



The skills transfer process from EFL teacher to educational manager

Clyde Fowle reports on the relationship between teaching and management skills.

This study attempts to examine the process of skills transfer between the role of EFL teacher and that of educational manager. It examines the experiences of seven educational managers working in Thailand and attempts to establish which areas of management responsibility their previous experience as EFL teachers most prepared them for and which it did not, as well as looking at the processes and strategies that they adopted in facilitating this transition.

Background

The area of management training in the field of EFL has become an issue of debate in recent years. The literature in the field indicates that most of those in managerial positions in the industry have little or no formal management training and have usually been promoted to their positions due to their success as a classroom practitioner (White et al., 1991, Wilson, 1994, McKeown, 1998, Mattacott, 1998, Pickering 1998:a, Clarkson and Lodge, 1999). In response to this several training courses specifically developed for EFL managers have been offered in recent years. However, despite there being some articles in the field on the parallels between teaching skills and management skills, including Wilson (1994) and Clarkson and Lodge (1999), little research seems to have been done into the process of skills

transfer in this context.

Outline of the study

This study uses a questionnaire survey to look at the experiences, and perceptions, of the transition process from EFL teacher to educational manager of seven EFL managers. Four of whom work for the British Council in Bangkok and three of whom work for Bell Educational Trust Associates in Thailand. Four members of the sample are Directors of Studies and the other three are Senior Teachers.

The study

The respondents have all been involved in areas of management for between eighteen months and five years. In terms of management training one had attended two one-week, in-house management courses and is doing an MSc. in ELT management, three others had attended a one-week, in-house management training course. The other three had received ad hoc informal training from their line manager.

Skills parallels

The table at the top of the next page shows the results of an exercise that asked the respondents to indicate whether the skills listed were primarily teaching skills,

management skills or important for both.

It would seem from these results that the greatest parallels between teaching and educational management lie in communication skills and various routine organisational skills. The four skills that all seven respondents felt were equally important for both teaching and management were: establishing rapport, effective listening, effective communication skills and monitoring and appraisal, all of which can be classified as interpersonal / communication skills.

The areas identified as having the least degree of correlation between the two roles were, firstly, financial management and managing change and conflict, being seen as only important for managers by all the respondents. Secondly, marketing, leadership, team building and managing people were identified by all as important for managers but each was only thought to be important for teachers by one person. Other areas seen as being significantly more important for managers included: managing stress, decision making and long-term planning. This would indicate that interpersonal skills are a particularly complex area that may have been over simplified previously in some of the literature.

Skills	Teaching	Management
Establishing rapport	7	7
Effective listening	7	7
Effective communication skills	7	7
Monitoring and appraisal	7	7
Giving feedback	7	6
Day-to-day planning	7	6
Effective use of resources	7	5
Presenting ideas clearly	6	7
Record keeping	6	6
Motivating people	5	7
Coping with the unexpected	5	7
Meeting client expectations	5	6
Prioritising	5	7
Time management	5	6
Decision making	3	7
Managing stress	3	7
Long-term planning	3	6
Team building	2	7
Managing people	1	7
Leadership	1	7
Marketing	1	7
Managing change / conflict	0	7
Financial management	0	7
Other: "Managing emotive issues"	0	1
Other: "Coping with belligerence"	0	1

Table 1: Important skills for teaching / management

Transferability of skills

The tables below show the results of an exercise that asked the respondents rank the management skills they felt their previous teaching experience most and least prepared them for. These results indicate that effective communication skills and establishing rapport seem to be the most readily transferable skills between the two roles. However, after that there seems to be far less homogeneity amongst the responses. This may indicate that there

are lots of variables involved apart from previous experience as a teacher.

The results in table 3 (next page) indicate that the skills the respondents were least prepared for were: financial management, marketing, managing conflict and change and long-term planning. The results from these two tables would seem to suggest that there are clearly

management skills for which a teaching background provides good preparation. However, it does not seem to be sufficient for preparing would-be managers in certain important areas, most notably specific management tasks such as financial management, marketing and long-term planning, as well as complex interpersonal skills such as managing conflict and change and leaderships skills.

Processes, strategies and attitudes

The responses to open-ended questions help to illuminate aspects of the process of transition. In response to the first question regarding the areas of managerial responsibility most prepared for by a teaching background, five of the respondents mentioned people skills and communication skills and four mentioned areas relating to academic management. Interestingly when asked to elaborate on how they facilitated the transfer of skills in the following question four respondents referred to "subconscious" or "instinctive" processes and three mentioned reflecting on the approach of their previous managers.

In response to the question, "What guided you when they felt that your skills were insufficient?" four respondents mentioned "instinct" or "common sense" coupled with advice from colleagues or line managers. Two stated a determination to succeed, one mentioned "modelling a previous boss" and another the value of drawing on management experience outside EFL.

In terms of what they had found most helpful in developing the new skills they required four mentioned support from others, including colleagues and line managers. One respondent stated "My ability to work things out combined with support from my line manager and colleagues who had managerial experience." Other individuals referred to the following: formal support systems, previous experience and training, feedback and reflection, determination and hard work, increased experience and

Management skill most prepared for:	1	2	3	4	5	Total
Effective communication skills	3	-	1	2	-	6
Establishing rapport	1	2	2	-	1	6
Motivating people	1	1	-	-	1	3
Presenting ideas clearly	1	-	-	-	2	3
Coping with the unexpected	-	1	1	-	1	3
Effective listening	-	1	-	1	-	2
Day-to-day planning	-	1	1	-	-	2
Long-term planning	-	-	2	-	-	2
Giving feedback	-	-	-	1	1	2
Managing people	1	-	-	-	-	1
Prioritising	-	1	-	-	-	1
Time management	-	-	-	1	-	1
Effective use of resources	-	-	-	1	-	1
Monitoring and appraisal	-	-	-	1	-	1
Decision making	-	-	-	-	1	1

Table 2: Management skills most prepared for by teaching

Management skill least prepared for:	1	2	3	4	5	Total
Financial management	3	-	1	1	-	5
Marketing	-	2	1	-	2	5
Managing conflict and change	1	1	-	2	-	4
Long-term planning	-	2	1	-	1	4
Leadership	1	-	1	-	1	3
Time management	2	-	-	-	-	2
Monitoring and appraisal	-	1	-	-	1	2
Managing stress	-	1	1	-	-	2
Decision making	-	-	1	1	-	2
Managing people	-	-	1	1	-	2
Prioritising	-	-	-	1	-	1
Team building	-	-	-	-	1	1
Coping with belligerence	-	-	-	1	-	1
Managing emotive issues	-	-	-	-	1	1

Table 3: Management skills least prepared for by teaching

following one's convictions.

In relation to dealing with theitudinal changes required with the change of role, two managers responded that this had not been difficult for them. Of the five who had found this difficult three found the process of coming to terms with others' perceptions of them problematic. One stated "In the beginning, the transition is difficult. You are conscious of how people see you and how they act towards you. You need to adjust." One mentioned a feeling of isolation and another the problem of implementing unpopular policies.

In response to the final question regarding their feelings towards the level of support that they had been given in the transition from EFL teacher to manager, five of them felt that the support provided had been sufficient. Of these four had received formal management training in their current post. Of the five, four also mentioned support from their peers / line managers. Three mentioned the usefulness of their organisations' performance management system and one the role of feedback from teachers. The two who stated that they had been given insufficient support both felt they would have benefited from formal management training. Five of the seven respondents took the opportunity to add further comments. Four of these referred to the need for training during

the period of transition. One stated "After having achieved a basic level of managerial skill I am left to develop on an ad hoc basis. Teachers have a firmer development structure with INSET. I think that the skills I need to become an excellent manager are harder to come by than the basic survival skills." This comment reflects the literature that recognises the disparity between the training required by EFL teachers and that provided for EFL managers (Pickering, 1998:b and Clarkson and Lodge, 1999).

Conclusion

In analysing the process of skills transfer from the role of EFL teacher to that of educational manager this study would seem to suggest that in some areas skills transfer is likely to occur, particularly in respect of certain communication and interpersonal skills. However, there are other areas in which there do not seem to be parallels between the skills required in the two roles and it would seem that teachers moving into management require formal training in these competencies. In other areas there seems to be more diversity in both the skills that respondents felt they were prepared for and those that they felt that they were lacking. This would suggest the need for individual professional development planning. The results also suggest that managers view training as important

and that in most cases if training is not provided alternative support systems are unlikely to be sufficient.

This study confirms the literature in the field that maintains that being a successful classroom practitioner is not a sufficient background for becoming a competent educational manager. As Pickering states (1998:a, p.2) "Teaching experience can provide you with many of the skills used by managers, but the move from teaching to administration is rarely seamless, as the skills transfer from the classroom to other areas is not automatic." It may be necessary to go further than this and suggest that for several key management skills parallels are clearly not found in the role of classroom teacher. These skills need to be systematically developed to ensure that educators become a competent all round managers.

References

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