I *Defining educational innovation*

1 Introduction

> There is nothing more difficult to plan,
> more doubtful of success, nor more
> dangerous to manage than the creation
> of a new order of things. (Niccolò Machi-
> avelli, *The Prince,* 1513; cited in Rogers
> 1983: 1)

Language teaching professionals have built up a body of theoretical and practical knowledge since the 1980s that has resulted in the formulation of various innovative approaches to language teaching. What exactly does the phrase "innovative approaches to language teaching" mean? For some readers, this phrase may suggest various "designer" methods like the Silent Way, Suggestopedia, Total Physical Response, or Community Language Learning (see Blair 1982 or Richards and Rodgers 1986). This is not the concern here, since the examples in this book are all within the mainstream of second and foreign language pedagogy: notional-functional syllabuses, the process syllabus, the Natural Approach, and various kinds of task-based language teaching. Rather, the concern of this book is why some new ideas or practices spread while others do not. More concretely, why does a new textbook succeed in the public education system of one country while identical materials fail in another? What must program directors at universities, public schools, and private sector institutions do to persuade teachers to use new ways of teaching?

All language teaching professionals doubtless ask themselves such questions often. Yet, until recently, applied linguistics, the discipline that should provide language educators with the knowledge to answer such questions, has been noticeably silent on these issues. This silence is surprising, since understanding what determines the success or failure of new pedagogical ideas and practices is surely a crucial issue, especially for teacher educators.

This book aims to provide language teaching professionals with the knowledge – both theoretical and practical – needed to answer precisely these questions. More specifically, asking such questions – which focus primarily on issues of syllabus *implementation* rather than *design* – in-

3

Defining educational innovation

volves adopting a "diffusion-of-innovations" perspective on understanding educational change. This perspective leads to other questions, about what change is, what attributes innovations should possess in order to be adopted, how different kinds of individuals react to innovations, and how various systemic factors – all sociocultural in nature – interact to affect the implemention of innovations.

Two assumptions undergird this book. First, given the ubiquitousness of change in education (Baldridge and Deal 1983), the study of how to effect educational change should be part of the basic intellectual preparation of all language teaching professionals – particularly of those individuals who possess or seek to obtain advanced graduate degrees in the field. Second, although curriculum development and teacher development are often treated as separate issues, they are in fact indivisible (Stenhouse 1975). Indeed, to summarize the message of this book in one sentence, the adoption of a diffusionist perspective on educational change involves addressing the short- and long-term professionalization of teachers, on whom real, long-lasting change in the classroom always depends.

This book is written from the point of view of an ESL program director; however, it is not ESL-specific. Whether we are talking about second or foreign language education, and whether we are Spanish, Russian, or Arabic specialists, the implementation of change in language education occurs within a systemic ecology that either promotes or inhibits innovation. In other words, cultural, economic, political, and other factors always mediate the possibility of change. Thus, whatever the language being taught, the problems of effecting change can be analyzed in terms of a common sociocultural perspective on change. This perspective is valid regardless of the contexts of implementation in which language teaching professionals operate.

This book addresses a broad spectrum of language specialists, especially those who are directly involved in language teaching and teacher education and training. Although all language teaching professionals have a stake in promoting educational change, the interests and motivations that different players bring to the task of implementing change vary tremendously. To address the needs and interests of this heterogeneous audience, the discussion is couched in both theoretical and practical terms.

In order to illustrate how innovation works, I rely heavily on the CATI project. This reliance may prompt some readers to ask, "What does this project have to do with me?" Any case study is potentially open to this criticism. If the package of *solutions* developed for the CATI project is not transferable to other institutions without considerable adaptation, nevertheless the *problems* that must be solved turn out to be strikingly similar across different sociocultural contexts.

4

Introduction

Whether the locus of change is a school or university, and whether change occurs in an Australian, a Canadian, a Hungarian, an Indian, an Indonesian, a Japanese, or a U.S. context, the same problems occur again and again. This insight is supported by a number of case studies of educational change in language teaching (see Bailey 1992; Beretta 1990; Bottomley, Dalton and Corbel 1994; Brindley and Hood 1991; Duff and Early 1996; Henrichsen 1989; Markee 1994a,b, 1996; Prabhu 1987; Ranta et al. 1996; Rounds in press; Tomlinson 1990; Young 1992).

Thus, the rationale for providing a detailed description of a single project is that this illuminates the kinds of problems of implementation that all language teaching professionals must confront. Consequently, just as language teaching professionals learned a great deal about developing, implementing, and evaluating innovative projects from the Bangalore Project, so can important lessons about the management of educational change be learned from the CATI project, which, unlike the Bangalore Project, is still evolving.

Since this book addresses a broad audience, different readers will have different reasons for reading it. Thus, not everybody will want to read it in the same way. Readers equally interested in the theory and practice of educational innovation should read all three parts of this book linearly. However, readers who have different aims or preferences may read this book like a computer hypertext. That is, they may want to begin with the sections that interest them most and refer to other chapters as needed. For example, researchers using this book as a reference on educational innovation theory may concentrate on Parts I and III. On the other hand, teachers interested in the practical aspects of effecting educational change may focus on Part II. Similarly, readers who prefer a deductive to an inductive approach may read Chapter 3 before Chapter 2.

In order to facilitate nonlinear reading, I have cross-referenced discussions of thematically related material in different parts of the book through 167 "Text Links." For example, if I were to refer to the CATI project, the reader would be directed to a series of references through a parenthetical text citation: for example, (see Text Link 1). Thus, Text Link 1 refers readers to the preface and also to Text Links 93 and 159, which reference relevant text later in the book. This text can be located by looking for the target Text Link box and reading the paragraph in which it is located. Note that, in a few instances, some of the relevant text is located in the paragraph that immediately precedes or follows the paragraph in which the target Text Link box is embedded.

> **∞ Text Link 1**
> For more specific information pertaining to the CATI project, see the Preface and Text Link 93. Finally, see also Principle 1 and Text Link 159.

Defining educational innovation

A diffusion-of-innovations perspective on curriculum work is a growth area in language teaching (see, for example, Alderson and Wall 1993; Allwright and Waters 1994; Bailey 1992; Beretta 1989, 1990, 1992a; Bottomley et al. 1994; Bowers 1987; Brindley and Hood 1991; Brumfit 1983; Burns and Brindley 1994; Burns and Hood 1995; Candlin 1984a,b; Cumming 1993; Henrichsen 1989; Holliday 1992a,b, 1994a,b, 1995a,b; Holliday and Cooke 1982; Kennedy 1982, 1987, 1988, 1994; Markee 1986a,b, 1993a,b, 1994a,b, 1996; Phillipson 1992; Savage 1996; Stoller 1992, 1994, 1995a,b; Wall and Alderson 1993; White 1987, 1988, 1993; White et al. 1991; Young, 1992). A much more comprehensive bibliography is available from the annotated bibliography of the Language in Development Forum, a World Wide Web site on the Internet. Despite the increasing numbers of publications, however, language teaching professionals are only beginning to discover innovation as an area of professional practice and academic study. Thus, critical caution is in order before wholeheartedly embracing a diffusionist perspective on language education.

If we are to avoid reinventing the wheel, we must realize that the heyday of the innovation movement in education occurred in the 1960s and 1970s, when there was widespread optimism and belief in the ability to effect important changes in educational practice. Nowadays, educators are less optimistic (Fullan 1989, 1993; MacDonald 1991; Rudduck 1991). Language teaching professionals should also know what the limitations of innovation research are. For example, Everett Rogers, one of the leading scholars in this field, notes that diffusion research has been criticized for displaying (1) a pro-innovation bias, in that it has been assumed that such research was conducted only to help promote the adoption of innovations; (2) an inequity bias, in which the socioeconomic and other consequences associated with developing innovations have been ignored or downplayed; (3) an individual-blame bias, in which individuals (rather than the larger social system) tend to be blamed for failure; and (4) a lack of methodological rigor, as when researchers rely on the subjective recollections of informants instead of using objective observational procedures to describe adoption behaviors (Rogers 1983).

Furthermore, we must remember that all innovation is risky and fraught with difficulty. For instance, Adams and Chen (1981) estimate that approximately 75% of all innovations fail to survive in the long term. Thus, it is not surprising that individuals and organizations involved in managing change have engaged in a continuing search for more effective ways of implementing and maintaining innovations. However, even relatively recent attempts to improve the effectiveness of innovation efforts have met with criticism. For example, Fullan (1989, cited by MacDonald 1991) argues that, within education at least,

6

all the conscious strategies of innovation developed to date have failed
to fully achieve desired goals.

I do not raise these issues to make language teaching professionals
shy away from a diffusionist perspective. As Ron White (personal com-
munication) notes, it is *crucial* to understand "the importance of con-
tinuous innovation as part of professional and organizational
development, particularly as circumstances in the wider environment
are constantly changing." Language teaching will benefit greatly if lan-
guage teaching professionals develop their own *critically informed* tra-
dition of innovation research and practice. This entails being aware of
potential problems in diffusion research, borrowing ideas from disci-
plines that already possess such research traditions (education, manage-
ment, medicine, anthropology, sociology, development planning,
language planning, and urban planning), and gaining practical experi-
ence in solving innovation-related problems. Along these lines, Brindley
and Hood (1991) suggest that teachers must *experience* innovations
firsthand if they are to adopt and incorporate these changes into their
pedagogical practice. This advice is relevant for all language teaching
professionals, particularly program directors, who must reinvent them-
selves as change agents who know how to promote change. It is only
by becoming familiar with both the practice and theory of innovation
that participants develop a critical understanding of the relevant issues.

7

2   Innovations in second and foreign language teaching

Nothing endures but change. (Heraclitus,
fifth century B.C.E.)

Striving to better, oft we mar what's well.
(William Shakespeare, *King Lear;* both
citations from Henrichsen 1989: 63)

This chapter presents six examples of innovations in language teaching
to highlight issues involved in managing change. Example 1 looks at
the problematics of effecting change in the cross-cultural context of
international language aid programs. The remaining five examples con-
stitute mainstream developments in curriculum design since the 1970s.
They include the notional-functional syllabus (Example 2), the process
syllabus (Example 3), the Natural Approach (Example 4), the proce-
dural syllabus (Example 5), and task-based language teaching (Example
6). For the purposes of this book, task-based language teaching is a
cover term for second and foreign language teaching that incorporates
elements of the process syllabus and the procedural syllabus and that
also applies insights from second language acquisition research to the
classroom. The five innovations in Examples 2–6 were developed by
different people and organizations and evolved in different geographical
and institutional contexts. Therefore, they may seem quite different
from each other. At a deeper level of analysis, however, the diffusion
of these syllabuses is analyzable in terms of common underlying prin-
ciples that affect all attempts to innovate.

Several clarifications about the examples are in order. Most of the
innovations I discuss here are syllabuses that stress the importance of
communication in language teaching and learning. Thus, the term *com-
municative language teaching (CLT)* applies to them all. However, al-
though I use CLT to exemplify the main theme of this book – how to
effect change in language education – I am not proposing yet another
variation of this approach to language teaching. Nor am I arguing that
CLT represents the best solution to the teaching and learning problems
of language teachers and students all over the world. Language teaching
professionals who operate in countries where English is a foreign, not

8

a second, language often express the concern that it is difficult or in-appropriate to teach language communicatively (Medgyes 1988). This is a real concern.

At the same time, I also want to emphasize that the problem of appropriateness is not unique to CLT. For example, in the 1920s and 1930s – long before CLT was ever invented – Harold Palmer at-tempted to introduce his Oral Method into Japanese secondary schools (see Howatt 1984). Similarly, Charles Fries attempted to introduce the Audiolingual Method into Ja-pan in the 1950s and 1960s (see Henrichsen 1989 for an account of Fries's attempts to diffuse the Audiolingual Method in Japan). Both attempts ultimately failed. The problems these innovations encountered are no different from those that affect CLT today. Finally, the principles I induce from this chapter go beyond the diffusion of innovative sylla-buses (see Text Link 2). They are relevant to the diffusion of *all* types of educational innovations, be these new ways of using personnel re-sources, conducting student placement and evaluations, organizing fac-ulty development, using new technologies, or organizing community–campus relations (Stoller 1992, 1994).

∞ **Text Link 2**
See Table 5.1 and Figure 5.2. See also Text Links 37, 42, 73, 80, 104, 105, 107, 121, 139, and 157.

Example 1: The British Council's international development work

Description

The British Council is an important cultural organization and aid agency that runs a variety of language teaching programs worldwide, one of which is the English Language Teaching Officers (ELTO) pro-gram.[1] ELTO is funded by the Overseas Development Administration (ODA), the Foreign Office agency responsible for all British aid work, and is administered by the British Council, which is responsible for staffing and managing ELTO projects. ELTO personnel – typically, spe-cialists in curriculum design, materials development, teacher training, or evaluation – operate in underdeveloped countries. They are usually based for up to five years in education ministries, universities, or teacher training institutes. Lately, ELTO projects have also been sited in sec-ondary schools.

From a language teaching perspective, the aims of ELTO projects are

1 ELTO superseded the Key English Language Teaching (KELT) program in 1986. There are technical differences in the way these two programs are organized, which need not concern us here. For ease of reference, I use ELTO to refer to all British Council–administered language teaching projects funded by aid money.

Defining educational innovation

quite innovative. Most "regular" language teaching professionals prob-
ably view themselves fairly narrowly as *language* specialists. The job
descriptions of ELTO personnel, however, are broader: They have to
train counterparts – local teachers and administrators who will take
over from the ELTOs once these individuals leave – to transform im-
ported pedagogical ideas into appropriate solutions to local problems.
The hope is that counterparts will, in the course of time, influence their
local colleagues to change their educational practices and values. En-
suring that this "multiplier effect" (Cracknell and Rednall 1986) occurs
is crucial if the innovations promoted by ELTO personnel are to survive
the end of a project (Holliday 1994a,b; Holliday and Cooke 1982;
Maley 1984; Markee 1986b). The challenge ELTO personnel face,
therefore, is to change how local teachers think and behave in the class-
room; in addition, they must create managerial infrastructures for the
development and implementation of innovations that are self-sustaining
in the long term.

∞ **Text Link 3**
For other instances of
this argument, see page
3 and Text Links 5, 8,
106, and 135.

ELTO projects represent classic loci for the
cross-cultural development of educational innova-
tions. If the problems – though not the solutions
– of implementing change are similar in different
cultural contexts, then all language teaching pro-
fessionals potentially have much to learn from
these projects (see Text Link 3). For example, at a time when the im-
portance of learner-centered instruction is so often stressed in method-
ology textbooks, the focus of many ELTO projects on teachers as the
linchpins of educational change may initially seem odd. However, this
emphasis on teachers is perfectly tenable. All teachers faced with im-
plementing learner-centered curricula – which frequently constitute the
content of language aid projects – need to develop more sophisticated
pedagogical and linguistic skills than teachers who implement teacher-
centered curricula. They therefore need to know how to make their
classes student-centered. Furthermore, this emphasis on teacher training
is in line with the emphasis on human resource development that char-
acterizes much current international aid work (Hilton and Webber
1993; Rondinelli, Middleton, and Verspoor 1990). In addition, this
emphasis on the central role of teachers in educational change is also
common in the education literature (Fullan 1982a,b, 1993; Stenhouse
1975). This position is beginning to find support in the field of language
teaching as well (Brumfit 1991; Freeman 1992; Richards and Lockhart
1994).

At the same time, language teaching professionals potentially have
much to learn from the failure of much recent aid work. This failure
not only provides rich insights into the technical difficulties of imple-
menting change; it also serves to highlight important ethical questions

10

that affect all change efforts – such as who "owns" or has a personal stake in change. I use British Council projects to illustrate my discussion of the failure of aid because it is through this organization that I gained my own aid experience; consequently, this is the agency with which I am most familiar. Nevertheless, my critique holds for all aid work, whichever organization acts as the donor agency.

According to Phillipson (1992), aid does not promote development, but rather perpetuates the dependence of underdeveloped countries on developed countries by implementing a "center-periphery" model of development. In this view, aid has far more to do with donor governments wishing to improve trade or gain political influence with the recipients of aid than with promoting human development through language education. This model – which involves sending expatriate "experts" from "center" countries like Britain to organize language education projects in "peripheral" countries like the Sudan – can only lead to failure. This is because most aid assumes that host country personnel are unable to organize language education in their own countries. Furthermore, it conceptualizes professionalism in language teaching in narrowly technical terms. That is, what succeeds in Britain or the United States is supposed to succeed in underdeveloped countries.

Phillipson's thesis is perhaps stated too boldly. In rare cases, language aid need not necessarily promote dependence – for example, the Brazilian project described by Alderson and Scott (1992) and Celani et al. (1988) – but that is probably because newly industrialized countries like Brazil do not need expatriate experts in the first place. Nonetheless, Phillipson's general position is well-taken. Proponents of the center-periphery model of development (whether conscious or unconscious advocates) ignore the fact that language aid projects function within specific sociocultural and systemic parameters. Furthermore, recipients of aid may perceive *language* aid projects to be irrelevant to their real needs.

For example, the Sudanese official in charge of a bilateral Anglo-Sudanese aid project I worked on claimed that the language component of a technical assistance project put together by ODA and the British Council had been *imposed* by these donor agencies, despite his strenuous objections that language aid was not needed. If true, this anecdote provides a classic example of how center-periphery patterns of development work (Markee 1993b). At the time, of course, I was skeptical that my professional expertise was so superfluous. However, I was also uncomfortably aware that my activities were tainted by this official's perceptions of what had happened. In retrospect, I am now convinced that my Sudanese colleague was right: My presence contributed little to my hosts' development. I am also convinced that "my" project was ultimately unsuccessful.

11