Managing Teacher Development

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Abstract

Developments in ideas about Language Teaching have led us to regard the role of the teacher as pivotal. This has brought teacher development to the forefront of Language Teaching. But whilst we now have a wide range of knowledge about the CONTENT of Language Teaching we are only now beginning to appreciate the importance of the CONTEXT within which teachers work and develop. This paper argues that study of the processes of the teaching and training contexts reveals a need to look beyond the traditional disciplines that have fed Language Teaching to other fields such as the field of Management. Ideas from Management can provide some of the tools we need for tackling the major questions of teacher development and the consequent need for trainer training.

The development and training of teachers can rightly claim to be the main focus of attention of the ELT profession in the late 1980s. However, although we now have a considerable body of knowledge about language and methodology to impart to teachers, a number of basic issues about the actual teacher development process itself remain unclear.

As an illustration of the kind of issue in question we might take an episode reported by Kouraogo (1987) from his own experience as a teacher trainer :

"In one remote school we visited, the teacher was using a drill handed out during a workshop at a national seminar to demonstrate how teachers can progress from mechanical to meaningful drills.

The drill, made to last from two to five minutes, was inflated by this particular teacher to last the entire hour, and by the end of the lesson it was obvious that both learners and teacher had had enough. As soon as we settled down for feedback, the teacher said, "Well that's what you taught us, but as you can see, it doesn't work. The pupils just aren't interested."

Incidents such as this are commonplace in teacher training, reflecting a general lack of understanding of how innovation takes place. Yet innovation is one of the key elements of in-service teacher training.

A further example of the problems of innovation in teacher development can be seen in ESP teacher training. This is often

regarded as predominantly a linguistc pro-
blem—teaching teachers the language of
Science. In fact, Ewer (1979) revealed that
the major problem faced by General English
teachers re-training as ESP teachers was
not linguistic but attitudinal. The teachers
had negative attitudes towards science.
Ewer's ESP teacher training course, therefore,
was concerned only in part with teaching
the language of Science. Far greater importance
had to be given to such matters as breaking
down the antipathy and fear felt by English
teachers towards the Sciences, Scientists and
their ways of working.

Such then are the kinds of issues that
emerge—and there are many more—when
we engage in teacher development. If the
Language Teaching profession is to deal
with these issues properly, we need to discover
the knowledge and methods that will enable
us both to understand what is going on and
to create constructive procedures for action.
It is likely that in this search we shall have
to look beyond the areas that have tradi-
tionally nourished Language Teaching. One
area that appears to offer a considerable
body of help is the field of Management.
This paper will describe some ways in which
Management concepts can help us.

1. Understanding the system

One of the most useful branches of
Management Science is Systems Thinking.
By taking a systems views of Language
Teaching it is possible to get a clearer view
of the various elements within the activity
and the channels of communication between
them. For example, an important question
in teacher development is who or what has
the greatest influence on teachers. A systems
view will reveal that this is at once both
more complex and richer in potential than
might at first be surmised.

The
Guidance
System

The
Classroom
System
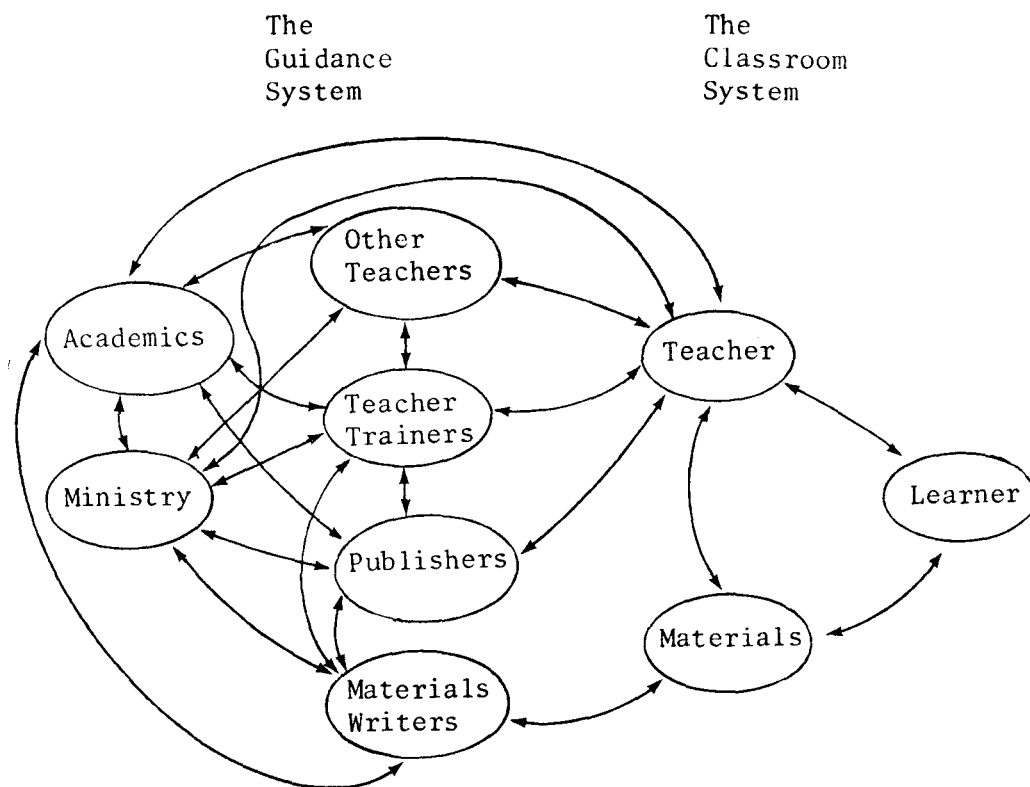
The Teacher and the System

As the model shows the teacher operates within two major systems. First of all, there is the classroom system, in which the teacher interacts with the materials and the learners. Behind this system, however, is another complex network of interaction, which we might call the 'guidance system' (see Allwright, 1988). This shows that there are numerous, and often indirect, influences upon the teacher—any one of which can be exploited (or distorted) as a means of changing teacher behaviour. The benefit to be had from a systems view like this is that it enables us to identify potential avenues of influence and possible areas of conflict or frustration. Thus we should be better able to maximise harmony between the different elements and to exploit all the avenues available.

A very practical way in which this kind of knowledge can help is in revealing the forces that exert the greatest influence upon teachers in their day-to-day working lives. For example, it is common to train teachers in seminars in isolation from the context in which they work, i.e. their own school. Yet an analysis of this context might well reveal that pressures within it (e.g. peer pressures from colleagues) work strongly against the ideas of the teacher training seminar. In such a situation it is likely that the power of the day-to-day context will override the message of the seminar, thus nullifying the value of the seminar and probably breeding a sense of frustration in the teacher. Applying systems thinking to the teacher's working context might well lead the trainers to work in a more appropriate way such as running a seminar for all the teachers in a particular school.

This is, of course, not the only way in which a systems view can help us to understand the educational context better. Limpongsa (1988), for example, describes how Soft Systems Methodology can be applied to identifying the different perceptions and motivational attitudes of people engaged in the same ELT activity. Such an approach can reveal the sources of motivation and frustration amongst teachers, so that help can be more appropriately directed.

2. Managing Innovation

The heading for this section is borrowed from White (1987). White argues that ELT is an industry providing the commodity of the English Language. As such it is subject to the same kinds of processes as any other industry. He concludes :

"Both management as process and as part of an organization play an important part in running a successful educational enterprise and in bringing about the successful development and installation of innovation ... In these respects the activities of commercial and educational management coincide. All of us working in ELT can benefit from the experience and theories derived from the commercial sphere, with whom we may be surprised to find that we have more in common than we thought." (White, 1987 : 217-218).

One of the most important lessons to be learnt from management, White argues, is the need for participation by all those involved in an activity in any innovation relating to that activity. In this regard White is supported by two other articles in the same volume by Kouraogo (op. cit.) and Kennedy. Kennedy sets out three strategies for innovation :

i) power-coercive

ii) rational-empirical

iii) normative-re-educative

The first strategy is a top-down approach in which laws and sanctions are employed to enforce change. The second strategy operates by explaining and describing the benefits of a proposed change. The third strategy is based on the idea that change is a very complex phenomenon. In this view "people act according to the values and attitudes prevalent in a given society or culture and ... accepting change may require changes to deep-seated beliefs and behaviour." (Kennedy, 1987 : 165) concludes :

"neither power-coercive nor rational-empirical strategies will be sufficient to effect the change in belief that is necessary for long-lasting change in the classroom, and the third strategy (normative - re - educative) with its emphasis on active participation and involvement is the one that offers the greatest potential."

While ELT is a comparative novice in the field of innovation it has been a dominant theme in Management studies for a long time. The ideas put forward by White, Kouraogo and Kennedy all owe their inspiration to this long experience. ELT today is probably more dominated than any other branch of teaching by the concept of innovation. We would do well, therefore, to develop the paths opened up by White et al. and explore deeper into the world of management.

3. Trainer-training

As a final example to illustrate what we can learn from ideas in management,

we may take the question of the training of teacher trainers. If we develop teacher training as a major element in ELT, we generate a demand for teacher trainers and consequently produce a need for trainer training courses. What skills should such courses aim to develop in the trainers?

Certainly, there will need to be some attention paid to CONTENT knowledge : the teacher trainer must have an adequate grasp of ideas about language and methodology. But this will represent only a small part of trainer training. Of far greater significance is the need to develop skills for creating the CONTEXT in which teachers can learn. The kinds of skills this will involve are :

a) Interpersonal : the ability to have empathy with teachers; to support and motivate them ; to be able to provide constructive and non-threatening feedback.

b) Communication: the ability to present information in a meaningful way; the ability to act as a useful channel of communication among teachers as well as between teachers and the other elements of the system.

c) Organizational : the ability to create and administer the framework in which teachers can learn, e.g. through seminars, teachers' centres, newsletters etc; the ability to build effective teams.

d) Research : the ability to observe intelligently and to learn from feedback from the classroom; the ability to keep up-to-date with new ideas.

e) Leadership : the ability to inspire confidence in teachers and to delegate responsibility.

The development of skills such as these are essential in the teacher trainer. For help in tackling these areas we need to look to fields such as Personnel Management,

Organizational Psychology, Leadership Studies, Sales and Marketing, all of which have useful experience that the ELT world can exploit.

Conclusion

Developments in ideas about Language Teaching have led us to regard the role of the teacher as pivotal. Changes in syllabus and materials can help, but if we really want to influence what goes on in classrooms, we should influence the teachers. This has brought teacher development to the forefront of Language Teaching. But whilst we now have a wide range of knowledge about the CONTENT of Language Teaching we are only now beginning to appreciate the importance of the CONTEXT within which teachers work and develop. Yet understanding this context is vital, if we are to influence and assist teachers effectively and with sensitivity. This paper has argued that study of the processes of the teaching and training contexts reveals a need to look beyond the traditional disciplines that have fed Language Teaching to other fields such as the field of Management. Ideas from Systems, Innovation Theory and the Management of Human Resources, can provide some of the tools we need for tackling the major questions of teacher development and the consequent need for trainer training. In short, we in ELT need as a profession to learn how to manage teacher development.

The Author

Tom Hutchinson is the Director of the Institute for English Language Education, Lancaster University. He is co-author (with Alan Waters) of *ESP : A Learning-centred approach*, CUP 1987. His main interests are in teacher development, management, and materials writing. He is author of *Project English*, OUP 1985, which was awarded the Duke of Edinburgh's prize for the best language textbook, 1986.

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