

***Language Teachers' Beliefs and Practices
Regarding the Appropriateness of Communicative
Methodology: A Case Study from Thailand***

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Analysts of curricular innovation distinguish two different versions. One is the documented curriculum, or the intended innovation, which presents idealized innovative prescriptions while the other is the realized version - that which is actually implemented in classrooms. This distinction reflects the complexity of curricular innovation which has been acknowledged by many researchers both in the mainstream education and in English language teaching and learning, especially in Asian contexts (e.g., Carless, 2001; Markee, 1997; Wang, 2008). This small-scale case study is an attempt to address the gap between curricular rhetoric and classroom reality by exploring how some teachers have implemented a curricular innovation in two Thai secondary schools. Data were obtained from classroom observation and in-depth interviews with eight teachers to identify what they believed about communicative English language teaching and the extent to which their classroom practices reflected their beliefs. In the course of the interviews, the teachers referred to a number of contextual factors which routinely constrained their practice, and this provides an opportunity for readers to consider the extent to which the same constraints to curricular innovation might occur in their own teaching and learning contexts.

Key words: communicative curriculum, school teachers, beliefs, Thailand, case study

INTRODUCTION

The Role of Teachers in Curriculum Innovation

It has long been recognized by educationists, if not policymakers, that wide-scale curricular innovations across a school system need to take into account the perceptions of the key stakeholders in the specific sociocultural contexts. Of these stakeholders, teachers play the key role to the success or failure of the innovation (Carless, 2001; Markee, 1997; Nunan, 1989) because they are the executive decision-makers in the actual settings in which the intended innovation is realized. As MacDonald (1991, p. 3) writes,

It is the quality of the teachers themselves and the nature of their commitment to change that determines the quality of teaching and the quality of school improvement. Teachers are, on the whole, poor implementers of other people's ideas. Teacher development therefore is a precondition of curriculum development, and teachers must play a generative role in the development of better curricula (MacDonald, 1991, p 3).

It is important that the knowledge and attitudes of school teachers regarding centrally-driven curriculum innovations are taken into account. According to Ur (1996), teachers will not adopt a new set of practices unless they believe in, and internalize, the underlying principles – and are conscious of their beliefs.

With regard to English language teachers in Asia, there are an increasing number of reports of mismatches between the intentions of curriculum innovators and the beliefs and practices of the teachers expected to adopt new textbooks and methodologies. It is within this research space that the present study is located: it is a preliminary investigation of the beliefs and practices

of a small number of language teachers coping with the introduction of a communicative English language curriculum in Thailand.

Communicative Language Teaching in Asian schools

Ministries of Education in many Asian countries, as elsewhere, have espoused Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) as the guiding principle for the curricula used in their schools. Over the years, there have been a variety of interpretations as to how CLT might be implemented in various contexts (Richards & Rodgers, 2001), but the basic tenets remain that the learners should primarily be engaged in activities which involve the construction and communication of meaningful messages in the target language, that the learning of grammar should be secondary to the acquisition of communicative competence, that many student errors should be seen as evidence of the development of competence, and that the teacher should be facilitator of student-centered learning rather than the transmitter of linguistic and cultural information. In a case study review of six countries in the Asia-Pacific region, Nunan (2003, p. 606) pointed out that “all of the countries surveyed subscribe to principles of CLT”, but that the considerable educational resources invested in this endeavor were “not achieving the instructional goals desired” (p. 610). In a later review of many empirical studies of East Asian classrooms, Littlewood (2007) pointed to a number of local concerns relating to the adoption of CLT. These concerns centered around five main issues; firstly, the practical difficulty of implementing CLT procedures in large classes; secondly the tendency of many students, and teachers, to avoid using English; thirdly, and consequently, that minimal demands to use English were placed on students; fourthly, that CLT is incompatible with the requirements of tests and examinations; and fifthly, in several ways CLT conflicts with local educational values and traditions.

Very similar issues have been raised in many empirical studies not reported by either Nunan or Littlewood. For example, the Korean high school teachers in Jeon and Hahn’s (2006) study had a high level of understanding

of task-based language teaching, but expressed negative views on implementing it in their classroom, reinforcing a point made earlier by Yoon (2004). In Japan, the lack of appropriate professional development regarding CLT has been reported in a detailed case study of high school teachers in Tokyo: “lacking support for learning, these teachers continued to avoid implementing innovation” (Sato, 2002, p. 80). Avoidance of communicative methods in Japanese schools is reinforced, according to Nishino and Watanabe (2008), by teachers’ and students’ concerns about university entrance examinations which do not seek to measure communicative competence (Gorsuch, 2000). In the People’s Republic of China, Wang (2008) has reported a wide gap between the textbook designers’ principles - which emphasize the adoption of a learner-centered approach and the entire use of English in instruction - and the classroom reality where teaching remains textbook-based, test-oriented, teacher-centeredness and extensive use of the first language in instruction. The biggest constraint to the implementation of the intended curriculum is, according to Yu (2001), a lack of qualified teachers in the schools. Thus the promotion of CLT has proved counter-productive – merely a “matter of paying lip-service” (Hu, 2002, p. 94). Even in Hong Kong, where educational facilities are generally better than elsewhere in the People’s Republic, there is a wide gap between the curriculum intentions and the practical realities (Ruffell, 2006), due not least to inadequate teacher preparation and insufficient resources. Primary teachers there have reported that there is not enough time in the syllabus to implement task-based learning causing them to “finish the book with little regard to the ability of the students” (Carless, 2003, p. 493) - a point reinforced in a later study of high school teachers (Carless, 2007). In Vietnam, an experienced teacher educator reported that, despite the strong promotion of CLT, the lack of appropriate in-service professional development meant that “teachers are generally incapable of teaching English communicatively in their real-world classrooms. Instead, they spend most of their lesson time explaining abstract grammar rules and guiding their students in choral readings” (Canh, 2002, p. 33). Tomlinson and Bao (2004) have reported that many of the Vietnamese

teachers in their survey do not wish to change their methods or to participate in intervention for change, and some refused to believe in the learners' willingness to participate and their potential to express themselves fluently in English (Tomlinson & Bao, 2004, p. 217).

Communicative Language Teaching in Thai schools

In Thailand, the 1999 Education Act (Office of the National Education Commission, 1999) specified that school curricula should become learner-rather than teacher-centered, and that the aims of English language teaching include the use of English for oral communication. Students of English in Thai schools should be able to develop communicative strategies, skills, critical and creative thinking skills, self-evaluation, and working with others (Wiriyachitra, 2002, p. 3). Therefore, their teachers need to be familiar with current theories, approaches and activities related to English language teaching and to equip themselves with new types of syllabus, materials, tasks and activities, and assessment and evaluation (Prapphal, 2005, p. 2). Relatively few studies have been reported in national or international journals regarding the consequences of the new Thai English curriculum, but those that have been published echo the points made above regarding Thailand's neighbors. For example, various authors (Bunang, 2002; O'Sullivan & Tajaroensuk, 1997; Simon, 1990) cited by Baker (2003, p. 11) reported the difficulty experienced by Thai teachers in attempting to implement, in a traditional teacher-centred education culture, the new learner-centred approach. According to one commentator, "Many teachers feel insecure when confronting changes to be introduced into their classrooms required by government policy changes" (Iemjinda, 2005, p. 104). For example,

It is difficult for teachers who themselves have learned English through traditional approaches to suddenly turn their backs on familiar classroom methods in favor of newer unfamiliar ones. Moreover, the teachers felt they did not have enough time to prepare their lessons. They would want to retain the more familiar grammar-translation and drill-and skill methods

with which they were taught and are comfortable with due to English proficiency (Kwangsawad, 2007, p. 275).

According to one recent study, although teachers *reported* using such activities such as role play, information gap, brainstorming and problem-solving tasks, what were commonly observed in their classes were “grammar explanation, vocabulary explanation, translation and whole-class drills and repetition” (Nonkukhetkhong, Baldauf & Moni, 2006, pp. 6-7). These findings led the authors to conclude that the inadequate facilities, resources and learning environments made “the policy goals unrealistic and all but impossible to achieve” (Nonkukhetkhong et al., 2006, p. 8). A more recent study (Segovia & Hardison, 2009) similarly reported skepticism by teachers and supervisors of the feasibility of the proposed reform from teacher- to learner-centered instruction.

Teachers' Beliefs and Teachers' Practices

The above review has emphasized the need – often neglected by curriculum innovators – to investigate teachers' actual beliefs and practices before, during and after the implementation phase. Such investigation, however, is a complex matter. There are many divergent definitions and conceptualizations of the term ‘belief’ (Borg, 2006; Pajares, 1992) and researchers in this area need firstly to clarify what they mean by ‘beliefs. This study proposes a working definition of *belief as a proposition which an individual subjectively forms or acquires in a culturally specific environment and strongly holds to guide his or her behaviors.*

While there is clearly a relationship between what people believe and what they do, it has long been recognized that what teachers believe is not always reflected in their practice (Clark & Peterson, 1986; Fang, 1996; Pajares, 1992; Richardson, 1998; Woods, 1996). Many of the studies of the Asian teachers reported above confirm the points frequently made previously (Bailey & Nunan, 1996; Coleman, 1996; Freeman & Richards, 1996) that individuals may or may not be in a position to do as they believe or claim to

believe. In part, this may be due to constraints on action imposed, for example, by external authorities. These could be direct prescriptions about what, how and when something should be taught – as well as proscriptions concerning what they may not do. These constraints can be perhaps less direct, such as through the backwash effect of examinations, or the social or political influence of other stakeholders such as parents. Often too, teachers' practices may merely *seem* to the external observer to diverge from their beliefs. While it is reasonable for researchers to infer, or deduce, beliefs from observed behavior (Argyris & Schön, 1974, p. 10), this runs the risk of missing the teachers' underlying intentions and meanings. Thus, unless the researcher is fully conversant with the specific context in which the teachers and learners are working, it is usually necessary to match the perceptions of the observer with those of the actors so as to co-construct mutual understanding.

THE PRESENT STUDY

The Research Questions:

1. What are the beliefs of the Thai teachers in this study about English language teaching and learning, with particular reference to communicative language teaching?
2. To what extent does their practice reflect their beliefs?
3. What reasons may be adduced for any differences between expressed beliefs and practice?

Given the small scale of this case study, it was decided to adopt a qualitative approach to the collection and analysis of primary data. As Denzin and Lincoln (1998) state,

Qualitative research is multi-method in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. This means that qualitative

researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998, p. 3).

The framework of the study was adapted from Bennett et al. (1997), who investigated pre-school teachers' theories of play and real-life practice through narrative writings, long interviews, and video-recorded classroom observations. The belief-practice patterns resulting from the analysis may provide a plausible explanations not only for the participants in this study, but also other language teachers in relatable settings in Thailand, and possibly elsewhere.

The Setting and Participants

The data were obtained from a small purposive sample of eight teachers from two schools in Bangkok, one in the public sector the other a private language school. These schools differed in terms of size, administration, curricula, reputation, teaching styles, and students' family and financial backgrounds. The actual classroom settings in the two schools differed in that the public school classes had twice as many students as the private school classes. The latter were more flexible in terms of student seating, allowing much more opportunity for group work than the public school, and were generally better equipped with teaching resources. For example, published course books were freely available in the private schools, while the teachers in the public schools relied more heavily on whiteboards and worksheets.

As can be seen in Table 1 below, the public school teachers were much more equivalent in age than their private school counterparts, and some of the latter were considerably less experienced.

TABLE 1
The Participant Teachers

Teacher	<i>School</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Experience</i> (Years)	<i>Employment Status</i>
1	State	40	Female	19	Full-time
2	State	40	Female	24	Full-time
3	State	41	Female	22	Full-time
4	State	45	Female	31	Full-time
5	Private	65	Female	45	Part-time
6	Private	44	Female	24	Full-time
7	Private	24	Female	2	Full-time
8	Private	30	Male	5	Part-time

Access and Informed Consent

The researcher gained access to the schools by sending the school principals an official letter containing the researcher's identification, study purpose, sponsorship, the number of participants requested, the data collection process, and the researcher's commitment to keep the participants and the school anonymous and the data confidential. In face-to-face-meetings, the participants were invited to participate in the study after being informed of the research purpose, the conduct at each stage, and possible disruption caused by the recording tools. Confidentiality was also maintained by not disclosing any information about one teacher to another; for example, the wish of one participant wanting to read the others' narrative accounts was met with a polite refusal.

Data Collection

Data were collected in two phases: Firstly, the participants were asked to write reflective essays of approximately three to four A4 pages on the following topics, with a specific focus on the recently-promulgated child-centred communicative English language curriculum

- a. What I learnt about EFL learning and teaching in formal teacher education;

- b. How I have changed as a teacher since I began teaching;
- c. What I consider as success and failure in my EFL teaching, and how or what I would like to improve.

The idea of using such reflective accounts stemmed from Bailey (1996), who maintained that the method enables teachers to reflect on their beliefs and theories in relation to their practice, to retrieve nearly forgotten memories and develop a new teaching perspective, and to interpret their past logically and theoretically. Despite its potential weakness of unclear data analysis, largely relying on *content* and *thematic analysis*, Pavlenko (2007) has still acknowledged three major advantages the method has to offer: 'insights into people's private worlds' (p. 164); 'new connections between various learning processes and phenomena' (p. 165); and, citing Nekvapil (2003), historic and diachronic accounts which are not easily available from other sources.

Subsequently, to provide empirical data in response to the second research question, each of the eight teachers was observed teaching two lessons with their regular classes in which the researcher adopted the role of a complete, non-participant observer. Each teacher was observed twice in order to limit the consequences of observer effects on participants' awareness and consequent changes in behavior. Thus, in order to familiarize the teacher and learners with the presence of the researcher, the first observation was recorded only by field notes. The second lesson observation, which was video-recorded, aimed to obtain a more holistic picture of the lesson with particular attention to the teacher-student interactions and non-verbal language, and to compare it with the first observation and the data emerging from the essays and interviews. Thus, it was possible to infer from the observations the extent to which their actual classroom activity conformed to what they said they had learnt in their formal teacher education

After the observations, there were informal conversations with the teachers, in which convergences and divergences between their beliefs and practices as evidenced in their observed lessons were discussed, and reasons elicited for

why any discrepancies might have occurred.

Data Analysis

The three types of data collected were analysed qualitatively based on the data management and analysis methods recommended by Miles and Huberman (1998): an interactive model, together with a grounded analysis approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) allowed for the data to be constantly compared and contrasted so that common patterns and themes could emerge. The grounded analysis was facilitated by quantifying certain manifestations of verbal interaction in the audio-recorded lessons, such as the proportion of talking time and the type of questions asked by the teachers. There was no perceived need to seek correlations among these statistical findings and therefore no inferential tests were applied.

FINDINGS

The Thai Teachers' Background and Beliefs

Before discovering the different beliefs of the participant teachers, it was necessary to explore their language learning and teacher education background, which was likely to be linked with their expressed beliefs. The teachers' essays indicated that most of the teachers started learning English after ten years of age, although the two younger teachers began learning the language several years earlier. All them learnt English through grammar-translation methods, audio-lingual methods or a combination of both, which were highly prevalent in the country when they were at school. The pre-service teacher education programs most of the teachers, except the younger two, attended also emphasized the above methods, as one of the public school teachers maintained:

When we were little, teachers taught us vocabulary...From Secondary Year 1 till Secondary Year 6, they were teaching grammar as the main thing. They taught nouns; we took notes, “nouns are...”, “pronouns are...”, and so on. They asked us to do so in order to know every word. Then we constructed sentences. After that we translated Thai into English and English into Thai. We read aloud and practised pronunciation. But most of the time they emphasised grammar (T4).

In such contexts, the English language classrooms were conventionally transmission-oriented; teachers were central, powerful and respected; students had to listen and keep quiet. As another public school teacher said, ‘students were still afraid of teachers. It was the matter of fear and consideration. It was like this, which was normal during those days. We were naturally afraid of teachers’ (T3).

Interactive techniques and communicative ideas for teaching were introduced to them during the in-service courses that most of the teachers had attended. There were, however, cases where there was a mismatch between the rhetoric of the professional development courses and classroom reality; this made the teachers inclined to follow a conventional path rather than use innovative approaches. This can be illustrated by the youngest private school teacher who had to revert to grammar-based teaching after finding that large classes did not enable her to teach in communicative ways:

Well, everything must be adapted and modified all the time. Like I learnt the model of Communicative Language Teaching from my university, but how can we use it with a lot of students per class? In real life teaching I have learnt that in some situations, we can't teach according to the model. We have to keep modifying things according to situations (T7).

The major patterns of the teachers' beliefs as indicated in their essays will be discussed in terms of the use of English, student-centred learning, the nature of language learning, error correction, and the relationship between teachers and learners:

Use of English in Class

The majority of the teachers were aware that the primary aim was to develop the students' use of the English language for communication. For instance, one of the public school teachers wrote: 'The aim of language learning ought to be communicating fluently because I feel that nowadays native speakers don't really mind mistakes' (T2). Therefore, the target language should be emphasized in the classroom.

In learning English, we would like a class where we can communicate in English. The best medium should be the English language (T8).

However, some caution was also expressed: 'Not every student in a whole class is highly able enough to understand spoken English thoroughly' (T3), and 'I use English when I can see that I can use it. If students don't understand, then I have to switch the language' (T7). Therefore,

If we use just the English language purely, Thai students won't succeed in their learning. Thai must play some parts. The best way is to do half English, half Thai (T6).

One teacher even went so far as to say that the students' first language should predominate: 'it ought to be the Thai language because it is the language which is easier for communication than other languages' (T5).

Student-Centered Learning

In general, the teachers in both schools espoused the idea of student-centered learning. For example, 'Talking about a 'child-centered' method, which is nowadays greatly encouraged, I think it is a good method, and I am applying it to some extent' (T2), and she added: 'The nature of an English language centre is where students can do activities and research' Another (T4) put it this way: 'now I am trying to use a child-centered teaching

approach with both subjects I teach this term'. One of the private school teachers said:

A way to enable students to learn fast is learning by doing. They can learn well if they have a chance to touch or to see. They will gain the most in 'student-centered' teaching (T8).

Another private school teacher said 'learning is studying, searching and experimenting by oneself and with other people's guidance' (T7).

Learning as an Active Process

Most of the teachers viewed foreign language learning as an active process, by which learners needed to be exposed to the target language to obtain fluency in language use - which was the primary aim. However, there were differences about what 'activity' constituted. For example, for some teachers, fluency should follow accuracy: 'If you ask me which one students should master first, it must be correct grammar. Then they still have confidence. With this confidence, their fluency will occur soon after' (T6). Another teacher, who had been intensively trained to apply a communicative approach, affirmed that learning a foreign language depended on practice and memorisation:

Practice is important. If we speak the language or use it often, it will be in our memory. If we use certain patterns often, we will be able to remember them. If we use them often, we will be used to them. When we see sentences based on the same patterns again, we will know how to give responses (T5).

Another view was to give the students opportunities to speak more freely: 'I think the best and most efficient one is to teach them to speak...to teach them to listen and to speak. According to what I think... I would let them try out the language' (T4). Two of the teachers explicitly espoused a

communicative approach – as one of them said: ‘The one I really believe in is the communicative approach, which I have learnt... I’m confident it is the best way’ (T7). On the other hand, another teacher did not argue for or against any particular method, believing that teaching approaches depended on contexts: ‘Yes... many methods. For this lesson, I may use this method. For other topics I may have to use another, there is no best method’ (T3). Only one teacher seemed not to favour activity-based learning: ‘The word ‘learning’ in my understanding is learning by receiving knowledge and understanding it’ (T6).

Error Correction

Most of the teachers perceived causes of errors in foreign language learning as both part of development and evidence of imperfect abilities, as follows: ‘It may be the matter of expertness. They make mistakes, probably because they really can’t make them right, or don’t understand rules’ (T1). Two of the private school teachers felt that students would not make errors if they had previously been taught, and they understood, the relevant rules. On the whole, though, the teachers felt it necessary to correct mistakes comprehensively. Some were aware of the limitations of their feedback: ‘When I check students’ work, I check everything and correct all their mistakes. But most students don’t pay attention to my corrections’(T7). Different views were expressed with regard to correcting students’ oral errors immediately. On one hand, ‘In my teaching when students speak, I stop them immediately after they make mistakes. and I correct them by saying the right thing and tell them that the right one should be like this’ (T4). On the other: ‘If not necessary, I don’t stop them while they are speaking or producing mistakes. This is because if I do, they won’t be able to continue ‘(T1).

Teacher and Student Roles

These teachers believed that a good teacher should above all be

knowledgeable:

Teachers should have knowledge...knowledge in many aspects. They should have knowledge about grammar so that they can use it for checking students' exercises. They should know accurate pronunciation; they shouldn't speak English with the Thai accent (T8).

Such knowledge tended to be focussed on the linguistic features ('grammar') of the language rather than on communicative aspects, as none of them explicitly referred to the need for them to be communicatively competent. The teachers also felt that they had a key role to play in monitoring and checking students' learning, giving explanations and observing their learning behaviours: 'I'm also their observer, for I evaluate their performance at the same time' (T6), and another teacher said:

I look at their scripts first. They write their scripts and let me see them. I check them whether they are fine or not. I see whether what they perform covers the contents I would like them to do or not' (T2)

They generally considered that active and motivated learners would succeed in language learning. They saw differences in learners' performances as caused by different attitudes, which led to different levels of motivation, and there was a general feeling that their current students were unmotivated; one of the public school teachers maintained, 'you know that Thai people are shy by nature. Therefore, the teaching is very difficult and discouraging for me' (T1). Some teachers felt that the responsibility for sustaining motivation depended on their own level of activity - 'I have to be dynamic and active all the time' (T6) - or on taking an informal stance:

the first rule I always tell my students is not to look at me as a teacher, but as their elder brother...If teachers are those who give love and warmth, their students can always approach them all the time (T8).

On the other hand, an excessively casual attitude might make students

disruptive: 'Sometimes I'm too casual, and this makes me unable to control the class' (T4).

The findings in this section have shown a range of the teachers' beliefs about their approach to English language teaching, with very little difference between private and public school teachers as two distinct groups. All of them had learnt English at school in traditional ways, and most had been initially trained to teach in the same way, but had subsequently been inducted into communicative approaches. They all expressed overt support for the student-centered and communicative language approach to teaching enshrined in the national curriculum and promoted in the in-service courses they had attended. However, there was little evidence of a deep, or even firm, grasp of the pedagogical implications of the communicative approach, nor did they indicate that they had developed appropriate strategies to implement this in their classes. On the contrary, the comments that they made, for example about the sort of practice their students needed and the importance of comprehensive error correction, suggest a pedagogical repertoire derived from their previous experience as language learners, and reinforced by their early teacher training.

The Teachers' Practices

The classroom observation findings revealed both convergences and divergences between beliefs and practices in main areas focused on in the teachers' previously-written essays: the use of English in the class, student-centered learning, learning as an active process, error correction, and the relationship between teachers and students. The following discussion, will present data mostly from the videotaped lessons.

Use of English in Class

In both schools, the use of Thai as the medium of instruction clearly

exceeded that of English, as shown Table 2.

TABLE 2
The Number and Percentage of the Teachers' English and Thai Utterances in the Videotaped Lessons

Schools/Teachers	English Utterances		Thai Utterances		Total	
	No	%	No	%	No	%
Public						
1	617	92.09	53	7.91	670	100
2	65	10.55	551	89.45	616	100
3	233	47.75	255	52.25	488	100
4	199	25.81	572	74.19	771	100
Average	278.5	44.05	357.75	55.95	636.25	100
Private						
5	50	11.39	389	88.61	493	100
6	170	28.57	425	71.43	595	100
7	124	30.39	284	69.61	408	100
8	467	93.59	32	6.41	499	100
Average	202.75	40.98	282.5	59.02	498.75	100

The figures show that the teachers in both schools spoke more Thai than English, but there were wide variations among the teachers within both schools. For instance, utterances in English classes in the public school ranged from 10.55 % (T2) to for 92.09% (T1), while in the private school, utterances in English ranged from 11.39% (T5) to 93.59% (T8). On the whole, these practices were consistent with the views expressed by the teachers in their essays, where, for example, T8 considered that the medium should be English, and T5 considered it more appropriate to use Thai. On the other hand T6, who considered that the instruction should be half in English and half in Thai spoke considerably more Thai during the recorded lesson.

Student-Centered Learning

In both schools the proportion of teacher-talking time (TTT) far exceeded that of the students, as indicated in the table below.

TABLE 3
Number and Percentage of the Teachers' and Students' Utterances in the Videotaped Lessons

Schools/ Teachers	Teacher Utterances		Student Utterances		Total	
	No	%	No	%	No	%
Public						
1	670	76.22	209	23.78	879	100
2	616	93.19	45	6.81	661	100
3	488	86.07	79	13.93	567	100
4	771	85.19	134	14.81	905	100
Average	636.25	85.17	116.75	14.83	753	100
Private						
5	439	85.24	76	14.76	515	100
6	595	86.99	89	13.01	684	100
7	408	81.09	89	17.91	497	100
8	499	87.70	70	12.30	569	100
Average	485.25	85.50	81	14.50	566.25	100

The percentage of teacher utterances in the videotaped lessons revealed little difference across schools. The teachers' utterances ranged from 76.22% to 93.19%, a mean of above 85%. The number of students' utterances ranged from 6.81% to 23.78% with an average of less than 15%. Not only did the teacher's talk dominate the lessons, but the type of questions they asked suggested little opportunity for students to use English extensively.

TABLE 4
Number and Percentage of the Teachers' Questions in the Videotaped Lessons

Schools/ Teachers	Close-Ended Questions		Open-Ended Questions		Total	
	No	%	No	%	No	%
Public						
1	78	96.30	3	3.70	81	100
2	81	97.59	2	2.41	83	100
3	35	83.33	7	16.67	42	100
4	42	24.42	130	75.58	172	100
Average	80.38	75.41	35	24.59	94.5	100

Private						
5	34	100	0	0	34	100
6	38	80.85	9	19.15	47	100
7	63	100	0	0	63	100
8	62	100	0	0	62	100
Average	49.25	95.21	2.25	4.79	51.5	100

Many of the close-ended questions were the typical sort of pedagogic 'display' questions to which the teacher knew the answer, such as:

- 'What does "made-to-order" mean?' (T1)
- 'What is the tense of "They believed"? What's the tense of "believed"?' (T5)
- 'Everything was a blur. What does "blur" mean?' (T8).

In the private school, only one teacher asked a few open-ended questions, such as 'Why do you think that the owner of the room is a writer?', 'In which part of the world do you think the house is located?' 'Why do you think that this house is in England?' and so on. Despite the teachers' general endorsement of child-centered learning, the very high proportion of such questions is not indicative of a student-centered approach in either school, as both the questions and the responses are directed by the teacher, and those responses are, by their nature, extremely limited in extent. The exception to this is T4, who indicated in her essay that she wanted the students to try out the language; over three-quarters of her questions in the recorded lesson were open-ended, which does suggest that she attempted to get more than minimal verbal responses from her students.

Learning as an Active Process

Whole-class teaching was typical in every lesson, consisting mainly of sentence construction, translation and drills. For example, both of the observed lessons by T5 proceeded with identical stages. They started with home-work checking, by which he asked the whole class, *'What is the entry*

word?, *'How do you call []?*, and so on. Then, he deductively presented new concepts of dictionary, for example, *rhymes, syllables, guide words and multiple entries*. The teacher asked the class to do two fill-in-the blank exercises in groups. Students did not move around, but did them individually. Then, he called students to read aloud their answers individually. The teacher reviewed a concept taught in the previous class (phonetic symbols in the first lesson, and context clues in the second). The class did a review exercise in the same way as they did the former exercise. The classes ended with checking attendance and collecting assignments. Consequently, when not responding to display questions, students' talk was generally formulaic, de-contextualized and non-creative, as may be illustrated in the following transcript of a recorded lesson extract:

Extract A (T5/Lesson 2)

- 01 T: Next, practise in pairs. We're going to do the dialogue in pairs.
Say, between Jiraporn and Weeraya. Weeraya is B. Jiraporn is A.
Give it a try. Stand up. It's a speaking practice.
- 02 S1: What happened?
- 03 S2: They say there was a tornado.
- 04 S1: What was destroyed?
- 05 S2: They say a whole town
- 06 T: Let's try another pair. Duangjai and O-pat. Try 'A volcano
crashes St. Peter's Church.'
- 07 S3: What happened?
- 08 T: Then, what should you say? (asking Duangjai)
- 09 S4: They say...
- 10 T: Just copy the sentence down.
- 11 S4: They say a volcano crashes St. Peter's church.
- 12 T: Hang on. Just now 'They say' is in the present tense, but the
event 'crashed' happened in the past, and should end with an -
ed, 'crashed St. Peter's church. O-pat, continue.
- 13 S3: What was destroyed?

14 S4: They say a St. Peter's church.

15 T: They say St. Peter's Church.

Given the infrequency of student talk compared to teacher talk, and the prevalence of controlled practice such as the above, it is hard to consider that, despite the teachers' general approval of a communicative approach and the students' learning by doing, the students were much engaged in the co-construction and exchange of meaningful messages. However, it may be said that the teachers were consistent with the views expressed in their essays that practice and accuracy should precede fluency.

Error Correction

There was a heavy focus in the majority of the lessons on making the students understand grammatical forms, and to use them accurately. As shown in the above extract (turn 12), students' errors tended to be corrected instantly. Explicit correction by the teachers dominated the treatment of errors in the public school, while peer correction and students' self-correction were more frequent in the private school. The following extracts illustrate these three types of error treatment; firstly, explicit correction by one of the teachers in the public school:

Extract B (T4, lesson 2):

01 Ss: A old man.

02 T: It must belong to an...an...Don't answer like Year 1 students do.
It must belong to an old man

The following brief episode illustrates a teacher in the private school prompting self-correction by a student. Here, the teacher's speech is in Thai.

Extract C (T5, lesson 1)

01 Ss: He asked me if I am a good girl.

- 02 T: *The tense is past!*
03 Ss: He asked me if I were a good girl.
04 T: *Why were? It isn't unreal.*

Another teacher in a private school classroom sought to elicit peer feedback before providing her own. In this extract, the student was required to provide an example of reported speech:

Extract D (T6, lesson 1)

- 01 S: 'She doesn't know how often he plays sport,' and 'I ask him how often he played sport.'
02 T: (Asking the whole class) Are they correct?
03 Ss: (The class objected that the verb 'played' in the second sentence should be 'play' due to the tense of the main verb 'ask').

As was seen in the teachers' essays, they had somewhat divergent views about feedback on oral errors – most holding that all mistakes should be corrected: some thought that it was important to check mistakes immediately, as indicated in the three extracts above, while others felt it better not to interrupt the students' speech. Since there was so little evidence of students working together interactively, it is not possible to evaluate or even describe the teachers' reactions to student errors in communicative tasks.

Teacher and Student Roles

On the whole, the students in both schools played passive roles most of the time, and were active speakers only when required: only very rarely did they initiate exchanges with the teachers. Rather than facilitate communicative learning, the teachers generally adopted the roles of authoritative informants; for example, in one recorded lesson the teacher used the following words and phrases repeatedly: passive voice, past participle, agent, subject, doer, receiver, that-clause, main-clause, conjunction, past simple, noun, present

perfect, question words, adjective, prefix, and suffix (T5). The teacher-student relationship was rather formal in the public school, and teachers sometimes appeared hostile when dealing with misbehaving students, as in such expressions as, 'I told you to look at the picture. What're you looking at? Look at the picture only. Don't do anything else. Hurry up!' (T4). Private school teachers, on the other hand, tended to deal with misbehaving students more congenially; for example when one teacher made the following comments in Thai 'You have come so far, so I would like to see you carry on studying. Please don't be bored or discouraged' (T6). There was also a greater sense of familiarity in the private school: The private school teachers tended to use more informal language and often addressed students as 'daughters' or 'sons', whereas most of the public teachers called them 'students'. Teachers in this school generally praised students more readily than in the public school, but there were occasions when students were rebuked, as in the following extract from the same teacher as above, where the entire exchange took place in Thai:

Extract E (T5, lesson 1)

- 01 T: As I always tell you, teachers in public schools don't need to push their students all the time. Students there motivate themselves to read and study. Do you do like they do? You can just stare at your book, but not understand what it says.
- 02 S: I can.
- 03 T: If you can, explain this part to me then.
- 04 S: Which one?
- 05 T: This one 'Read and Study'. Read and tell me what you understand. Stand up. Stand up, please.

On the whole, it can be said that these teachers, both as a group and individually, put into practice their various, and sometimes differing, attitudes regarding their classroom roles. They sought to motivate their students by their authority, judgment and, sometimes, familiarity: the latter

never, however, diminished the social distance that they considered appropriate in the light of the wider socio-cultural *mores*. It is difficult to say whether the relationship they sought and adopted with their students actually facilitated, rather than hindered, the active and communicative interaction among students deemed appropriate to CLT.

Teachers' Rationalizations

Most of the teachers in this study admitted that they had to use more transmission methods than they actually wanted but mentioned a number of factors that routinely constrained their practice. These limitations were largely noticeable in their teaching, and were emphasised by the teachers during the formal conversations following the observations.

Administration-related constraints were major constraints, which included the national curriculum, prescribed by the Ministry of Education, the schools' policies, inadequate time for delivering a fixed content, low incentives and large classes (particularly those in the public school). Two teachers clarified the issue: 'certainly, Thailand is in the period of communicative approaches. Therefore, teaching should follow this approach from a young level. It's not that once this theory was introduced, everyone could immediately use it.' (T7); and 'in the west teachers may teach 9 hours a week, but Thai teachers do at least 18 hours..., they have few opportunities to search for new knowledge. And another thing is that teachers are lowly paid.' (T8)

Material constraints involved a scarcity of resources, namely teaching aids and well-equipped language classrooms, as one of the public school teachers maintained 'it depends on the availability of resources as well... We don't have enough classrooms for all students in the whole school. So there are few classrooms specifically for language learning, for classrooms are for every subject.' (T3)

A content constraint was concerned with outdated teaching content which was not interesting to students or content with cultural differences incomprehensible for students: 'one disadvantage is that it's easy for Thai learners of EFL to forget what they have learnt due to the use of Thai as the main language in the country.' (T3)

Student constraints involved their familiarity with transmission modes, their inactive behavior, and their lack of motivation to learn: 'nowadays, Thai students have to memorize various things, as the school system still gives the primary emphasis on memorization from the kindergarten level till the university level.' (T2)

Teacher constraints included the teachers' excessively casual characteristics, which made students disruptive: 'sometimes I'm too casual, and this makes me unable to control the class.' (T4)

The other constraints reflected situations specific to the Thai context. *Expectation constraints* concerned students' and their parents' preference for language learning goals and approaches that the teachers did not support, particularly grammar learning for exams:

It's the case of parental expectations, and students' expectations as well. They don't pay attention to some particular things, thinking what they need the most is guidance for the university entrance exam. At the same time, I am thinking about how to help them to use the language automatically. I prefer this, but students would like to gain just grammar knowledge. (T1)

Evaluation constraints were accuracy-based school and university entrance exams: when we make tests...for a long time, we have been using multiple choices. Students are like monkeys...I sometimes tell them that they are like monkeys under experiments. It's like everyone can tick A, B, C, and D. So we can't evaluate their abilities or decide who do well and who do poorly.' (T3)

IMPLICATIONS OF THIS STUDY

This was a very small-scale case study involving only eight teachers from two schools in the capital city of Thailand carried out over a limited time period. It cannot claim to be representative, nor can its findings be generalized to other contexts. Nevertheless, the study provides detailed data about some English language teachers' beliefs and practices - a matter which has so far been under-researched in Thai schools. Moreover, the findings substantially confirm empirical evidence derived from investigations in neighboring countries, as reported earlier in this article, that there is a wide gap between the aims and methodologies proposed by the official curriculum statements and what actually happens in school classrooms. Of course, further research needs to be carried out with larger populations and in different educational contexts to more fully explore the fate of intended curricular innovations, and indeed the reality of classroom learning and teaching. In particular, it is necessary to clearly identify what teachers know about, and understand, issues relating to communicative language teaching, or indeed any other proposed curriculum reform. It is also important to appreciate the extent to which teachers are able to implement recommended changes in their classrooms, and the (internal and external) factors that might both assist and constrain them from adopting recommended changes. Such research might both inform, and indeed constitute an important element of professional development programs, which should be sensitive to the working contexts of the teacher, and their state of readiness for curricular change. The chance of successful implementation requires more than optimism, or even the advice of international experts. Perhaps most important is the need for officials in Ministries of Education, and those they delegate to design curricula, to look more closely at classroom reality before embarking upon wide scale educational reforms.

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APPENDIX

TABLE 1
The Teaching Procedures of Public School Teachers

Teachers	Teaching Procedures	
	Lessons 1 (field notes) (Activities/Time Allocation)	Lessons 2 video-recorded) (Activities/Time Allocation)
1	Deductive Presentation of Former Vocabulary Items/ <i>5 mins</i> Listening Comprehension Questions, Understanding Checking/ <i>5 mins</i>	Vocabulary Game/ <i>25 mins</i> Word-meaning Matching Exercise, Dialogue Repetition Drill/ <i>20 mins</i> Homework Assigning: Dialogue Substitution Drill, Passage Reading/ <i>5 mins</i>
2	Homework Checking/ <i>10 mins</i> Group Arrangement/ <i>35 mins</i> Attendance Checking/ <i>5 mins</i>	Deductive Vocabulary Presentation (Signs and Notices)/ <i>25 mins</i> Group work: Fill-in-the-blank and Matching Exercises (5)/ <i>35 mins</i>
3	Conversation Practice/ <i>5 minutes</i> Group Work: Sentence Construction/ <i>30 mins</i> Homework Checking, Homework Assigning: Sentence Construction (Group work) , Understanding and Attendance Checking/ <i>15 mins</i>	Conversation Practice/ <i>5 mins</i> Group Work: Listening Game/ <i>20 mins</i> Group Work: Grammar Rule Induction and Presentation/ <i>15 mins</i> - Homework assigning/ <i>5 mins</i>
4	Sentence Construction and Translation/ <i>15 mins</i> Pair Work: Dialogue Construction, Memorisation and Role-playing/ <i>35 mins</i>	Opinion Questions and Answers, Deductive Grammar Presentation/ <i>45 mins</i> - Homework Assigning/ <i>5 mins</i>

TABLE 2
The Teaching Procedures of Private School Teachers

5	<p>Grammar Pre-test (Multiple Choice)/ <i>25 mins</i></p> <p>Deductive Grammar Presentation/ Fill-in-the-blanks and Matching Exercises (3)/ <i>20 mins</i></p> <p>Deductive Grammar Presentation/ <i>5 mins</i></p>	<p>- Deductive Grammar Presentation/ <i>10 mins</i></p> <p>- Sentence Transformation Drill, Sentence Construction Drill, Pair Work: Dialogue Substitution Drill/ <i>20 mins</i></p> <p>- Homework Assigning: Reading Comprehension/ <i>5 mins</i></p>
6	<p>Deductive Grammar Presentation, Sentence Transformation Game/ <i>35 mins</i></p> <p>Post-test/ <i>10 minutes</i></p>	<p>- Sentence Transformation Drill/ <i>10 mins</i></p> <p>- Deductive Vocabulary Presentation Matching Exercises (2)/ <i>25 mins</i></p> <p>- Homework: Reading Comprehension/ <i>5 mins</i></p>
7	<p>Deductive Grammar Presentation/ <i>10 mins</i></p> <p>Dialogue Substitution Drill, Reordering Exercise, Listening Comprehension Questions Substitution (writing) Drill Listening Comprehension Questions/ <i>35 mins</i></p> <p>Homework Assigning: Substitution Drill (writing)/ <i>5 mins</i></p>	<p>- Pre-test (Questions and Answers)/ <i>10 mins</i></p> <p>- Listening Comprehension Questions and Group Work, Dialogue Substitution Drill/ <i>35 mins</i></p> <p>- Homework: Reading Comprehension/ <i>5 mins</i></p>
8	<p>Homework Checking: Questions and Answers/ <i>10 mins</i></p> <p>Deductive Knowledge Presentation: Questions and Answers, Group Work: Fill-in-the-blank Exercises (2), /<i>25 mins</i></p> <p>Deductive Presentation of Former Knowledge, Fill-in-the-blank Exercise/ / <i>25 mins</i></p>	<p>- Homework Checking: Questions and Answers/ <i>10 mins</i></p> <p>- Deductive Knowledge Presentation: Questions and Answers Group Work: Fill-in-the-blank Exercises (2), / <i>25 mins</i></p> <p>Deductive Presentation of Former Knowledge, Fill-in-the-blank Exercises/ <i>25 mins</i></p>