RE-CONCEPTUALIZING EFL PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT: ENHANCING COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE PEDAGOGY FOR THAI TEACHERS

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Abstract: The spread of globalization means an accompanying growth in the importance of English as a lingua franca. Efforts to increase English proficiency are especially pronounced in Southeast Asia with the opening of the ASEAN Economic Community in 2015. A common strategy to enhance English learning in Asian countries is to begin instruction at the primary level, but policymakers face the challenge of preparing teachers of young learners with the necessary content and pedagogical knowledge to provide high quality English education. This article reports on a professional development effort aimed to help Thai primary teachers of English integrate communicative language teaching approaches. After describing the Thai English education context and key project components, the author uses participant and trainer response data to identify factors that contribute to perceived quality of the project. From these findings, the author makes recommendations to re-conceptualize best practices in teacher professional development for Thai English teachers. Findings and recommendations are applicable both to Thailand and to other nations with EFL contexts.

Keywords: English as a foreign language (EFL), communicative language teaching, professional development, Asia, young learners

Globalization has meant an increased reliance on English as a lingua franca across the world. Nations without a history of English as a native or second language, those within Kachru's (1992) expanding circle, are experiencing an

urgency to ensure citizens are equipped with English skills needed to be competitive in the international economy. Southeast Asia's political landscape makes learning English especially important. For instance, most recently, the opening of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Economic Community (AEC) in 2015, which adopted English as its working language, is strengthening the resolve to learn English in the region (Kirkpatrick, 2011).

Of the 10 ASEAN countries, Thailand is one of the most pivotal for English education: while it has experienced rapid economic growth and development over the past two decades, communicating in English is still rare for many of its citizens. Education First's (EF) English Proficiency Index (EPI), which ranks countries by adults' communicative English skills, listed Thailand as 48 of 60 countries, one of the lowest-ranking countries in Asia (Education First, 2014). This low level of English proficiency in Thailand may be a function of its historical context; unlike most of its neighbors, Thailand has never been colonized by Western powers and therefore has never been obliged to learn English. Some have suggested that Thailand has yet to embrace English as a global language, or to "own" English (Foley, 2005), further hindering its progress in adopting English. Nevertheless, the nation is committed to upgrading language proficiency through government schools. As an example, since the early 2000's, the Ministry of Education (MOE) has required schools to provide at least one hour of English instruction beginning in Grade 1, a reflection of the growing trend among Asian countries to start English learning at young ages (Nunan, 2003).

A challenge that Thailand faces in implementing compulsory primary English education is recruiting English proficient teachers who are qualified in communicative language pedagogy for young learners. English language teaching in Thailand consists largely of outdated grammar translation instructional methods that give little attention to authentic communication or oral language skills, a phenomenon that has been documented in other Asian EFL classrooms as well (e.g., Butler, 2005). The need for qualified teaching personnel is especially acute at the primary level because, unlike secondary teachers, Thai primary teachers are not required to take many English language university courses before earning their teaching credential. Therefore, preparing primary teachers to provide English instruction is left to in-service teacher professional development (TPD) initiatives. This article evaluates the implementation of a training program for primary English teachers (henceforth called the *Primary-PD Program*) on communicative language teaching. I collaborated with Thai

and American colleagues to design, deliver, and evaluate the professional development program.

The study sought to inform the research question: *What themes contributed to perceived quality of CLT PD for Thai primary teachers?* Data were gathered through survey, interviews, observation notes, and autobiographical reflections. Lessons learned from the project are applicable to nations within and beyond ASEAN that teach English as a foreign language (EFL) in primary schools. Following, I first review literature on teacher development theories and CLT in Thailand and then summarize how the Primary-PD Program's design took into account existing theory and Thailand's unique English educational context. I next describe the evaluation methodology and distill key themes that inform the research question. From these themes, I suggest considerations for adapting PD common in Anglophone countries to Thai English teachers. Finally, I provide recommendations for systemic changes at a policy level necessary to support any TPD initiative.

Literature on adult learning theory was the foundation of the project design, as it underlies promising TPD (Speck, 1996; Zepeda, 2011) across a range of contexts. Built on constructivist epistemology, the notion that individuals actively make knowledge rather than passively consume information (Bruner, 1960), adult learning theorists posit that best practices for teaching adults do not necessarily mirror those for teaching children because of different prior experiences and motivations. Knowles' seminal concepts of andragogy serve as a common basis for the variety of adult learning theories in education and informed the design of the PD-Program. Specifically, Knowles (1984) asserts that adult learning should: (a) involve learners from the planning stages; (b) incorporate life experiences learners bring; (c) focus on subjects that are relevant for learners' professional or personal life; and (d) adopt a problem-oriented focus so that adult learners can apply new concepts immediately. Although empirical evidence documenting TPD's effects on student outcomes is sparse (Yoon, Duncan, Lee, Scarloss, & Shapley, 2007), research is clear that promising PD reflects foundational concepts in adult learning theory, such as sustained, ongoing, and relevant support tailored to teachers' needs (Desimone, 2009).

While Thai scholars have recognized the importance of constructivist learning and tenets of adult learning theory in TPD (e.g., Teng & Sinwongsuwat, 2015) much existing English TPD is based on the knowledge transmission model that is prevalent in classrooms (Kustati, 2013). It is not

clear if the learner-centered, job-embedded collaborative coaching that is at the heart of the high-quality TPD in Western contexts is as effective in Thailand. Indeed, as evidenced by Darling-Hammond, Wei, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos' (2009) review, few seminal, robust PD studies examine ASEAN contexts. Effective TPD in Thailand may differ from best practices in Western countries, especially given manifestation of Buddhism in social institutions (Saengboon, 2004). For instance, *karma*, which emphasizes acceptance of the status quo, means that Thai teachers may avoid confrontation or uncomfortable conversations that could occur in coaching (Adamson, 2005). And, the uniquely Thai concept of *Kreng Jai*, showing deference to older and higher-status individuals, is evident among students' unquestioning acceptance of their teacher as an expert (Adamson, 2005; Foley, 2005); a similar phenomenon may be at play among teachers and TPD trainers. The scarcity of literature in Thai contexts makes defining effective PD for Thailand difficult. The present analysis contributes to the emerging knowledge base on TPD in Thai contexts and can help inform a PD model for Thai English teachers.

To address the ongoing challenge of teachers employing grammar translation instructional approaches, the Primary-PD Program addressed communicative language teaching (CLT) with an emphasis on teaching oral language skills. The goal of the Primary-PD Program was not just to impart knowledge about CLT, but also to provide teachers with the practical tools and confidence to implement CLT in the classroom. The concept of CLT has been interpreted variously among scholars in the field of language education (Harmer, 2007), and specific components of the approach differ by perspective (e.g., see Brown, 2007; Littlewood, 1981, Nunan, 1991). In general, Widdowson's (1978) foundational notion of "achieving communicative purposes" as an instructional goal rather than "comprehending isolated linguistic units" underpins present-day understandings of CLT and guided our operationalization of the concept for the Primary PD-Program.

Although CLT is not implemented consistently in Thai schools, the MOE has advocated for the approach for over two decades (Darasawang, 2007; Kustati, 2013). In fact, Thailand's Basic Education Core Curriculum, first developed in 2001 and most-recently revised in 2008, defines foreign languages as the "knowledge, skills, attitude and culture…for communication, seeking further knowledge and livelihood" (p. 11). Prior Primary TPD has included topics that fall under CLT, such as task-based learning and content-based language learning (Kustati, 2013; Teng & Sinwongsuwat, 2015). Explanations are

varied for Thai English teachers' reluctance to apply CLT in their classroom: the nation's high-stakes English test measures grammatical accuracy rather than communication (Wongsothorn, Hiranburana, & Chinnawong, 2003), which understandably leads to a lack of teacher belief in the efficacy of CLT (Foley, 2005); teachers do not feel confident enough in their own English skills to teach communicatively (Foley, 2005; Wanchai, 2012; Wongsothorn et al., 2003); and the hierarchal structure within schools do not allow teachers adequate job-embedded support to apply CLT theories to instruction (Iemjinda, 2005).

Although overhauling these deep-rooted educational systems and transforming firmly-held beliefs is beyond the scope of the TPD, the Primary-PD Program can make inroads to changing teachers' attitudes. In line with Knowles' emphasis on the need to provide adults with relevant knowledge that they can apply to solve daily problems at work, we theorized that demonstrating step-by-step CLT activities designed for use by teachers with only a beginning level of English would facilitate this attitude change. The Primary-PD Program was built on the theory that the most effective training for Thai teachers would account for Knowles' principles of adult learning with special attention to the unique challenges Thailand faces in implementing CLT methods. The following components were thus at the heart of the PD program.

Based on an analysis of literature and conversations with teachers and MOE officials, we determined four principles of CLT consistent with Widdowson's (1978) seminal definition: (1) meaningful communication; (2) collaborative student group work; (3) language connected to context; and (4) language to engage in critical thinking. I intentionally narrowed the broad and potentially messy theories of CLT to principles that could be exemplified with videos and images to ensure concepts were accessible for teachers with beginning English proficiency. From these principles, I worked with Thai teachers and MOE officials to identify and adapt 8 classroom activities. These activities were selected from comprehensive search of research and best practice in primary EFL teaching from refereed journals, pedagogy texts, Internet Blogs, and colleagues' recommendations. The following criteria were used in determining the techniques to include in the training: (a) applicable across topics; (b) could be differentiated for various language levels; (c) appropriate for young learners; (d) involved student-to-student oral communication; (e) required few or no supplemental materials; and (f) aligned to one or more of the 4 CLT principles.

We also created a handbook in which each of the activities with step-by-step directions and ideas for adaption written in basic English. A Web link of the activity in practice was listed so that teachers could see the activity in action, something we theorized would be especially valuable for teachers with low English proficiency in reading. To address teachers' need to prepare students for the national test, we also included target language skills that each activity addressed. Although the validity of the national test has been called into question (Goodman, 2013), these language skills we included are supposedly represented on the test.

The activities were introduced to participants through active learning methods, such as simulating instruction so that the teacher participants first engaged in the activities from a student's perspective. Participants then tried out the activities through microteaching for their peers. These 15-minute presentations required participants to work in pairs or groups of three to adapt a particular activity to their context (e.g., students' age and language level, learning objectives, and textbook topics) and then to demonstrate how they would teach the activity to their students, including giving directions and applying a topic they usually teach to the activity. For example, one group used an information gap activity with animal photographs because vocabulary for animal features was part of their regular curriculum. Microteaching was made more meaningful by requiring participants to use a checklist when observing their colleagues, noticing for observable examples of the CLT principles. This reflection tool reinforced the connection between CLT theory and classroom activities and facilitated collaborative sharing rather than the top-down teacher evaluations prevalent in Thai schools.

We conducted an intensive multi-day train-the-trainer (TOT) session for the 25 teacher leaders (henceforth called *local trainers*) who helped lead the subsequent 10 regional workshops. These local trainers were primary teachers with strong English language proficiency, and most had received pedagogy training abroad sponsored by the MOE within the past five years. Keeping in mind Knowles' tenet that adults thrive when directing their learning experiences, we theorized that involving teachers in the initial stages of the PD would increase their sense of ownership of CLT, crucial to fostering subsequent sharing with colleagues. In the past, these local trainers have been responsible for "cascading" training they received from outside consultants without an explicit TOT support mechanism. Further, while these trainers are recognized as leaders for primary teachers, they rarely have input into the design or content of the

training, instead being asked to "pass down" knowledge from workshops they attended.

Between four and six local trainers co-led each of the 10 regional workshops together with the visiting trainers. Collaboration enabled us, as the visiting trainers, to provide intensive support to the local trainers by modeling training techniques and debriefing in daily reflective meetings. The local trainers were able to support participants with low English proficiency through translation at strategic moments. The workshops also built on the teacher trainers' prior experiences of working with Thai teachers as a resource for learning, another one of Knowles' principles of adult learning theory. Thai local trainers' leadership lent credibility to the PD content for participants, demonstrating that CLT is no longer the sole domain of consultants from native English-speaking countries, but is also part of Thai education. We also theorized that transferring leadership to Thai teachers would begin to break down stringent hierarchal relationships that assume teachers learn passively from outside experts or superiors.

METHOD

The goal of this evaluation was to analyze implementation factors that appeared to facilitate or hinder the perceived quality of the Primary-PD Program. Data does not allow us to make conclusions about the PD's ultimate effectiveness on teacher learning or student achievement. Our research question was informed by evidence from participants, local trainers, and visiting trainers. We gathered data through surveys, field notes from observations, informal interviews, and my own autobiographical reflection.

We distributed a paper-and-pencil survey to assess participant satisfaction after the initial TOT session, and then a slightly different survey after each of the 10 training sessions. The survey was adapted from those used previously with English teachers in countries where English is taught as a foreign language. Both surveys consisted of Likert-type and open-response items. The Likert-type items were designed with a 4-point scale to measure perceived usefulness of each aspect in the workshops. The same six open-ended items were used for the TOT and regional workshops. These items measured participants' opinions on the quality of the training (e.g., *What was the most interesting part of the workshop? What changes would you suggest to improve this workshop?*). The open-response items also attempted to measure the likelihood that partici-

pants would apply strategies in the classroom (e.g., *Will you do anything differently in your classroom as a result of this training? If so, what will you do?*). We asked Thai colleagues at the MOE to review the surveys for content and face validity. The surveys responses were transferred to an electronic database for analysis.

For the train-the-trainer session, all 25 attending teachers completed the survey. Due to miscommunication, the survey for the local trainings was only distributed to 8 of the 10 locations. Of the 883 participants who attended these 8 trainings, 349 completed some or all of the survey, for a response rate of about 40%. The relatively low rate may be a function of the limited English proficiency of many participants, though we permitted participants to write in Thai because local trainers could translate. Another explanation is participants' absence; due to school-related responsibilities, some participants left the workshop before the final ceremony at which the surveys were distributed.

Additional data sources were visiting trainers' field notes of observations from the workshops and informal interviews, recorded in email exchanges and summary reports after each workshop. My own reflections served as data as well, recorded through notes and email exchanges with other trainers. These notes represented events that occurred during the workshops as well as the daily debriefing conversations that were held with local trainers. I initiated these debriefing sessions with questions such as, *How do you think it went today?* and *What worked well? What might we change next time?* For eight of the ten workshops, the teacher trainers collected "exit tickets," a type of formative assessment that required participants to write what they liked best about the day and problems or questions they still had about the content. Reviewing and discussing responses on the exit tickets comprised many of the debrief meetings, helping us make data-informed conclusions about the workshop.

Data analysis was an iterative process. Information from surveys and field notes were reviewed regularly throughout the training, and preliminary findings were used to adapt and improve subsequent trainings. Responses to the open-ended items on the survey were coded thematically. In line with analysis protocols of mixed method studies (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009), data from different sources informed holistic understandings about the training. At the completion of the training series, I distilled overall successes and challenges based on data from surveys, visiting trainers' field notes of observations and conversations with teacher trainers, and my own subjective experience as a visiting trainer.

Temporal and structural constraints posed multiple limitations to data collection. Improved student outcomes is the ultimate indicator of effective teacher PD (Guskey, 2000), but determining achievement means carefully following cohorts of students over years, a task that was beyond the scope of the project. Another measure of effective PD is the quality of instruction that occurs subsequent to training, but without permission or resources to visit participants' classrooms, ascertaining applicability in the classroom was not possible. We instead examined perceived effectiveness through self-report data on surveys, informal interviews, and field notes. The study thus contains common limitations of self-report data: social desirability, ordinal rather than interval data on rating scales, participants' varying level of introspective ability (Merriam, 2009). My participation as a trainer both introduced researcher bias and enhanced findings by presenting an insider's perspective (Merriam, 2009). Given these limitations, the study cannot make conclusions about effectiveness of the PD program. However, self-report PD evaluation data still holds value, as they may predict the likelihood participants will apply learned content in their classroom (Guskey, 2000). In the absence of long-term application data, subjective data can be used when planning subsequent training.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Data was analyzed holistically to identify themes that appeared to contribute to the perceived quality of the Primary-PD Program. The survey results indicated that in general participants were satisfied with the training. Between 97%-99% of respondents from the eight trainings in which the survey was distributed rated each component of the workshops as either "somewhat useful" or "very useful" on a four-point scale. On the open-response item about changes participants would suggest to improve the training, nearly a quarter of respondents indicated that the session was good as is and needed no changes. At the debriefing meetings, local trainers reported that they thought participants were "having fun," especially during interactive simulations. The microteaching was particularly well-received, with 12% of participant respondents listing it as the most interesting activity of the workshop. These overall positive perceptions suggest that teacher participants left the workshops willing to try out new strat-

egies in the classroom. The overwhelmingly positive responses on the survey may also reflect the Thai cultural value of *kreng jai* (Foley, 2005) that discourages negative opinions that jeopardize others' contentment. Thus, while the participants may have been genuinely satisfied with the workshops, some of them may have withheld specific concerns. The following are specific themes that appeared to contribute to perceived quality of the PD.

"Fun" Active Learning

The positive responses to microteaching and simulations suggest that the activity simulations and microteaching facilitated learning. This finding is not surprising, as active learning has been shown to be effective in previous PD studies (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009). Microteaching was included as a workshop component because it made the materials relevant, requiring participants use a topic that they teach for the activity. Surprisingly, though, respondents did not mention this relevance when praising the microteaching. Instead, open-response items emphasized how the microteaching and simulations were enjoyable, with 6% of respondents using the word "fun" in describing why they chose their "most interesting part." Further, at least five participants suggested more games and "fun" activities when responding to an open-response item about suggestions for changes. In fact, when suggesting changes, one survey participant pointed out that, "Thai teachers have different learning behaviors than foreigners, so foreign trainers should add more fun activities into the session." This emphasis on fun is consistent with the high value that Thais tend to place on *sanuk*, roughly translated as "fun" (Foley, 2005).

A component which was seemingly not popular with participants was the CLT checklist that they used to rate the trainers and each other as they demonstrated the activities. Only one survey respondent mentioned this when responding to the "most interesting part." Further, at least three of the local trainers "forgot" to instruct participants to use the checklist during the microteaching or the simulations. At first blush, this finding is at odds with the positive reviews of active learning: we designed the checklist to facilitate active learning so that all participants would be cognitively engaged, even when watching their peers present or playing the part of a primary student during modeling simulations. However, while the checklist required critical thinking, it did not involve ostentatiously "fun" activities, such as moving around or talking with peers, as did the activity simulations. Another possible explanation is teachers'

hesitancy to critique their peers, a reflection of a work culture that discourages potential conflict. The participants may also have been affected by the traditional passive learning during PD and were not comfortable vocalizing criticism.

Participants' English Language Proficiency

A recurring challenge in all the training locations was the level of participants' English proficiency. The 25 local teacher trainers appeared to have relatively strong English skills, evidenced by their confidence to lead sessions in English and ease in conversing with visiting trainers. Most of these local trainers benefitted from attending coursework in countries where English was widely spoken. Many of the primary teacher participants, on the other hand, did not have experiences abroad, and only a minority majored in English at the university level.

About 10% of respondents indicated that the language level was a barrier to their comprehension of the PD content. These participants wrote comments such as 'I cannot do because I am not English major,' and some suggested translating the materials into Thai. Varying levels of language proficiency may have been a reason why the cooperative structure of the microteaching was popular among participants; planning time for microteaching presentations enabled those participants with higher levels of English to explain the process to those with lower levels.

Some participants' perception of their English abilities and lack of self-confidence in English – rather than actual proficiency level – appeared to be the main barrier to applying CLT. For instance, after presenting a near flawless CLT microteaching activity, one participant confided that she felt the native English-speaking teachers at her school could implement CLT better than she could because of her English. In another regional workshop, local trainers asked participants to brainstorm ways Thailand could improve English teaching in the schools as part of a simulation of the gallery walk activity. Common responses included hiring foreign English teachers and sending primary Thai teachers to study abroad in English-speaking countries, reflecting a priority to use English teachers with native or native-like proficiencies. While not underestimating the real need to improve English proficiency of Thai primary teachers, an associated issue is the self-confidence level of teachers in speaking Eng-

lish, as native-like proficiency is not necessarily pre-requisite for an effective English teacher.

Likely related to the English proficiency levels of teachers, another theme throughout the PD was the persistence among participants to regard native speakers as experts in all matters related to English, a phenomenon sometimes referred to as the "native speaker paradigm" (Holliday, 2005). Despite our self-identification as "visiting trainers," MOE staff, local trainers, and participants often called us "native-speaker trainers" or sometimes "native experts," implying that our status as native speakers granted us the authority to provide CLT pedagogy training. In fact, an MOE staff-person admitted that I was recruited to coordinate the Primary-PD because of a "demand for teachers to interact with native speakers." Even the 25 local teacher trainers, many of whom scored at near-native levels on standardized proficiency tests, consulted me to edit their PowerPoints or handouts for grammatical accuracy. In an open-response item on the survey from the TOT session, one local trainer stated that she wanted me to give her more feedback on her pronunciation rather than teaching style.

Support for Teacher Leadership

Co-leading the regional workshops together with visiting and local trainers was not an effortless process. By the end of the program, I viewed many of the local trainers as true leaders. However, my initial frustration at their lack of leadership and willingness to take initiative was evident in my personal notes and email exchanges to colleagues soon after the TOT session. For instance, I complained in an email to a visiting trainer who would help during one of the subsequent local trainings: "the teachers at the TOT seem to want me to do everything… I'm not sure they understand that they are supposed to be trainers and not just in charge of arranging hotel rooms." Immediately after the face-to-face TOT session, I set up a social network site for local trainers and I to exchange information about trying out the CLT content in their classrooms and then planning the regional PD sessions in the next few months. Despite email reminders, structured tasks, and even incentives, though, the teacher trainers did not use the site beyond posting that they like CLT activities and enjoyed the training. From conversations with MOE colleagues, I later discovered that these teacher leaders were accustomed to serving in assistant or translator capacities when working with outside trainers.

Co-planning the first regional workshop fell largely on me, but I learned that the local trainers were able to plan their own presentations when given specific tasks and directions. They also all agreed that planning and presenting with a partner was more "better" and "more fun." Thus, assigning small groups specific time blocks and activities to present worked well. With this written scaffolding, the local trainers took on ownership and creatively adapted activities using topics they taught in their classrooms and knew were common for the teachers.

The visiting trainers and myself witnessed gradual improvement in the quality of the workshops over the 10-session series. The daily pre- and post-session meetings among trainers served as opportunities for reflection and enabled trainers to review critically the session and collaborate to make adaptations for future sessions. An example of growth among the trainers was the alteration in giving directions. After a debrief meeting following the first day of a workshop, the trainers discussed how participants did not seem to be engaged with a small group board game activity, concluding that the root of the problem was that the participants did not understand the directions. The first solution some of the trainers offered was to switch languages and include more translation in the workshop, even translating entire slides and directions. However, as the workshops were opportunities for teachers to improve their own English skills along with learning about CLT, we discouraged extended translation unless absolutely necessary. Instead of translating directions, I suggested that the local trainers break down directions for activities into explicit steps and model playing the game. The multiple regional workshops gave trainers the opportunities to watch me show them what I meant by explicit directions and then try it out multiple times.

Another area of growth for the trainers was in their use of warm-up activities. When co-planning the workshops, the teacher trainers confidently volunteered to coordinate and lead warm-up activities each day. Throughout the workshops, it became clear that the trainers had a plethora of warm-up games and songs at their disposal, and the teacher participants seemed to enjoy the activities, as evidenced by their eager engagement and laughter during the warm-up. Although the warm-up activities achieved the purpose of injecting light-hearted fun into workshops, they were not always directly tied to the content of the workshop. Moreover, some of the warm-up activities required little or no English communication, thus wasting an opportunity for English language practice for the teachers. During the post-workshop meetings, we dis-

cussed how the purpose of warm-up activities was not only to 'get people mov-ing,' but also to 'get people talking,' and brainstormed ways to adapt the warm-up activities to include content related to the workshop and require English language communication among teachers.

A third example of growth was using participant feedback to inform the workshop. During the initial TOT session, we introduced the concept of daily 'exit tickets' to the local trainers. Several trainers stated that while they were accustomed to distributing a cumulative evaluation form, these formative measures were new. The responses on the exit tickets served as a conversation starter for the debrief meetings, as they empowered the teacher trainers to make data-based assessments about the successes and challenges of each day and then adapt future sessions based on participants' needs.

Discussion

The findings of the PD Program provide implications for re-envisioning high-quality PD for Thailand. Transplanting the PD best practices of job-embedded coaching and ongoing reflective observations into the MOE's PD strategy will not affect long-term change in the classroom. Instead, a fusion of best practices in TPD drawn from seminal adult learning theories, such as Knowles' concepts, with the country's unique culture might be the best hope for improving teacher quality in Thailand. As an outgrowth from the findings, I recommend the following concepts be considered explicitly when planning TPD on CLT for Thai English teachers. While these recommendations are spe-cific to Thailand, many of them may be transferrable to other Asian nations that teach EFL.

Kreng Jai

Roughly translated as consideration for others (Foley, 2005), *Kreng Jai* is a concept unique to Thailand, but similar to notions of deference to authority in other Southeast Asian countries. Observations and interactions with partici-pants and local trainers demonstrated that we were right to forefront this con-cept when designing the Primary-PD, and in fact, future PD initiatives may take even further measures to accommodate this cultural value. The local train-ers were reluctant to take on leadership roles that weren't prescribed in a step-

by-step fashion, but after substantial coaching and encouragement during and after the TOT session, most local trainers gradually assumed more control during the regional workshops. The reasons for this reluctance were varied, but other visiting trainers and a few local trainers themselves stated that they were hesitant to give direction to their peers because it was not "very Thai."

Future PD might systematically and intentionally scaffold local leadership so that teachers first lead with scripted directions and then move to designing their own sessions using templates and graphic organizers. Similar steps should be considered for microteaching: a step-by-step prescriptive process should precede an open-ended request to "lead a small group." Such written guidance may not directly address the *kreng jai*, but would provide teachers with a resource to follow as they may be unaccustomed to giving peers directions. Written guidance may also be understood as a higher authority so that younger teachers who feel uncomfortable leading older peers can explain that they are only following the authority of the written guidance rather than usurping a superior's position. An additional measure to mitigate the stifling potential of *kreng jai* would be to recruit and train more leaders so that teachers become accustomed to seeing peers in leadership positions.

Native-Speaker Paradigm

The fact that teachers valued my accent more than my credentials and experience revealed that they did not perceive English as a world language rather than one belonging to Anglophone countries. Despite scholarly voices that have long debunked the superiority of native speaking teachers (e.g., Seidlhofer, 1999), many nations in which English is a foreign language continue to defer to native speaking experts in English educational practice Remaining is the quandary why the native speaker paradigm persists when English is becoming increasingly understood as a global language. It might seem logical that Thailand would in fact embrace this new understanding of English, as it opens doors for its own practitioners and scholars to speak with authority on English and English education. Rather, the continued deference to native speakers may reflect Thailand's reluctance to accept ownership of English. Reasons for this hesitance may lie in an apprehension that English may encroach in the well-preserved Thai language and culture, especially when considering historical campaigns to promote Thai identity through schools (Foley, 2005). PD initiatives can help Thailand move away from a native-speaker paradigm by ceding

decision-making roles to local experts. Anglophone trainers who lead PD for Thailand should insist that Thai teachers take part in the training as equal partners from the beginning. PD providers might also resist using sole examples from native-English-speaking teachers. In the Primary-PD, we showed video examples of local teachers throughout ASEAN, including Thailand, and tried to minimize videos and images from U.S. classrooms. In a particularly powerful example for teachers, a TL at one of the regional trainings showed a video of her classroom completing one of the CLT activities. Future PD should provide opportunities for local teachers to showcase their instruction so that teachers understand a native-English accent is not the gold standard.

Sanuk

PD providers should take seriously Thailand's value of fun – or *sanuk* in Thai – seriously. The first step to classroom implementation of PD training is ensuring teachers believe or "buy-into" the content (Guskey, 2000). For Thai teachers, earning this belief means demonstrating that fun is involved because for Thais, learning should be fun. The Thais may have something to offer education cultures focused on test performance in this regard: students will be less likely to become life-long learners if they do not have positive educational experiences. However, a risk in overemphasizing this *fun* factor is watering down the rigor so that students are not frustrated with unanswered questions, the kind that often accompany critical thinking exercises that are essential for 21st century learning. The challenge for PD providers is to strike a balance between fun and challenge for teachers, and then to help teachers strike this same balance with their students.

Policy Implications

Teacher training is only one lever for improving student learning. Professional development cannot occur in isolation of other efforts, nor can it be expected to single-handedly transform teaching and learning. I thus put forth a few policy recommendations for Thailand that stem from the experiences in the Primary-PD Program. These systemic changes might enhance the probability that the CLT addressed in Thai PD will make its way into the classrooms and impact student learning.

Differentiated TPD

A challenge in the workshops was meeting the needs of all teachers, especially those with limited English language skills. As evidenced in participants' feedback and trainers' reflections, English language was a barrier for some of the participants in their learning about instructional strategies. Rather than providing one workshop topic for all teachers, EFL countries like Thailand might consider first identifying the language learning needs of its teachers and then offering a selection of professional development opportunities designed for teachers at different levels. Professional development can include a common pedagogical focus at all levels (e.g., communicative language teaching), but those teachers with limited English skills might benefit from workshops that focus more on language learning than on pedagogical knowledge.

Long-term Planning

We were unable to determine the quality or extent of the cascade training beyond the 10 workshops across the country. However, it is probable that any local workshops subsequent to the 10 regional ones we coordinated and led suffered from dilution of content, a common disadvantage of cascade PD models (Gilpan, 1997). Although we provided the training materials to teachers, and the local teacher trainers and visiting trainers even assisted with some of these localized workshops, there was no dedicated TOT session for the participants who shared the workshop content. Furthermore, the participants at the 10 regional workshops were asked to conduct a cascade training for their colleagues within a few months – and sometimes weeks – of the regional workshop they attended, which meant that teachers had little time to prepare for their cascaded versions, much less time to focus on applying the instructional strategies in their classroom.

However, these challenges should not discredit the cascade model; as articulated by Hayes (2000), problems with the cascade PD are usually a function of the implementation of the model rather than theory underlying the model itself. The Primary-PD Project may have experienced more success in the cascaded trainings if the project was extended beyond a one-year timeframe. Instead of approaching PD as annual training initiatives, the MOE might conceive of the training as an ongoing project in which cohorts of teachers move through different training stages that include a coaching component. After a

period of dedicated classroom application teachers will be more prepared and confident to share the training with their colleagues. Structures such as professional learning communities might be instituted so that teachers can support each other and manage their own growth in ongoing structures. Learning communities may also help break down strict hierarchal relationships that prevent collegial sharing in informal contexts.

Integration of PD with Student Assessment

While a lack of job-embedded coaching contributes to the ongoing struggle to ensure teachers apply what they learn at PD workshops in the classroom, a mismatch between curriculum, assessment, and teacher training also limits the likelihood that Thai teachers use the communicative instructional strategies with their students. Thailand's national English assessment only addresses reading and writing and focused on grammatical details rather than communicative competence (Goodman, 2013), even though the National English Curriculum included standards for all four language skills. At the time of the Primary-PD Project, conversations were underway within the MOE about developing or identifying English assessments that measure speaking and listening and include a stronger communicative focus. However, until an assessment that measures English communication is adopted, teachers have little motivation to implement such a curriculum or to use communicative methodologies. Before investing in large-scale PD efforts on particular pedagogical techniques, Thailand might first align curriculum, assessment, and professional development so that they send a consistent message to educators.

Rethink Primary English Language Education Policy

Perhaps the most radical recommendation is for EFL countries to rethink policies on English instruction at the primary level. Ample resources in the areas of curriculum, assessment, personnel, and home support need to be in place to ensure effective English learning at the primary level (Enever & Moon, 2009; Garton, Copland, & Burns, 2011; Kirkpatrick, 2011). In particular, teachers need to be knowledgeable in both the language and the pedagogy. Currently, Thailand's education policy does not require primary teachers to demonstrate a minimum level of English proficiency or to major in English at the university level, resulting in English classrooms led by teachers who are

unable to communicate in English. Instead of investing resources in pedagogy and language training for these teachers, Thailand might consider prioritizing secondary level English education, in which English teachers are required to major in English at the university and then specialize in the subject for teaching. Meanwhile, primary teachers can focus on ensuring students have a strong literary background in Thai and (if applicable) their mother tongue. Seminal bilingual researchers have long theorized the benefits that first language literacy brings to learning a second language (Cummins, 1989), so by improving Thai language education, primary teachers will be contributing to students' eventual English language learning.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Thailand's commitment to enhancing English language instruction in schools is commendable, and its dedication to integrate best practices in language education is evident by the ongoing professional development structures in place. The Primary-PD Project holds promise for improving the pedagogical skills of primary teachers across the country, and the model may be adapted and applied to other EFL countries. Utilizing local teacher trainers alongside visiting trainers from English-speaking countries helps Thailand integrate educational innovations in the western world with local, contextualized knowledge. Moving forward, Thailand can build on these connections to determine a vision for communicative English language teaching that is accessible for Thai teachers and appropriate to the Thai educational culture. Such a vision might take into account the varying language needs and pedagogical backgrounds of local teachers as well as the differing educational contexts within the nation.

Based on the Primary-PD Project experiences, I suggest that the field of professional development might revisit taken-for-granted 'best practices,' such as intensive job-embedded support. Researchers that extol the benefits of these models are often from western contexts (e.g., Darling-Hammond et al., 2009), and it remains to be seen if such practices are the most effective means to boost English instructional quality for students in Thailand. With an education system that is tied to the strict hierarchical culture common to many Asian countries, Thai teachers may struggle to implement PD structures that require a collaborative culture in which teachers and administrators can provide non-evaluative critique, such as peer observation. For example, as evidenced in the

Primary-PD Project, teachers were reluctant to embrace the CLT checklist to evaluate each other. Instead, PD providers might redefine best practices for Thailand so that they are integrated within existing societal norms, including the Thai values of *kreng jai* and *sanuk*. PD should also be redefined to account for unique challenges EFL teachers from non-English-speaking countries face, most notably achieving adequate proficiency and confidence in communicative English use. Such a task requires close rapport and collaboration between researchers and local practitioners to take risks in trying new initiatives and documenting short and long-term outcomes in teacher learning and instructional change as well as eventual student achievement. Future research in PD for EFL teachers in Thailand might explore systematically PD models that draw on adult learning theory while also explicitly accounting for cultural values and language challenges of teachers.

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