Editorial

Over the past couple of decades, education, and language education in particular, has seen the growth of teacher-initiated change. Teachers have engaged in teacher-research, especially action research; teachers have developed standards and assessments for use locally at their school site; teachers have instituted learner-centred curriculums and new technologies. At the same time, local, state and national governments and institutions have sought to implement policies to change teaching practice – whether content standards, teacher competencies, learner competencies, or assessment. Often, top-down initiatives meet resistance from teachers; often teacher-led initiatives are appropriated by institutions for their own institutional ends, such as accountability. Sometimes institutions pay lip-service to teacher knowledge by consulting teachers in reform initiatives but, as the initiatives are negotiated through the political system, the teachers’ voices become muted.

In much of the literature, change and innovation are considered as synonymous. Stoller (1997), however, makes a useful distinction between them: for her, ‘change is predictable and inevitable, always resulting in an alteration in the status quo but not necessarily in improvements’ (p 34). ‘Innovation, on the other hand, results from a deliberate and conscious effort that is perceived as new, is intended to bring about improvement, and has potential for diffusion’ (p 34). Consequently, she claims ‘we should strive for innovation and work towards deliberate, rather than unplanned, efforts to promote innovation’ (p 45). And, for the innovation to be successful, it must be carefully managed.

Change theory focuses on managing change – even the term implies that stability is desirable. The literature on change tries to identify the stages in the change process and to provide ways of managing it to ensure the change is seen as growth and so leads to development, as opposed to being seen as loss and so leading to resistance. So, the literature suggests understanding the process, starting from where you are and building out, seeking support, and taking ownership of change. The literature also identifies the roles participants in change assume. Kennedy (1988) applies this model to ELT by identifying the participants who play the various roles (see Table 1 for my summary of his classification).

Any of these, except the change agent, can also play the role of resister, opposing the innovation or change. Educators have tried to turn such a model on its head, arguing that teachers can be the entrepreneurs since they are professionals and have the requisite expertise. However, even working from a bottom-up approach, the view is that change can be managed, that it can be planned, that it is a linear process.
I suggest we need a different perspective, one not grounded in closed systems, but in open systems. Such a perspective comes from the new science. Complexity theory, sometimes also called chaos theory or systems thinking, challenges traditional assumptions by noting that human activity allows for the possibility of emergent behaviour. Emergent behaviour comes out of the interaction of participants, behaviour that cannot be predicted or even envisioned from knowledge of what each component of the system does in isolation. ‘Often the emergent nature of change as experienced by other members of the organization is overlooked. Change, instead, is treated as continuous, step-like, or even chaotic but with a definable scope and focus. The experienced sense of change – that the whole is bigger than the sum of the parts and that the patterns observed and felt are unexpected – is not captured’ (Lissack 1999: 12). In such open systems, the results of change and innovation cannot be planned for. Instead, ‘changeability’ needs to be built into the organisation (Stacey 1996).

In the February/March 2000 issue of *American Sociological Review: Allowing for the unexpected*, Alejandro Portes, a professor of sociology at Princeton University, in his presidential address stated that it is ‘nearly impossible to predict how individuals and groups will behave or what outcomes will extend from deliberate policy’ (Portes 2000: 13). While Portes was speaking of sociology, the application to education is striking. For example, Scarcella (1996) notes that the introduction of Krashen’s notion of comprehensible input as a guiding principle for language education of ESL learners in Californian schools led to several decades of learners who arrived at institutions of higher education without the linguistic skills and accuracy required for academic work.

Portes suggests that sociologists can best contribute to the building of social institutions by sceptically considering proposals and theories for social change, and then producing more sophisticated theory and policy. ‘The role of informed contrarian seems preferable to that of the enthusiastic but naive visionary’ (Portes 2000: 13) because consequences do not follow rationally.

### Table 1: Roles for participants in ELT innovation

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<tr>
<th>Roles</th>
<th>Participants</th>
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<td>adopters</td>
<td>ministry of education officials</td>
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<td>deans</td>
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<td>implementers</td>
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<td>suppliers</td>
<td>curriculum and materials designers</td>
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<td>entrepreneurs (change agents)</td>
<td>expatriate curriculum experts</td>
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from antecedents and deliberate actions. It is not a linear process. They do, in some cases: children’s educational achievements reflect their parents’ own aspirations; years of education affect wage-earning capacity. But such predictability is rare. Portes calls for ‘skepticism’ and for ‘unearthing the unexpected in social structures and events’. Among examples he provides is that of bureaucracies, as idealised in a 1922 theory by Max Weber, which turned out not to behave as well-oiled machines, due to undetermined factors. By embracing the sceptical mode of sociology, Portes says, his colleagues can act as ‘social craftsmen’, carefully analysing social processes in ways that take into account the unforeseeable ways people may react. He recommends a ‘more cautious form of intervention’ rather than an attempt at social engineering. His words mirror those of St Benedictine: The challenge is to learn to respond to whatever it is time for. This is echoed yet again by Wheatley (1992), when she says ‘We would seek out surprises, relishing the unpredictable when it finally decided to reveal itself. Surprise is the only route to discovery, a moment that pulsates with new learnings’ (Wheatley 1992: 162).

I think the parallel is clear: we can influence policy; but our influence may be unexpected; we can change our teaching practice, but the resulting change may be unexpected. We need then to try to predict the unforeseeable. We can’t just assume that good intentions will convince and bring about appropriate change. Thus, when we are in situations where our influence and innovations are being accepted by policy makers, we should not be complacent; nor should we despair when our views are not being heard by policy makers. Our language learners’ success depends not only on how they learn in our classrooms, but also on how well we can advocate for them to policy makers. As language professionals, we have the responsibility to advocate, to plead for a cause. However, to be successful, we must work from a position of knowledge about what is best practice and policy, expect setbacks, and anticipate the unexpected.

The articles in this special issue provide examples of educational innovation and change – examples that invite us to examine assumptions underlying proposed change and innovation and to learn how to build changeability into our educational practice. The issue includes change and innovation in different countries, different ELT sectors, in different aspects of the teaching/learning enterprise and at different levels of educational administration.

- Lewis and White report on an action research project in which they compared two different ways of teaching the same content in two academic writing courses at a university in New Zealand. They discuss the unexpected outcomes of this collaborative project, outcomes that were disconcerting to the teacher-researchers.
• Langman reports on a study of language minority students in a United States middle school. She demonstrates how a principal, with the best of intentions towards the teaching of such learners, inadvertently, through her professional development program, reduced these learners to ‘incidental language learners’.

• Adamson and Davison evaluate the process of implementation of a more student-centred task-oriented approach to English language teaching in Hong Kong primary schools. They demonstrate how the reform was reformulated at various stages of implementation – from what policy states to how textbook writers interpret, how teachers implement and how learners experience the curriculum.

• Slatyer describes how the development of a competency-based curriculum in Australia’s AMEP led to professional development of teachers in the area of assessment task design and administration.

• Katz and Snow report on an Egyptian project designed to develop educational standards for English language teachers throughout the country. They note both planned and unplanned aspects of the development process, and how they, through this development process, came to emphasise process more than the final product.

• Klippel reports on the advantages and unexpected consequences of two decades of integrated content and language instruction in English in German schools.

REFERENCES


DENISE E MURRAY
GUEST EDITOR
Book review

The dynamics of the language classroom
Reviewed by Marilyn Lewis

Ian Tudor’s name has been associated with learner-centredness and learner autonomy since the early 1990s. Here he brings a fresh perspective on these and related topics in the nine chapters of The dynamics of the language classroom. Through a combination of literature reviews, commentaries and examples from a number of continents, Tudor makes the case for the complexity of classroom dynamics. Each chapter ends with an overview. For readers who prefer to see the large picture before the details, this would be a good place to start reading. The book is one of several to be published recently on affective aspects of language teaching and follows the genre of others in the Cambridge Language Teaching Library in which authors take a theme and give it cohesion by bringing together recent work from a number of sources.

Chapter 1 is a theoretical review of the ecological metaphor. Although ecological perspectives initially focused on learners’ lives, Tudor points out that teachers’ beliefs and understanding are equally important in classroom dynamics. The ‘dynamics’ theme continues in Chapter 2 with reference to the writing of Freeman, Nunan, Richards and Rodgers, van Lier, Wenden and others. From here on Tudor explores ‘methodological options in terms of their contextual and thus their local meaning’ (p 48). The next three chapters are titled ‘visions of...’ (language/learning/the classroom) although, not surprisingly, these themes are not dealt with separately. Interwoven with a reflective commentary by the author are examples from his own and his students’ experiences. One of these emphasises the flexibility of students’ learning and teaching preferences. Business students at the Université Libre de Bruxelles had, by their fourth year, moved from wanting to have content knowledge transferred to them, to a willingness for classroom activities with a functional orientation.

The methodology-context relationship is the theme of Chapter 6. Here there was a slight sense of déjà vu in that both case studies have appeared elsewhere. Indeed, aspects of the Shamim study of large classes in Pakistan feature in three other Cambridge books in the same series. What is fresh is Tudor’s analysis and discussion. Chapter 7, ‘Exploiting local dynamics’, draws also on previously published examples, one from China and one from Papua New Guinea. ‘Negotiation in the classroom’ (Chapter 8) brings to mind the ‘negotiated syllabus’ discussions of the 1980s but for Tudor the word has
a different slant. For him negotiation ‘does not necessarily imply an explicit discussion of options in an open “rational” manner’ (p 181) but rather it refers to ways in which the classroom players, teacher and student, less consciously influence each other.

Writing a book on such a diverse topic must bring a number of challenges, not least being decisions about dividing the topic into chapter-suitable sections, and then labelling those chapters clearly. Tudor’s headings move between the literal (‘A changing perspective on language teaching’ in Chapter 1 and ‘Methodology and context’ in Chapter 6) and the more figurative (‘Visions of …’ in Chapters 3 to 5). What gives the book coherence is not, in fact, divisions between the literal and the figurative or the theoretical and the practical. Rather it is Tudor’s synthesising of ideas and examples, both his own and those of others, into a readable commentary for which chapter divisions are almost irrelevant.

Tudor’s own description of the book as primarily a ‘teacher reflection’ text captures its mood, the reflection being by the writer as well as by the reader. As with others in the series, it will probably be read mainly by teachers on courses and by their lecturers. Some of the discussion suggestions scattered throughout, such as exploring students’ cultural background, suggest that the book would sit well in a practicum. Whether it is used for this purpose or, more generally, to complement a basic methodology course, its straightforward style will make it easily accessible to teachers. It could also remind educators to set assignments which take into account the less tangible aspects of learning in language classrooms.

The book concludes with an invitation to teachers ‘to analyse their own culturally based conceptions of teaching and learning’ (p 214). Once this would have been a message mainly for native English speakers going to teach their language in other parts of the world. Now, the invitation could equally apply to teachers travelling in the opposite direction. This book opens the way for discussions that draw on the experiences of large numbers of teachers from a range of countries enrolled in postgraduate applied linguistics courses.
Notes on contributors

**Bob Adamson** is a senior lecturer in the TESOL unit, Faculty of Education, Queensland University of Technology, on extended leave from the University of Hong Kong. He has published in the fields of English language teaching, teacher education, comparative education, curriculum studies and higher education. He is now completing *China’s English*, a study of the official English Language textbooks and syllabuses for secondary schools in China since 1949.

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**Marguerite Ann Snow** (PhD in Applied Linguistics, UCLA, 1985) is Professor in the Charter College of Education at California State University, Los Angeles where she teaches in the TESOL MA program. She is co-author of *Content-based second language instruction* (1989), co-editor of *The multicultural classroom: Readings for content-area teachers* (1992) and *The content-based classroom: Perspectives on integrating language and content* (1997), and editor of *Implementing the ESL Standards for pre-12-students in teacher education* (2000). She has published in *TESOL Quarterly*, *Applied Linguistics*, and *The Modern Language Journal*. She had a Fulbright fellowship in Hong Kong (1985–86) and in 1989 she received, along with her co-authors, the Pimsleur Award from ACTFL for the best research study in foreign language education. She was given the Outstanding Professor award at California State University, Los Angeles in 1999. In addition to working closely with local public school teachers, she has trained EFL teachers world-wide. She is currently consulting on a project for the US Agency for International Development in Egypt to develop EFL standards.

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