 2,400 teachers of English and German, Poland quickly had to train around 20,000 teachers of Western languages, mostly English – an impossible task for the very few language departments offering

five-year theoretical courses at universities. Moreover, university graduates educated in big cities were unwilling to work in the provinces. Retraining Russian teachers was unrealistic, because of their lack of skills in other languages, but also because of their lack of communicative teaching skills. Teacher Training Colleges were a chance to solve the problem. The project was implemented in October 1990, in spite of resistance on the part of universities which feared a loss of their monopoly in the field of languages, but with the support of the democratically elected local decision makers and, paradoxically, former communists who – especially in small towns – were eager to show their usefulness in a new situation. To supervise implementation, take care of dissemination and, above all, solve the problems which were sure to emerge, the National Council for Teacher Education was set up by the Ministry of Education.

Although the original plan was to open 30 colleges, pressure from local communities and their guarantee of premises and staff led to the opening of 50 colleges with 1,500 places for students of English (41 language programmes in total in the colleges), 400 for students of French (19 language programmes), and 450 for students of German (13 language programmes) (Komorowska 1991). A few years later, several colleges opened language programmes for future teachers of Spanish and Italian.

Dissemination and sustainability proved more than satisfactory. In 2005, the number of foreign language (FL) teacher training colleges reached 82 (Country Report. Poland 2006). The fact that, in the first years, graduates tended to look for employment outside mass education, because of low salaries in state schools, was not considered a failure of the system, as their appearance on the market raised the quality of education in newly established private schools of all levels, as well as in language schools (Fisiak 1992, Komorowska 2007). Today, i.e. in 2011, the number of colleges is still as high as 66. The college system is supposed to function until 2014 – which will give it a life span of 25 years – and, by that date, colleges are supposed to become fully integrated with the university system. Some colleges will close down as a result of a downward trend in population figures, but most of the programmes taught by today's staff will survive, albeit within different formal structures.

Stage – implementation

The stage which seems to be most useful to describe in the present case study is implementation. This is because most of the decisions worth discussing here were related to difficulties which arose during the implementation of the new system. It is relatively difficult, however, to separate the design stage and the early phase of implementation of the college network because of the speed with which all the Polish reforms were planned and implemented after the fall of communism.

Story

In analysing what led to successful implementation, which in turn ensured the dissemination and sustainability of the system, let us first look at those organisational decisions which proved to be constructive and then at those related to curricular issues which had to be taken to meet some challenges encountered in the early phase of the functioning of the system.

Initial impetus through early organisational decisions
Decisions made in the initial phase of implementation of the project gave initial impetus and proved significant for the future of the system. The overview of difficulties is here presented from the point of view of the designer of the whole system and the first director of the flagship college set up at Warsaw University.

Crucial *organisational decisions* which led to success included:

■ the decision to focus the college curriculum on language skills, as this made colleges attractive to students and helped the dissemination process

■ the decision to go for a three-year course of studies, which turned out to be a lucky one, as when the Bologna process started in 1999 resulting in the introduction of three-year BA and two-year MA studies at universities, the fact of having the same length of study at colleges and for university BA courses facilitated smooth integration and ensured sustainability; a decision in favour of two- or four-year programmes would have meant the death of the colleges after the first decade of their life

■ the decision to create a dense network of colleges, in spite of the lack of the legal uniformity of the system, as this helped to increase the number of graduates and thus to reduce teacher shortages quickly. (University colleges were subject to the Higher Education Act and Local Educational Authority (LEA) colleges to the Schools Act. University students would, therefore, obtain teaching qualifications with a BA diploma and be able to continue their studies towards an MA, while – in spite of having covered the same programme – LEA college students would only get a certificate of teaching qualifications and would thus have to start a BA course at a university in order to enter an MA course three years later)

■ the decision to require university supervision and quality control in order to ensure academic recognition of coursework completed at the colleges run by LEAs, and permission for LEA college graduates to sit BA exams and start follow-up MA studies, as this helped to avoid blind alleys in education and to enable all college graduates to obtain a university degree at BA level

■ the decision to encourage agreements between LEAs financing colleges and presidents of supervising universities, on the basis of which the university would ensure its staff's participation in the admission process, staff recruitment, language examinations, and final college-leaving exams, while the local educational board would provide the budget for all those activities, as it gave more power and status, as well as extra finance, to the universities, which then took a much more favourable view of the new system.

Facing unexpected challenges – some crucial curricular decisions

Future sustainability of the system strongly depended on *curricular decisions* taken in response to challenges emerging at the implementation stage.

An early difficulty in this area consisted in the fact that a fairly general curriculum framework and differences in the way supervision was conducted by universities brought about huge differentiation in the curriculum structure of individual colleges. Differences in local staff availability were also a factor here. Moreover, teacher trainers jumped at the chance of giving status to their subject areas by increasing their curricular time at the expense of others, to the point where excessive changes undermined the comparability of study programmes. In response, a more precise curriculum framework was laid out by the National Council of Teacher Education, with a centrally decided ratio between curricular components. Individual decisions about the required minimum of contact hours were to be taken by Pedagogical Councils at colleges and approved by the supervising university. Subject-area co-ordinators were also appointed in all the larger colleges. Moreover, conferences for teacher trainers were organised to develop team spirit and a sense of participation in a national teacher education programme. This proved sufficient in terms of diploma and qualifications recognition, and at the same time left enough space for flexibility. A degree of curricular variety proved beneficial for the sustainability of the college system, as, on the one hand, it strengthened the supervising university's link with its own fields of research and, on the other, it helped the local educational authorities maintain the college in their district using human resources available there.

Yet more problems were to arise, some involving the students, and some the teachers. In the first years of the life of the colleges, a high dropout rate was noticed after the first two terms which could not be ascribed to study problems. It became apparent that some students treated colleges as free language schools. The first year gave them up to 700 language hours, after which they chose other study programmes or sought employment for which their newly acquired skills qualified them. To solve the problem, the National Council for Teacher Education decided to spread practical language teaching more evenly throughout the three years of study and to increase dramatically the participation of subjects directly connected with teacher education in the first two terms of study. This helped to attract students who were genuinely interested in obtaining teaching qualifications. The college staff also experienced difficulties as a result of their lack of syllabus design skills. The solution was almost immediately found in international co-operation. Colleges were encouraged to enter international programmes of the European Union such as TEMPUS (Trans-European Mobility Scheme for University Studies) and JEN (Joint European Network) to build contacts and benefit from the sharing of expertise. A special programme, PRINCE (Projects in Controlled Environments), was also set up by the British Council to help link Polish colleges with British universities so that they could benefit from British curriculum construction expertise. As a result of teacher education conferences, special interest groups were formed to work on particular subject methodologies.

It also became apparent that students did not have enough opportunities to observe good practice, although they seemed to have spent sufficient time

observing language classes at various schools. This was due in part to the shortage of highly qualified language teachers who could function as mentors. Consequently, students lacked skills to analyse classes they watched critically, and were unable to gain perspective on their own teaching. This marked a difficult moment in the life of the colleges – there were calls for some colleges to be closed down. The solution to the problem was found in collaboration with in-service teacher training centres. Highly qualified teachers were located and their lessons were recorded. Series of recordings illustrating methodology were then distributed among the colleges to enable students to get acquainted with as much good practice as possible during in-college video sessions. Special mentor training programmes were also initiated and a new methodology slot was introduced in the final year of studies during which college teacher educators individually consulted trainees and helped them develop autonomy and self-reflection.

Lessons

The main learning points from the implementation phase can be summarised in the following dos and don'ts:

■ Respond quickly not just to burning needs, but also to every difficulty! Immediate reaction to seemingly minor curricular challenges and not just to major problems related to legal issues proved crucial for further success.

■ Do not wait for ideal solutions. Forget the 'all or nothing' philosophy! The decision to establish a dense network of small colleges was by no means ideal and created lots of problems, but was worth all the problems which came in the initial period, as the network helped to provide qualified staff for small schools in distant regions of the country.

■ Co-operate with everybody, your former enemies included! Friendly co-operation with major universities which initially opposed the college idea resulted in the creation of follow-up opportunities for college graduates and at the same time opened a new source of finance for the universities.

■ Do not get carried away by success. Look for critical feedback! Complaints from the teaching staff helped to produce a new curriculum framework which preserved the autonomy of the colleges and the supervising universities, while at the same time ensuring comparability of education and recognition of college diplomas.

■ Do not try to salvage a bad situation by fighting undesired behaviour: create rewards for desired behaviour! Instead of trying to block the activity of teachers who wanted to give more status to their own subject area at the expense of other subjects, the work of subject area co-ordinators was rewarded and conference participation was sponsored for teachers who decided to present their ideas at inter-college staff meetings where proposed innovations were to be discussed.

■ Think globally, act locally, and always look for good local solutions to share with others! Local changes in the syllabus, teaching practice, and mentor training were successfully communicated to other colleges and made their way into a generalised curricular framework recommended for the whole country.

Case 11:
Change in Tamil Nadu, India

Clare O'Donahue

The project

In 2009 UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund), Sharva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), the Indian government's flagship programme for Universalisation of Elementary Education, and the British Council's regional initiative *Project English* began working together on a large-scale teacher development programme aiming to improve English language teaching and learning for over 6,000,000 children in 37,000 government primary schools in Tamil Nadu, South India.

From 2003-07, Activity Based Learning (ABL) was introduced into primary classrooms in Tamil Nadu. An extensive training and development programme which significantly challenged existing teaching and learning practices in Tamil Nadu was rolled out to teachers. As a result of this ambitious programme, the seeds for change were sown, and teachers began to question their beliefs and practice as they became part of the changing learning environment.

Because of the demand for English in India, many parents are making uninformed choices to remove their children from local-medium government provision and send them to the growing number of low-cost private English-medium schools. It was against this developing background that UNICEF, the SSA, and the British Council's *Project English* set about facilitating change in English language teaching and learning for children in government schools, as they progressed through and beyond the ABL system. A large-scale development programme was initiated which would select and directly train 900 master trainers, who, in turn, would cascade the training to 120,000 teachers of one year group.

Extensive dialogue about the expected outcomes took place between the three partners throughout the initiation stage, during which clear communication channels were established. Following a needs analysis, it was agreed and communicated that the overall aims would be to improve teacher confidence when using English in the classroom and to increase opportunities for learner interaction, while keeping within the existing curriculum and textbooks.

Stage – implementation

This case study aims to explore strategies and reflect on their effectiveness during the implementation stage. Limitations of the cascade model are fully recognised

but, because of the large numbers involved and the vast geographical reach in India, direct teacher training was not an option. The cascade model is used extensively in India and mitigating risk was a shared concern. On the basis of the previous experience of the partner organisations, strategies for minimising transition loss were embedded into the implementation plan.

Story

There were many factors which impacted on the effective implementation of this programme. These can be categorised into three key areas: collaboration, communication, and engagement.

Collaboration

Agreeing partners' specific roles (see Table 1 below) at the outset of the programme laid the foundation for a plan which recognised each organisation's expertise and set the scene for reciprocal learning. An environment of mutual respect and trust was created by holding consultations and meetings which involved key stakeholders working at different levels within their organisations. Listening to, acknowledging, and acting on suggestions discussed in these consultations led to buy-in from the key players.

SSA	UNICEF	British Council
• overall action plan • monitoring and field-level support • support residential training programme for master trainers • all logistical arrangements for cascade/planning meetings • funds for monitoring master trainers and cascade training ensuring similar standards in training sessions at cascade levels throughout.	• technical and financial assistance • monitoring both master trainers and cascade training • professional knowledge and expertise relating to context • ongoing advice and support.	• needs analysis and design of training modules for master trainers and teachers • direct training and monitoring of master trainers • monitoring cascade training • providing follow-up support and advice.

Table 1: The partners' roles and responsibilities

Table 1 shows the clearly defined roles and responsibilities related to organisation expertise agreed during the initiation phase.

The co-operation of local implementers was achieved by undertaking pre-programme visits to venues out in the districts to identify and mitigate potential risks. These visits included meeting local administrative staff, teachers, and teacher educators, which enabled a rapport to be built, and assessing the venue and accommodation, inspecting the restrooms, and, perhaps most importantly, sampling the food the participants were expected to eat!

Comprehensive monitoring and evaluation were undertaken throughout the programme by all partners at all levels. Monitoring visits made by representatives from the three partner organisations often coincided with each other, where we

made ourselves highly visible and accessible while we shared key findings and agreed on subsequent action. Good relationships with each other, the participants, and the administrators were built up by this close, on-the-ground monitoring schedule. Supporting each other to work towards a common goal meant that there was no place for egos, only reciprocation.

Communication

Establishing clear and transparent two-way communication channels helped to build an atmosphere of trust and ownership, where all stakeholders and interested parties were equally valued. The SSA had already set up a 1,500 strong closed user group mobile network for staff working at all levels across the state. This allowed free access to anyone at any level at any time in an environment where access to the internet and e-mails is extremely restricted. This mobile network proved an invaluable means of communicating, not only from head office to district, but also district to district and organisation to organisation. Text messaging became the *modus operandi*. Many logistical glitches were cleared up swiftly and efficiently on the spot, because of the instant accessibility of the relevant team members located across the state.

In each delivery district, a local media officer was assigned to document the participants' experience and to alert the local press and television networks. A press release was prepared and widely circulated through the extensive networks of the three organisations, and newspaper articles were often released in both English and local language versions to widen the reach.

Engagement

When initiating, planning, implementing, or evaluating the programme, we kept in mind the following mantra: 'It is people who make the change possible, not the policies' (Wedell 2009). Master trainers are the direct communication with teachers and, similarly, teachers are the direct communication with learners. Both layers need to be convinced that the proposed 'change' will have beneficial effects. Not only do they need to know 'What's in it for me?', but it also helps if they know what the intended change in classroom practice might look like.

Several strategies to ensure participant buy-in have already been mentioned, such as meaningful consultation leading to shared expectations and the importance of building a relationship of mutual respect and trust.

In Tamil Nadu all the training courses for the master trainers were residential. This meant that the programme was different, special, and allowed the participants to be fully engaged for the whole 10 days. Much reflection and sharing of ideas took place in the evenings, as well as the forming of new friendships and bonding as a teaching community. Provision for those who had home responsibilities that could not be neglected was also made; for example, one participant brought her mother to look after her small baby while she attended the sessions.

Trainers and teachers of class 5 had already been a party to a certain amount of reculturing (Fullan 2007) brought about by the implementation of ABL in classes 1–4. They had seen and heard the change in the ABL classrooms in their

schools; their curiosity had been aroused. Therefore, from the start of the English programme, there was generally a willingness to learn and an openness to change. This pre-acclimatisation had a positive impact on the uptake of new ideas and methodologies presented in the course.

New ideas may challenge existing beliefs and practice, so time must be allocated for adequate sharing and trying out of new ideas. Immediately after the master training and before the cascade to teachers, master trainers attended a three-day planning workshop. They gathered in groups from different batches and districts in order to facilitate cross-fertilisation of ideas, share their experiences, and group-plan their cascade to teachers. It also gave the master trainers time to reflect on their own learning.

Another principle we held in our minds throughout was: 'One size does not fit all.' Bringing the master trainers together enabled them to plan and adapt the materials to make them suitable for teachers in their local context. Master trainers were also strategically paired up to deliver the programme. It was recognised that the benefits of co-delivery outweighed the extra cost implications. Delivering in pairs meant that there was less lost in transmission, strengths of individuals were recognised, and those less confident were supported by their peers; in addition, risks of absenteeism through sickness were minimised.

Lessons

So what lessons did we learn from working on the Tamil Nadu project and what advice would we pass on to others when implementing educational change programmes?

- First and foremost, we learnt to go with the flow. In most instances, it is advisable and significantly less stressful than trying to impose alien procedures which may match your own preconceptions or plan, but may not be acceptable or appropriate for the local context. This is particularly important to remember when partnering with local organisations that have invariably had experience in their own environment. Collaboration, to us, meant recognising each other's expertise, listening to each other, valuing each other's input, and moving forward together towards a shared goal.

- Take considerable care and attention when building up a working relationship and opening effective communication channels with those you are relying on for smooth implementation. It is well worth the time and effort. Identify the most effective mode of communication and adapt and use modes most effective in and acceptable to the given environment, whether this means using cloud computing or carrier pigeons!

- Ensure the overall aims of the programme are agreed and that the partners have a shared understanding of what these aims look like in the classroom. Meeting participant expectations is a crucial factor for success.

- Clearly set out and communicate the agreed roles and responsibilities of all those involved and, when action is demanded, do it quickly and effectively and expect all others involved in the programme to do the same.

- Recognise that state policy cannot take each specific locality into account. Adaptations which do not interfere with the broad aims of the programme should be made by the people who work within the local context. Build in time for participants to share ideas, reflect, and empower them to adapt the programme, if necessary.

- Change takes time and effort, so do not expect to see results overnight. If the outcome of the programme involves a change in beliefs or attitudes, it will very much depend on where the teachers are at the beginning of a programme and how far they may need to travel. Local implementers are key players in communicating change: build a good rapport with them and value their contributions.

- Remember that it is the people and not the policies that effect change. Listen to and value individual expertise. Give due importance to the physical comfort of trainers and trainees; their perception that they are being treated with all due care and respect will minimise the risk of disengagement. Do not underestimate the importance of selecting venues which offer the best possible facilities! One disgruntled participant can cause a negative ripple effect across a whole programme.

- Observations and opinion from comprehensive monitoring and evaluation throughout the programme by all partners at all levels of the cascade are essential, as this allows information sharing both horizontally and vertically within and across the partner organisations.

- Finally, celebrate and communicate success and provide continuing support for trainers and teachers to enable them to continue growing after the initial programme has concluded.

Case 12:
The Romanian Textbook Project: Learning together, driving reform

Ruxandra Popovici

The project

English emerged in the last decade of the 20th century as the dominant foreign language in Romania. In the wake of the 1989 revolution and the overthrow of the totalitarian communist regime, the demand for English kept growing. In the increasingly open world of the end of the 20th century, the English language was seen as a key tool for providing access to European and international communication, information, and the labour market. Therefore, Romania's national education authority placed English language education at the forefront of its reforms. The British Council was quick to partner the Romanian Ministry of Education in its effort to set up the reform process. This partnership placed English language teaching and teachers of English at the forefront of educational change. The British Council's joined-up thinking on ELT in 1991 provided the foundation for the first coherent reform framework in Romanian education, covering new curricula and textbooks, in-service and pre-service teacher training, inspector training, cultural studies, and language for specific purposes.

In 1991, the Ministry of Education, in partnership with the British Council Romania, launched a textbook project, with the aim of producing a new series of eight textbooks of English, one for each of the secondary school grades in Romania (grades 5–12), and creating local expertise in materials writing. The need to replace instructional materials that were outdated in content and methodology was urgent and was recognised by the teaching community and the education policy decision makers as a key part of the overall education reform agenda. Textbooks have been constantly perceived in Romanian education as one of the 'genres of power' (Wells 1999: 145) that construes reality in a form that can influence people's values and attitudes. This perception contributed to the decision to put significant resources into a project that could have far-reaching impact. It became clear in the following years that the English textbook component was, to a large extent, the driving and unifying factor behind the whole area of pre-university EFL (English as a foreign language) education.

The fact that the Romanian textbook project was written locally has been central to its success. As Bolitho comments:

> Locally produced materials can best reflect the values and cultural norms of the society in which they are used and can view the culture of the target language from a position of security. (Bolitho 2002: 44)

Stage – implementation

The novelty of the project and the long and winding road to educational change within the transition context of the early 1990s in Romania made detailed initial planning of the project difficult. Those involved in the project had to exercise critical thinking and flexibility in order to deal efficiently with innumerable setbacks, moving goalposts, and even changes of educational policies. Therefore, I consider that the dynamics of the implementation phase, which I am going to focus on in this paper, are particularly important for those involved in the conceptual planning and development of educational projects.

Story

Acting on recommendations made following a scoping visit by a UK ELT expert in 1991, the British Council and the Ministry of Education agreed on a project outline, and University College Plymouth St Mark and St John was selected as the UK partner institution through an open tender. In late 1991, the British Council in Bucharest advertised nationally for writers. The applicants, all teachers, mostly from secondary schools, were required to submit a sample teaching unit, and the shortlisted candidates were called for an interview. For the first time in Romania, a textbook series was going to be authored by a large team made up of experienced and less experienced secondary teachers from the five regions of the country, who were going to work under the guidance of UK consultants. The selection of at least two teachers from the same city in each case was seen as a means of ensuring that no writer would work in isolation.

For everyone in the team, the sense of responsibility for the great task that lay ahead went hand in hand with excitement at spending 10 weeks in the United Kingdom doing a course commissioned for the group and getting first-hand exposure to British culture. During this initial course, the teachers were given an update on ELT methodology and were trained in syllabus and materials writing design. The Romanian textbook team was one of the first professional groups in the country which started to work in organised teams, thereby proving that the individualist attitudes of the past could be replaced by a collaborative culture. By the end of the course, Rod Bolitho, one of the college tutors, had agreed to take on the role of consultant to the project. His perspective demonstrates the two-way learning process that the textbook project involved from the beginning:

> For the tutors in Plymouth, work with their Romanian colleagues had added a dimension to their thinking about English language teaching … and had begun to overturn some of their own deep-rooted prejudices about life in a one-time communist country. (Popovici and Bolitho 2003: 506)

Looking back on it, all the writers considered that the initial course was undoubtedly the most important formative experience for them.

In accordance with the working pattern that was initially agreed, that of dividing into two writing teams at lower and upper secondary levels, the writers were allocated units and encouraged to work in teams on a city basis. All writers would then come to the regular workshops, with their units in draft form, for peer-reading and team discussion. These were intense working sessions that soon became points of reference for the writers. Without exception, all those involved in the project saw the writing workshops as a key context for learning, by writing together.

The path of project implementation was not a smooth or straight one. There were highlights and achievements, but also setbacks and moments of crisis. One turning point in the life of the project was the decision to invite one of the writers to take on the manager's role, following the resignation of a newly appointed UK manager. She would become the first Romanian manager of a British Council ELT project. At the same time, the consultancy structure changed when Rod Bolitho was joined by a British consultant, Sue Mohamed, who took responsibility for working with the lower secondary team. This decision made working on two levels of the textbook in parallel possible and ensured that publishers' deadlines and the Ministry's textbook competition schedules were met. Eventually all pieces of the management, consultancy, and team structures fell into place and ensured the project's progress and stability in times of change.

Another turning point was the change in the Ministry textbook provision policy. The 'unique textbook' system was replaced by the 'alternative textbook' system. With this, the state monopoly over educational publishing came to an end. This represented a major change for textbook writers, who now had to face intense competition from other publishers. For our project, it was a time for a rethink of strategies, plans, and attitudes. The writers and the management team needed to overcome feelings of uncertainty and disappointment, adapt rapidly to the new conditions, and make quick revisions to the draft materials in order to comply with the new official curricula and textbook evaluation criteria, which were not always clear and transparent. Publishers in Romania and in the United Kingdom were invited to tender for the production of the remaining six textbooks in the series and a top UK publisher was chosen according to strict criteria. This was a huge boost to the writers' motivation to continue and offered unique professional development.

The ELT methodology that the books represented was a case of innovation that challenged some of the deep-rooted traditional values in Romanian ELT. To make the textbooks a durable educational innovation, an important task of the project was to convince teachers to adapt to new, almost revolutionary methodologies and approaches. The link between textbooks and teacher training was strengthened with the setting up of a complex training project that involved the training of teachers, trainers, inspectors, and university methodologists throughout the country. From the beginning, it was planned that the new textbooks would be closely integrated with all these projects. The materials written by the team were used in training courses alongside other materials mainly drawn from global

course books. Universities started including the new textbooks in bibliographies for teacher education courses. For the first time in Romania, extensive piloting was organised for all books in the series in order to keep the dialogue with peers and students open. The team took every opportunity to attend professional events in Romania and abroad in order to speak about the textbooks and present the principles behind them. Appreciation of the new materials was generally very high, but there were times when the team had to face criticism of the results of their work and learn to overcome frustration and defensiveness.

The first tangible achievement of the project was the *Pathway to English* course book series itself. The lower secondary books in the series (Achim, Capota, Comişel, Dinu, Mastacan, Popovici, and Teodorescu: 1995–1999) were published in parallel with the upper secondary ones (Bălan, Carianopol, Colibaba, Coşer, Focşeneanu, Stan, and Vulcănescu: 1995–1999) and, as a result, a whole generation of secondary school students could benefit from the modern methodology in the textbooks at the same time. The initial syllabus designed in Plymouth underwent several changes that reflected the development of the writers' own thinking in relation to the balance between innovation and tradition in the content of the textbooks. Some of the features were completely novel for an English textbook in Romania. Very importantly, the books retained aspects that reflected the traditional values attached to the culture and civilisation of the English-speaking world and placed them within a modern methodology perspective. Two years after the end of the project, in the face of strong competition, the *Pathway to English* series was the teachers' and students' first choice for instructional materials.

A further major project output was the creation of a group of specialist syllabus designers and textbook writers. As a result of their development in the project context, they were able to extend, transfer, and diversify their professional skills and act more generally as change promoters.

According to an evaluation assessment in 2000, the Romanian textbook project revived the British Council's interest in this area and influenced some of the emerging textbook projects of the time in other countries.

Lessons

Interim and end-of-project evaluation reports and the analysis of the feedback from the ELT community demonstrated that the Romanian textbook project went far beyond its initial aims and provided a learning context for all involved.

There are many learning points that emerged from our work. These relate to educational projects in general and can be of benefit to large categories of ELT professionals. However, I will mention here only those that I find more directly relevant to the textbook project experience.

- Textbooks are powerful triggers of educational reform, but there is a need for systematic and integrated reform in other areas of education such as the curriculum, teacher training, and examinations, if educational change is to be effective and long-lasting. There is great mutual benefit in establishing strong

working partnerships between local and English native speaker professionals. In the Romanian textbook project, this 'best-of-both-worlds' formula was achieved by the sensitively handled collaboration between Romanian authors, the Romanian project manager, UK consultants, and UK publishers.

■ Tight project planning is necessary; it lowers the risks that project implementation entails. However, there should always be some contingency planning and room for adjustment, particularly in the case of national innovative projects that are bound to challenge existing systems. The Romanian textbook project would not have survived without the trust and support of the project's senior management, who never failed to believe in the project and its team.

■ The greatest and most long-lasting impact of educational change can be achieved by promoting innovation together with respect for local tradition. One of the challenges of innovation as sustained improvement is the successful management of the link between the existing stability, the 'fit' situation, and the evolutionary clashes, the 'split' situation. (Kennedy 1999a).

■ Time and detailed attention given to the selection of team members pay off in that they ensure commitment, ownership, and efficiency. Capacity building, which should be an aim at the project concept stage, should be consistently developed throughout all the stages of the project, as a long-term gain of any educational endeavour. Initial training in the specific area of the project should be followed by continuous on-the-job training, in order to prepare team members for a complex and sometimes fluctuating project route, and to ensure that their development is based on first-hand experience. At present, years after the inception of the project, the Romanian textbook writers continue to engage with and manage innovation in wide areas of education, and to be at the forefront of the ELT scene in Romania and transnationally.

Acknowledgements

Case 13:
Implementing the pilot stage of English in Action in Bangladesh: Negotiating the route to sustainable improvement in ELT classroom practice

Mike Solly and Clare Woodward

The project

English in Action (EIA) is a programme requested by the Government of Bangladesh in response to the poor English language skills of the population. The project's purpose is 'to increase significantly the number of people able to communicate in English to levels that enable them to participate fully in economic and social activities and opportunities' (English in Action Project 2008: 5).

EIA is a nine-year project funded by the UK Department for International Development (DfID) with the following partners: BMB Mott MacDonald, the Open University (OU), the BBC World Service Trust (BBC WST), Friends in Village Development Bangladesh (FIVDB), and the Underprivileged Children's Education Project (UCEP). EIA is involved at primary and secondary level in the government school system, as well as in non-formal settings through UCEP and FIVDB schools. It also targets a mass adult audience through the BBC WST's EIA products.

Stage – implementation

In the 18-month pilot phase from March 2010, EIA worked with around 700 primary and secondary school teachers across Bangladesh. The teachers work in the project in pairs from each school, and 10 schools are grouped together in a local district *(upazilla)*; the 20 teachers meet for monthly cluster meetings. A similar model will be applied in the next phase, 2012–15, when 12,500 teachers will join the project. These teachers will continue to work with peers in schools and come together six times a year. The facilitators, in turn, are to be supported by ELT/teacher training experts or core trainers.

In this paper, we focus on the implementation of the pilot stage of the project and the challenges that have been encountered in introducing resources and materials. We should also stress that our focus is on the schools' part of the intervention, a particular area of responsibility for the OU, and not on the adult learning element that was the particular responsibility of the BBC WST.

Story

Bangladesh has had a very traditional approach to English language teaching, focusing on teaching about the language rather than how to use it effectively. As Oliveira says:

> In general, teacher training is confined to situations in which teachers are exposed to theories about teaching, abstract discussion about general issues, or are being directly taught. Seldom do they have the opportunity to watch and interact with their peers – a fundamental tool for the creation of a learning community. (Oliveira 2007: 101)

Concerns have been expressed about the inability of students and adults to communicate effectively in English (for example, Chowdhury and Ha 2008; Hamid and Baldauf 2008; Hamid, Sussex, and Khan 2009).

A number of ELT improvement projects came about as a result of this concern, including the Government of Bangladesh's English Language Teaching Improvement Project (ELTIP 1998–2002), which helped introduce a more communicative framework in schools. EIA came into being as a result of the recognition that these earlier projects, while providing a foundation for improved teaching and learning, were not enough, and a more comprehensive and sustainable intervention was required.

The time span of the project meant that, during the pilot, a number of different classroom materials, technologies, and participatory ways of creating and reviewing materials and the support for using them could be explored, monitored, and evaluated, in order to have a greater understanding of what would be most appropriate and sustainable at the later embedding phase of the project.

However, a number of clear parameters were set by the Bangladeshi Government. Crucially, EIA had to work within the existing course book and assessment system. The revised course book *(English for Today)* was itself a product of earlier methodological reforms in English teaching in the ELTIP project and adopts a broadly communicative approach to learning. However, almost all teachers teach the book in the rote-learning way that is the cultural norm. A lesson, for example, designed to practice listening and speaking skills, while strengthening the use of the present perfect, but set around the story of Anne Frank's diary, would be seen by teachers as a lesson about Anne Frank's diary, in which a reading passage needed to be learnt by rote. More significantly still, the assessment system reflects this notion of writing an exam paper on 'the book'.

Materials

There were some differences of focus in the production of primary and secondary materials. For primary, the concentration was on introducing materials directly into the classroom and closely supporting the curriculum of the existing course book. Many primary school teachers in Bangladesh receive no training prior to entering the classroom and have little English language understanding, which results in the children receiving minimal modelling of good communicative language practice.

To give the children and teachers access to clear and accurate English, all participating teachers received an iPod loaded with classroom materials and provided with speakers. The materials on the iPod support the content of the textbooks and code-switches between Bangla and English to ensure that the children understand the context within which the English dialogues are set. There is also an activity guide for every lesson in the EFT (English for teachers) primary course books. The recycling of taught items from the course book is also embedded into these new primary audio materials. The iPod contains files of classroom language for the teachers to practise and video of good classroom practice to discuss in their cluster meetings. This is accompanied by a range of visual resources that the teacher uses alongside the audio.

The secondary classroom context is somewhat different, as the teachers are specialist teachers of English and all have degrees, with many holding an MA or M.Ed. The emphasis here is on practice-based teacher professional development. Through the iPods, bilingual multimodal materials are delivered which engage teachers in practical activities. The programme also encourages teachers to reflect on activities, adapt them to their own contexts, and gain confidence in ELT. Teachers are not expected to have native-like fluency in English and are encouraged to use Bangla when necessary. As with primary, there are files with classroom language and video of classroom practice. These devices can be used in the classroom, as many textbook dialogues, readings, poems, and songs have been recorded.

To get the most benefit from the secondary materials, we encouraged reflective learning in the programme. This was incorporated into exercises in the materials, but, in addition, an assessed non-compulsory OU course in reflection, MYTEC (Make Your Teaching Experience Count), was created to support the materials.

Support

The dilemma was to find a sustainable balance between materials support and mediated support. Ultimately, a blended approach was taken: materials on the MP3 players, hard-copy teacher guides, classroom materials, peer support in the schools, monthly cluster meetings, and classroom visits. Peer teacher facilitators (TFs), who also have contact with each other and other EIA stakeholders via mobile phones, facilitate these meetings and classroom visits. In the latter stages of the pilot, SMS (short message service) was used to encourage teachers to try out activities in their classrooms and reflect upon successes and challenges.

The TFs are supported through a range of mechanisms. As with the teachers, they are in pairs, with two supporting each set of 20 teachers; they also receive support from one of nine teacher development co-ordinators (TDC), who assist and advise the TFs on strategies for the meeting and have a handbook containing guidelines on maximising their role and techniques to apply when facilitating the cluster meetings.

Stakeholders: A teacher's journey

Having described the materials that were produced for the pilot stage of the project and how they were built around the existing curriculum and materials to create a more communicative way of teaching English, rather than teaching about English as a content subject, and having explained how the support system promoted this learning, let us now look at the project through a teacher's eyes.

Yasmeen Chowdhury is a 35-year old primary teacher from the semi-rural area of Jessore in Southern Bangladesh. In early 2010, her primary school was selected as one of 340 pilot schools for EIA. Yasmeen had previously taken part in a number of English methodology workshops, where she had been told about 'communicative English'. She understood that this meant getting her students to talk more, but she remained very unsure about how to do it.

In February 2010, with the other English teacher from her school, she attended a three-day workshop that brought together 60 primary teachers. There was much excitement on Day Two of the workshop, when the teachers were all given an iPod and a speaker for the classroom, with videos of Bangladeshi classroom activities and audio that could be used in every lesson. Yasmeen had seen on the video how the children loved this material and she left the workshop eager to try it in her classroom. She also felt more confident about her English, as she had used it far more than ever before.

At the end of the workshop, Yasmeen was asked whether she would like to play a special role in the programme as teacher facilitator, helping to run the monthly day-long cluster meetings that would take place over the next year, bringing together 20 teachers from her region. She would be supported by the teacher development co-ordinators and through two training workshops.

It took Yasmeen some time to understand her role as a teacher facilitator and exactly what 'peer support' meant; she felt that she could have had a little more help in this, but she contacted TDCs and other TFs on her mobile phone when she had concerns and slowly came to comprehend her role of supporting teachers. The two workshops held in Dhaka, which brought together all the TFs, were also very helpful.

In addition to the cluster meetings, there were also two workshops during the programme; these gave teachers the opportunity to share experiences, demonstrate techniques, and discuss the problems they encountered. For example, several teachers had difficulties charging their speakers properly for use in the classroom, as their schools had no electricity, and some people did not understand the relationship of some of the materials to the course book. In the final workshop,

Yasmeen learnt that this was not really the end of the programme, as there would be continuing cluster meetings held from time to time over the next year.

Yasmeen now feels more confident about using different techniques in the classroom, and her students' attendance has improved. She knows she has a lot further to go in her development as a teacher but hopes that what she has learnt will be sustained though continued contact with other teachers. Both she and her students also use English much more than before and they love the audio in the classroom. This is not only her experience, as all the research carried out during the pilot phase has come to the same conclusion.

Lessons

As with any pilot project, it has been crucial to document and examine all the areas where we have been successful and ensure, as we scale up in the next stage of the project, that we learn from the areas where there have been difficulties.

One major lesson learnt was that we tried to do too much, with the consequence that some of the teachers felt overwhelmed by the sheer volume of 'stuff'. In Bangladesh, classroom materials are scarce, and if you have them, you use them. Some of the EIA materials were produced as additional classroom aids, which caused some confusion, with teachers expressing concerns about how to relate all of the materials to specific parts of the course book. The lesson here is the need to be explicit about learning outcomes, even to the level of explaining why, in a picture provided for a particular lesson, there is a mango and not an apple on the tree when 'mango' was taught three weeks ago! In secondary, where the concentration was on teacher development through the demonstration and discussion of classroom techniques, there was a demand for more direct classroom materials. What we have learnt is that the strategy we adopted for primary (tying classroom materials very closely to the course book) needed to move a little more towards secondary (less material and more concentration on reflection and teacher development) and the strategy adopted for secondary has moved considerably closer to primary.

The second lesson was that, while mobile technology was essential in leveraging the delivery of both classroom materials and teacher professional development, the iPod was not sustainable. These have now been replaced by Nokia C1-01 mobile phones, which cost around £30 and are fitted with a 4GB micro SD card pre-loaded with the EIA materials. Some teachers who already own phones with SD card slots may simply be given the pre-loaded SD card.

Finally, a generic lesson learnt was to be specific about the scale of what can be achieved at various points of the project – and make sure that this is clearly shared with all the implementers of the project. Although we knew we had to demonstrate improvement in both the students' English language use and in the delivery of appropriate communicative teaching by teachers, we were halfway through the pilot when we found a clear way of expressing that in terms of what we would hope to see as a success measure at different stages. Once this was produced, there was a much clearer shared understanding of what we had achieved.

Although it is important to be cautious, as the project approaches the next phase, the results achieved strongly suggest that peer-supported, practice-based learning, leveraging mobile technology both to bring ELT resources into the classroom and provide professional development to teachers, could be an effective model for providing ELT training at scale to large numbers of teachers.

Case 14:
The Oman BA Project:
ELT change implementation,
process or event?

Martin Wedell

The project

Until the mid-1990s, teaching and learning in Omani schools was content-focused, teacher-centred, and emphasised rote learning. Assessment was conducted entirely through examinations which largely tested memorisation.

In 1996, the Omani Ministry of Education (MoE) launched a major policy initiative, *Reform and the Development of General Education*. Its goal was to create a 10-year system of Basic Education that would provide Omani citizens with the knowledge and skills needed to participate in the changing global and local economy and job market. The principal strands of the reform programme included:

a. moving towards teaching materials and pedagogy which adopted a student-centred approach and supported the development of transferable skills

b. ensuring that assessment was, at least in part, continuous

c. allocating increased teaching time to key subjects such as science, mathematics, Arabic, and English

d. supporting the efforts to implement (a) and (b) by the existing 9,000 Omani teachers qualified to diploma level, by upgrading their qualifications to first-degree level

e. increasing the proportion of all teachers who were Omani citizens.

The first group of teachers chosen under (d) above were Omani English teachers. In 1999, an agreement was drawn up between the MoE and the University of Leeds to upgrade the qualifications of the approximately 1,000 Omani diploma-holding English language teachers to a Bachelor of Arts (BA) in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). The agreement ran through to 2008 and provided for six overlapping cohorts to study for their BA part-time over three years. Each cohort had members from across the country and was divided into a number of regional groups. Participants retained their roles as practising English

teachers in their schools throughout the programme. Inputs were provided to the whole of each cohort during summer and winter schools, and teachers were entitled to day-release from their schools each week to meet each other and a full-time MA-qualified Regional Tutor. The day-release sessions provided weekly opportunities for teachers to discuss their attempts to implement or adapt ideas from the summer/winter schools in their classrooms with colleagues from the same regional context and to obtain resources for and advice on writing their BA assignments.

Stage – implementation

This case study focuses on one key strand of any ELT change initiative – the provision of contextually appropriate teacher support and development – and highlights some beneficial results for the outcomes of the initiative as a whole that can arise when implementation is (at least implicitly) recognised to be 'a process, not an event' (Fullan 2001:34).

Story

From the very beginning, two features of the way in which the BA project was planned and one feature of the context in which it took place supported its implementation. These features are, in my experience, rarely present in ELT change initiatives worldwide. I discuss these one by one.

The project timescale

From the very beginning it was stated that the project and its funding would continue for a nine-year period. At national level, leadership and management of the BA project was shared between Oman and Leeds. The benefits of the long project timescale were, in this case, maximised by the stability of the project leadership personnel on both sides. In effect, both sides were able to develop a thorough understanding of the aims of the project and of how these might be achieved over the project lifetime. At local level, the Regional Tutors, (employed for three years, one cohort at a time) were the project representatives with whom the students had most frequent contact. The great majority of these also remained with the project for at least one full cohort, providing a stable source of local leadership for participants of each cohort.

This stability of leadership and management over time enabled the people involved on both sides to get to know each other well, develop good, trusting personal relationships, and so establish ever more effective communication systems. It also meant that there was sufficient time for the MoE (which commissioned and funded the project) to recognise that the project leadership was competent and thus feel able to delegate ever more decision making to the project level. This, in turn, supported and enhanced relationships between leaders, enabling more informed development of coherent systems such as summer/winter school monitoring and reporting systems.

The information provided by such systems, over the extended project timescale, enabled Leeds-based leaders, tutors, and materials writers to develop a more thorough than usual understanding of the project (Omani) school and cultural context. This understanding informed the constant revision of programme materials and assessment practices, which, although desirable for any initiative, only becomes feasible and obviously worthwhile when the implementation process will clearly last for some time.

The length of the project timescale helped to highlight an important truth in any such ELT change project context. Awareness of what an educational change means in practice and of what this implies for how it may best be supported is an evolving process both for change planners and leaders, and for those (teachers, head teachers, and local education officials) who are expected to implement change in classrooms. The generally short lifetimes of most international joint ELT projects make the development of such awareness among all participants much less likely.

Teachers remained full members of their schools while studying on the BA project
Throughout their studies, all teachers taught four days a week at their schools. Structuring the project in this manner had positive effects on the success of the project. Teachers had ample opportunity to consider the appropriateness or otherwise for their own contexts of the ideas and practices that the programme introduced. The comments from their teaching experiences generated through discussion during their weekly day-release sessions also contributed more or less directly to the teaching materials revision process which was such a constant feature of the project.

Equally importantly, their continued presence in their schools and the consequent need for their head teachers to be contacted to agree their day-release played an important part in raising awareness of the project and of the wider educational reform of which it formed part. Since head teachers had to be approached to obtain permission for project members to have day-release for the three years of their study, they could not remain totally unaware of the BA project or the wider reform. The Omani educational hierarchy, like most others, is top-down. Heads had to be approached by regional-level educational administrators and/or supervisors-teacher trainers. Their need to convince heads to release their teachers meant they too needed to be aware of the purpose of the project and of its role in the wider reform. Since the project lasted for such a long time, graduates from earlier cohorts provided information and advice for their colleagues in later cohorts and for head teachers about what participation on the BA project entailed and what degree of adjustment to established working patterns was needed. Anecdotal evidence suggests that these informal contributions were often highly influential, given the tendency in Omani society to share experience orally in social gatherings. Overall, therefore, the need to negotiate teachers' day-release and the increasing number of project graduates in schools contributed to raising national awareness both of the project and its aims, and (more indirectly) of the direction which changes within other subjects in the curriculum would follow.

Harmony between project processes and goals and those of the wider educational reform

The changes to the teaching and learning of English which the project would introduce to teachers were consistent with changes being proposed across all Basic Education subjects. This affected positively how teachers experienced the change process. Teachers studying on the project worked in a school environment in which colleagues, heads, supervisors (and perhaps even parents and learners) were unlikely to be hostile to the changes they were trying to implement. Their daily work setting was, thus, one that was at worst neutral and at best positive about their attempts to change some of what happened in their classrooms. This is rarely the case in the many contexts where curriculum changes are limited to English classes only.

The 'whole-system' nature of the reform also positively affected several aspects of the project design. The teaching materials (textbook) that the teachers used were broadly consistent with the aims of the reform. Extracts from these could, thus, be used by programme designers/module materials writers to support/illustrate BA teaching inputs and as the basis for teachers' practice tasks back in their school classrooms. Similarly, the principles and practices of assessment introduced as desirable on the BA programme matched the assessment principles espoused by the educational reforms. As a result, over time, the project became more clearly seen as linked and relevant to what was (supposed to be) happening nationally in Basic schools across Oman. This led to a mutually supportive relationship between the project and the wider reform.

Lessons

State education systems introduce educational changes as considered appropriate and necessary for their national contexts. However, over recent decades, changes to the teaching of English across such systems worldwide have been unusual in the extent to which they have shared a goal: the development of school learners' communication skills.

In most contexts, the achievement of such a goal entails substantial adjustment to existing teaching and learning beliefs and behaviours for teachers and all those who may directly or indirectly influence their implementation attempts. The extent of adjustment required amounts to a process of re-culturing (Fullan 2007, Wedell 2009), during which implementers alter long-established professional (and possibly personal) behaviours, and eventually also beliefs about professional roles and responsibilities. Such a process takes time.

Much of the literature that comments on the outcomes of ELT innovations in different parts of the world (for example, Al Hazmi 2003, Nunan 2003, Chacon 2005, Waters and Vilches 2008, Ong'ondo 2009), alongside anecdotal evidence from postgraduate students, suggests that few state-system ELT change initiatives have in fact enabled the development of their learners' communication skills. One reason for the lack of success referred to in both formal and informal reports is the lack of communication and understanding between what Fink (2000) calls the 'two solitudes': *the policy makers*, whose planning often appears to give little

consideration to supporting the re-culturing of those who are expected to make change visible in classrooms *(teachers and others)*.

It would be untrue to say that these 'two solitudes' were never apparent during the BA project. However, as the discussion of the supportive features above hopefully shows, over time, 'leaders' were able both to develop a fuller understanding of how best to support implementation in context and to act on that understanding in terms of adjusting teaching approaches, module content, and assessment formats to suit implementers' needs better.

Such supportive features are rarely present in the many international ELT projects which:

- are situated in contexts where the changes expected in English classrooms represent the first stage of some possible future transition from an existing 'transmission based' (Young and Lee 1984) version to some version (usually poorly defined) of a more learner-centred/interactive approach to learning and teaching across the wider education system

- continue to view the introduction of a 'communicative curriculum' as a simple event that can be rapidly completed and, therefore, plan with a short-term (often three-year) commitment to funding and leadership

- provide (usually only some) teachers with minimal (often short-term and off-site) training and do little to raise awareness of the changes and their implications among those whose attitudes and responses affect teachers' implementation experiences

- consequently expect successful implementation to take place in school contexts which understand little or nothing about the rationale for, or practical implications of, the change, and where change goals may be in direct conflict with what heads, learners, and their parents believe is needed to pass the unchanged examinations against which society measures teaching-learning success.

The above 'case' suggests that, if those responsible for initiating national ELT reforms hope to see evidence of their new ELT curriculum with its focus on communication skills being implemented in most classrooms, they would be wise to plan for a medium- to long-term process. Additionally, their attempts to change how English is taught are more likely to be successfully implemented if they are part of a 'whole-system' change, in which similar pedagogical changes are introduced to teaching and learning across all school curriculum subjects. Finally, initiatives need to be structured in ways that make direct and indirect support for implementers (heads and local administrators, as well as teachers) available over time. Planning that bears such issues in mind will make it more likely that the 'parts' of and the 'partners' within the whole system will be mutually supportive and so provide a positive context for the re-culturing process that will be needed if (versions of) the desired changes are ever to become visible in the majority of classrooms (Wedell 2011).