

Sustaining Learning

Colloquium Papers

Sustaining Learning

Numa Markee

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Introduction

In my previous address to the participants of Colloquium One, I defined innovative curriculum work as an activity which involves designing, implementing and maintaining qualitative changes in pedagogical materials, approaches and values that are perceived as new by individuals who comprise a formal (language) education system. I further noted at the end of this paper, which essentially offered the outlines of a context-independent framework for understanding innovative curriculum work, that what I called program maintenance is the most crucial aspect of any attempt to promote development, particularly in the context of high profile international aid projects.

It is a sad fact that most such projects ultimately fail (Markee, 1986; Jequier, 1976). We may take some forlorn comfort from the statistic that approximately 75% of all innovations fail anyway (Adams and Chen, 1981), whatever the kind of innovation that is being promoted and whoever the sponsors of the innovation are. But given the enormous amount of effort and human, financial and technological resources that are all too often wasted on international aid projects, we need to take a long hard look at what we are trying to do, since it may very well be the case that aid is in and of itself an inappropriate technology which will simply never be able to promote human development in societies that are so very different from those of Britain, Australia or the United States (see also Phillipson, 1992).¹

I believe that if aid projects are to have any chance of success, we must do some more clarification work regarding what we are trying to do. So, rather than trying to provide some grandiose solutions to problems which the best minds in the international development community have yet to solve after some forty years of experience, I would like to tackle a much more modest question. That is, I want to discuss what types of change change agents can promote and how these different types of change correlate with the idea that there are different levels of innovation (see my address to Colloquium One). Only then can we talk about what we are trying to maintain in an informed manner.

Types of Change

Figure 1 shows that there are four types of change, which we may distinguish on the basis of who recognizes a need for change and who proposes change:

ORIGIN OF THE NEW IDEA

<u>RECOGNITION OF THE NEED FOR CHANGE</u>	INTERNAL to the social system	EXTERNAL to the social system
INTERNAL: Recognition is by members of the social system	I. Immanent change	II. Selective contact change
EXTERNAL: Recognition may be by change agents outside the social system	III. Induced immanent change	IV. Directed contact change

Figure 1: Types of social change (Rogers and Shoemaker, 1971:8)

Self-motivated, self-perpetuating innovation is the goal of all development work (Jequier, 1976). Thus, if we posit a continuum of change where internally-induced change is recognized as inherently more desirable than externally-induced change, then we can use INTERNAL as a basic characteristic of lasting change and use a +/- notation system to distinguish between different categories of change.

Immanent change is INTERNAL +/+. That is, it occurs when the person(s) who recognize a need for change and who propose solutions to a perceived problem are all part of the social system in which the innovation is to diffuse. It is the most frequently discussed type of change in the education literature on curriculum development (perhaps more as an ideal to be achieved than as wide-spread, attested practice), since this type of change allows teachers to act as internal change agents. Potentially, it also allows instructors to own the innovations they design and implement (see Stenhouse, 1975; Nicholls, 1993; Rudduck, 1991).

Induced immanent change is INTERNAL -/+. It occurs when outsiders identify a problem within a social system but insiders develop the solution to the problem. This typically happens when a professional consultant is invited to diagnose the problems of an (educational) organization and helps system members to devise their own solutions (see Kennedy, 1985 for an example of this in second language teaching aid work).

Similarly, selective contact change is INTERNAL +/- . It occurs when insiders select an innovation that comes from outside their social system. For example, the decision by some of the Teaching Assistants in the innovative curriculum development/teacher education project I direct at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC) to use software programs originally designed for native speaker/writers of English with their ESL students is an example of this type of change.

Finally, directed contact change is INTERNAL -/-. It occurs when outside change agent(s) introduce new ideas or practices into a social system in order to fulfill goals which they (rather than the intended users) have determined. Thus, my decision to use the ESL service courses as a laboratory for curriculum development/teacher education at UIUC is an example of directed contact change, in that the Teaching Assistants did not have any say in this matter.

Before I discuss how this continuum correlates with the idea that there are different levels of innovation, it is worth noting that the distinction between inside and outside change agents (as, for example, in immanent change and directed contact change) is not always as clear in practice as it is in theory. For instance, in my position as program director of the UIUC ESL service courses, I am both an insider and an outsider. I am an insider in the sense that I am constantly involved in the on-going administration and development of these courses. So it is ultimately to me that Teaching Assistants come most frequently for assistance and advice about any problems they might encounter in their teaching. This means that we share a lot of assumptions about how the service courses work, assumptions which are not necessarily common or shared knowledge for other UIUC faculty members.

But I am also an outsider in relation to the Teaching Assistants as a social group, in the sense that the Teaching Assistants and I have different statuses in the university, which is a function of different levels of education, professional sophistication, age and experience. Consequently, we have different responsibilities, aims and aspirations. Indeed, we also have different perceptions of what the service courses are for and how and why they function as they do. This somewhat ambivalent situation poses both problems and opportunities. However, due to lack of space, I will have to leave these issues for another day.

How, then, does the continuum of general types of change correlate with depth of pedagogical innovation and development? I interpret directed contact change to be the most immediate way of promoting development; but its reliance on external reasons and change agents for innovating results in a rather shallow level of development. This is shown by the -/- valency of the category INTERNAL -/-. Consequently it is equivalent to promoting the use of new materials in the context of promoting educational change. When necessary, it is most appropriate to use this type of change at the beginning of a development effort.

Induced immanent change and selective contact change represent a more significant, though still intermediary level of innovation and development. This is captured by the mixed valencies of both types of change which comprise the category INTERNAL -/+ or +/- . These types of change occur during that period of development when users are still experiencing difficulty acquiring the "significant new skills" which Fullan (1982:247) speaks of. Consequently, adopters are still somewhat dependent on others for help and support in implementing innovations. This type of change corresponds in an educational context to the use of a new approach.

Finally, contrary to Henrichsen's (1989:3) claim that immanent change "is perhaps the simplest type", and despite the fact that this is the most popular type of change in the educational literature, I would like to argue that this type of change is in fact the most difficult to implement. I assert this because it is important to recognize that teachers must possess a considerable amount of knowledge, skill and autonomy to implement immanent change successfully. This is clearly not something which we can take for granted. As Rudduck (one of the major proponents of this type of change) candidly acknowledges:

In our efforts at change I think that we have generally underestimated the power of the existing culture of the school and classroom to accommodate, absorb or expel innovations that are at odds with the dominant structures and values that hold habit in place. We hear how novel features of innovations are blunted in an effort to fit them into established patterns of practice...While some individual schools have managed to transform themselves, there seems little evidence across schools of initiatives surviving that have successfully challenged the existing framework or values and teaching styles (Rudduck 1991:28).

Thus, if teachers successfully engage in this kind of change, this behavior suggests that they have reduced their levels of vulnerability (Goulet, 1971) or, to use Fullan's (1982) terminology, restructured their fundamental beliefs about teaching to such an extent that they are free to contribute to the maintenance of a program as a matter of course. Thus, high quality change of the INTERNAL +/+ variety is essentially what we aspire to achieve; it is not an entry-level behavior for new teachers. This type of change is equivalent to teachers changing their fundamental pedagogical values.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have outlined how four different types of change (immanent change; induced immanent change; selective contact change; and directed contact change) may be regarded as a continuum of change types. According to this classification, directed contact change is the most immediate way of promoting development and is equivalent to promoting the use of new materials in an educational context. Induced immanent change and selective contact change are intermediary forms of change in terms of their relative desirability and correspond in an educational context to the use of a new approach. And finally, immanent change is the most sophisticated (and most desirable) type of self-motivated change, which is equivalent to teachers changing their fundamental pedagogical values.

Partly due to lack of space and partly deliberately, I have not said anything about how these different types of change occur. If this were generally known, the problem of maintenance in international development would not exist. Before this session is finally opened up for discussion, during which we will undoubtedly have occasion to address this very issue, I would like to conclude my remarks by saying that there is room for all the types of change I have identified in international development work. However, the trick is to promote the appropriate mix of change. In my experience, whether as a KELT officer in the Sudan or in my latest incarnation as Language Czar of the UIUC ESL service courses, this may well be akin to trying to find the Holy Grail.

NOTES

1. For a possible counter-example to this claim, see the evaluation of the Brazilian ESP Project by Celani et al. (1988) and the analysis of this project by Alderson and Scott (1992).

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Sustaining Learning: A Learner's Perspective

Anita L. Wenden

York College
City University of New York

From an organizational perspective, ensuring the sustainability of learning means, in part, seeking to develop programs that are capable of operating autonomously, i.e. of sustaining their teaching/learning task, once the consultant or trainer leaves. Underlying this view, if it is a teacher training program, is the assumption that English language learning needs will be met by well-trained teachers. If the program is directly responsible for language training, i.e. does not train teachers, as in the case of ESP programs, for example, it is further assumed that participation in the program's courses will be adequate to sustain learning.

An alternative view on the question of sustaining learning would consider the learner's perspective. Such a view, to be taken here, seeks answers to questions regarding (1) how language learners can maintain the language skills acquired in a language program and (2) how they can continue to learn on their own outside the classroom. This analysis raises questions about how we teach and what we teach.¹

Maintaining Acquired Language Skills

The first of these questions is methodological. It is concerned with our approach to language training -- how we teach. That is, how can learners be helped to acquire language skills so that, once learned, they will continue to use these skills? and apply them appropriately in different contexts? How can the gains made during a language program be sustained? Pointing to one measure of successful teaching, these questions refer to the issues of maintenance and transfer of learned skills. Insights from intervention research, which investigates how to help learners acquire and use learning strategies, has distinguished five guidelines used in strategy training which enhance the likelihood of maintenance and transfer. These might also be applied with benefit to task design in language training.

First of all, research has shown that strategy training should be informed. It is not sufficient simply to tell learners what procedures to follow to complete a task (e.g. find words you don't understand; guess their meaning). For learners to continue using the strategy, they need to be made aware of the significance of the strategy they are told to use. They need to discuss why they are using a particular strategy and when or where it can be used. When a self-control component is built into training, students are led to monitor their use of the strategy. In this way, they become aware of the difficulties they encounter in using it and learn how to remediate them. Self-control training also requires learners to evaluate the outcome of strategy use and so to determine a strategy's utility.

Furthermore, insights from strategy training has led to the conclusion that informed and self-control training is not sufficient. In learning to use a strategy and to apply it in different contexts, it is also necessary for learners to deliberately seek the relationships between the contexts in which the strategy is applied. Therefore, reflective training requires learners to consciously seek such connections between a prior learning task and a new one so that they can mindfully discover for themselves where it is appropriate to apply the new learning strategy.

It has also been found necessary for learning strategy training to be contextualized. Strategies must be presented and practiced in the context of the subject matter content and/or skill for which they are appropriate. Nor should learners be left on their own while learning it. Learning should be interactive. Learners need the presence of a teacher who can give them feedback on their efforts. (Of course, it is also expected that the teacher gradually cede control to the learner.)

The research in learning and instruction has demonstrated that when, in the learning of a new strategy, learning tasks take these five mentioned guidelines into account, it is more likely that maintenance and transfer will occur and that learning will be sustained. This kind of deliberate approach has also been suggested for the re-learning of inappropriately acquired skills, and it may be useful to consider their applicability to language learning. In other words, language skills and learning strategies are both forms of procedural knowledge -- knowledge about rules and 'how to' apply them to particular circumstances. In the case of language skills, learners learn 'how to' apply sets of rules to a communication problem and in the case of learning strategies, procedural knowledge is applied to a learning problem.

Therefore, to help learners maintain the gains they make while taking language courses, it may be useful to apply and adapt these guidelines, found to characterize successful interventions in the training of learning strategies, to the development of materials and procedures for language learning. How can language learning tasks be designed so that students are led to consider their significance? to monitor and evaluate their learning? to reflect upon the kinds of communication and linguistic contexts in which it is appropriate to use the skills? How can materials and tasks be selected so that the skills are presented and practiced in context? so that there is opportunity for learners to be given feedback on their efforts? Based on a cognitive view of learning that underlies widely used ELT methods, such as communicative language learning, these guidelines could provide insight on a methodological solution to the problem of sustaining learning.

Promoting Learner Autonomy

The second question regarding sustainability of learning, 'what we teach learners' is a curricular question. Here, sustainability goes beyond the need for learners to maintain the gains made while taking a language course to the need for them to continue learning autonomously in their professional and/or educational contexts once they complete the course.

Implicit in the acknowledgement of such a need is the assumption that it is not possible for one or even several language courses to help students acquire all of the skills they will need to function efficiently outside the classroom. This is not a statement about the quality of instruction provided by these courses but, more so, about practical matters related to the nature of learning and the needs of learners.

First of all, the time periods that separate one course or workshop from the next are never quite sufficient to provide for the learning required to achieve pre-identified and emerging learning needs unless they are very specific and discrete. This does not reduce the need for these courses nor question their value. However, it does recognize the fact that learning takes time and that it is not always possible for learners to achieve the level of communicative competence that will enable them to function without difficulty outside the classroom within the time period set aside for a course. Secondly, in setting objectives and outlining tasks, it is impossible to anticipate the many different contexts in which learners' professional responsibilities will place them once they leave. Their needs will change and vary. How, then, can these varying needs be anticipated and addressed?

These practical concerns suggest that language programs include the promoting of learner autonomy among their objectives. Rather than focus exclusively on language learning, programs should include learning tasks that help students learn to learn so that they may continue with their language learning once they leave the classroom. Language training should be complemented by learner training. Moreover, such training needs to go beyond simply allowing students to self-direct selected projects that require them to use English. To fully benefit from such experiences, they need to acquire learning skills and knowledge about the learning process.

Key among the skills required for autonomous learning are learning strategies that enable learners to manage or self-direct their learning. Learners need to develop facility in planning, monitoring and evaluating their learning -- however broad or discrete a task may be. They need to be able to set objectives and select the processing strategies and the resources necessary to achieve them. They must also be able to note when they are having difficulty with their learning and why. Finally, they should be able to evaluate the outcome of their learning -- both of what they have achieved and of the means used to achieve these ends.

Of equal importance is knowledge about the task that is the focus of learning. Learners need to be able to determine the nature of the task and what will be required to complete it in order to plan, monitor and evaluate their learning effectively.² Otherwise, learners may set objectives that are not realistic, and their choice of resources and strategies to implement their plans may not be the most appropriate. Nor will they necessarily realize that they must monitor their learning to note the difficulties they encounter. Finally their criteria for evaluating learning outcomes will be limited and, perhaps, inappropriate. In other words, for learners to be truly autonomous, self-management strategies need to be complemented by task knowledge.

Learning strategies that enable learners to comprehend and store incoming information and to retrieve and apply it as required are also necessary for autonomous learning. These processing strategies are essential to the successful use of self-management strategies. They enable learners to implement their plans and to respond to problems they encounter as they are learning.

Other than learning strategies and task knowledge, learners also need to understand that certain personal factors can facilitate or inhibit learning. While they should not be expected to become learning psychologists, they need to examine and, if necessary, revise and expand their beliefs about those cognitive (e.g. learning style) and affective (e.g. motivation) dimensions of human learning that are relevant to language learning in general and as they apply to themselves (e.g. A special aptitude for language learning is necessary to learn. I don't have this aptitude, so I can't learn.).

Finally, underlying and determining learners' use of learning strategies and knowledge will be their attitudes, i.e. beliefs and feelings, regarding their role in language learning and their self concept. Do they see their future professional involvements as opportunities for ongoing learning? And do they consider it their responsibility to use these opportunities for new learning? Or is it their view that learning cannot take place without a teacher? Then, how do they view their ability as learners? Do they have the confidence that will enable them to actually pursue learning autonomously?

From the learner's perspective, then, ensuring the sustainability of learning means helping students acquire learning strategies and knowledge about the learning process necessary for them to learn independently outside the classroom together with the attitudes that will motivate and sustain their efforts to do so. Incorporated into a curriculum of language skills organized on the basis of the tasks learners are preparing to take on after the language course, these dimensions of learning to learn should promote learner autonomy and so heighten the likelihood that learners will continue to learn on their own in the social, professional, and educational contexts in which they find themselves after they leave a language program.

NOTES

1. While the focus of the discussion will be on the sustainability of language skills, it can be equally applied to teaching skills.
2. See my statement on task based educational approaches for more detail on the components of task knowledge.

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Sustaining Learning

Tony Dudley-Evans

University of Birmingham
England

Most of my experience is with international students at the University of Birmingham in England. These students study at Masters or Doctoral level, usually as part of a development project. I therefore feel justified in discussing these students' ability to sustain learning rather than students on development courses in their own country of which I have very little recent experience.

Students attend either a pre-session course or in-session courses. The former focuses on the study skills traditionally taught on such courses, such as reading, note-taking, listening comprehension and writing a short project while the latter pay considerable attention to the two rather different areas of academic writing and remedial grammar. Other skills such as listening and reading comprehension are taught, particularly in the subject specific courses (Johns and Dudley-Evans, 1980) but the most popular of the general classes offered to all students are Academic Writing and Remedial Grammar.

Most of these courses are taken early in students' careers at the university. The pre-session course by definition precedes the students' entry into their subject course and even on the in-session courses only a minority of the students are actually involved in writing assignments at the time of the class. The majority of students are attending the classes as a preparation for later writing tasks rather than because they are actually writing an essay or a report at the time of the class. So we have the classic ESP/EAP situation that the actual need is a postponed need rather than an immediate need.

So the question that interests me in relation to 'sustaining learning' is what evidence do we have that the students are able to sustain and apply what they have learned in the EAP class when they come to the key academic task of writing their assignments, examination answers and thesis.

We have conducted very little research in this area. The little we have done is to administer a questionnaire to students who had followed the pre-session course six months after the end of the course to see how the experience on their subject course had altered their perceptions of what was useful on the pre-session course. Evaluation of ESP courses, as with all evaluation of ELT programmes, has tended to concentrate on attempting to measure what has been learnt at the end of the course rather than on the long term benefit. Alderson (1992:287) notes the need for 'follow-up studies' but points to difficulties with regard to the 'likely gestation periods' for learning or attitude/behaviour changes as a result of a language education programme' (*ibid*:287).

I can report on no actual research in this area but can offer a few thoughts arising from the academic writing classes and the one-to-one work we do with students who are actually writing an essay or their thesis.

The first is that the work prepares students for an understanding of the expectations of the discourse community, i.e. the detailed analysis and teaching of the conventions of the thesis, essay and academic article, and the specific teaching of relevant lexis for the expression of the various 'moves' used in those genres (Swales, 1990), is absorbed by students and applied to their actual writing tasks. This is not surprising as the teaching materials and the activities set up in those materials both mirror the actual process of academic writing and provide insights into the actual end-products that students have to produce. This much seems consistent with all the literature on motivation in language learning and second language acquisition. Furthermore, the attention paid in the teaching of academic writing to the development of an awareness of the expectations of the discourse community to which the student is 'apprenticed' seems to pay off in terms of students being able to apply what they have learnt in the language course to actual writing tasks. This development of rhetorical awareness is a vital part of the development of learner autonomy. Part of this process is the training of students to look at the ways in which writers of papers express ideas, both in terms of the structuring of the argument and the actual lexis used. It has been suggested (Shaw, personal communication) that students can be encouraged to have a notebook of 'useful phrases' to be used in their own writing.

The more surprising observation I would like to make is that the focus on language form and system in the Remedial Grammar sessions also appears to have a long-term effect on students' writing. To put it very simply, the majority of students do develop an ability to express themselves in clear, accurate English as well as in the appropriate academic style. It is particularly noticeable that where students receive specific instruction designed to correct persistent sentence level errors in their writing in the context of either the Remedial Grammar class or in one-to-one consultations they often do learn to use the correct form. There are, of course, exceptions: students with definite and indefinite article problems rarely seem to be able to master the total system and to claim that students develop the ability to write totally error-free prose would be foolish indeed. Nonetheless, most do make substantial progress in this area.

This would seem to contradict what SLA suggests about learner behaviour, in particular the idea that negative evidence is of no value in L2 learning (e.g. Schwartz & Gubala-Ryzak, 1992). The question is whether what the students have learnt in the classes or tutorials is superficially learnt, applied to the thesis and later forgotten (White, 1992). In other words, have they actually improved their competence or have they developed an 'encyclopedic knowledge' that they use in actual writing (Schwartz, personal communication).

Again, I can provide no evidence on this. I would, however, suggest that EAP teaching, particularly in situations where English is the medium of instruction in tertiary level education, does provide a context that is worthy of the attention of SLA researchers.

Conclusion

I have argued here that the typical EAP situation in Britain does provide interesting data relevant to the discussion of 'sustaining learning'. The attention paid to sensitizing students to the requirements of their discourse community and the extensive use of one-to-one tutorials for students who need help with writing are techniques that are largely used in Britain, USA and Australia but I would argue that they may also be of value in development projects.

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