

THE CHALLENGE OF CHANGE

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INTRODUCTION

This paper is offered in the context of considerable change happening in education, generally in Colombia with many important implications for the future of English teachers in this country. We do not yet know what the outcome of the *Proyecto de Ley* will be since it is still being debated by Congress; we do not yet know whether English will be taught at primary level in schools in Colombia; we do not yet know what the training programmes for future teachers of English will look like. What we do know, however, is that things will change and that these changes will face us all with a challenge—a collective challenge to adapt to future needs and an individual challenge to redefine our roles as participants in improving the teaching of English in Colombia.

I want to begin by asking the question “Why change?”. I will then move on to specify what the challenge is. Part III will deal with defining our objectives. We then need to move towards a framework for change. This will enable us to develop a clear profile for the future teacher of English we need in Colombia in Part V and, finally in Part VI, having worked through a framework for change, we will redefine the challenge which faces us.

Part I: Why Change?

In a recent document published by the COFE ELTO Project in Santafé de Bogotá¹, the Project Team answers the question, *Por qué necesita el cambio?* by demonstrating the overall inadequate standards of English of future English teachers, following tests administered to students in the final semesters in 26 Colombian universities. There is clearly a dissatisfaction with standards of English countrywide and this is in the context of the firmly established need for English to be taught in Colombia not only because of the *apertura* but also, more widely, because the skill of speaking English is perceived to be a priority for the development

of all sectors in this country. So, the first answer to the question “Why change?” refers to the what, i.e. the need to improve the product, namely the standards of English.

A second answer to this question concerns the how, i.e. the methodology used to teach English in Colombian institutions. If we consider the development made in research and practice in fields related to English language teaching (ELT), even in the past five years, there is a need for a radical rethinking of the methodologies we use in order to realign our teaching with current ideas in linguistics, applied linguistics, psychology, sociology and education. The how is concerned, therefore, with the process of achieving our new objectives.

A third answer to the question deals with the where. Where is change required? Given the what (the product) and the how (the process), we need to train teachers better so that they possess the linguistic and professional skills to enable them to cope with the new demands of change. But, that is not sufficient in itself. We need to convince the decision makers (the Ministry of Education, ICFES, etc., and administrators in universities, *Rectores*, Heads of Departments, etc.) not only to accept the need for change but also to implement the proposals for change. We have been presented with an opportunity for change by the law makers and must use this opportunity to the fullest advantage. But we also need to convince the decision makers that we as the professionals in the field, the teachers of English, can make a substantial contribution to the proposals for change. And further down the line, we need to convince ourselves that we are ready to accept the challenges involved in change.

We can, therefore, summarize our answer to the question “why change?” in three ways:

- There is a need to improve the product. This is largely a linguistic objective, subject-specific to ELT.
- There is also a need to rethink the process. This is an educational objective which deals with the learning process.
- And, thirdly, we need to take advantage of the

¹ COFE (1992) *Mission Statement and Strategic Plan: A Public Relations Document*. Published by the British Council on behalf of the COFE project team.

opportunity for change which we have been given by re-examining the context in which we operate and by re-defining our roles in the process of change. This is a management objective which requires us to operate on a political level.

We will return later to these three categories when we consider a framework for change.

Part II: What is the Challenge?

Change does not occur automatically; it has to be *managed*. Change can, however, occur in a variety of ways: *top-down* when the Ministry of Education or Director of a Department forces change on those beneath them; *bottom-up* when the initiative for change begins with people at the bottom of the power pyramid and they then persuade their superiors of the need for change. Change can also be brought about by external forces, by, for example, publishers or advisors on the periphery of the working context. What is necessary for change to have a chance of succeeding, however, is a consensus between all participants in the change that the planned change is not only necessary but that it is worth implementing and will benefit the system as a whole. In order to arrive at this consensus a needs evaluation has to take place. Following that, the change has to be planned, then implemented and, finally, evaluated².

It follows that an element of ownership of the planned change has to be felt by all participants in the change. No participant in the planned change can afford to sit back and wait for the change to be imposed since this will result in a sense of alienation from the change when it is implemented.

This, then, is the challenge which faces us: we, the professionals in the field, need to make our voice heard; we need to contribute to the consensus for change and we need to define our role in the process of change. What follows is a discussion of the factors involved and some thoughts on how we can achieve this objective. We have to make our voice heard either individually and/or through our professional associations like ASOCOPI so that we, too, are participants in the process of change and stakeholders in the outcome of change.

2. I am grateful to Dermot Murphy of Thames Valley University and for his lecture "Innovation and Evaluation: Can change in ELT be Made Effective?", delivered at Universidad de Los Andes in September 1992

Part III: Defining our Objectives

In a paper given at a previous conference this year in Medellín³, I suggested that we need to begin by asking the question "Why are we teaching English in Colombia?". This is a simple question which does not have a simple answer, but the answer is fundamental as far as defining our objectives is concerned.

Kelly⁴ in his book *25 Centuries of Language Teaching*, says that, over the past centuries, there have been basically three objectives in language teaching: social objectives, i.e. seeing languages as communication; artistic, literacy objectives, i.e. language as means to appreciating literature; or language for artistic creation and philosophical objectives, i.e. language for the sake of language analysis. In a recent and very timely paper entitled, "Los 500 Años y la Enseñanza de Lenguas Extranjeras en Colombia", Zuluaga⁵ adds to the debate by giving us a summary of how English became to be taught in this country. Following the teaching of Greek and Latin by missionaries at the beginning of the colonial period, it was perceived that other languages like French and English would be useful in the context of developing links with the Old World. The predominance of French as the language of culture was soon overturned by the need for English given economic expansion and the important political and technological influence of the United States. Above all, says Zuluaga (op.cit), English has an educational function in Colombia and learners of English in this country have an instrumental motivation since they need English to improve their professional opportunities.

The balance of importance of Kelly's objectives has changed over the centuries as opinions and approaches have differed. Traditionally, the teaching and learning of languages have been justified, at best, on a combination of grounds of world travel, multilingual societies, vocational and commercial opportunities (the "shrinking world phenomenon") and, sometimes of "improving the mind" or, at worst, on the grounds that languages have always been taught and so why not continue?

3. Whitehead (1992). Living up to the Challenge: Why are we teaching English?, delivered at the Centro Colombo Americano ELT Conference in Medellín in July 1992. Parts of this lecture summarize some aspects of this paper which has subsequently been extensively reworked.

4. Kelly, L.G. (1969) *25 Centuries of Language Teaching*. Newbury House.

5. Zuluaga, O. (1992) *Los 500 años y la Enseñanza de Lenguas Extranjeras en Colombia* (unpublished).

These rather trite grounds for justifying the teaching of languages are, however, not acceptable at a time when resources are scarce and when fundamental changes in the educational system in Colombia are being proposed. So, why are we teaching English in schools in Colombia? Is it to allow communication with the rest of the world; is it to allow personal growth and enrichment? or is it for a combination of these and other reasons?

Dubin and Olshtain⁶ in their book *Course Design* present a useful model for assessing societal factors which can help us to define our aims. Their model is represented diagrammatically in Appendix 1. Language teaching policy can be determined by asking five questions:

- * Who are the learners?
- * Who are the teachers?
- * Why is the programme necessary?
- * Where will the programme be implemented?
- * How will it be implemented?

These questions need to be answered from four perspectives: the language setting, the pattern of language in society, group and individual attitudes towards language and the political and national context. The perspective of language setting deals with the way English is perceived in the country. In Colombia, we have a good example of a language for wider communication (LWC) setting where English is perceived as being increasingly important within the context of the *apertura económica* and other political and economic reforms.

Patterns of language use in society addresses the role of English in education, the role of English in the labor market and the role of English in the development of the country.

Group and individual attitudes deal with attitudes to English and to the culture of English-speaking countries as well as attitudes to language learning itself.

Finally, the political and national context concerns laws which exist or are proposed which relate to the learning of English, government funding for English language programmes and the existence or planning of research programmes or projects in materials development and so on.

This may appear to be a complex theoretical model but answers to the questions it raises are very important when it comes to defining our aims. The ELT challenge our profession is facing begins by having to take a fresh look at why we are teaching English.

Part IV: Moving towards a Framework for Change

When we have defined our reasons carefully for teaching English in Colombia, we can go on to think about a design for a framework for change. Here we need to ask several important questions. The first is "What we are trying to achieve?" and this relates to our learners.

We need to think of achievement not only in terms of language proficiency but also in a broader educational context, since the connection between the teaching of English and the other elements of the school curriculum needs to be made clear. The question we can ask is, therefore, "What do we want our learners to have gained from learning English which will help them to contribute significantly towards the development of this country?"

It is, therefore, convenient to look at objectives from a multidimensional perspective. This can be represented diagrammatically (see Appendix 2). If we think, firstly, in terms of general, broad educational objectives, we have a useful checklist of questions provided by Tyler⁷:

- * What educational purposes should the school seek to attain?
- * What educational experiences can be provided that are likely to attain these experiences?
- * How can these educational experiences be effectively organized?
- * How can we determine whether these purposes are being attained?

On a second level, we can define learning objectives generally. Again, a useful checklist is provided by Nunan⁸. In his book *The Learner-Centred Curriculum*, Nunan defines broad learning aims for all subjects across the curriculum as follows:

6. Dubin and Olshtain 1986:6ff.

7. Tyler (1949). *Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction*. Harcourt Brace, quoted in Nunan 1988:11.

8. Nunan 1988:3ff

- * To provide learners with efficient learning strategies.
- * To assist learners to identify their preferred ways of learning.
- * To develop skills needed to negotiate the curriculum.
- * To encourage learners to set their own objectives.
- * To encourage learners to adopt realistic goals and time frames.
- * To develop learners' skills in self-evaluation.

Again, Nunan's checklist refers to all types of learning in the classroom. The third level of objectives can be labelled "subject specific" and these relate to the skills and knowledge which are required or should be attained in one subject on the curriculum, in this case, English. This model helps us to understand how the language classroom is special and different in some ways from other subjects on the curriculum but, at the same time, we do not lose sight of the broader educational objectives in which we are operating.

Stern⁹ in his new book, *Issues and Options in Language Teaching*, offers four categories for defining language teaching objectives, i.e. subject-specific objectives: *proficiency, knowledge, affect and transfer*. Under the label *proficiency* we need to define carefully what type or level of proficiency we wish our learners to achieve. Clearly, we require more than linguistic competence — a certain degree of communicative competence is also desirable. But what does the functional use of a language mean? How far do we want our students to aspire to approximate the proficiency of the native speaker? These are the questions which need to be addressed here.

The *knowledge* category deals with cognitive goals. Language learning does not consist of a body of knowledge like some other subjects on the school curriculum but a certain linguistic knowledge and cultural knowledge and awareness are desirable. To what extent can our learners achieve this language and foreign culture? How can we encourage our learners to develop a liking for and empathy with the forms and features of English and a tolerance of the new and different culture? How far can we develop in our learners a positive attitude towards language learning generally?

Finally, the *transfer* category deals with language learning and acquisition techniques, obtaining insights

into language and culture and, most importantly, developing generalizable attitudes to language, culture and language study. We need to ensure that our learners develop knowledge and skills which they can transfer to other types of learning, specifically other languages—the so-called "learning how to learn" and "teaching for transfer" components of the programme. In short, Stern's model shows the need to develop three sets of positive attitudes in our learners (a) to the foreign language, in this case, English, (b) to the speakers of that language and (c) to the self as a learner.

In this way and in answer to the question "How can the learning of English in Colombia contribute towards the development of this country?", we avoid seeing English language teaching as a separate subject, different from the other subjects at school. This model allows us to see how we share common objectives with teachers of all subjects on the first two levels and shows us how our subject-specific objectives for the teaching of English are integrated into the broader educational context. The model also conveniently brings us back to the answer to the question "Why change?" which we asked earlier in this paper. We said, you will remember, that we need to improve the product which is a linguistic, subject-specific objective; we need to rethink the process which is an educational objective and we need to re-examine the context which is a management objective on a political level. Our future teachers of English need to be able to operate on all three levels in order to link the need for change with the objectives we set out for a framework for change.

Part V: What sort of teachers do we need?

We can, therefore, produce the beginnings of a framework for change by defining objectives for the teaching and learning of English in the sense of defining what we want and expect our learners to achieve. Let us now turn to our future teachers. To take the framework further, the next stage is a draft profile for the skills and knowledge required by our teachers. What I would like to propose here is a teacher profile or a minimum list of the skills and knowledge which a member of the future teacher population will require in order to participate in the change.

This list is not definitive, of course, but more of a proposal for discussion for the establishment of teacher training syllabuses in our universities. It is, again, important to distinguish between the skills and knowledge which relate to education broadly and which we would expect language teachers to share with teachers

9. Stern, 1992, Chapter 1.

of other subjects, and skills and knowledge which are subject-specific to, in this case, English. I have borrowed and adapted ideas from several sources in compiling

this list, notably McNair (1980)¹⁰ and Bastidas, et al (1991)¹¹.

An ELT Teacher Profile	
The good language teacher is professional who....	
EDUCATIONAL/LEARNING BASIC SKILLS & KNOWLEDGE	ELT BASIC SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * has a good knowledge of the chosen subject; * understands the objectives of the whole curriculum and how ELT can contribute towards its aims and objectives; * has a good understanding of learning processes (psychology); * understands the social context in which he/she is operating (sociology); * can motivate, interest and challenge learners and is prepared to take risks; * treats learners as partners in the learning process and promotes different learning styles and strategies in learners; * has skills in designing teaching materials and in evaluating their effectiveness * has a good understanding of the role of and techniques of testing and evaluation; * has good classroom management skills; * has basic skills in classroom research and a willingness to update his/her knowledge and skills. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * uses English predominantly; * is confident about methodology and techniques; * is vigilant about pronunciation, intonation and stress; * is positive about errors, praises correct responses and uses pupils' errors to their advantage; * relates the language to the target culture; * explains tasks clearly in English whenever possible; * shows flexibility with regard to materials and objectives; * involves all learners through a variety of language teaching activities which involve teachers and learners playing different roles; * promotes the use of English by his/her learners; * conveys warmth and enthusiasm for the language and culture.

Part VI: Redefining the Challenge

We earlier defined the challenge of change as the need for all participants in the change to define their different roles and to, thereby, gain some element of ownership of the change. We are now able, in this final part and having worked through the beginnings of a framework for change, to specify more clearly what those roles might be. Having first recognized the need for change, we need to go on to define our objectives both in terms of the reasons for learning English and in terms of what we want to achieve. The next stage has to be reflection. We have to be realistic about what we can achieve. I refer to this stage as *applied realism* and it will help us to develop a framework for change which is based on the achievable. The following stage requires us to work out strategies for implementation of the change and to work towards gaining acceptance of the recommendations for change at the level of all participants in the change. The penultimate stage is implementing the change, and the final and important stage is the evaluation of the change.

These stages in the process of change add up to what is meant by the management of change (see Appendix 3). We will not all be equal participants in the change at each stage but we can contribute towards the management of change by committing ourselves to the whole process and by playing a part at the appropriate level.

In order to do this, we need four qualities (see again Appendix 3), confidence to participate, professional competence to make informed judgements, consensus with other participants in the change and a commitment to knowing the change will bring about improvements in the system.

10. McNair, J. (1980). Progress in Modern Languages Teaching: Aspects of Education. University of Hull. Quoted in Stern 1992: 51ff.

11. Bastidas, J.A. et al (1992). A Proposal of a Framework for the Teaching of English in the Colombian B.A. Programmes. Polytechnic of West London (unpublished).

I would like to end with a profile of a participant in the change¹². Armed with the four main qualities specified above, we need to develop skills in a variety of areas. Our roles as professionals require us to diversify so that we can achieve our aims. Firstly, we need to be a specialist in ELT so that we can make good professional judgements; we have to be an innovator who is ready to think creatively and be open to new ideas; we have to be a realist to know what can be achieved; we also need to be a sharer—there is little room for the individualist in radical change; we need to develop skills as negotiator to persuade other participants of what we believe in; we also need to be a manager so that we can help to organize change; another important skill is that of the investigator—we have to be ready to engage in research so that we can have a good theoretical and practical base to argue from; we have to be prepared to be a yardstick so that others can measure themselves against our example; this begins to add up to the fact that we need to be an activist, speaking out for what we believe in and, finally, we have to be an optimist in order not to give up when the going gets tough!

¹² The "missionary" analogy was first developed by the writer at the COFE Semi-National Seminar at Universidad Javeriana in September 1992.

If you rearrange these words (see Appendix 3 again), you will find they make up the word "missionary" which sums up our roles as participants in change, not in the sense of a missionary teaching Greek or Latin in colonial times (although, we must admit, those missionaries were usually very successful!) but someone who has a professionally well-informed mission to contribute towards the improvement of the teaching of English in Colombia.

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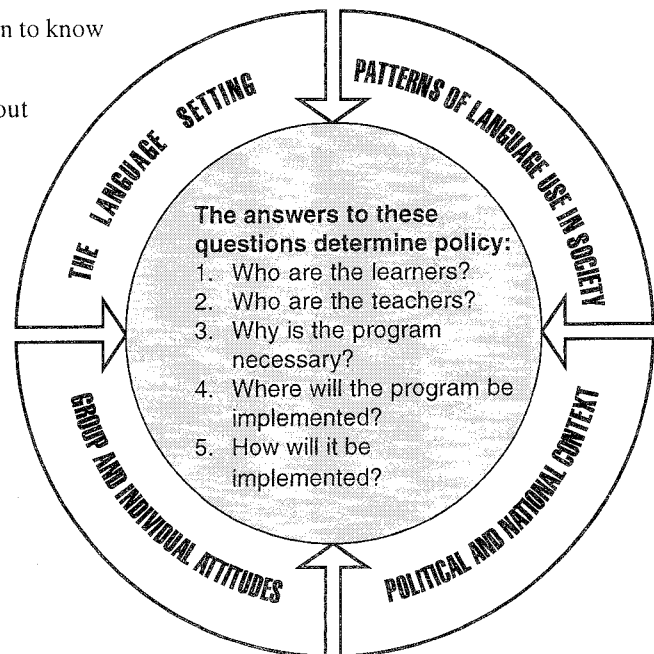
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Appendix 1

Dublin and Olshain 1986:6

- * How do you feel about your English class?
- * Why is it important for an educated person to know English?
- * How do your friends (peers) feel about English?
- * Have you ever studied English privately? If yes, what was the reason or purpose?
- * Would you like to be more proficient in English? How would you go about obtaining your goal?



Appendix 2

Defining objectives for the teaching of English

EDUCATIONAL OBJECTIVES

(political, social, economic)

- * what educational purposes should the school seek to attain?
- * what educational experiences can be provided that are likely to attain these experiences?
- * how can these experiences be effectively organized?
- * how can we determine whether these purposes are being attained?

(Tyler 1949)

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- * to provide learners with efficient learning strategies
- * to assist learners to identify their preferred ways of learning
- * to develop skills needed to negotiate the curriculum
- * to encourage learners to set their own objectives
- * to encourage learners to adopt realistic goals and time frames
- * to develop learner's skills in self-evaluation

(Nunan 1988)

SUBJECT-SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

- * proficiency
- * knowledge
- * affect
- * transfer

(Stern 1992)

Appendix 3

Redefining the challenge

MANAGEMENT OF CHANGE

- recognition of need for change
- defining objectives
- reflection: applied realism
- framework for change
- strategies for implementation of change
- acceptance of recommendations for change
- implementation of change
- evaluation

Participants in the change

- confidence
- competence
- consensus
- commitment

Profile of a participant in the change

1. manager
2. innovator
3. sharer
4. specialist
5. investigator
6. optimist
7. negotiator
8. activist
9. realist
10. yardstick