

Addressing curricular innovation in a multi-stakeholder environment: Planning to change

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Abstract

As language innovations move outside the boundaries of autonomous departmental units, the process of change through the planning, design and implementation phases become more complex. Therefore, there is a greater need for awareness of the steps in the innovation process. This is especially true for the planning process since the adoption decision is divided amongst potentially numerous potential adopters. This paper will present a case study of curricular innovation, a move from an EAP to an EBP class, to highlight and discuss the necessary process with initiating curricular innovation in a diverse adoption decision-making environment. The initial planning stage of the innovation process is often a top-down model for managing change that tends to de-emphasize the planning process. A different model for planning change is needed for this diverse context. While this case study is content specific, a general framework for managing the planning process will be applicable to various contexts.

Key Words: curriculum innovation, planning

INTRODUCTION

One inherent aspect of language teaching is change. As White (1988) points out, this change is usually referred to as curriculum renewal. Curriculum renewal takes on various forms, from major innovations such as aid projects and teacher training programs advocating changes in methodology to more minor changes in classroom behavior and materials. This propensity for change only seems to be increasing with the recent emphasis on student-centeredness which creates a need for teachers to change their syllabi, materials or approach to teaching depending on student needs or perceived needs (Nunan, 1988). Since enormous amounts of time, energy and other resources are invested in the process of change, language teachers need to have an understanding of how change occurs in various situations to help them better plan, design and implement innovations. This ultimately will lead to a more efficient use of time through the improved adoption of innovations rather than failures.

However, as Markee (1997) points out, the field of Applied Linguistics has not conducted much research in this area until recently. Although diffusion of innovation research in education has been a significant field of study since the 1970's (Karavas-Douvas, 1998), Markee (1997: 6) states, "Language teaching professionals are only beginning to discover innovation as an area of professional practice and academic innovation as an area of

professional practice and academic study.” This can be observed by reviewing the articles in language teaching on this subject. A few publications came out in the early 1980’s such as Kennedy (1982), but a proliferation of these studies took shape in the late 1980’s and early 1990’s and continue on today. For this reason, much of the language teaching research draws on research conducted in other fields of study especially education. This has led to a focus on implementation because the educational innovation failure during these early studies prompted researchers to consider the implementation process more carefully (Kavaras-Douvas, 1998).

In an effort to better understand innovation as presented in the literature to date, it is important to understand the ways change can be implemented. Although a more problem-solving (bottom-up) approach to innovation is desirable because it incorporates the implementers in the process of change and instills ownership in the innovation (Kennedy 1988, Tomlinson 1990, Markee 1997), in reality, most educational change still incorporates many attributes of top-down (center- periphery) models of change. Many of the case studies regarding language innovations that are presented are of teacher education programs with the express goal of changing beliefs and attitudes or international aid programs that are implementing ministry defined goals. Markee (1997) even alludes to this fact in stating that problem-solving models for change such as the Process Syllabus are rarely implemented in their strong form. Other implicit evidence to the enduring nature of the center-periphery model and the linkage model (a combination of top-down, bottom-up and rationalistic models of change) are evident in authors’ statements, such as, “Change and innovation have become words that policy makers seem to love and teachers seem to dread (Karavas-Doukas, 1998: 26).” This implies a forced change representative of a center-periphery model. It would be rare if an institution could avoid a center-periphery styled change since innovation often needs leadership and direction from someone with power. As White (1988) points out, most organizations exhibit a combination of the two different systems and which model or which mixture of models best fits an institution depends on the context.

The current emphasis of the literature on the center-periphery model of change also tends to shift the emphasis from what to implement (the planning stage prior to innovation development) to how to implement (the implementation stage). This perspective is even largely advocated as a solution to the way change was initiated in the early stages of innovation research which was rather random where the objectives and motivation for change were not clear (Karavas-Doukas, 1998). This movement to emphasizing implementation is an understandable development since the innovation is dictated by a central power figure and

the importance of getting *buy-in* from the stakeholders which Lambright and Flynn (1980 qtd. in Markee 1997) define as “adopters, suppliers, implementers, clients and entrepreneurs” becomes necessary. The need for the innovation has already been predetermined, but the need for the implementers to take ownership of the innovation is critical. This can be exemplified through many of the foreign aid case studies, such as Tomlinson (1990) and Markee (1997), where the decisions to begin the change process is strictly a top-down model but shifts to a more bottom up model with regard to design and implementation to instill ownership.

While there is no doubt that there is justification for focusing on the need for innovators/implementers of innovations to understand the implementation/diffusion process, it is equally important to understand the activities that take place prior to the decision to innovate as well. The processes and decisions that take place in the planning stage may also impact the adoption of innovations negatively. As Rogers (1995: 131) states, “Past diffusion investigations overlooked the fact that relevant activities and decisions usually occurred long before the diffusion process began.” This narrow view is considered by Markee (2000) as the consequence of educators focusing on the aspects that they can directly control, i.e. the classroom.

With the current trend toward student-centeredness taking on a greater role in our teaching, a move toward more collaborative, interdepartmental innovation seems likely. With more stakeholders who have power to affect the adoption of change to consider, the planning stage prior to change will take on greater importance. This re-emphasis of the planning stage should increase the visibility of the criticism toward a pro-innovation bias that diffusion research currently has leveled against it. Case studies of the development of innovations will help highlight what Rogers (1995: 100) describes as a “pro-innovation bias of diffusion research” which causes researchers to be blinded to the fact that knowledge about the innovation is often lacking and that innovations are often changed or reinvented, along with other factors. Rogers brings up some very salient points when he highlights the areas within diffusion theory that need more emphasis. Rogers states:

Researchers should investigate the broader context in which an innovation diffuses, such as how the initial policy decision is made to diffuse the innovation to members of a system, how public policies affect the rate of diffusion, how the innovation is related to other innovations and to the existing practices that it replaces, and how it was decided to conduct the R&D that led to the innovation in the first place. (Rogers, 1995: 109)

PLANNING FACTORS

While implementation has been a central issue, some authors have placed some attention on events that happen prior to innovation development. For example, Markee (1997, 2000) adopts a questioning framework to consider all aspects of the innovation process. This framework consists of “who adopts, what, where, when, why and how” (Cooper 1989 qtd. in Markee 2000). Also, White (1988: 152-154) defined in more detail a model for language curriculum development. The stages prior to planning consisted of the following factors: “. . .clarify motivation for LCD; clarify the purpose of LCD; analyze the situation: a) institutional b) wider environment; consult with all stakeholders, especially students and teachers; identify specific problems; define aims; evaluate; establish appropriate structures, organization; ensure appropriate forms of support from top-down as well as grass roots.” These categories are explained below to clarify the steps and processes in White’s model and to provide a basis to compare with the case study that will be presented later.

Motivation and purpose

Understanding why a specific innovation has been determined to be favorable is an obvious start to innovation. Motivation is usually associated with some type of problem or need that arises, and the purpose is to address this problem/need in a detailed fashion. However, other motivations are also possible. For example, one might be able to imagine a scenario where a researcher might innovate to further his research. One must be able to explain this to outsiders for reasons of accountability and possibly to show the significance. Equally important is understanding where this innovation will lead and the process in getting there (White, 1988).

Situation analysis

As mentioned earlier, Cooper (1989 qtd. in Markee 1997) indicates that the sociocultural context which he defines as “where” can affect the adoption of an innovation. Kennedy (1987) had earlier defined these into separate sociocultural systems that interact together to limit innovation. The factors he defined, although not inclusive, included “institutional,” “educational,” “administrative,” “political,” and “cultural” factors which would define the local and more global situations that White (1988) refers to in his model. Markee (1997) in reference to his CATI project identified ten specific sociocultural factors affecting his innovation. Each context will have a different set or mix of factors that affect any type of

change. Understanding these factors are of great importance. As innovations move out of an autonomous departmental context to a more diverse interdepartmental context, these factors may play an even more limiting role to the adoption of an innovation.

Consult with stakeholders/identify specific problems

In whatever area of the innovation process, communication with the various stakeholders and incorporating them into the decision making process is a significant message in the successful innovation process. Karavas-Doukas (1998) points to various case studies of successful innovations that have indicated both communication and feedback as key factors. It seems as though White envisions this as a form of needs analysis to determine the parameters that change can function within. This needs analysis will lead to identifying specific areas to be addressed by the innovation.

Define aims/evaluate

The motivation and the purpose for the innovation must be redefined for all of the stakeholders as specified earlier so that there is clarity of the goals and the means of accomplishing these goals is clearly understood by all. This will be a start to the evaluation stage that follows. In this stage, a continual evaluation of how the language curriculum development innovation fits the context is addressed. White envisions this as a continuous needs analysis.

Establish appropriate structures, organization/top-down and bottom-up support

Both of these categories refer to the need to gain support for the intended change. This is not only a bottom-up type of support which is necessary for the implementers to gain ownership, but also a top-down support structure which is needed to address the broader issues.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this paper is to illustrate through the examination of a case study of curricular change within a large research university in the United States that there is a need for more attention on the planning stage of curriculum renewal. It will also provide evidence that the initial pre-innovation steps as outlined by White (1988) do not necessarily hold true in multiple stakeholder environments. Although the factors that White outlines do not change,

the order in which they occur does. This case study also helps to shed light on the "broader context" and other issues that Rogers outlines as described above.

CASE STUDY

To exemplify, I will highlight the planning stages of changing a traditional English for Academic Purposes (EAP) class into an English for Business Purposes (EBP) class.

Background

In 1997, when this project was under development, this institute had approximately 36,000 students of which approximately 3,000 were international students. All of the international students are required to take the English placement test prior to beginning their first semester of study to determine their proficiency level and the need or lack thereof for EAP classes. The students that placed into the ESL program were classified as a high-intermediate level and further development of academic English skills was deemed necessary. Until the EBP course was adopted, all non-native speaker (NNS) undergraduates and graduates who placed into the ESL Service Courses were required to take one or two EAP courses at the undergraduate or graduate level respectively depending on their proficiency level. This paper is mainly concerned with the upper-level EAP graduate level courses, since EBP class was intended strictly for MBA student. In these courses, Task Based Language Teaching (TBLT) was the designated teaching methodology for the CATI project (see Markee, 1997) which encompassed these courses, and the main objectives were to prepare students for writing essays and research papers in their fields of study. Students were randomly placed in these classes with respect to their majors, so a typical class would have numerous majors represented in it.

Motivation for change

The necessity of subject specific classes that addressed the English needs of the students more directly had been recognized by the Department of English as an International Language (DEIL) for quite some time, but until the spring of 1997, there had been little movement in that direction even though a mandate to that effect had been made. This departmental mandate was made for various reasons. First of all, the department chair held the belief that some students' academic needs could not be met by general EAP courses. Although this is a point of contention in the literature (see Spack, 1988), it will not be taken up because it is outside the scope of this paper. Furthermore, other signals were present that

indicated a need for change. These included continual problems faced by MATESL teaching assistants in trying to evaluate subject specific final project research papers and chronic attendance and assignment problems among MBA students. A further problem was the way the students used the present system to their advantage. Since students could take these courses at any time during their graduate work, many of them would enroll and drop out if they did not receive exemption from the class from the diagnostic test given on the first day of class. This would allow them to retake the diagnostic test each semester in an effort to be exempted from the class.

All of these factors indicated a specific need for change from the traditional EAP classes. This in and of itself would fit into White's (1988) specification that for innovation to occur there must either be a need identified by insiders, by insiders in collaboration with outsiders, or by outside governing organizations that define the need and method of change. The main question that needs to be answered is: Why with all of the evidence pointing to change and the understanding of the need for change did nothing happen at this point?

Situation analysis

Even though a definite need was identified, the further realities of the sociocultural context in which the needed innovation would take place were prohibitive. This context, as mentioned earlier, was a large research institution in the United States. As is common in public universities, departmental budget constraints are often pushed to the limits and there is an unwillingness or impossibility of funding change on the scale of the development of a new class without outside funding. In this case, receiving enough money for two extra teaching assistants and for materials development was the main factor hindering development. Seeing the funding issue as a major barrier to developing an ESP innovation and understanding that the chances of persuading the MBA department to fund such change with little knowledge of the English classes that students were required to take, DEIL decided that the innovation should be shelved.

This example illustrates two critical points that must be addressed in the preliminary stage of any innovation. First of all, the sociocultural context must be evaluated for compatibility prior to developing and implementing an innovation. This is something that is often looked at in hindsight when problems arise. Also, communication and cooperation must be developed between the adopters prior to issues of change being introduced. This is a critical point not expressed in White's model that was presented earlier.

Building awareness

This encompasses White's categories of establishing appropriate structures and ensuring appropriate forms of support from top-down (bottom-up support will come at a later stage). While these missing critical factors were the reasons for not pursuing the development of needed change, they were also the driving forces in pre-innovation initiatives to improve these areas. An important pre-innovation development was the farming out of graduate assistants to the MBA Communications Office (MBACO) to assist in helping students, specifically foreign students, with assignments and skills applicable to both their studies and their job searches. The MBACO, facing an ever growing foreign student population (48% or 143 of the 298 students), contacted DEIL to see if graduate assistants with language teaching expertise and with some business background would be willing to work part-time in the Communication Office. This specific mix of talents and expertise is a rare quality and DEIL even circumvented its assistantship granting policy to assure that a student with business background would enroll in their program and subsequently work part-time for the MBA school.

As was hoped, the addition of DEIL graduate students to the staff of the MBACO increased the visibility of DEIL if not the "*observability*" (Rogers, 1995: 16) of the ESL classes themselves. This was not enough to provide the impetus for change; however, it did develop initial channels of communication that were essential in the innovation process. While the director of the MBACO was more aware of the content and teaching methodology employed in the ESL classes and felt that changes could improve the training for the students, she did not have the time or authority to be involved at this point. The fact that the MBA program also provided a pre-MBA training program for its foreign students that did include language training might have lessened the concern of the MBACO.

The factor that brought the *observability* of the EAP classes to the forefront of everyone's mind (DEIL faculty and MBA faculty alike) was the student initiated petition for change which was submitted to the MBA Dean. Because the MBA program was re-engineered in 1995 so that it was much more integrated and also much more demanding, students were subject to time constraints that made them unwilling to invest time in general EAP classes which they felt were not specifically targeted to their needs. The main complaints were that the writing assignments did not reflect the work that the students needed to do for their own classes and that the final project for the Academic Writing class (a seven to ten page research paper on a topic in the students' fields of study) was not applicable either. While their overall English ability might have improved through the tasks and highly

communicative methodology (TBLT) used in the class, they felt that an English class that focused on their particular language skill needs would be of particular interest and help. Without this unforeseen event, it is unlikely that the awareness level within the MBA department would have been large enough to foster change. The “client” complaints made it necessary for the MBA department to take an active role in finding a solution rather than a passive role of listening to what may have been perceived as selfish interests on the part of DEIL. By gaining knowledge of the ESL requirements the students faced, the MBA administrative staff could understand the incompatibility of the EAP course design with the needs of the students which fostered a cooperative spirit in a search for a solution.

While *observability* is one of the key elements in why stakeholders either adopt or reject an innovation according to Rogers (1995), it is a necessary component of the planning stage. All power holding stakeholders who can affect the decision to adopt must be able to observe the current situation prior to innovation to understand why innovation is necessary. The problems must be understood and agreement must be reached that there is a problem or change will not happen.

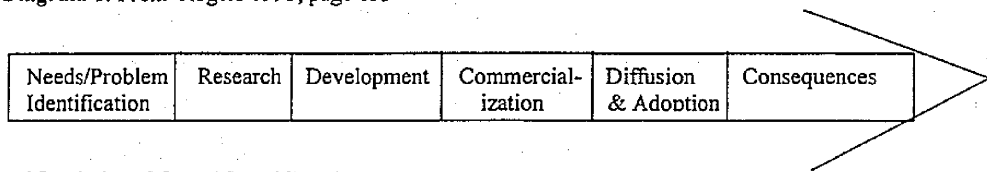
Although agreement about the financing of the project took a considerable amount of time, needs analysis tools including written questionnaires, student focus groups and faculty interviews were conducted to determine the specific needs as perceived by all of the interested stakeholders. This information was compiled and used by the materials designers when the adopters came to agreement upon the terms of the innovation.

By analyzing the steps that took place in the planning stages leading to the innovation, we can see a fundamental realignment of the steps White (1988) outlined. The process described in the case study above seems to fit well into Rogers’ (1995) general framework for the innovation-development process shown below. An important point to note, however, is that ELT innovations are usually designed as one-off changes (Karavas-Douvas, 1998) for particular classes in particular contexts, and certain steps such as *commercialization*, and *diffusion & adoption* often do not come into play.

INNOVATION DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

Using the framework set forth by Rogers in Diagram 1, I have added subcategories that will be exemplified by the case study provided earlier and have included the terminology used by White in parenthesis to help contrast the two approaches.

Diagram 1: From Rogers 1995, page 133



1. Needs/problem identification

a. Become aware of a need for change by one or more stakeholders (motivation and purpose)

The case study indicates that this identification of the problem is only the initial step in the *Needs/Problem Identification* step. There must be recognition of the current system and the problems or need for change by all stakeholders involved in the initial adoption decision.

b. Understand the sociocultural constraints (situation analysis)

An understanding of the various sociocultural factors of the system one is working within is necessary to decide how to proceed with planning the innovation. In this case, the sociocultural context, specifically the institutional, political and financial factors came into play to limit the actions that were available.

c. Develop communication channels among potential adopters

If all of the stakeholders who can influence the adoption decision do not understand the current system, communication needs to take place. Without knowledge of the system that is currently in place, recognition of the need to change is very small.

d. Persuade others or diffuse the need for change to other power holding stakeholders (Establish appropriate structures, organization/ top-down support)

Once understanding of the current system has diffused to the stakeholders, the task of persuading the stakeholders that there is a need for change can take place.

2. Research

e. Conduct needs analyses of all stakeholders' concerns (Consult with stakeholders/Identify specific problems from both a top-down and bottom up perspective)

The student needs must be determined from the view of the various stakeholders. This may include both written and verbal questioning of the various stakeholders and to some extent text analysis. This should be the beginning of a lengthy process to build support for

the innovation. All of the stakeholders bring certain needs to any situation and all of the stakeholders' needs must be addressed to ensure support from all interested parties.

f. Further analyze the sociocultural context in which the innovation will function

Innovations do not take place in isolation. While some of the sociocultural constraints were analyzed to determine whether to approach potential adopters of the specific innovation, the interdepartmental sociocultural context of DEIL must be considered.

g. Agree on stakeholder responsibility for the innovations

Decisions regarding the responsibilities for conducting the research that will lead to innovation need to be decided. Of particular concern will be financing of the project.

COMPARISON OF INNOVATION PLANNING MODELS

Table 1 has been created to show the steps to the planning stage as White (1988) has defined it in the first column. The second column shows how White's categories for the planning process would be realigned in a diverse stakeholder environment as defined in the case study.

Table 1: Comparison of Planning Process Models

White's (1988) Planning Process	Reorganization of White's process for a diverse stakeholder environment
Clarify motivation for LCD	Clarify motivation for LCD
Clarify the purpose of LCD	Clarify purpose for LCD
Analyze the situation: institutional and the wider environment	Analyze the situation: institutional and the wider environment
	Establish appropriate structures, organization
	Ensure appropriate forms of support from top-down
Consult with all stakeholders, especially teachers and students	Consult with all stakeholders, especially students and teachers
Identify specific problems	Identify specific problems
Define aims	Define aims
Evaluate	Evaluate
Establish appropriate structures, organizations	Ensure appropriate forms of support from bottom-up (grass-roots)
Ensure appropriate forms of support from top-down as well grass roots	Agreement of stakeholders on the responsibilities for the innovation

As one can see from the table provided above, the order of steps in the process defined by White and the actual order seen through the planning process of an innovation in a diverse stakeholder environment are significantly different. However, it would be wrong to assume that this means different models are needed. The model with diverse adopters should also be used in the autonomous departmental units to consciously place emphasis on the analysis. This would seemingly help to address the problem of teachers ignoring aspects of innovations that they cannot directly control as Markee (2000) noted.

CONCLUSION

Since much of the innovation research in Applied Linguistics has been conducted from the perspective of aid work and teacher training programs, there is a tendency to focus more on the implementation process rather than on the planning that takes place during curricular innovation. This is due to the structure of the organizations from which these projects originate. The decision to adopt a particular innovation is left in the hands of one or an elite core of individuals (adopters), and implementers are asked to carry out these decisions. This situation causes the focus of concern to shift to the implementation process and how to get all of the stakeholders committed to the project. While implementation is undeniably a legitimate concern, the planning process that leads up to designing an innovation should not be ignored. It can also have serious implications on the success of the innovation. While some studies outline the planning process such as White (1988), these focus on autonomous environments where the decision to adopt the innovation is strictly top-down. This, therefore, limits the emphasis placed on the planning stage. As we enter more diverse decision-making environments, these models no longer hold true.

This paper presents a case study of curricular innovation that transcends traditional departmental boundaries. Within a diverse environment, the factors affecting change are more easily distinguishable. Therefore, it provides a chance to analyze issues that might be overlooked in an environment where one is often so familiar with the setting that important issues are taken for granted. Therefore, it provides a generalizable framework to base change on in any context. Specific aspects of the pre-innovation process illustrate some of the major constraints within which all innovations must function. First of all, although a specific need was identified no action was taken because of financing concerns, political concerns and perceived institutional roles, which are some of the major sociocultural variables limiting innovation in almost any institution. Next, the Department of English as an International Language had to address the issue of raising the awareness of the MBA administration to the

fact that there was a need for change. The problem then shifted to convincing them to *buy into* the fact that the need for change and the advantages associated with the change were great enough from their perspective to finance the project.

Although the successful outcome of the innovative process mentioned is significant, understanding the key components in the process that lead to acceptance of the innovation should be of more interest. These components include an understanding that: 1) social/cultural variables do play a role in every context and need to be considered before innovation is begun; 2) communication is the key to increasing awareness and involving stakeholders in the innovation; and 3) gaining acceptance of innovative ideas invariably takes time. These concepts need to be considered in any context. Rather than focusing just on the implementation process as the reason behind failure and success as is commonly done in top/down organizations, change agents should be analyzing these key concepts prior to developing or implementing an innovation.

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