Managing Change:  
A Look at the Implementation of an English Language Teaching Project

Tyler BURDEN*

Abstract

This paper examines the expansion of a team teaching project in the junior high schools of a Tokyo ward. The expansion was found to be unsuccessful in meeting its stated aims. The principal reasons for this were identified as lack of communication and participation from the management of the host institution and poor staffing decisions by the management of the client organisation.

Introduction

In recent years, the British Council’s team teaching project in Koto Ward (Koto-Ku), East Tokyo has expanded significantly to become one of the largest of its kind in Japan. The expansion highlighted a number of important issues to do with the management of change. This essay analyses those issues and, after a period of time since the changes were implemented, evaluates how successful the management team was in facilitating the expansion.

The essay is organised as follows: Firstly, there is a review of the relevant literature to identify the key issues involved in managing change. Secondly, there is a background section describing the project, and this is followed by a description of the expansion and the various issues that arose. It is concluded with an evaluation and discussion drawing on feedback from both the native English teachers (hereafter referred to as NETs) and the Japanese English teachers (hereafter referred to as JETs).

*Faculty of Regional Development Studies, Toyo University, Japan
Implementation Issues

The following is a broad overview of the issues that emerge from an examination of the existing literature on the management of change. These issues have been divided into subheadings.

Understanding the complexity of the situation

There is a complex range of factors that may influence the success of an overseas ELT project. Kennedy (1988: 332) identifies a hierarchy of interrelating subsystems moving from cultural and political at the top, down to institutional and classroom systems at the bottom. He warns that when implementing a change, managers need to identify the factors within this hierarchy and adapt their plans accordingly. This is supported by Smith (1999: 44) who views the manager’s task in terms of satisfying the various stakeholders within a project.

The need for involvement of everyone

Staff will not be committed to the change process unless it is involved in every stage from planning to implementation (Jennings and Doyle, 1996: 170). In a project such as this one, involving not just the NETs, but the JETs and management staff as well must be viewed as essential. Although this requires extra efforts of coordination and liaison, one positive benefit is that increased involvement at the planning stage provides opportunities for staff development (Kennedy, 1987: 169).

Managing resistance

From a psychological perspective Hutchinson explains that resistance to change is entirely natural (1991: 87). Part of the manager’s role is in identifying and dealing with resistance as sensitively as possible. Kennedy points out that persuading teachers to accept change is at its most difficult when the change challenges deep-seated beliefs and behaviours (1987: 164).

The Importance of communication

Perceptions of change will naturally differ and participants will need to know what the change means in practical terms which requires communication (Everard and Morris, 1985: 188). Good communication skills will also be needed to build up team spirit and keep everyone involved in the change process (White, 1987: 213).
However, as Holliday (1999: 27) notes, there is often a problem here in that some cultures do not recognise the need for such communication.

**The need for accurate information**

At the planning stage it is essential to have access to accurate information as otherwise a mismatch may occur between the needs of the host institution and the nature of the change being implemented. Holliday points out that a number of EFL projects in the past have failed due to the problems of gaining appropriate information. This may be difficult however, as often officials may not wish to admit to any failings of their institution (1992: 403-409).

**Regular evaluation**

This is considered important as it provides formative feedback through which problem areas can be identified and addressed (White et al, 1991: 176-177).

**Historical factors**

There are often lessons to be learnt from mistakes made in the past. Stephenson advocates investigating such historical factors to help inform the decision making process (1994: 229). A study by Henrichsen of a failed American attempt to introduce an oral teaching approach to Japanese schools highlights a number of issues. Two major obstacles to the success of that innovation were the inadequacy of the Japanese teachers’ English language skills (1989: 162) and the strong examination backwash effect that militated against teachers spending time on new approaches (1989: 176).

**Case Study: The Koto-Ku Project**

**History of the project**

The Koto-Ku Project was initiated in 1984 by the Koto-Ku Education Board in collaboration with the British Council. The project was essentially a politically motivated decision taken by the Mayor of Koto who wished to promote the feature of “Internationalisation” in the ward.

It was first implemented in October 1985 initially involving two part-time teachers, a small number of schools and only first grade students. After successful pilot schemes the project was expanded to include all the schools in the ward and
all the year groups (first to third grade). The age range of these students is from twelve to fifteen years.

_The system prior to the expansion_

Prior to the expansion, there were only fifteen lessons per year group and these were delivered over the course of one term (two scheduled lessons per class per week). It was timetabled so that third grade students received their lessons in the first term (starting April), second years in the second term (starting September) and first years in the third term (from January). For the NETs, this meant changing schools every term and generally working in two or three different schools per term.

_The Aims of the Project_

There are three principal aims (as stated in the teacher’s guide). They are:

1. To make students more confident and able in speaking and listening to English.
2. To encourage international awareness, particularly of British culture, through the teaching of English.
3. To develop the teaching methodology of the Japanese teachers through example and co-operation.

_Key Components of the Project_

_Materials/a typical lesson_

The materials are produced by the British Council and are designed to supplement the Japanese teachers’ core textbook which follows a structural syllabus. They are designed to practice the key grammar points from the textbook using communicative activities.

A typical lesson involves a presentation dialogue, drills and some speaking and listening activities. It is intended that teachers take an equal role in both the planning and delivery of the lessons. Thus, there are timetabled meeting periods for the two teachers to coordinate their classroom roles. Typically, there are about thirty to forty students in a class. The language proficiency of the students is low. In fact many of the first grade students are complete beginners.

_Workshops_

These are run by the British Council and take place twice a month during
term-time. There are two hour-long sessions involving both the NETs and the JETs. They are aimed principally at teacher development of the JETs in the British Council’s methodology. The NETs organise and present in the majority of the sessions.

*Induction Training*

This is a week-long session involving the British Council teachers only. It has two main aims: Firstly, to help NETs develop sensitivity towards the Japanese team teachers and their host schools. Secondly, to introduce and familiarise the NETs with typical lessons and activities that might be used in a lesson.

*Management and Organisational Structure*

The main hands-on manager for the British Council is the coordinator. The coordinator’s duties include organising the induction week training period for the NETs at the beginning of each academic year, performing lesson observations once a term (in rotation with the academic managers at the Council) and organising workshops twice a term. The coordinator also attends meetings with the Koto-Ku board and liaises with the coordinators of the Japanese teachers. He or she then feeds back any comments for the NETs through memos or formal meetings (six per academic year). In effect, the coordinator is the main source of information for the teachers.

To assist the coordinator in facilitating the expansion, a new level of management was introduced, the ELT projects manager. This person was recruited from abroad and was introduced to the team during the induction week prior to implementation.

*The Expansion of the Project*

To further its ‘Internationalisation’ feature, the Koto-Ku Education board approached the British Council requesting to expand the project. Instead of fifteen team teaching lessons per year group they requested thirty-five lessons. This meant that each year group would have one lesson a week throughout the academic year. The British Council accepted the proposal and set about planning for the changes. The main changes that the Council had responsibility for were:
Teaching Materials
At the beginning of the term, prior to the expansion, one teacher was relieved of her teaching duties and given the task of writing the necessary new materials. This totalled around forty new lesson plans with activity sheets. On top of this some of the existing lesson plans needed reviewing and updating. She was to be supported in this task by the coordinator and the academic management.

Recruitment and Induction of new teachers
The expansion required five more NETs than in the previous year (fourteen in total). However, due to staff turnover only five of the existing team would remain. Hence, a further nine new teachers needed to be recruited and trained. The Council’s management team was fortunate in this regard as it already had a number of curriculum vitaes from qualified applicants on file and thus did not have to advertise.

Revised Contracts
With different hours to fill a new contract had to be written. However, whereas in the past teachers had had to supplement Koto-Ku work with on-site work in the Council’s main school (generally requiring split shifts), now they could fill their timetables entirely with hours at the project schools. Thus, for the NETs it represented improved pay and conditions and was welcomed.

Finances
The Council’s ‘Network Office Manager’ calculates the costs and sends this to the Koto-Ku board. The principal factors involved are teacher time, management time (the coordinator, ELT projects manager and academic managers), office staff time and transport costs to the schools. The office staff deals with processing teachers’ contracts, tax forms and visas etc. The cost of writing the new materials was charged separately.

Allocation of teachers to schools
The individual schools performed the timetabling. Once this was completed and the details submitted, the coordinator and projects manager decided which schools individual teachers would be placed at.
Evaluation

Was the expansion successful?

To some extent the project is meeting its stated aims (see above). Given the increased number of lessons, increased contact with students and increased contact with Japanese team teachers, all three aims are, to some degree, being met.

However, the formal feedback elicited from the JETs highlighted some problems. Many complained of exhaustion, it being too difficult to complete the British Council lessons and prepare students for their own curriculum requirements. They complained they did not have enough time to do both. This was particularly so for teachers in the third grade who had had to prepare their students for high school entrance tests. We saw in the above similar difficulties in the scheme described by Henrichsen (1989).

The Council materials were roundly criticised for containing over-ambitious tasks, being difficult for the JETs to understand and containing numerous careless mistakes. Both JETs and NETs felt they had not been allocated enough planning time to prepare and coordinate their roles in the classroom effectively (this provision is the responsibility of the Koto-Ku board). Thus, with the extra time needed to compensate for the weak teaching materials, lesson planning became a rushed and difficult process. The result of this was that many badly planned lessons were delivered and a large number of lessons were cancelled.

In fact, most of the teachers on the project only managed to complete an average of less than thirty of their contracted thirty-five hours, a serious shortfall on the aims of the expansion.

The need for communication and a clear description of what the change situation would mean in practical terms was mentioned above. There were thirteen new JETs to the project many of whom had not been adequately briefed. Some of the NETs complained that their teaching partners did not know of the existence of the Council’s teaching materials. As is inevitable in such situations, there were differing interpretations of peoples’ roles within the project. In some cases this caused conflict. In fact, in one case, it caused a NET to resign.

Had the Council management team been informed of this situation, they would have been able to use the first scheduled workshop of the year to induct the new Japanese teachers. However, as was seen in the above, often the need to give such information is not recognised. This was a clear failing on the part of the Koto-Ku
board.

A further problem with the expansion was that the JETs’ attendance at the workshops declined. This was partly as a result of the increased workload, and partly because they felt intimidated by the increased number of NETs present. It was compounded by a feeling that the workshops were becoming increasingly theoretical and difficult for the JETs to understand. When interviewed about the sessions, many of the JETs who attended saw the positive benefits as being building social relationships with fellow teachers and gaining an opportunity to practice their English, not professional development which was the main reason for holding the workshops (and a stated aim of the project).

*How effective was the management team in facilitating the expansion?*

Given that this project was essentially a political initiative, it is likely that the details of its implementation and educational goals were of secondary importance to those authorising its expansion. Many of the problems arose from the lack of communication from the Koto-Ku board and the board’s failure to prepare its own teachers. The fact that the change was imposed from above without an attempt to consult or involve the Japanese teachers in the process is a situation that, as we saw in the above, invites difficulties. The target of thirty-five hours was clearly ambitious as there were many other pressures on teachers and various events in the school calendar that were not taken into account when this target was set.

For their part, the Council’s management team already had a viable system in place for facilitating the expansion: the induction training, the workshops, and a formalised system of communication with its staff, the Koto-Ku board and the Japanese coordinators. They made attempts to involve both the board and the JET coordinators in the planning process.

Furthermore, at the implementation stage, the management team introduced formal meetings during workshop time to give feedback and discuss problems and they introduced a formal system of peer observation to help the new teachers to adapt.

However, in hindsight, a clear failing of the management team, came in the division of responsibilities. They gave the planning for the expansion to a single inexperienced teacher who was not used to the demands of teaching in Japanese high schools. There was minimal support from the academic management team and thus quality control on the lesson plans was low. Furthermore, the teacher was allocat-
ed an inadequate amount of time to complete the required number of lessons and, thus, some lessons were rushed to the extent that there was no time to proofread them. The result, as we saw in the above, were plans poorly matched to the proficiency level of the students and full of careless mistakes. Also, they were frequently too complicated for the JETs to understand, resulting in JETs seeking ways to avoid using the materials without losing face. It is ironic that the Council established a formal system of peer observation for the classroom teaching but no such editing procedure for checking the classroom materials.

Another factor that emerged concerns the management’s role in recruiting NETs. Although there was a rigorous procedure for entry into the British Council network, this procedure was not specific to the demands of the Koto-Ku project. Candidates with impressive qualifications were favoured over those with relevant experience. This resulted in the recruitment of a significant number of NETs that were ill suited to teaching in schools. A by-product of this recruitment policy was that a number of these new teachers were keen to use the workshops as a forum for displaying their academic expertise. We saw in the above how this had a negative influence on the JETs’ participation in these sessions.

**Recent Developments and Discussion**

It was noted in the above that factors such as communication, monitoring and evaluation are important. In an effort to improve in these areas the management team has recently introduced performance management into its structure. It is hoped this will give staff a less threatening forum to discuss problems and what it expects of the management to help solve them.

Also, a system is now in place to regularly review and improve the teaching materials. There is a clear need to simplify not only the tasks, but also the teacher notes. One such improvement would be to incorporate a glossary of terms as the notes (and in fact the workshop presentations) contain numerous examples of confusing jargon and EFL terminology which are generally not understood by the JETs.

There is a clear need to adapt to and work within the existing hierarchy which seemingly has not been adequately recognised. If one aim of the expansion is simply to do thirty-five lessons then maybe for some of the lessons, where there has been insufficient time to plan together, the JET could act as a classroom assistant
and not be pushed into taking such a hands-on role in delivering lessons. Conversely, if the JET needs one of those thirty-five lessons for, for example exam preparation, then the NET could act as a classroom assistant. In insisting rigidly on a particular style of lesson, the management are attempting to impose lesson plans that often do not fit the perceived needs of the JETs. The NETs are consequently caught between the pressures of their own managers and that of their partner teachers. A lot of problems could be avoided if the Council took steps to adapt to the constraints of the host institution.

Conclusions

In this essay the principal issues involved in managing the expansion of a team teaching project in Japan were discussed. The management's role in facilitating this expansion and the overall success of the expansion were evaluated. It was found that, overall, the expansion was not a success. The main reasons for this lack of success were lack of communication, lack of adequate participation in the change process from the management of the host institution and poor staffing decisions by the British Council management team. It was noted that attempts have subsequently been made to address some of these issues.

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