Successful Models of English Education: Preparing our Students for a Multilingual Society

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I. INTRODUCTION

A recent study carried out in Thailand (Segovia & Hardison, 2009) identified a number of key issues in educational reform, including “(a) the economic benefits of globalization as the driving force behind English teaching, (b) concern for teachers’ English proficiency and methodological training, and (c) the disconnect between curriculum policy and classroom practice in terms of teaching principles, referred to as the gap between ‘rhetoric and reality’” (Nunan, 2003, p. 604). Additional issues included the lack of sufficient teacher training, resources, mentoring support, and the cost of further education for in-service teachers.

These findings have important implications for Korea if students are to be prepared for globalization and if reform is to be implemented successfully. Students must be provided with sufficient resources, educational opportunities and competent, qualified teaching staff. Dual language education presents an infrastructure for the development of such resources that has been effective in Canada and Europe: “Perhaps the most important lesson we have learned from past experience with dual language education is that most school-age children are able to acquire two, or more, languages successfully in these programs while mastering the academic skills and knowledge we expect of all students” (Genesee 2008, p. 42).

This presentation suggests how successful European models of language learning (particularly bilingual and multilingual approaches) might be beneficially adapted to the Korean situation, taking into account the specific characteristics of Korean society and its culture, and the need for multilingual global citizens.

Based on a recent fact-finding research trip, the presenter examines successful language learning models in Europe and concludes that a bilingual (as in Finland), or a multilingual (as in Luxembourg) approach to language education is feasible in Korea, and could have tremendous impact in terms of achieving the sort of multilingualism that is already the norm in many developed countries. Such innovation, if implemented on a large scale, would require significant changes in the Korean education system. However, this study suggests that a more gradual approach, along the lines of bilingualism in Canada, might be more successful, allowing time both for the development of effective curricula, and for the training of multilingual teachers. In view of the current atmosphere of reform in Korea, made more urgent by the recent global financial crisis, this research finds that the
The goal of producing a multilingual workforce for the knowledge economy of the 21st century is both realistic and attainable.

The question of the socio-cultural appropriateness of foreign educational models is an important issue, given the danger of adopting concepts, approaches and methods designed for different socio-economic contexts. Such ‘linguistic imperialism’ (Phillipson, 1992; Canagarajah, 1999) is a problem that has particularly affected the field of English as Foreign Language (EFL). This concern was uppermost in the researcher’s mind when collecting data. However, it was also considered that globalization can be a process of sharing and accepting the best that other communities have to offer, that Korean language learners have an aptitude for learning that defies stereotypes (Finch, 2009), and that awareness of the issues involved permits informed and socio-culturally suitable conclusions to be made by those concerned.

The extensively-researched success of bilingual teaching in Europe (Beardsmore, 1993), the USA (Freeman, 2007) and Canada (Genesee, 1988) has promoted the use of English as both learning content and a teaching medium around the world. For this reason, the research focused on successful European models, within a framework of dual language education. The findings are presented as starting points for further reform in Korea. Two of the recommendations of this study are:

1. Improved teacher training and support programs need to be implemented as part of any educational reform in Korea; and
2. Teacher training institutions, when rebuilding their programs to suit the 21st century, should be encouraged to take on contemporary language teaching theories and practices.

II. THE CALL FOR REFORM

If schools are to reflect the “social, economic and political needs of the societies that invest in them” (Kennedy & Lee, 2008), then recent changes in the economies and technologies of the world require corresponding changes in educational policies and institutional environments (OECD, 1996), in order to prepare a workforce that is radically different from that produced by the Industrial Revolution – an event which initiated the ‘factory’ model of education (Rogoff, Matusov, & White, 1996). A number of commentators (Dryden & Voss, 2005; Graddol, 2006) have identified a new revolution in learning, with implications as profound as those following the invention of the printing press. This revolution can be seen in the day-to-day emergence and interaction of a number of mutually influencing factors:

1. The new world of instant information;
2. The new world of interactive technology;
3. The explosion of ‘mass innovation’;
4. The ‘computer in your pocket’ revolution (blogs and social networking);
5. The community revolution (schools as lifelong community learning centers);
6. The sharing revolution (online access to teachers and information);
7. The new open-source world of cooperative, collaborative, co-creativity. (Adapted from Dryden & Voss, 2005, pp. 20-21)

This situation has been described by Ridley (1999) as “The greatest intellectual moment in history” and by Tapscott (1996) as “the dawn of an Age of Networked Intelligence – an age that is giving birth to a new economy, a new politics and a new society.” If such statements are true, then the economic future of East Asian societies depends on a similar educational transformation, involving a fundamental restructuring of schools, from architecture (OECD, 1996) to curricula and teacher training, while maintaining their long-held cultural values.

It is significant that restructuring has already begun in parts of East Asia (Mok, 2006; Feng, 2007; Hoare & Kong, 2008) and official policy on language teaching in Korea is also adapting to global requirements. Bilingual teaching, immersion, and Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) are being permitted in some state schools and the government is taking steps to make positive changes in English education (Oryang Kwon, 2000; Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, 2007a-d, 2008) and in teacher training, a crucial aspect of reform (Cheng et al. 2004, p. 3).

III. EUROPEAN MODELS: THE RESEARCH

In addition to accessing relevant research literature on language teaching models, this research investigated aspects of language teaching in five countries (The Netherlands, Finland, Germany, Luxembourg, and Belgium), covering a range of school types, pedagogic approaches (Bilingual, Multilingual, Immersion, Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL)), and types of student (Kindergarten, primary, secondary, adult). A number of significant observations were made during this research – in terms of the potential they show for adaptation to the Korean educational system.

The results of semi-structured interviews with teachers, students, school principals, university professors and ministry officials, confirmed the findings of Pufahl et al. (2001) that “successful approaches … consider students' first languages as a foundation upon which to build second language proficiency” (Pufahl et al., 2001). In Luxembourg, both German and French are used as a medium of instruction throughout students' school careers to support simultaneous learning of both languages, whereas in immersion or bilingual programs in other countries, primary school children are taught subject matter almost exclusively in a second or foreign language.

It was also noticeable that the status of teachers, their role in the classroom, and their initial training, offer useful models for Korea. In Finland, for example, potential teachers are recruited from among the best high school graduates. Teaching is a highly valued profession and admission to universities, where all teacher education takes place, is very competitive. Teacher-training typically lasts for five years, with two years of practical in-service training in schools. This situation creates a high degree of selectivity and increases the prestige of a teaching degree. Furthermore, “Pre-service training that integrates academic subject studies with pedagogical studies and teaching practice is considered one
of the most successful aspects of foreign language education in several countries. In some countries, including the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, study and work abroad programs contribute to the high level of language proficiency among foreign language teachers” (Pufahl et al., 2001).

**IV. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

This study shows that dual language education can have positive educational outcomes in Korea, with the proviso that “if immersion is to achieve its potential, it is the implementation of immersion programmes, especially teacher knowledge and skills, that must be developed” (Hoare & Kong, 2008, p. 260). Any reform which attempts to adopt and adapt features of models that are successful in other settings must provide an effective infrastructure for implementation, a comprehensive support system, and an informed teacher-training program, in addition to compensatory mechanisms appropriate to the local socio-cultural and economic conditions.

Examination of teaching models in Europe shows a number of desirable results resulting from bilingual models of education, immersion teaching models, European School models and CLIL models: i) student ability to communicate and work in more than one language; ii) high scores on the PISA; iii) appreciation of diversity; and iv) cultural awareness. In addition, this research found that there are a number of features of European language education models that can be adapted to the Korean education system without fear of imperialism or of importing culturally inappropriate practices and assumptions. Based upon the preceding findings and discussions, recommendations for education reform in Korea are offered here.

1. **Educational philosophy.** Hughes (2006) states that the pressing need “is to make schooling, and particularly secondary schooling, work effectively for all, rather than using it as a filtering system, leaving a large proportion of students with a feeling of failure and frustration” (2006, p. 260).
2. **Teacher-training and teacher development.** Teacher training is extremely important if bilingualism is adopted. In the current global situation, traditional methods of teacher-to-student information transfer can no longer deal with the volume of new knowledge which is “is too huge for any possible delivery to students during school years” (Cheng, 2001). It is vital to produce a highly qualified and committed teaching force and make teacher education institutions more effective. Rather than preparing students and teachers to teach only grammar-translation and reading skills (in preparation for multiple-choice tests), teacher-trainers also need to train them how to teach performance skills, conversation strategies, study skills (including self-teaching and emotional learning), pragmatics, and higher-order thinking.
3. **New methods.** Language education must adapt to the changing times, emphasizing learning “as a self-actualizing, -discovering, experiencing, -enjoyable, and -reflecting process, through which students would know how to learn and achieve new knowledge and skills by themselves continuously in a fast changing environment” (Cheng & Chow, 2004, pp. 230-231).
4. **Pre-service teacher-education.** Programs could be expanded to 5 or 6 years and teaching practica for public-school language teachers could be extended from 5 weeks to a minimum of one whole school year. The example of Finland shows that extensive on-site teacher training is extremely effective in producing autonomous, professionally responsible teachers, competent in both theory and practice.

5. **Parents.** Parents are the ultimate stakeholders in any education system, though they are sometimes ignored in favor of more ‘expert’ interests. Communication with parents is vital, at all stages. No attempt at innovation can hope to be successful without parental support and participation.

6. **Successful models of language education in Europe.** Such models, (bilingualism, immersion and CLIL) have potential for contributing positively to the movement for reform that is already taking place in Korea. Jong-Hee Lee (2007, p. 53) has proposed that “it would be appropriate to pursue the track of *coordinate and additive bilingualism* rather than compound and subtractive one,” installing “a *strong type of bilingual education*.”

7. **Choice.** Rather than imposing bilingualism nationwide, parents should be given the choice to send their children to bilingual schools (or not). Teachers should also be given the choice to work in bilingual schools (or not). Bilingual teaching could be installed gradually. Decentralization of educational policy-making could give provincial education authorities the right to set their own standards and requirements, within the bounds of the National Curriculum. Then individual schools could emulate their sisters in Finland by providing dual language programs according to local demand. If such programs proved successful, they could be allowed to expand, providing employment opportunities for the growing number of multilingual teachers. In this way, parents, students, principals and teachers would have the choice of participating in and developing a dual language education model.

8. **Trust.** Trust is extremely important. Teachers need to be highly trained, bilingual, and competent. They must then be allowed to perform their profession as experts. The respect for professionalism and self-direction that lies behind a culture of trust results in an enhancement of standards on the part of teachers and improved achievement by students at all levels.

9. **Bilingual teachers.** Well-trained, multilingual, indigenous teachers are more valuable educational assets than untrained native speakers. Korea has a large bank of bilingual potential teachers – people who have studied abroad and can teach in the L1 (Korean) and the L2 (English). These teachers are the starting point for effective and successful bilingual education.

The above recommendations are offered as a means not only of enhancing and supplementing the significant changes that are already taking place in English language education in Korea (Oryang Kwon, 2000, pp. 75-76), but also of facilitating the sort of paradigm shift that is necessary if the challenges of globalization are to be met and if Korea is to ensure its economic status in the world. The final word is left with the OECD:
The resources devoted to education are among the most important investments that countries and their people make. Modern knowledge economies require a highly skilled workforce, not just an elite, since economic growth is driven by a powerful interaction between increased human competence and the adoption of new technology. (OECD, 2005)

REFERENCES


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Dr. Andrew Finch is associate professor of English Education at Kyungpook National University, Korea and was on sabbatical leave as Visiting Fellow at the Graduate School of Education, Bristol University, England, during 2008. While in Europe, he researched contemporary European language learning models, as well as Korean Heritage Language Learning in the UK. Andrew has seen many changes in education in Korea since he first arrived in 1989 and sees important changes ahead. He has produced a number of publications aimed at empowering teachers as materials designers, assessors and reflective researchers. These can be accessed from www.finchpark.com/courses, along with various teaching and learning resources.