

TEACHER ROLES IN CURRICULUM REFORM

Chris Kennedy

INTRODUCTION

We are now exposed almost daily to far-reaching socio-economic changes with governments increasingly concerned to produce citizens who will be able to respond positively to a new environment, who can adapt and change and learn new skills at different points in their lives and who will contribute to the society which they wish to develop in the future.

Most governments invest heavily in education as a proportion of their total budget since they tend to see the educational process as a primary means of producing the sort of intelligent and skilled workforce required to operate in this changing environment at all levels of the economy. We are therefore experiencing a period of expansion and change in many public educational systems throughout the world, as governments try to implement the sort of educational programmes they think will achieve their aims but within the resources available to them. The change is represented by increased access to education at all levels, and a consequent re-thinking of the aims, objectives, and manner of delivery of the curriculum.

Changes to the curriculum are occurring at all levels (though I shall be dealing in my examples with public primary and secondary level schooling) and across subjects. English is therefore not the only subject affected and indeed the importance of English within the curriculum will vary considerably. In many contexts it may play a relatively minor role; in others however, it may assume a high degree of importance with governments and indeed parents perceiving, rightly or wrongly, that a mastery of the English language is an indispensable tool for technological development, international communication and access to a career. It is important to remember that the motivation behind educational change and the role of English within that change is socio-political and much debate within the community of applied linguists is centred around these issues (see for example Pennycook 1995; Phillipson 1994; and Tollefson 1994).

Those having to implement the educational changes taking place are the teachers within the public education system who are having to adopt new ideologies and implement them in their teaching, since it is the teachers who are responsible for passing on the changes through their teaching to their students (i.e. the future citizens the governments are concerned to educate). This double demand (teachers having to change their teaching ideologies and then pass on those ideologies through their teaching to their students who also have to change) puts teachers under strain where the changes involved represent a major shift in beliefs and practices, and can threaten successful implementation unless necessary logistical and professional conditions are met (I shall refer to these conditions below).

THE CONTROL OF CHANGE

Much debate in educational change concerns the question how best such a shift as described above in beliefs and practices can be achieved, and how the balance of power between the educational centre and the periphery should be distributed. It is in the interests of governments to control the content of the curriculum and the manner of its delivery since in this way they may have some influence over the thinking and behaviour of society's future citizens, and most governments will also be concerned with the most efficient way to run national systems of education. Given the arguments for control and cost-efficiency, there is a natural tendency on the part of governments to centralise educational change. Paradoxically however, too much centralised control impedes the implementation of change and innovation, and stifles the development and creativity among teachers and learners which governments need to encourage if they genuinely wish to produce the thinkers and learners needed for their future societies. Over-centralisation therefore, although possibly cost-efficient may not be cost-effective in terms of the overall objectives of the educational system which I referred to in my introduction. Much current thinking (e.g. Fullan 1993) places the school as the centre of innovation and change and this too argues for decentralisation.

Decentralisation, in opposition to centralisation, is commonly characterised as leading to participation, relevance, ownership and (hence) increased commitment and motivation from those implementing the change, in our case, teachers. However, just as over-control can lead to rigidity, so too much decentralisation can result in chaos. Such a dichotomy (referred to by Pascale 1991 as "fit" and "split") is problematic, if

governments remain fixed at one of the two ends of the spectrum, or constantly veer between the two extremes, so that an educational system is constantly shifting from “fit” to “split”. It is preferable if the two dimensions can be managed together in a state of flux to suit the context and purpose of the innovation. We need to accept the tension between the two and achieve whatever creative mix is most likely to achieve the objectives of the innovation. Nor is the question of centralisation versus decentralisation the only one - Pascale (op. cit., writing primarily from a business perspective) lists a number of dimensions which need to be taken together in any renewal or reform, one of which, the tension between collegiality and individualism is mentioned below.

COMPLEMENTARY ROLES

What then might be an appropriate mix and what might be the role of the centre and the periphery in educational change? Despite the difficulty of making generalisations since all change is context-bound, some indications are provided by the results of a research project conducted by Dalin and colleagues in Colombia, Bangladesh, and Ethiopia who set out to find out what characterised successful (primary) schools engaged in major national reform (Dalin 1994).

They found that both the centre and the periphery have important roles to play to provide a mix that will promote successful innovation. Thus the centre, at governmental /Ministry level, ideally should provide long-term political and resource support and the necessary pressure for systemic reform, (Dalin suggests that at least 10 years’ environmental stability is required for a change to be adopted within a national system). A national team is important for the development of materials, provision of resources, teacher development, and evaluation, and for generally providing a co-ordinating role. The periphery (at the level of the school or groups of schools within an area) designs or adapts materials, and conducts staff development and teacher training, both of which are carried out as “close” to the classroom as possible. Supervision of teachers is provided by Heads or local inspectors (if supportive rather than judgmental), and teams are created in schools and across schools. The role of the Head is particularly important as a local leader, as is the local community and involvement of parents.

There has to be linkage between centre and periphery and strong professional capacity at both levels. Change should be a process rather than a blueprint and it should affect school life substantially. Implementation may be gradual, spreading from school to school, but the change proposals themselves should be significant. This view is shared by other writers on change. “Think big” is Fullan’s advice (1991). In Dalin’s research the school emerges as the centre of change with central support vital. The arguments over the relative advantages of centralisation or decentralisation as either/or categories are therefore scarcely relevant; what is important is a careful consideration of the complementary roles that centre and periphery can play.

DECONCENTRATION

Dalin’s findings have much in common with ideas in organisation theory. Lyons (1985) has a view of different levels in a system taking on whatever tasks they are capable of with powers being delegated down from centre to periphery. Lyons calls the process *deconcentration* and from this perspective self-access and self-directed learning, for example, is the result of looking at education from a deconcentration viewpoint with the learners in this case taking over certain aspects of the learning normally the responsibility of the teacher. Sorting out responsibilities within a system of deconcentration will require considerable negotiation and responsibilities may change over time. Implementation of the concept will result in tension between the centre and the periphery commented on above.

Deconcentration is an attractive concept but not easy to put into practice. There must be a high degree of mutual trust and confidence between centre and periphery and between the levels of responsibility within them and a genuine commitment on all sides, both from those who are relinquishing power and influence, and from those gaining it but also becoming as a result accountable for their actions. Handy (1990:122) emphasises this aspect:

“It is only too easy to create negative self-fulfilling prophecies because the individual to whom you have delegated does not have the right information or access to it, cannot mobilise the resources to implement any decisions, and is inadequately trained for the new responsibilities.”

Handy might seem to be making an obvious point but it is worth highlighting since it is one that illustrates the distinction between policy and implementation and the fact that is relatively easy to create a policy (in this case deconcentration), but more difficult to implement it. It is a distinction of which Ministries of Education are aware but one which as we shall see they may be unable or unwilling to turn into an effective reality, not necessarily because the policy is more important politically than the implementation, or because the policy-makers are unaware of the realities of implementation, (though examples of each exist) but because effective implementation throughout national systems requires resources that may be in short supply. The inevitable compromises occur and management becomes a process of “muddling through” (Lindblom 1973). A number of governments (Finland is one, and Spain, as we shall see below, another) are reacting against past centralised systems of education and attempting to create more decentralised systems, at least in terms of the delivery of the curriculum. An example of the effect on materials design in a Finnish school is described by Pollari (1995); I shall be referring to the Spanish experience below.

Such reforms, which are essentially attempting to introduce the notion of deconcentration into national systems, are unlikely to be sustained unless the conditions contained in the Handy quote above are met. The potential problem lies in the fact that teachers are not only being asked to change their roles and take on increased responsibility, but they are also being asked to change previously held attitudes and beliefs (Kennedy and Kennedy 1996 forthcoming). They therefore require support in two dimensions, referring both to the new curriculum and to their role within it. They require information/knowledge both about the background to the new curriculum (which would include information about the approach and the design) and about how they will be expected to manage it, taking on responsibilities for example for designing materials themselves that they may not have had before. They require training in the skills required and they require the physical resources to implement the changes. In addition they will need time to take on the new ideas and space to try them out and adapt them to their situation. Time and space are important as teachers adjust their attitudes and beliefs and move through the psychological processes associated with change. These may be more or less stressful depending on the psychological “distance” between the old and the new practices. Plant (1995:94) has identified four

possible stages that individuals may go through when faced with change. They are shock; defence; acceptance of reality; and adaptation and growth. The danger is that if teachers are not given the support of information, skills training, time, space and resources, many will remain in the first three stages and not progress to the final stage of adaptation and growth which will be necessary if the change is not to fossilise.

THE CULTURE OF THE SCHOOL

Before giving an example of deconcentration and its consequences, I should briefly like to mention another aspect related to it, that of the school culture. I have already mentioned that Dalin (op cit.) puts a high priority on teacher teams operating within and across schools. This accords with the intuition that although teachers operate as individuals within their classes and although change itself occurs through the actions of individuals, more effective and efficient change at the level of syllabus and materials design may occur if individuals can form groups. These may be small but nonetheless create a critical mass sufficient to produce a force for change, which individuals working alone may find hard to achieve, especially if they have little influence within the system. This is not to decry the value of individual work and the present emphasis on individual action research to improve classroom skills, but it may be that group activity is more likely to lead to wider change within a school than the work of separate individuals. Both Kennedy (1987) and Roberts (1993) would seem to support this view.

The notion of teacher groups has important implications for the school culture and the role of teachers within it. Schools have tended to be individual cultures where teachers may have co-operated especially over administrative aspects but where collaboration on professional issues close to the classroom such as methodology and materials has been rare. There have been many good reasons for this - the nature of teaching and the individuals' sense of responsibilities to their pupils, the organisation of the school, the compartmentalisation of the curriculum, the lack of time, elements of competition and promotion. Together the factors have created an individualistic school culture. There is nothing intrinsically wrong in this since excellent teaching can still be achieved. However, the research I have mentioned above appears to indicate that a collaborative culture is required if notions of deconcentration are to be successfully implemented.

The culture change may be difficult to achieve and will depend for its success largely on the leadership of the Head of the school, a point also made by Dalin (op cit.).

CURRICULUM REFORM - AN EXAMPLE

The Spanish reform is attempting to both change the content of the curriculum, its manner of delivery and who has access to it (the school leaving age has been raised from 14 years to 16). The reform which applies to the whole of the secondary level is a political response to the perceived need to bring Spain closer to the rest of Europe, and to produce a more educated workforce able to adapt to a fast-changing society. It is in part also an attempt to throw off the vestiges of the hierarchical society left by the legacy of the old Franco regime (a centralised view of society) and to emphasise equality of opportunity and cater for differing educational needs throughout the country, its regions and its cities and rural areas (a decentralised view).

Table 1 summarises the resultant changes in the curriculum, with the general characteristics of the “old” curriculum in the left-hand column, and those of the “Reforma”, the “new” curriculum, in the right-hand column.

	<i>“Old” curriculum</i>	<i>“New” curriculum</i>
<i>Goals</i>	education	development
	facts	thinking
<i>Social relations</i>	T authority	T/P equality
	T on own	T/T co-operation
<i>Learning</i>	teacher Q/A	discovery
	instruction	discussion
	product	process
<i>Syllabus and materials</i>	laid down by Ministry	produced by teachers
	approved book	“loose” format
<i>Assessment</i>	norm	criterion

Table 1 - Discontinuous change - the Spanish “Reforma”

A glance at the characteristics of the five categories (goals, social relations, learning, syllabus and materials, and assessment) shows that the reform represents such a shift in

values and beliefs that the change cannot be regarded as incremental or gradual, but rather represents a paradigm shift, or what I shall call discontinuous change. Teachers are being asked to review their attitudes and beliefs towards the goals of education, and the type of learning they promote in the classroom.

In addition, we can see that the Ministry has decided to “deconcentrate” particularly in the area of syllabus and materials design. Formerly, teachers were responsible for teaching and did not have to produce syllabuses or write materials. Now, the Ministry provides general guidelines for education, and general objectives for each two-year cycle from 8 - 16 years for each subject (Level 1 specification). Groups of teachers across schools in the same geographical area are then asked to specify content (Level 2 specification), and finally at Level 3 specification, individual schools are asked to produce syllabuses (to be approved by the Ministry) and teachers to write materials for 30-hour credits. Each English Department must write its own specific syllabus and materials. So not only are teachers being asked to take on new attitudes and beliefs about learning and teaching, they are also being asked to turn those new ideas into their own syllabuses and materials, something that most teachers have not attempted before. In addition, they are being encouraged to collaborate with one another within and across schools.

Most of us would I think agree with the thinking behind the reform, especially the principle that syllabuses and materials should respond to the needs and wishes of different groups of pupils. Response to the reform from different teachers in different parts the country has been varied, since it is impossible to expect within a national reform that all teachers will react in the same way. Thus far, no systematic investigation of the reactions of teachers to the reform has taken place, though some initial case study research of a few teachers in Catalonia (Branchat 1994; Moreno 1995) provides an indication of what teachers may be thinking more generally across the country. Thus, one teacher was still at Plant’s (op cit.) initial stage of shock:

1 “...I was really scared. I thought, why me? Why, now that I am getting used to teaching according to the old system, they have to change everything? Why?”

Another teacher is favourably inclined to the changes (the problem is not one of attitude):

2 *“It is good to foster group work among teachers and to discuss one’s own experience with teachers who have started in this profession I have.”*

The same teacher admits that the changes will need time to be adopted and that it will be necessary to learn new techniques:

3 *“The change is worthwhile. Yes, I am prepared to change, but I guess it will take me some years to learn how to manage the class.”*

Another agrees:

4 *“...we will end up adapting but not totally...mental frames cannot change in one day, time and interest are needed.”*

The same teacher recognises the mental changes involved and has moved to the stage of acceptance and is moving toward the stage of adaptation:

5 *“Either we change our mentality and try to adapt to the new situation or if we do not change we will end up’potty”.*

We cannot draw firm conclusions from such limited evidence, but the quotations may indicate that some teachers may well not be antagonistic to the ideas behind the reform, but that they need the support that I mentioned above, through provision of training, so that they may gain the knowledge and skills required to implement the new curriculum. At present there is little specific teacher training within the Spanish system for those entering the secondary school system as teachers since a university first degree and a written examination is the only requirement. Some Masters degrees are beginning to be introduced which provide training and development in ELT and Applied Linguistics, but these are as yet few in number, reach comparatively few teachers and are part of the in-service provision rather than pre-service. Teachers require information about the thinking behind the reform, and the skills particularly to

design syllabuses and write the materials. Model materials are being produced for guidance and materials produced by schools already within the scheme are circulated (schools at present join the reform on a voluntary basis) but these materials tend to be produced within centres of excellence by groups of dedicated committed teachers and they do not automatically transfer across to different schools. Other aspects of infrastructure tend to operate against successful implementation. Class numbers are perceived to be large (35+), salaries have been frozen, and schools are not well equipped. Departmental Heads are elected by teachers and have an administrative rather than a professional role within the system, so the professional leadership required for a change to a collaborative culture within the schools may be lacking. However, teachers are encouraged to form themselves into groups within the schools to produce materials and some central funding is available to assist them, though the groups as I have mentioned above still require training in the skills required.

There is a danger therefore that without substantial infrastructural reform (for example a one year training course to prepare teachers for teaching after their initial degree) the reform may remain at the level of a permanent pilot within certain schools where the conditions exist for development and is not spread throughout the national system. This may be unduly pessimistic and it is important to remember that it takes years for changes to spread throughout educational systems. The danger is that disaffection and disillusionment sets in before the changes are accepted.

Looking at the situation realistically therefore, it may well be that asking teachers to create their own syllabuses and materials at the same time as taking in the new ideologies of teaching and learning underlying the reform is causing too much overload with insufficient support. The solution may well be to implement the reform through a system of approved books written to cater for the various needs of groups throughout the system. Teachers would then have the time and the space to try out the materials with the textbooks themselves acting as powerful agents of change. This could be regarded as an initial phase with a further phase encouraging teachers to create their own materials. The textbook has perhaps been criticised unduly in recent times as restricting teachers' freedom for action and creativity. In contexts such as described here where it is unrealistic to expect short-term infrastructural change, it could act as a

major force for development. A case for using the textbook as an agent of change in this way, though not in the Spanish context, has been made by Hutchinson and Torres (1994) and it appears (Shepherd 1993) in any case that such a solution may well be occurring by default. Schools and publishers are beginning to co-operate with publishers running in-service training seminars and offering to provide assistance with the writing of syllabuses and the provision of course books based on the syllabuses, perhaps providing an instance where professional development and commercial interests are combining positively.

CONCLUSION

In cases of major national reform, both the centre and the periphery play complementary roles. In those systems which were heavily centralised, the case for some form of deconcentration is strong. However, devolving of responsibilities for syllabus and materials design to teachers will only work if teachers have the necessary knowledge and skills, and are given time to evaluate the thinking behind new developments. Discontinuous change represented by a swing from an individualistic school culture to a collaborative one may prove difficult to implement, and the textbook should not be excluded as a possible powerful agent for change in such circumstances. Teachers then can be powerful positive forces for change but only if they are given the resources and support which will enable them to carry out implementation effectively, otherwise the change is more like to cause stress and disaffection with the change remaining as a pilot within certain schools rather than creating a renewed national system.

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