

UNIVERSITY OF EXETER  
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION AND LIFELONG LEARNING

Doctorate in Education  
(Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages)

**Making Sense of Curriculum Change: Teachers' Perspectives  
Implementing a Communicative English Language Curriculum at the Tertiary  
Level in the Dominican Republic**

Submitted by

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To the University of Exeter as a dissertation in partial requirement for the degree of  
Doctor of Education (Ed.D.) in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages  
(TESOL)

March 2013

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Signature: Federica Castro

## **Abstract**

This piece of research describes an exploratory case study designed to investigate the perceptions and attitudes of a group of thirteen English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers towards the implementation of a new Communicative English Language Curriculum at a university in the Dominican Republic (D.R.). This exploration focused on teachers' experiences of the proposed change, the kinds of meanings they construe as they teach and learn, and the personal ways in which they interpret the worlds in which they live (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988). Three constructs were particularly relevant for the present study, namely: teachers' understandings of curricular change, teachers' attitudes towards curricular change, and the training and professional development opportunities required to support teachers throughout the implementation phase in a curricular change.

Data were gathered through focus groups and individual semi-structured interviews. Analyses of the data were done in such a way as to capture the common themes across individuals, as well as comments that were unique to individual participants (Lasky, 2005). Additionally, constant comparison of the data and member validation were used to confirm or adjust my own interpretations. The results indicate that to explore teachers' perceptions of a change process is both important and necessary, especially because the exploration of a particular need for a change is an influential factor in the success of any educational change (Iemjinda, 2007). They also indicate the importance of acknowledging that curriculum change is a multi-faceted and highly complex process (Carl, 2009) that, as such, takes time and that teachers understand this process and adopt it at different paces, as well as that some might never succeed in adopting the demands required by the change. Although these results provide no definite solutions to implementation problems, they do help clarify some of the critical issues and the many constraints that possibly limit curriculum development, which must be addressed in resolving those problems (Guskey, 1988; Kelly, 2009).

Recommendations for curricular change implementation are offered and areas for future research are suggested.

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*This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, Federico Castro and Teolinda Díaz, for always instilling in me the importance of quality education.*

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to acknowledge first of all the institution where this study took place for allowing me to conduct it and for the support offered to me at all levels during these last four years.

My special gratitude to my supervisor, Dr. Salah Troudi, for his incredible, precise, respectful, and extremely useful guidance and feedback, and for his support throughout this process.

I also want to thank my editor, Dr. Lynne Guitar. Her willingness to revise my work and her professionalism were of invaluable help. My thankfulness also goes to Ariel de los Santos, Tanya Serrata and Iván Carrasco for their invaluable technological help in formatting this document and all previous assignments.

Lastly, I want to thank my husband, Ramón, and my two children, Natalí and Miguel, for their patience, understanding and support throughout the precious time I took away from them.

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## **List of Acronyms and Abbreviations**

### **Acronyms**

**ACTFL:** American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages

**FSI:** Foreign Service Institute

**TESOL:** Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages

### **Abbreviations**

**ALD:** Applied Linguistics Department

**B.A.:** Bachelor of Arts

**D.R.:** Dominican Republic

**EFL:** English as a Foreign Language

**ESP:** English for Specific Purposes

**GPA:** Grade-Point Average

**MT:** Mother Tongue

**NEC:** New English Curriculum

**NES:** Native English Speakers

**NNES:** Non-Native English Speakers

**TEFL:** Teaching English as a Foreign Language

**TL:** Target Language

## **Chapter I: Introduction**

## **1.1 Nature of the problem**

In the Dominican Republic (D.R.), at the tertiary education level, the Ministry of Education does not require universities to include English courses in their study programmes; however, if the role of English is now considered as entrenched worldwide (Phillipson, 1992) and as a powerful tool that can provide access to all types of professional opportunities (Troudi, 2005), two English courses do not fulfil this role. Being aware of this reality, the educational institution where this study took place, almost since its beginnings, has required all of its undergraduate students (except Law students who have to take French courses) to complete compulsory English courses.

At the moment this investigation began, the existing English curriculum consisted of four compulsory courses for all of the career fields offered (except Law), two courses at the introductory level and two at the intermediate level. These levels obviously did not prepare students with the competencies needed to perform appropriately in the language. Moreover, the majority of the students took the English courses because they were required to, not because they were interested. These courses could be taken at any time during their studies, so there were often sequential breaks; that is, academic terms during which they did not study English. Teachers' methodology was mostly teacher-centred, directed by the textbook and oriented towards preparing students for the tests. Given this situation, the institution saw the imminent need to restructure the existing English curriculum if it wanted to provide society with professionals who can effectively communicate in English.

The New English Curriculum (NEC) has represented a significant shift compared to the previous English curriculum, not only because more courses were added, but also and most importantly because it has required a paradigm shift in teaching methodology; this shift, of course, has had clear and profound implications for teachers. Teachers have necessarily had to make changes and adjustments, especially to their own beliefs and practices. This reality has also been acknowledged in the research literature in that new curricula are often not implemented as planned; one possible reason is the unacknowledged mismatches between the new curriculum's principles and teachers' beliefs (Orafi & Borg, 2009).

Among other changes teachers needed to make were that the new curriculum would require more careful planning and would require them to be more creative, to learn to use technology and to incorporate it in their classes, and above all, to shift their traditional teaching approach towards a more student-centred approach. The implementation of the NEC has also had important implications for the institution, since more financial support was needed. The institution needed to invest more money to provide teachers with the appropriate classroom environment, teaching resources and materials, and investment was also needed in the training and development of teachers.

This curricular change has implied an enormous responsibility and posed great challenges for those in charge to direct and implement this process of change. To face those challenges, and with the belief that educational processes of innovation and change should be constantly assessed and evaluated, the exploration of teachers' perceptions about these changes was necessary in order to help policy makers, the institution, and other professionals make decisions about how to improve the development and implementation of the NEC (Norris, 1998).

## **1.2 Rationale of the study**

Curricular innovation, change and implementation are highly in the teachers' hands since teachers are, in effect, the agents of change (Carl 2005). Quality teachers' participation and involvement is essential, not only in curriculum development but also for recognizing and nurturing teachers' personal and professional growth, their identity with the institution and also to strengthen their sense of agency. Thus, the rationale for conducting this research was three-fold. First, in my dual role of change leader and researcher, it was important for me, from my professional dimension, to gather information from the teachers' perspectives about the necessity, appropriateness and quality of the NEC in order to increase the effectiveness of curriculum planning and implementation and to benefit everyone involved (Levine, 2002). Moreover, it was my personal intention that this research study serve as an opportunity for this group of teachers to voice their individual lived experiences of this time of change. I believe that as a change leader, and after seeing their hard work and commitment, I owed them this possibility. Second, it was important to find out how teachers have coped with the process of change in terms of the adjustments they have had to make to their own practices to match the intended curriculum. The existing literature (Orafi & Borg, 2009) suggests that the manner in which curricula are implemented does not always reflect

what curriculum designers have in mind. Unless curriculum designers assess the gap and use this information to support the necessary changes that will facilitate the implementation process, the mismatches will continue to grow and the goals of the curriculum innovation will surely not be met. It was then necessary that an assessment of teachers' perceptions and attitudes towards this change during the first year of the NEC implementation be conducted. As Orafi & Borg (2009: 252) clearly state: "...curriculum innovation needs to be the focus of on-going evaluation and periodic review." Third, it was important to explore, from the teachers' perspectives, the challenging and rewarding experiences which the NEC has provided them that have enriched their worldviews while also informing them about themselves. In other words, it was important to find out whether the NEC has served them for their own growth and professional development.

With the NEC, teachers are now engaged in a new approach to the teaching and learning of English as communication, as an additional way of thinking, being, and interacting. Curriculum implementation is at the core of this situation, and modern conceptions of this educational area encourage us to value stability and certainty, among other factors, and to apply guidelines and standards (Levine, 2002) that ensure quality and establish accountability; thus, teachers' attitudes and perceptions about this whole process emerge as an inherent aspect of curriculum innovation and change. Consequently, exploring the relationship between the intended curriculum, how it is implemented, and attempting to understand the factors which may cause disparity between the two (Orafi & Borg, 2009) were of high importance to this project.

From an interpretive researcher position, being part of the situation under study and, at the same time, being the change leader of this curricular change, it is hoped that the results yielding from this exploration will be of great value for the stakeholders of this curriculum design and implementation process. Furthermore, it is expected that these results can be used to inform them about the changes and adjustments that still can be done, and the strengths and benefits that this initiative may be providing the teachers, the students and the institution, as well.

### **1.3 Significance of the study**

Among the reasons for a curricular change in the teaching of EFL at the institution where the study took place were the dissatisfaction with the results of the existing

English curriculum, the role of the institution in today's society, and the external needs for learning English because of its role in a constantly changing world. This curricular reform has necessitated a considerable investment of time, effort and financial resources. It seems, then, necessary for the institution to be informed about its quality and appropriateness (Levine, 2002). It is expected that through this formal investigation of the teachers' views as highly influential agents of this change, this information will be provided.

From a collaborative and participatory perspective, this investigation sought to strengthen the value of all stakeholders' participation in constructing knowledge through the process of curriculum development and curriculum implementation. In this respect, it was not restricted solely to the goals, practices and outcomes, but also to the processes that lead to the decisions taken by the participants (Levine, 2002).

This research study attempted to fill a gap in the local literature and provide the first study of this type conducted in the D. R. No studies in the area of English curriculum development and implementation have yet been conducted; thus, no concrete evidence on innovations of this kind is available. This investigation also sought to contribute to the existing literature related to curriculum innovation, change and implementation. At the same time, it may be considered as a worthwhile model for curriculum implementation research and contribute to the advancement of how processes of educational innovations in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) are carried out. Finally, the findings and the implications are offered which include refinements and adjustments for the improvement of the NEC and this will, hopefully, illuminate other researchers in similar contexts and situations.

#### **1.4 Research aims**

1-- To gather information from the teachers' perspectives about the necessity, appropriateness and quality of the NEC at a higher education institution in the D. R.

2-- To find out how teachers have coped with the process of change in terms of the adjustments they have had to make to their own practices, to match the intended curricular change.

3-- To explore, from the teachers' perspectives, both the challenging and rewarding experiences the NEC has provided them with, and how these experiences might have served them for their own individual growth and professional development.

4-- To inform the stakeholders of this curriculum design and implementation processes about the changes and adjustments that still can be done and the strengths and benefits that the NEC may be providing the teachers, the students and the institution, as well.

5-- To fill a gap in the local literature and provide the first study of this type conducted in the D. R. At the same time, to contribute to the existing literature in relation to educational change.

### **1.5 Research questions**

1-- What do EFL teachers at a university in the D. R. think of the NEC?

2-- How have teachers coped with the implementation of the NEC?

3-- What is the potential of the NEC to provide teachers with professional development opportunities?

### **1.6 Thesis organization**

The present work is organized into six chapters. The first chapter presents the preliminary aspects of the research study; that is, the nature of the problem under study, its rationale and significance. The research aims, the research questions and the organization of the study are also presented in this chapter. In the second chapter, the contextual background where the study took place is broadly explained. Chapter three presents a review of the literature concerning the constructs that shape the research study: curricular change and innovation, teachers' perceptions and attitudes towards change, and teachers' training and professional development as an essential component in a process of educational change. In chapter four the elements concerning the research methodology are presented and explained. The data analysis and results are presented and discussed in light of the research questions in chapter five. Finally, in the sixth chapter, the conclusions from the results gathered and the pertaining recommendations are offered.

## **Chapter II: Context Background**

## **2.1 Context description**

The institution where the present study took place is located in the D. R. It is a private non-profit university dedicated to teaching, to research and to community service. It has three different campuses located in three different cities. For this institution, today's university has a mission to educate human beings who are committed to providing service to their society, who are determined to stimulate and assist in the development of the country, and who are capable of contributing solutions to the problems that limit its development (institution's Profile, 2006). Undoubtedly, the role of students' communicative competence in other languages contributes significantly to achieving these goals.

From its beginning, the institution has always recognised the importance of learning an additional language as an integral part of students' development. In terms of the evolution of language instruction, the first English programme in this university started in the 1970s and consisted of four courses: two 5-credit courses corresponding to the Introductory level and two 4-credit courses corresponding to the Intermediate level. At this university, credits are calculated as follows: T for hours of theory, P for practice hours and C for the total of theory and practice hours (each theory hour equals two practice hours). Practice hours are paid to teachers at half the rate of theory hours. The aim of the programme at that time was for students to develop reading comprehension skills that allowed them to understand any bibliography in their field of study. Speaking, listening, and writing skills were also considered but not as the main goal of the programme. As students entered the university, a written exam was required in order to place them in the appropriate language level. The teaching methodology in that programme was teacher-centred, the size of each class ranged from 30 to 45 students, the students' evaluation was mostly based on written tests, and teaching resources were limited. This programme continued until the year 2000. From the year 2000, the focus and aim of the programme changed to a communicative approach, and classes integrated the four skills as required by this new approach to teaching English.

It is important to note that even though a communicative approach was adopted, teachers did not receive any kind of training or preparation; as a consequence, change to a communicative approach never occurred. This is to say that the teachers'

methodology continued to be teacher-centred, directed by the textbook and oriented towards preparing students for tests. Students' evaluation continued to be based mainly on written exams. Teaching resources consisted of the teacher's manual and a radio for the listening activities which were also textbook-based. The written placement exam continued to be a requirement to register in different courses. Something that did dramatically change was the size of the classes to just 25 students in each class.

Being aware that the English curriculum was not achieving the intended results, there was a growing interest in rethinking the EFL curriculum to meet the university's quality standards and students' needs. As a consequence, change became a necessity. Similarly, Hazratzad & Gheitanchian (2009: 1) point out that: "A constant stimulus for change in EFL educational system has been the frequently-voiced dissatisfaction with the results of the traditional methods. Having spent a lot of time learning English in the classrooms, learners lack the proper knowledge or ability to use their language potentials for communication."

In the year 2005, the Academic Vice-President asked the Applied Linguistics Department (ALD) to design a proposal for what a new English language curriculum would be. It took around two years for the proposal to be approved by the institution. During 2008, a pre-implementation teachers' training plan was designed and implemented so that the transition from the old to the new curriculum would not be painful due to all the changes and adjustments that teachers would have to make. This pre-implementation plan consisted of teachers' workshops in using technological resources, two 2-week training workshops on the communicative approach offered on two different occasions, class observations, reflective journal writing and teachers' meetings. In the year 2009, a new English language curriculum started to be implemented, beginning with level one. The other levels were to be included progressively, each academic term. Students continue to take a written placement exam which allows those with English language knowledge to pass the first seven levels. An oral level exam was also added and is administered to those students who pass the first four courses in the written exam. This is because it is not worthwhile for a student who did not pass at least four courses in the written test to take the oral exam. At present, class size ranges from 12 to 20 students per class and teachers are able to use more teaching resources, ranging from posters and flashcards to computers and DVDs.

Students' evaluation is centred on students' everyday performance in class, written portfolios and specific homework tasks.

## **2.2 The New English Curriculum**

### 2.2.1 The Applied Linguistics Department

The NEC is implemented through the ALD on the main campus and on the Capital's campus. The departments comply with the institution's goals of preparing professionals who exhibit communicative competencies in accordance with today's social demands. Therefore, they promote the development of intercultural competence of a foreign language within the context of diversity and cultural exchange.

### 2.2.2 Reasons for a change

Understanding that the development of communicative competence in one or more foreign languages is more necessary than ever, the institution foresaw the need for its students to complete their professional education with courses of English at an advanced level in order to be better able to perform their career responsibilities in compliance with the demands of today's society. Mastering an additional language, in this case English, in addition to improving students' professional opportunities, permits them to widen their potential to interact globally in a world where multilingualism is now a common phenomenon. This is why the institution has taken the initiative to create a new curriculum for the teaching of EFL. The general aim of the new curriculum is to prepare all of its students in the development of the communicative competence of English at an advanced level of proficiency, both oral and written, during their first three years of study at this university.

This initiative seeks: 1) to facilitate students' potential for achieving a high level of proficiency in the English language; in other words, for acquiring the linguistic, socio-linguistic and pragmatic competence needed to communicate in English in any work, academic, or social situation, 2) to provide students with the opportunities that permit them to enter into contact with other cultures and to have the best access to diverse sources of information so as to widen their world view, 3) to prepare professionals within a profile that fulfils the demands of today's globalised world, and 4) to contribute to the continual professional upgrading of graduates by providing them with

access to bibliographic materials published in English, seeing as how this is the language used by the scientific community to inform the world about new discoveries, knowledge and inventions.

### 2.2.3 Description of the New English Curriculum

The theoretical perspective that informs the NEC in terms of the view of the nature of language and of language learning is, first of all, that language is for communication (Larsen-Freeman, 1986). Communication is conceived as a dynamic exchange between two or more individuals, which suggests togetherness, joining, cooperation and the establishment of commonalities (Oxford, 1990).

The NEC consists of nine different courses taught consecutively in order to ensure continuity of contact with the language and, thereby, contribute to the students' success in learning the target language. These courses correspond to the introductory level for beginners, with no or hardly any knowledge of the English language, and continue progressively to the advanced level. These levels have been determined by parameters and criteria established by two recognized institutions: the Foreign Service Institute (FSI) (**See Appendix # 7**) of the United States of America and the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) (**See Appendix # 8**). These were adopted for practical and pragmatic reasons. They explain each level included in the NEC and the expected outcomes in all four skills according to the level. The courses are distributed in the following manner: six basic courses (two introductory, two intermediate, and two advanced) with emphasis on the four skills, and three special courses, including Conversation, Academic Writing, and various courses of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), depending upon the students' areas of study.

Codes	Names of Courses	T P C
ILE-101	Introductory English I	5 – 0 – 0
ILE-102	Introductory English II	5 – 0 – 0
ILE-201	Intermediate English I	5 – 0 – 0
ILE-202	Intermediate English II	5 – 0 – 0
ILE-301	Advanced English I	5 – 0 – 0
ILE-302	Advanced English II	5 – 0 – 0
ILE-311	Advanced Conversation	4 – 0 – 4
ILE-322	Academic Writing	4 – 0 – 4
<b>English for Specific Purposes (ESP)</b>		
ILE-491	English for Business	4 – 0 – 4
ILE-492	English for Hotel Administration	4 – 0 – 4
ILE-493	English for Health Professionals	4 – 0 – 4
ILE-494	English for Architects & Engineers	4 – 0 – 4

<b>Codes</b>	<b>Names of Courses</b>	<b>T P C</b>
ILE-495	English for Education & Psychology	4 – 0 – 4
ILE-496	English for Social Communication	4 – 0 – 4
ILE-497	English for Ecology and the Environment	4 – 0 – 4
ILE-498	English for Engineering Sciences	4 – 0 – 4
<b>Total credits</b>		<b>12</b>

Table 1: New English Curriculum

The first basic courses are taught for five hours per week and the other courses for four hours per week, throughout three academic years. In total, the programme represents 588 hours, and a total of twelve credits. As can be noted in Table 1, only the last three courses have credits; that is, students' grades in these last three courses have an impact on their grade-point averages (GPAs). This does not occur in the first six courses. The grades for these first six courses are based on Pass or Fail: to pass, students must earn at least 60 out of 100 points.

In terms of teaching methodology, the NEC was conceived in accordance with the principles of the communicative approach (Larsen-Freeman, 1986). That is, students' participation in class is highly encouraged and promoted through creative lessons, the use of authentic materials, and detachment from the book as the only teaching resource. Students learn the language for communication, not as the object of study (Larsen-Freeman, 1986). These courses are oriented towards students' mastery of the four skills (speaking, listening, reading and writing) by promoting meaningful and purposeful language use. Therefore, class time should be devoted to communicative interaction. This does not mean that techniques and activities from other methods are ignored. In fact, teachers are encouraged to use in their classes whatever fits them, their students, the content and their teaching situation. The main purpose of these classes is that students learn the language by using it.

### 2.2.3.1 REQUIREMENTS FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE NEW ENGLISH CURRICULUM

#### Human Resources needed

For the implementation of the NEC, in terms of human resources, the following were needed: training of the ALD native-English-speaking (NES) professors who have earned at least a Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) degree in another field (not TEFL), training of the ALD non-native English-speaking (NNES) professors via short summer English courses (four weeks) in an English-speaking country, and the hiring of at least one

professional in the area of Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) each year to continue and upgrade the trainings required.

### Other Resources

Additionally, technological assistance, that is, the use of audio-visual media such as transparency projectors, computers and data show projectors, radios/CD players and VHS/DVD players, was integrated. It was also essential for the implementation of this programme to have a minimum of 15 classrooms, all equipped with the audio-visual resources previously mentioned. All of the above requirements have progressively been achieved as the NEC develops.

### **2.2.4 Design of the New English Curriculum**

The task of developing the NEC was the responsibility of a team of EFL teachers in the ALD at the main campus. Initially, the team's main concern was the structure of the NEC; that is, what courses to include and in what sequence. Keeping in mind that with the previous English programme students could not achieve the advanced level of proficiency desired, the first thing to do was to add more courses to the previous two introductory and two intermediate courses. This curricular change did not just imply to add more courses to the existing ones, but more importantly it was about changing teaching paradigms from traditional teacher-centred, textbook driven courses, limited use of resources, and evaluation based on written tests, to more participatory teaching methods and strategies, student-centred classes, use of more varied teaching resources, and students' evaluation based on everyday performance. It is also important to say that, as suggested in the literature (Richards, 2001; Graves, 1996; Graves, 2000; Brown, 1995), a formal needs analysis was not carried out before the design of the NEC. The design stage was based on the students' perceived needs, which came from the design team's teaching experience and knowledge of the context from which the students come.

#### 2.2.4.1 LANGUAGE PROJECTIONS

In order to make a projection of what could be attained and expected from the programme, a Language Projection Chart (**See Appendix # 9**) (levels are expressed in both numerical terms and descriptive terms) was developed, based on the criteria of the FSI (**See Appendix # 7**) and ACTFL (**See Appendix # 8**). Looking at the categories

within this range and assuming that first-year students enter this university with levels ranging from Novice-Low to Novice-Mid, the courses should produce the expected results; that is, the “average” student will achieve a 2 to 2+ level of language proficiency (i.e., Advanced to Advanced Plus) by the end of the 3-year sequence. The Projection Chart shows that total classroom hours required to attain a 2 to 2+ level is somewhere from 480 to 720 hours. The NEC provides 588 hours. This supports the new programme’s expectations towards enabling students to satisfy routine social demands, most work requirements, and gain the ability to communicate on concrete topics.

#### 2.2.4.2 THE SYLLABI

Each course syllabus (**See an example in Appendix # 10**) includes the following components: course title, level, pre-requisites and co-requisites, course goals, course aims, course description and methodology, assessment process, course contents, and both bibliography and webgraphy.

At the design stage, the main concern of the team of teachers who were developing the NEC was focused on how to assure that the aims of the programme would be met by the students. These teachers had to figure out what the appropriate content was for each course level and what functions, topics or themes, tasks, grammar structures, vocabulary and cultural aspects were to be included in order to achieve the goals and aims of each course. Since the NEC is oriented towards the development of students’ communicative competence, the functions of the language, which focus upon particular purposes of language and how these would be expressed linguistically (Breen, 2001), were the organising principle of each syllabus. This seemed to be a logical way to plan the curriculum even though in practice it might be too rigid (Nunan, 2002) (my translation). Each set of functions were, at the same time, organised around a topic or theme. Thus, the NEC syllabi are topical-functional organised and task-based oriented (Brown, 1995). Even though functions and topics were the organising principles of the NEC, a more flexible approach was adopted, in which content and tasks could develop together (Nunan, 2002) (my translation). Some of the activities suggested to implement the functions and topics are task-based. This is so in order to provide learners with opportunities where they can engage in communicative activities. After identifying and sequencing the themes and functions, additional aspects relevant to each theme were considered, e.g.: a topic/context appropriate to the theme, function/task, and relevant

language structures needed, cultural aspects, and behavioural/interactional strategies. This way of structuring the NEC is also suggested by the research literature. Alalou & Chamberlain (1999: 34) recommend that: “...any foreign language programme should offer motivating courses in which both sociolinguistic and pragmatic aspects of language ...are taken into account.” The content and the suggested process to implement each part of each syllabus were detailed on a separate document (Lesson Plan), **(See an example in Appendix # 11)**. In doing this task, the syllabi design team consulted the textbook for themes and functions presented there. Since they were not presented in the same sequence as in the text, the chapter and exact pages were identified on which the themes and functions could be found. Other themes and functions were added as appropriate to the context, the institution and the students. Thus, the structuring of lessons around thematic units would allow students to learn to speak and write in a more organised fashion (Alalou & Chamberlain, 1999).

Overall, the hope in designing such thematic syllabi was to motivate students through a diversity of material and methodologies, and to focus on tasks that are proven to contribute to the acquisition of many features of language (Alalou & Chamberlain, 1999).

#### 2.2.4.3 PROFICIENCY CRITERIA AND RUBRICS

Since the students’ evaluation in the NEC is mainly based on their performance and everyday participation in class and less on written tests, a list of criteria was developed for each skill area from passive to productive skills (listening, reading, speaking, and writing). These criteria served as the benchmarks or rubrics to help measure and monitor student performance and progress during the course. Three different rubrics were developed, one for the first six courses, one for the Conversation course and one for the Academic Writing Course. The reason for having the same rubric for the first six courses was that all of those courses focus on developing the four skills, according to the level to which they correspond. Proficiency criteria would also help to reduce the level of subjectivity when evaluating students and would ensure that the same level of demands is required of each student. In order to be coherent, basically, the rubrics **(See Appendix # 13)** are the same as the aims listed in the Course Syllabus.

### **2.2.5 Implementation of the New English Curriculum**

During the August-December academic term (fall of 2009), the NEC was put into effect. Up to that moment, the challenges the team confronted could be easily overcome. It was a matter of writing, consulting, and re writing until the team was satisfied with the final product.

The implementation of the NEC was designed to be carried out progressively, for there are many different courses and teachers needed to assimilate all the changes slowly. When it came to this stage, the team had to deal with teachers' feelings of fear, uncertainty, anxiety and insecurity about their capabilities to meet the challenges of a completely new way of teaching English as a foreign language. Initially, teachers complained about not understanding the reasons for a change. Consequently, they did not understand clearly what was expected from them in this new curriculum. The research literature points out that if teachers are to implement an innovation, it is essential that they have a thorough understanding of the principles and practices of the proposed changes (Orafi & Borg, 2009). Therefore, the first task was to explain the reasons for the change, the principles and practices that support the NEC, each of the syllabi, and how to work with the general lesson plan. During the first term, the team met with teachers almost on a weekly basis to see how they were doing, to listen to their complaints and doubts, and to find solutions together.

The implementation of the NEC has involved a significant change in the programmatic conception of all of the courses that it encompasses--on the teaching methodology, on teaching resources, the use of technology in the classroom; and on evaluation. Teachers now have to plan their classes in a more careful and detailed manner because of the student-centredness nature of the NEC. They have had to detach themselves from the textbook as the one and only guide and resource for their classes. Because of the change in teaching practices, the implementation of the NEC required support for teachers in terms of academic decisions and institutional investment in teaching materials, technological equipment, and adequate classrooms. This was a crucial aspect of the implementation since teachers were asked to make a change in methodology that required a detachment from the book. If this was going to be done, it was necessary that teachers had other resources available. This is also supported by the research literature (Alalou & Chamberlain, 1999), which suggests that reform of the method of instruction

would include emphasis on the incorporation of a diversity of mediums that would enable the students to have a global view of the language and its use as well as prepare them for advanced work beyond intermediate courses. The inclusion of technology-based resources exposes students to the spoken language of diverse social settings and provides students with enriched cultural input. Furthermore, it can be easily accompanied by related grammar, reading, and listening activities. In that way, the integration of the four skills (required in the NEC) could be accomplished by teachers, and students could be encouraged to reflect and analyse the pragmatic and sociolinguistic aspects of the language.

This curricular change has also implied working and teaching towards transformation and change for the well-being of others (students). This has meant that everyone involved, both administrators and teachers, have had to be engaged in their work, their context, and it has also meant working outside their comfort zones, moving away from the certainties, from the-taken-for-granted that is imbedded in traditional approaches to education. All these changes have had a great impact, especially on teachers, who have had to break with the routines and patterns of the previous curriculum. Initially, teachers also saw this change as a threat in terms of effort and work load. Nevertheless, once they started implementing the curriculum, and with the support offered through different training and professional development activities, their feelings started to change. Some of them began to see these changes as learning experiences, as opportunities to grow personally and professionally.

Undoubtedly, for a curriculum change to be successfully implemented, external support is required. In the case of the NEC, this support required key academic and administrative-financial decisions from the institution where the NEC is being implemented. These decisions, most definitely, would have an impact on the successful implementation of the NEC and on how teachers would put into practice the desired changes.

#### 2.2.5.1 ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE

The following graphic represents the organisational structure created to support the NEC implementation. As can be noted, besides the Director and Coordinator, three

working teams of teachers were created to involve teachers in the decision-making process and to offer support throughout the implementation stage.

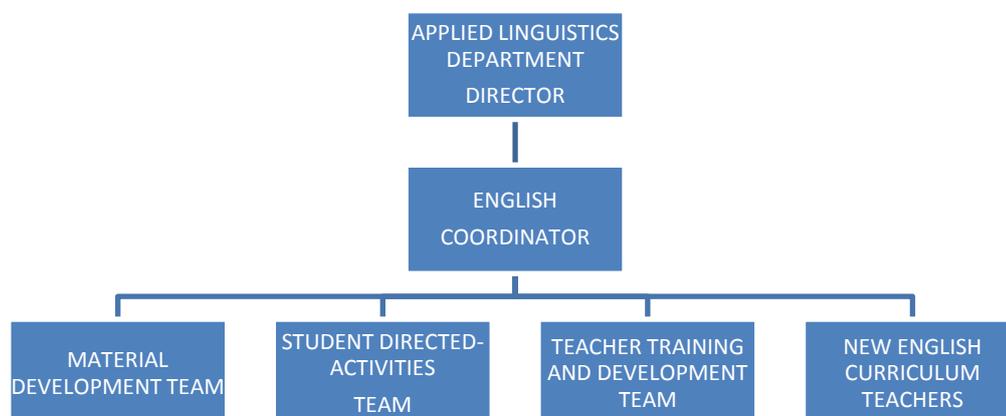


FIGURE 1. ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE OF THE NEC

#### 2.2.5.2 TEACHERS' QUALIFICATIONS

Until recently, teachers in the D. R. could work at universities having only a Bachelor's Degree in the field they were teaching. The Ministry of Tertiary Education in the D. R. is now demanding that universities hire only teachers with masters' degrees. This situation has made it difficult for institutions, especially for the university where this study was conducted and the implementation of its NEC. In the D. R. very few universities offer Masters Degrees in TESOL and very few teachers are able to complete their degrees abroad, be it for personal or financial reasons. Luckily enough, the institution has agreed that the ALD can continue hiring teachers with Bachelor's Degree, since the teaching of English per se does not lead to any undergraduate degree. At the moment, all English teachers have Bachelor's Degree, some have Masters Degrees in Education, and very few have Masters Degrees in TESOL. Being aware of this reality, the ALD conceived, parallel to the NEC implementation, a teachers' training and professional development model that started along with the NEC. This model will be described in the following sections in this chapter.

Besides the implementation of this model, the institution, through the Centre for Teachers' Development, offers a variety of courses and seminars throughout the academic year so that teachers can choose according to their needs. This offer ranges from general pedagogy courses to courses on how to implement technology in the

classroom. It is regularly planned among the Centre and the different academic departments to ensure that the needs of each group of teachers are met. Teachers are expected, but not required, to register in at least one course per academic term; however, since attending these courses is not a requirement, sometimes very few teachers register. It is important to mention that most of the teaching staff is part-time, which means they also work at other institutions so they do not always have the time to participate in an academic course.

#### 2.2.5.3 STUDENTS OF THE NEW ENGLISH CURRICULUM

Traditionally, in contexts like the D. R., students in schools (both private and public) and in universities take EFL classes either as their recess hour, because they want or need to increase their GPAs, or because they are required to do so.

Students in the NEC come from different cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds, and from public and private schools. The majority of the students are Dominican, and Haitians form our largest group of foreign students (this group is increasing). Students usually start their university studies at the age of seventeen. The NEC courses they take depend on the placement test. They are supposed to start these courses according to the academic term. For example, if a student tests out of first-year English, he/she would begin English classes their second year of university. The institution's population of English students ranges from true beginners to native speakers. Some of them have never before attended an English class; some, during their school years, have attended English language institutes; some come from bilingual schools; and others were born and raised in an English-speaking country, most often the United States.

#### 2.2.5.4 THE EVALUATIVE COMPONENT OF THE NEC IMPLEMENTATION

The evaluation of this programme was planned to be conducted in a formative or continuous way, which is to say, throughout each academic term, as well as in a summative way, at the end of the academic term. For the formative evaluation, this process takes into account the following elements: students' feedback, periodic and end-of-term meetings, teachers' reflections through journal writing and peer observation (class visits among teachers). These written records were discussed and shared periodically with the rest of the team (teachers, the NEC coordinator, and the head of the ALD) in order to take into account other visions and opinions that favour

professional development in action and to make any required adjustments. For the summative evaluation, elements for final evaluations were utilised in addition to the documents collected during meetings. So throughout and at the end of each course, the information collected from these evaluations constituted the needs analysis (Richards, 2001). Doing both formative and summative evaluations assured that the programme is continually moving back and forth in a kind of never-ending cycle to adjust and fine-tune curriculum situations (Connelly and Clandinin, 1988) and to help in making decisions (Brown, 1995). This view of evaluation is in line with the conception of curriculum as a *process* adopted by the designers of this programme after its implementation started.

### **2.2.6 Teachers' training and professional development in the NEC**

The implementation of the NEC has put special innovative emphasis on the area of teaching methodology, on teaching resources, the use of technology in the classroom and on evaluation. This premise served as the basis for the development of the teacher training and professional development model that, parallel with the commencement of the NEC took place. It was intended, through this model, to offer permanent support to teachers in the processes of updating and change that are implicit in this new curriculum and, at the same time, guide teachers towards their own professional development.

#### 2.2.6.1 FUNDAMENTALS OF THE TEACHERS' TRAINING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT MODEL

The model lays the foundations of its formative dimension in the belief that learning is a process of both individual and social construction of knowledge, and in the methods and strategies of teaching that promote spaces for reflection and learning in a cooperative, collaborative manner with students and other colleagues. It takes into account two dimensions: permanent teacher training and continuous advancement towards professional development. From the dimension of continuous professional development, it was expected that the development of a critical and reflexive attitude would allow the teachers to apply self-evaluation processes and analyses of their classroom practices, as well as improve their comprehension with respect to the teaching processes that they perform, their attitudes and beliefs towards the profession, and openness and disposition towards change, among others. In a similar way, it is

centred upon the development of teaching competencies and trainings that guarantee a quality of practice based on updated knowledge about the theories and current tendencies in the teaching of foreign languages and on the effective use of methods and strategies that correspond to the adopted methodology as well as on students needs.

#### 2.2.6.2 COMPONENTS OF THE MODEL

In this model, work is done in a manner that integrates the following elements: reflective journals, peer observation (class visits among teachers), study circles, students' feedback, periodic meetings, teachers' lesson planning, training workshops and short courses, teachers' working teams and experiential learning (learning based on experience).

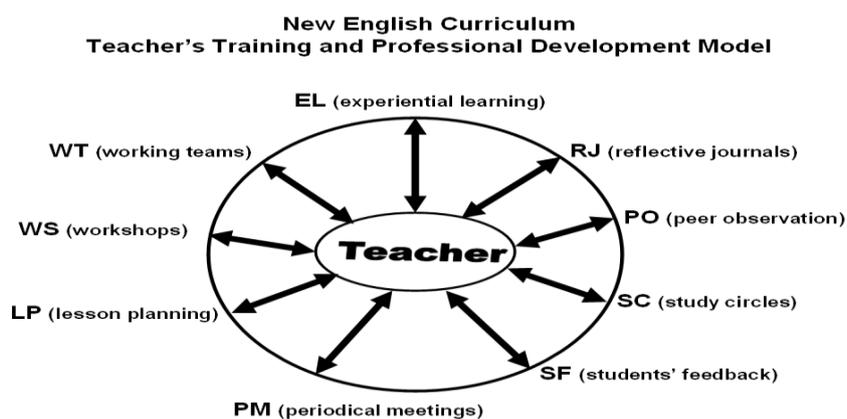


FIGURE 2. TEACHER'S TRAINING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT MODEL

These components are classified in accordance with the view that teacher training and continuous professional development ought to be considered as integrated processes in which the human and professional dimensions of the teachers are constantly kept in mind. Each one of them is encapsulated within one of the two categories that compose the model of Teacher Training and Professional Development. Within the category of Teacher Training, three sub-categories are considered. The first sub-category is the training of teachers, which includes study circles and training workshops, plus courses based on detected needs (e.g. new technologies applied to the learning of foreign languages). The second refers to teacher mentoring, which is carried out through periodic meetings, peer class observations, working teams, revision of teachers' lesson planning and students' feedback. The third relates to learning based on experience; that

is, a yearly short update course abroad for a minimum of ten teachers and annual workshops with an international professional in the TESOL area. In the Professional Development category, three elements are considered: teaching journals, independent study and teachers' self-evaluations. For a description of each component of this model, **see Appendix # 14.**

All teachers in the NEC, regardless of their type of contract (full time or part-time), get paid extra hours for the class visits component and for participating on one or more of the working teams. This is so because these activities are not stipulated in any teacher's contract at the institution.

Because of the on-going evaluative nature of the NEC implementation, by the time this research study concluded, some adjustments were made to the syllabi, rubrics, and to the training and professional development model.

In the next chapter, a review of the literature on curricular change, its implementation, and the implications it represents for teachers will be presented. This review was guided by the aims of this research study while keeping in mind the main constructs in which it is supported.

## **Chapter III: Literature Review**

### **3.1 Theoretical framework**

In general, the literature on curriculum development tends to identify principles and pre-conditions for change to occur, rather than outline theories or models of change for general application (Griffiths & O’Neill, 2008). Nevertheless, curriculum development models help designers to systematically and transparently map out the rationale for the use of particular teaching, learning and assessment approaches (O’Neill, 2010). Even though curriculum development models are technically useful, they often overlook the human aspect such as the personal attitudes, feelings and values involved in curriculum making (O’Neill, 2010). For that reason, and because of the nature of this research study, the theoretical elements considered can be linked to Fullan’s (1991) model for educational change, in that the model focuses on the human participants taking part in the change process during the four stages proposed in his model, namely: initiation, implementation, continuation and outcome. Furthermore, the clear sequence of the stages in his model provided this study with a precise sense of structure.

Curriculum development encompasses how a curriculum is planned, implemented and evaluated, as well as what people, processes and procedures are involved (O’Neill, 2010). Given the fact that at the time in which the investigation was conducted, the curriculum change was at the implementation stage, the literature review of the study focused on this stage of the model and not the other three. Within the implementation stage, and in order to be coherent with the rationale of the study, the characteristics of change in Fullan’s model were analysed. These characteristics include the need of a change, clarity about goals and needs, complexity or the extent of change required from those responsible for implementation and the quality and practicality of the programme. For this research study, the previous characteristics are considered a requisite for teachers' understanding of the change. For that reason, in this study, they will be referred to as “teachers’ understandings.” Other aspects of the implementation stage were also explored and analysed, as well. These included the quality and quantity of teacher training, teachers' attitudes towards the change, and teachers' judgements of the feasibility and practicality of the change, as factors that affect the implementation of changes and innovations (Carless, 1998; Lamie, 2005; Wedell, 2009).

The notion that in order for a curricular change to be successfully implemented and continued it is necessary that teachers understand and believe in the proposed changes

was of particular importance for this research study. This is suggested by Fullan (1991) and also supported by Carless (1998: 355) when he expresses that: “If teachers are to implement an innovation successfully, it is essential that they have a thorough understanding of the principles and practices of the proposed change.” In this study it is assumed that educational change does not simply occur, does not become visible in the classrooms just as a result of a new written document; instead, it occurs depending on how teachers understand what is written down and how they behave in response to that understanding (Wedell, 2009).

Teachers’ understandings in the setting where this study took place, presumably, have influenced teachers’ perceptions of the change. In this study, the term “perceptions” is defined as the processes that organise information in the sensory image and interpret it as having been produced by properties of objects or events in the external, three-dimensional world (Gerrig & Zimbardo, 2002). These perceptions, in turn, may have influenced teachers’ attitudes towards the new situation. Attitudes are understood as a stance towards self, activity and other factors that link interpersonal dynamics with external performance and behaviours (Bailey, et al. 2001). At the same time, teachers’ attitudes could have possibly been affected by their needs in terms of training and preparation towards effecting those changes. Accordingly, Shriner, Schlee, Hamil & Libler (2009: 126) state that: “...changes in teachers’ attitudes, perceptions, and behaviours can come about as a result of [training and] professional development activities alone.” Three constructs were particularly relevant for the present study, namely: teachers’ understandings of curricular change, teachers’ attitudes towards curricular change, and the training and professional development opportunities required to support teachers throughout the implementation phase in a curricular change. Therefore, exploring how teachers made sense of those changes by analysing: 1) their understandings of the curricular changes, 2) their attitudes towards those changes, and 3) their perceptions of what is required to support them in terms of training and professional development opportunities, seemed to be the most appropriate path to structure and guide this investigation.

The following figure summarises how the concepts expressed in the previous paragraphs, and their interrelationship, directed this research study.

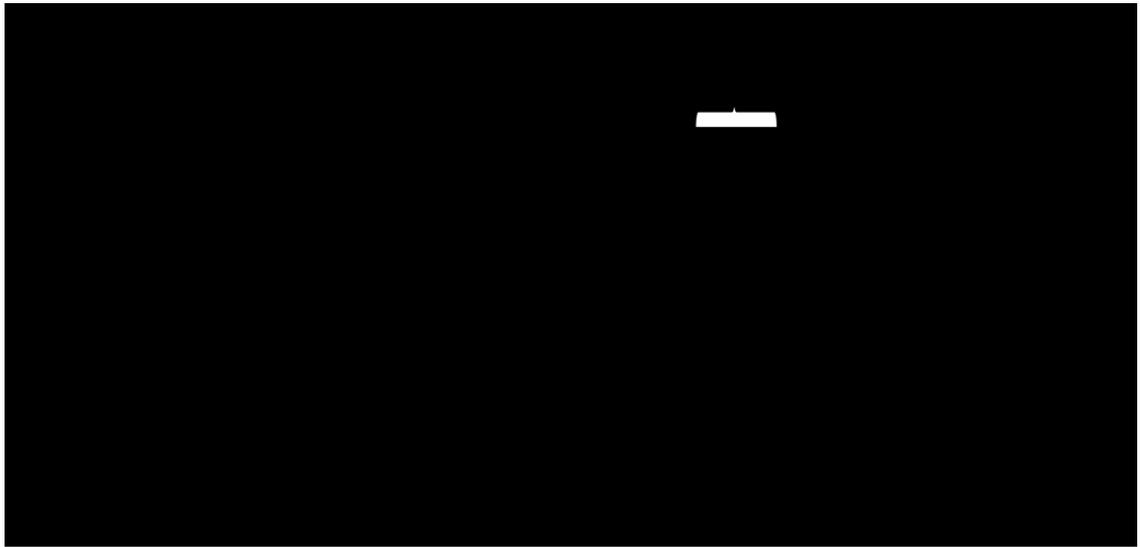


FIGURE 3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK CONSTRUCTS

In the context of this research study, curriculum is defined as the philosophy, purposes, design, and implementation of a whole programme (Graves, 1996). This definition encapsulates the elements in the NEC described in the previous chapter. The view of curriculum development and implementation favoured in this research is that of curriculum as a process, a process of continuing improvement, one that must never be viewed as a finished product, but as a process of developing and refining a language programme in which educational purposes are seen not as goals to be achieved at some later stage in the process, but as procedural principles that should guide teachers' practices throughout (Kelly, 2009). It is considered as a development process that is never finished, that is perpetually on-going and evolving, where evaluation is a continuing process in the service of decision making (Brown, 1995). As such, curriculum here is conceptualized from a constructivist view, that of an evolving, dynamic, and creative process in which teachers and learners are viewed as active creators of knowledge, understanding knowledge as a construct for social interaction with others (Levine, 2002).

For the present study, the word "change" was used instead of innovation, understanding innovation as something new, not done previously. Since the curricular reform discussed in the study refers to changing practices and implementing a communicative

approach methodology that has been known worldwide since the late 1970s early 1980s, change and not innovation is what has been done. For that reason, curricular change refers to as all the alterations and adjustments to the process and content of education (Wedell, 2009), specifically to an EFL curriculum in a higher education context in the D. R. These adjustments and alterations to the EFL curriculum included the programme's scope and sequence, the syllabi, the teaching methodology, teachers' practices, teaching resources and materials, and students' evaluation. All of these intertwined processes have presumably had an impact on teachers' work and their required training and other professional development actions.

### **3.2 Curricular Change**

The role and desired outcomes of teaching and learning English have undergone profound changes in most parts of the world (Wedell, 2009), including the higher education institution where this study took place. Over the past decades in the D.R., learning English has become a central feature of general education for learners who wish to succeed in a globalising world. Consequently, urgent demands for changes in the content and processes of education have emerged. The existing education systems in the D.R. are mainly based on the transmission of knowledge which, because of the results in students' achievements, seem to be no longer adequate to enable learners to develop the skills they will need for life and employment in a rapidly changing world. It is evident that achieving the objective of preparing students for life and employment in this scenario requires profound curriculum changes at the university level in the D.R. including the teaching of English. For the teaching of English at the university where this study took place, these changes have implied revising the traditional conception of teaching as the transmission of knowledge and information, the conception of students as passive receivers, and of the teaching methodologies that prevail in many educational institutions.

In this regard, López Noguero (2005: 48) states that: "The new challenges of education oblige us to restate the question of teaching methodology in the university environment" (my translation). This makes it necessary, then, to rethink the university curricula and the teaching methodologies required by new curricula. Nevertheless, it would be very difficult to strengthen or revitalize the areas of university-level education in the D.R. unless institutions promote and support such methodological changes. It must be kept in mind that each classroom represents a unique teaching configuration, and that the

context- free general statements may not apply to a specific situation (Skela, 1998). In my view, it is required that administrators and teachers reflect and analyse deeply upon their conceptions, beliefs and practices of what is or ought to be the teaching-learning process in EFL. Furthermore, the research literature on students' expectations and needs of a foreign language course recommend that ample opportunities must be provided to students so that they can express themselves using the vocabulary, grammar and cultural information which they learn in class while engaging in meaningful contextualized activities (Alalou & Chamberlain, 1999). These assumptions have required that the NEC developers and teachers review and revise the teacher-centred methodologies that have been used for a long time. These methodologies require that correct responses always emanate from the teachers, and participation, reflection and student judgment are practically absent because the student is a passive element of the teaching-learning process (López Noguero, 2005) (my translation). Therefore, this curricular change that is required for the successful implementation of the NEC has implied paradigmatic changes with regard to methodological and teaching strategies in order to achieve the NEC's goals and for the programme to be sustainable across time. It has also been necessary that said change be embodied first at the individual level by each teacher.

### 3.2.1 The element of change

The existing literature (Lamie, 2005; Carless, 1998; Kennedy & Kennedy, 1996; Levine & Nevo, 2009) about the process of curriculum innovation and change abounds with the assumption that change is a difficult, often a painful and highly complex phenomenon fraught with challenges, concerns and expectations. One thing that makes change so difficult is that it involves uncertainty and risk (Bailey, et al. 2001). Changing involves unknown, and is therefore risky (Bailey et al., 2001). It is because many of us fear the unknown that the proposed changes make us feel threatened; threatened about our ability to perform the assigned tasks and even about losing our jobs (Lamie, 2005). Change is not always easy. Bringing about planned changes in our professional environments is difficult but necessary (Bailey, et al. 2001). It is challenging, but also promises many rewards. Given these facts about change, it was essential for this study to more profoundly explore teachers' understandings about the proposed changes and to deeply examine how they think and act in this context of change. As also suggested in the research literature, understanding teachers' beliefs is

essential to improving teaching practices Farrell & Patricia (2005). Teachers' beliefs are conceptualised in this study as a tacit set of often unconsciously held assumptions about teaching, learning, curriculum, schooling and knowledge (Levine & Nevo, 2009).

In order to better examine the NEC change, it was useful to break down the change process into the parts that it implies; that is, in terms of the different stages that all of its actors (teachers, students, and educational administrators) had to go through. In this respect, and similar to Fullan's (1991) model of educational change, Todd (2006: 1) states that: "The management of educational innovation [change] can be divided into three main stages: planning, implementation, and continuation." In the case of the institution where this study took place, the implementation stage has implied that the stakeholders involved in the change process adopt a critical and self-reflexive stance towards questioning common assumptions—starting by their own. This process, as the literature on curricular change points out, requires that those affected by the proposed changes should first understand the principles and practices of those changes; that is, the theoretical underpinnings and classroom applications of the changes (Carless, 1998). Similarly, it is important that teachers understand the need for the changes, what the changes imply, the extent of them, what their role in implementing those changes will be, and how they will be affected by the change in terms of efforts, adjustments and investments to be made.

In the context of this study, that explicitness at the initiation stage (Fullan, 1991) was a missing element of the curricular change process; however, as the implementation of the NEC progressed, teachers became more involved through participation in the process of decision-making. Recent literature (Fernandez, Ritchie & Barker, 2008; Lamie, 2005; Wedell, 2009; Drake & Gamoran, 2006) shows that it is critical for curriculum developers to be explicit about the conceptual goals, aims and intentions of the curricular reform. Without a clear understanding of what, how and why teachers are going to change, successful implementation could be at high risk. In that sense, it is essential that teachers understand the principles and practices of the proposed change (Carless, 1998). Moreover, educational change does not simply occur as a result of a written document, it occurs depending on how teachers understand and act in response to that understanding (Wedell, 2009).

### 3.2.2 Teachers as curriculum developers

When faced with the professional dimension of teachers as curriculum developers, questions on the views and understandings of such concepts as education, knowledge, teaching, and learning necessarily come to mind. The answers to these questions will invariably shape the curricula and how teachers and students will navigate through them. Similarly, it is important to bear in mind the existing teaching-learning conditions and educational culture (Wedell, 2009) that would contribute (or not) to facilitating the proposed change. In this respect, central to the NEC change process has been, on one hand, the recognition of the need to work on a “reculturing,” a process (Wedell, 2009) of adjusting many of teachers’ established professional and possibly personal behaviours about their roles and responsibilities. In order for that “reculturing” to occur, it is deemed necessary for teachers to know and understand the proposed changes. This should happen at the planning stage; however, in most cases in the Dominican educational system, planning for change is undeniably top down, without prior consultation with those responsible for making the changes happen in the classroom. On the other hand, and in addition to the importance of the “reculturing” process, research literature emphasises that teachers as curriculum developers need to take into account the existing context conditions that would affect the change implementation either positively or negatively. These conditions refer to class sizes, teaching and learning resources available in the classrooms, appropriate teaching materials and cultural assumptions among educational administrators, among others. As suggested by Wedell (2009: 24), these conditions represent: “obvious variables that [curriculum developers] might need to consider in most educational contexts.”

Given the complexities inherent in a process of change, one might deduce that there is no one perfect and only way to approach and implement curricular change. It is in the hands of curriculum planners to adjust the different options according to the specific needs and contexts, as well as to the specific teachers and students, as the change implementation begins and progresses. Furthermore, the research literature also indicates that even when teachers have progressed through the change process, reversion still remains a possibility, meaning that individuals may reject an idea that has been previously accepted (Levine & Nevo, 2009). Similarly, Wedell (2009: 21) asserts that: “educational change involves a great deal of moving backwards and

forwards.” It is important, therefore, to explore how the teachers in the NEC have understood and coped with the on-going evaluative nature of this new curriculum. It seems necessary during any curricular change process, and in particular the NEC, that teachers assume that these moves both backwards and forwards are inherent to this kind of process. From this perspective, the NEC implementation needs to be understood as a period of analysis, evaluation and adjustment of its various components. With respect to this, and in order to help teachers, especially the most traditional ones, cope with this new way of working, this perspective implies the adoption of an eclectic attitude, a search for balance, taking what best suits the students’ and teachers’ needs and situations, and keeping in mind what is feasible in the institution, in their lived realities and experiences. Connelly and Clandinin (1988: 98) claim that: “Good teachers are expected to make reasoned curriculum decisions and to be able to defend their actions.” Taking such a flexible approach makes it more likely that more change will be visible in more classrooms.

Among other responsibilities that the change leaders of the NEC have had was to help teachers to see that changes are opportunities for professional growth, for renewal, and for preventing the drudging routine their teaching might turn into. In this sense, curricular change should be assumed to be an opportunity to refresh teachers’ professional lives (Wedell, 2009). To achieve this, it was important to work on the creation of a departmental culture where collaborative work and collegiality are possible. With respect to this way of working, Lamie (2005: 58) states that “...collaborative interaction is the key to effective implementation.” It seemed essential, therefore, to provide a working environment where teachers felt confident and secure, where it was possible to disagree with some aspects of the implementation and to discuss adjustments that needed to be made, and to do so while providing them with the certainty that their voices would be heard and acted upon. This kind of behaviour would provide more sense of control to teachers, in particular the NEC teachers, about how the change would affect them (Wedell, 2009).

Ultimately, and as Wedell (2009: 18) argues: “Whichever view we take, it is clear that the successful implementation of educational change takes a long time. It is an on-going process, not an event that takes place at a particular point in time.” Wedell (2009: 31) also emphasizes that: “[educational change] is carried out at different speeds and to different degrees of conformity to the official documents.” It is widely recognised that

curricular change is a process implemented by people who act and react differently, at different paces, with different degrees of involvement. Change in educational perspectives is a gradual process (Levine & Nevo, 2009)--it does not occur overnight. Initially, this was not easily accepted by the NEC change leaders but with time they realised that unless they did accept it, the successful implementation of the new curriculum could be at risk.

Finally, the literature on curriculum change implementation indicates that what matters most in the achievement of an intended curricular change is that curriculum developers, educational leaders and educational administrators understand and be sensitive to the actual daily working realities of those who are expected to bring about the proposed changes in the classrooms--the teachers and their students (Wedell, 2009).

### **3.3 Teachers' attitudes towards change**

As a researcher, it is my position, and also supported by others (Kennedy & Kennedy, 1996) that change is a complex process and that one part of that complexity is the role of teachers' attitudes in the implementation of change. Attitudes must be addressed in any attempt to introduce or promote change. Attitudinal change is an essential and inevitable part of any pedagogical change (Lamie, 2005).” Furthermore, the literature on curriculum innovation and implementation suggests that one of the causes of the discrepancy between teachers' claims and practices may be teachers' attitudes (Mowlaie & Rahimi, 2010). From the interpretive perspective guiding this study, it was important to explore participants' attitudes towards the curricular change and how these attitudes, on one hand, might have facilitated or interfered with the NEC implementation and; on the other hand, how these attitudes have helped or hindered participants' abilities to cope with this change. In that respect, it was necessary to be sensitive of the human factors that strongly influence change processes (Wedell, 2009).

The literature on the management of change (Lamie, 2005; Kennedy & Kennedy, 1996; Carless, 1998; Mowlaie & Rahimi, 2010) indicates that one factor that seems particularly relevant in the implementation of curricular changes is teachers' attitudes. This determines not only what teachers think about reforms but also how they feel about the reforms (Van Veen & Slegers, 2006). In this section, I will discuss the

impact and importance of teachers' attitudes in a process of change and the factors that might shape these attitudes.

Even though this study concentrates on teachers' attitudes, it is necessary to acknowledge the significance of the interconnections between attitudes and teaching behaviours. These interconnections are clearly presented in what is referred to as "theory of planned behaviour" (Kennedy & Kennedy, 1996). This theory argues that attitudes lead to intentions that, finally, will be transformed into actions. Nevertheless, attitudes alone do not result in intentions; according to this theory two other important elements also come into play: subjective norms and perceived behavioural control. The former refers to "important others"; that is, what the individual believes that others (colleagues, heads of departments, students) think about the behaviour concerned, and the latter refers to the degree of control individuals believe they have over a change situation. Behavioural control, at the same time, can be influenced by internal factors, skills and abilities to implement a required change and the clarity of information provided, and by external factors that refer to the conditions and circumstances in which teachers are supposed to execute the change. As a result, it appears that it does not matter how positive teachers' attitudes are if teachers do not have any kind of control over the actions they have to take in order to implement the demanded changes. From that statement it seems right to infer that external (institutional) support and cooperation will also be of great importance during processes of educational change. Studies conducted elsewhere on curricular change (Kennedy & Kennedy, 1996) reveal that even though teachers' attitudes towards a proposed change in teaching methodology was favourable, teachers were more influenced by the subjective norms and perceived behavioural control, which caused them to revert to their former type of teaching.

The study of teachers' attitudes is important, but emphasizing this one aspect alone might run the risk of excluding other features of the context that may also be influencing teachers (Kennedy & Kennedy 1996). In fact, trying to explore and understand teachers' attitudes as separate from the other contextual features might be confusing (Kennedy & Kennedy, 1996). Such features inherent to any curricular change, that must be examined for this study mainly include: teachers' workload, the additional work the NEC has implied, teachers' feelings, the amount of time and energy that change has required from teachers. All this results, in most cases, in a negative

impact on teachers' attitudes with regard to welcoming change and with regard to their emotional lives (Van Veen & Slegers, 2006). Because change implementation involves requiring people to alter aspects of their familiar professional practices (Wedell, 2009), taking care and being sensitive to teachers' emotions should be as important as teachers' understandings of the proposed change and the implementation of that change. This is also supported by Wedell (2009: 2): "[T]here is a tendency for national educational change policy makers and planners in different parts of the world to ignore the *human* factors that strongly influence change processes." Therefore, planning and implementing educational change needs to take people's feelings into account (Wedell, 2009). There are different feelings that teachers experience as a result of the situations or external factors imposed by the contexts in which they work. These feelings or psychological states directly affect teachers' motivation and, consequently, their attitudes towards the new situation. This is also true for the group of teachers who started the NEC implementation. Other elements in a process of change that are usually related to teachers' feelings and emotions are teachers' professional self-esteem, insecurities, frustration, additional work, lack of recognition and feelings of loss. In general, teachers' feelings may arise as a response to an external threat or danger to one's existence, or attitudes that one has about oneself (perceived behavioural control), or one's relations with others (subjective norms).

Even though experiencing those feelings and personal investment is almost inevitable, because teaching involves intense personal interaction (Van Veen & Slegers, 2006), another factor, also supported by previous studies (Jessop & Penny, 1998; Carless, 1998; Carl, 2005; Lasky, 2005; Van Veen & Slegers, 2006, Fernandez, et al. 2008; Orafi & Borg, 2009; Levine & Nevo, 2009), is the lack of teachers' participation and involvement in curriculum development at the design stage and in the administrative decision-making processes. This factor, which is often out of most teachers' reach, seems to be critical in influencing teachers' attitudes towards curricular change. For this reason, the teachers themselves need to be approached and involved explicitly if any development or change in language teaching is to take place (Lamie, 2005). Similarly, over time, the role of teachers in the D. R. and specifically EFL teachers in the setting where this study took place, has been limited to planning and teaching their classes, writing exams, and passively participating in informational meetings. Providing teachers with input in the decision-making processes and opportunities to take active roles in change processes plays a fundamental role in developing their

motivation, positive attitudes towards change, engagement with the institution and the profession, and with giving them a sense of "ownership" of their professional lives. As Wedell (2009: 38) expresses it: "[change leaders] are expected both to lead and support others (teachers), and to simultaneously [adjust] elements of their own organization and/or their own role." It could be argued, then, that the role of teachers' attitudes in a process of change, especially at the implementation stage, appears to be crucial, and to lead and support teachers requires strong leadership.

### 3.3.1 TEACHERS' VOICE IN CURRICULAR CHANGE

The constructs of voice, participation and involvement, for the present study, are understood as being able to articulate one's interests and aspirations by negotiating a space through the competing discourses of domination and control; being able to develop and exercise a sense of agency (Canagarajah, 1999). Over the last two decades, the issues of teacher's voice, participation and involvement in the processes related to educational changes have increasingly been recognised in the research literature (Jessop and Penny, 1998; Carl, 2005; Flores, 2005; Troudi, 2009); nevertheless, there seems to be a large gap between theory and what happens in real life. It is widely acknowledged that teachers have an important role to play in the educational processes that originate at their work place, especially processes that have to do with curriculum reform. This is also supported by Day (2002: 422) when he expresses that: "Externally imposed curricula, management innovations and monitoring and performance assessment systems have often been poorly implemented, and have resulted in periods of destabilization, increased workload, and intensification of teachers' work and a crisis of professional identity." Similarly, Carl (2005: 228) argues that: "By ignoring teachers' voices, the outcomes of new thinking on curriculum development may in fact be thwarted, prolonging the dangerous situation that teachers, as potential curriculum agents, simply remain 'voices crying in the wilderness'." Moreover, teachers' lack of voice in decision-making processes have been identified as one of the causes of teacher burnout, understanding burnout as the physical and emotional exhaustion and anxiety caused by teachers' failure to derive a sense of existential significance from their work (Pines, 2002). Studies conducted in different settings reveal that changes in curriculum development are of little value if they do not take the teacher into account. Similarly, Jessop & Penny (1998: 393) in their study on teacher's voice, state that: "[O]ne of the main reasons for the 'spectacular lack of success of change initiatives may be traced to the neglect of teacher's voice." Given such a reality, personal commitment and

involvement are likely to be limited, especially when teachers must follow dictums devised by others (Day, 2000). Moreover, the uptake of an educational innovation can be limited if teachers' lived experiences and realities are not taken into consideration (Orafi & Borg, 2009). Undoubtedly, the omission of teachers' voice in policy-making processes resonates in the achievement of sustainable educational change and development (Jessop & Penny, 1998). Teachers' voice, as Jessop & Penny (1998: 401) argue: "is such a strategy that, for change to be implemented and sustained, teachers need to *own* the educational innovation and the process of change." In other words, teachers have to be informed about the reasons for curriculum change, understand and believe in it. For changes to occur, shared understandings, values and goals need to exist (Lasky, 2005). Obviously, this is more beneficial if done at the planning stage, not right before the implementation phase, as was done in the case of the NEC.

In spite of the recognition of teachers' roles in change processes, there seems to be a large gap between theory and what happens in real life. Furthermore, if teachers are only regarded as implementers of other people's plans, the power of pedagogy is probably lost. They become merely technicians and, instead of feeling responsible for successfully implementing a new curriculum, they are simply its deliverers (Jessop & Penny, 1998). Teachers are, in effect, the principal role-players of curriculum change; therefore, they should be given the opportunity for their voices to be heard before the implementation phase takes place. In other words, they should be given the opportunity to make an input during the initial curriculum planning and development process (Carl, 2005). Unfortunately, in many contexts such as that in which this study took place, teachers' role in the process of curriculum changes remain limited to the correct application of what has been developed by others. Previous studies (Jessop & Penny, 1998; Carl, 2005; Lasky, 2005; Orafi & Borg, 2009) report that teachers' exclusion from the planning and designing of curriculum innovation and change is detrimental to the process of taking ownership of the curriculum. If teachers are those who ultimately have to implement the curriculum, they have the right to be involved in the process right from its beginnings.

If educational change is to be sustained (Jessop & Penny, 1998), prior consultation should form an important part of any curriculum reform, and the acknowledgement of teachers' input would ensure that teachers' participation is incorporated at the appropriate time. This opportunity will serve as a means to ensure that teachers gain

access to and take ownership of the new curriculum in a more significant way (Carl, 2005).

In order for teachers to be committed to the process of change, it appears necessary that the diminishing sense of agency or control that many teachers report be replaced, instead, by a sense of accountability with trust (Day, 2000), participation and involvement. They must know that their voices are heard and must be brought into the educational processes that occur outside the classrooms walls. In the implementation of the NEC, its planners have intended to do so by providing opportunities for individuals' participation in what are called joint-productive activities or co-joint activities (Lasky, 2005) through the training and professional development model that accompanies its implementation. These opportunities operate as the mediation system to create the conditions that would allow and increase teachers' sense of agency. These mediation systems have been developed through processes of consultation with teachers in order to incorporate their voices and participation and ensure that reform policies are adopted not ignored.

From the previous observations, it is clear that quality teachers' participation and involvement are essential, and change leaders must ensure that teachers are involved in all of the decisions, plans and activities related to the curricular change implementation if it to be successful. The existing research literature highlights that recognizing and nurturing teachers' personal and professional growth reinforces teachers' identity with the institution where they work and contributes to strengthen their sense of agency. Teachers more willingly can become more active agents, able to influence their environment to change the context. Needless to say, allowing teachers' voices to be heard should bring positive results. Teachers' satisfaction, professional self-esteem and status seem to be reinforced and put in the place where they should be, at the heart of the educational enterprise, when they are an integral part of the entire process of curriculum change. As Brown (1995: 206) expresses: "Involving teachers in systematic curriculum development may be the single best way to keep their professionalism vital and their interest in teaching alive." Carless (1998: 355) advises that: "Dissemination of innovation .....is often insufficient.....Instead, what is often needed is the negotiation of meaning between developers and teachers." In line with Carless' previous quote is the fact that imposed change will not be successful, as curriculum change is inexorably linked to personal change and we alone have the

ultimate power to change ourselves (Lamie, 2005). Undeniably, successful implementation lies in the hands of teachers; at the end of the day, it is these teachers who will determine whether innovations will eventually be carried out inside the classroom (Lamie, 2005).

Ultimately, and in addition to the importance of teachers' inclusion in all stages of a curriculum change, the crucial point in teachers' attitudes towards change seems to be their lived experiences of that change—in other words, clear evidence of improvement in their students. If teachers' implementations are successful, if they believe it works because they have seen it work, then those lived experiences will probably shape their attitudes (Guskey, 2002). This situation has been evident in the NEC teachers' behaviour. They have demonstrated, and verbally expressed, that they are ready to adopt any change after they try it and see that it works for them and their students, not just because it has been suggested or required by others. Similarly, Guskey (2002: 388) confirms that: "When teachers gain evidence, and see that a new programme or innovation works well in their classrooms, change in their attitudes and beliefs can and will follow."

### **3.4 Teachers' training and professional development in a process of change**

Research studies (Drake and Gamoran, 2006) have shown that to effect change, curricula need to directly address teachers' learning and teachers' needs. In this section, I will discuss how, through the support offered to the NEC teachers during the implementation stage via a specific training and professional development model described in the previous chapter, those needs could possibly be addressed. As Wedell (2009: 32) asserts: "However appropriately change aims are adapted [and understood], teachers are almost certain to need support at the beginning [and throughout] the implementation stage." Others, (Fernandez, et al. 2008) point out the importance of appropriate professional development in bringing about curriculum change and how it can be expected to go a long way towards helping teachers to understand and commit to the proposed changes. The quality of initial training is crucial if the new programme is to be well implemented. Teachers' new practices must become part of their natural repertoire of teaching skills and, hopefully, they should arise almost out of habit (Guskey, 2002). This section will also offer relevant information to support my position about the importance of the existence of a training and development programme that parallels any process of educational change and, in particular, the NEC.

Change does not occur simply because there are new materials, ideas, and information; instead, changes in teachers' instructional practices are the result of particular interactions between teachers and the proposed change. Understanding what teachers bring to this interaction is as important as what is contained in the curriculum (Drake & Gamoran, 2006). Other studies conducted on curricular change (Carless, 1998; Drake & Gamoran, 2006) highlight that despite the challenges associated with curriculum implementation, teachers' academic and professional training, their English proficiency (in the case of non-native EFL teachers), their attitudes towards the change, and their desire for self-improvement and professional development have proven to influence the efficacy and quality of the implementation. This emphasises that teacher training and professional development programmes offered to teachers are crucial issues in preparing teachers to implement a new programme or curriculum. With this in mind, Carless (1998: 355) explicitly states that: "[teacher training and professional development programmes] can play a major role in shaping the teacher attitudes." Furthermore, without sufficient training and support, even teachers initially enthusiastic about a change may become frustrated and turn against the project and revert to the security of their previous teaching methods (Carless, 1998).

In the setting where this study took place, parallel to the NEC implementation, a training and professional development model was designed to help teachers gain insights into their personal teaching philosophies, to undertake self-examination to review their past practices and to support them throughout the change process. One of the aims of this model is to contribute to raising teachers' awareness of the adaptations they need to make in order to face the demands of their present professional experiences and the implications with respect to classroom processes and their professional growth (Levine & Nevo, 2009).

Besides teachers' involvement and participation in all stages of a curricular change, it is also of extreme importance to support them through training and professional development opportunities. Troudi and Alwan (2010: 117) suggest that: "Training and support should be of great help in reducing the stressful effects of change [especially] during implementation." Teachers' training and support should go hand in hand with any change, to enhance their confidence, to show that the institution cares about their affective issues and to let them know they are not alone in the implementation of the,

sometimes imposed, changes. Close collaboration between change leaders and teachers can greatly facilitate the adaptations and adjustments teachers necessarily have to make in any change process (Guskey, 2002). With regard to the NEC, this collaboration has taken the form of periodic meetings, informal conversations with teachers, support expressed through paying attention to and acting upon their requirements, getting the institution to pay teachers for the extra work they do, etc.

Change leaders, to a great extent, appear to be the main people responsible for providing teachers with formal and informal opportunities to develop the understanding and skills needed to begin to try out new practices in the classroom. On the other hand, if teachers are not appropriately supported throughout the process of change, they may experience that their key meanings as teachers, their perceptions of themselves and their relationships with others, are being threatened. Support provides them with important personal and professional stability and security (Wedell, 2009). It is in the change leaders' hands to guide the "reculturing" process referred to previously in this chapter. With respect to this, it would be advisable that change leaders ask themselves the following set of questions suggested by Wedell (2009: 33): "What might an implementation stage.....actually demand of a teacher? What changes to existing ways of thinking and behaving might a teacher need to learn? What support would a teacher need?" It is the answer to such questions that can help guarantee the efficacy of a training and development programme. One possible answer to the previous questions might be the necessity of creating some kind of learning space within the work setting that allows room for growth and development without interfering with teachers' personal time. This will probably require diminishing teachers' workload so that they can have the time to invest in their own training and development. In the case of the NEC, reducing teachers' workload was not possible since it would have represented a reduction in teachers' income, too. Instead, time between classes was allocated weekly during which teachers could participate in the various training and professional development activities.

The need to offer teachers support through training and professional development opportunities is clear. It is important, then, at this point, to refer to the nature of such opportunities in order to fulfil teachers' needs and demands. Thus, approaches to professional development programmes should not ignore the personal and autonomous dimensions of professional development if they really want to encourage teachers'

motivation for wanting to go further, to know more, and to get better at what they do (Poulson & Avramidis, 2003). At the same time, however, teachers need to be aware that as Edge (2005: 32) states clearly: “Choice [autonomy] brings responsibility...”

Teacher-based approaches to change implementation (Todd, 2006) emphasise that teachers need to have a voice, a sense of ownership and some kind of control over the decisions that will affect them, especially when referring to professional development programmes. Such approaches also emphasise that, in order for those voices to be heard, it is important that curriculum planners and designers, as change leaders, recognise the particularities of the context where the change is going to take effect (Todd, 2006). These particularities of the local factors often include the possibilities and constraints that teachers have along with the knowledge of teachers’ skills, actual practices, strengths and areas to be improved. The lack of this knowledge will probably make any training and development programme inaccurate and inefficient. To address this, teacher development programmes need to include a strong cognitive component so that change in materials or method does not simply operate at the surface level, but represents an increase in understanding and knowledge (Lamie, 2005). The design of the training and professional development model implemented along with the NEC considered the teachers’ needs, their constraints and possibilities, and the constraints and possibilities of the context as well. For that reason, this model focuses on addressing the skills and cognitive knowledge that teachers required to implement the change. The model also aims to offer regular feedback on teachers’ performance and on students’ learning progress. This is also supported by Guskey (2002: 387), as he states that: “If the use of new practices is to be sustained and changes are to endure, the individuals involved need to receive regular feedback on the effects of their efforts.” In this way, negotiation of meaning can take place and practical constraints can be raised and discussed (Carless, 1998). Studies conducted elsewhere indicate that the use of a coaching approach is deemed appropriate because it provides a monitoring and supporting role to the supervisors (Iemjinda, 2007). Thus, a key element in such an approach appears to be the on-going feedback offered to teachers. Feedback is an essential element in the success of any professional development effort; therefore, it is convenient that specific procedures to provide it exist. In the particular case of the NEC implementation, those procedures took the form of lesson plan revisions and individual feedback about teachers’ lesson plans, plus peer visits and on-going student feedback.

Of similar importance to such programmes is the inclusion of some form of continued follow-up support and sometimes some pressure (Guskey, 2002). Support allows those who are engaged in effecting the change to cope with the difficult process of implementation and to better tolerate the anxieties of occasional failure. Pressure is sometimes necessary to trigger change in those whose self-impetus for change is not that great. Both support and pressure serve to provide the encouragement and motivation that many teachers require to move forward in the challenging daily activities intrinsic to all change efforts (Guskey, 2002).

Not only support from change leaders is necessary but, perhaps more important, is the support created among teachers. That is another challenge that most change leaders have to face since, in most of the contexts, teachers are accustomed, and sometimes prefer (Ballet & Kelchtermans, 2008), to work alone. This is not different in the context where this study took place. As a consequence, change leaders in the NEC have had to create the opportunities to promote a culture of collaboration among teachers. Collaboration among colleagues is an important source of advice for complicated and demanding work in the implementation of educational change (Van Veen & Slegers, 2006). Nevertheless, this collaboration is not always promoted in schools and universities in the D. R. Many reasons could possibly explain that lack of collaboration; namely, teachers' lack of time, excessive workloads and lack of institutional policies to create the kind of working environment that would encourage such collegiality and collaboration. It could be argued, then, that in relation to the element of teachers' training and professional development in a process of change, curriculum planners and developers, policy makers, teachers, students... all have a role to play; therefore, they are all responsible to various degrees and at different times of the change process.

Perhaps the best way to conclude this section is by stating that the roles of teachers' attitudes and teachers' understandings are important; however, unless teacher development in a process of change occurs, curriculum development processes are incomplete and at risk. If such an attitude is adopted, it is important that change leaders be aware that to be successful, professional development must be seen as a process, not an event. Therefore, it is imperative that improvement be seen as a continuous and on-going endeavour (Guskey, 2002). Training needs to be on-going and developmental rather than piecemeal (Carless, 1998). It seems that both curricular changes and training and professional development are interrelated processes that are complex, have

profound impacts on teachers' lives, and above all take time. It might be possible that, in order to make the change happen in a little less painful, smoother and more successful way, it would be wise, then, to keep in mind certain rules of actions. These are suggested by Lamie (2005: 211-214): “[C]reate a positive environment for change, communicate, treat change as a process and not as an event, set realistic goals and priorities, provide resources and on-going support, monitor and evaluate progress, be flexible and open-minded, be accountable, develop your awareness of the process of change and expect the unexpected.”

Finally, in the words of Bailey, et al. (2001: 242): “...[L]iving systems cannot grow, develop, and adapt to their changing environments without themselves changing.” Change can be planned or unplanned, embraced or resisted; however, one thing is certain--it is inevitable (Lamie, 2005).

The next chapters present how this theoretical framework became concrete and evident through the actions that were taken.

## **Chapter IV: Methodology**

#### **4.1 Research framework**

This chapter comprises a major aligning of the key elements of the research project and at the same time attempts to direct the research methodology (Holliday, 2007). This research study was informed by the interpretive paradigm, whose purpose is to clarify how interpretations and understandings are formulated, implemented and given meaning in lived situations (Radnor, 2002). This research paradigm also advocates that there are multiple realities that are constructed by the interactions of people.

Interpretivism entails an ontology in which social reality is regarded as the product of processes by which social actors together negotiate the meanings for actions and situations (Crotty, 2003). In that respect, intense involvement with the research participants is a decisive issue for the effectiveness of the interpretive inquiry (Troudi & Alwan, 2010). At the epistemological level, this paradigm assumes that the researcher cannot separate reality (object) and knowledge (subject)--knower and known are inseparable. Truth, or meaning, comes into existence in and out our engagement with the realities in our world (Crotty, 2003). It is through dialogue and negotiation between researchers and participants that knowledge claims are created. As Crotty (2003: 9) also argues: “[M]eaning is not discovered but constructed.”

Within the interpretive paradigm, a constructivist perspective was adopted since it provided a lens to look at the nature of social reality and learn from the individual’s perspective (Troudi, 2010). Furthermore, constructivists view people as constructive agents and view the phenomenon of interest (meaning or knowledge) as built instead of passively received by people whose ways of knowing, seeing, understanding, and valuing influence what is known, seen, understood, and valued (Troudi, 2010).

Constructivism points out the unique experience of each of us. It focuses on the meaning-making activity of the individual mind (Crotty, 2003). It is this premise that guided the investigation in the search for meaning and answers that were mutually constructed by the researcher and participants through the exploration of each participant’s lived experience of understanding and making personal and professional sense of a curricular change. Thus, this investigation intended to facilitate an understanding of the ways in which teachers in this particular institution were experimenting with, and responding to, new curriculum arrangements (Flores, 2005). In addition to being flexible and open in approach, this research project was also methodical and directive (Levine, 2002).

## **4.2 Research aims**

1-- To gather information from the teachers' perspectives about the necessity, appropriateness and quality of the NEC at a higher education institution in the D. R.

2-- To find out how teachers have coped with the process of change in terms of the adjustments they have had to make to their own practices, to match the intended curricular change.

3-- To explore, from the teachers' perspectives, both the challenging and rewarding experiences the NEC has provided them with, and how these experiences might have served them for their own individual growth and professional development.

4-- To inform the stakeholders of this curriculum design and implementation processes about the changes and adjustments that still can be done and the strengths and benefits that the NEC may be providing the teachers, the students and the institution, as well.

5-- To fill a gap in the local literature and provide the first study of this type conducted in the D. R. At the same time, to contribute to the existing literature in relation to educational change.

## **4.3 Research questions**

1-- What do EFL teachers at a university in the D. R. think of the NEC?

2-- How have teachers coped with the implementation of the NEC?

3-- What is the potential of the NEC to provide teachers with professional development opportunities?

## **4.4 Methodology**

The present study was designed to explore a selected group of teachers' perceptions and attitudes towards a curricular change and how they have coped with the implementation of a new English curriculum in a tertiary education institution in the D. R. Given the fact that processes of interpretation and sense-making as well as the particularities of the context were central to this study, the choice of an interpretive approach and an exploratory case study methodology seemed to be the most appropriate one. This study fits into the exploratory case study methodology in that case studies are designed to bring out the details from the viewpoint of the participants

(Tellis, 1997), investigate and report on the unfolding interactions of events, human relationships and other factors in a unique instance (Cohen, et al. 2005). The study is exploratory in nature with an implicit critical element in that it was the researcher's intention not only to gain information about teachers' attitudes and perceptions of their own process of coping with change but also to act upon their worries, concerns, considerations and suggestions in order to attempt to improve teachers' work and professional lives, and the NEC implementation, as well.

It is expected that the results of this investigation provide insights for researchers that could lead to a better understanding of how teachers deal with the concerns and challenges inherent to a curricular change process.

#### **4.5 Participants**

The institution where this study was conducted has three campuses in three different cities. Due to time and distance constraints for this research study, only the teachers on the main campus participated. A group of thirteen teachers who work in the ALD has purposely been identified as the target population. Out of the twenty-seven EFL teachers who, at the moment this study was conducted, made up the staff of the English teaching section, twenty-two of them were teaching in the NEC. Within this group, only the thirteen teachers participating in this study have worked in both the previous English curriculum and the NEC. The participants included eleven women and two men. They come from different cultural backgrounds. Ten of them, nine women and one man, are Dominicans. The other man in the group is Haitian, and two women are North Americans. Their ages range from twenty-six to fifty-eight years old and they have been teaching at the institution from three to thirty-four years. Five of the participants are full-time teachers and the other eight are employed as part-time teachers.

The participants' qualifications include Bachelor's Degrees and Masters Degrees, some of them in TESOL, others in Tertiary Education or Technology Applied to Teaching. Their work load ranges from ten to twenty-five class hours a week. As for the full-time teachers, their work load also includes twenty-five office or service hours a week. This service can take the form of specific tasks such as: writing exams, administering language-level exams, attending departmental meetings, lesson planning, participation

on different committees, participating in at least two academic activities programmed by the institution, and some other requirement from the department.

<b>Participants</b>	<b>Qualification</b>	<b>Years teaching at the institution</b>
Lina	MA (TESOL)	30
Dania	BA (TESOL)	29
Nuris	BA (TESOL)	34
Marta	MA (Education)	4
Esther	BA (Education)	5
Shannon	MA Social Work (Education)	9
Martin	Certificate in Tertiary Education	6
Rina	Certificate in Tertiary Education	4
Gilda	Certificate in Tertiary Education	6
Fay	BA (TESOL)	3
Yasmin	BA (TESOL)	7
Omar	Certificate in Tertiary Education	3
Ana	MA (Bilingual Education)	4

TABLE 2: PARTICIPANTS' INFORMATION

#### **4.6 Sampling**

A group of thirteen teachers was selected as the population for the research study because they have taught in both the previous and the new English curriculum. This characteristic enables them to compare the two curricula in which they have taught and most importantly they are the only ones who have experienced this change process. Therefore, this was the strongest criterion for the selection. In other words, the sample size has been chosen for a specific purpose. In this sense, the strategy (Cohen, et al, 2005) used was purposive sampling. Thus, the sample size depended on the purpose of the study and the style of the research (Cohen, et al. 2005). As it is the case, and as Cohen, et al. (2005: 93) express: "...[In] qualitative style of research it is more likely that the sample size will be small."

#### **4.7 Gaining access**

Being a member of the institution where the study took place, gaining access was not a problem. Nevertheless, a letter of permission to conduct this research study was sent to the Academic Vice-President of the institution (**See Appendix # 2**). In this letter, the purpose of the study and the procedures to collect the data were specified. Anonymity and confidentiality in relation to the institution and participants' information was assured, as well. The participants received a letter of invitation (**See Appendix # 4**) to participate in the research study. Along with the invitation letter each participant received a blank consent form (**See Appendix # 5**) which they signed and returned. They kept a copy of this form for themselves. All participants received the invitation letter personally. At that moment, they were informed of what the research project was going to be about, its nature and purposes, what their participation consisted of, how their participation will benefit the research process, and how the results were going to be disseminated and used. They were also informed about their rights during the data collection time, and the anonymity and confidentiality of their names and the information they provided. Keeping in mind that the people participating in the study were doing it voluntarily and offering their help, a letter of thanks was also sent (**See Appendix # 6**) after the data collection period.

#### **4.8 Data collection methods**

Having in mind that the central focus of this study was to explore, from an interpretive inquiry position, teachers' perspectives and understandings of a curricular change, the data in this study came from two sources: focus group and individual interviews. They seemed particularly suitable to investigate a curricular change because they enabled the development of an understanding of the phenomenon from the teachers' points of view. As Carless (1998: 357) expresses it: "They [teachers] are the individuals who will implement faithfully, reinvent or reject a [change]." This process of data collection required a personal involvement of the researcher in order to understand the actions, personal constructs, and meanings of the participants (Cohen, et al. 2005).

To develop the focus group and interview schedules a range of factors (Ha, Lee, Chan & Sum, 2004) that affect teacher receptivity to a system-wide change were considered. Participants were asked a set of broad and general questions concerning their beliefs about teaching EFL, and about their beliefs and attitudes towards the curricular change. These included beliefs about general issues in TEFL, overall feelings and attitudes

towards the NEC, practicality of the NEC, perceived support for teachers, personal cost-appraisal of the change, and some important aspects of the NEC in comparison with the previous English curriculum.

#### 4.8.1 Focus group

The focus group was selected for several reasons; it is a useful research tool to develop themes and topics for subsequent interviews, it promotes the participants interaction with each other rather than with the researcher so that the views of the participants can emerge, it produces large amount of data in a short period of time, and it is economical on time (Cohen, et.al, 2005). The focus group as a data collection tool sought, in this particular study, to explore teachers' perceptions and beliefs about teaching EFL in general, and how those perceptions and beliefs might affect the implementation of this new curriculum.

Throughout the task of exploring teachers' understandings and teachers' attitudes towards curricular change, it was necessary to examine the assumptions that underlie those understandings and attitudes. Consequently, the focus group questions were designed as an initial stage to inform the interview design and to gather participants' views and perspectives. This examination provided a useful initial frame to understand how these teachers have approached and coped with their own process of change and the beliefs from which they operate.

The questions for the focus group were five open-ended broad and general questions (**See Appendix # 15**). The first question sought to explore teachers' own beliefs about how EFL should be taught despite the NEC conceptions and practices. The purpose of this question is supported by the research literature which indicates that because of changing external conditions, in this case a curricular change, teachers feel the need to adopt teaching practices that are often incongruous with their own perceptions. Many teachers feel conflicted as they are forced to teach in ways that do not measure up to their personal standards of the way things should be (Cole, 1997). This was a challenging question to ask because the participants have been immersed in the NEC for two years. Nevertheless, it was necessary to explore teachers' own beliefs in order to understand how their beliefs match the NEC assumptions and practices. The latter was the focus of question number two.

As a result of their answers to questions one and two, participants were in a better position to answer question number three which asked them to establish a comparison between the two English curricula. This comparison helped to show how congruent their answers to the two previous questions were and to have an initial understanding, according to their perceptions, of how appropriate and necessary the curricular change was. Questions four and five served to provide a general idea of how teachers have felt and coped with the changes the NEC has implied for them at the professional and, probably, personal levels. Finally, the information gathered from the focus group helped to refine and adjust the individual interview questions and complemented the data from the interviews. It also served to compare and to validate the data collected.

#### 4.8.2 Individual interviews

Following the interpretive paradigm assumption that the researcher wants those who are studied to speak for themselves, to provide their perspectives in words and other actions, a semi-structured research interview was also used as a method for data collection. The interview schedule contained open-ended questions to encourage the participants to talk freely without restrictions (Troudi & Alwan, 2010). Moreover, interviews are effective in encouraging people to disclose confidential information (Troudi & Alwan, 2010) and allow the researcher to make richer and more accurate inferences (Pajares, 1992).

The semi-structured individual interview, as the principal means to gather information, served as a data collection tool to explore in depth and at a more confidential level the teachers' perspectives, understandings, and the adjustments that they have had to make in order to cope with this process of curricular change. It was expected that by providing access to what it is inside the participants' head (Cohen, et al. 2005), it would become possible to learn what they know, value, and think (Cohen, et al. 2005).

Among other reasons to choose the interview as a data collection method were that the knowledge obtained is produced through the interpersonal interaction in the interview, different interviewees can produce different statements on the same themes and descriptions of specific situations and action sequences are elicited, not general opinions. The qualitative interview is the lived world of the subjects and their relation to it (Cohen, et al. 2005).

The interview in the present research study consisted of twenty-nine open-ended sub-questions (**See Appendix # 16**). Each set of sub-questions addressed the corresponding research question. The first section of the interview included twelve questions, which addressed participants' knowledge and understanding of the necessity and appropriateness of the change and their understandings of the NEC in terms of the programme's goals and objectives, teaching methodology, principles and practices, and students' evaluation. Besides collecting information about participants' understandings of the NEC, of equal importance for this study was to investigate the way teachers have coped with and adopted this process of change. As suggested in the research literature, attitudinal change is important (Kennedy & Kennedy, 1996). It was then necessary to explore teachers' attitudes and feelings of how they have lived this new professional experience which, presumably, has also touched their personal lives.

For the above reasons, the second part of the interview included twelve questions to explore the issue of attitudes and change management in terms of participants' feelings and personal strategies used. Keeping in mind the constructivist perspective guiding this study, where meaning is mutually constructed by researcher and participants, and participants are active agents in the meaning-making process. Questions related to their contributions to the implementation of the NEC and to suggestions to improve this implementation process were also included in this section.

There are many challenges when moving away from traditional approaches in EFL, and bringing about curricular changes can be very difficult. Consequently, such changes require assistance and support for teachers through some kind of training and professional development programme. This is the case of the teachers participating in the present study. For that reason, the third part of the interview included five questions focused on teachers' perceptions about the effectiveness of the NEC teacher training and professional development model.

#### **4.9 Piloting the instruments**

Before conducting the piloting process, the focus group and the interview questions were validated by two colleagues who work in the field of Applied Linguistics research. Piloting the instruments was a key element in the present study. As advised in the research literature, pre-testing the data collection tools is of paramount importance for

their success. Furthermore, the piloting process was also followed in order to increase the credibility and trustworthiness of the instruments. It also helped to ensure that there was no personal bias towards the topic under study due to my direct involvement throughout the curriculum planning, designing, and implementation processes. The piloting of the instruments provided an opportunity to check the clarity of the questions and to identify any redundant and/or leading questions. It also helped to eliminate ambiguities or difficulties in the wording. The piloting also helped to ensure that every issue was explored and that the data acquired would answer the research questions (Cohen, et al. 2005). The focus group questions were piloted with a group of six teachers who work in the NEC at the Capital's campus and who were not participating in this study. After conducting it, I realised that if I wanted to keep question number one, which I did, I had to be very clear and explicit to participants about the type of information I was asking for. The interview questions were piloted with two teachers who also participated in the piloting of the focus group.

As a result of piloting the instruments, the focus group questions indicated the order in which the interview questions should be asked. It was necessary to modify the placement of some of the interview questions in relation to which research question they were addressed to answer. As for the interview schedule, it was necessary to eliminate some questions, rephrase, and change others so that they reflected a neutral position in order to get the required information. The piloting process was useful and necessary. It contributed to improving the research tools in order to clarify the path to follow during the focus groups and each individual interview; thus, contributed to obtaining the right information.

#### **4.10 Conducting the focus group**

To conduct the focus group, the thirteen participants were divided into two different groups. The first group included six of the participants and the second one the other seven. This was done following the criteria that the appropriate size of a focus group should be from four to twelve participants (Cohen, et al. 2005) and also taking into consideration the participants' time availability. At the time the focus groups were conducted, participants had just finished the spring term and were in a two-week break. This situation facilitated their accessibility. Each focus group was conducted at the department's meeting room, which is a comfortable area with the appropriate sitting arrangement, temperature, and privacy. To avoid interruptions and disturbances, the

door was locked and a sign indicating that there was a focus group in process was posted. The first focus group was conducted in the morning and lasted one hour and twenty minutes, and the second one was conducted in the afternoon for a period of approximately one hour. With the consent of all the participants, the focus group interviews were audio-recorded which then were transcribed to create a written protocol. The focus groups protocol was sent to the participants for validation. Both focus groups were conducted in Spanish because the person who would transcribe the audio tapes does not know English.

Before asking the questions, an introduction, to set the atmosphere, was included. This introduction served to explain to the participants the purposes of the research and of the focus group, what their participation would consist of, and to assure participants that they could freely express themselves with honesty and sincerity. This was also done to conform to what the research literature suggests, in that the interviewer needs to establish an appropriate atmosphere such that the participants can feel secure to talk freely (Cohen, et al. 2005). After the introduction, the first open-ended question concerning participants' beliefs about how EFL should be taught, independently from what the NEC has required from them, was asked. After that, wherever possible, an active listening approach was adopted whereby interviewer participation took the form of paraphrasing, clarifying or asking for more details (Todd, 2006). In addition, when the discussion had answered each question and when participants had finished, a direct question introducing another area was asked.

Conducting the first focus group was more challenging for several reasons. It was the first time, as a researcher, that I used this type of data collection tool. To keep each participant focused on the question asked was a bit difficult. They tended to switch their answers to other areas and sometimes some of them answered the next question. When this happened for the second time, I had to intervene for clarification. This situation did not occur with the second group. I was aware of it and when introducing the second session, I was careful to warn them to keep focused to the question being asked each time.

#### **4.11 Conducting the interviews**

The thirteen individual interviews were conducted over a period of approximately six weeks. This was due to the length of the interviews (twenty-nine questions) and

because of participants' time availability. Contrary to the time when the focus groups were conducted, all participants at this time were teaching from approximately four to six hours every day, four times a week. Each individual interview was conducted in one of the fulltime teacher's office in order to assure privacy and to avoid interruptions. The interviews lasted around three hours each. With the consent of each individual participant, each interview was audio recorded and then transcribed. They were asked to speak as freely, honestly and sincerely as possible. It was also emphasised that the results of the study were going to be used to improve the implementation of the NEC. Consequently, the results from the information they provided would result in improvements in the way that they perform their work and the working conditions in which this is done.

During the interviews, there were times that it was necessary to encourage participants to give concrete examples, explanations, and expansions of what was initially said. In the words of Radnor (2002: 61): "This is necessary because an interpretive researcher wants rich data from her interview in order to build up a picture of what is happening from the perspective of the interviewee." The same as with the focus groups and because the person who transcribed the audio tapes does not know English, all interviews were conducted in Spanish. The interviews' written protocols were also sent to the participants for respondents' validation.

#### **4.12 Data analysis**

Since the purpose of this study was to explore and understand the inner thoughts and feelings of the participants, words and not numbers were considered to be the primary sources of data. The data yielded from both instruments were analysed with reference to the research questions. The analysis of the data depended on identifying key features and relationships, something that is difficult if not impossible unless some degree of order is imposed (Richards, 2003). Moreover, analysis is not adhering to any one correct approach or set of right techniques; it is imaginative, artful, flexible, and reflexive. It should also be methodical, scholarly and intellectually rigorous (Richards, 2003). Analyses were done in such a way as to capture the common themes across individuals, as well as comments that were unique to individual participants (Lasky, 2005). It is important to clarify that even though all participants were assigned a pseudonym, I identified each interview by numbers and not names. This was to assure my detachment from each individual teacher to avoid judgmental interpretations.

The best way to approach the initial stage of analysis was to read the data several times in different occasions. It helped me to become familiar with all that amount of information and at the same time it was also an opportunity to reflect on the participants' responses. As suggested in the research literature, the analyst must first gain an overview of the data coverage and become thoroughly familiar with the data set (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). It is also argued that familiarisation, though it may seem an obvious step, is a crucial activity at the start of analysis (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). This step of getting familiar with the data later helped in the interpretation stage. After this extensive reading period, a more formal and rigorous analysis of the data was carried out. For data analysis I also followed Radnor's (2002) six-step process. It helped to organise and summarise the information and to visually focus on the most salient information. Additionally, constant comparison of the data and member validation was used to confirm or adjust my own interpretations. The focus groups and the interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. The raw data was organised to highlight relevant responses to the questions posed in the focus group and the interviews. The original questions in both instruments gave access to the themes. All qualitative information was transcribed and then coded and organised thematically to create categories. Overarching themes were identified, thus representing the necessary dialogue between data and researcher (Holliday, 2007). Then an open coding system was created to identify meaningful pieces of information for each theme, and then the data was organised into categories (**See Appendix # 17**). This organisation led to an analysis of teachers' perspectives about the necessity, appropriateness, and quality of the NEC. How teachers have coped with the process of change and the challenging and rewarding experiences the NEC has provided them with, was also the focus of analysis. For the purpose of showing how I coded the content, I *only* included the excerpts that show *some* of the categories that emerged from the themes that relate directly to the research questions (**See Appendix # 18**).

#### 4.12.1 Phase One: Focus groups

The qualitative information was transcribed for thematic coding and further analysis. A thematic framework listing the major aspects in the data was developed (Todd, 2006). This framework was applied to the data as a coding scheme. The specific issues identified were the basis for data interpretation. Participants' views and perceptions on

the curricular change and how they have managed this process were explored and analysed.

#### 4.12.2 Phase Two: Individual semi-structured interviews

The process of qualitative data analysis was undertaken in two phases. The first was a vertical analysis (Flores, 2005), according to which each of the participant's interviews was analysed separately. At this time, all relevant information was underline to be later classified into themes and categories. A second phase was then carried out according to a comparative or horizontal analysis (cross-case analysis) (Flores, 2005). At this point, and through constant comparison of the data, a list of themes was generated. Most of the themes emerged from the focus groups and interview schedules. However, it was important to read carefully to make sure that any further theme was identified; that is, those themes embedded implicitly in the responses (Radnor, 2002).

After the process of identifying the themes, establishing the categories in each theme followed. To establish each category, it was really helpful to change the sub-questions in the focus group and organise the interview schedules into categories. Sometimes one individual question represented one category, other times; a set of sub-questions could be grouped as one single category. As each category was identified, a specific code was assigned and written next to the text. This was done to quickly locate the quote on the original text (Radnor, 2002). The categorization process gave access to all the data of the same category in the same place. The purpose of isolating the data into the respective category was to facilitate the interpretation process. As Radnor (2002: 80) asserts: "The taking of data from the mass and their re-emergence under a category heading is what makes interpretation possible." This process of isolating the data under the respective category was very constructive and clarifying. It helped to organise the data clearly and to see possible relationships between categories; thus, it was especially useful in order to prepare my researcher mind for interpretation. This is also supported by Ritchie & Lewis (2003: 229): "The final stage of data management involves summarising or synthesising the original data. This not only serves to reduce the amount of material to a more manageable level but also begins the process of distilling the essence of the evidence for later representation."

As a final step and in order to get ready for interpretation, I copied and pasted from the original text, on a separate document, the themes and categories under the corresponding research question.

#### **4.13 Research issues**

This section discusses three fundamental issues in interpretive research, namely credibility, trustworthiness, and transferability, and how they were treated and thought of throughout the research process in the present study. These were important issues to address in my interest to produce a serious and robust piece of research. Being aware that as a researcher I was part of the world that I was researching (Cohen et al., 2005), principles of the interpretive research were kept in mind. These were mainly that the natural setting is the principal source of data and that the researcher, rather than a research tool, is the key instrument of research, seeing and reporting the situation through the eyes of participants; that is, to understand others' understandings of the world is necessary (Cohen, et al. 2005). Similarly, Radnor (2002: 38) expresses that: "The researcher cannot remove her own way of seeing from the process but she can engage reflexively in the process and be aware of her interpretive framework." In that respect, actions were taken to minimise threats to credibility and trustworthiness. These will be explained in the corresponding sub-sections below. Transferability was also an important issue to address, since it is one of this research aims to contribute to the existing literature in relation to educational change and its implications. Hence the research design, data, analysis, and results are open to others (Richards, 2003).

##### 4.13.1 Credibility and Trustworthiness

It is of high importance that this piece of research offer quality analysis. The seriousness and the integrity, with which this research piece was assumed, planned, designed, and conducted have been determinant elements throughout the process.

Understanding that the concepts of credibility and trustworthiness are key issues to effective research, and in order to give a robust and faithful representation of the social worlds or phenomena studied, the kind of data collected, and the way they were analysed, are meant to provide efficient and accurate descriptions. In this manner, the reader is able to catch sight of how the research was done (Radnor, 2002). Moreover, the intensive personal involvement and in-depth responses of individuals secure a

sufficient level of credibility and trustworthiness (Cohen, et al. 2005). Both the intense personal involvement and the in-depth responses of individuals constituted fundamental features in this investigation. In assuring issues of credibility and trustworthiness, a number of steps were taken to minimize possible threats, to give robustness to the analysis, and to increase the accuracy of my interpretations (Radnor, 2002). First, the establishment of a trustworthy environment was vital. It is important to signal here that this was the third time that this group of teachers participated with me in an individual interviews process. They had already participated in two small-scale research studies conducted as module assignments and they had witnessed and experienced how I treated the information that they provided. The participants were well aware of the fact that what I told them was what they would later see happening at the workplace and in our professional relationship. Nevertheless, establishing trustworthiness in qualitative research cannot be proven but can only be strived for (Troudi & Alwan, 2010). Thus, from the beginning, participants were informed in as much detail as possible of the research aims, what their participation consisted of, the confidentiality of the information they would provide, the anonymity of their names, and how the findings would be used. They were sincerely assured that they were going to be listened to without judgment. They could voice their thoughts freely, and honesty and sincerity were encouraged and highly valued. All these, together, were expected to contribute to the authenticity of the information, participants' honest cooperation, and to the credibility of the findings. Second, data were gathered using two different techniques, which ensured the data-source and allowed for constant comparison, elaboration, and verification of interpretations. Third, after each interview was transcribed, each participant was asked to read their transcripts for respondent validation, which is one of the several principles of naturalistic research (Cohen, et al. 2005).

In my view, a key aspect in credible and trustworthy interpretive research is how accurate researcher's interpretations of the data are, and how those interpretations are consistent with the phenomena encountered (Richards, 2003). This was something I was aware of from the beginning and of which I was very careful. In that respect, constant comparison of the data, to review and revise categorisations, and member validation, to confirm the data as trustworthy evidence on which interpretations were made (Radnor, 2002), were two additional procedures implemented at the data analysis stage. Furthermore, and in order to detach myself from my dual role of a change leader and researcher, and because of my familiarity with the participants, all of the interviews

were labelled by numbers, not by pseudonyms. For this reason, all references to participants' information in the next chapter were always made as "*participants*" and not as names.

In sum, as with all aspects of qualitative research, there are no easy rules that can be used. In terms of credibility, those are matters of interpretation, whereas in terms of trustworthiness, those are matters of procedures (Richards, 2003). Finally, and in the words of Radnor (2002: vii): "What constitutes interpretive research is the explicit recognition of the researcher being engaged in the act of interpretation from the beginning of the research process to the end."

#### 4.13.2 Transferability

The definition of transferability adopted here is the possibility to assess the typicality of a situation--the participants and settings, to identify possible comparison groups, and to indicate how data might translate into different settings and cultures (Cohen, et al. 2005). The present study, in my view, fits into that definition in that it could be conducted in similar contexts where, very often, educational change decisions usually follow a top-down approach, where traditional EFL methodologies are used in the classrooms, and where teachers have to adopt and adapt to the proposed changes with very little or no prior consultation. The situation presented throughout this piece of research is typical of such contexts and change processes.

Even though to establish generalisations was not the intention of this study, the issue of transferability is important in that the study sought to contribute to the existing literature of educational change. As Richards (2003: 288) clearly states: "...if it is to be worth [while]...research must have relevance outside the setting(s) with which it is concerned." Nevertheless, as Ritchie & Lewis (2003: 263) express: "...there is much diversity among authors in the meaning attached to the term and in conclusions about whether qualitative research findings are capable of supporting wider inference." They continue arguing that: "...there is no clear and agreed set of ground rules for the conditions under which qualitative research findings can be [transferred] or what this process involves." In spite of the lack of agreement on the issue of transferability, and as Ritchie & Lewis (2003: 266) also state: "... [Transferability] is an important criterion by which the utility or quality of a research is judged." However, they

recognise that: "... there may also be value in individual studies which cannot be [transferred]." There will always be factors that make a particular setting unique; however, taking these into account, judgments about transfer to other settings can be made (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003).

In short, transferability should be a matter of judgment. It is the researcher's role to provide thick descriptions of the researched context and the participants' views and experiences which will allow others to assess their transferability to another setting (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). By offering sufficient detailed and richly articulated descriptions, it is expected that the readers can engage in and relate to this study in terms of their own experiences (Richards, 2003). As a consequence, it is their decision to determine the level of transferability this study provides or whether it is possible.

#### **4.14 Ethical issues**

This research project follows the Ethics Policy set out by the Graduate School of Education. Issues regarding informed consent, anonymity, and confidentiality were carefully considered. In order to assure the ethical dimension in this investigation, the following actions were taken: the Certificate of Ethical Research Approval required by the Graduate School of Education was filled out, and the corresponding approvals and signatures were obtained (**See Appendix # 1**). Before this research project began, a letter of permission to conduct the research study was sent to the Academic Vice-President of the institution (**See Appendix # 2**). In this letter, anonymity and confidentiality in relation to the institution and participants' information were assured. After obtaining the permission from the institution (**See Appendix # 3**), a letter of invitation to take part in the study was sent to each one of the participants (**See Appendix # 4**). The participants' anonymity and confidentiality was assured in that letter and also before starting the focus groups and each of the interviews. Each one of the participants was also given a consent form (**See Appendix # 5**) that they signed and returned to the researcher before they engaged in the research. The form acknowledges that participants' rights would be protected during the data collection period (Creswell, 2003). They kept a copy of this form for themselves. Records were kept of when, how, and from whom consent was obtained. Participants were reminded that they had the right to withdraw from the research at any given time and that data related to them would be destroyed. Participants were also informed from the beginning of the data collection period about how the data gathered from them and the research findings

would be used. Before starting the focus group and each individual interview, participants were reassured that their names and the information they provided would remain anonymous in the write-up of the research.

To establish rapport and to create a trustworthy environment, before each focus group and before each interview began, participants were encouraged to express what they really felt and thought with confidence and with the certainty that the information they provided would be taken into account to improve the NEC implementation; thus, their answers were highly valued. Records of the data collected (including transcripts and audio recordings) were stored in a secure and safe place. Information was also coded to ensure anonymity. Collected written information would be destroyed when it was no longer required. Since the tapes were to be transcribed by another person, who did not know any of the participants, I made sure not to mention the participants' names during the focus groups and the interviews.

#### **4.15 Challenges and limitations**

The greatest challenge faced while conducting this research study was my dual role of being the leader of the curricular change process and at the same time the researcher. My personal involvement in the change process, with its advantages and disadvantages, called for constant examination and reflection of my personal experience throughout the research process. Acknowledging this reality at each stage of the research and the constant making sense of things and decisions about the next step, have led in the end to a critical distance from the phenomena studied. I have passed through a process of analysing, becoming aware and understanding my own views and embedded assumptions. A detachment from my change leader role was something I had to keep in mind throughout the research time.

It was important for me to think in a positive and constructive way about my dual role. My knowledge of the situation under study meant that I was more acutely aware of the bigger picture with regard to the practical and personal experiences of the participants. This is also supported by Holliday (2007: 127) when he asserts that: "The researcher's own experience of life, which technically stands outside the realm of 'data' ...can also provide valuable evidence." As a researcher and during the data collection stage, I was aware of factors that have not been revealed to me as the change leader. Factors concerned with understandings of the NEC and personal individual lived experiences of

participants. Therefore, I felt I was in a better position to understand and relate teachers' responses to the everyday challenges and rewards they have gone through this past two years. It was undeniable that I had to separate my previous and intuitive understandings and perceptions of the situation so that I could make sure I benefited from participants' own perceptions, feelings, attitudes, and understandings; otherwise, it would have been non sense to collect new data.

It would have been of great value for this research study to include the teachers who are also implementing the NEC at the campus in the Capital but, as expressed earlier in this chapter, due to time and distance constraints, it was not possible. Besides, there would have been too many interviews (around thirty in total) in a very short period of time (two months). Had I only been dedicated to this research study, it could have been possible; however, my workload and the teachers' was also an important limitation.

In the next chapter, the findings and results will be presented and thoroughly explained.

## **Chapter V: Findings and Results**

This chapter presents the results yielded from the data obtained in the focus groups and the individual semi-structured interviews. Through a process of exploration and examination, participants in this study reported their perceptions of how they understand, think, and act in the context of a curricular change process.

The results will be presented in light of the research questions, which pay close attention to the three main constructs guiding this investigation, namely: teachers' understandings of curricular change, teachers' attitudes towards curricular change and the training and professional development opportunities required to support teachers throughout the implementation phase in a curricular change.

To discuss the key issues that emerged from the analysis and interpretation of the data, in the first section, I report and analyse various issues related to the participants' views, perceptions, and understandings of the current change. In the second section, the participants' lived process of change is presented. I tried to capture the uniqueness of each participant's view as well as a collective interpretation within the particularities of the context and of the situation. In this section, teachers' feelings, attitudes, and individual coping strategies with the change process, among others, will be analysed, as well. The last section presents and discusses how teachers perceive that this curricular change has added to their professional lives and the opportunities for professional growth this change has presented to them. It is expected that the results presented in this chapter will contribute to the research literature and to a better understanding of the concerns and challenges that teachers go through in a curricular change process, wherever they may be.

## **5.1 Research question 1**

### **What do EFL teachers at a university in the D. R. think of the NEC?**

#### 5.1.1 Teachers' beliefs about teaching EFL

It is unquestionable that all teachers hold beliefs about teaching, how it should be done, what it entails, and about students. Such questions on their views and understandings of general aspects of teaching and learning a foreign language needed to be asked in order to provide a more accurate interpretation of their perceptions about the NEC. This first section emerged from participants' responses to the first question in the focus group schedule (See **Appendix # 15**). This question was included to explore teachers' general

beliefs and to create a logical sequence in order to move progressively from the general to the specific. This would lead to an in depth exploration and analysis of the relationship of the participants' general beliefs about teaching EFL and how they might have influenced the NEC implementation. In that respect, the purpose of this first section was to create the basis for a better understanding of the analysis presented in the sections that follow.

What teachers believe seems to play an important role in how they make sense of their context and specific teaching situations. Beliefs might also influence teachers' attitudes and explicit behaviours. For this reason, and in order to better interpret the participants' accounts, it was necessary to keep in mind the transformation these thirteen participants have gone through this last two years. One of the participants referred to this transformation as follows: *"Obviously, my beliefs as an EFL teacher now are not the same as many years ago. In the past, we did not have the knowledge about the techniques we use now. Our assumptions on how to teach EFL were different but with the passing of time we have learnt and seen how things have changed."* Until 2009, when the NEC implementation started, the teachers in this study followed a system of education that was mostly transmission based, grammar focused, and textbook centred. In this first section about teachers' beliefs, there were several aspects that seemed of decisive importance for this group of teachers in relation to TEFL. These aspects are presented in detail in the next sections.

#### 5.1.1.1 CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT

From the data gathered, there was considerable focus on the importance of an appropriate TEFL classroom environment. These teachers reported that the EFL classroom should be a comfortable, secure, and motivating one in which teachers can make individual connections with students from the beginning of the course and in every class. Most of the participants responded along the lines that: *"One of the most important things in EFL is to create a comfortable environment, one that motivates the students, one in which the teacher can make an individual connection with each student and with the group as a whole, from the beginning and in every class."* In the views of participants, these connections meant that students would take greater interest and motivation in the subject being taught, and would affect how they kept those students engaged in the class (Lasky, 2005). According to the participants, for these connections to occur, certain conditions were required. Similarly, Fullan (2007: 75) indicates that:

“...many teachers are willing to adopt change at the individual classroom level and will do so under the right conditions.” These conditions, for this group of teachers, included class size, teaching resources, teaching methodology, and time to develop the new contents. Participants also expressed that EFL classes need to be creative and dynamic, classes that promote and allow for students’ participation. This participation can be better encouraged if the size of the class is small, if the teaching methodology allows room for communication, if the appropriate teaching resources, other than a textbook, are available, and if teaching time is sufficient. With regard to this, participants acknowledged that having smaller classes now has facilitated small-group work to maximise the amount of communicative practice students receive. They expressed that now they are also able to use more teaching resources favouring the use of authentic materials. That is, the contents in the new curriculum are arranged in such a way that permits teachers to include opportunities for practice and additional activities other than the ones suggested in the textbooks.

#### 5.1.1.2 COURSE CONTENT

Another issue participants referred to as important, that is also tied to the class environment, was the contents of the EFL courses. In order to create dynamic and interesting classes, the contents of the courses should appeal to the students’ needs and should be relevant to their lives. With regard to this, one of the participants, during the focus group interview, expressed that: *“Teaching English has to focus on students’ needs not on what we think is necessary for them.”* This, according to the participants, was very difficult to achieve in the prior curriculum, which was mainly textbook centred. Since the NEC’s course contents are based on language functions and developed through task-based activities, teachers expected that such relevance of contents to students’ life will be facilitated. With regard to this Carless (2008: 331) states that: *“Task-based approaches seem well-suited for young adult learners.”* It is the participants’ opinion that an EFL course should include topics and real life situations that correspond to students’ needs and interests, contents that promote students’ participation in class and that contribute to more interaction between teacher and students. In that respect, students’ needs should determine the course contents. Along with these lines, one of the participants emphasised: *“We need to bring to our classrooms topics that are relevant to our students. We need to know what really interests them and how they will use it in the future. This way there will be more participation, more interaction in the classrooms.”*

### 5.1.1.3 STUDENTS' NEEDS

. With regard to the issue of students' needs, two of the participants expressed: "*The EFL classes should be one in which the students feel they are learning something that they will really use in their everyday lives*" and "*I think that teaching EFL has to focus a lot on the students' needs, not on what we think is important for them. Instead, we need to know what really interests them and how they are going to use it in the future.*" Similarly, Alalou & Chamberlain (1999: 27) have addressed the importance of students' needs in an EFL curriculum. They highlight that: "Because of the variety of issues affecting EFL instruction, meeting students' needs is a well-known challenge, particularly in a general education context." As a consequence, the goals of an EFL curriculum should pay special attention to what it is that students need English for and what motivates them to take those classes. It seems that the emphasis on reading and grammatical exercises, as has been the case in traditional language programme models, may not respond to students' current needs (Alalou & Chamberlain, 1999).

### 5.1.1.4 GOALS OF THE EFL CLASS

As a group, participants agreed that the goals of any EFL course should be informed by what the students taking these courses want and need. This is also suggested by previous research (Alalou & Chamberlain, 1999), which indicates that today's students come to the language class with different goals and demands and that this information provides helpful insights for designing curriculum and defining the goals of a language programme. In relation to what should be the goal of an EFL course, one of the participants believes that: "*The goals of an EFL class should be to teach English as a form of expression, a way to communicate with others. It is very important when you can communicate with different people in another language different from yours.*" Another participant expressed that: "*English should be taught in a way that students do not see it as a subject but as something that is going to benefit their lives and their careers.*" It is worth noting that research shows, because of the variety of students' goals, there is a growing interest in rethinking curricula to meet those needs (Alalou & Chamberlain, 1999). This is also true for the institution where this study took place, where learning English has become a central feature of general education.

#### 5.1.1.5 LEARNING PROCESS

When asked about the way EFL should be taught, the characteristics of the EFL learning process was a recurrent category that emerged from that question. With regard to this, most of the participants noted that in a learning process, the students need to have an active role. Other participants noted that teachers have to empower the students with the appropriate tools so they can become involved in their own learning process. According to one of the participants, this empowerment can be partially achieved if: *“Teachers provide students with activities related to everyday life situations in which students have to think, analyse, and say how they would solve them.”* In this sense, and according to these teachers, students should learn the language by using it in situations similar to the ones they may encounter in their own lives.

#### 5.1.1.6 ROLE OF TARGET LANGUAGE (TL) IN THE CLASSROOM

An issue relevant to numerous EFL contexts is the perennial challenge of student use of the mother tongue (MT) in the foreign language classroom (Carless, 2008).

Teacher education in TEFL programmes and institutions where EFL is taught in the D. R. emphasise that English has to be the *only* language used by the teacher in the EFL classroom. This paradigm is so rooted in the NNES teachers’ own set of beliefs that many of these teachers feel that if they speak Spanish for any specific reason, they are doing something wrong. Teachers feel uncomfortable or somewhat guilty when students are using the MT or when teachers are obliged to use the students’, and sometimes their own, MT (Skela, 1998). In some ways this discomfort is natural since teachers are expected to improve students’ English language. The question is then, how will this occur if students are speaking in their MT? (Carless, 2008). This reality was also obvious in the participants’ responses. All of them, NES teachers and NNES teachers agreed that translation, as a teaching strategy, has to be avoided, and that other strategies, e.g. using synonyms and cognates, should be used, especially when teaching vocabulary. One of them said: *“It is necessary that in an EFL class, all the parties involved speak in English.”* Participants explained that this posture is needed given the fact that, for many EFL students, the only time they are in contact with the TL is during the English class. These students do not have any exposure to the TL outside these classes. According to a study conducted by Carless (2008) in Hong Kong on student use of the MT in the task-based classroom, he suggests that: “Student use of the MT needs to be placed within the general context of school foreign language interaction

patterns where it is often difficult to motivate adolescents to produce sustained [TL] [ in this case English].” Among the factors that might influence students’ unwillingness to speak English, he mentions: “lack of confidence or fear of making mistakes, limited opportunities, peer pressure, and resistance to speaking in a foreign language.” Other studies (e.g. Levine, 2003) concluded that whereas communicative approaches to foreign language instruction may dictate maximal or exclusive TL use, it appeared that the MT did and should have a role to play. This role has also been signalled by others (Tang, 2002) as a supportive and facilitating one and that as with any classroom technique, the use of the MT is only a means to the end of improving TL proficiency. Even though many of the participants resisted the idea of using the MT as a teaching strategy because it involves a risk of failing to encourage TL practice and communication (Carless, 2008), the use of MT does seem to be a humanistic and learner-centred strategy, with the potential to support student learning. Seen this way, inferences can be made about the need for a balanced and flexible view of MT use in the EFL classroom. It seems, then, that EFL teachers need a framework that identifies when reference to the MT can be a valuable tool and when it is simply used as an easy option (Levine, 2003). It is worth noting that the issue of MT vs. TL use in the English classroom was less apparent for the NES teachers-participants in this study, whose mastery of the students’ MT, Spanish, is more limited than their NNES counterparts.

#### 5.1.1.7 TEACHING METHODOLOGY

Considering that prior to the NEC implementation, the established practices were based on knowledge transmission and teacher-centred classes, the participants have had to make profound changes in the ways that they have taught for the past two years. Most importantly, they have witnessed the effects of the change in themselves and in their students. As a consequence, it was not surprising that all of them agreed that the TEFL methodology cannot be grammar based, test oriented, and teacher centred. The participants all seemed to agree that the TEFL methodology to be favoured is one that promotes students’ participation, one that favours communication and not memorising grammar rules. This was clearly expressed by one of the participants, who said that: *“The methodology should be interactive and participatory, that is the way people communicate.”* Another participant said that: *“The teaching methodology should focus on the student as the key element in the process of learning a foreign language.”*

Apparently, teachers have seen how the students in the NEC, compared to the previous English curriculum, have progressed from the first course onward. One of the participants pointed out that: *“The kids are really learning and at the same time they are enjoying these classes.”* This phenomenon of the teachers noticing change is supported by the research literature of curricular change in terms that teachers’ change may be primarily the result of change in students’ learning outcomes (Guskey, 2002). Moreover, Guskey (2002: 284) signals that: *“...evidence of improvement or positive change in the learning outcomes of students...may be a pre-requisite to, significant change in the attitudes and beliefs of most teachers.”*

In general, participants’ assumptions about the TEFL methodology adopted for the NEC, most certainly, have had clear and profound implications on the way they see TEFL now.

### 5.1.2 Teachers and the Curricular Change

#### 5.1.2.1 TEACHERS’ POINTS OF VIEW ABOUT TEACHING EFL IN THE INSTITUTION

In terms of how EFL teaching has evolved in this institution, those participants with longer time (20 to 30 years) in the institution were in a better position to trace the history of the different English programmes that have existed and their goals. As a consequence, those teachers gave a more thorough picture of the dimension of this curricular change. With regard to this, two of the participants expressed that: *“When I started to work here back in the early 1980s, the emphasis of the English language classes was on reading comprehension. Now with the NEC, it has been a total and complete change of approach. There is a huge difference.”* and *“I think English has been taught according to the needs of the specific moment and to the characteristics of the students. There was a time where the emphasis was on reading comprehension but, for example, now that is not enough. Then, we had to change the approach.”*

On the other hand, those teachers more recently hired (3 to 9 years) had a limited reference of history since they only worked with the previous curriculum. For this reason, this group of teachers tended to answer by comparing the two English programmes, as two of these teachers expressed: *“The previous curriculum was the book only and had a lot of emphasis on teaching grammar. Now we focus more on students using the language in real life situations.”* and *“In the previous programme,*

*we taught for a test and students were only interested in obtaining a good grade.*” Yet another participant expressed: *“The other programme was too traditional. I probably could have taught in a communicative way but that was not what I had in mind. With the new programme, the classes are totally different. It is a big difference in terms of teaching and how I feel in the classroom.”* This last quote is powerful in the sense that, in the case of this particular participant, the way she taught English at the institution did not necessarily reflect the way she thought English should be taught. Nevertheless, she decided to adjust to the way teaching was done by the rest of the teachers at that time. This teacher’s attitude illustrates an essential element in a change process, which is the pressure that is often necessary to initiate change among those whose self-impetus for change is not great Guskey (2002). Needless to say, this teacher’s reaction was probably normal in the sense that no demands were placed on her to teach differently before the new programme was implemented.

Other participants view the evolution, or the lack of it, in TEFL in the institution this way: *“It was us, the teachers, who fell into some kind of routine. We let ourselves go by the book, the contents we had to teach for the tests. We forgot to put them [the students] in situations to talk, and the truth is, our classes were really boring.”* And *“.....we had no interest; we lost perspective and the real function of teaching a language and to motivate the students.”* It is worth highlighting here these participants’ openness and sincerity. This may be the result of the period of time in which they have come to the realisation of their own responsibilities as the main agents of this change process, as will be supported by data presented in later sections of this chapter.

In general, it is perceived that teachers have a clear understanding of the way English has been taught at the institution and, in the case of the older teachers, a clear understanding of the reasons why. Participants’ answers to this section were of particular relevance in that their knowledge about the situation determined their answers to such aspects as the necessity and appropriateness of the change that were adopted.

#### 5.1.2.2 REASONS FOR THE CHANGE

Initially, teachers complained about not understanding the reasons for a change. They were not clear about what was expected from them in this new curriculum. After two years of implementation, participants still did not appear to be that sure about the

reasons why the institution had to effect the EFL curriculum change. That was implied from the way most of them started their answers, which was usually with expressions like: *“I assume...”*, *“From what I have heard...”*, *“I do not know them but I imply....”*, etc. This could be so for several reasons. Some of them were not working at the institution when the NEC was presented (March, 2008) to all English teachers at the ALD or possibly because the reasons for the change were not explicitly or clearly stated. Only two participants seemed to be sure about the institution’s reasons for the change. They expressed that: *“This proposal was approved because the institution understood the need for a change.”* And *“The main reason was the institution’s understanding that in today’s’ world a professional who can communicate in English will have more and better job opportunities.”*

The teachers’ lack of clear knowledge about the reasons for the curricular change could be attributed, in part, to an undeniable reality of educational contexts, which the Dominican educational system does not escape, where top-down approaches to education in general seem to prevail, especially with regard to planning for change. On very rare occasions, teachers are asked to take part in decision-making processes that will have an effect on what they do and how they do it. Within this kind of traditionally managed, highly-centralized and top-down educational system the teachers are mainly witnesses of educational changes; in this particular case, a curricular change. Generally, the rationale for change and the main benefits that the changes are expected to bring about are not communicated and, if so, it is usually done shortly before or at the implementation stage. In regard to this reality, Troudi & Alwan (2010: 118) recommend that: *“More transparency is needed.....More active communication channels need to be established as well.”*

#### 5.1.2.3 NECESSITY OF THE CHANGE: *It was a necessity for this change to occur.*

Even though this category is related to the participants’ views on how TEFL has evolved in the institution, after the data analysis stage, I decided to include it as a separate category because, as Radnor (2002: 80-81) says: *“Data chunks can have information within them that could be categorised in more than one place.”*

Furthermore, there were opportunities for the interviewees to dwell on areas that were priorities for them (Radnor, 2002). The necessity of the change seemed to be one of those priorities. This assumption is supported by some of the participants’ answers who expressed that: *“I think that the time for a change arrived. It was a necessity for this*

*change to occur.*” Another participant was even more explicit in expressing his opinion: *“This change should have happened a long time ago. I think the institution was aware of this need but did not make the decision because we had to change too many paradigms.”* Interestingly, two other participants expressed the need for a change with a sense of guilt yet very responsibly: *“We were the problem. This change was necessary; we have felt obliged to change.”* The other one said: *“I think it was necessary and appropriate. We have lost perspective; we did not have any interest.”* Others justified the need for a change from the students’ perspectives and needs. Two of them very clearly expressed that: *“If we want students to communicate, to interact, it was necessary to change the approach to teaching EFL and the goals of the curriculum”* and *“The world of young people is changing. They think very different from us.”* This last quote shows that a new generation of students with different goals is entering the EFL classrooms. Students come to language programmes seeking new competencies in response to changes in their professional responsibilities, among other aspects of their lives (Alalou & Chamberlain, 1999).

In spite of what this change has implied for these teachers, they expressly agreed with the necessity of the change, for them and for the students, as well. This was evident in one of the participants’ responses: *“I think this curricular change was necessary, even though it has represented for us much more work. I think it is worthy. We change, improve, adjust...”*

#### 5.1.2.4 UNDERSTANDINGS OF THE NEC

According to the data, the participants in this study seemed to understand what it is that the NEC pursues in general, for example, one of them expressed that: *“The main goal of the NEC is that students develop competencies in the four skills.”* Another participant said that: *“The goal of the new curriculum is that the students develop the competencies necessary to communicate in English and at the same time can function in the diverse cultural contexts where the language is spoken.”* In spite of their understandings of the NEC’s goals, it seems that some of these teachers have a limited understanding of what developing communicative competence implies. When referring to what they understood that the NEC seeks, they very often limited their answers to *“promote oral communication”* only. One of the participants clearly stated that: *“The goal of the NEC is that the students can talk, communicate.”* Two others answered that they thought the communicative approach was very good and that the goal was that

students spoke English and would be able to maintain a conversation with a native speaker. It seems that the radical change in teaching methodology has made teachers jump to the other extreme. Some teachers stated that there is some confusion on how to make the transition from a grammar-based methodology to one that favours learning a language by interacting with it and by integrating the four skills. Those teachers expressed concerns regarding their own and other teachers' understandings of what it means to adopt a communicative methodology to TEFL. According to what they said, they have concentrated more on developing communicative abilities by focusing more on the speaking skill. This, according to the participants, was mostly absent in the previous curriculum. That may explain some of the limitations that participants recognised they have in their understandings of a communicative approach to TEFL. Some of them expressed that even though they have had it explained many times, they think some teachers have limited the new methodology to a set of techniques and, because oral communication has been emphasised in the classroom, they do not use useful techniques from other methods. Apparently, as one of the participants commented: *"There is some confusion regarding the use of the textbook and the communicative approach methodology. I have noticed that many teachers have not understood and they think they cannot do other things."* In relation to the confusion expressed, one of the participants offered the following advice: *"In relation to the new approach, many times we get confused and I think that what we should do is to adjust the Communicative Approach methodology, the way we have been doing, to what is beneficial for us and our students. I think this is the way we should continue working."* Similarly, the concerns expressed by the participants, in regard to their understandings of the curriculum change and more specifically to the way in which this change should be approached by teachers, are also echoed in studies (e.g. Orafi & Borg, 2009; Carless, 1998) conducted on the implementation of communicative curriculum reform. These studies suggest that no matter how changes are introduced, how much support teachers receive, such challenges will exist. There will always be the possibility that people misinterpret and misunderstand some aspect of the purpose or practice of something that is new to them (Carless, 1998).

Overall, the literature suggests that if teachers are to implement a curricular change successfully, it is essential that they have a thorough understanding of the principles and practices of the proposed change. It is desirable that they understand both the theoretical underpinnings and classroom applications of the innovation, especially in

contexts where teachers lack sound subject knowledge (Carless, 1998). This seems to be the case for this group of teachers. Thus, it seems necessary that they receive more training on the theoretical principles and practical applications of the communicative approach. It is fair to say, however, that, whereas lack of sound knowledge can bring confusion to the implementation process, these teachers have a clear understanding of what the NEC pursues, especially in terms of students' achievement. It is clear that the understanding of the proposed change is necessary; however, it is also important to acknowledge that an in-depth understanding of the principles and practices of the curriculum change tend to evolve over time. It is to be expected, then, that these teachers will develop their interpretations further as they continue to gain experience with the NEC (Carless, 1998).

5.1.2.5 APPROPRIATENESS AND ADVANTAGES OF THE NEC: *I think we all have benefited: the students, the teachers, and the department.*

As the data revealed, participants agreed that with the NEC they have had more advantages than constraints. They think that the curriculum design, in terms of its functional and task-based approach, is appropriate and supports the communicative teaching methodology. They also think that the sequence of the courses, in terms of level progression, is appropriate. One of the participants expressed it this way: *“One thing that favours the way we want to teach English is how the content is organised and the functional approach it is based on.”* Likewise, other two participants agreed that: *“The sequence of the courses is appropriate. It is logical. It's O.K”* and *“In the new curriculum, we practice the four skills in an integrated and more active way. The students are exposed to more practice; this will help them to develop better and more abilities.”*

They also expressed that in the NEC, classes are more dynamic and interactive, that they have more time to develop the content of the course, that students have more opportunities to learn other things, like the cultural aspect of the language, and not only grammar rules and limited vocabulary, and that students are more motivated in the English classes. Participants also expressed that they have more freedom now. They can be more creative and believe that the communicative methodology will definitely help them and the students to achieve the programme's goals. In general, participants agreed that the NEC is appropriate and necessary because it helps the students to develop their fluency, among other things. They continuously emphasised that the NEC

gives the teacher more freedom. In regard to this, one of the participants expressed: *“In the previous programme we worked for an exam and students worked for a grade. Now we are all enjoying the process. The students are learning and enjoying the classes.”* In terms of students’ learning and progress, the participants considered that, up to this moment, the change for the NEC has been beneficial, as one of the participants signalled: *“The new curriculum will definitely make a difference in students’ learning. We are already witnessing that from the very first courses, and students are much more interested. I am amazed at what is happening.”* Furthermore, another participant illustrated it this way: *“I don’t know how we could have worked in the previous programme for such a long time. It is incredible how we have changed for the better, the students and ourselves, the teachers.”* The noticeable difference in students’ learning, interestingly enough, has also been noted by the students themselves. This was expressed by one of the participants as follows: *“Well, I am going to answer with my students’ testimonies. They say to me: ‘We are practicing, reading, writing, and listening, and on top of that we are talking, too!’ ”* Participants recognised that even though this curricular change has not been easy, the NEC is very appropriate and necessary and that the students, the teachers, and the department have benefited from this change.

On the other hand, and in spite of participants’ agreement with the appropriateness and advantages of the NEC, data also revealed that there were contradictory views among participants about the appropriateness of the NEC in terms of its scope. Some teachers agreed that nine courses are necessary if an advanced level is to be achieved by students. Two teachers illustrated this view as follows: *“I think nine courses is O.K. Four courses were not enough. To achieve the programme’s goals requires a lot of time. In general the amount of courses allows time for students to achieve and advanced level”* and *“The sequence is fine. At the beginning I thought there were too many courses, but now, with all the content and functions we have to teach, I understand why so many courses are needed.”* Other participants, however, thought that adding one or two more courses to the previous curriculum would have been enough. According to them, what was really needed was a change in the teaching methodology. This belief is supported by some of the participant’s comments. One of them said: *“I think a change in the teaching methodology would have been enough. Nine courses are too many for a person who has to start from course one.”* Another one stated: *“I think that we should have added two more courses to the four we had.”*

By and large, the participants in this study agreed with the appropriateness and advantages of the changes in the English curriculum. Apparently, the introduction of these changes has provided teachers with a rationale for a more active and innovative teaching approach (Carless, 1998). On the other hand, even though participants recognised the benefits and advantages of the change, some of them were critical of the scope that the NEC implies. It seems that a revision of the number of courses that compose the NEC is implicitly suggested.

#### 5.1.2.6 PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE NEC

This category is of particular importance for the present study in that here, the impact of the curricular change in participants' everyday practices and the implications, from a pedagogical perspective, that the NEC has represented for this group of teachers are more evident. The new curriculum, as a whole, has required a different approach to TEFL in general. Participants' responses revealed that the NEC has placed greater and more demands on them. There were two salient implications among the participants. One of the greatest implications of the change has been the way that teachers must plan their classes and the time that teachers need to devote to planning them. One of the participants clearly stated: *"Now, I have to invest much more time in planning my classes."* Since the previous curriculum was mostly book centred, teachers taught the content in the book, following what the book indicated and in the same sequence the book suggested. Likewise, Iemjinda (2007) reports, that one of the main challenges for Thai EFL teachers is being independent from using the textbook as the main teaching-learning resource. This practice was also found in the study conducted by Troudi & Alwan (2010) on teachers' feelings during curriculum change, where participants manifested the view that the book was the centre of the curriculum; in other words, the book was the curriculum. One of the participants in the present study expressed that: *"The new curriculum has taught me to work without dependence on the textbook, which for those of us who come from the old school [traditional, text book-centred classes]; we didn't know what to do without the book. Now I can frankly say that the book does little."* Now, with the NEC implementation, in order to plan their classes, teachers need to focus more on what the students need and the language competencies they have to develop. Teachers need to plan in ways that integrate the four skills, using a variety of resources and materials, preferably authentic materials, different from what is in the book. As participants have stated earlier, they now have to be more creative.

They have to be prepared to expand the contents according to what might come up in class. Students participate more and conversation is related to topics of everyday life and everyday situations. This has required that teachers be better prepared and do more research about the topics they have to teach—all of this requires time and more work on the parts of the teachers.

The other major implication that seems to have an impact on teachers' work has been the way students are assessed in the NEC. Research literature (e.g. Orafi & Borg, 2009) indicates that the influence of assessment in teaching is well-established and that it is clear that changes in pedagogic practices need to parallel changes in assessment.

During the course of the individual interviews, participants agreed that the most evident contrast in this process of change has been the way students are evaluated now. One of them expressed that: *“Before, it was exam-based. Now students are given more and different opportunities to show what they have learnt.”* Necessarily, and as a result of the change in the teaching methodology's approach, a change was also required in the way students' evaluations were conducted. In the previous English curriculum, students' assessment was mostly based on exams. Teachers did not have to worry about documenting the grades students obtained because it was a matter of giving the correct or incorrect answer on a test. The sources of students' grades were evident.

In the NEC, students' grades are based on their everyday performance in class; therefore, teachers need to be active observers and use other assessment tools apart from exams, e.g. scoring rubrics. This method of evaluation implies more subjectivity, with which most of the participants are struggling. Also, teachers need to be systematic in documenting students' performance, and the way evaluation is communicated to students requires a different interaction at the individual level. This way of evaluation also requires that the teacher be ready to justify the grade assigned. Participants' remarks showed that evaluating the students is a challenge and makes them feel anxious. One of them complained about not being used to working *“in such a systematic way.”* They also expressed that now, *“Teachers have a greater responsibility”* and *“Teachers have to be attentive to students' performance in every class in order to make the right decisions which, in turn, will determine if a student passes the course or not.”*

Studies (e.g. Orafi & Borg, 2009) conducted on implementing communicative curriculum changes support the coherence that needs to exist between teaching methodology and the manner of students' evaluation. These studies highlight that changes in pedagogy not supported by changes in assessment may have little practical impact in the classroom. The previous claim is well established in the research literature, in that the success or failure of any proposed changes in teaching content and methods depends on whether the examination system is altered to reflect the proposed changes Orafi & Borg (2009). This assumption was also noted by what one of the participants' claimed: *"The way we are conducting evaluation in the NEC is much more coherent with what we do in the classroom. It does more justice and motivates the students more. We are asking students for more participation, more interaction, that they need to be active in class-- and the highest percentage of the course evaluation is precisely on that part."*

In general, and in spite of the challenges students' evaluation presents to this group of teachers, participants agreed that it is now more authentic since it is centred in students' everyday performance and participation in class, and specific homework tasks usually relate to students' real life situations and contexts. That is, the methods of evaluation employed in the NEC seek to find out what students know or can do that shows students' growth and informs instruction, and at the same time are consistent with classroom dynamics and curriculum goals (Valdez-Pierce & O'Malley, 1996).

#### 5.1.2.7 INSTITUTIONAL DECISIONS AND SUPPORT

In order to help and support teachers during this transition, the institutional decisions and support were extremely important. With regards to this, it was obvious from the participants' comments that they, in general, are satisfied and grateful to the institution for the support received. This was reflected in one of the participants' statements: *"From the beginning, we have received a lot of support from the institution through the technological resources and the new classrooms."* Another participant agreed that *"The technological resources that we have available in the classrooms have facilitated enormously the implementation of the Communicative Approach."* Another participant recognised and is well aware of the fact that: *"Without resources and technology to teach the aspects of language that this methodology involves, it would be very difficult, not to say impossible."* As part of this support, another important decision made was the reduction of the number of students per class from twenty-five, and sometimes even

thirty, to a maximum of twenty students. This was a key element that participants also referred to when describing the best classroom environment for an EFL class. This reduction in the number of students per class would help to promote and facilitate students' participation, which is required by the new teaching approach. It would also allow room for the integration of a variety of techniques, activities, and resources that would promote the development of the communicative competencies that underlie the NEC goals. Teachers have more opportunities to know their students, to interact with them at a more personal level. Institutional support for the training and professional development was essential in order to help teachers through the change process. Participants were well aware of this fact and of the institution position to this. One of the participants expressed that:

*“The support we have received from the institution, from the beginning, has contributed greatly to our professional growth. This support has been evident through the courses we have participated in prestigious institutions abroad, through our international advisor, the equipment in our classrooms. The institution has invested a lot of money trying to help us.”*

Research literature (Guskey, 2002; Iemjinda, 2007; Fullan, 2007) highlights the fact that professional development is a central component in nearly every modern proposal for improving education (Guskey, 2002). Furthermore, others (e.g. Iemjinda, 2007) emphasise that strong advocacy at the administrative level is essential for change. Moreover, Fullan (2007: 101) asserts that: “lack of money for professional development and staff support...signalled the end of many implemented programmes.”

Whereas all participants agreed that they are grateful and recognised the support the institution has given to this curricular change, they all agree that a serious limitation and a harmful situation for the achievement of the NEC's goals is the zero-credit policy for the first six courses. Students' efforts in these classes are not rewarded in terms of impact on their GPAs. According to the participants, this policy is severely affecting students' motivation and fulfilment of the course requirements. Some of the participants expressed how sympathetic they feel towards these students. They consider it to be a “not fair” situation and that, at some point in the near future; this policy needs to be changed. Two of the participants expressed it as follows: *“It is terrible, at the university level, to have so many courses with no credits. It doesn't make sense.*

*Students are paying their money” and “I would change the fact that the first six courses do not have credits.” All participants expressed how concerned they are about this policy and its implications associated with students’ fulfilment of the course requirements. Since the grades students obtain to pass these courses will not have any impact on their GPAs, it is the same to pass with the minimum passing grade (60%) as to pass with a 90% or 100%. Consequently, once students achieve the 60% required to pass, they do not show any interest in completing the end-of-term requirements, the final exam. Another aspect of the NEC that some participants disagree with is the mandatory nature of the programme for all students at this institution, except for the Law school students. This was highlighted by one of the participants, who believes that students should have the choice to decide if they want to take these courses or not. The participant expressed it as follows: “I think students should have the option to decide if they want to learn English or not. The student should have the opportunity to make his [or her] own decision. Now, the way it is in the students’ study plans, they have to take it as a mandatory graduation requirement.”*

In general, it is perceived that, in spite of the consensus among participants that there are some academic/institutional decisions that need to be revised, these teachers appreciate and value the financial/institutional efforts that have been made to support them from the very beginning of the curricular change, efforts that have supported them throughout the implementation of the NEC.

#### 5.1.2.8 TEACHERS AND STUDENTS’ ROLES IN THE NEC: *Now it is more of an interchange.*

When the participants talked about the reasons behind their instruction, they revealed conceptions of the roles of teachers and students that are congruent with those implied in the NEC. Participants showed that they seem to be well aware of these new roles, as some of them referred to this new role by saying: *“I have changed the way I see the teacher’s role. The teacher is not the boss anymore or the one who controls everything, or the person who says what to do and how to do it all the time,”* or by expressing comments like: *“I think that now it is more of an interchange between teacher and student.”* Participants’ understandings of their new roles as teachers were also evident through the comparisons they made between their past and present roles. One of them expressed: *“Before, the teacher had to give everything. He [or she] was the centre of the class. Now the teacher is just a guide. The students are the centre of the class.”*

*Because of that, classes are more dynamic. The students move, act, talk.*” They also coincided in their beliefs that now: *“The teacher is the person who motivates, is part of the process. It is necessary to reflect about this teaching model in order to do a good job.”* Furthermore, another participant elaborated more deeply on her view of the new role of teachers, as she said that:

*“I have always believed that the teacher should be a person who inspires confidence, who is able to satisfy the students’ needs, who teaches new things. Before, the teacher was stricter, more mechanical; there wasn’t an environment of trust in the classroom. Now there is space for students to express their opinions. Students are more connected.”*

These teachers believed that, associated with the appropriate classroom environment, the construction of trusting and respectful relationships are critical conditions for making connections with their students. The aspect of making connections with students was a recurrent element noted by participants. They saw these more human connections as key to their students’ increased involvement in their learning (Lasky, 2005). Participants agreed that to make these connections was not always possible in the previous curriculum due to the teaching methodology used and to time constraints. Teachers were more focused on finishing the contents of the tests on time than on anything else, and the students’ main interest was to pass those tests. In the previous curriculum, most teachers’ and students’ actions turned around the evaluation system. Participants explained that because of the change from a traditional, text-book based methodology to a participatory, interactive, and communicative-based one; the teachers’ and students’ roles have necessarily changed, too. One participant expressed this change as follows: *“The role of the teacher has dramatically changed. Now we have more responsibilities in and out of the classroom. In the classroom we have to observe, help, guide, motivate, and out of the classroom we have to plan more.”*

With regard to the students’ new role, some of the teachers believe that now the student has more responsibilities in the classroom. The teacher explains and gives directions, but it is the students who have to perform the activities. The teacher observes and monitors; the class is for the students. Participants noted that with the NEC students are learning to be more independent, not to wait for the teacher to tell them what to do all the time. They are learning to be responsible for their own learning, to collaborate with

the other students, because they have to work in pairs, in small groups. This did not happen in the previous curriculum, where students worked individually all the time. Apparently, there is a clear understanding and acceptance from the teachers on their new role and the students' new role; however, as one of the participants said: *"I have had to learn to hold myself from always giving the right answer, now I have to give the students the opportunity to demonstrate that they can do it. I have become a more reflexive teacher."* It could be inferred from the previous quote that, in order for teachers to adopt this new role, they have had to learn to trust in their students' abilities and capabilities. Similarly, and according to studies conducted on implementing communicative curriculum reform (Orafi & Borg, 2009), teachers' beliefs in their students' abilities show a significant influence on teachers' instructional practices. Not only have these teachers made changes in their classroom practices, but they also have had to question and adjust their own set of beliefs about many aspects of teaching, including their beliefs about the students. Participants' agreement about the necessity of the change in teachers' and students' roles might indicate what was previously argued in chapter III, that in order for the NEC to be sustainable across time, it is necessary that this change be embodied first at the individual level by each teacher.

Among all the other changes the NEC has implied for teachers, it has also challenged the traditional view of the role of the teacher and the student in the classroom. This new perspective on teachers' and students' roles asks teachers to adopt roles and behaviours which require them to develop a sense of trust in their students and their abilities, to plan their classes in terms of the students' needs, to loosen their control and, by doing so, allow students to take an active role in their learning process. That is, a view of the teaching-learning process as a shared responsibility.

#### 5.1.2.9 TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

Teachers' perceptions of students' achievements was a recurrent theme in the data. The overall interpretation of data revealed that these teachers, in addition to the importance of creating connections with students, feel that it is also important for them to see how this curricular change is enhancing the learning outcomes of students in their classes. One participant expressed: *"I see the students' motivation. I see students are learning and that they feel fine. I like that. It makes me feel good that they are motivated, that they like our classes."* Research literature (Ha, et al. 2004) is very explicit on this matter in that evidence of improvement in the learning outcomes of students is the key

element of any change in classroom practices. Generally, teachers tend to adopt the proposed change after they have seen the new practices work for their students. In that sense, improvement in students' learning outcomes may even be a prerequisite to significant change in the attitudes and perceptions of most teachers. Learning outcomes include not only cognitive and achievement indices, but also the wide range of changes in students' behaviours and attitudes, such as, students' attendance, their involvement in class sessions, and their motivation for learning (Guskey, 2002). It has been suggested in the literature about curriculum change (Guskey, 2002) that significant change occurs after teachers gain evidence of improvements in student learning. This evidence was stated by the participants with comments like: *"I feel very committed to this programme because I am witnessing the results"* and *"In fact, I have seen the difference now. Students can express themselves, at their levels, from course one."* Their positive reaction to the change is also illustrated by comments such as: *"The students are really learning and enjoying the English classes."* Participants also showed that they feel confident about the positive impact the curricular change is making, and will continue to make, on students. This is so because, as one participant said: *"The students are becoming aware that with the NEC they are learning."* Another participant added that: *"Students are motivated to learn because they see how taking these courses will help them in their lives."* Another participant took his analysis to a deeper level and not only commented upon how the NEC is impacting students' learning of EFL but also how this experience will influence students' perceptions of the learning process in general. This participant believes that:

*"...this new programme will affect how students perceive learning, not only English but all subjects in general. This programme is also teaching them that learning is not a matter of getting a good grade; instead, it is a matter of something that I need because it will help me in my life. I think that if other departments adopt this teaching methodology to teach their subjects, the way students perceive learning is going to change."*

Clearly, the thirteen participants coincide in their belief that the influence on students' learning of the new curriculum is already visible. According to some of them, anyone who has taught in both EFL curricula, without doubt, could see the difference, the improvements, in how students act and interact in the classroom now. Moreover some teachers reported with excitement that students are speaking in English among

themselves outside the classrooms. Nevertheless, it is important to note that, even though participants seemed satisfied with their students' achievements so far, they also expressed two main concerns: first, they are concerned about the sequence in which students take these courses. Teachers believe that the sequential breaks students sometimes take between courses will definitely have a negative impact on their language achievements at the end of the programme. The second concern they expressed was a recurrent theme in the data and is related to the impact of the zero-credit policy on students' motivation and achievements. The following quotes clearly describe this concern: *"The issue of the courses with no credits is negatively affecting the new curriculum. Students are motivated, but when they see that their grades do not have any impact on their GPAs, the motivation decreases noticeably"* and *"With the new programme, they learn and enjoy the classes. They like the teaching methodology but because of the 'no credits policy' they make a minimum effort."*

Undoubtedly, the implementation of educational change requires on-going evaluation and periodic revision of practices (Orafi & Borg, 2009) in order to make the appropriate adjustments as the programme develops. Nevertheless, and as some participants expressed, there are adjustments that cannot be made on an on-going basis, such as the zero-credit policy. In that sense, participants are aware of the necessity to wait until the implementation process has been completed and the curriculum change is evaluated as a whole before other changes are made.

## **5.2 Research question 2**

### **How have teachers coped with the implementation of the NEC?**

#### 5.2.1 Teachers in the NEC Change Process

##### 5.2.1.1 TEACHERS' FEELINGS: *My feelings have gone up and down.*

Without doubt, curricular change implementations involve people altering aspects of their familiar professional practices (Wedell, 2009) and sometimes aspects of their personal lives. As the data revealed, teachers' professional and personal lives have been greatly affected by this process of change.

The overall interpretation of data revealed that participants have developed mixed feelings throughout the different stages of the NEC implementation. First, they

expressed being afraid and frustrated, insecure of their abilities to face the challenges the NEC imposed on them. Some of the participants expressed that their initial feelings were those of fear, insecurity, doubts, and uncertainty because they felt threatened by the demands the change implied. As recognised by these teachers, their psychological states also included feelings of anxiety, fear, helplessness, loneliness, meaninglessness and hostility (Cole, 1997). This recognition is supported by recent literature on teachers' emotions (Bennesch, 2012) which recommends allowing teachers to articulate their "ugly" or negative feelings as a way to better understand their situations, to acknowledge those feelings as legitimate, rather than ones that need to be repressed, thus, promoting a healthy "emotional culture" (Bennesch, 2012) that might produce "emotional affinities" between teachers (Bennesch, 2012). Participants expressed that those negative feelings were also because they were afraid that their capabilities would not measure up with those demands. One of the participants referred to those initial feelings as follows: *"Some of those feelings came from my doubts about my own capabilities to integrate [the new demands], especially all the resources and materials that I wasn't used to using."* Others expressed that at the beginning they had mixed feelings, from enthusiasm and motivation about the novelty of the change to fear, insecurity, and frustration. One of the participants said: *"When I started, I felt motivated and impressed by the change. I was very excited. Later I felt lost, that it was too much for me."* Participants also indicated that as they progressed in dealing with the implications of this change, they all started to feel overwhelmed by the requirements of the new curriculum, their lack of preparation for the change, and their increased workload and responsibilities. Therefore, feelings of frustration, anxiety, discontent and loss started to emerge. Thus, for some of them it was adding more pressure to how they already felt and others had paradoxical feelings. These paradoxical feelings during change are also reported in Troudi & Alwan (2010), who found that teachers experience excitement with one aspect of change but also are disturbed by other aspects of the same change. As data indicated, feelings of uncertainty, ambiguity, and tension are key words in defining times of change (Flores, 2005) because change involves unknowns, and is therefore risky (Bailey, et al. 2001). Despite those initial feelings, data also revealed how those feelings have evolved with the passing of time, as familiarity with the new curriculum have grown (Troudi & Alwan, 2010). Participants reported that once they started implementing the new curriculum, their feelings started to change. They reported that the support offered by administrators and throughout the different activities they were involved in, as part of the training and professional

development model helped them to slowly experience change as something positive. These two elements have also been noticed in studies conducted on teachers' feelings during curricular change; as Troudi & Alwan (2010: 117) report: "Training and support should be of great help in reducing the stressful effects of change during implementation."

Participants emphasised that with the support and the training received, their perceptions and feelings started to change to feelings of confidence, security, self-worth, and professionalism. Similarly, other studies show that teachers' view of their work is an essential part of their professional identity. According to Van Veen & Slegers (2006: 106): "...the manner in which teachers react to educational reforms is largely determined by whether the teachers perceive their professional identities as being reinforced or threatened by reforms. This determines not only what teachers think about the reforms but also how they feel about the reforms." As for the participants in this study, they expressed that they began to see these changes as learning experiences, as opportunities to grow at both their professional and personal levels (Castro, 2010). Others (e.g. Troudi & Alwan, 2010; Guskey, 2002) have also reported how teachers' feelings might change during the implementation of curriculum change. It seems that with the passing of time, the initial concerns gradually start to be resolved, and with the familiarity that experience provides, teachers' perceptions and acceptance of change contribute to improving their feelings towards that change (Troudi & Alwan, 2010). Moreover, teachers do not simply adopt or passively undergo calls for change, but interpret them, and as such filter them. Clearly, teachers' personal interpretive frameworks play a key role in this filtering (Ballet & Kelchtermans, 2008). Not having a clear understanding of the dimensions of the change probably made this group of teachers experience those negative feelings at the beginning of the process; however, once they understood the implications of the change, they started to feel more secure. At the same time, they realised the dimension of the changes in terms of responsibilities, workload, and time investment. On one side, they felt more confident and relaxed, but on the other, feelings of being overwhelmed and of exhaustion started to grow. Two of the participants described this process as follows: "*My feelings have gone up and down. On one side a lot of satisfaction, on the other extreme exhaustion*" and "*I have experienced different feelings. At the beginning, I wanted to leave everything. It's a lot of work. On the other hand, now I enjoy what I do in the classroom.*"

After two years of the implementation of the NEC, data revealed that participants seem to be at different stages in the evolution of their feelings and of the way they view change now. Some of the participants reported feelings of stability, satisfaction and rewards. They expressed that to work in the NEC has meant growth, renewal and satisfaction, that they are enjoying the process, and that to work in this new programme is keeping them, professionally alive. Others, however, are still struggling with feelings of pressure, adaptation, and insecurity. One of the participants expressed: *“I am still struggling with the lesson planning, with assessment at the end of the class, then connecting with the next class.”* These still existing contradictory feelings might be understood through the findings in the study Ballet and Kelchtermans (2008) conducted on teachers’ experience of changes in their working conditions or what they define as ‘calls’ for change. They found that even though calls for change usually come ‘from above’ or from external sources such as the school organisation, there is a call for change that lies within the teachers’ task description and their normative beliefs of ‘good education’. They expressed that the teachers themselves can become a source of increased workload... as the demands increase, the pressure grows. This seems to be the case of one of the participants who said that: *“I think this change goes too fast, the amount of work is too much. It is hard to understand, assimilate, and internalise. This creates a lot of tension for me and makes my work much more difficult than it really is.”* What participants described seems to go in line with what has been stated in the literature on curricular change in that educational change has to be understood as an on-going process and that people carry it out at different paces and to different degrees. As a consequence, whatever view is taken, change takes time (Wedell, 2009).

#### 5.2.1.2 TEACHERS’ ATTITUDES: *We have to be willing to work with ourselves.*

In general, most participants, when asked about the implications of this change in their professional lives, expressed that at the initial stage they were concerned and afraid of what this change would imply. They were not clear about what was expected from them or about the new methodology. All those feelings made them have an attitude of a resistance. One of the participants stated such resistance as follows: *“At the beginning, it was hard. At the beginning, I was against it.”* Interestingly some of them expressed an initial enthusiasm about the change because they felt professionally stuck in the previous curriculum. They saw this change as an opportunity to leave the boredom and monotonous state they were in. This reflects what Fullan (2007: 138) states: “Change is needed because many teachers are frustrated, bored and burned out.” Nevertheless, as

the NEC started to be implemented, those initial attitudes started to change once they realised the magnitude of the change and the implications it demanded. Then, they felt threatened and insecure about the new practices, probably because teachers are reluctant to adopt new practices or procedures unless they feel sure they can make them work (Guskey, 2002). In addition, and because of the implementation of the training and professional development model, they were threatened by the amount of work required and the time investment, which increased enormously under the NEC. Teachers had to attend more meetings, devote more time to planning their lessons, and visit each other's classes, among other things. All these activities, together with the curricular change, made most of the teachers become stressed out, nervous, and tired. As expressed by participants, however, and as time went by and the NEC started to develop and support was offered, teachers gradually learnt to handle and prioritise their new duties. Thus, those initial attitudes of resistance started to progressively change to attitudes of acceptance, understanding, awareness, openness, and willingness to change. This can be illustrated with the following quote from one of the participants: *"It is necessary to have an attitude of openness to, among other things, accept our students' feedback."* Another participant also expressed that: *"We will get what we want, depending on how we internalise that we need training that we need to be updated."* Yet another one directly stated that: *"We have to be willing to work with ourselves."* One of the participants, during the focus group interview, also expressed that their sense of agency and empowerment has highly increased. That participant expressed having a more professional attitude now towards teaching and the responsibilities it implies. She said that: *"The additional work and the time investment the NEC requires has taken me to a higher level as a professional. I feel like a real teacher now. It's not like before, coming to the office to pick up materials, attending departmental meetings...."*

On the whole, most of the participants seem to have developed attitudes that show a sense of commitment and willingness to learn about instruction, and to view learning as an on-going process about change in ideas (Lasky, 2005). Similar findings have also been reported in previous studies, such as the one conducted by Ha, et al., (2004) on teachers' perceptions of a curriculum change in Hong Kong. They reported that all respondents indicated that teachers' attitudes were one of the most important factors for successful curricular change. In particular they indicated that good morale heavily depended on their colleagues having professional attitudes. Nevertheless, after two

years of implementation, some participants are still struggling with the new working style because it implies a lot of effort and time. They expressed that: *“Changes are always difficult, they demand a lot from you as a human being. They make you resist. We also have to deal with that”* and *“It is logical that I feel stressed and confused. We have a totally new curriculum that we have to dedicate time to. It’s a lot of work.”* It then, appears necessary, to acknowledge that attitudes and perceptions of teachers are critical in a change process. Presumably, the manner in which teachers react to educational changes is largely determined by whether the teachers perceive their professional identities as being reinforced or threatened by reforms. This may also be true for this group of teachers whose status quo was highly impacted by the implementation of this New English Curriculum.

#### 5.2.1.3 TEACHERS’ CHALLENGES

To change or to try something new means to risk failure (Guskey, 2002). The challenges expressed by participants in this study could be grouped into three sub-categories: first, curricular challenges, these include the changes the teachers have had to face in their teaching assumptions and practices. Among these, participants referred to teaching a class in which the centre is the student, to write their lesson plans with a focus on students and not to plan for themselves, as they were accustomed to doing. It was also challenging because they needed to reduce the amount of teacher’s talk to allow the students to have more interaction and participation. One participant expressed it in the following way: *“In the NEC, my challenge is not only how to get students involved, but also how I am going to reduce the amount of talking I do in class.”* Another participant pointed out that one of the greatest challenges they all have had to face has been to understand and to implement the Communicative Approach. This participant observed that implementing this new approach is not only aimed at having students talk, but also helping them to overcome their fear of speaking in English and helping them to develop fluency in the language. Another participant expressed doubts in relation to what this approach really means and what it requires. This person said: *“Sometimes I am not really sure if the activity I am doing is communicative or not. Sometimes I don’t know if I am being careless about teaching grammar. I often ask myself if my students are really learning.”* For the NNES teachers an additional curricular challenge they have had to face is trying to teach cultural competence in relation to patterns of appropriate behaviours in an Anglo-Saxon context. Some of them said that it is a limitation they have and that sometimes it is a significant struggle for

them. Additionally, all participants expressed that another curricular challenge has been the paradigmatic change in the methods of students' evaluations, which includes assessing students on their everyday performance. It represents an important issue for these teachers that the higher percentage of students' evaluation is based on their daily performance and not on the grade they obtain in the exams. This paradigmatic change seems to be neither well understood nor completely accepted by this group of teachers. Similar challenges on new evaluations systems were reported in Iemjinda's study (2007) on curriculum innovation and EFL teacher development. This situation could possibly be explained assuming Ballet and Kelchtermans' (2008) argument that teachers want to keep control of the particular form that implementation should take and that they want to decide how changes are to be translated in specific practices. Participants also expressed that they are confused about the rubric they have to use to assess students' everyday performance (**see Appendix # 13**). They think the criteria need to be clarified and adjusted to each level. One complaint they had about the rubric was that the criteria, in order to fit the first six levels, became too general and was not applicable for the specific levels they were teaching. Even though the proficiency criteria were developed to avoid teachers' subjectivity when evaluating students, participants expressed exactly the opposite. They were obviously concerned about the subjectivity implied in this new way of assessing students. They expressed that they sometimes felt insecure about the grade they assigned because they feared to be either too strict or too flexible. They felt that because of that insecurity, the levels of demands varied from teacher to teacher, and they were afraid this situation was affecting students' outcomes. This perception was also reported in the Fernandez, et al., (2008), study of the implementation of a new senior physics curriculum in New Zealand schools. They observed that the curriculum as designed cannot ultimately determine the final form of practice and that there is an inherent uncertainty between design and its realization in practice, since practice is not a result of design but rather a response to it (Fernandez, et al., 2008). The second source of challenges refers to the professional challenges. As reported by the participants, another important challenge has been in terms of teachers' professionalism. Many of the participants expressed that working in the new curriculum demands that they be updated at all levels, in the profession and about the contents they teach. They said that they had to be ready for possible questions students may ask outside the course content but related to the specific topics dealt with in class. This new possibility implies researching those topics, studying, and reading. This situation has obviously required that these participants invest more time and do additional work. The third

source of teachers' challenges is the contextual challenges that centre around the limitations inherent in an EFL context, where opportunities to expand classroom work and practice with the TL outside the classroom are minimal. This, for them, has represented a constant challenge in terms of providing students with effective real life situations that resemble a real English speaking context. One of the participants illustrated this context limitation in the following terms: "*We have the great disadvantage that in the context in which we are teaching English, students are not exposed to the language constantly outside the classroom. We, as teachers, face the challenge of creating situations where they can feel they are interacting in a real situation and where they can use the language effectively.*" Even though this last quote is true from the teacher's point of view, the fact remains that English is taught as a foreign language. The probabilities of students practising the language outside the English class are minimal, except in some cases where English is the medium to access information, e.g. from the internet, music, and other leisure activities.

Within the context of where these participants work, they have also been challenged by students who have also had to adjust to the new paradigms this curriculum implies. It is worth to note that these students are accustomed to being taught in traditional ways where students are passive agents in the learning process. Students in the NEC have also had to break paradigms including the new vision of the teaching-learning process that the NEC promotes in terms of allowing for more student participation and interaction, promoting a more autonomous, responsible and independent way of learning. According to participants, this is most obviously perceived in the way students react especially to the participatory teaching methodology, the use of the book as only a resource and not as the curriculum, and the way students' evaluation is conducted. The educational system where this study took place does not usually allow room for students to take an active role in their learning processes. Some of the participants complained about having to convince the students that these new practices are important for them and more beneficial to their learning process.

Nevertheless, and in spite of the challenges these teachers have had to overcome, as a whole, they felt that all the efforts they have made have greatly paid off. In that respect, they expressed that they had also experienced many rewards which come mainly from two sources: themselves, for what they have achieved professionally and personally for the last two years and from the students' feedback and achievements.

#### 5.2.1.4 EFFECTS ON TEACHERS: *I don't have time for any social life.*

Participants in the study were of the view that the implementation of the NEC has had both positive and negative elements that have impacted their lives in general, and in many different ways.

As far as the effects of the curriculum change, the large majority of the participants stated that one of the two elements that has most affected them in a negative way is the amount of time invested both in and outside of the institution. Since 2009, the participants in this study have experienced an increased number of changes in their teaching practices and job context, which according to their views have significantly affected their professional and personal lives. They reported that since the NEC implementation, they have had to be at the institution for longer periods of time, and when they are at home on week days and weekends, they are always working. One of the participants said: *"Whenever I am at home now, I am in front of my computer working, investigating. I need time for me!"* Undoubtedly, the NEC implementation has imposed additional work and more time investment from teachers. Additional to all the extra work this change has implied, it might be possible that teachers have also self-imposed additional demands to meet self-formulated standards of "pedagogical perfection" (Ballet & Kelchtermans, 2008). In that sense, and as Ballet & Kelchtermans (2008: 52) express: "Teachers themselves can also become a source of increased workload....Exhaustion seems to endanger teachers because of the high demands they put on themselves." The other element that has most affected this group of teachers negatively is that not only do they have to spend more time at the institution than before, but also they have had an increased workload and extra responsibilities. These extra responsibilities include peer visits, participation in workshops, study circles and meetings. Day (2000: 101) in reference to the effects of changes on teachers' lives recommends that: "...investment in maintaining [teachers] intellectual and emotional selves is key to the educational success of schools in changing times."

Undoubtedly, the implementation of the Training and Professional Development Model has also added to their increased workload and time investment. Apparently, some of the participants were not completely aware of and clear about the purposes and implications of the model, and they saw all the actions that emanate from it mostly as

additional work. Teachers were not consulted about the elements and mode of implementation of the Training and Professional Development Model. This might explain the lack of clarity teachers felt. The research emphasises the importance of identifying what teachers think about a reform while ‘what teachers take to be their task, and why they see it the way they do, is often ignored’ (VanVeen & Slegers, 2006).” Participants also reported that their personal lives have been negatively affected too. The following quotes illustrate this reality: “*The new curriculum has modified my life in many different ways. It has affected my personal and family life. I don’t have time for any social life*” and “*My work now has made me sacrifice the free time I used to have for my family and my personal life.*” Participants’ responses at times reflected emotions of tension and uncertainty, frustration and impotence. Apparently, the scope and implications of this new curriculum implementation have entailed, for this group of teachers, complex and conflicting views of teachers’ professionalism. Nevertheless, such personal investment is almost inevitable: teaching involves intense personal interaction (Van Veen & Slegers, 2006). In spite of such a statement, and although educational innovations carry both implicit and explicit assumptions about how teachers should work, these assumptions need not be in keeping with the views of the teachers themselves. Therefore, these assumptions can invoke strong emotional reactions (Van Veen & Slegers, 2006) like the previous quotes expressed by some of the participants. These conflicting and sometimes contradictory views were evident as participants recognised that, despite those factors, the change has been beneficial.

With a more positive view, participants expressed that the new curriculum arrangements have brought about positive changes for both teachers’ work and students’ learning. Namely, the NEC has provided them with more time to develop the lessons and has allowed room for creativity. Participants also see as a positive effect of the NEC the kind of interaction and relationship it promotes between teacher and student due to its focus on a communicative and interactive teaching methodology. They said that now they feel more motivated to teach, they have renewed their energies and increased their professional self-esteem. To illustrate the previous statement, one of the participants acknowledged that: “*Sometimes with the routine of our work, we are not aware of the talents we have. With the opportunities the NEC has presented to us, I have realized my potentials.*” To add to participants’ sense of increased professionalism, another participant highlighted that: “*With the NEC, I had not only tested my experience as a teacher but also it has become evident to me what I am*

*capable of doing. This has also been gratifying.*” They also highlighted that, in spite of all the work this change has implied, the change has had many positive effects on them compared to the previous curriculum. Some of the participants recognised that even though it has been a difficult process, the change was necessary.

#### 5.2.1.5 COPING STRATEGIES

Curricular change is a complex, multidimensional, socially situated phenomenon that is affected, among other things, by the strategies that are used to cope and to manage change in a particular context (Markee, 1997). This is also true for the participants in this study, for whom these last two years have meant a time of understanding, assimilating and struggling to put into practice the NEC. It has been a time to build ‘bridges’ between the status quo and the proposed change (Wedell, 2009) in order to keep up with the requirements and demands that such change has implied.

In terms of the strategies these teachers have had to develop in order to cope and succeed in the NEC, participants reported that, in general, understanding that the new curriculum change is a process and learning to take the changes at an easy pace have helped them not to give up. Hence, as the demands increase the pressure grows teachers feel obliged to live with it (Ballet & Kelchtermans, 2008). They recognised that now, after two years, they have learnt to catch up with the new practices and with this new way of teaching. One of the participants referred to this as follows: *“Being a person teaching for so many years in the previous curriculum, it was very difficult to adapt to the NEC, but now, with the amount of time we have been teaching in it, I feel fine and I have started to cope with this new way of teaching.”* Other participants commented that they have learnt not to feel scared anymore, to think of the change as a process, to do what they can, to learn to take things slowly, and not to put so much pressure on them. In addition, participants identified other specific actions they have taken that have helped them to deal with this change process. Among these they mentioned that they have had to learn to look for and use a large quantity of information and materials in order to rely on the book only as a resource and not as the curriculum, like they used to. Other participants expressed that they have learnt to see the positive side of all the adjustments the NEC has implied and that they have also learnt to take advantage of almost everything they have gone through. Self-discipline and more time invested in lesson planning were two other strategies participants have become aware of as a necessity in order to cope with the new demands. Accordingly, others have suggested

that teachers interpret and evaluate the calls for change, and try to cope with them in ways that fit their own aspirations and working conditions. This was well exemplified by two of the participants, who said that: *“I have had to make adjustments in almost everything, from organising the chairs in the classroom to doing things that, because of my age, I thought I couldn’t do. The NEC has taught me that I can”* and *“After last semester, I decided I had to do something for me. I was totally exhausted and it was affecting my personal life. I decided to take yoga classes and now I am starting to feel better.”* Similar actions have been reported in studies (Ballet & Kelchtermans, 2008) conducted on processes of change and how teachers have dealt with them. They reported that teachers maintaining a sense of control over the decisions they make and the particular ways that changes take place in their classrooms safeguards their sense of professional autonomy, which contributes to their acceptance of the new demands and responsibilities.

Another beneficial strategy that some participants reported was to share ideas with other teachers and to plan their classes together. This cooperative and collaborative way of working has also played an important role in their coping with the NEC process. On the same token, programme innovations are more successful when teachers can meet regularly to discuss their experiences in an atmosphere of collegiality and experimentation (Guskey, 1989). For most of the participants, having the chance to share perspectives and seek solutions to common problems together seemed to have been of great benefit. Nevertheless, most of the participants reported that the coping strategy that has served them the most at this point in time is the continuous search for balance. Many of them expressed that they have found such a balance by adjusting what they have been required to do to their own classrooms’ realities, taking from the new approach what works best for them and their students, thereby adapting the new practices to their own personalities and the students’ needs. Two of the participants illustrated their own adaptation processes as follows: *“I personally adjust the new methodology to how I feel more comfortable and how I can get to my students better”* and *“I think what we have to do is, to reconcile the practices that worked for us in the past with the practices the NEC demands. We tend to go to extremes and that is not good.”* Ultimately, teachers are the ones who must make informed, self-reliant choices and connect the method with their own teaching situation (Skela, 1998).

#### 5.2.1.6 PERCEIVED SUPPORT

Participants reported that even though, at the initial stage, they were not involved in planning or designing the new curriculum, once the proposal of the NEC was approved, change leaders began to involve teachers, through periodic meetings, to present and to explain the new curriculum and its requirements. Nevertheless, it seemed that, for some of the participants, that amount of preparation was not enough. One of them expressed it this way: *“At the beginning of the implementation, we did not have the support we needed.”* The centrality of teachers’ support during a change process is well established in the extensive literature on the need and importance of providing support to teachers during the implementation phase of a change process (Troudi & Alwan, 2010; Guskey, 1988; Carless, 1998; Guskey, 2002; Iemjinda, 2007). For example, Guskey (2002: 388) advises that: *“If change in teachers’ attitudes and beliefs occurred primarily before implementation of a new programme or innovation, the quality of initial training would be crucial.”* Others (e.g. Carless, 1998; Guskey, 2002), have emphasised that, in order to facilitate the teachers’ implementation of curricular change and to reduce the risk of misinterpretation, continuous and on-going support, monitoring and follow-up are essential elements that will enhance teachers’ abilities to understand and to cope with change. Moreover, the kind of support they receive and from whom they receive it seems to be of decisive importance in the successful implementation of an educational change. One of the participants said about this that: *“I must recognise that the support we have been receiving from the department has made the change process smoother.”* Another participant said that: *“The people in charge of the implementation of the NEC are constantly looking for ways to help us keep updated about what we are doing.”*

Another form of support is to assure teachers that their concerns are valid and taken into account. The fact that, in order for an educational change to be successful, teachers’ voices and participation ought to play a key role is widely recognized by the research literature (Jessop & Penny, 1998; Troudi & Alwan, 2010; Carl, 2005). One of the participants expressed with satisfaction that: *“Something we wanted to be changed was changed. I feel satisfied about that.”* This quote also reflects that in a change process, it is important not to impose mandates, but to present teachers with the new curriculum as a reality that they can act upon and transform (Young, 1989).

Participants also commented on the idea that support for teachers in a change process is essential in order to help them understand and cope with the demands of the change. In this particular context, teachers have received and also shared such support, monitoring and follow up through some of the elements of the training and professional development model. That is, through periodic meetings, peer visits, feedback from students, and workshops on identified needs, among others. Participants reported that the main sources of the support they have received have come from the head of the ALD department, the foreign languages coordinator, and from colleagues. With regard to the sources of teachers' support in the implementation of a new curriculum, the research literature heavily emphasises the role of the principals and heads of departments as an important factor in the management of change. Carless (1998: 363) highlights that: "Instructional leadership, staff development, the building of collaborative cultures, academic, administrative, and resource support are some of the main means by which principals can facilitate change." In line with Carless' statement, participants agreed that they have received direct support from the ALD Head and from the Coordinator. They acknowledged that the support received has been essential for them throughout this process of change. One of the participants expressed it as follows: *"To know that we are not alone, the support given to us by the head of the department and the coordinator has been essential. They have been patient with us."* Another participant expressed this support from another perspective: *"We have received direct support from the head of the department. That support has taken the form of the teaching resources that are available to us, the workshops and the teaching course abroad."* Participants also perceived as another way of support that: *"... in the ALD... everything is planned and organized. There are no surprises and everything we ask for is right on time."*

Despite the importance of the principal's role in supporting this group of teachers during the process of change, according to Fullan (2007: 133): "When teachers do get help, the most effective source tends to be fellow teachers, and second, administrators and specialists." This was also true for what this group of teachers perceived as the most powerful and beneficial source of support during the implementation of the NEC-their colleagues. This was clearly illustrated in the following comments made by two of the participants. They expressed that: *"For me, the greatest help and support have come from the other teachers. They have been my support day in and day out"* and *"The implementation of the NEC has made us come closer to each other. It has*

*promoted team work and more collaboration among us.*” Another participant also added that: *“I have always felt supported by the ALD, but above all, the greatest support I have received is from my colleagues who are, the same as me, going through the same situation.”* According to the perceptions of support reported by participants, it would be accurate to infer that on-going support from administrators and skilled teachers promoting change is important to teachers’ continuing commitment to the change (Iemjinda, 2007).

#### 5.2.1.7 TEACHERS’ CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE IMPLEMENTATION STAGE

Participants, from their individual perspectives, assume that they have contributed to the implementation of the NEC in different ways. For some, their contributions range from attitudes of collaboration with others to feelings of enthusiasm; for others, their contribution is being responsible for their work, being present in the activities they are required, and respecting the practices required in the NEC.

Acknowledging the centrality of the teachers’ role in a context of change and the importance of how they perceive themselves within that process, one of the participants expressed that: *“The teacher is the core element in this new programme. What we receive and learn is what we then implement in the classroom.”* Similar answers have been reported by Carl (2005) in his study on the voice of teachers in curriculum development. One of the participants in Carl’s study (2005: 225) said that: *“Teachers are the ones who have to implement the curriculum and have the experience and contact with learners.”* Participants in this study seemed to be aware that teachers, as main agents of change, are also responsible for the successful implementation of the change. In general, it seems that they have developed a sense of responsibility through which it is expected that teachers gain a sense of empowerment of such change. Some of the participants expressed this sense of responsibility as follows: *“My contribution has been by doing my job correctly.”*, *“I have involved myself in this new programme with a lot of responsibility.”* and *“I think that the way I teach my classes following the NEC guidelines and practices has been my best contribution.”*

Data gathered also revealed that participants’ perceptions of their contributions to the NEC implementation have elevated their professional self-esteem and their sense of agency throughout this change process. The concept of agency is understood in this

work as the ability human beings have to influence their lives and their environment (Lasky, 2005). One participant expressed her perceived sense of agency like this: *“There have been moments when I have seen the need to change or adjust something. I have contributed by giving my opinion and it has always been taken into account and, when possible, I have seen my suggestions implemented.”* In relation to the importance of teachers’ agency on a change process, Flores (2005: 403) is of the view that: *“Teachers’ individual agency is a crucial element in attempts to implement structural reform or educational [change].”*

Other participants in this study viewed their contributions from a more collegial dimension. They acknowledged that the interchange among teachers the NEC has produced has been the most valuable contribution they all have offered throughout the process. In relation to the collaboration and constant communication that has emerged among them, other participants reported the sense of pride they feel when they can contribute by helping others. One of the participants expressed it this way: *“I feel great pride and satisfaction when one of my colleagues approaches me and I can offer help or guidance. In that sense, I think all of us have contributed greatly.”* The way these teachers perceived they have contributed to the change process and how those contributions have been welcomed and recognised by others, both colleagues and administrators, supports the idea that teachers are the ones who adopt, adapt, or ignore (Lasky, 2005) a proposed change. These teachers’ perspectives were crucial for this study because, in my view, teachers are the key element in the implementation process (Carless, 1998). Participants’ perceptions on how their voices have been heard and taken into account on one hand and, the opportunities they have been given to develop their sense of agency, on the other, apparently have played a significant role in the way participants believe they have contributed to this process and the quality of their contributions in affecting the NEC implementation.

5.2.1.8 SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT : *We all have a personal life that needs to be respected.*

Participants’ suggestions ranged from daily work issues to institutional policies. Suggestions that might facilitate their daily work have to do with the format used to turn in their lesson plans (**See Appendix # 12**). They suggested that the format should be revised or changed. Two of the participants said that: *“The way we turn in our lesson plans... I don’t know what it is for”* and *“I would change the way we turn in our*

*lesson plans. I think it is double work.*” Another suggestion they offered that directly impacted their daily work was about the time they had to invest at the institution aside from their teaching time. They expressed that the demands were too many. One of the participants suggested that: *“We need to think about the use of our time. We all have a personal life that needs to be respected. I think we need to make adjustments on that.”* The amount of time and energy that educational changes require, and the resulting impact on teachers’ emotional lives is one problematic aspect for teachers (Van Veen & Slegers, 2006). Another suggestion participants offered was about finding institutional ways in which the sequence that the courses in the NEC have to be taken be maintained and not allow students to take these course whenever they want. They considered that this practice is going to negatively affect the NEC’s results.

Besides the previous suggestions, all participants were emphatic about two aspects that seem to be causing the most concern and distress. One is the struggle they are going through trying to adapt and to understand the new way of evaluating students. In relation to this new way of assessment, they reported two main suggestions: that the rubric be revised and adjusted according to each level, and that more and immediate training on this new evaluation paradigm be offered. The other one is the no-credit policy for the first six courses. Participants were very emphatic in suggesting that this policy needs to be changed if the results expected in the NEC are to be achieved.

Overall, the participants seemed to be very involved with the new curriculum and well aware of the issues that were affecting them as teachers and that could possibly negatively affect the NEC implementation and continuation stages.

### **5.3 Research Question 3**

#### **What is the potential of the NEC to provide teachers with professional development opportunities?**

##### 5.3.1 Professional Development

###### 5.3.1.1 TEACHERS’ PERCEPTIONS: *With the NEC there is always space to grow.*

The continuous training of the teaching staff is considered to be an integral part of the professional development of the teachers in an educational institution. Similarly, the assumption that for an educational change to be implemented and achieved, change initiators need to consider the kind of support they will offer to those who will

implement the change. In the initiation and implementation of any curricular change, professional development programmes are crucial in bringing about change in teachers' classroom practices, their attitudes and beliefs, as well as students' learning outcomes (Ha, et al., 2004). Others (e.g. Fernandez, et al., 2008), point to the importance of appropriate professional development in bringing about curriculum change. As Fernandez, et al. (2008: 195-196) suggests: "Such development would be expected to go a long way towards helping teachers to understand and commit to changes suggested in a curriculum document." According to the participants' responses, when asked about their perceived usefulness of the training and professional development model; there seems to be consensus that they value the training and support offered through the different elements the model provides. The teachers claimed that the model, which covered both current theoretical information and successful teaching practices, has allowed them to face and implement change (Ha, et al., 2004). They acknowledged that through the activities the model proposes, they have updated their teaching practices, have undergone the change process easily and their teaching careers have improved. This can be noted in the responses of two participants who expressed that: *"With the NEC there is always space to grow I have grown. There is also space for sharing."* and *"I don't have words to describe how the opportunities we have been given have helped me to grow as a professional. One keeps updated and our development is more complete."*

When asked about the specific activities that have helped them the most throughout the implementation of the NEC, most of them highlighted the peer visits, team work, the periodic meetings, and the feedback they received from their students. They expressed that these activities have helped them to develop more cooperation and collaboration among all the teachers and to revise their understandings of the NEC and the implementation of the new practices. For example, they said, that the periodic meetings have contributed because they have created a space where they can hear the struggles other teachers are going through--thus they realise they are not the only ones, they are not alone. They also said that in these meetings they can offer advice and they also learn from the others' experiences. It is an opportunity to be heard and for them to bring to the table the difficulties they are having so that change leaders and colleagues can offer help and support. These comments made by the participants are also considered in the research literature (Iemjinda, 2007) which suggests that through professional discussions and meetings time should be made available to allow for these

discussions. For example, Guskey (1989: 448) states that: “Simply providing teachers with opportunities to interact and share ideas can also be a valuable mechanism for support.” For most participants, having the chance to share perspectives and seek solutions to common problems has been beneficial. Benefits were also reported in reference to the peer visitation element of the model. One of the participants said that:

*“The peer visits are what have helped me the most. When I visit one of my peers, I can see how other teachers are implementing the NEC and, as you see that teacher, you reflect on how you do it and you realise if you are doing the right thing. On the other hand, when one of my peers visits me, they offer me suggestions to improve. In other words, we are learning from each other, we take care of each other.”*

Classroom observations and conversations with teachers have also been suggested (Orafi & Borg, 2009) as two strategies that would allow to assess the gap between curricular plans and the instructional realities to be monitored, the responsive forms of support that need to be provided, as well as any necessary adjustments that need to be made to the curriculum. Of equal importance is the need teachers have to receive regular feedback on the effects of their efforts (Guskey, 2002). Specific procedures to provide feedback on results are essential to the success of any professional development effort. The element of feedback to teachers has been offered through various forms, collectively, during the periodic meetings, and individually, after lesson planning revisions, as well as at the end of each peer visit and through the students’ feedback. Participants in this study acknowledged in general the usefulness of the feedback they have received from those sources; however, the element of students’ feedback was highly valued as a source for improvement. They said that the feedback they have received from the students has helped them to keep focused on and aware of what they are doing; that is, how students perceive they are benefitting from the classes or what adjustments students suggest that teachers need to make. For teachers receiving regular feedback on students’ involvement during class sessions could be very powerful in facilitating their use of new instructional practices (Guskey, 2002). Similarly, giving teachers evidence on students’ feelings of confidence or self-worth can also serve this purpose (Guskey, 2002). Some of the participants agreed that these students’ feedbacks helped them to direct their classes better and to keep updated because, as one of them said: *“it is easy to fall back into the old routine.”* Research literature clearly supports

what this group of teachers has experienced in relation to their perceptions of the ways and usefulness of the feedback received, especially from their students. For example, Guskey (2002: 388) states that: “When teachers gain this evidence and see that a new programme or innovation works well in their classrooms, change in their attitudes and beliefs can and will follow.”

Another important finding in relation to the opportunities for professional growth is that most of the participants expressed to have a higher professional self-esteem and appeared to be more confident in fulfilling what this curricular change is requiring from them. They appear to value themselves and what they do now more than before. One of the participants referred to this in this way: *“The peer visits that we do have made my work noticed and valued. Other teachers benefit from what I do.”* Some of them expressed that after being immersed in this change process, they feel like real teachers, real professionals, more updated. One of the participants expressed: *“I have been given the opportunity to change. I feel more like a teacher, stronger. Anyone can notice that.”* Another one said that the need to continue her education has flourished. This participant said that: *“I think it has added to me as a teacher. I feel motivated now to begin my Masters.”* At the same time, the participants valued the opportunities they have been given; however, the increasing work load and investment of time the activities in the model have required has been a general concern. They complained about not having a time allocated for the professional development activities. The following extract illustrates the frustration perceived in one participant who clearly said:

*“We have to come every day even though we don’t have to teach that day. There is not even one day that could be given to us. There is no time for teacher training. Our workload is the same, it hasn’t been reduced. We are told that we have to do different things, but our workload remains the same. I believe we need to think about it. If what is pursued is our professional development, our growth, we need to think of other ways of doing it.”*

It seems that one important aspect of change is the intensification in the number of tasks teachers have to accomplish without sufficient time. The teaching job is intensified; more has to be accomplished in less time.

All in all, and in spite of the additional workload these changes have brought about, the influence of the training and professional model apparently has provided some benefits to these teachers' individual processes of change. The following quotes illustrate what was perceived in each individual conversation during the interviews. One participant expressed that: *"The professional development activities have been as if I were placed in front of a mirror, to become aware of how I was teaching and to understand that by being a little more creative, by studying and reading, I can make a difference"*, another one said: *"To me, to work in the NEC has meant a constant reflection. Every time I teach, I reflect and journal on how the class went, what I should have done differently, how I will improve it the next time. It has been a continuous learning process. From the moment I start my classes until they finish I am learning."* A third participant thought that: *"Through the various activities that the model proposes, we all have been giving support to each other. Those activities have helped us to grow, to communicate among us, to know that we are not alone."*

In spite of participants' perceptions of all the benefits these activities have represented for them, it seemed necessary that more time for the professional development activities needs to be allocated. Equally, participants' working conditions should be revised. Many participants, as part-time teachers, cannot lower their workloads to dedicate time to their professional growth, since their salaries depend on the amount of classes they teach. These are undeniable contradictions that need to be considered and worked on if institutions want to be successful in curriculum change processes.

### 5.3.2 Teachers' learning: *It has been a continuous learning process.*

It is desirable that teachers understand both the theoretical underpinnings and classroom applications of the innovation (Carless, 1998), especially in contexts where teachers lack sound subject knowledge. The training and professional model implemented parallel to the NEC considered a number of elements to address teachers' subject knowledge needs. These elements took the form of study circles, workshops, and courses to address teachers' identified needs. It was necessary that teachers received training on the theoretical principles and practical applications of the Communicative Approach. Participants expressed that, before the curriculum change, they were not sure about how and why they were teaching the way they used to whereas now they are more aware of what is expected from them as teachers. As a

consequence, they feel more secure about what they are doing in the classroom with the students. Research studies (Carless, 1998) report that English teachers who are academically and professionally trained, among other things, have responded better and more effectively to curriculum implementations than those who are not. About this matter, participants reported that they felt more confident now when they have to discuss issues concerning TEFL with other colleagues and trainers. Others expressed that they feel more professionals in terms of the subject knowledge they have gained and the teaching practices they are now implementing. They also reported that they have learnt a lot about themselves in the sense that, because of the position this change has placed them in, they are more aware of their abilities to adapt to changes, more aware of their teaching abilities and their own capacities as human beings and teachers. One of them said that she feels more capable of making decisions in the classroom and of understanding why she does it. Other participants expressed that because of the fact that they have had to study, to be in contact with recent literature in TEFL, they now know why they do what they do. One of them expressed it like this: *“Everything that I do now, a new technique or strategy, I know the specific name, its author. It’s not something that we have created, it was there.”* In general, participants perceived that they have advanced in the sound subject knowledge they have gained.

In spite of their perceptions of progress, there were several occasions in which some of the participants expressed that there is still confusion and lack of knowledge about the new approach and its implementation. One of them said: *“Sometimes I am not sure if an activity is communicative or not. I ask myself, sometimes, am I being careless with the teaching of grammar? Are my students really learning?”* It is probably the case that, as Guskey (2002: 389) suggests: “We need to find more creative ways to help teachers translate new knowledge into practice.” Participants’ responses clearly indicate that curricular change does not happen overnight, that it is a complex and difficult process that requires time then, it is imperative that improvement be seen as a continuous and on-going endeavour (Guskey, 2002) rather than piecemeal (Carless, 1998).

Overall, this chapter, by providing a detailed view of what this curricular change process has meant for these teachers, at various levels and in different aspects, has attempted to answer the three research questions guiding this study: teachers’ understandings of the NEC, the effects, in terms of feelings and attitudes that the NEC has had on this group of teachers, the various strategies they have used in order to cope

with this process of change and the professional development opportunities the NEC has provided them with. From an interpretive perspective, processes of interpretation and sense-making were based on each participant's lived experience through the construction of knowledge between participants and researcher.

In the next chapter, a discussion of the implications of a curricular change and the recommendations for initiatives like the one presented in this piece of research will be offered.

## **Chapter VI: Recommendations and Conclusion**

In this piece of research I sought to gather information from the teachers' perspectives and experiences about the necessity, appropriateness and quality of the NEC at a higher education institution in the D. R. Another purpose of the study was to inform the stakeholders of these curriculum design and implementation processes about the changes and adjustments that still can be done, and the strengths and benefits that this initiative has provided for the teachers and the students as well. Since no study of this type has been conducted in the D. R. this research is an attempt to fill a gap in the context literature and to provide the first study of this type. At the same time, it is expected that this research contributes to the existing literature related to curriculum innovation, change or reform during the implementation process. Reference has been made to how teachers have understood and coped with the process of change in terms of the adjustments they have had to make to their own practices, to match the intended curricular change. The perspectives and experiences of the teachers studied illustrate both the challenging and rewarding experiences the NEC has provided them with, which have served to stimulate their individual growth and professional development. In this way, this chapter offers the recommendations and conclusions from the interpretations of the data gathered.

The results indicated that to explore teachers' perceptions of a change process is both important and necessary, especially because the exploration of a particular need for a change is an influential factor in the success of any educational change (Iemjinda, 2007). This exploration focused on teachers' experiences of the proposed change, understanding experience as what people undergo, the kinds of meanings they construe as they teach and learn, and the personal ways in which they interpret the worlds in which they live in (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988). Although these results provide no definite solutions to implementation problems, they do help clarify some of the critical issues that must be addressed in resolving those problems (Guskey, 1988) and the many constraints which limit all forms of curriculum development (Kelly, 2009). Three constructs were particularly relevant for the present study, namely: teachers' understandings of curricular change, teachers' attitudes towards curricular change, and the training and professional development opportunities required to support teachers throughout the implementation phase in a curricular change.

According to the focus groups and interviews, the main themes raised by participants revolved around: 1--their understandings of the curricular changes, 2--their attitudes

towards those changes, and 3--their perceptions of the usefulness of the support they have been offered in terms of training and professional development opportunities. After conducting this investigation and analysing the data gathered, the results reported generated recommendations about a number of issues relevant to the implementation stage of a curricular change. Those recommendations will be offered in the following sections of this chapter.

### **6.1 Teachers' perceptions of the change**

By exploring teachers' perceptions of the NEC implementation in general, it was perceived that this group of teachers, in spite of all the challenges and difficulties they have had to deal with, highlighted more the positive aspects of the change and how they have benefited from the professional development opportunities, rather than the negative elements. It seemed that the inner motivation and the will to become better teaching professionals by pursuing continuous development was one of teachers' priorities. In support of this, Bailey, et al. (2001: 246) reminds us that: "Professional development is not something that just happens: It must be actively pursued...we as teachers must be our own [and first] sources of renewal and continuance."

Due to the static stage most of the participants perceived their careers were in, they saw this curricular change more as an opportunity than a threat. Even though there were times of great confusion and immense struggles, participants' attitudes of openness and cooperation with the process of change have prevailed and helped them to develop coping strategies and positive attitudes during the most difficult times of the implementation process. Responses from participants indicated that teachers felt supported and valued by colleagues, change leaders, administrators and the institution, in general; this has elevated their professional self-esteem and sense of professionalism. A recommendation for educational change leaders that emanates from participants' responses is that change leaders need to be well aware of the fact that recognition for teachers' work, efforts, experience and professionalism is what teachers need and seem to value most of all. Contrary to Troudi (2009), and clearly an exception to most institutions in the context of this study, the participants felt that their immeasurable efforts have been valued and recognised. Recognition and value can take many forms, depending on the institution's possibilities. Instances of how recognition and value were made explicit to this group of teachers were by praising and thanking them for their work and efforts publicly during meetings, by creating or identifying opportunities

for teachers to develop in other areas, e.g. presenting at local conferences and delivering workshops for colleagues, as well as paying financial recompense for additional work and providing financial support for professional development courses abroad, among others.

## **6.2 Teachers' voices**

Another and perhaps more significant recommendation that this study generated is the need to involve teachers in the decision-making processes right from the initial stage of the change process; that is, the planning of the curricular change and throughout the change implementation. Teachers' voices need to be and should be recognised and heard through taking into account their suggestions for adjustments necessary during the implementation of the curricular change. Teachers' voices can also be given a place in educational processes by creating opportunities where teachers are integrated and participate with an active role from the very beginning of the curricular change. Perhaps one way to hear the voices of teachers is by supporting them through participation and involvement in all the work and academic activities that a curricular change requires. In this sense, if educational change is to be sustained (Jessop & Penny, 1998), prior consultation should form an important part of any curriculum reform, and the acknowledgement of teachers' input would ensure that teachers' participation is incorporated at the appropriate time. This opportunity will serve as a means to ensure that teachers gain access to and take ownership of the new curriculum in a more significant way (Carl, 2005). Teachers have an important role to play in the educational processes that originate at their work place, especially processes that have to do with curriculum reform. Externally imposed curricula, management innovations, and monitoring and performance assessment systems have often been poorly implemented, and have resulted in periods of destabilization, increased workload, and intensification of teachers' work" and a crisis of professional identity (Day, 2002). Carl (2005: 228) is of the view that: "By ignoring teachers' voices, the outcomes of new thinking on curriculum development may in fact be thwarted, prolonging the dangerous situation that teachers, as potential curriculum agents, simply remain 'voices crying in the wilderness'."

Quality teachers' participation and involvement is essential, not only in curriculum development but also for recognising and nurturing their personal and professional growth, their identity with the institutions where they work, and to contribute to

strengthen their sense of agency. Needless to say, allowing teachers' voices to be heard can bring positive results, and the teachers' professional self-esteem and status will be reinforced and put in the place where they should be, at the heart of the educational enterprise. Among the possible ways that institutions could explicitly put teachers at the heart of the educational enterprise, from the planning stage, is by consulting them about the change plans, assuring their participation in decision-making meetings, and assigning group work to develop drafts of the document containing the proposed changes. As Brown (1995: 206) expresses: "Involving teachers in systematic curriculum development may be the single best way to keep their professionalism vital and their interest in teaching alive." In this respect, teachers need to be assured that the curriculum change is not because they are not doing a good job. Curricular changes should not be based on a deficit model, rather, as a different approach to achieving teachers' goal of effective EFL teaching (Iemjinda, 2007).

### **6.3 Teachers' feelings and attitudes**

Besides teachers' understandings and preparation, it is important to take into account that teaching is an emotional practice (Lasky, 2005) as well as a cognitive and technical endeavour (Lasky, 2005). This study also revealed that change leaders in general should be sensitive and aware of the feelings and attitudes teachers develop before and throughout the implementation process. The importance of the role of teachers' attitudes during a process of change has also been stressed by others (e.g. Hazratzad & Gheitanchian, 2009; Mowlaie & Rahimi, 2010), who argue that attitudes are such important factors that they can be considered the cause of teachers' success or failure in a classroom. Knowing teachers' attitudes is beneficial because any investment in a curricular change seems to be a waste of time and energy if teachers' full support is missing (Mowlaie & Rahimi, 2010). In this respect, change leaders need to develop an awareness of how much an educational change can have an impact on teachers' professional and most importantly teachers' personal lives. With regard to this, collected data revealed that the demands an educational change poses on teachers, both at the professional and personal levels, need to be made step by step so that teachers' time and workloads are respected. Done this way, teachers are more likely to commit to the new situation and do their jobs with joy and satisfaction.

It was obvious in this study that conflicts and challenges inevitably arise in a process of change; however, and as Fullan (2007: 123) points out: "... conflict and disagreement

are not only inevitable but fundamental to successful change.” A conflicting issue that most of the participants in this study highlighted was the fact that their personal lives have been greatly affected by the time demands the NEC has imposed on them. Nevertheless, most of them agreed that this situation was more evident at the beginning of the NEC implementation. With the passing of time and their better understanding of the NEC changes, participants expressed that now they are in a better position to balance their work with the time they need for their personal lives. Regardless of the search for balance between their professional and personal lives, participants admitted that working in the NEC has required a different approach to assuming and doing their work. Obviously, this new approach to teaching demands more time investment than they were used to. Thus, a change process, as such, takes time and teachers understand this process and adopt it at different paces; furthermore, some might never succeed in adopting the demands required by the change.

#### **6.4 Teachers’ understanding and support**

Another recommendation that this study has generated is that teachers’ understanding of the changes implied in a new curriculum in terms of new methodologies and practices need to be clear. Moreover, change leaders need to find creative ways to help teachers translate new knowledge into practice. For instance, change leaders can promote and help organize activities such as teachers’ demonstrations of a class they plan to teach in front of colleagues for feedback, as well as peer teaching, peer observation, discussion meetings and workshops delivered by colleagues who understand and implement the changes more successfully than others. In this respect, it is of vital importance that, parallel to the change implementation process, teachers be supported through training and professional development programmes. Troudi and Alwan (2010: 117) suggest that: “Training and support should be of great help in reducing the stressful effects of change [especially] during implementation.” Teachers’ training and support should go hand in hand with any change in order to enhance teachers’ confidence and to let them know that they are not alone with the sometimes imposed changes. It is also important that change leaders be aware of teachers’ cognitive as well as affective needs during the usually stressful and difficult, process of change.

Participants’ experiences and perceptions also revealed the need to look beyond the introduction of ideas to the importance of continued support during implementation

(Guskey, 1989). No matter how good the training is, it is unlikely to stick without follow-up support. Without follow-up support, most teachers understandably resort to old, comfortable patterns (Guskey, 1989). After listening to teachers' experiences with the NEC during the interviews, a useful recommendation during curricular change processes is that it is essential to recognise that the successful implementation of any educational change is a complex process and that teachers require continuing support (Iemjinda, 2007). Carless (1998: 366) also recommends this kind of support when he states that: "support for teachers at the classroom level plays a significant role in facilitating the implementation of innovations."

It was also noted in the course of the interviews that, after two years of implementation, some teachers in the NEC still need more follow-up support at the classroom level. Therefore, it is highly recommended that more and proactive support be offered from change leaders; that is from the department head, coordinator and experienced teachers who are more advanced in their understanding of the new methodology and practices. This support can be offered in a variety of ways; namely, providing teachers with technical feedback, which sometimes results from class observations and lesson plan revision, and guiding them in adapting new practices to the needs of their students. In other words, it has to be personal, hands-on, in-classroom assistance (Guskey, 1989). Nevertheless, and despite the support needed during the implementation of a curricular change, there is no doubt that as Iemjinda (2007: 14) observes: "There are many challenges posed by moving to Communicative Language Teaching Approach and moving away from traditional approaches in EFL. Bringing about these changes can be very difficult to achieve, but this is not a reason for not setting out to implement such changes."

### **6.5 Leadership and guidance of teachers in a change process**

The need for strong leadership and guidance in educational improvement efforts is well established in the research literature (Guskey, 1988, 2002; Carless, 1998; Lamie, 2005; Fullan, 2007; Iemjinda, 2007; Weddel, 2009) and it appears to be extremely powerful during the implementation of curriculum changes. These roles are usually assumed by schools principals, heads of departments or directors. The leadership of the change leader in a curricular change and teachers' professional development is critical to the creation and success of an educational institution learning community (Ha, et al. 2004). In this particular context, such leadership and guidance was assumed by the Head of the

ALD. Ha, et al., (2004: 431) highlight that: “Within schools, the principal is in a unique position to influence the implementation of any curricular change and to affect the overall quality of school improvement.” Moreover, it is suggested in the research literature (Guskey, 1989) that guidance and direction coupled with, perhaps, pressure from educational leaders are requirements for such changes to occur. Perhaps more observations of classrooms by the change leaders should be included in any implementation of change, since only then can knowledge of actual, rather than reported behaviour be gained (Kennedy & Kennedy, 1996). Another recommendation for change leaders is that even though finding balance has been an important strategy for this group of teachers, it is important to acknowledge the need to be vigilant and aware of that somewhere along the path of finding balance there might be risk of misinterpretation involved. The same as with this group of teachers, Orafi and Borg (2009) found that teachers filtered the content and practices of the new curriculum according to what they felt was feasible and desirable in their context and, in the process of transforming it, it did not represent the intended major departure from the curriculum that it had replaced. Consequently, the results of what teachers implement and the intended curriculum may be somewhat different. Teachers’ interpretive frameworks might influence how they filter information and make their own adjustments. It is also essential that curriculum implementation leaders provide a working environment where teachers feel confident and secure, where it is possible to disagree with some aspects of the implementation and to discuss adjustments that need to be made with the certainty that their voices would be heard and acted upon. With regard to this, Iemjinda (2007: 13) expresses that: “School leaders can help develop a climate of experimentation and enquiry rather than one of judgment or blame. In such a climate, teachers will be prepared to take professional risks and be open to sharing the results of such risks and experimentation.” To add to the importance of the role of the principal in a change process, Fullan (2007: 156) states that: “Some of the earlier implementation research identified the role of the principal as central to promoting or inhibiting change.” He continues to argue that: “Today, no serious change effort would fail to emphasise the key role of the principal.” Finally, findings indicate that to be effective in their leadership roles, principals, directors or head of departments, as change leaders, need to be sensitive and open to the teachers’ needs during the implementation, and must remain open to making any necessary adjustments as the curriculum unfolds if the conception of curriculum adopted is one of a process and not of a finished product.

## **6.6 On-going curriculum evaluation and feedback**

Curriculum evaluation needs to be continuous and its results utilised in modifying the various components of the curriculum (Troudi & Alwan, 2010). One recommendation that this study yielded is that curriculum change needs to be the focus of on-going evaluation and periodic review to make the necessary adjustments and modifications for the improvement of the proposed change and for the benefit of all parties involved. Evaluation's most important role is to help in making decisions, so it should be a continuing process implemented in a systematic way (Brown, 1995). As with the NEC, this can involve periodic meetings with teachers, revision of teachers' lesson plans, students' feedback, class observations, that would allow gaps between curricular plans and instructional realities to be monitored, responsive forms of support to be provided, and any necessary adjustments to the curriculum to be made (Orafi & Borg, 2009). In addition to the importance of the on-going evaluation of change, participants in this study highlighted the usefulness and the role of the feedback they received on a constant basis from different stakeholders of the new curriculum implementation. Furthermore, the role of feedback from colleagues and administrators has been recognised in the research literature as one of the variables that can prevent teacher's burnout (Pines, 2002). In the context of this study, on-going evaluation was observable in the different ways feedback about the implementation and evolution of the change process was obtained; that is, through peer observations reports, teachers' reflections, students' feedback, periodic meetings, and mid- and end-of-term evaluation meetings. The feedback obtained was discussed with teachers and, through a dialogic process, consensus was obtained and adjustments made. Nevertheless, the source of feedback most important to participants was the feedback they received from their students. As stated earlier, teachers adopt changes in practices when they see that those new practices have improved students' results (Guskey, 1989).

## **6.7 Institutional support**

From the participants' responses, it was observed that institutional support is needed in a multidimensional and complex process such as changing a curriculum. This support is needed in terms of financial funds to invest in supporting teachers with training, materials and classroom preparations, among others. Participants' responses highlight how thankful and satisfied they were by the efforts the institution made and the financial support offered from the beginning. It is worth noting that this is not usually

the case of many educational institutions in the D. R. This common reality is also addressed in the research literature on teachers' recognition (Troudi, 2009), which can be characterised by the lack of financial support offered to teachers by many educational institutions. In this sense, participants' lived experience is somewhat different from the realities of their colleagues in other institutions. Beyond the financial support needed during the implementation of an educational change, there are also other kinds of support that teachers value and need, such as institutional support in the form of revision or creation of institutional policies that allow time for teachers' training and development and professional growth. If such policies are either revised or established, sacrificing teachers' personal time would be diminished or unnecessary. Lack of support, in terms of time allocation for their professional development and training, was a recurrent theme brought up by participants throughout the data collection stage. It is, then, recommended, in order to preserve teachers' sense of well-being and to avoid teacher burn out with regard to supporting the initiatives that the curricular change implies, that educational institutions provide not only financial investment but also, and perhaps most importantly, human investment and care. Investment in maintaining teachers' intellectual and emotional selves is key to the educational success of schools in changing times (Day, 2000). Similarly, Troudi (2009: 61) when referring to the perceived lack of enthusiasm and passion of today's teachers, signals that: "Despite [teachers'] love of teaching, teachers can be affected by their work conditions, managerial decisions, lack of support...in most parts of the world."

Instructional leadership, staff development, the building of collaborative cultures, academic, administrative and resource support (Carless, 1998), but above all, reducing the institutional sense of urgency in effecting changes are some of the main means by which institutions can facilitate change and contribute to the human investment in teachers. Possibly for the participants in this study, the lack of support perceived in terms of time allocated for the training and professional development activities in the NEC had to do more with the urgency to prepare teachers in the new methodology and the new practices the NEC required. It is then recommended that before embarking on a curricular change initiative, two important facts be considered: first, the dimensions of the change and what it represents for the teachers who will implement it in terms of knowledge of the practices that the change proposes, and second, to understand that changes do not happen overnight. Therefore, the implementation of new practices must be approached incrementally if staff development efforts are to be successful; in other

words, change strategies should be developed and planned in advance. Such strategies include time that allows for implementation to be at a gradual but steady pace, time provided for teachers' training, experimentation, adaptation, and collaboration. This way, changes will be more likely to succeed (Guskey, 1989).

In sum, bringing about a curriculum change takes time; nevertheless, working on changing the infrastructure (policies, incentives) is necessary if valued gains are to be sustained and built upon (Fullan, 2007). In that respect, and probably the most important fact, is that as Fullan (2007: 124) emphasises: "Assume that changing the culture of institutions is the real agenda, not implementing single innovations." Therefore, institutional initiatives that upgrade the professionalism of teachers, in addition to being desirable in their own right, should help to provide a climate conducive to the development of curriculum changes (Carless, 1998).

A clear implication arising from this study is that institutions need to create learning spaces for teachers that are more conducive to learning and growth so they can handle the challenges of time and work load more easily. Recognizing this fact implies a review of the policies and practices related to the professional development of teachers (Poulson and Avramidis, 2002). In my view, this revision should start from the everyday working conditions at educational institutions, where teachers spend a disproportionate amount of time coping with the immediate demands of their job, to the personal and institutional vision as part of the daily life of the teacher. The time teachers invest in class preparation, attendance at meetings and other activities in which teachers are involved outside the classroom should count as part of their workloads and should be included in their salaries regardless of the type of contract they have. This way, teachers would not have to overload themselves by teaching more classes than they should in order to earn enough money to live on. Tertiary education institutions should allocate specific times during the week just for teachers' preparation; that is, time within the working schedule of teachers and not during teachers' personal time. Another suggestion that could help to create a learning environment, especially at the participants' institution, is the revision of credit distribution in the subjects offered, which should reflect the real amount of work and time invested by teachers aside from teaching. Hiring more full-time teachers could be another possibility. In this way, the additional work the NEC requires could be more evenly distributed. Nevertheless, in order to hire more full-time teachers, higher education institutions should offer, in this

particular context, TESOL programmes in order to prepare the future generations of full-time EFL teachers. In the institution where this study was conducted, because of the nature of their contracts, part-time teachers are sometimes less involved and many times less committed to participating in the additional work that curricular changes require. This, in spite of the remuneration they could obtain.

It is also necessary that institutions be aware of the need to create some kind of tenure programme that allows teachers to advance in their positions within the institution, as a way to tell teachers that their work is recognized and valued. Unluckily, language teaching offers few pathways for promotion and makes it difficult for teachers without permanent positions to secure mortgages or be confident that they can support their families in the long run (Troudi, 2009).

Finally, in my view, it is important for teachers, administrators and researchers to focus their attention on the following questions: What conditions are necessary to create engaged teachers who are reflective of their practice? What conditions do institutions have to provide teachers to encourage their motivation in continuing their professional growth and development? What are the risks and responsibilities that teachers might face when deciding to engage in their own professional development?

## **6.8 Future Research**

The purpose of this study was to understand teachers' perceptions of a curricular change; that is, their understandings of the change, the challenges they have faced, the strategies they have used to cope with the change, and how this process has influenced their professional growth and development.

Considering that the study is the first of its type in its focus on exploring teachers' attitudes and practices during the implementation of a new English language curriculum, in the D. R., the study has contributed to various areas of knowledge. Nevertheless, further research is needed to investigate how teachers translate their understandings of the proposed change to their everyday classroom practices. Research has shown that one of the most evident problems with change implementation is the gap between what teachers say they do and what really happens in the classroom. Literature suggests that incongruence between beliefs and practice is an issue that should be addressed by change administrators and teacher educators so that teachers

may become better equipped to reconcile beliefs and practices in order to implement more effective instruction that reflects the proposed changes. There is also a need to investigate if, how, and why changes in innovations occur in the continuation stage (Todd, 2006). With regard to this, continuing and consolidating change is as important as initiating change (Todd, 2006). In addition, in continuing change, teachers reinterpret the change in light of their own knowledge and experience, resulting in change which may not be immediately recognisable as the change originally intended (Todd, 2006). Thus, a topic to explore in future research is the congruence between the practices required by the curricular change during the implementation stage and teachers' practices in the continuation stage.

It is also important for future research to investigate and analyse the nature and characteristics of effective teachers' development programmes needed to facilitate teachers' transitions from traditional methods and practices to more creative, dynamic, and innovative ones. Such results will serve to inform the support systems which will be necessary to facilitate curriculum implementation.

Finally, further research is also needed to investigate the process of change from the perspective of other stakeholders, specifically, the students' perceptions of the need and appropriateness of a language curriculum change. It would be of great value to explore these perceptions and the effects on the implementation of a new English curriculum, since most research focuses on the teachers' processes in curriculum implementations.

## **6.9 Reflection**

Looking back at where I was as a researcher at that moment when I first started to outline all the ideas and questions I had in my mind, as well as reflecting upon my doubts and worries about being new to the research field, and comparing those reflections with where I feel I am now after almost two years of professional growth and understanding, a sense of empowerment is what defines all the experiences I have lived through during this process. Needless to say, this process was exciting and rewarding at times, confusing and frustrating at others. Throughout the process I faced many challenges. Two of them were the most problematic: first was my dual role as a researcher and as the change leader of the NEC, and second was my inexperience as a researcher. There were difficult times of deep doubt that I had to clear up by myself through extensive periods of reading and consultation of different sources; however,

the guidance I received from my thesis supervisor through his immediate and always useful feedback and direction was fundamental during those times as well. This whole process has affected me in two main dimensions, personal and professional. In the personal dimension, the process of listening and understanding teachers' perceptions during the focus groups and interviews made me deeply reflect on my role as a change leader and to evaluate myself within that role. As Carless (1989: 363) states: "The role of the school principal has been acknowledged as an important factor in the management of change...." That self-awareness-raising process helped me to understand how my leadership could have contributed at times, or hindered at others, teachers' own implementation processes. In that sense, conducting this investigation has served not only to fulfil a programme requirement, but also as an opportunity for personal growth. Professionally, I have greatly expanded my knowledge of curriculum development, curricular change implementation, and professional development. Moreover, as a doctoral student, I have greatly benefited from having the opportunity to put into practice in my job what I have learnt and experienced throughout these four years of intense study. I considered myself really lucky for being able to take so much advantage of this opportunity and at the same time for being able to relate my new knowledge to my professional practice.

As an interpretive researcher, I had to keep myself focused in order to understand the situation from the researcher's position and not as the change leader. Undeniably, this was a constant and tremendous challenge. Adopting a reflective stance and entering into the inquiry wanting to create a trustworthy environment, wanting to be informed by my interviewees with honesty and humility, all contributed to the detachment necessary to interpret and understand what the participants were experiencing and thinking about this process of change. I now have a better understanding of an interpretive research process, the challenges one can expect, and how those challenges could be overcome. In terms of curricular change, I gained new insights that will definitely help me, the implementation process, the teachers, and the students, as well. These insights are oriented towards, but not limited to, facilitating and maintaining the implementation of new ideas, identifying better ways to promote adaptations and revisions in the implementation process, supporting and guiding teachers to exert a more powerful influence on the learning of students, and the tools and procedures they need to do so.

Without doubt, my greatest learning has been to acknowledge that curricular change is, in the words of Markee (1997: 176): "...an inherently messy, unpredictable business" that evokes a variety of emotions, involves a multitude of attitudes and beliefs, and above all requires support and takes time (Lamie, 2005). Nevertheless, and in spite of the "messiness" of the process at times, my reflections support the concept that curricular change should not prescribe limitations; rather, curricular change is an integral process with features that are dynamic, influential, and alterable under appropriate conditions (Guskey, 1989).

## **6.10 Conclusion**

Teaching now takes place in a world dominated by change, uncertainty and increasing complexity (Day, 2002). Consequently, teachers need to retain a clear sense of purpose and vision, which will inform their teaching. Teachers must prepare themselves, must acquire the knowledge required to maximise equality and social justice. It is my view that one way of making this possible is by adopting a critical attitude towards the teaching profession, an attitude that will lead teachers to analyse how their explicit and implicit behaviours are contributing (or not) to legitimate practices that might lead them to deviate from the true meaning of education. Teaching involves a moral commitment to serve the interests of students and society. It involves knowledge and expertise, but it also involves ideals (Day, 2000). Therefore, as this research study has suggested, those who are responsible for promoting educational changes and reforms in the twenty-first century must acknowledge that experience alone will not guarantee good teaching that not all teachers develop along a linear pathway. They must recognise the complications, challenges and limitations that threaten teachers' commitment and enthusiasm across time and that circumstances and environments are not always conducive to high quality teaching and learning (Day, 2000). In this sense, perhaps the main contribution this study has provided is the importance of the role and responsibility that change leaders have in terms of creating a trustworthy environment in two ways. First, and probably most importantly, change leaders, before anyone else, need to believe that the teachers they work with are capable of executing the change as it was planned. They need to develop an inner sense of trust in the people with whom they work. If this does not happen, insecurity and fear of failure will take place. This in turn will be detrimental to the working environment and stability that change leaders are expected to provide teachers with, especially in a process of change. Second, and as a consequence of what was previously said, teachers need to feel secure and safe and to

trust in the person who is guiding them in the process. They need to be assured that they will be truly and sincerely supported and that the change leader is by their side. Support and encouragement, from change leaders, are an essential prerequisite for the successful implementation of a curricular change (Carless, 1998).

On the other hand, imagination and creativity in the teaching-learning process are concepts that, in my view, and as participants in the study also pointed out, need to be part of any educational process, no matter what model for curriculum development one adopts. It seems appropriate to emphasise at this point that there is no single perfect model for curriculum development. It is not a matter of “one size fits all”. Curricular changes depend on our views and philosophies of education, teaching, learning, knowledge and how well we can articulate those views in our job situations, be it as teachers, administrators, curriculum planners, etc. Being eclectic, taking the best from each position and what best suits us, our needs, our contexts, our teaching situations, our teachers and our students, should be our main consideration when working with education, knowledge and values. Thus, balance could be the key word.

A good curriculum is the extent to which students possess a desire to go on with the things into which they were initiated (McKernan, 2008). That, in my view, should be one of the goals of education, to awaken in students the need to learn more, to go beyond what is said and done in classrooms, to take the initiative, to challenge teachers with new knowledge, to have the desire to grow. Without any doubt, to achieve these goals, institutions and teachers need to initiate students’ induction in worthwhile activities through meaningful practices, through a commitment to their profession. To be educated is not to have arrived at a destination; it is to travel with a different view (McKernan, 2008). It is in the hands of educators to make that journey possible. As educators, we need to be aware of how our views, assumptions and positions are benefitting one group and how other groups are disadvantaged.

As this study has indicated and according to Day (2000: 110): “To develop [and to improve] schools we must be prepared to develop teachers...to invest in teachers. A first step in this process is to help teachers to remind themselves that they have a crucial role to play in making a difference in the lives of their students.” In this respect, educational improvement depends highly on teachers wanting to make a

difference (Flores, 2005). Teachers have power in the sense that they have to want improvement for improvement to happen (Flores, 2005). To a great extent, this seemed to be the case for many of the participants in this study who were bored and tired of the routines and practices of the traditional, text-book centred, previous English curriculum. It was time for them to embark on a new and totally different way to approach TEFL and, from a more general view, to approach the teaching-learning process at the university level with a new generation of students.

Finally, this study has contributed to the field of curriculum change and implementation at the university level, in that it has attempted to fill a gap in the context literature in reference to exploring issues related to teachers' perceptions during the implementation stage of an EFL curriculum. Hopefully this study will shed light on extending the research literature so that other researchers in similar contexts can benefit from this work.

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# Appendices

## Appendix 1

STUDENT HIGHER-LEVEL RESEARCH



Graduate School of Education

### Certificate of Ethical Research Approval

#### STUDENT RESEARCH/FIELDWORK/CASEWORK AND DISSERTATION/THESIS

You will need to complete this certificate when you undertake a piece of higher-level research (e.g. Masters, Ph.D., Ed.D. level).

To activate this certificate you need to first sign it yourself, and then have it signed by your supervisor and finally by the Chair of the School's Ethics Committee.

For further information on ethical educational research, access the guidelines on the BERA web site: <http://www.bera.ac.uk/publications/guidelines/> and view the School's statement on the GSE student access on-line documents.

**READ THIS FORM CAREFULLY AND THEN COMPLETE IT ON YOUR COMPUTER** (the form will expand to contain the text you enter). **DO NOT COMPLETE BY HAND**

**Your name:** Angela Federica Castro

**Your student no:** 540030122

**Return address for this certificate:** Edificio Profesores I, 3ra planta. Pontificia Universidad Católica Madre y Maestra (PUCMM), Autopista Duarte Km. 1 ½, Santiago de los Caballeros, República Dominicana

**Degree/Programme of Study:** Doctor of Education (Ed.D.) Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages

**Project Supervisor(s):** Dr. Salah Troudi

**Your email address:** fcastro@pucmmsti.edu.do

**Tel:** (809) 580-1962 ext. 4470

I hereby certify that I will abide by the details given on overleaf and that I undertake in my dissertation to respect the dignity and privacy of those participating in this research.

I confirm that if my research should change radically, I will complete a further form.

Signed: Federica Castro Date: 04-11-2011

Chair of the School's Ethics Committee  
updated: July 2010

## Certificate of Ethical Research Approval

Your student no: 540030122

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**Title of your project:** Making Sense of Curriculum Change: Teachers' Perspectives Implementing a Communicative English Language Curriculum at the tertiary level in the Dominican Republic

**Brief description of your research project:**

The existing English curriculum at the institution where this research project will take place consists of four compulsory courses for the career fields offered (except Law), two courses at the introductory level and two at the intermediate level. This level obviously does not prepare students with the competencies needed to perform appropriately in the language. Given this situation, the institution decided to change to a New English Curriculum (NEC), which allows students to graduate with an advanced level of proficiency in the English language.

The implementation of the New English Curriculum (NEC) started in 2009 and has involved a significant change in the programmatic conception of all of the courses that it encompasses--on the teaching methodology, on teaching resources, the use of technology in the classroom, and on students' evaluation. All these changes have had a great impact, especially on teachers who have had to leave their comfort zone, who have had to break with the routines and patterns of the previous curriculum.

This research project seeks to gather information from the teachers' perspectives about the necessity, appropriateness, and quality of the NEC; to find out how teachers have coped with the process of change in terms of the adjustments they have had to make to their own practices; to explore, from the teachers' perspectives, the challenging and rewarding experiences with which the NEC has provided them and how those challenges and experiences have enriched their professional lives.

**Give details of the participants in this research (giving ages of any children and/or young people involved):**

Phase 1 participants:

- Focus group: A group of thirteen English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers has purposively been identified as the target population for this research study. These teachers work in the Language Department in a higher education institution in the Dominican Republic. The participants include eleven women and two men. Their ages range from twenty-six to fifty-eight years old. They have been teaching at the institution from two to thirty four years. Five

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Chair of the School's Ethics Committee  
updated: July 2010

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of the participants are full-time teachers and the other eight work as part-time teachers. Their qualifications include Bachelor's degrees and Masters Degrees, some of them in TESOL, others in Tertiary Education or Technology Applied to Teaching. Their work load ranges from ten to twenty-five class hours and in the case of the full-time teachers, their work load also includes twenty-five office hours a week.

Participants will be asked a set of broad and general questions about their teaching beliefs and attitudes toward the curricular change. The information gathered from the focus group will help to refine, and adjust the individual interview questions. Consent will be obtained prior to involvement in the focus group.

Phase 2 participants:

- Individual semi-structured interviews: The same group of teachers who participated in the focus group will be asked to participate in the second phase of the research study. At this point, each individual teacher will be asked to participate in a semi-structured interview. The information gathered from Phase 1 will inform and guide these individual interviews.

**Give details (with special reference to any children or those with special needs) regarding the ethical issues:**

I will be following the Ethics Policy set out by the Graduate School of Education and Lifelong Learning. Issues regarding informed consent, anonymity, and confidentiality will be carefully considered as detailed below.

**a) Informed consent: Examples of the consent forms accompany this document. :**

A letter of permission to conduct the research study will be sent to the Academic Vice-President of the institution. In this letter, anonymity and confidentiality in relation to the institution and participants' will be assured.

The participants will receive a letter of invitation to participate in the research study. If they accept, each one of them will be given a blank consent form that they will sign and return to the researcher. They will keep a copy of this form for themselves. Records will be kept of when, how, and from whom consent was obtained.

Participants will be reminded that they have the right to withdraw from the research at any given time and that data related to them will be destroyed. Participants will also be informed from the beginning of how the data gathered from them and the research findings will be used.

**b) Anonymity and confidentiality**

Before starting the focus group and each individual interview, participants will be assured that their names and the information they will provide will remain anonymous in the write up of the research. Records of the data collected (including transcripts and audio recordings) will be stored in a secure and safe place. Information will also be coded to ensure anonymity. Collected written information will be destroyed when it is no longer required.

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**Give details of the methods to be used for data collection and analysis and how you would ensure they do not cause any harm, detriment, or unreasonable stress:**

**Phase One:**

**Data Collection**

- Qualitative: The focus group as a data collection tool seeks to explore teachers' perceptions and beliefs about teaching English as a Foreign Language in general and how those perceptions and beliefs might affect the implementation of this new curriculum. The information gathered will help to refine and adjust the individual interview questions. With the consent of participants, the focus group interview will be recorded and then transcribed. This will then be coded thematically.

**Data Analysis**

- Qualitative information will be transcribed for thematic coding and further analysis. Participants' views and perceptions on the curricular change and how they have managed this process will be explored and analyzed. This information will also serve to make any necessary adjustments to the semi-structured interview questions.

**Phase Two:**

**Data Collection**

- Qualitative: The semi-structured individual interviews will serve as a data collection tool to explore in depth and at a more confidential level the teachers' perspectives, understandings, and the adjustments that they have had to make in order to cope with this process of change. With the consent of each individual participant, each interview will be audio recorded and then transcribed. This information will also be coded thematically for further analysis.

**Data Analysis**

- Qualitative: All qualitative information will be transcribed and then coded and organized thematically to analyze teachers' perspectives about the necessity, appropriateness, and quality of the NEC. How teachers have coped with the process of change and the challenging and rewarding experiences the NEC has provided them with, will also be the focus of analysis.

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**Give details of any other ethical issues which may arise from this project (e.g. secure storage of videos/recorded interviews/photos/completed questionnaires or special arrangements made for participants with special needs etc.):**

During the data collection, data analysis, and write up, data (audio recordings, focus group data, and individual interview data) will be securely stored at the researcher's home. It will be destroyed when it is no longer required.

**Give details of any exceptional factors, which may raise ethical issues (e.g. potential political or ideological conflicts which may pose danger or harm to participants):**

Given the anonymity and confidentiality under which the research will be conducted, no exceptional factors are expected to arise.

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***This form should now be printed out, signed by you on the first page and sent to your supervisor to sign. Your supervisor will forward this document to the School's Research Support Office for the Chair of the School's Ethics Committee to countersign. A unique approval reference will be added and this certificate will be returned to you to be included at the back of your dissertation/thesis.***

***N.B. You should not start the fieldwork part of the project until you have the signature of your supervisor***

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**This project has been approved for the period:** May 2011 **until:** Dec 2011

**By** (above mentioned supervisor's signature): Salah T. A. **date:** 03/05/2011

***N.B. To Supervisor:** Please ensure that ethical issues are addressed annually in your report and if any changes in the research occur a further form is completed.*

---

**GSE unique approval reference:**..... D/12/11/61.....

**Signed:** Salah T. A. **date:** 03/05/2011  
Chair of the School's Ethics Committee

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This form is available from <http://education.exeter.ac.uk/students/>

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Chair of the School's Ethics Committee  
updated: July 2010

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April 12, 2011

**Ms. Dulce Rodríguez**  
**Academic Vice-President**

Dear Ms. Rodríguez:

After a cordial greeting, I wish to solicit permission from the institution to conduct a research study on the views and perspectives of the English teachers with regard to the New English Curriculum and how they have managed this process of curricular change. This research project constitutes part of the dissertation, which is a requirement in order to complete the Doctoral Program in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) in which I am enrolled through the University of Exeter in Exeter, England.

Teachers' participation will consist of taking part in a focus group and in an individual interview. The participants' data and that of the institution will be kept anonymous throughout the research period as well as throughout the analysis and presentation of the results.

Sincerely,

*Federica Castro*  
**Federica Castro**  
**Applied Linguistics Department**

May 5, 2011

To : Lic. Federica Castro  
Head of the Applied  
Linguistics Department

With reference to : Research authorization  
(as per your communication  
of April 12, 2011)

In reference to your request for authorization, we have no objections to your proposed research project, in accordance with the methods described in your communication.

We hope that the results of your research will allow you to comply with the thesis requirements as a component of your studies toward a doctorate in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) that you are enrolled in at the University of Exeter, in Exeter, England.

Sincerely,

Dulce Rodríguez, M.S.  
Undergraduate Studies  
Academic Vice President

DR/

May 7<sup>th</sup>, 2011

Prof.  
Applied Linguistics Department

Dear professor:

After a cordial greeting, I wish to invite you to participate in a research study I have to conduct as part of my dissertation, which is a requirement in order to complete the Doctoral Program in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) in which I am enrolled through the University of Exeter in Exeter, England.

Your participation will consist of taking part in a focus group and in an individual interview, during which you will be asked about your views and perspectives with regard to the New English Curriculum and how you have managed the process of curricular change.

The information that you provide will be kept anonymous throughout the research period as well as throughout the analysis and presentation of the results.

If you agree to participate in this research study, please sign the attached consent form, then return the original and keep the copy for yourself.

Thank you in advance.

Sincerely,

  
Federica Castro



GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

CONSENT FORM

I have been fully informed about the aims and purposes of the project.

I understand that:

there is no compulsion for me to participate in this research project and, if I do choose to participate, I may at any stage withdraw my participation

I have the right to refuse permission for the publication of any information about me

any information which I give will be used solely for the purposes of this research project, which may include publications

If applicable, the information, which I give, may be shared between any of the other researcher(s) participating in this project in an anonymised form

all information I give will be treated as confidential

the researcher(s) will make every effort to preserve my anonymity

.....  
(Signature of participant )

.....  
(Date)

.....  
(Printed name of participant)

One copy of this form will be kept by the participant; a second copy will be kept by the researcher(s)

Contact phone number of researcher(s):.....

If you have any concerns about the project that you would like to discuss, please contact:

.....  
OR

.....

Data Protection Act: The University of Exeter is a data collector and is registered with the Office of the Data Protection Commissioner as required to do under the Data Protection Act 1998. The information you provide will be used for research purposes and will be processed in accordance with the University's registration and current data protection legislation. Data will be confidential to the researcher(s) and will not be disclosed to any unauthorised third parties without further agreement by the participant. Reports based on the data will be in anonymised form.

July 10th, 2011

**Prof.** \_\_\_\_\_

Department of Applied Linguistics

Dear Professor \_\_\_\_\_:

This is to thank you for participating in my research project on “Making Sense of Curriculum Change: Teachers’ Perspectives Implementing a Communicative English Language Curriculum at the tertiary level in the Dominican Republic.”

I am truly grateful for your participation and for the data I collected from your answers during the focus group and the individual interview in which you generously participated.

I really appreciate your openness and your willingness to contribute to this project.

Best regards,

Federica Castro

**Condensed Foreign Service Institute  
Oral Proficiency Rating Scales**

Government (FSI) Scale	Academic (ACTFL/ETS) Scale	Definition
5	Native	Able to speak like an educated native speaker
4+	Superior	Able to speak the language with sufficient structural accuracy and vocabulary to participate effectively in most formal and informal conversations
4		
3+		
3		
2+	Advanced Plus	Able to satisfy most work requirements and show some ability to communicate on concrete topics
2	Advanced	Able to satisfy routine social demands and limited work requirements
1+	<b>Intermediate-High</b>	<b>Able to satisfy most survival needs and limited social demands</b>
1	Intermediate-Middle	Able to satisfy some survival needs and some limited social demands
	Intermediate-Low	Able to satisfy basic survival needs and minimum courtesy requirements
0+	Novice-High	Able to satisfy immediate needs with learned utterances
0	Novice-Middle	Able to operate in only a very limited capacity
	Novice-Low	Unable to function in the spoken language
	0	No ability whatsoever in the language

Source: Judith E. Liskin-Gasparro. *ETS Oral Proficiency Testing Manual*. Princeton, N.J.: Educational Testing Service, 1982.

<b>Group I:</b> Afrikaans, Danish, Dutch, French, Haitian Creole, Italian, Norwegian, Portuguese, Romanian, Spanish, Swahili, Swedish.			
<b>Length of Training</b>	<b>Aptitude for Language Learning</b>		
	<b>Minimum</b>	<b>Average</b>	<b>Superior</b>
8 weeks (240 hours)	1	1/1+	1+
16 weeks (480 hours)	1+	2	2+
24 weeks (720 hours)	2	2+	3
<b>Group II:</b> Bulgarian, Dari, Farsi, German, Greek, Hindi, Indonesian, Malay, Urdu			
<b>Length of Training</b>	<b>Aptitude for Language Learning</b>		
	<b>Minimum</b>	<b>Average</b>	<b>Superior</b>
16 weeks (480 hours)	1	1/2+	1+/2
24 weeks (720 hours)	1+	2	2+/3
44 weeks (1320 hours)	2/2+	2+/3	3/3+
<b>Group III:</b> Amharic, Bengali, Burmese, Czech, Finnish, Hebrew, Hungarian, Khmer, Lao, Nepali, Filipino, Polish, Russian, Serbo-Croatian, Sinhala, Thai, Tamil, Turkish, Vietnamese			
<b>Length of Training</b>	<b>Aptitude for Language Learning</b>		
	<b>Minimum</b>	<b>Average</b>	<b>Superior</b>
16 weeks (480 hours)	0+	1	1/1+
24 weeks (720 hours)	1+	2	2/2+
44 weeks (1320 hours)	2	2+	3
<b>Group IV:</b> Arabic, Chinese, Japanese, Korean			
<b>Length of Training</b>	<b>Aptitude for Language Learning</b>		
	<b>Minimum</b>	<b>Average</b>	<b>Superior</b>
16 weeks (480 hours)	0+	1	1
24 weeks (720 hours)	1	1+	1+
44 weeks (1320 hours)	1+	2	2+
80-92 weeks (2400-2760 hours)	2+	3	3+

Source: Judith E. Liskin-Gasparro. *ETS Oral Proficiency Testing Manual*. Princeton, N.J.: Educational Testing Service, 1982.

**ACTFL\* Oral  
Proficiency Guidelines**

<b>Novice</b>	The Novice level is characterized by the ability to communicate minimally with learned material.
Novice-Low	Oral production consists of isolated words and perhaps a few high frequency phrases. Essentially no functional communicative ability.
Novice-Mid	Oral production continues to consist of isolated words and learned phrases within very predictable areas of need, although quality is increased. Vocabulary is sufficient only for handling simple, elementary needs and expressing basic courtesies. Utterances rarely consist of more than two or three words and show frequent long pauses and repetition of interlocutor's words. Speaker may have some difficulty producing even the simplest utterances. Some Novice-Mid speakers will be understood only with great difficulty.
Novice-High	Able to satisfy partially the requirements of basic communicative exchanges by relying heavily on learned utterances but occasionally expanding these through simple recombinations of their elements. Can ask questions or make statements involving learned material. Shows signs of spontaneity although this falls short of real autonomy of expression. Speech continues to consist of learned utterances rather than personalized, situationally adapted ones. Vocabulary centers on areas such as basic objects, places, and most common kinship terms. Pronunciation may still be strongly influenced by the first language. Errors are frequent and, in spite of repetition, some Novice-High speakers will have difficulty being understood even by sympathetic interlocutors.
 <b>Intermediate</b>	
	The intermediate level is characterized by the speaker's ability to: - create with the language by combining and recombining learned elements, though primarily in a reactive mode; - initiate, minimally sustain, and close in a simple way basic communicative tasks; and - ask and answer questions
Intermediate-Low	Able to handle successfully a limited number of interactive, task-oriented and social situations. Can ask and answer questions, initiate and respond to simple statements and maintain face-to-face conversations, although in a highly restricted manner and with much linguistic inaccuracy. Within these limitations, can perform such tasks as introducing self, ordering meal, asking directions, and making purchases. Vocabulary is adequate to express only the most elementary needs. Strong interference from native language may occur. Misunderstandings frequently arise, but with repetition, the Intermediate-low speaker can generally be understood by sympathetic interlocutors.
Intermediate-Mid	Able to handle successfully a variety of uncomplicated, basic and communicative tasks and social situations. Can talk simply about self and family members. Can ask and answer questions and participate in simple conversations on topics beyond the most immediate needs: e.g., personal history and leisure time activities. Utterance length increases slightly, but speech may continue to be characterized by frequent long pauses, since the smooth incorporation of even basic conversational strategies is often hindered as the speaker struggles to create appropriate language forms. Pronunciation may continue to be strongly influenced by first language and fluency may still be strained. Although misunderstandings still arise, the Intermediate-Mid speaker can generally be understood by sympathetic interlocutors.

\*ACTFL: American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages

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Intermediate-High

Able to handle successfully most uncomplicated communicative tasks and social situations. Can sustain, and close a general conversation with a number of strategies appropriate to range of circumstances and topics, but errors are evident. Limited vocabulary still necessitates hesitation and may bring about slightly unexpected circumlocution. There is emerging evidence of connected discourse, particularly for simple narration and/or description. The Intermediate-High speaker can generally be understood even by interlocutors not accustomed to dealing with speakers at this level, but repetition may still be required.

Advanced

The advanced level is characterized by the speaker's ability to:

- converse in a clearly participatory fashion;
- initiate, sustain and bring to closure a wide variety of communicative tasks, including those that require an increased ability to convey meaning with diverse language strategies due to a complication or an unforeseen turn of events;
- satisfy the requirements of school and work situations; and
- narrate and describe with paragraph-length connected discourse.

Advanced

Able to satisfy the requirements of everyday situations and routine school and work requirements. Can handle with confidence but not with facility complicated tasks and social situations, such as elaborating, complaining, and apologizing. Can narrate and describe with some details, linking sentences together smoothly. Can communicate facts and talk casually about topics of current public and personal interest, using general vocabulary. Shortcomings can often be smoothed over by communicative strategies, such as pause fillers, stalling devices, and different rates of speech. Circumlocution which arises from vocabulary or syntactic limitations very often is quite successful, though some groping for words may still be evident. The Advanced level speaker can be understood without difficulty by native interlocutors.

Advanced-High

Able to satisfy the requirements of a broad variety of everyday, school, and work situations. Can discuss concrete topics relating to particular interests and special fields of competence. There is emerging evidence of ability to support opinions, explain in detail, and hypothesize. The Advanced-Plus speaker often shows a well developed ability to compensate for an imperfect grasp of some forms with confident use of communicative strategies, such as paraphrasing and circumlocution. Differential vocabulary and intonation are effectively used to communicate fine shades of meaning. The Advanced-Plus speaker often shows remarkable fluency and ease of speech but under the demands of Superior-level, complex tasks, language may break down or prove inadequate.

Superior

The Superior level is characterized by the speaker's ability to:

- participate effectively in most formal and informal conversations on practical, social, professional, and abstract topics; and
- support opinions and hypothesize using native-like discourse strategies.

Superior

Able to speak the language with sufficient accuracy to participate effectively in most formal or informal conversations on practical, social, professional, and abstract topics. Can discuss special fields of competence and interest with ease. Can support opinions and hypothesize, but may not be able to tailor language to audience or discuss in depth highly abstract or unfamiliar topics. Usually the Superior level speaker is only partially familiar with regional or other dialectal variants. The Superior level speaker commands a wide variety of interactive strategies and shows good awareness of discourse strategies. The latter involves the ability to distinguish main ideas from supporting information through syntactic, lexical and suprasegmental features (pitch, stress, intonation). Sporadic errors may occur, particularly in low-frequency structures and some complex high-frequency structures more common to formal writing, but no patterns of error are evident. Errors do not disturb the native speaker or interfere with communications.

Source: Judith Liskin-Gasparro. ETS Oral Proficiency Testing Manual. Princeton, NJ: Educational Testing Service, 1982

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# ACTFL PROFICIENCY GUIDELINES

The 1986 proficiency guidelines represent a hierarchy of global characterizations of integrated performance in speaking, listening, reading and writing. Each description is a representative, not an exhaustive, sample of a particular range of ability, and each level subsumes all previous levels, moving from simple to complex in an "all-before-and-more" fashion.

Because these guidelines identify stages of proficiency, as opposed to achievement, they are not intended to measure what an individual has achieved through specific classroom instruction but rather to allow assessment of what an individual can and cannot do, regardless of where, when, or how the language has been learned or acquired; thus, the words "learned" and "acquired" are used in the broadest sense. These guidelines are not based on a particular linguistic theory or pedagogical method, since the guidelines are proficiency-based, as opposed to achievement-based, and are intended to be used for global assessment.

The 1986 guidelines should not be considered the definitive version, since the construction and utilization of language proficiency guidelines is a dynamic, interactive process. The academic sector, like the government sector, will continue to refine and update the criteria periodically to reflect the needs of the users and the advances of the profession. In this vein, ACTFL owes a continuing debt to the creators of the 1982 provisional proficiency guidelines and, of course, to the members of the Interagency Language Roundtable Testing Committee, the creators of the government's Language Skill Level Descriptions.

ACTFL would like to thank the following individuals for their contributions on this current guidelines project:

Heidi Byrnes  
James Child  
Nina Levinson  
Pardee Lowe, Jr.  
Seichi Makino  
Irene Thompson  
A. Ronald Walton

These proficiency guidelines are the product of grants from the U.S. Department of Education.

Advanced	Able to satisfy the requirements of everyday situations and routine school and work requirements. Can handle with confidence but not with facility complicated tasks and social situations, such as elaborating, complaining, and apologizing. Can narrate and describe with some details, linking sentences together smoothly. Can communicate facts and talk casually about topics of current public and personal interest, using general vocabulary. Shortcomings can often be smoothed over by communicative strategies, such as pause fillers, stalling devices, and different rates of speech. Circumlocution which arises from vocabulary or syntactic limitations very often is quite successful, though some groping for words may still be evident. The Advanced-level speaker can be understood without difficulty by native interlocutors.
Advanced-Plus	Able to satisfy the requirements of a broad variety of everyday, school, and work situations. Can discuss concrete topics relating to particular interests and special fields of competence. There is emerging evidence of ability to support opinions, explain in detail, and hypothesize. The Advanced-Plus speaker often shows a well developed ability to compensate for an imperfect grasp of some forms with confident use of communicative strategies, such as paraphrasing and circumlocution. Differentiated vocabulary and intonation are effectively used to communicate fine shades of meaning. The Advanced-Plus speaker often shows remarkable fluency and ease of speech but under the demands of Superior-level, complex tasks, language may break down or prove inadequate.
Superior	The Superior level is characterized by the speaker's ability to: —participate effectively in most formal and informal conversations on practical, social, professional, and abstract topics; and —support opinions and hypothesize using native-like discourse strategies.
Superior	Able to speak the language with sufficient accuracy to participate effectively in most formal and informal conversations on practical, social, professional, and abstract topics. Can discuss special fields of competence and interest with ease. Can support opinions and hypothesize, but may not be able to tailor language to audience or discuss in depth highly abstract or unfamiliar topics. Usually the Superior level speaker is only partially familiar with regional or other dialectical variants. The Superior level speaker commands a wide variety of interactive strategies and shows good awareness of discourse strategies. The latter involves the ability to distinguish main ideas from supporting information through syntactic, lexical and suprasegmental features (pitch, stress, intonation). Sporadic errors may occur, particularly in low-frequency structures and some complex high-frequency structures more common to formal writing, but no patterns of error are evident. Errors do not disturb the native speaker or interfere with communication.

#### Generic Descriptions—Listening

These guidelines assume that all listening tasks take place in an authentic environment at a normal rate of speech using standard or near-standard norms.

Novice-Low	Understanding is limited to occasional isolated words, such as cognates, borrowed words, and high-frequency social conventions. Essentially no ability to comprehend even short utterances.
Novice-Mid	Able to understand some short, learned utterances, particularly where context strongly supports understanding and speech is clearly audible. Comprehends some words and phrases from simple questions, statements, high-frequency commands and courtesy formulae about topics that refer to basic personal information or the immediate physical setting. The listener requires long pauses for assimilation and periodically requests repetition and/or a slower rate of speech.
Novice-High	Able to understand short, learned utterances and some sentence-length utterances, particularly where context strongly supports understanding and speech is clearly audible. Comprehends words and phrases from simple questions, statements, high-frequency commands and courtesy formulae. May require repetition, rephrasing and/or a slowed rate of speech for comprehension.
Intermediate-Low	Able to understand sentence-length utterances which consist of recombinations of learned elements in a limited number of content areas, particularly if strongly supported by the situational context. Content refers to basic personal background and needs, social conventions and routine tasks, such as getting meals and receiving simple instructions and directions. Listening tasks pertain primarily to spontaneous face-to-face conversations. Understanding is often uneven; repetition and rewording may be necessary. Misunderstandings in both main ideas and details arise frequently.

Intermediate-Mid	Able to understand sentence-length utterances which consist of recombinations of learned utterances on a variety of topics. Content continues to refer primarily to basic personal background and needs, social conventions and somewhat more complex tasks, such as lodging, transportation, and shopping. Additional content areas include some personal interests and activities, and a greater diversity of instructions and directions. Listening tasks not only pertain to spontaneous face-to-face conversations but also to short routine telephone conversations and some deliberate speech, such as simple announcements and reports over the media. Understanding continues to be uneven.
Intermediate-High	Able to sustain understanding over longer stretches of connected discourse on a number of topics pertaining to different times and places; however, understanding is inconsistent due to failure to grasp main ideas and/or details. Thus, while topics do not differ significantly from those of an Advanced level listener, comprehension is less in quantity and poorer in quality.
Advanced	Able to understand main ideas and most details of connected discourse on a variety of topics beyond the immediacy of the situation. Comprehension may be uneven due to a variety of linguistic and extralinguistic factors, among which topic familiarity is very prominent. These texts frequently involve description and narration in different time frames or aspects, such as present, nonpast, habitual, or imperfective. Texts may include interviews, short lectures on familiar topics, and news items and reports primarily dealing with factual information. Listener is aware of cohesive devices but may not be able to use them to follow the sequence of thought in an oral text.
Advanced-Plus	Able to understand the main ideas of most speech in a standard dialect; however, the listener may not be able to sustain comprehension in extended discourse which is propositionally and linguistically complex. Listener shows an emerging awareness of culturally implied meanings beyond the surface meanings of the text but may fail to grasp sociocultural nuances of the message.
Superior	Able to understand the main ideas of all speech in a standard dialect, including technical discussion in a field of specialization. Can follow the essentials of extended discourse which is propositionally and linguistically complex, as in academic/professional settings, in lectures, speeches, and reports. Listener shows some appreciation of aesthetic norms of target language, of idioms, colloquialisms, and register shifting. Able to make inferences within the cultural framework of the oral text and includes sensitivity for its social and cultural references and its affective overtones. Rarely misunderstands but may not understand excessively rapid, highly colloquial speech or speech that has strong cultural references.
Distinguished	Able to understand all forms and styles of speech pertinent to personal, social and professional needs tailored to different audiences. Shows strong sensitivity to social and cultural references and aesthetic norms by processing language from within the cultural framework. Texts include theater plays, screen productions, editorials, symposia, academic debates, public policy statements, literary readings, and most jokes and puns. May have difficulty with some dialects and slang.

### Generic Descriptions-Reading

These guidelines assume all reading texts to be authentic and legible.

Novice-Low	Able occasionally to identify isolated words and/or major phrases when strongly supported by context.
Novice-Mid	Able to recognize the symbols of an alphabetic and/or syllabic writing system and/or a limited number of characters in a system that uses characters. The reader can identify an increasing number of highly contextualized words and/or phrases including cognates and borrowed words, where appropriate. Material understood rarely exceeds a single phrase at a time, and rereading may be required.
Novice-High	Has sufficient control of the writing system to interpret written language in areas of practical need. Where vocabulary has been learned, can read for instructional and directional purposes standardized messages, phrases or expressions, such as some items on menus, schedules, timetables, maps, and signs. At times, but not on a consistent basis, the Novice-High level reader may be able to derive meaning from material at a slightly higher level where context and/or extralinguistic background knowledge are supportive.

Intermediate-Low	Able to understand main ideas and/or some facts from the simplest connected texts dealing with basic personal and social needs. Such texts are linguistically noncomplex and have a clear underlying internal structure, for example chronological sequencing. They impart basic information about which the reader has to make only minimal suppositions or to which the reader brings personal interest and/or knowledge. Examples include messages with social purposes or information for the widest possible audience, such as public announcements and short, straightforward instructions dealing with public life. Some misunderstandings will occur.
Intermediate-Mid	Able to read consistently with increased understanding simple connected texts dealing with a variety of basic and social needs. Such texts are still linguistically noncomplex and have a clear underlying internal structure. They impart basic information about which the reader has to make minimal suppositions and to which the reader brings personal interest and/or knowledge. Examples may include short, straightforward descriptions of persons, places, and things written for a wide audience.
Intermediate-High	Able to read consistently with full understanding simple connected texts dealing with basic personal and social needs about which the reader has personal interest and/or knowledge. Can get some main ideas and information from texts at the next higher level featuring description and narration. Structural complexity may interfere with comprehension; for example, basic grammatical relations may be misinterpreted and temporal references may rely primarily on lexical items. Has some difficulty with the cohesive factors in discourse, such as matching pronouns with referents. While texts do not differ significantly from those at the Advanced level, comprehension is less consistent. May have to read material several times for understanding.
Advanced	Able to read somewhat longer prose of several paragraphs in length, particularly if presented with a clear underlying structure. The prose is predominantly in familiar sentence patterns. Reader gets the main ideas and facts and misses some details. Comprehension derives not only from situational and subject matter knowledge but from increasing control of the language. Texts at this level include descriptions and narrations such as simple short stories, news items, bibliographical information, social notices, personal correspondence, routinized business letters and simple technical material written for the general reader.
Advanced-Plus	Able to follow essential points of written discourse at the Superior level in areas of special interest or knowledge. Able to understand parts of texts which are conceptually abstract and linguistically complex, and/or texts which treat unfamiliar topics and situations, as well as some texts which involve aspects of target-language culture. Able to comprehend the facts to make appropriate inferences. An emerging awareness of the aesthetic properties of language and of its literary styles permits comprehension of a wider variety of texts, including literary. Misunderstandings may occur.
Superior	Able to read with almost complete comprehension and at normal speed expository prose on unfamiliar subjects and a variety of literary texts. Reading ability is not dependent on subject matter knowledge, although the reader is not expected to comprehend thoroughly texts which are highly dependent on knowledge of the target culture. Reads easily for pleasure. Superior-level texts feature hypotheses, argumentation and supported opinions and include grammatical patterns and vocabulary ordinarily encountered in academic/professional reading. At this level, due to the control of general vocabulary and structure, the reader is almost always able to match the meanings derived from extralinguistic knowledge with meanings derived from knowledge of the language, allowing for smooth and efficient reading of diverse texts. Occasional misunderstandings may still occur; for example, the reader may experience some difficulty with unusually complex structures and low-frequency idioms. At the Superior level the reader can match strategies, top-down or bottom-up, which are most appropriate to the text. (Top-down strategies rely on real-world knowledge and prediction based on genre and organizational scheme of the text. Bottom-up strategies rely on actual linguistic knowledge.) Material at this level will include a variety of literary texts, editorials, correspondence, general reports and technical material in professional fields. Rereading is rarely necessary, and misreading is rare.
Distinguished	Able to read fluently and accurately most styles and forms of the language pertinent to academic and professional needs. Able to relate inferences in the text to real-world knowledge and understand almost all sociolinguistic and cultural references by processing language from within the cultural framework. Able to understand a writer's use of nuance and subtlety. Can readily follow unpredictable turns of thought and author intent in such materials as sophisticated editorials, specialized journal articles, and literary texts such as novels, plays, poems, as well as in any subject matter area directed to the general reader.

#### Generic Descriptions-Writing

Novice-Low	Able to form some letters in an alphabetic system. In languages whose writing systems use syllabaries or characters, writer is able to both copy and produce the basic strokes. Can produce romanization of isolated characters, where applicable.
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Novice-Mid	Able to copy or transcribe familiar words or phrases and reproduce some from memory. No practical communicative writing skills.
Novice-High	Able to write simple fixed expressions and limited memorized material and some recombinations thereof. Can supply information on simple forms and documents. Can write names, numbers, dates, own nationality, and other simple autobiographical information as well as some short phrases and simple lists. Can write all the symbols in an alphabetic or syllabic system or 50-100 characters or compounds in a character writing system. Spelling and representation of symbols (letters, syllables, characters) may be partially correct.
Intermediate-Low	Able to meet limited practical writing needs. Can write short messages, postcards, and take down simple notes, such as telephone messages. Can create statements or questions within the scope of limited language experience. Material produced consists of recombinations of learned vocabulary and structures into simple sentences on very familiar topics. Language is inadequate to express in writing anything but elementary needs. Frequent errors in grammar, vocabulary, punctuation, spelling and in formation of nonalphabetic symbols, but writing can be understood by natives used to the writing of nonnatives.
Intermediate-Mid	Able to meet a number of practical writing needs. Can write short, simple letters. Content involves personal preferences, daily routine, everyday events, and other topics grounded in personal experience. Can express present time or at least one other time frame or aspect consistently, e.g., nonpast, habitual, imperfective. Evidence of control of the syntax of noncomplex sentences and basic inflectional morphology, such as declensions and conjugation. Writing tends to be a loose collection of sentences or sentence fragments on a given topic and provides little evidence of conscious organization. Can be understood by natives used to the writing of nonnatives.
Intermediate-High	Able to meet most practical writing needs and limited social demands. Can take notes in some detail on familiar topics and respond in writing to personal questions. Can write simple letters, brief synopses and paraphrases, summaries of biographical data, work and school experience. In those languages relying primarily on content words and time expressions to express time, tense, or aspect, some precision is displayed; where tense and/or aspect is expressed through verbal inflection, forms are produced rather consistently, but not always accurately. An ability to describe and narrate in paragraphs is emerging. Rarely uses basic cohesive elements, such as pronominal substitutions or synonyms in written discourse. Writing, though faulty, is generally comprehensible to natives used to the writing of nonnatives.
Advanced	Able to write routine social correspondence and join sentences in simple discourse of at least several paragraphs in length on familiar topics. Can write simple social correspondence, take notes, write cohesive summaries and resumes, as well as narratives and descriptions of a factual nature. Has sufficient writing vocabulary to express self simply with some circumlocution. May still make errors in punctuation, spelling, or the formation of nonalphabetic symbols. Good control of the morphology and the most frequently used syntactic structures, e.g., common word order patterns, coordination, subordination, but makes frequent errors in producing complex sentences. Uses a limited number of cohesive devices, such as pronouns, accurately. Writing may resemble literal translations from the native language, but a sense of organization (rhetorical structure) is emerging. Writing is understandable to natives not used to the writing of nonnatives.
Advanced-Plus	Able to write about a variety of topics with significant precision and in detail. Can write most social and informal business correspondence. Can describe and narrate personal experiences fully but has difficulty supporting points of view in written discourse. Can write about the concrete aspects of topics relating to particular interests and special fields of competence. Often shows remarkable fluency and ease of expression, but under time constraints and pressure writing may be inaccurate. Generally strong in either grammar or vocabulary, but not in both. Weakness and unevenness in one of the foregoing or in spelling or character writing formation may result in occasional miscommunication. Some misuse of vocabulary may still be evident. Style may still be obviously foreign.
Superior	Able to express self effectively in most formal and informal writing on practical, social and professional topics. Can write most types of correspondence, such as memos as well as social and business letters, and short research papers and statements of position in areas of special interest or in special fields. Good control of a full range of structures, spelling or nonalphabetic symbol production, and a wide general vocabulary allow the writer to hypothesize and present arguments or points of view accurately and effectively. An underlying organization, such as chronological ordering, logical ordering, cause and effect, comparison, and thematic development is strongly evident, although not thoroughly executed and/or not totally reflecting target language patterns. Although sensitive to differences in formal and informal style, still may not tailor writing precisely to a variety of purposes and/or readers. Errors in writing rarely disturb natives or cause miscommunication.

### Projected Proficiency Levels in the New English Curriculum

#### Expected Achievement Levels by the end of year one:

PUCMM	FSI	ACTFL
ILE 101 (Beginners)	0 to 0+ (70 hrs)	Novice-Mid to Novice-High – able to satisfy immediate needs with learnt utterances in all 4 skill areas.
ILE 102 (Beginners)	0+ to 1- (70 hrs)	Novice High to Intermediate Low – able to satisfy basic survival needs and minimum courtesy requirements in all 4 skill areas.
ILE 201 (Intermediate)	1- to 1 (70 hrs)	Intermediate Low to Intermediate Mid – able to satisfy some survival needs and limited social demands in all 4 skill areas.

Total = 210 hrs

#### Expected Levels of Achievement by the end of year two:

PUCMM	FSI	ACTFL
ILE 202 (Intermediate)	1 to 1+ (70 hrs)	Intermediate Mid to Intermediate High – able to satisfy most survival needs and limited social demands in all 4 skill areas.
ILE 301 (Advanced)	1+ to 2- (70 hrs)	Intermediate High to Advanced Low – able to satisfy basic routine social demands and very limited work requirements in all 4 skill areas.
ILE 302 (Advanced)	2- to 2 (70 hrs)	Advanced Low to Advanced – able to satisfy routine social demands and limited work requirements in all 4 skill areas.

Total= 210 hrs + 210 hrs = 420 hrs at this point

#### Expected Levels of Achievement by the end of year three:

PUCMM	FSI	ACTFL
ILE 311 (Conversational English)	2 to 2+ (56 hrs)	Advanced to Advanced Plus – able to satisfy most work requirements and show some ability to communicate on concrete topics in all 4 skill areas.
ILE 322 (Academic Writing)	2+ to 3- (56 hrs)	Advanced Plus to Superior – able to speak with sufficient accuracy and vocabulary to participate effectively in most formal and informal conversations in all 4 skill areas.
ILE 491-495 (English for Special Purposes)	3- to 3 (56 hrs)	Superior – able to speak with increased accuracy and vocabulary to participate effectively in most formal and informal conversations in all 4 skill areas.

Total= 420 + 168 hrs = 588 hrs at end of three years

**APPLIED LINGUISTICS DEPARTMENT  
FOREIGN LANGUAGES AREA**

**COURSE SYLLABUS**

**Introductory English I  
ILE-101**

**T P C  
5 0 0**

**Prerequisite: High School Diploma  
Co-requisite: None**

**COURSE GOALS**

The goals of the New English Curriculum are to have participants, develop English language proficiency and target culture competencies, enjoy the process and enhance their motivation to learn, contribute, and appreciate the value of bilingual-bicultural abilities for their lives and work in a globalized world.

**COURSE OBJECTIVES**

Upon completion of this course, students will have developed: communicative, behavioural, and interactive abilities in English, in all four skill areas (listening comprehension, speaking, reading, and writing) that will, enable them to interact effectively and appropriately with English speakers at a basic level.

**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

This course introduces students to English as a Foreign Language. The 70-hour course employs a combined communicative and cultural approach designed to develop both language proficiency and target culture competence. In this course, students will develop communicative skills in listening comprehension, speaking, reading, and writing at a basic level. This is accomplished through a communicative approach based on activities related to specific functions, contexts, and grammar/vocabulary relevant to common life situations. Sessions are highly participatory and interactive, utilizing frequent pair and small group work. In addition to the teacher's input, students are expected to share responsibility for their own learning and that of their classmates through participation, their contributions, and other tasks.

**ASSESSMENT PROCESS**

Assessment is an on-going process and will be conducted throughout the course. Assessment is conducted in various ways and is based on several aspects:

- 1) appropriate student participation, and the quality of their performance,
- 2) the degree of attainment of the student's English ability in all 4 skill areas,
- 3) the quality of homework tasks,
- 4) a written portfolio, and
- 5) results demonstrated through evaluations given at the middle and end of the course.

The process involves both teacher assessment and self-assessments conducted by students. The relative weight of each assessment component is as follows:

<b>Multiple Assessment Components</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Appropriate Participation and Quality of Performance	10%
English Proficiency (comprehension/speaking/reading)	40%
Homework Tasks (all four skill areas)	20%
Mid-Course Evaluation (reading/writing/grammar/vocab)	15%
End of Course Evaluation (reading/writing/grammar/vocab)	15%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>

## COURSE CONTENT

<b>Weeks 1-2</b>	Greetings and Salutations
<b>Weeks 3-4</b>	Personal Introductions and Biographical Information
<b>Weeks 5-6</b>	The World of Work.
<b>Weeks 7-8</b>	Leisure Activities
<b>Weeks 9-10</b>	Where We Study and Where We Live
<b>Weeks 11-12</b>	Languages We Speak
<b>Weeks 13-14</b>	Then and Now

## **REQUIRED TEXTBOOK, WORKBOOK & CD (for both Courses 101 and 102)**

Soars, Liz; Soars, John; and Maris, Amanda. 2001. **American Headway 1**. New York: Oxford.

## **OTHER RESOURCES**

**Crossword Puzzles for ESL Students (Activities for ESL Students):** <http://iteslj.org/cw/>

**Vocabulary Quizzes:** <http://aitech.ac.jp/~iteslj/quizzes/vocabulary.html>

**Online Dictionary:** <http://www.answers.com/>

[www.merriam-webster.com](http://www.merriam-webster.com)

[www.britannica.com](http://www.britannica.com)

<http://idioms.thefreedictionary.com>

<http://www.raz-kids.com/main/PlaySample>

<http://a4esl.org/>

[www.fonetiks.org](http://www.fonetiks.org)

<http://esl.fis.edu/vocab/index.htm>

<http://home.earthlink.net/~eslstudent/read/read.html>

[www.oup.com/elt/global/products/americanheadway](http://www.oup.com/elt/global/products/americanheadway)

<http://www.soundsofenglish.org/links.htm>

**APPLIED LINGUISTICS DEPARTMENT  
FOREIGN LANGUAGE AREA**

**ILE 101: LESSON PLAN ONE**

**PART I: CONTENT (to be covered during weeks 1-2 / 10 hours)**

Topic: Greetings and Salutations

Functions:

- exploring class rules and regulations
- performing greetings and salutations/leave-taking
- self-presentations/proper address for teacher
- spelling names
- introducing others
- asking and answering basic questions

Contexts:

- classroom
- campus

Grammar/vocabulary (Stages 1-4 Activities):

- See American Headway, Book 1, Chapter 1 (Hello, Everybody!), pps. 2-7

Sociolinguistic (Stage 5 Activities)

- explore appropriate ways to address the teacher and each other (proper titles of address)
- explore appropriate ways to greet (e.g., handshake, physical contact, etc.)
- explore appropriate ways to interact/participate in classrooms/group contexts, ways to call teacher, etc.

Cultural/Intercultural exploration (Stages 6-7 Activities)

- use the activity, "Find someone who . . ." which lists several questions for students to ask of each other in a cocktail-style situation
- see Fantini, Exploring New Ways, "The Cocktail Party," pps 80-84
- compare and contrast ways of greeting/interacting across cultures

Skill areas

- address all 4 skill areas (reinforce the above with reading/writing activities)

**PART II: PROCESS (Teacher's Task – decide ways to implement the above content by selecting activities and dynamic strategies that include the following:**

Choose and sequence activities and dynamic strategies (e.g., inductive/deductive; small groups/large group, etc.)

- Stages 1-4 activities
- Stages 5-7 activities

Materials & equipment needed

- computer, OHP, video
- realia, map, handouts, posters, pictures, other

Homework tasks to assign

- meet and greet a foreign student on campus
- gather information from the internet, etc.
- textbook Book 1/Chapter 1, pps xxx, exercises ??
- workbook Book 1/Chapter 1, pps xxx, exercises ??

Decide on multiple assessment indicators (direct/indirect, discrete/global)

- attendance, participation, quality of classroom performance
- periodic documentation, quizzes, exam

## ILE 101: LESSON PLAN TWO

### **PART I: CONTENT (to be covered during weeks 3-4 / 10 hours)**

Topic: Personal Introductions and Biographical Information

Functions:

- exchanging personal information
- asking and answering basic questions (re name, age, status, address, telephone number, email address, etc.)
- using meta-language (e.g., how do you say...? what does this mean?, etc.)
- exploring the student's context (university campus)
- exchanging family information
- describing your family
- talking about family life

Contexts:

- classroom
- university campus
- home/family

Grammar/vocabulary (Stages 1-4 Activities):

- See American Headway, Book 1, Chapter 2 (Meeting People), pps. 8-15

Sociolinguistic (Stage 5 Activities)

- explore appropriate ways to address various people (e.g., known/unknown/formal, informal, etc.)
- explore appropriate ways to greet various people (e.g., handshake, physical contact, etc.)
- explore appropriate ways to interact in differing situations (in public, offices, church, etc.)

Cultural/Intercultural exploration (Stages 6-7 Activities)

- use roleplays (assigning different roles with varying interlocutors (e.g., age, sex, position, roles, etc.))
- see ESL Miscellany, Gestures, pps 266-284 & Fantini, "My ideal classroom," pps. 165-166
- compare and contrast ways of greeting/interacting/behaving across cultures
- compare and contrast students and universities at home and abroad

Skill areas

- address all 4 skill areas (reinforce the above with reading/writing activities)

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### **PART TWO: PROCESS (Teacher's Task – decide ways to implement the above content by selecting activities and dynamic strategies that include the following:**

Choose and sequence activities and dynamic strategies (e.g., inductive/deductive; small groups/large group, etc.)

- Stages 1-4 activities
- Stages 5-7 activities

Materials & equipment needed

- computer, OHP, video
- realia, map, handouts, posters, pictures, other

Homework tasks to assign

- meet and greet a foreign student on campus
- gather information from the internet, etc.
- textbook Book 1/Chapter 2, pps xxx, exercises ??
- workbook Book 1/Chapter 2, pps xxx, exercises ??

Decide on multiple assessment indicators (direct/indirect, discrete/global)

- attendance, participation, quality of classroom performance
- periodic documentation, quizzes, exams

## ILE 101: LESSON PLAN THREE

### **PART I: CONTENT (to be covered during weeks 5-6 / 10 hours)**

Topic: The World of Work

Functions:

- asking and answering basic questions
- discussing your birthplace, nationality
- relevance to your life and your work
- asking and telling time, dates, etc.
- talking about jobs

Contexts:

- neighbourhood
- public

Grammar/vocabulary (Stages 1-4 Activities):

- See American Headway, Book 1, Chapter 3 (The World of Work), pps. 16-23

Sociolinguistic (Stage 5 Activities)

- explore appropriate ways to greet, sit, eat, table manners, etc.
- explore the various roles and responsibilities of each member of the family

Cultural/Intercultural exploration (Stages 6-7 Activities)

- conduct simulations of visits to English-speaking families
- see ESL Miscellany, "family," p. 68
- compare and contrast families/homes across cultures

Skill areas

- address all 4 skill areas (reinforce the above with reading/writing activities)

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### **PART TWO: PROCESS (Teacher's Task – decide ways to implement the above content by selecting activities and dynamic strategies that include the following:**

Choose and sequence activities and dynamic strategies (e.g., inductive/deductive; small groups/large group, etc.)

- Stages 1-4 activities
- Stages 5-7 activities

Materials & equipment needed

- computer, OHP, video
- realia, map, handouts, posters, pictures, other

Homework tasks to assign

- meet and greet a foreign student on campus
- gather information from the internet, etc.
- textbook Book 1/Chapter 3, pps xxx, exercises ??
- workbook Book 1/Chapter 3, pps xxx, exercises ??

Decide on multiple assessment indicators (direct/indirect, discrete/global)

- attendance, participation, quality of classroom performance
- periodic documentation, quizzes, exams

## ILE 101: LESSON PLAN FOUR

### **PART I: CONTENT (to be covered during weeks 7-8 / 10 hours)**

Topic: Leisure Activities

Functions:

- describing leisure activities (hobbies, sports, music, etc.)
- expressing preferences, likes/dislikes
- learning numbers and colours
- talking about days of week/months/years

Contexts:

- classroom
- campus
- personal and public settings

Grammar/vocabulary (Stages 1-4 Activities):

- See American Headway, Book 1, Chapter 4 (Take It Easy?), pps. 24-31

Sociolinguistic (Stage 5 Activities)

- explore appropriate ways to behave in public spaces (e.g., sports events, concerts, etc.)
- explore when/how it is appropriate to express likes/dislikes
- explore implications of weekdays/weekends and special occasions

Cultural/Intercultural exploration (Stages 6-7 Activities)

- discuss preferred hobbies, sports, music in English-speaking cultures
- see ESL Miscellany, "Sports and Games," p. 98 and "Music" p. 99
- compare and contrast leisure type activities across cultures

Skill areas

- address all 4 skill areas (reinforce the above with reading/writing activities)

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### **PART TWO: PROCESS (Teacher's Task – decide ways to implement the above content by selecting activities and dynamic strategies that include the following:**

Choose and sequence activities and dynamic strategies (e.g., inductive/deductive; small groups/large group, etc.)

- Stages 1-4 activities
- Stages 5-7 activities

Materials & equipment needed

- computer, OHP, video
- realia, map, handouts, posters, pictures, other

Homework tasks to assign

- meet and greet a foreign student on campus
- gather information from the internet, etc.
- textbook Book 1/Chapter 4, pps xxx, exercises ??
- workbook Book 1/Chapter 4, pps xxx, exercises ??

Decide on multiple assessment indicators (direct/indirect, discrete/global)

- attendance, participation, quality of classroom performance
- periodic documentation, quizzes, exams

## ILE 101: LESSON PLAN FIVE

### **PART I: CONTENT (to be covered during weeks 9-10 / 10 hours)**

Topic: Where We Study and Where We Live

Functions:

- asking and giving instructions (e.g., classroom procedures, course, tasks, homework, etc.)
- asking and giving (spatial) directions
- learning how to get about
- describing your home and your neighbourhood
- describing your environment

Contexts:

- classroom, campus
- local area, neighbourhood, city, region

Grammar/vocabulary (Stages 1-4 Activities):

- See American Headway, Book 1, Chapter 5 (Where Do You Live?), pps. 32-39

Sociolinguistic (Stage 5 Activities)

- explore appropriate ways to behave when visiting someone's home
- explore and role play appropriate ways to stop someone on the street to ask for directions
- explore and practice ways to give geographical and/or spatial directions
- describe your environment to a foreigner/have a foreigner describe his/her environment to you

Cultural/Intercultural exploration (Stages 6-7 Activities)

- conduct the "Airport" activity (students work in pairs, one is blindfolded and is guided through the room which has various obstacles)
- have students sit in pairs, back to back/one has a map and the other has a pencil and a blank piece of paper/the first gives instructions to the other to reproduce the map
- see Jerald & Clark, "Mapping it out," pps. 24-26
- compare and contrast ways of stopping people on the street to ask for information across cultures

Skill areas

- address all 4 skill areas (reinforce the above with reading/writing activities)

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### **PART TWO: PROCESS (Teacher's Task – decide ways to implement the above content by selecting activities and dynamic strategies that include the following:**

Choose and sequence activities and dynamic strategies (e.g., inductive/deductive; small groups/large group, etc.)

- Stages 1-4 activities
- Stages 5-7 activities

Materials & equipment needed

- computer, OHP, video
- realia, map, handouts, posters, pictures, other

Homework tasks to assign

- meet and greet a foreign student on campus
- gather information from the internet, etc.
- textbook Book 1/Chapter 5, pps xxx, exercises ??
- workbook Book 1/Chapter 5, pps xxx, exercises ??

Decide on multiple assessment indicators (direct/indirect, discrete/global)

- attendance, participation, quality of classroom performance
- periodic documentation, quizzes, exams

## ILE 101: LESSON PLAN SIX

### **PART I: CONTENT (to be covered during weeks 11-12 / 10 hours)**

Topic: Languages We Speak

Functions:

- talking about languages we speak
- exploring bilingualism-biculturalism
- exploring ways to become bilingual-bicultural
- discussing advantages/disadvantages

Contexts:

- classroom, campus
- national, international

Grammar/vocabulary (Stages 1-4 Activities):

- See American Headway, Book 1, Chapter 6 (Can You Speak English?), pps. 40-47

Sociolinguistic (Stage 5 Activities)

- explore how the language you speak influences how you see the world
- discuss how bilinguals may see the world differently from a monolingual person

Cultural/Intercultural exploration (Stages 6-7 Activities)

- discuss aspects of bilingual people you know
- interview a bilingual person
- see ESL Miscellany, "Language," p. 78
- compare and contrast people in your class with others who have traveled abroad

Skill areas

- address all 4 skill areas (reinforce the above with reading/writing activities)

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### **PART TWO: PROCESS (Teacher's Task – decide ways to implement the above content by selecting activities and dynamic strategies that include the following:**

Choose and sequence activities and dynamic strategies (e.g., inductive/deductive; small groups/large group, etc.)

- Stages 1-4 activities
- Stages 5-7 activities

Materials & equipment needed

- computer, OHP, video
- realia, map, handouts, posters, pictures, other

Homework tasks to assign

- meet and greet a foreign student on campus
- gather information from the internet, etc.
- textbook Book 1/Chapter 6, pps xxx, exercises ??
- workbook Book 1/Chapter 6, pps xxx, exercises ??

Decide on multiple assessment indicators (direct/indirect, discrete/global)

- attendance, participation, quality of classroom performance
- periodic documentation, quizzes, exams

## ILE 101: LESSON PLAN SEVEN

### **PART I: CONTENT (to be covered during weeks 13-14 / 10 hours)**

Topic: Languages We Speak

Functions:

- talking about languages we speak
- exploring bilingualism-biculturalism
- exploring ways to become bilingual-bicultural
- discussing advantages/disadvantages
- reviewing and summarizing course content

Contexts:

- classroom, campus
- national, international

Grammar/vocabulary (Stages 1-4 Activities):

- See American Headway, Book 1, Chapter 6 (Can You Speak English?), continued pps. 40-47

Sociolinguistic (Stage 5 Activities)

- explore how the language you speak influences how you see the world
- discuss how bilinguals may see the world differently from a monolingual person

Cultural/Intercultural exploration (Stages 6-7 Activities)

- discuss aspects of bilingual people you know
- interview a bilingual person
- see ESL Miscellany, "Language," p. 78
- compare and contrast people in your class with others who have traveled abroad

Skill areas

- address all 4 skill areas (reinforce the above with reading/writing activities)

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### **PART TWO: PROCESS (Teacher's Task – decide ways to implement the above content by selecting activities and dynamic strategies that include the following:**

Choose and sequence activities and dynamic strategies (e.g., inductive/deductive; small groups/large group, etc.)

- Stages 1-4 activities
- Stages 5-7 activities

Materials & equipment needed

- computer, OHP, video
- realia, map, handouts, posters, pictures, other

Homework tasks to assign

- meet and greet a foreign student on campus
- gather information from the internet, etc.
- textbook Book 1/Chapter 6, pps xxx, exercises ??
- workbook Book 1/Chapter 6, pps xxx, exercises ??

Decide on multiple assessment indicators (direct/indirect, discrete/global)

- attendance, participation, quality of classroom performance
- periodic documentation, quizzes, exams

**APPLIED LINGUISTICS DEPARTMENT  
FOREIGN LANGUAGE AREA**

**PART II (Process): Lesson Plan Outline for a Bi-weekly Cycle**

**Course:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Teacher:**  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Cycle No. & Weeks of Course** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:**  
\_\_\_\_\_

List functions to be addressed

List grammar structures to be taught:

List activities, materials, and equipment related to stages (1-4):

List activities, materials, and equipment related to stages (5-7):

State how functions are enforced with reading/writing

List home tasks to be assigned:

List assessment indicators to be used:

APPLIED LINGUISTICS DEPARTMENT  
FOREIGN LANGUAGE AREA

EVALUATION FORM TO DOCUMENT STUDENTS' PARTICIPATION/PERFORMANCE AND ENGLISH PROFICIENCY

COURSE \_\_\_\_\_ TEACHER \_\_\_\_\_

DATE \_\_\_\_\_ [ ] MID-TERM EVALUATION [ ] END OF COURSE EVALUATION

APPROPRIATE PARTICIPATION AND QUALITY OF PERFORMANCE (10%)	ALWAYS	USUALLY	SOMETIMES	SELDOM	NEVER
Comes to class on time					
Brings required materials to class					
Completes assignments on time					
Participates and contributes in a positive manner to the class experience					
Is attentive to teachers and classmates					
Works well in small groups					
Demonstrates interest and motivation					
<b>ENGLISH PROFICIENCY (3 Skill Areas) (40%)</b>					
<b>Comprehension (15%)</b>					
Understands and follows instructions					
Understands vocabulary and expressions appropriate to this level					
Demonstrates the ability to participate appropriately in conversations at this level					
<b>Speaking (15%)</b>					
Pronunciation is intelligible					
Demonstrates grammar control appropriate to level					
Has a range of vocabulary appropriate to level					
Speaks with fluency appropriate to level					
Participates in conversations in ways that are appropriate to English-speakers					
<b>Reading (10%)</b>					
Reads and understands written instructions in exercises and exams					
Uses strategies such as skimming, scanning, inference, and context to understand the meaning of new words and phrases					
Demonstrates ability to read texts and understand their meaning appropriate to this level.					

\* Writing skills are evaluated through Homework Tasks (20%).

\*\* Use this form to evaluate students twice each term (one week before the exam at mid-course and one week before the exam at the end).

**Description of the components  
of the Training and Professional Development Model**

**Teaching journals:** In order to help teachers to analyse their practices, to explore their own beliefs about teaching and learning and to understand their behaviours as teachers, every teacher keeps a weekly journal of one of the assigned classes. It is expected that by keeping a journal, teachers themselves contribute to their own development, which in turn, might help them to assimilate and internalise all the changes implicated in this new curriculum.

**Peer observation or class visits:** In a regular academic term (August-December/January-May) each teacher visits three times with three different colleagues. In the summer term (May-July), they visit twice. Each teacher receives a class-visit calendar and a class-visit guide prior to these visits. The visits are coordinated taking into account the days when there would be no student evaluations. After each visit, teachers meet for individualised feedback, with the aim of emphasising positive aspects of the teaching experience and with a view towards making improvements or modifications where it is considered necessary to do so. At the end of each visit cycle, each teacher turns in the completed class-visit guide to the English Coordinator. The guide is signed by both parties (the visiting teacher and the teacher who was visited). The teacher who was visited fills out a self-evaluation form for each class observed which is also turned in to the English Coordinator.

**Study circles:** Aimed at all the professors in the Area of English, the study circles' dual goals are maintaining good inter-relations and a collaborative environment as well as improving teacher training. Teachers are given a specific article in advance, usually on a topic related to the communicative approach, which they read and are prepared to discuss in the study circle. Questions and reflexive activities during these circles are guided by one of the professors, who was previously selected.

**Students' feedback:** Because of the formative and evaluative nature of this model, one of the most important elements of it is the feedback obtained from the students. At the end of each month all teachers collect written feedback from their students. In order to obtain the desired information, teachers guide students with a set of oral questions as to

what they should write about. These questions include areas such as teaching methodology, perceptions of the programme and their own learning, and what is benefiting or hindering their learning. Teachers then read the feedback and in the next class, discuss it with the students for clarification, agreement or disagreement, and to offer explanations. By doing so, students know their comments are taken into account, and they know it is a serious, honest and transparent process for the improvement of the NEC. After the discussion session each teacher turns in the written feedback to the English Coordinator. The English Coordinator and the Head of the Applied Linguistics Department also read each student's comments. In this manner, students' feedback becomes a powerful tool to inform about teaching methodology, teachers' practices, the development of the NEC, and their perceptions on their own progress and learning. Actions then are taken to make any necessary adjustments. The Head of the ALD writes a summary of students' feedback and shares it with the whole group in the periodic meetings so that all teachers are kept informed and, as a group, deliberate on possible ways to approach the different difficulties and challenges expressed by students. This way, teachers are active agents in the decision making processes.

**Periodic meetings:** There is a meeting at the end of every month with the English Coordinator which is aimed at on-going evaluation of the implementation process in order to make whatever adjustments are necessary. In these meetings, teachers exchange ideas and experiences that permit them to take action towards resolving any detected problems. These meetings also promote a cooperative and collaborative way of working to create a learning community among teachers.

**Lesson planning:** Every two weeks, teachers turn in their lesson plans for those two weeks to the English Coordinator. A guide is provided so that all professors can plan using the same format in order to ensure better unity in the orientation of the work. Each lesson plan is revised by the English Coordinator, as well as by the training and development team and materials development team. There are two aims for turning in the lesson plans. One is to make sure every teacher is on the right track and the second is to provide individual help to those teachers experiencing difficulties.

**Training workshops and courses:** Based on necessities detected during class visits as well as those based on the professors' suggestions. The training and development team, along with the English Coordinator, organise training workshops and courses determining the topics, date and who will implement each workshop or course.

**Working Teams:** In order to support the English Coordinator and to involve teachers in decision making processes, three teams of English teachers work in the following areas: materials development, student-directed activities, and teacher training and development.

**Experiential learning:** This is a programme designed to provide EFL university-level teachers with a foreign language/cultural immersion experience in an English-speaking country. The aims of this programme are: 1) to improve teachers' English language skills, as needed, in the four skill areas, 2) to have them explore and experience the life and culture of an English-speaking community, 3) to provide opportunities to enhance their familiarity and abilities with a communicative approach to the teaching of EFL and to have them interact with other professionals, collect materials in English for use in their own classrooms, while considering ways to apply their learning upon return to enrich their own EFL classes and 4) to help them to develop intercultural competencies that will serve them in their work and in their personal lives.

**Making Sense of Curriculum Change: Teachers' Perspectives  
Implementing a Communicative English Language Curriculum at the  
tertiary level in the Dominican Republic**

**Focus group questions**

- 1- How do you think English as a foreign language should be taught?**
  
- 2- In what ways does the New English Curriculum (NEC) match your beliefs about teaching English as a Foreign Language?**
  
- 3- How would you compare the NEC to the previous English curriculum?**
  
- 4- Has the new curriculum affected you in any way?**
  
- 5- As an English as a Foreign Language teacher, what has it meant for you to teach in the NEC?**

**Making Sense of Curriculum Change: Teachers' Perspectives  
Implementing a Communicative English Language Curriculum at the  
tertiary level in the Dominican Republic**

**Individual Interviews questions**

**Research question 1**

What do English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers at a university in the Dominican Republic think of the New English Curriculum (NEC)?

**Sub-questions**

- 1- What is your opinion about the way English language has been taught at this institution?
- 2- What do you know about the reasons to change the English curriculum?
- 3- How necessary do you think this change was?
- 4- How much do you know about the New English Curriculum (NEC) objectives?
- 5- How appropriate do you think the scope and sequence (amount and sequence of courses) of the new curriculum are?
- 6- What do you think about the Communicative Approach teaching principles and practices?
- 7- How appropriate do you think the Communicative Approach teaching methodology is?
- 8- How do you feel teaching this way?
- 9- What do you think of students' evaluation in the NEC?
- 10- Compared to the previous English curriculum, what differences in terms of students' learning will this New English Curriculum make?
- 11- What is your general opinion of this curricular change?
- 12- If you were asked to change anything what would it be?

**Research question 2**

How have teachers coped with the implementation of the New English Curriculum?

### **Sub-questions**

- 1- Has the new curriculum changed any of your views on education and English teaching?
- 2- How do you see the role of the teacher now?
- 3- As a teacher in the New Curriculum, have you had to make any kind of adjustments to your teaching?
- 4- What have they been?
- 5- What professional and personal strategies have you used to cope with this change process?
- 6- What feelings have you experienced throughout this process?
- 7- How much support have you received during this implementation process? From whom? How has it helped you?
- 8- So far, what are your most important rewards?
- 9- In general, how do you feel teaching in this New Curriculum?
- 10-Why do you feel that way?
- 11-In your opinion, how have you contributed to the implementation of the New English Curriculum?
- 12-What suggestions can you offer in order to improve the New English Curriculum implementation process?

### **Research question 3**

What is the potential of the New English Curriculum to provide teachers with professional development opportunities?

### **Sub-questions**

- 1- What kind of professional development activities were you involved in before you started teaching in the New English Curriculum?
- 2- What kind of professional development activities have you been involved in during the NEC implementation?
- 3- Have these activities helped you to manage this process of change?
- 4- In what ways?
- 5- In terms of professional growth, how has the New English Curriculum influenced/added to your professional development and growth?

## Focus groups and interviews themes-codes-categories

Themes	Codes	Categories
<b>1. Teachers' beliefs about teaching EFL</b>	TBEFL	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Classroom environment</li> <li>2. Course content</li> <li>3. Students' needs</li> <li>4. Goals of the EFL class</li> <li>5. Learning process</li> <li>6. Role of the target language in the classroom</li> <li>7. Teaching methodology</li> </ol>
<b>2. Teacher's and the curricular change</b>	TCC	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Teachers' point of views about teaching EFL in the institution</li> <li>2. Reasons for the change</li> <li>3. Necessity of the change</li> <li>4. Understandings of the NEC</li> <li>5. Appropriateness and advantages of the NEC</li> <li>6. Pedagogical implications of the NEC</li> <li>7. Institutional decisions and support</li> <li>8. Teachers and students' role in the NEC</li> <li>9. Teachers' perceptions of students' achievements</li> </ol>
<b>3. Teachers in the NEC Change Process</b>	TCP	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Teachers' feelings</li> <li>2. Teacher's attitudes</li> <li>3. Teachers' challenges</li> <li>4. Effects on teachers</li> <li>5. Coping strategies</li> <li>6. Perceived support</li> <li>7. Teachers' contributions to the implementation stage</li> <li>8. Suggestions for improvement</li> </ol>
<b>4. Teachers' Professional Development in the NEC</b>	TPD	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Teachers' perceptions</li> <li>2. Teachers' learning</li> </ol>

## Examples of Data Coding

### Research question 1

*What do English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers at a university in the Dominican Republic think of the New English Curriculum (NEC)?*

**Interviewer:** And how necessary do you think this curricular change was?

**Participant:** Well, *I think that yes, it was very necessary* (TCC3). If we compare, for instance, *the way we used to teach, that even ourselves as teachers got bored and our classes were so monotonous* (TCC1). There was a moment in which I said to myself, oh! Well, it was doing the same, the same, the same teaching methodology, working with the same skills. *Now it is different, now, both teachers and students have a dynamic class; that is, the students have more opportunities to express themselves, to talk, to participate.....* (TCC6)

**Interviewer:** In general, what do you think of this curricular change?

**Participant:** Well, *I think it was necessary that this change occurred* (TCC3) *even though for us, it has implied a lot more work. I think it has been worthwhile, of course with its ups and downs* (TCP 5) *but we are in a process, as I said before, a paradigm shift and as with all changes it has its pros and cons; then, we implement, change, adjust, take away, and add until we are satisfied.*(TCP2).

**Interviewer:** If you could or would have to change anything in the New English Curriculum, what would it be?

**Participant:** First, it was the portfolios but that was changed already. Right now? *I am not sure. I would say, we have to wait and see, to evaluate later and verify if there is something that needs to be changed.* (TCP8). For me, it is fine the way it is now. In terms of teaching methodology, I think everything is fine.

### Research question 2

*How have teachers coped with the implementation of the New English Curriculum?*

**Interviewer:** O.K. And as a teacher in the New English curriculum, have you had to make any adjustments?

**Participant:** Adjust? Almost everything! Yes because.... Well, first, ah... What comes to my mind *in terms of adjustments I have had to make, first is the seating arrangement in my classes that is one thing* (TCP4). For example, in my classes, as you know, in the previous curriculum students sat in rows, one after the other, *now we sit in semi-circles where we can see each other faces, students and teachers, because now, everybody, teachers and students have to be involved* (TCC7).

**Participant:** Ah, well, we, *some of my colleagues and I exchange ideas, activities, we plan our classes together, there is a lot of exchange. We talk a lot about our classes, there is more interaction among colleagues; in other words, a strategy has been the mutual support among us* (TCP4).

### **Research question 3**

*What is the potential of the New English Curriculum to provide teachers with professional development opportunities?*

**Interviewer:** In terms of professional growth, how has the New English Curriculum influenced/added to your professional development and growth?

**Participant:** The New English Curriculum, *the new curriculum is making me see that the traditional models in education are almost obsolete and that a professional in the education field has to be constantly renewing herself, keep updated* (TPD1).

**Interviewer:** Have these activities helped you to manage this process of change?

**Participant:** They have helped me a lot, and I am not saying it was easy, but they have helped me. Little by little I have gained more confidence. *Now I see that what I do is supported by theories; it is because an author suggests it* (TPD2).

**Participant:** .....besides learning about the Communicative Approach, *I have learnt many other things during the implementation of the new curriculum. I have had to read, investigate to keep updated* (TPD2).