Resocialisation and Change Implications for Inservice Teacher Professional Development

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Abstract

A sociocultural perspective on teacher education highlights the process of resocialisation (Johnson, 2009) faced by experienced teachers returning to the institutional teaching context following the provision of inservice teacher education and training (INSET). Similar to the initial socialisation of novice teachers, resocialisation involves potential constraints at the level of the institution that teachers may encounter when attempting to implement changes in their classroom practice, and sustain changes in their beliefs and attitudes towards teaching and learning. Such constraints to change may be classroom-based (such as resources and students' needs), and may also involve the practices and expectations of the institution (such as norms, values, and power relationships).

This paper presents findings from a longitudinal inquiry into the process of change in beliefs and attitudes, and change in classroom practice, for experienced teachers of English as a foreign language (EFL) in China, and these are discussed in relation to theories from the research literature. It then makes suggestions about how the process of resocialisation may be mitigated by teachers in a range of institutional contexts, including examples from the research findings which demonstrate ways in which teachers successfully implemented intended changes in their classroom practice. It concludes by recommending methods by which teachers can work within potential constraints present in their institutional teaching contexts.

Keywords: Resocialisation, INSET, China, EFL, teacher change

Introduction

Teachers are likely to take part in professional development activities over the course of their career, including inservice teacher education and training (INSET) courses, which may be designed to improve some aspect of teachers' classroom practice, as well as (or alternatively) to change their beliefs and attitudes about aspects of teaching and learning (Guskey, 2002; Mulford, 1980). The nature of INSET is that it is provided for inservice teachers, and these are teachers who have experience, who work in institutional teaching contexts, and who have existing beliefs, attitudes, and classroom practice. This paper reports findings from a recent longitudinal inquiry into the process of change for experienced inservice teachers of English as a foreign language (EFL) in the context of Chinese tertiary institutional teaching contexts, and an external INSET course in Macau. In particular, this paper reports on the constraints to teacher change in the resocialisation process that teachers experience when returning from INSET to their teaching context in their institutions (James & McCormick, 2009; Johnson, 2009), a process which is likely to reduce teacher change. This paper reports on the implications for teacher change provision of resocialisation, and suggests ways in which any negative impacts may be mitigated by teachers in their institutional teaching contexts.

Inservice teacher professional development

Teacher professional development for inservice teachers is marked by diversity. This may be in the professional backgrounds of teachers (i.e., what and how much teaching experience they have); their ages, educational levels, and qualifications; and the beliefs and attitudes towards teaching and learning that they hold prior to any professional development activities, such as INSET (Benson, 2010; Borg, 2006; Fullan, 2007). It is likely that teachers will come to INSET with different levels of motivation for change, depending on their professional context, and on their perceived need for change (Freeman, 1992; Waters & Vilches, 2001). INSET may take place at any stage of a teacher's career, so the effect of diversity may be intensified if teachers attend INSET from very different backgrounds (Bolam & Porter, 1976).

INSET itself may be in different forms, and be designed for different purposes. A deficit approach presupposes that teachers lack certain skills or knowledge needed for classroom teaching, and thus attempts to fill this gap, typically at the insistence or demand of a school or educational system (Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002; Richards, 2008; Sikes, 1992). A more developmental model of teacher professional development focuses on individual teacher needs, and the possibility of teacher change through reflection, knowledge, and adaptability (Pennington, 1990; Roberts, 1998; Wallace, 1991).

The aim of teacher professional development is teacher change—to change what teachers do, think, and know—and for change that is an improvement over previous practice or knowledge (Bailey, 1992; Richardson, 1996; Roberts, 1998), though this may not be assumed to always be successfully achieved (Rubin, 1978). Innovation diffusion theory (Rogers, 2003) notes how there are stages to the adoption and use of an innovation: knowledge, persuasion to use, intention to use, implementation, and eventual routinisation or institutionalisation. In the context of INSET for EFL teachers, an innovation in classroom practice may be introduced during INSET

(knowledge of and persuasion to use), and teachers make decisions to use it when they return to their institutional teaching context (intention stage). However, any implementation of an innovation—or any change in teaching—only takes place once a teacher is back in their institution, and in their classroom setting (Fullan, 2007; Guskey, 2002; Rogers, 2003).

Resocialisation

The implementation of an innovation from INSET for experienced teachers therefore takes place not during INSET, but afterwards in the institutional context that existed prior to INSET. This return to their institutional teaching context post-INSET has been described as a process of resocialisation (Johnson, 2009), similar to the socialisation process that novice teachers are reported to experience when they finish initial teacher preparation and start teaching in a school or other institution (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2011; Freeman, 1992; Haritos, 2004; Jackson, 1986; Sarason, 1996). "Teachers' knowledge and beliefs are constructed through and by normative ways of thinking, talking, and acting that have been historically and culturally embedded in the communities of practice in which they participate (both as learners and teachers)" (Johnson, 2009, p. 17). In the case of experienced, inservice teachers who participate in INSET that aims to change (and improve) their beliefs and attitudes, or their classroom practice, or both, the institutional context exists prior to INSET, and is the site of any innovation implementation post-INSET.

Resocialisation is likely to have an influence on teachers in various ways:
• the norms of behaviour in the institution (Avalos, 2011; Cuban, 1998; Johnson, 2009);
• the expectations from leaders, colleagues, students, and other stakeholders, on teachers and classroom practice (Hargreaves, 2001);
• the pressures and expectations from the educational system itself, notably high-stakes examinations (Underwood, 2012);
• defining what is quality or successful teaching (Fenstermacher & Richardson, 2005; Korthagen, 2004);
• the nature of the community of practice among colleagues (Borko, 2004; Lave & Wenger, 1991).
These may influence teachers in terms of shaping teachers' beliefs about teaching and learning, managing expectations of classroom practice, and mediating teacher change (Freeman & Johnson, 1998).

Researchers have reported resocialisation as a complex, constraining process on teacher change. Mulford (1980) made a jigsaw analogy—a new shape being fitted into an existing pattern—and Guskey (1989) and (Johnson, 2009) both noted the inherent difficulties and inner contradictions of this post-INSET process. While (Cuban, 1998) argued that schools themselves change teaching reforms, Shulman (1986) noted how collective responsibility in an institution may influence teachers, and Vulliamy and Webb (1994) suggested the teachers may feel loyalty to their institution and so not be willing to change common practices. In addition, the research literature reports how there is uncertainty and risk for teachers changing classroom practice (Cuban, 1993), for they may be vulnerable in their institutional context (Gao, 2008), and a teacher acting alone—a lone ranger (Taylor, 1998)—will be unlikely to sustain change without ongoing support (Pedder & Opfer, 2013).

Recent research findings

The author carried out research in the context of Chinese university teachers attending an external INSET course, and the impact on their beliefs and attitudes, and their classroom practice, one year afterwards. This was a longitudinal case study of a group of seven inservice Chinese EFL teachers from Xinjiang Province, China, attending an 11-week INSET course in Macau, in southern China, from February to May 2012. Case study methodology was used in order to investigate a process from the perspective of the participants in that process, and to provide an in-depth understanding of that process (Chapelle & Duff, 2003; Stake, 2000; Yin, 2003). Data were collected during the INSET course from in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, teaching practicum lesson observations, and field notes (e.g., post-teaching practicum feedback discussions run by the INSET trainers). Data on teachers' beliefs and attitudes towards teaching and learning were additionally collected from a pre-course questionnaire adapted from Lightbown and Spada (2006), which was used again in May 2013 when the author conducted in-depth interviews with all seven teachers in Xinjiang in order to collect data on perceived changes in classroom practice, and sustained changes in beliefs and attitudes. Data were analysed inductively and iteratively—coding, analysis, reflection, memo writing, and so forth—and findings emerged from the interpretation of the data analysis (Merriam, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Wolcott, 1994).

Findings from this research suggest that teachers may not implement intended innovations in classroom practice post-INSET in their teaching contexts due to institutional constraints if:
• there are pressures from evaluation of their teaching (i.e., classroom practice), and a risk of criticism from students or leaders;
• there are a lack of opportunities to use innovations in classroom practice in their classroom settings, for example because the courses they teach have been changed by their leaders;
• teachers' beliefs and attitudes remain incongruent with those of the INSET providers, and the aims of the INSET course, or any change in them is not sustained;
• teachers completed the INSET course without the opportunity to develop the skills necessary to implement innovations in classroom practice (e.g., classroom management techniques), or without the chance to trial and test an innovation during teaching practicum lessons during INSET.

For example, one of the teachers, COL (all names are pseudonyms), when asked about the support she expected from her colleagues when she finished the INSET course and returned to Xinjiang stated that: "The rest of my colleagues have finished this course, but most of them tell me that they won't use the methods that they used here" (COL – Interview 1). Another of the teachers, POE, explained how her beliefs about teaching and learning were at odds with those of her leaders:

"I usually just don't like some kind of teaching style in middle school, because I always think that they input something or force students to do something. So in my class it's very free. You could just sit and answer my question, and you can just put up your hand and ask me any questions. But my administration don't agree with such kind of teaching style. They think that you always control the classroom, and you

always just input a lot of information into your students, and you always just do something like middle school teachers" (POE – Interview 1).

At the same time, findings form the research indicate that a teacher may implement intended innovations in classroom practice post-INSET despite potential institutional constraints if:

- the teacher is already used to change, such as changed roles in their institution (e.g., promotion, or changed courses and students);
- the teacher is already a successful innovator in their classroom practice before INSET, and thus has the skills and confidence to make changes in their teaching;
- the teacher has no high status to risk, or has a high enough status to not be at risk from negative evaluations of changed classroom practice;
- the teacher's beliefs and attitudes are congruent with those of the INSET course, and hence the classroom practice innovations (and associated pedagogical beliefs).

One of the teachers, CAN, explained how she intended to implement more integrated teaching into her classroom practice, and would work around potential constraints. When asked what she would do differently in her Xinjiang classroom setting if she could, she replied: "Integrated skills. Although I cannot change my textbooks, but I still try to make it fun. That's the question I'm thinking about: How can I use integrated skills to teach those texts" (CAN – Interview 3). Similarly, VIN (another teacher) remarked how she had changed her classroom practice after INSET even though lacking the resources in Xinjiang that she had had in Macau: "So I add some pages in my PPT, and sometimes the classroom is not equipped with a projector [so] I just use handouts, make sure there's a copy for each student, or each pair, and let them practise" (VIN – Interview 4).

Institutions control "the organization of opportunity" (Lanier & Little, 1986, p. 561), and findings in the present research show how this may have a negative impact on teacher change if teachers do not have the chance to implement intended innovations in classroom practice. For example, CAN (teacher) had been expecting to teach English major students after the INSET course, for she had been teaching them prior to INSET, and was planning changes in her classroom practice during INSET based on this assumption. However, post-INSET CAN reported that she was teaching non-English major students instead, students with typically lower levels of English and in larger classes. FOX (teacher) was no longer teaching an anticipated business writing class post-INSET, yet had been planning new teaching activities for this class during INSET.

Communities of practice—that is, the colleagues of a teacher, and how they work together to support one another (Borko, 2004; Lave & Wenger, 1991)—may constrain or drive teacher change in their post-INSET teaching contexts. The present research finds that colleagues may be a driver to change if the institution (or department) encourages teachers to collaborate together and to share innovative classroom practices; if teachers are supported in this collaboration and sharing by their leaders; and if teachers feel that that they are able to innovate in their classroom settings without risk. However, communities of practice may constrain intended teacher change if a teacher remains a lone ranger (Taylor, 1998), without collegiate support; if colleagues have not experienced the same INSET as that teacher; and if colleagues have experienced the same INSET but hold negative attitudes towards it.

Moreover, the present research identifies the resocialisation process not just occurring after INSET, that is teachers return to their institutional teaching context. As in the example above from COL (teacher) in which she stated that her colleagues did not consider the INSET course to be useful for their classroom settings, it is clear that the resocialisation process may be taking place before INSET even starts (e.g., COL's negative evaluation of the INSET course before even arriving in Macau), and is taking place during INSET (e.g., CAN wondering about integrating skills in her lessons post-INSET). Therefore, teachers attending INSET are evaluating innovations in classroom practice during the course, basing these evaluations on their known prior teaching contexts, and planning for change (or no change) as a result of these evaluations.

Implications and recommendations

Implications and recommendations relate to institutions, to INSET, and to individual teachers. In order to mitigate the potential negative impact from the resocialisation process, it is suggested that institutions provide consistent opportunities for teachers to innovate in classroom practice following INSET, most simply by not changing classes and courses for teachers between their attendance on INSET and their resumption of teaching. Institutions can also provide the collaborative environment for positive communities of practice in which sharing and mutual support happen. One way may to ensure that there is a suitable weight of numbers—that is, enough teachers have benefited from an INSET programme that is itself appropriate to the teachers and their teaching contexts. In addition, institutions may need to consider how teachers are evaluated—by leaders, colleagues, and students; formally and informally—and to ensure that teachers do face threats to their status in the institution from innovating in their classrooms.

INSET providers should be making efforts to ensure that teachers' beliefs and attitudes are congruent with those of the INSET trainers, and the overall pedagogical approach of the innovations presented during INSET, for incongruence between beliefs and attitudes and classroom teaching innovations is likely to lead to rejection or discontinuation (Ajzen, 2005; Rogers, 2003). Furthermore, teachers need not just knowledge of an innovation, but also the ability to reinvent and adapt that innovation to meet their known (as well as unknown) classroom settings (Johnson, 2009; Rogers, 2003). In addition, follow-up support after INSET is likely to be beneficial, helping teachers mitigate specific constraints in their particular institutional contexts, and providing greater opportunities for effective implementation (Pedder & Opfer, 2013).

At the level of individual teachers, the impact of resocialisation may be reduced by a focus on reinventing innovations to meet local needs and constraints, helping teachers to be effective adaptive experts (Johnson, 2009). This may include providing sufficient opportunities for teachers to trial innovations in non-threatening situations, such as INSET teaching practicum lessons. Teachers also need support post-INSET, as well as the time and resources to enact changes in their classroom practice (Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002; Freeman, 1989).

In the context of the present research, drawing on the findings to support suggested new actions, in May 2014 the author (along with a colleague) was able to deliver a weekend of workshops in Xinjiang for teachers who had attended an INSET course in Macau (over 100 EFL teachers on courses from 2005). This went some way to

providing the long-term support for teachers who are making changes (or intend to) in their classroom practice. In autumn 2014, the Macau training centre ran a special INSET course for teachers from Xinjiang who had already been on the course in 2005 or 2006, and who now had more senior positions in their Xinjiang institutions. This was partly aimed at encouraging the development of more supportive communities of practice in those institutions.

Conclusion

Teachers can and do change, whether change in their classroom practice or in their beliefs and attitudes about teaching and learning (Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002; Fullan, 2007). INSET can provide the means to develop teachers, and can present innovations that represent potential improvements in existing classroom practice. However, INSET is not implementation of innovative classroom practice, and the return of experienced teachers to their institutional teaching context is where innovation succeeds or fails (Guskey, 2002; Johnson, 2009; Rogers, 2003). The process of resocialisation is known to have an impact on teacher change (Johnson, 2009), but can be mitigated by policies and interventions from the INSET providers, as well as from the institutions themselves, and these should be taken into consideration when planning and carrying out teacher professional development activities for experienced inservice teachers, in the context of EFL teachers in Chinese tertiary institutions and beyond.

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