

**Joint Action Plan for Improving Practice
in the Foreign Languages Department at Guyana Teachers College**

Names: Dean Tian Fengjun, Dr. Moira Laidlaw **Date:** 4/12/02

1) What do we want to improve?/What are our concerns?
How can we continue to build a sustainable research base here, in order improve the quality of teaching and learning? (N.B. with the perspective of augmenting Ningxia Province's and possibly China's educational development-programme over the next year.)

2) What are the reasons for our concern? This Department has been involved over many years in various attempts to improve teaching and learning, but has not yet seen much developmental educational benefit to teachers and students in terms of methodologies, or teachers and students able to think constructively for themselves. Education in China is seen as having reached the ceiling of its present sustainability (hence Deng Xiaoping's Open Door Policy to foreign intervention in its educational, political, economic, and healthcare programmes). If Kong-zi's maxim is right, about China's future lying in its ability to create individuals with a 'good heart', then individual teachers and educational organizations need to develop ways to help teachers and their students to think critically and developmentally about education and the possible futures of their country. China's education system has become stymied with traditional ways of thinking and acting, which negate the developmental nature of teaching and learning as interconnected, complex, negotiated, individual and group-processes. Teaching is not traditionally viewed in China as a value-laden practical activity, but as a mechanistic formula whose theories apply to individuals and groups regardless of individual insights and experience. A process is needed which enables systematic reflection, flexibility, negotiation, evaluation and development by individuals and groups to be built in at the core.

3) How might we improve it?

- We (meaning in this AP, Dean Tian Fengjun and Dr. Moira Laidlaw) need to be clear about our aims and intentions through regular meetings; (ongoing)
- We need to set an example through our own reflective practice; (ongoing)
- We need to continue to support the department's Action Research group in regular meetings and encourage their individual enquiries; (ongoing)
- We need, individually and together, to go through our own cycles of action research as we seek to improve the process of education here;
- We need to share values, incidents of classroom teaching and management with our colleagues in order to encourage a learning culture within the department (ongoing);
- We need to hold one-to-one conversations as appropriate with colleagues; (ongoing)
- We need to visit classrooms at the invitation of colleagues to offer feedback, encouragement and to share skills; (ongoing)
- We need to negotiate on-going evaluation of the process with individuals (students and teachers and outsiders) and the AR group; (ongoing)
- We will offer a bi-lingual workshop to the whole staff of Guyana Teachers College for information and to encourage wider insights; (Spring term)

How will we know that we have improved it?

- Through an increased coherence about what teaching and learning signify in the department;
- Through sensing the commitment of staff and students about teaching and learning English here;
- Through teachers' and students' enhanced capabilities to articulate what they are doing and why and how, which might show through more student-centred lesson plans and evaluations of classes, as well as through discussions between

Who can help us and how?

- The Academic Committee of Guyana Teachers College, by ratifying, supporting and publicizing our work; (ongoing)
- The Ningxia Education Committee through a grant; (Spring term, 2003)
- Dr. Jack Whitehead and the Action Research Group at the University of Bath, U.K., for ideas, support and advice (ongoing);

- We should encourage individual teachers to write reports of their AR cycles to be published in a Ningxia-wide journal of English teaching; (in process, reports expected Spring term)
- We will publish jointly an article about why it is important to do this work in China in above volume (ongoing);
- By writing a three-way article with Dr. Jack Whitehead for the International Journal of Action Research (early stage);
- We need individually and together to encourage teachers to work more collaboratively with students, to analyse and comment critically (constructively) about teaching and learning methods; (ongoing)
- We should negotiate a summative evaluation of the success of the work with the AR group; (end, Spring term, 2003)
- A possible visit from Dr. Jack Whitehead in 2003.
- Apply for grant from college to support AR group; (successfully completed December, 2002!)
- Get information from other places about AR theory and practice; (ongoing)
- Find out information about local and national educational initiatives; (ongoing)
- Establish a website at the college; (early stage)
- Trial the recently-completed draft of a Communicative Methodology Handbook with students on their Teaching Practice (Spring term, 2003) and teachers in the department; (ongoing)
- Hold seminars with students after TP to consolidate their experiences; (Spring term, late)
- By keeping up-to-date about the many innovations in the Chinese educational reforms in Beijing to be in place in 2005, (possibly through Professor Wang Qiang, Beijing Normal University); (ongoing)
- Establish email contact with a number of our future graduates to share their action plans in their workplaces; (to be organised in Spring term, 2003)
- Hold workshops at GTC for other VSO volunteers and their Deans; (Spring/Autumn terms, 2003, negotiations already begun)
- By interviews and conversations with students and teachers about their insights about teaching and learning as a part of the process of our evaluation of the effectiveness of this process; (ongoing)

- teachers and students, administrators and teachers, leaders and teachers;
- Through the proficiency examinations with students, in which their previous proficiency will be evaluated in the light of their present achievements;
- Through a greater sense of empowerment experienced by individuals within the AR group;
- Through classrooms which are appropriately characterized by student-centered methods rather than a complete reliance on teacher-centered ones;
- Through increased flexibility in planning, monitoring and evaluation by teachers, administrators and students;
- Through teachers' and students' insights into the benefits for their careers of this process of working;
- Through publishing successfully;
- Through a systematic monitoring of individual students through their learning processes to see how much they have seemed to benefit from the new teaching methods;
- Through enquiries from various sources about the work we are doing and a desire to join us;