

**THE ROLE OF THE FOREIGN TEACHER AS AGENT OF  
CHANGE AND IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHER EDUCATION  
PROGRAMMES IN CHINESE TEACHER TRAINING  
COLLEGES**

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*This article is based on my experience of working in a teacher education programme in Jilin Province in China. The first section gives a background to the programme and to teacher training in China. This is followed by an introduction to the role of the foreign teacher in teacher education programmes in Chinese teacher training colleges and strategies for the management of change the foreign teacher adopts. From this it is then possible to put forward a suitable model for teacher education programmes in such contexts.*

**INTRODUCTION**

**The Change**

In September 1993 a new syllabus for the teaching of English in Chinese middle schools came into effect. This new syllabus prompted the production of new teaching materials, and the Provincial Education Committees were required to meet the requirements of the new syllabus. Jilin Province opted for the most widely chosen set of materials, Junior English for China (JEFC), a set of four textbooks with cassettes, flashcards and posters produced jointly by the People's Education Press (PEP) and Longman Publishers with the aid of a grant from UNESCO.

It is claimed that the new materials foster a more communicative approach, with student-centred learning, an emphasis on oral and aural skills, and language presented for use, not study. The materials retain many of the more traditional Chinese practices such as teacher control, memorisation and an emphasis on phonetics, and some aspects of the new methods, such as drilling, are the "old" disguised as the "new". However, the materials are a real departure from the old, with the teachers encouraged

to present new language in the target language, to help students practise language in pairs and groups, to teach spoken forms before the written, and to encourage a more cognitive approach in freer production stages where students produce their own language rather than copy from texts or repeat after the teacher. The texts are also a real departure from the old with an emphasis on dialogue rather than texts for translation. Visual aids such as flashcards and posters, realia, gesture and the tape recorder are all incorporated into the materials, and the teacher's book gives detailed lesson guidance for each lesson in order to assist with the change.

The materials aim to improve English teaching with a departure from behaviourist theories of imitation, rote learning and grammar translation techniques (although in reality they still allow for such an approach, with practice material expecting students to conform to dialogue models and with the retaining of drilling, even in its new "communicative" form). They also aim to make lessons more interesting and vivid with the use of new methodology and visual approaches to language presentation and practice. The textbook follows a five-step method: revision, presentation, drilling, practice and consolidation. This method is based largely on the PPP approach so common in ELT in the late 1980s and early 90s.

### **Teaching and Teacher Training in China**

The change described is already affecting middle school teachers and students in the first and second grades as the first two books in the series of four have been introduced into middle schools. It is the teachers who have to implement the change; teachers who have had no say in the decision making process behind the change in syllabus and materials; teachers who often feel alienated from the change and feel resentment at the top-down, power-coercive approach to its introduction; the authorities having forced the change upon them.

Added to this resentment, the low status of teachers, the poor working conditions and the low salaries they receive result in a depressed profession with poorly motivated teachers. Change has brought the teachers extra work with more planning and familiarisation with new materials and methods. With no increase in pay and no improvement in conditions motivation becomes weaker. Teachers often see no benefits in using the new materials and methods, and to them the costs are high with loss of free time and added feelings of insecurity. Those teachers who are motivated to implement the change often become disheartened when obstacles block their way, obstacles which result from lack of professional support and training. Lin summarises these points when he states that “reform efforts have set high and diverse expectations for teachers by requiring them to learn more about their subject areas, to use texts that are becoming more and more difficult, and to use new methods in teaching. Yet, lack of motivation and lack of help result in very little change in the classroom. Accordingly, the traditional way of teaching dominates.” (Lin 1993)

Often, especially in rural areas, teachers who have to implement the change have no qualifications in English. Although after 1978 the Ministry of Education aimed to improve training for teachers, Lin notes that, despite these efforts, “only a few teachers have received training due to the lack of openings in teacher training schools”. (ibid.) Teachers implementing the change are in need of in-service training (INSET) and although this is becoming available at varying levels within the catchment areas of some Prefectural Education Committees, training is not always sufficient to meet the requirements of the teachers.

Undergraduates in teacher training colleges are also aware of the low status of teachers and some lack motivation before entering the profession. Cleverley (1985) points out that “along with agriculture (teacher education) is the least attractive form of tertiary education.” Many students hope to build up strong enough connections to

change their occupations before they are assigned to schools as teachers after graduation.

Just as low motivation is common to students and teachers alike, so is the inadequate training. Cleverley goes on to note that “normal college courses are heavily oriented to teaching trainees the subject matter they must transmit in class, less than a fifth of the time goes on teaching method, psychology and pedagogy... time spent on practice teaching is minimal, four weeks in a four year course.” (ibid.) At Tonghua College students studied on a two year course and language teaching methodology was not introduced until the second year. The methodology course consisted of one lesson per week for one semester leading up to a three week teaching practice in a local middle school. For my own students it was not uncommon for them to have only three opportunities to teach a class. The rest of the time was for preparation and observation. At the college more emphasis was placed on improving the students’ level of vocabulary, grammar, reading and translation skills than on teacher training. Certainly, the course did little to prepare the students for the introduction of the new materials and methods. Even though the college was in possession of thirty copies of JEFC, nothing was being done by the English department to introduce these materials to the students one year before the materials were due to be introduced in schools.

### **THE FOREIGN TEACHER AS AGENT OF CHANGE**

The foreign teacher as agent of change must be aware of two important features when involved in the implementation of change in a teacher education programme: cultural differences and strategies for the management of change.

#### **Cultural Differences**

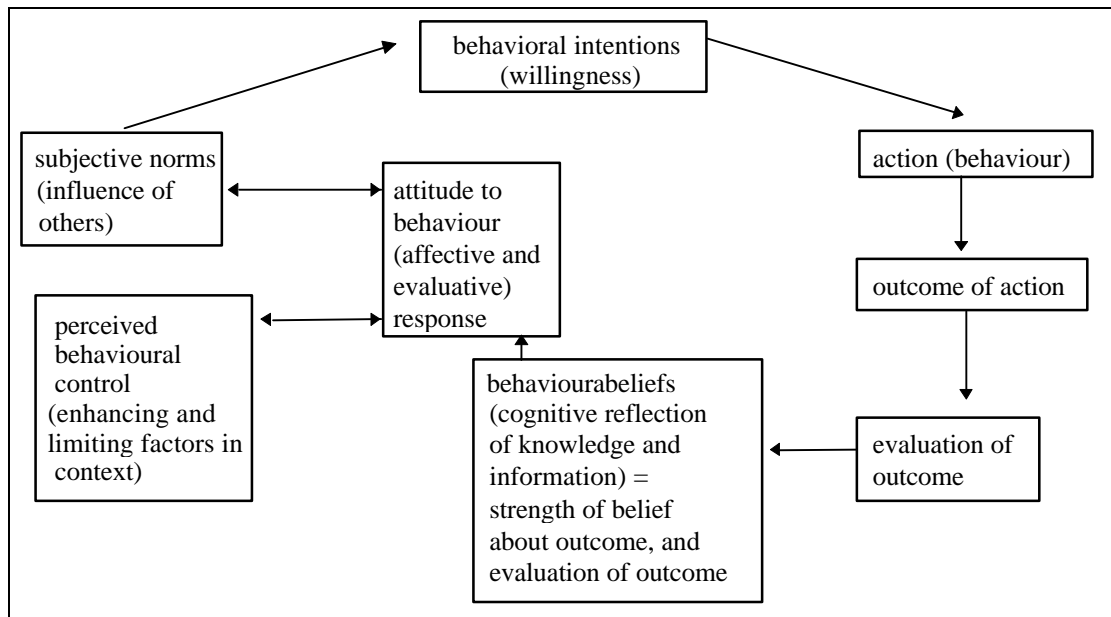
Foreign teachers may find two levels of conflict as far as culture is concerned: a mismatch between their own national culture and that of the context in which they teach (Hofstede 1991) and a mismatch of management culture (Handy 1991). The

former is concerned with the culture of the nation, the latter with the management culture within an organisation. Foreign teachers need to be sensitive to both the national and organisational cultures in which they work. Foreign teachers who come from a national or organisational culture which recognises the freedom, identity and voice of the individual must take care not to threaten the balance of management roles in a cultural context where individual personality is subordinate to a set of duties, rules and procedures which give stability and predictability to the organisation. Instead, foreign teachers must be prepared to negotiate their own role and culture for the successful management of change. My experience at Tonghua Teacher Training College provides an example. Armed with thirty copies of Book One of JEFC, seeing the need for students to be introduced to the new materials and methods, I wanted to be involved in a teacher education programme to help prepare the students for their future teaching experience with the new methods. Discussion with the department leaders allowed me to gauge how far I might be involved, and with some compromises, the timetable was changed to incorporate one session of 110 minutes each week of JEFC. The session was not to have “methodology” in the title and I had to be careful not to step on the toes of the methodology teacher and threaten her role. I was able, in addition, to observe the students on teaching practice, but again I had to be careful not to threaten the role of the class teacher and college observer by giving contradictory feedback.

Finally, with reference to culture, the foreign teacher must be aware that the materials and their methods under discussion are largely the result of foreign influence on ELT. They are, in fact, a transfer from western educational theory and practice, and if presented by foreign teachers, care must be taken to ensure that the attitude “west is best” is not a feature of the teacher education programme. Teachers and trainees who feel that an “alien” approach is being thrust upon them as superior to their traditional approach may soon feel resentment to the change and develop hostility to its implementation.

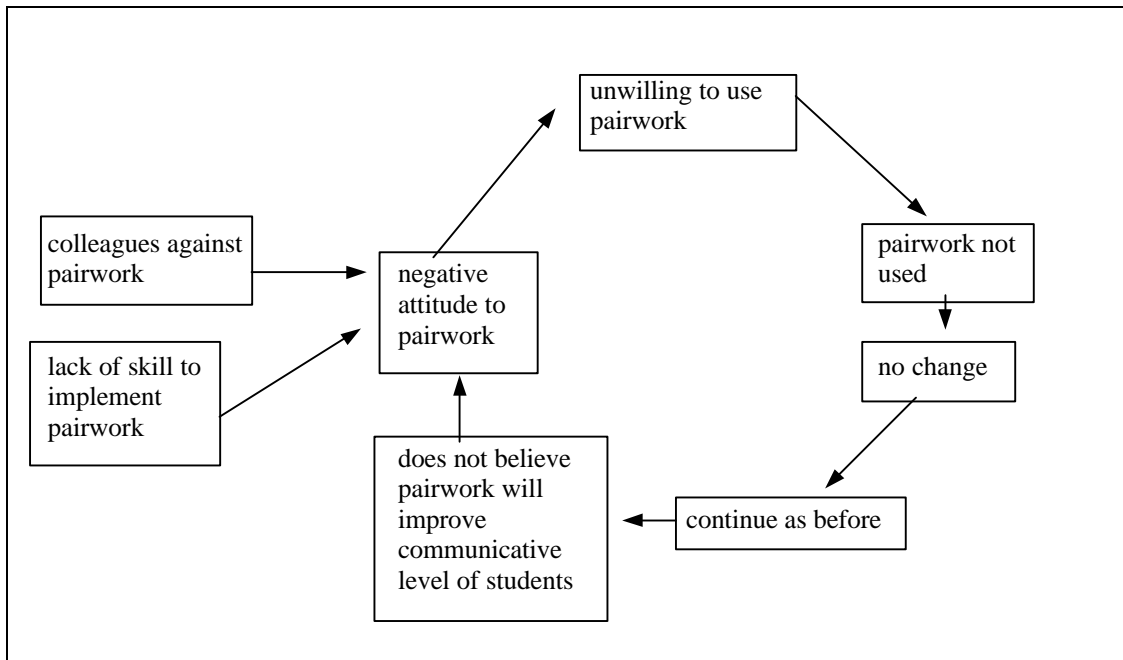
### **Strategies for the Management of Change**

I have already pointed out that teachers, having been subjected to a top-down, power-coercive strategy to the change, may feel alienated from the change, and that this lack of participation in the decision making process may cause resentment to the change with the extra work it brings. Foreign teachers must be aware of this top-down strategy and the problems it carries, and in planning their own teacher education programme must avoid continuing the top-down approach as far as possible. Although the change is top-down and this fact cannot be hidden, the foreign teacher must aim to balance the management strategy for change by adopting a normative-re-educative strategy where a collaborative, problem solving approach aims to raise an awareness of the change and involves those affected by the change in making decisions about the degree and manner of change they themselves wish to accept. Change threatens the values, attitudes and beliefs of those involved and teachers and trainees may feel that their beliefs, deep-rooted in their culture, are being challenged and questioned. For successful change the foreign teacher must plan a teacher education programme which eases this threat by attempting to raise an awareness of both the beliefs and attitudes of the trainees and of the principles behind the change. Kennedy and Kennedy (forthcoming) note that “if they are to be successful, (teacher education programmes) involve a change in teacher and student behaviour in the classroom.” With reference to the work of Ajzen (1991) on a theory of planned behaviour, they look at the relationship between beliefs, attitudes and actions, and examines reasons for teachers’ failure to implement change in their behaviour in the classroom. The following diagram will help to explain the relationship:

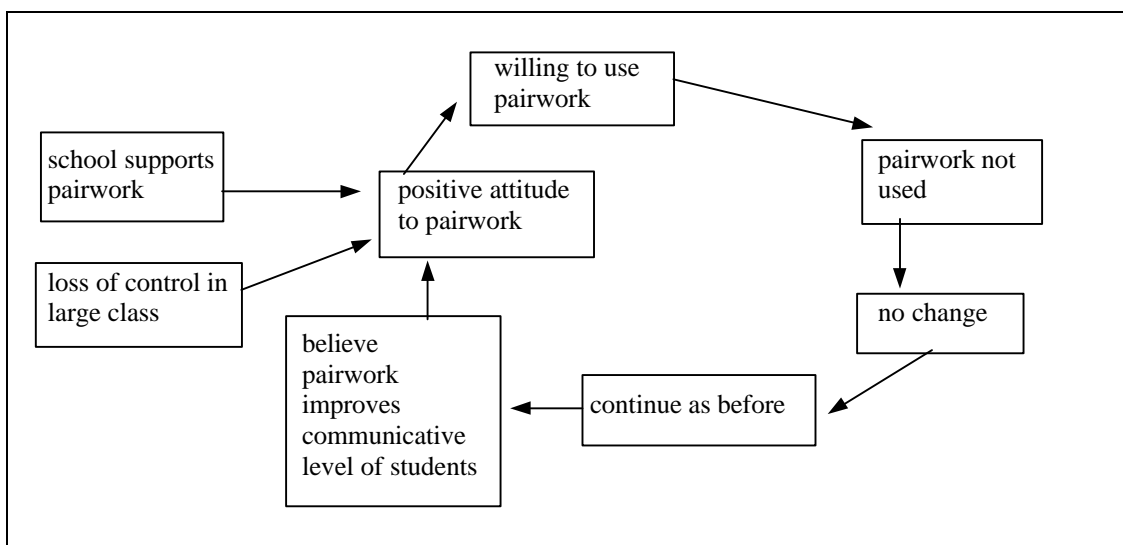


The willingness to implement the change or individual aspects of the change derive from the individual's attitude to the action or behaviour, an attitude influenced by the influence of others in the teaching situation and by the amount of control the individuals feel they have over the behaviour and change. Subjective norms "reflect not the individual's personal beliefs but what the individual believes other think about the behaviour concerned." Perceived behavioural control consists of "enhancing or limiting factors associated with the context" (ibid). Individual attitudes stem from behavioural beliefs; a cognitive reflection on the strength of belief about the outcome of the action and of the evaluation of the outcome. The following examples clarify the process and represent four trainees and their approach to the implementation of pairwork (one aspect of JEFC) in class:

**TRAINEE A**

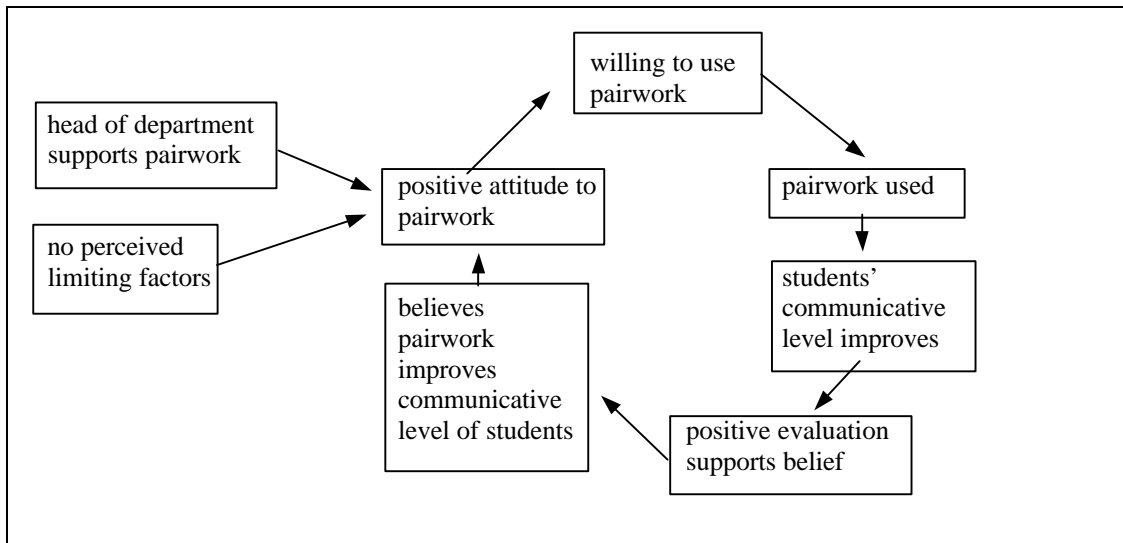


**TRAINEE B**

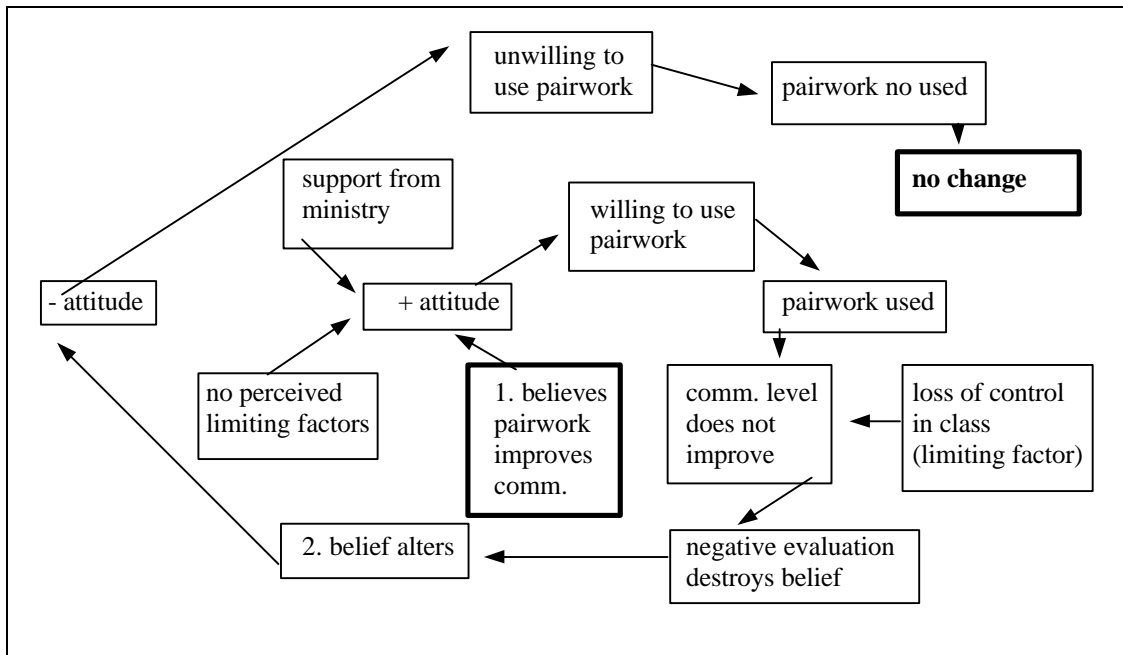




**TRAINEE C**



**TRAINEE D**



Trainee A is unwilling to use pairwork in class due to his negative attitude, the influence of his colleagues who are against pairwork and his lack of ability and skill to implement pairwork in the classroom. He does not believe that pairwork will improve the communicative level of his students. Pairwork is not used and therefore no change is implemented.

Trainee B is willing to use pairwork in class and has a positive attitude with the belief that it will improve the communicative level of her students. The school supports the change but unfortunately she does not use pairwork as she is worried about losing control of her large class, especially in a culture which has high regard for student discipline. Although willing, pairwork is useful for small classes and not for her with her large class. No change is implemented.

Trainee C is willing to use pairwork and has a positive attitude, support from his head of department and sees no limiting factors at all. He believes pairwork will improve the communicative level of his class and uses pairwork. His belief is supported by a positive evaluation of the outcome; the communicative level of his students does improve. His optimism is maintained and there is change.

Trainee D also believes that pairwork will improve the communicative level of students. She has a positive attitude as a result, and with the support of the Prefectural Education Committee and her head of department uses pairwork in class. She sees no limiting factors. Unfortunately her optimism is quashed as she finds that the communicative level of her students does not improve. Instead she finds that the noise level in her large class leads to discipline problems, a limiting factor she had not accounted for and which is largely due to her inexperience of managing such an activity. The outcome is therefore evaluated negatively and she alters her belief on the strength of this, develops a negative attitude and shows unwillingness in the future. No change is implemented.

Of course these are not the only alternatives and many combinations may be found in one class. In the last example the trainee may evaluate the outcome negatively yet remain optimistic and, keeping her belief and positive attitude try pair work again but with improved classroom management strategies. Indeed, it is this type of evaluation process trainers should be encouraging on a teacher education programme.

Trainers must be aware of all the factors on the diagram in order to encourage effective and smooth change. Unwillingness to adopt change stems from attitudes and beliefs, and as I noted earlier, to get trainees to change their attitudes and behavioural intentions requires awareness raising of beliefs. Subjective norms and perceived behavioural control must also be dealt with by getting support from others in the management structure and by developing strategies to overcome the perceived limiting factors and to emphasise enhancing factors. Trainees must be persuaded to try the change and evaluate the outcome. In evaluation they should be persuaded not simply to reject the change, but to think of factors which led to its failure and to try again in the light of the evaluation. This way the trainees feel that they are involved in the change with a professional evaluation process giving them a chance of participation and giving them a firm base on which to accept or if necessary reject aspects of the change in relation to the their teaching contexts and needs. This approach may lessen the feeling of resentment of the power-coercive approach and give the trainees a sense of empowerment.

### **A MODEL FOR A TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAMME**

From the points made so far it is possible to list the following conclusions which are relevant to the foreign teacher in running a teacher education programme to introduce JEFC in a Chinese teacher training college:

- 1) The new materials are a departure from the old requiring teachers and trainees to develop new skills and classroom techniques related to the new methodology.
- 2) A top-down, power-coercive strategy for implementing the change may cause resentment amongst teachers and trainees.
- 3) There is lack of motivation for teachers and trainees to implement the change due to the problems of the low status of teaching as a profession, lack of adequate training, poor resources and low pay.
- 4) Foreign teachers need a culturally sensitive approach to the management of the change and take care not to threaten the management culture of the organisation/institution.
- 5) The foreign influence on the materials and methods may cause resentment amongst teachers and trainees.
- 6) A normative-re-educative approach to the management of change may balance the already power-coercive approach in operation.
- 7) Raising the awareness of attitudes and beliefs amongst teachers and trainees is an important factor in a normative-re-educative approach in order to change their behaviour in the classroom.
- 8) Gaining support of others in the management structure is an important factor for aiding the change process.
- 9) Overcoming perceived limiting factors to the change will assist teachers and trainees to implement the change.
- 10) Effective evaluation is vital for teachers and trainees to give them a firm base on which to accept or reject aspects of the change. Evaluation is a tool which helps the teachers and trainees to make informative decisions and participate in the change process.

From these conclusions it is possible to put forward a suitable model for a teacher education programme. It is clear that the trainees need to be introduced to new skills and classroom techniques related to the new methodology (such as drills, pairwork,

substitution tables, presentation of new language and using the tape recorder). A collaborative, problem solving approach ensuring student-centred learning will help to counteract the power-coercive strategy already in action and will attempt to increase trainee motivation through participation. Emphasis must be diverted from “this is how we do it in Britain” and the methodology in the materials must be presented in a way which stimulates the trainees’ cognitive abilities and helps them to relate the principles behind the methodology to their own beliefs, attitudes and experience; the use of trainee diaries, loop input and action research are possible methods which can achieve these aims. Similarly, raising the awareness of trainees’ attitudes and beliefs is important for relating these to the principles of the methodology. Involving trainees in evaluation procedures and encouraging them to initiate their own procedures is a necessary component of a teacher education programme. Finally, it is vital that foreign teachers help the trainees to overcome limiting factors to the change and emphasise the importance of support of others in the management structure. Evaluation procedures must be related to these two aspects as they can help identify limiting factors and lack of support, and from this identification solutions and alternatives may be found.

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