

## Interpreting Continuity and Change in Secondary School English Language Teacher Education in Singapore

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### Abstract

This paper explains how at the institutional level a teacher preparation agency responds to the changes as mandated by the Ministry of Education in Singapore. In particular, it focuses on how the English Language Postgraduate Diploma in Education (PGDE) Programme has been responding to the changes to more effectively prepare pre-service trainee-teachers to teach English Language in secondary schools to meet the requirements of the new *English Language Syllabus* (MOE, 2001a). It briefly describes the requirements for entry into the PGDE (Secondary) English Language Programme and the core courses on the programme. Then it reports on how pre-service training is being carried out on various programmes designed to train secondary school teachers, especially, how the “Pupil Experience (PE)” programme is operationalised as an important initiative to induct pre-service trainee-teachers into the English Language teaching profession in Singapore. Implications of such initiatives are also discussed.

### 1 Introduction

It is widely acknowledged that teacher training or teacher education is pivotal to the success of any education system. However, given that the term “teacher training” is loaded with negative connotations in the sense that it does not really take into consideration how transformation occurs to those receiving training (Deng & Gopinathan, 2003: 51), and that the “training model cannot stand up to the expectations and challenges to teacher preparation created by current new educational initiatives”, I use “teacher education” to embrace a much wider perspective. The reason is obvious. It is through teacher education that important ideologies in education and pedagogy are inculcated in trainee-teachers in the hope that they will become catalysts who will put into practice what has been learned or experienced on the training programme at a teacher-preparation agency. It is exactly for this reason that syllabuses are revised and updated and the teacher preparation agency is expected to implement this mandate. In this sense, change is necessitated by the urgency arising from the policy-making bodies such as the

Ministry of Education (MOE). This is no exception for Singapore (see Ang, 2000; Cheah, 2001, for more information).

Thus this paper outlines how the National Institute of Education (NIE), the sole teacher-education institution in Singapore, responds to the changes as mandated by the Ministry of Education. In particular, it focuses on how the Postgraduate Diploma in Education (PGDE) Programme has been responding to the changes to more effectively prepare preservice trainee-teachers to teach English Language to meet the requirements of the new *English Language Syllabus* (MOE, 2001a). It briefly describes the requirements for entry into the PGDE English Language programme and the core courses on the programme. Then it reports on how pre-service training is being carried out on various programmes, especially, how the “Pupil Experience (PE)” programme (Skuja-Steele, 2004) is operationalised as an important initiative to induct pre-service trainee-teachers into the English Language teaching profession in Singapore. It concludes with a discussion of some of the implications that such initiatives might have for TEFL (teachers-of-English-as-a-foreign language) training in China and elsewhere.

Initial teacher-training is really pre-service preparation in its real sense, as trainee-teachers have never been prepared in any way that would familiarise them with principles of learning and teaching as well as the school context, of which pupil characteristics, class dynamics and school culture are a part. Trainee-teachers’ understanding of these factors surely plays an important part in their transition and repositioning process, especially their role change from trainee-teachers to that of full teachers. Liberman and Miller (2000) have identified seven transitions that are needed by trainee-teachers to make “the new social realities of teaching.” These range from individualism to professional community, from teaching at the centre to learning at the centre, from technical work to enquiry, from control to accountability, from managed work to leadership, from classroom concerns to whole school concerns, and from a weak knowledge base to a stronger, broader one. It follows from the above that there is now a greater demand for better quality teachers and their role is going to change in profound ways. Indeed, these are important elements that should not be forgotten when I examine initial teacher preparation.

In the word of Reynolds (1992), beginning teachers, including, of course, those in training, should have four characteristics, or at least, they should be equipped with such characteristics after completing their training at a training agency:

- 1) knowledge of the subject matter
- 2) disposition to find out about students and schools and the skills to do so
- 3) knowledge of strategies, techniques and tools to create and sustain a learning environment/community, and the ability to employ the above
- 4) knowledge of content specific pedagogy

Therefore, in initial teacher training, it is pivotal that some of the ideas Liberman and Miller (1994) and Reynolds have listed should be taken into consideration. This approach to thinking about initial teacher education is also one of the bases upon which changes in teacher education have happened.

Moreover, metaphors abound in the field of teacher education. These metaphors are endowed with various cultural missions. Not unexpectedly, the Singapore Minister of Education, RADM Teo Chee Hean, similarly used varied metaphors to drive home the need for schools to be centres of educational innovation at the graduation ceremony held for the Leaders in Education course for potential principals on October 23, 2001. He said,

Innovation is no longer simply encouraged; it has to become an imperative of all professional endeavour in business, government and education... A new mindset and new strategies are needed to foster innovation, and all organisations, especially schools, will have to respond to the imperatives of innovation at work around us ... Schools are knowledge organisations.. they must therefore serve as catalysts for learning and discovery, and the wellsprings of the knowledge society. Innovation in education can take place in school organisation, use of technology, or physical organisation of instruction. This may involve discovering better ways to integrate new technologies into conventional teaching; or trying out models different from conventional one-teacher classrooms such as teaching laboratories, team teaching, and multi-disciplinary teaching; or introducing new international collaboration projects that instil greater breadth of outlook among students and teachers. Schools can also be innovative in how they form close school-community linkages with employers and corporations, and how they leverage on their stakeholders as an important extension of the school.

Deng and Gopinathan (2003), Gopinathan, Ho and Tan (1999), and Wong and Goh (2002) echo the Education Minister's message equally well. They have rightly pointed out that teacher education in Singapore plays a key role in the country's efforts to become an education hub in Asia so that education per se can become a marketable product. Wong and Goh's (2002) report on the NIE's recent initiative, that of a tripartite model as a collaborative endeavour among the three bodies involved in teacher education: MOE, NIE, and the schools, is an illustration of what a success story teacher-training can be in such a tiny but efficient education system. According to them this new model has made it possible for all the major parties to be directly engaged in the teacher education process, with trainee-teachers being in the centre of the enterprise. In the words of Wong and Goh (2002: 201), the tripartite Partnership Model has the following objectives:

- 1) To better prepare the trainee-teachers to take on the challenges of the "real" classroom by involving schools much more in teacher training and preparation.

- 2) To strike a better balance between the theoretical knowledge and the practitioner knowledge received by the trainee-teacher.
- 3) To enable NIE to train more trainee-teachers to meet the demands of teacher shortage as projected by the MOE, without comprising on standards, in spite of staff and facility constraints.

This new initiative has also brought new challenges to us English Language teacher educators in that we will have to prepare our students well before they are posted to schools for practicum-related experiences, where school teachers work as Cooperating Teachers (CT) in their capacity as on-the-spot supervisors. All these efforts are aimed at improving the quality of teacher education. In the following sections, I will present an overview of secondary school teacher education at NIE, followed by a more specific delineation of the English Language Postgraduate Diploma in Education (PGDE) Programme, with particular reference to the Pupil Experience component conducted by faculty members of the English Language and Literature Department.

## 2 Overview of Secondary School Teacher Education in Singapore

Secondary school teacher education programmes offered at the NIE are of two types: one at the diploma level and the other at the postgraduate level. This ties in well with the subjects offered in schools. All graduates from secondary school teacher training programmes are trained to teach two subjects, i.e., two curriculum subjects, abbreviated as CS in the rest of the text henceforth. There was once a Bachelor of Arts with a Diploma in Education Programme, but when the MOE found that primary schools were in need of teachers less urgently, the BA Programme was suspended. With the competition from foreign universities who have already expressed intent of coming to Singapore to run their outreach or extension programmes, the NIE has re-expressed interest to the MOE in reactivating its single BA (Ed.) degree and double B.A. and B.Ed. degree programmes, both which are expected to be completed within 4 years. However, this new initiative has yet to be granted approval by the MOE, and even if it is, it will not be implemented until July 2005. Therefore, in the following sections, I will focus on both the DipEd and the PGDE programmes.

### *2.1 Diploma in Education*

The Diploma in Education Programme is offered to non-university graduates, who are either “A”-level holders (Singapore-Cambridge General Certificate in Education, Advanced Level), taken by junior college graduates (equivalent to senior middle school graduates in China), or diploma holders (graduates from other tertiary institutions, e.g., graduates from polytechnics). The duration of the programme is two years. Upon completion, the graduates are usually assigned to teach at the lower secondary level (first two years, instead of the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> or the 5<sup>th</sup>

year)<sup>1</sup>. Table 1 shows how the Diploma in Education is structured. The example given below illustrates how trainee-teachers' CS1 and CS2 are combined.

**Table 1** Diploma in Education (Example shown CS2: English Language to Be Completed in Two Years)

<i>Educational Studies (first 3 are Compulsory; one must be chosen from the 19 prescribed electives offered; to save space only 2 are listed here):</i>		<i>Academic Units Awarded</i>
EED100	Introduction to instructional technology	2
EED101	Introduction to learning and teaching	2
EED102	Providing for individual differences in learning and teaching	2
EDD234	Strategies for enhancing pupils' learning and thinking	2
EED238	Teaching and learning with the Internet	2
<b><i>English Language Teaching (Compulsory)</i></b>		
ECE121	ELT at Lower Secondary Level I: Grammar	2
ECE122	ELT at Lower Secondary Level II: Oral Communication	2
ECE221	ELT at Lower Secondary Level II: Reading, Vocabulary and Writing	3
ECE222	ELT at Lower Secondary Level IV: Consolidation of trainee knowledge and skills in interactive teaching environments	2
<b><i>Curriculum Content (Compulsory)</i></b>		
ETE121	Introduction to the English Language I	2
ETE221	Introduction to the English Language II	2
ELE121	Use of English in Teaching (Written communication)	2
ELE222	Use of English in Teaching (Oral Communication)	2
<b><i>Language Enrichment and Academic Discourse Skills (LEADS) (Compulsory)</i></b>		2
<b><i>Teaching Practicum (Compulsory)</i></b>		
EPR120	Practicum I	5
EPR220	Practicum II	9

Source: Based on NIE (2004a)

#### *Example 1:*

CS1: Teaching Music, Art, or Home Economics (no information is given in the table below due to limited space. However, it should be understood that trainee-teachers must take equal numbers of curriculum and academic subjects in any of these three CS1 teaching specializations;

<sup>1</sup> Secondary school students are enrolled in accordance with their academic performance on the annual Primary School Leaving Examinations (PSLE). They are streamed into different tracks on the basis of their aggregate scores: the best go to Academic Express (4 years) and Special Course streams (4 years); only those who do well on PSLE papers on two languages (L1, English and L2, Mother Tongue) are offered Higher Mother Tongue in the Special Course stream in addition to their learning their L1, English. Those who are academically-oriented but fare fairly well are assigned to do the Normal Academic Course (5 years). These three categories of students are basically on the academic track, who, upon graduation from secondary schools, are eligible for entry into junior colleges (JC, a pre-university stage) based on their GCE "O" level results (Singapore-Cambridge General Certificate of Education Ordinary-Level Examinations). Upon completion of the JC studies, they take the GCE "A" level examinations, the results of which entitle them a place in one of the three Singapore universities. Some GCE "O" level takers prefer going to polytechnics before finding employment in society. Those who are not capable of coping with academic subjects are assigned to follow the Normal Technical course (4 years). They go to the Institute of Technical Education (ITE) for vocational training before going into society to get employment.

CS2: English Language Teaching at Lower Secondary, Levels I, II, III (3 different but related modules in connection with language teaching methodology).

## 2.2 Postgraduate Diploma in Education

Candidates who qualify for the Postgraduate Diploma in Education (Secondary) usually have to undergo one year's training. Generally, trainee-teachers are assigned two teaching subjects. For those who specialize in teaching Physical Education and another teaching subject, whichever that subject may be, will have to go through two years' training. Although candidate qualifications vary, most often candidates wishing to take the following combinations must meet the enrollment standard. Candidates can be any of the following three qualifications, Bachelors' degree holders; 2) Masters' degree holders; and 3) Doctoral degree holders, albeit the majority being Bachelors' degree holders. Necessarily, the MOE has set up certain criteria for assigning curriculum subjects (i.e., teaching subjects) to trainee-teachers as shown in Table 2.

**Table 2** MOE-NIE Agreed Criteria for Assignment as Curriculum Subjects (CS) for Trainee-Teachers (English Language and English Literature)

<i>Subjects</i>	<i>MOE-NIE Agreed Criteria for Assignment as CS with Effect from Feb 02</i>
English Language CS1	a) Applicants who majored in English Language, Linguistics or Mass Communication during their university studies; or b) Applicants who have taken English Language for at least ONE year at university level.
English Language CS2	a) BA graduates with only one teaching subject other than EL can be assigned EL as CS2 if they scored at least C6 for General Paper (at 'A' level); or b) Applicants who majored in English Literature or Law at university level; or c) Applicants who scored at least a C grade for English Literature at 'A' level <u>and</u> at least B3 for EL at 'O' level; or d) Applicants with no 2 <sup>nd</sup> teaching subjects but scored at least B3 for EL1 at 'O' level <u>and</u> B3 for General Paper at 'AO' level.
English Literature CS1	a) Applicants who majored in English Literature or Law during their university; or b) Applicants who have taken English Literature for at least ONE year at university level.
English Literature CS2	a) Applicants who scored at least a minimum B grade for English Literature/Literature in English at 'A' level.

Source: Based on NIE (2004b)

### 2.2.1 Pathway through the English Language PGDE (Secondary) Programme

The English Language PGDE (Secondary) Programme exists mainly to serve the purpose of preparing trainee-teachers to teach English Language in secondary schools. In addition to compulsory courses they have to take, trainee-teachers take three courses that are directly related to their teaching of English Language. PCE511 Language Teaching Approaches (42 hours), PCE513 English Language Teaching Issues in Singapore Secondary Schools (36 hours), and PCE514 Language Study (36 hours), which is a recently revamped course in

response to the changes in the new *English Language Syllabus* (MOE, 2001). PCE511 and PCE514 are offered in the first semester, whereas PCE513 is offered in Semester II. As an important part of PCE511, Pupil Experience precedes the commencement of the major content of the course. The allocation of time to Pupil Experience (24 hours) and the teaching method components may vary slightly during the blocks, but six hours per week is the amount of time you can expect to spend for each module in each semester. Pupil Experience is a six-week programme involving preparation for teaching at the NIE and team teaching in schools on six Saturday mornings. All English Language trainee-teachers will study all the methods components which are spread in two semesters under the course codes PCE511 and PCE513, totally 72 hours. The components are the Teaching of Oral Communication (Listening & Speaking), Reading, Writing and Grammar. Table 3 shows the overall structure of the English Language and English Literature PGDE (Secondary) Programmes. The programme handbook also clearly explains all this (see NIE, 2004b). This is also further explained in Table 4.

*Core Modules:* they refer to compulsory modules that must be passed to fulfill programme requirements.

*Prescribed Electives:* they refer to electives that form a certain field of specialisation in a particular subject. They add to the depth and/or breadth of knowledge and skills to be acquired by trainee teachers.

The contents of the Postgraduate Diploma in Education Programme comprise four main areas of study, according to the handbook (NIE, 2004b):

- (a) Education Studies: courses that address general issues in education
- (b) Curriculum Studies: courses that are very subject-specific, i.e., the two teaching subjects
- (c) Practicum: teaching practice which is required of all trainee-teachers
- (d) Language Enrichment and Academic Discourse Skills (LEADS): the component that is aimed at improving the use of oral and written language in teaching, but it is not credited. However, a pass grade is required.

Let me take an example to illustrate how trainee-teachers on the PGDE Programme are assigned two teaching subjects (CS) by the MOE. In Table 4 below, we also see the subjects they have to learn while they are trainee-teachers receiving training at the NIE.

*Example 2:*

CS 1: The Teaching of English Language

CS 2: The Teaching of English Literature

**Table 3** Core Modules, Prescribed Electives and Curriculum Studies Subjects (Teaching Subjects) for Trainee-Teachers Who Are Assigned to Teach *English Language* and *English Literature*

<b>Educational Studies</b> (first 4 are Core and the rest are Prescribed Electives, one of which is required to be selected by the trainee out of 31 modules offered)		<b>No. of Academic Units Awarded</b>
PED513	Instructional Technology	2
PED514	Social Context of Teaching and Learning	2
PED515	The Psychology of Pupil Development and the Learning Process	2
PED516	Teaching and Classroom Management	2
PED553	Teaching Pupils with Behavioural and Learning Problems	2
PED558	The Psychology of Learning and Motivation	2
PED560	Strategies for Effective Thinking and Learning	2
PED563	Understanding and Helping Gifted and Talented Pupils	2
PED565	Understanding and Teaching Creative and Critical Thinking	2
PED571	Advanced Social and Educational Measurement	2
PED577	Achieving the Desired Outcomes of Education through Project Work in Secondary Schools	2
PED583	Schooling in Meritocratic Societies	2
<b>Curriculum Studies</b> (Any 2 combinations as assigned by MOE. An example of combination: English Language and English Literature, as shown below)		
<i>1) The Teaching of English Literature</i>		
PCR511	Approaching Literature: Aims and Approaches	6
PCR512	Writing about Literature and Literature Assessment	2
PCR513	Approaches to Literature (for those who have no background in Literature at the undergraduate level)	2
<i>2) The Teaching of English Language</i>		
PCE511	Language Teaching Approaches (including Pupil Experience)	6
PCE513	English Language Teaching Issues in Singapore secondary schools	2
PCE514	Language Study	3
<b>Language Enrichment and Academic Discourse Skills (LEADS)</b> (Required of all students)		
PCU511	Use of English in Teaching (written and Oral Communication)	0
<b>Practicum</b> ( <i>Compulsory</i> )		
PPR511	Teaching Practicum (9 weeks in schools)	0

Source: NIE (2004b)

Notes:

- 1) Trainee-teachers are required to pass PCU511 and PPR511 to be awarded the PGDE albeit their carrying zero Academic Unit.
- 2) Roughly calculated, 12 hours per semester per course can accumulate to one Academic Unit (AU).
- 3) As will be explained later, PCE511 and PCE513 are basically the same course, spreading throughout two semesters, where the four language teaching areas are covered: The Teaching of (1) Oral Communication, (2) Reading, (3) Writing and (4) Grammar.



### 3 Changes from the Top: *The English Language Syllabus* (MOE, 2001)

As compared with the old syllabus, *English Language Syllabus* (MOE, 1991), the publication of the new *English Language Syllabus* (MOE, 2001) indicates a shift in focus from the top-level policy-makers that English language teaching in Singapore schools has to be revisited. Obviously, this shift was made due to perceived as well as policy-makers' well-recognised neglect of grammar in the preceding syllabus, as discussed in the literature (Ang, 2000; Cheah, 2002). Therefore, the new syllabus has made drastic changes in terms of learning and teaching objectives, expected learning outcomes and the principles of learning and teaching. I explain some of the key features in the following sections with reference to the new *English Language Syllabus* (MOE, 2001a).

#### *3.1 Areas of Language Use*

It is obvious that one key feature is a focus on appropriate and effective communication in internationally acceptable English that is grammatical, fluent and appropriate for purpose, audience, context and culture. In terms of teaching, it is mandated that teachers should teach pupils how the language system works, how language conventions can vary according to *purpose, audience, context and culture*, and how to apply this knowledge in speech and writing in both formal and informal situations. The three-level guide emphasizes critical reading and literacy skills in relation to purpose, audience, context and culture. This emphasis promotes cultivating pupils' interest in approach text in that learners will have to read at the literal, interpretive/inferential and evaluative/critical levels.

#### *3.2 Three Major Areas of Language Use*

The three areas of language use refer to 1) Language for information, 2) Language for literacy response, and 3) Language for social interaction. These three major areas cover almost all the aspects pertaining to language teaching and learning, giving emphasis not only on language learning and teaching per se but also on how language is used in accordance with purpose, audience, context and culture, as mentioned above.

#### *3.3 Learning Outcomes: Text Types and Grammar*

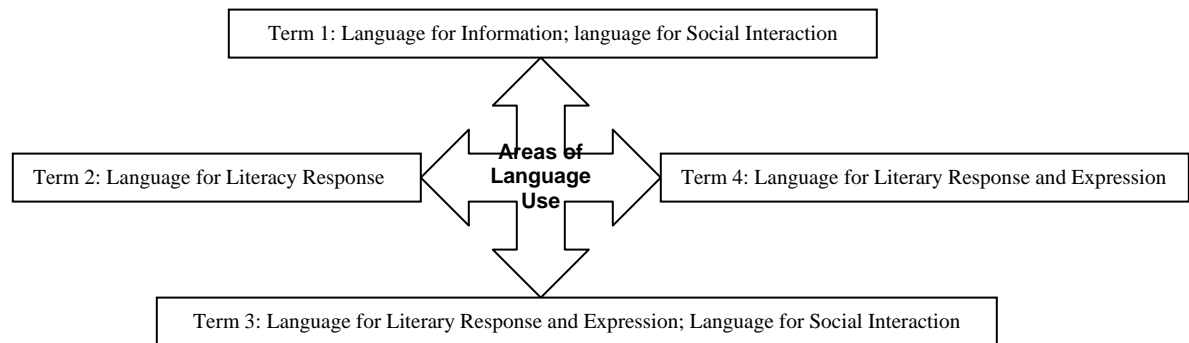
Focus on language skills, strategies and attitudes are clearly stated in the new syllabus. In this connection, grammar is given its due role that was once neglected in the 1991 English Language Syllabus. Two prominent features relating to language use in its social contexts are 1) Text types and 2) Grammar. However, different from traditional notion of grammar teaching, the teaching of language is realized through language use so that this part of the learning objectives does reflect the three areas of language use and cover a variety of resources, e.g., books, radio/TV programmes, brochures, websites, postcards, instructional

manuals, advertisements, etc. In terms of grammar teaching it mandates grammar has to be taught and it also illustrates how grammatical features and lexical items can be taught in relation to different text types in the context of reading, writing and oral communication. In other words, grammar has to be taught in use and in communication.

### 3.4 Principles of Language Learning and Teaching

In order to smoothly implement the new syllabus, the MOE has published guides that give concrete examples to show how different concepts are represented or expressed in lesson plans. Four skill areas—reading, writing, oral communication, and grammar—are specifically demonstrated to the users, i.e, teachers, of the guides (MOE, 2001b). Learner-centredness dominates the syllabus to a certain extent.

**Figure 1** An Example of Planning According to Areas of Language Use



*Source:* Based on MOE (2004b)

In addition to this, process orientation, integration, contextualisation, spiral progression and interaction are also crucial features. As is well understood, teachers’ planning is essential to the successful implementation of the syllabus. Therefore, the syllabus suggests that teachers plan according to 1) areas of language use, 2) learning outcomes, 3) text types and grammar and 4) theme/topic. We can examine how this planning can be implemented by looking at an example, as shown below.

## 4 Teacher-Preparation Agency’s Response

In order to meet the challenges of the changes mandated by the MOE, the NIE took measures to prepare the trainee-teachers with the new syllabus in mind. I explain how the two relevant courses on the PGDE (Secondary) Programme are structured.

#### 4.1 PCE511/513: Language Teaching Approaches and the Pupil Experience Programme

This course is offered to prepare trainee-teachers with useful methodologies for teaching English Language. Preparation is undertaken for teaching the four language skills: Oral communication (listening and speaking), reading, writing and grammar, spreading in two semesters. Throughout the course various ideas are incorporated into the four skill components to reflect the changes as mandated by the syllabus. Theoretical input usually precedes practical-oriented experiential learning activities in the form of tutorials. It is hoped that at the conclusion of the method components they will be able to stand on their own feet in the future. However, we found that even with the preparation of this kind, trainee-teachers still feel a lack of connectivity when they realise that they are learning the methods without any pupils in the classroom to try out with. Therefore, an important component of the course, Pupil Experience (PE) component was initiated to bridge the gap between theory and practice in reality in the very beginning of the course, lasting for six weeks. So the whole English Language PGDE (Secondary) Programme can be summarised in the following table.

**Table 4** Curriculum Structure of the English Language PGDE (Secondary) Programme

First Semester	PCE511 Language Teaching Approaches (I)		PCE514 Language Study
	<i>Pupil Experience</i> 4 hrs/week (24 hours)	Teaching Oral Communication 2 hrs/week (18 hours)	Grammar Study 2 hrs /week (24 hours)
	Teaching Reading 6 hrs/week (18 hours)		
Second Semester	PCE513 Language Teaching Approaches (II)		
	Teaching Grammar 6 hrs/week (18 hours)		
	Teaching Writing 6 hrs/week (18 hours)		

PE was initiated as an indispensable component of English Language teacher education in the early 1980s at the then Institute of Education and has been revised and updated several times. As a replacement of “micro-teaching”, it has been in operation since then at the newly revamped National Institute of Education, an institute of the Nanyang Technological University.

In terms of the contents and the structure, PE comprises six 2-hour preparation sessions at the NIE and six corresponding teaching sessions in the school. In the preparation sessions the teacher-educator and the trainee-teachers discuss issues ranging from classroom management to the actual delivery of English Language lessons (Zhang, 2003). However, the teacher-educator acts as a facilitator at most, i.e., learning takes place in a constructivist framework

for trainee-teachers (Zhang, 2004b). It is sequenced in such a way that trainee-teachers are expected to realise the rationale by which all the sessions are prepared and conducted. A chronological and sequential breakdown of the PE programme shows that the following are typical:

- getting to know your pupils;
- teaching listening;
- teaching reading;
- teaching oral communication;
- teaching writing; and
- teaching grammar (inclusive of a PE completion party for the class) (see Skuja-Steele, 2004, for details).

To a great extent, just as Skuja-Steele (2004: 2) explains, “PE is a sheltered introduction to the realities of the classroom. It will help you [trainee-teachers] to better understand lesson planning and presentation and your pupils as learners.” It is through such a sheltered approach that trainee-teachers are expected to hone skills in collaborative learning and cooperation in the classroom as students themselves. Learning about pupils as individuals—their interest, motivation levels and attention spans, becoming familiar with a basic plan for a unit of work, practising preparing and presenting lessons, learning how to observe and analyse teaching events in the classroom, becoming aware of common teaching practice, trouble-spots and time management problems and beginning to reflect professionally on effective teaching strategies for estimating whether pupils are learning, and what are expected of all the trainee-teachers at the conclusion of the PE programme. In sum, in preparing trainee-teachers for PE, teacher-educators try to help them understand what the syllabus requires them to do and what they are expected to achieve by teacher-educators.

### *5.2 Augmenting Trainee-teachers’ Content Knowledge to Keep Up with the Changes*

At the institutional level, as a training agency, we are entitled to negotiate with the MOE on how courses can be developed to improve trainee-teachers’ knowledge that is necessary for them to take our training programme confidently. PCE514: Language Study was designed for this purpose. As is stated in the programme handbook (NIE, 2004b), the course focuses on various aspects that are important to trainee-teachers’ readiness to teach English Language in secondary schools. It highlights linguistic knowledge such as interaction between form, meaning and use in language description, elements of context and genre which construct meaning in texts as well as some pedagogical knowledge of how these theoretical positions can be applied to the analysis of texts from secondary EL textbooks. It also foregrounds theoretical approaches to understanding language learning, psychological and social factors that influence language learning, notions of accuracy, fluency and appropriacy that are applicable to analysing learner errors, systematic differences between standard and non-standard English in learner language, evaluating texts (oral and spoke texts) produced by

secondary school pupils, knowledge of grammatical and other metalanguage terms used in the new *English Language Syllabus* (MOE, 2001a).

In order to do so, examples of the curriculum text types are discussed in class so that trainee-teachers will be able to build upon what is covered in the previous lessons of the course. More importantly, in order to tie in well with language teaching as a profession, language reference resources are shared and examples of a Year Plan for Secondary Level One according to text types and grammar are shown. All this is done in accordance to what the new syllabus has mandated. At the conclusion of the course, trainee-teachers feel more confident when they are asked of their career prospects in schools.

## 6 Conclusion and Implications

As we can see, in the Singapore education system change is very systematic as reflected in the new syllabus as well as in the teacher-preparation agency. All this is highly possible thanks to the relatively small size of the country and the administrative efficiency at the MOE. The whole process of change is marked with a focus on integration, i.e., teaching language by putting it into use becomes a common feature in the language curriculum. Unlike the traditional notions of grammar teaching, the new syllabus highlights the importance of learning and teaching grammar in context. The obvious big jump from the earlier *English Language Syllabus* (1991) to the new *English Language Syllabus* (2001) in terms of a shift of focus in both learning and teaching philosophies and ideologies has made teacher-educators, school teachers and trainee-teachers realise that new challenges have to be faced with agility. Through concerted efforts change is feasible at both the institutional as well as the individual levels.

Our attempts at curriculum renovation in the way the contents of the courses were changed, upgraded and repackaged to align with the new MOE mandate suggest that revamping the curriculum is time-consuming but necessary and that implementing the change takes time. However, ours have been regarded as conducive to developing trainee-teachers' confidence and competence in ELT pedagogy in relation to the government's stipulation that English Language is offered as an L1 school subject. Compared with what was traditionally practised on our PGDE (EL) Programme in terms of the curriculum structure, I can tentatively conclude that the new curriculum 1) focuses very much on both trainee-teachers' academic knowledge and skills that they will need in delivering the new syllabus, 2) shows our strong concerns over trainee-teachers' pedagogical knowledge and skills, and 3) indicates an organic unity between teacher preparation programmes and the *English Language Syllabus*. Everything practised on our PGDE (Secondary) programme integrates well with the NIE's macro-level administration in pre-service teacher education in Singapore, which is the Tripartite Model of Teacher Training (Wong & Goh, 2002). This systematic development in curriculum innovation has incorporated theoretical knowledge into the programme, which

makes our PGDE (secondary) English Language programme comply with the national expectations. Just as Lawes (2004: 197) argues,

It is only through a sound knowledge of theory that real professionalism is possible. Theoretical understanding may not offer much in the way of ‘tips for teacher’, but there is more important outcome: sound theoretical knowledge implies “generalisability”, gives a framework of understanding that ultimately improves the quality of practice and leads to the transformation of subjective experience. But to make the case for teachers to have greater theoretical knowledge right from the start their preparation for teaching does not necessarily mean a return to the separation of theory and practice, but the development of a balanced approach to the two that requires a re-examination of the unity of theory and practice.

Therefore, our experiences in responding to changes can shed light on similar programmes in other sociocultural contexts where English is offered at the L1 level. Equally possible will be an invitation to teacher educators in ESL/EFL contexts, particularly those colleagues working in China, to think about how language learning as skill acquisition can be well incorporated into the teacher-preparation programmes at teachers’ colleges or universities (Zhang, 2004a). It is specially necessary for policy-makers at the ministry level to revisit how teacher-preparation programmes can be organised such that pedagogical knowledge acquisition can take place concurrently with trainee-teachers’ learning of the language per se in order to improve their language proficiency. To that end, I would like to add that initial teacher preparation or teacher education must take into consideration a proper balance between educational theory and pedagogical practice in addition to language skill training. The reason is that insufficient provision of educational theory and a lack of pedagogical knowledge and skills will make trainee-teachers over-rely on specific teaching techniques that they will exhaust in a few weeks’ time. In other words, we are really obliged to remember the sage, Confucius’ words: giving a man a fish, he can finish it in a day; teaching him how to fish, he can have fish every day. Indeed, trainee-teachers need to be prepared to think creatively and critically of education in general and language teaching in particular. In addition, we will have to raise trainee-teachers awareness that in learning to be teachers they should have some very important considerations as hallmarks by which they examine their growth as professionals. In today’s world, teacher-preparation, including ESL/EFL teacher-education, has to go a little beyond the basics the same way literacy instruction does, as Luke (1995: 96) argues. Trainee-teachers’ very own critical literacy competence can reinforce their understanding of pupils’ learning needs (Hammond & Macken-Horarick, 1999) such as what we have been doing on the PE component within the PGDE (Secondary) Programme.

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