



Change and Development: A Case Study of the Implementation of Mandarin Chinese into the UK School Timetable

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Author's contribution

The only author performed the whole research work. Author Wang Ping wrote the first draft of the paper. Author Wang Ping read and approved the final manuscript

Case Study

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ABSTRACT

Implementing Mandarin Chinese into the UK school timetable is causing a big challenge and change within the Modern Foreign Language department (MFL). This paper explores some of the issues related to this new change within the MFL department. It begins with the initiative and the context of the challenge and change. Then it reviews resistance and its resources to the change. The next part goes through how these barriers were overcome and the final part of the paper summarises some useful suggestions for those who want to implement similar change within a MFL department in the UK.

Keywords: Managing the change; mandarin Chinese; the UK school; barrier.

1. INTRODUCTION

One of the reasons for the departure of a Spanish colleague in the summer of 2006 was the direct consequence of the implementation of Mandarin Chinese in the Modern Foreign Language (MFL) curriculum. The number of full time staff in the MFL department had increased from seven to nine. The governing body and strategic leadership team had looked at the implications for and against this measure, and had concluded that the school was able

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to only financially justify eight full time staff in the MFL department. Everyone in the department felt bad because it was the first time in my formal school that someone had to leave. Of course, other colleagues left in the past, but they chose to do so for personal and family reasons. This informs what [1] finds that implementing a new language program may effect change within a given school, and staffing, instructional organization, allocation of human and material resources, and student and staff timetables are a few examples of areas that may be affected.

Implementing Mandarin Chinese into the UK school timetable is causing a big challenge and change within the MFL department. According to [2], about 60% of the teachers claimed they were qualified in teaching Mandarin Chinese. They were either qualified teachers in China or in the UK but in subjects other than Mandarin Chinese. Most of those unqualified teachers were qualified English teachers in China. Therefore it might not take long to train them to be. [3] (p.229) states that linguistic theories are the backbone of language teaching in the sense that they equip teachers with analytical tools to solve language problems on the job. For instance, an understanding of the importance of appropriateness in speech would provide a teacher with a sound base for teaching 'chi fan le ma?' ('Have you eaten?') as an opening greeting rather than the conventional 'nihao!' (hello!). [4] shows his concern on the major challenges facing by native speakers Mandarin Chinese teachers in Australia,

1. **“Acculturation:** *This applied particularly to the educational environment where behavioural patterns and attitudes of students as well as interpersonal relationships among teaching staff differed greatly from those which a native teacher would have experienced in a Chinese learning environment.*
2. **Pronunciation:** *It seems to be a common phenomenon that native speakers whose mother tongue is other than the Mandarin dialect speak Mandarin with a pronounced accent, and some have great difficulty in mastering particular Mandarin sounds. In general, native speakers from Malaysia, Singapore, Hong Kong and to a lesser degree, Taiwan, fall into this category.*
3. **Romanisation:** *Taiwanese, even those whose native tongue is Mandarin, would have no exposure to the pinyin Romanisation system.”*

The issues mentioned above also confronted the Mandarin Chinese teachers surveyed in the UK, especially pedagogical and classroom management problems. [3] explained that native speakers typically came from an educational environment in which students expected to be led by teachers to a greater extent than their Western counterparts. In such an environment, teachers also prefer a more teacher-centred style of classroom management than Western colleagues. Another common problem may be language-related. [5] noticed this among non-English native student teachers in the UK, who found that such teachers often faced challenges in teacher-pupil relationships. These were primarily about understanding what students were saying to each other and to the teacher, knowing when students were serious or trying to take advantage, understanding humour and sarcasm, and being made to feel 'foreign' by the students. Procedure-related problems such as understanding hierarchies or disciplinary procedures for students, identified by [5], were also found among the part-time Mandarin Chinese teachers who responded to the survey.

Moreover, the lack of adequate textbooks and other teaching and learning materials in Mandarin Chinese is a concern for teachers. However, as [6] (p.131) claimed that there is no such thing as an ideal textbook. Materials are but a starting point, teachers are the ones who make materials work; they make them work for their students and for themselves in the context in which they teach. Mandarin teachers perhaps should not depend too much on a

formally approved textbook, as they once would in the context of the Chinese education system. Finally, most Mandarin Chinese teachers in the UK complain that the GCSE and A-level Mandarin Chinese examinations are intended for British-born Chinese who speak Mandarin at home, but are too difficult for most British students.

Any change is complex because it is inextricably linked to our emotions: sorrow at the sense of loss of the old, and anxiety at the uncertainties that the new will bring [7] (p.16). This paper is going to explore some of the issues related to this new change within the MFL department. It begins with the initiative and the context of the change. Then it reviews resistance and its resources to the change. The next part goes through how these barriers were overcome and the final part of the paper will summarise some useful suggestions for those who want to implement similar change within a MFL department in the UK. In a word, the paper focuses its on the following questions: what problems lie ahead for the secondary schools in the UK school context? How is Mandarin Chinese taught in the secondary schools in the UK?

2. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

The importance of MFL is said to lie in helping pupils to understand and appreciate different cultures and countries; and to think of themselves as citizens of the world [8] (p.162) and if education must enable us to respond positively to the opportunities and challenges of the rapidly changing world in which we live and work [9] (p.3), we would assume that within any MFL department today, what languages to teach is a question. In addition, what do “opportunities” mean in terms of foreign languages? When Moon says that the structure of employment in the twenty-first century is likely to have a greater European and international character, the ability to communicate in a second or third language, or even to learn a new one quickly, could become crucial to many jobs [10] (p.91). What does he mean by “international character”? What changes are happening in the UK in terms of international relationship? We will agree that China’s international importance, relevance and profile are increasing.

In the UK, the government departments of education in English, Wales and Scotland, together with the British Council, have agreed on a strategy to support the learning Mandarin Chinese through direct access to native speakers, school linking and collaborative activities. Qualified and experienced teachers from China are recruited to act as Chinese language assistants. Confucius classes are established in the UK secondary schools and fully-trained Mandarin teachers are sent to boost the classroom teaching.

Statistic shows that it is still not very common for secondary schools in the UK to include Mandarin Chinese on timetable, though a significant number of schools have started to offer Mandarin Chinese. So why did the MFL department of my school decide to do so? Before I answer the question, I will give a very brief description of the school. It is a catholic girl’s school in London. The school is a “language college”. Traditionally, it only offered French, then Spanish on school’s timetable. Today, it offers seven languages in all, 3 in curriculum time, the others in twilight time: French, Spanish, Russian, Italian, Portuguese, Japanese and Mandarin (which was started in 2001). 56% of the students are girls whose parents are first or second generation immigrants from Africa and Caribbean. In the local community, unemployment is high, and the number of pupils who receive free school meals is an indicator of the socio-economic background of these families. I agree with Fullan that less-well-educated communities are not as likely to initiate change or put effective pressure on

educators to initiate change on their behalf [11] (p.62). Therefore the new policy in MFL in my school is not because of pressure from parents.

According to Fullan, one of the factors affecting initiation of a specific educational change is the “access to information [11] (p.57).” It is true in my school case. The Head of MFL department and coordinator of Language College spends large amounts of time at conferences and in workshops within ongoing professional networks of communication among her peers, which contributes to her identifying the need for a new direction for the development of the MFL department—to offer Mandarin Chinese and to implement it into school timetable.

However, that only the Head of MFL department should identify the need for the change is not enough. Another very important factor affect the initiation is “advocacy from central and /or school administrators”. As Fullan claims, at the school level, the principal has always been the “gate-keeper” of change, often determining the fate of innovations coming from outside or from inside [11] (p.59). The current principal in my school was appointed two years ago. As a new Head, she was very keen to implement something new in the school, and to support the Language College ethos. Also, she shows how important “marketing the school or selling the school” [12] it is for her. Since the establishment of the so-called ‘quasi-market’ in education, parental choice, open enrolment, age-weighted pupil funding, and a mixture of different kinds of schools in any locality are all intended to engender a climate of competition[13,14,15,16]. It is therefore not surprising that she was very supportive for this new policy. However, will it be easy to implement it?

3. RESISTANCE AND CAUSES

According to [17] (p.172), it is often easy to identify the need for change but agreeing on the direction of change is another matter, especially when people are still arguing about the place of MFL in the school curriculum. Even if not everyone is as extreme as Williams who insisted that allowing young people to give up MFL after Key Stage 3 is wise and it would be even wiser to take the more radical step of limiting compulsion to just one year because this knowledge cannot be said to be of utility to the vast majority of English-speakers. There is a conspicuous lack of hard evidence that foreign language skills will increase productivity and employment [18] (p.117). Many educators more or less take his side. My school is not an exception. [19] identified this reason for resisting change as “belief that change is unnecessary.” “Resistance is always a likely response, especially in the early of a change initiative and most frequently among the more experienced and long-serving members of a teaching community” [20]. Other members of staff, including some of the Strategic Leadership Team in my school expressed their doubts when the new plan was raised.

At most of the UK secondary schools, French had always been the accepted traditional language. All pupils learned French from Year 7 to 11, and all had a year of Spanish in year 9. The Head of Department said it took her three years to raise the status of Spanish to the same level as French in the department. Spanish and French are now taught to all pupils having the same percentage of curriculum time over the 3 years at the cost of one fewer hour on Technology. In fact, one nature of change was identified by [21] as “structural and systemic”, which means “any real change will affect the whole system, in that change in one part of institution has a knock-on effect in other parts.” As a result, it is understandable that other department might resist the change due to the possible “loss of status and power” [19], if another new language is taken into timetable.

Besides the resistance from the colleagues from other departments, as we all know, learning foreign language requires substantial investment of resources. Thus it makes the task even harder than the possible cost of taking a completely different language into school timetable. Even as early as in 1976, the Prime Minister of the time, James Callaghan questioned in a speech the value for money of the British education system [7] (p.1). Is it worth investing in new teachers, buying new textbooks and building up other resources needed for this Mandarin Chinese subject? Does the school have some other more urgent needs for this money? Thus the second cause of the resist is due to “the relatively high cost” [19]. Even the Head and Head of the Department are very supportive; the resource of Mandarin is still quite limited in the department compared with French and Spanish. Let alone the additional materials, they don't have enough textbooks for each student therefore the Mandarin teacher needs to do lots of photocopies.

Within the MFL department, the change is likely to be resisted if it threatens the job security of those affected by it [19]. In the case of my working school, Spanish is directly threatened by this new policy. Year seven girls used to learn French and Spanish at the same time. Now, all Year 7 girls are doing two terms of French, one term of Spanish, and one term of Mandarin, which means fewer hours for Spanish, of course. That is why one Spanish teacher will have to leave. In addition, even if it is not that serious to cause the threaten of “job security”, other language teachers might still feel what [22] (p.75) described that in some schools where there were already two languages on offer in the lower school, colleagues might be unwilling to see a third introduced because they would be seen as ‘competing’ for pupils at the option stage. In my school all students in Year 8 choose two from French, Mandarin or Spanish. No teachers would be happy to see the students drop her/his subjects and naturally they all hope to keep their talented and well-behaved students so that they could have better candidates for GCSE and A-level exams. Thus the competition arose from here: who is to learn what language? In the case of my school, 45 girls chose to do Mandarin and thirty of them got the chance. The Head had planned to choose girls who were well behaved and also gifted in Languages to learn Mandarin because it is much more difficult than European languages. However, the final list of the students, which was decided by a French teacher because the Head of the department was away for a school trip, turned out to be a mixed one with several students who were very difficult to manage and didn't take the subject seriously. Therefore, we can sense the resistance from other language teachers, which is quite natural response.

4. STARTING SMALL AND THINK BIG

[23] describes the change process as having three major components: initiation, implementation and institutionalisation. In the case of my school, the change is still at early “implementation” stage because it is only in the second year. So what might be interesting is how the Head of MFL department managed to overcome the resistance to start the implementing Mandarin into school timetable by distributing the school kids in the different classes as a lash-up or contingent measure of meeting the resistance.

[24] suggested that if necessary, implement change initially on a small scale and Fullan [25] also said “starting small and think big”. That is exactly what the Head of MFL department in my school does. Right at the beginning, she knew what her long-term goal was. But she didn't implement the change suddenly. Instead she started to offer Mandarin in one of the after school clubs in 2001. In order to help the students, staff and parents know more about China and Chinese culture so that the learning of Chinese language becomes more acceptable in the school organised by British council in 2004, in which the students have

opportunities for contact with speakers of the language, through structured interviews, letters or e-mail messages, face-to-face meetings, art, music, song and student exchange programs, which also make learning the target language meaningful. And it turned out to be a big success. Students and staff came back from China and shared their experienced community, she started to join the Summer Mandarin Immersion Trip to China with their family members and peers, which contributed to a Chinese atmosphere in the school and community. At the same time, with support from the Head and the Governors of the school, she decided it was time to seriously begin the innovation within the department. First she found a Chinese Language Assistant via British Council who actually is an experienced teacher in China. In this way it saves her time to train a new teacher and saves the school money if we bear in mind that “relatively high cost” was always one cause of the resistance.

In order to avoid resistance from other departments, she kept it within the MFL department. Chinese was taught in curriculum time by sharing with Spanish’s time thus it didn’t affect any other department.

During the process, she knows that telling people about the progress of the change can help to maintain commitment to the change [24]. Also according to [26], one of the key factors for success at this stage is early feedback on progress made. Therefore, she herself first continually showed her commitment to this new change within the department. For example, she fully supported the new Mandarin teacher with resource and classroom management. She helped the new Chinese teacher with the techniques of Information Technology. She encouraged the new teacher to participate in professional development activities and teach her how to arrange and design a variety of interactive learning activities for students. She changed the new teacher’s view towards the assessment- either an aid to learning or a process which enabled students to demonstrate their knowledge and skills in the target language, based on curricular expectations. She helped this new teacher from China adapt gradually in the education system in the UK by involving the teacher in accessing a variety of professional development activities in language learning. She used to comment,

“Technology can provide greater access real-world problems and authentic contexts for facilitating Mandarin learning and teaching, and provide alternative methods of representing and communicating knowledge. It fosters innovation, facilitates dialogue and offers potential for developing new practices in the education and research communities. And education technology can be crucial to the success of any language learning and teaching program. Professional development, which supports effective practice, is essential to the successful use of any technology, resource or application.”

And she never forget inform the Head and the Governor of any progress about the change. For instance, BBC reported the Mandarin Project in Lauriston primary school run by the Chinese teacher; the Mandarin lesson was filmed by both “ITV” and “CNN”. This was, of course, on “News Letters” to parents, too. All these send out a message to both school and community: It is right to implement Mandarin into school timetable. Even so, the program assessment was held by the school authority to find the language program was reviewed periodically to ensure quality; and to find the assessment strategies adopted were valid and reliable measures of program outcomes.

At the beginning, some of the Strategic Leadership Team was not happy because she sent the Mandarin teacher to teach Mandarin in local primary school for free. But later the feedback was that the Mandarin project in the primary school became so famous that more primary schools in the district wanted it. Especially one primary school, with which the

Principal of my school was trying hard to forge link contacted her asking for help with starting Mandarin lessons. Mandarin now became the 'ambassador' of the school. Nobody doubts that it is a waste of money to send the Mandarin teacher to primary schools anymore.

Furthermore, she even made Mandarin earn money for the school. This is also shown in the research by [1],

"The school authority, school administrators, counsellors and teachers promote the benefits of language learning. Communication documents and activities include information packages for parents and students, open houses, information evenings, brochures, school authority/school Web site, school displays and posters. Student activities may include student clubs, Internet pen pals, field trips and student exchanges. The language taught is visible in the school through the use of signs, bulletin boards, displays, school concerts, extracurricular activities and school announcements."

She contacted principals or Heads of MFL department she knew. They might want to offer Mandarin Chinese but lacked qualified teachers for some reason. She went to these schools with the Mandarin teachers to deliver taster Mandarin lessons for free. And in the end, the LEA of Westminster agreed to pay my school to send teachers to teach Mandarin Chinese at first in two primary schools. And there are more schools asking for it. Up to now, three schools are paying my school for it. Once again all these factors prove that it is worth the money to invest in this new subject. In summary, as the head of the department, what she fulfilled is establishing policies that support language learning; ensuring that schools implement quality language programs; establishing clear measures of student achievement for target languages; allocating sufficient funds for language learning; developing, authorizing and offering locally developed language programs per provincial policy; and providing professional development opportunities [1]. While what I as a leading Mandarin teaching, reflects, too, what [1] has explored in their research that is "encouraging students to learn the language; stating clearly what students are expected to learn; selecting and implementing appropriate resources for students; assessing and reporting student progress in target languages; pursuing individualized professional development that will improve the language learning in students; advising on student program placement; providing advice about provincial standards and curriculum; planning methods of communicating with parents and with the public; and reporting to, and communicating with, parents about their students' progress."

5. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATION

Though it is still early to say the new change in MFL Department of my formal school is successful. The implementation of Mandarin Chinese into school timetable, however, is proved to be a good start. As a reflection I totally agree with [1] the indicators of an effective school language program:

- *alignment of curriculum, instruction, assessment, resources and reporting of student progress;*
- *student and parent understanding of learning outcomes and student assessment;*
- *staff-initiated language projects and ideas that support and improve language learning;*
- *staff voluntarily sharing their knowledge or best instructional practices;*
- *staff cohesiveness, meaningful participation and sense of belonging;*

- *staff responsibility for providing programming that ensures all students have the opportunity to achieve a measure of success;*
- *willingness to critically assess past practices, eliminate barriers and risk trying new strategies or organizational models;*
- *ongoing, regularly scheduled monitoring and adjusting of instructional strategies and program plans to ensure student progress;*
- *setting and modelling high expectations for achievement, conduct and behaviour;*
- *targeted professional development to address personal, school and school authority goals;*
- *a focus on language learning in discussions at meetings, in the staff room, in newsletters and at assemblies;*
- *school-initiated processes that collect input from staff, students, parents and the community recognition that meaningful parental involvement contributes to student success*
- *frequent, open and clear communication among all members of the learning community.*

Then what does this good start imply? It is more than that they have the courage to take the risk, though there is risk in any change. According to [23], top-down is all right under certain conditions. The success of my school lies in the fact that they have a principal and a Head of MFL Department who understand the implementation and fully support it. And this change, which has a clear, well-structured approach, was also tied to a “local need”. As the Head of the MFL department puts it “many pupils in my school are already disadvantaged by birth, family background, income and race. If learning Mandarin means future possible employment opportunity, why should we hesitate?”

According to [27] and [28], evaluating the change right from the beginning and a review of the school’s current state as regards it are also essential. Before you start to implement the change, ask yourself “Is the proposed change necessary at this time? Can the proposed change be properly resourced? Are additional resourced required? What will be the benefits of the proposed change? How will these be monitored and evaluated?” And it is also important to think about the potential resistance and can you overcome them and in what way? The thinking maps provide some systematic and reliable information that can be used as a basis for action [29].

More importantly, in gauging the success of the implementation process, it is a good idea to continue to compare the current Chinese teaching program to the characteristics of the so-called successful language program discussed earlier. More and more of these characteristics should become apparent as the implementation process proceeds. All new programs are likely to experience some bumps during the implementation stage. Over time, these should resolve themselves and the confidence and comfort level of all stakeholders should increase. Continued improvement is the result of a continuous cycle of planning, implementing, monitoring, assessing and revising. As each goal is reached, an existing goal is expanded or a new goal is established, and the cycle continues to generate positive change and improvement. Individuals may incorporate the cycle of continuous improvement into their professional practices as efficiently as schools incorporate it into the teaching and learning environment [1].

COMPETING INTERESTS

Author has declared that no competing interests exist.

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