

Isabella Seeger

MA TEFL/TESL

Module 5

ELT Management,
Sociolinguistics
February – May 2010

Tutor: Gena Bennett

**Curriculum development at a secondary school
in Lower Saxony, Germany: A critical analysis**

Assignment MN/09/03

Drawing on your own experience, describe an innovation implemented at your own institution. What configuration did the process of innovation take (see table below for possible configuration elements)? What were the advantages and drawbacks of this configuration? In what ways do you think the process could have been improved?

Stage	Level	Content	Participant
formulation	Government	approach	adopters
implementation	Ministry	design	implementers
evaluation	CDC	procedure	entrepreneurs
	Region		clients
	Institution		suppliers
	Department		
	Classroom		

Word count: 4,403

excluding long quotes, translations (in italics),
figures, references and list of acronyms

Translations from German by the author

Table of contents

1	Introduction	1
2	The 'PISA shock' and its effects	2
3	ELT curriculum development from 2001 until today	2
	3.1 The structure of the German education system and the configuration of innovation elements	2
	3.2 National level: The Standards of Education for foreign language learning at secondary schools	5
	3.3 Regional level: The new ELT curriculum of Lower Saxony	6
	3.3.1 Accountability	7
	3.3.2 Teacher recruitment	8
	3.3.3 Restructuring the school system	9
	3.4 Local level: Curriculum development at the David Fabricius School in Westerholt	10
	3.4.1 The effects of restructuring	10
	3.4.2 Teaching materials	12
	3.4.3 Centralised final examinations and comparative tests	12
4	What has been achieved?	15
	4.1 Adoption and sustainability	15
	4.2 Targets and results	16
5	Conclusion	17
	Reference list	19
	German terms and acronyms	22

1 Introduction

A nation historically held in high regard world-wide as one of 'poets and philosophers', Germany has been accustomed to considering its standard of education to be comparatively high. Consequently, during the last quarter of the 20th century – after the 'baby boomer' years in the late 1950s and the subsequent wave of educational innovations in the '60s and '70s (as e.g. anti-authoritarianism, the introduction of comprehensive schools and communicative language teaching) had subsided – public school teaching settled down in a comfortable rut of perceived excellence.

However, with the beginning of the new millennium this complacent attitude was shaken to the core by the results of the first survey of the Programme of International Student Assessment (PISA), in which German students' performance ranked well below average. The shock and the following public outcry, amplified through the new medium of the Internet, electrified politicians and educators into immediate-action mode.

In this paper I will outline how the innovations introduced in the wake of the 'PISA shock' have affected the ELT curriculum of German secondary schools to this day. In particular I will describe my own experience of these changes at a small secondary school in a rural part of North Germany as an example of how the innovation has been handled by its different stakeholders and how it has been received by those closest to the action, i.e., teachers and students, and I will also discuss its actual effects on the individual learning process.

Notwithstanding the huge efforts to improve educational standards, not all of the goals described in the new curriculum have actually been achieved, due to the specific configuration of innovation elements, in which the government demanded immediate innovation, to be speedily designed and evaluated by the regional ministry and implemented by the institutions without delay. Although this power-coercive strategy ensured efficiency, it disregarded the needs and perceptions of each lower level in the hierarchy, thus compromising the chances of adoption and sustainability. I will point out where greater improvement might have been achieved through a different strategy and where, with some adjustment to the innovation process, this is still possible in the future.

2 The 'PISA shock' and its effects

The first PISA survey, carried out in 2000 by the Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), examined the performance of secondary students from 32 countries in reading comprehension, mathematics and natural science, taking into account different competences as well as social and immigration backgrounds. In the survey Germany scored significantly below the OECD average of 500 points, while, for comparison, the United Kingdom and France scored well above (Stanat, 2001).

Although these rankings would seem a somewhat simplistic basis for any large-scale innovation, which might require an extensive analysis of problems, causes and needs as well as a definition of objectives reassessed at different stages (White et al., 1991), the German government felt prompted to act immediately, in particular with a view to the approaching national elections in 2002. While the survey did not examine foreign language competence, its results led to a wholesale reform in German education, including changes in the ELT curriculum, which therefore need to be regarded within the overall context. Moreover, the entire innovation process has been continually and massively influenced by diverse political changes occurring between 1998 and 2009, leading to President Köhler's (2010, p.18) comment: "[Es] toben in der Bildungspolitik parteipolitisch gefärbte Kämpfe um Schulstrukturen, die keinem Lehrer und keinem Kind helfen. (*Education policy is a raging battlefield of party politics about school structures, helping neither teachers nor children.*)" The curriculum development outlined in the following sections, which will describe in detail how the configuration of innovation elements has affected its adoption, must also be seen in the light of these influences.

3 ELT curriculum development from 2001 until today

3.1 The structure of the German education system and the configuration of innovation elements

The main structure of the German education system is strictly hierarchical, comprising three levels: national, regional and local (cf. fig. 1 below). The operators on national level are the BMBF (Bundesministerium für Bildung und

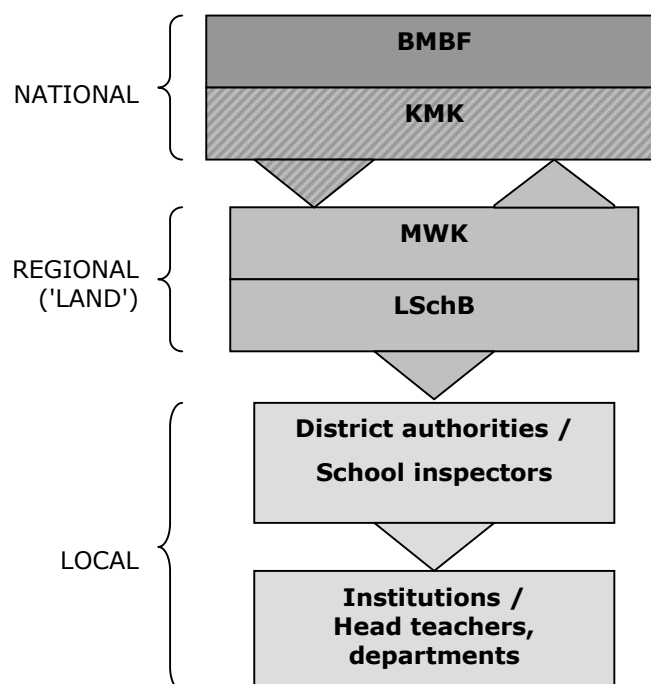


Fig. 1: The three levels of the German education system
(Graph by the author of this essay)

Forschung – Federal Ministry of Education and Culture) and the KMK (Kultusministerkonferenz – Conference of Ministers of Education), a body representing the sixteen partly autonomous 'Länder' (federal states). On regional or 'Länder' level, the MWK (Ministerium für Wissenschaft und Kultur – Ministry of Science and Education) individually implements the plans of the KMK, while the LSchB (Landesschulbehörde – Administrative Education Authority) functions as executive body for the MWK. Locally, public schools are supervised externally by district authorities and a school inspector taking orders from the LSchB, and internally by head teachers, deputy head teachers and heads of department.

The structure corresponds to Hofstede's (1994, p.142) description of a "well-oiled machine" with high uncertainty avoidance, established procedures and standardised skills. Innovation processes are centralised and mainly top-down, with power-coercive implementation strategies leaving little room for active involvement of the lowest stakeholders (i.e. the teachers and students at the individual schools), and therefore counter-productive with regard to adoption (Kennedy, 1988). While fig. 2 below visualises the configuration of the innovation process, I will describe and analyse these elements in the following sections.

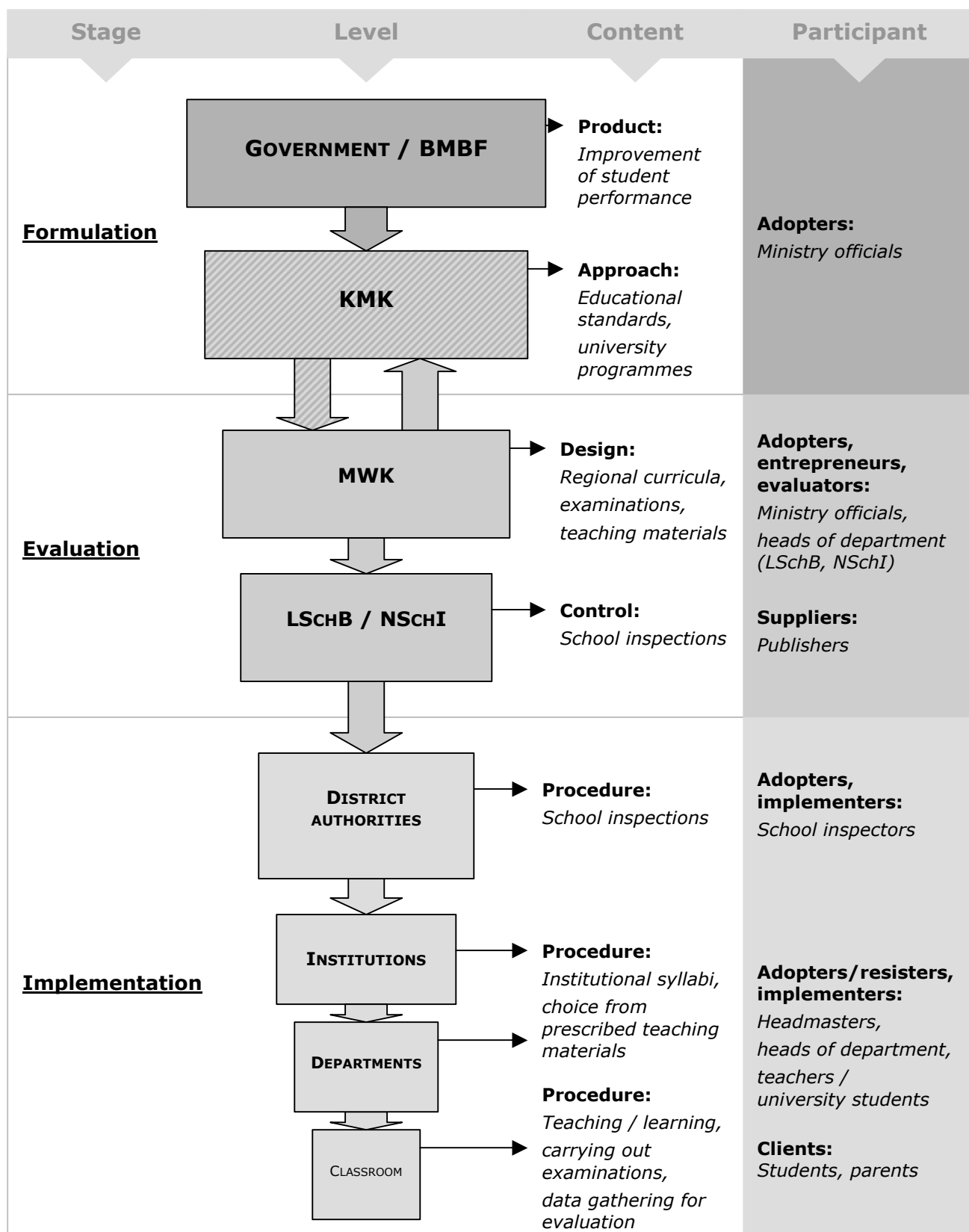


Fig. 2: Configuration of elements of the innovation process
(Graph by the author of this essay)

3.2 National level: The Standards of Education for foreign language learning at secondary schools

Upon the Government's urgent call for action, the KMK issued new Standards of Education for foreign language learning at secondary schools (years 5-10) in December 2003, to be implemented by August 2004. With the aim of improving and assuring the quality of public school development while leaving room for pedagogic interpretation in the classroom, the Standards acknowledge a change in the requirements of language teaching due to the political, cultural and economic developments in Europe (Kultusministerkonferenz, 2003). They define language competences according to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), i.e., "die Entwicklung von Kenntnissen und Fertigkeiten für das erfolgreiche kommunikative Handeln (*the development of knowledge and skills for successful communicative interaction*)" (Tranter, 2003, p.3). Besides signifying an opening of the rigid German education system for better international comparability, as suggested by Kennedy (1988), the innovation emphasises the communicative character of language learning and thus of English as lingua franca.

Furthermore, university programmes for teachers – until then individually designed by the 'Länder' – were changed to bachelor/master programmes in 2003, in compliance with the 'Bologna Process', a Pan-European standardisation process for university programmes, adopted by forty-six countries to be implemented by 2010. Enabling international comparability, leading to various other professions besides teaching and including more work practice (Niedersächsisches Ministerium für Wissenschaft und Kultur, 2008), the new programmes appeared to be genuinely advantageous. However, their content overload and prescriptiveness resulted in nation-wide student riots in November 2009, forcing the Federal Minister of Education to publicly admit flaws in the implementation of the 'Bologna Process' and promise amendments (Deutsche Bundesregierung, 2010). In May 2010, the National Bologna Conference concluded a quality agreement for better "'Studierbarkeit' (*'studiability'*)" and acceptance of the programmes to promote lifelong learning (Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung, 2010, p.1).

The KMK decision to reform the education system was obviously made under a lot of pressure, which is counter-productive to success (White, 1988).

Although all stakeholders may have anticipated a reform after the PISA survey, the speed of the process – barely seven months from decision to implementation – left the lower ranks in the hierarchy hardly any time to react. Since rushing a new idea entails unpredictability and the risk of flaws and need for improvements, the innovation itself is less likely to be adopted (White et al., 1991). Instead of enforcing the new concept for political reasons, it would have been advisable, in my opinion, to give participants more time: at regional level, to provide the necessary foundations, as e.g. financial and human resources or expert advice, and at local level, to adjust or to voice concerns; issues I will discuss in the following sections.

3.3 Regional level: The new ELT curriculum of Lower Saxony

In the 'Land' of Lower Saxony, another political change in 2003 – from social-democratic to conservative – affected the innovation process. Innovation contents and appropriate procedures were defined in 2006 by the CuVo (Curriculare Vorgaben – *Curricular Guidelines*) issued by the MWK, which describes the changes to the ELT curriculum as "Paradigmenwechsel im Fremdsprachenunterricht (*a paradigm shift in language teaching*)" (Niedersächsischer Bildungsserver, n.d.). Where the curriculum had described contents in terms of grammar and vocabulary to be learned, its goals are now learners' competences as defined by the MWK (Niedersächsisches Kultusministerium, 2008, p.4):

Kompetenzen sind erlernbare, kognitiv verankerte (weil wissensbasierte) Fähigkeiten und Fertigkeiten, die eine erfolgreiche Bewältigung bestimmter Alltagssituationen ermöglichen. Im Kompetenzbegriff fallen Wissen und Können zusammen; er umfasst auch Interessen, Motivation, Werthaltungen und soziale Bereitschaften. Kompetenzen sind demnach kognitive Dispositionen für erfolgreiche und verantwortliche Denktionen oder Handlungen.

(Competences are learnable abilities and skills cognitively anchored (being based on knowledge) and enabling learners to cope with certain real-life situations. The notion of competence comprises knowledge and ability; it includes interest, motivation, values and social abilities. Competences therefore are cognitive dispositions for thinking or acting successfully and responsibly.)

3.3.1 Accountability

Above all, the CuVo emphasise their binding character and the aspect of accountability, prioritising results orientation and output control, visualised by the 'quality cycle' shown in fig. 3 below (Niedersächsisches Kultusministerium, 2005, p.29). The 'cycle' function, however, consists of nothing else than top-down procedural prescription and bottom-up data feedback (euphemistically presented invertedly), as the CuVo do not offer any opportunities for dialogue between the stakeholders, as suggested by Kennedy (1988) (cf. section 3.4.1).

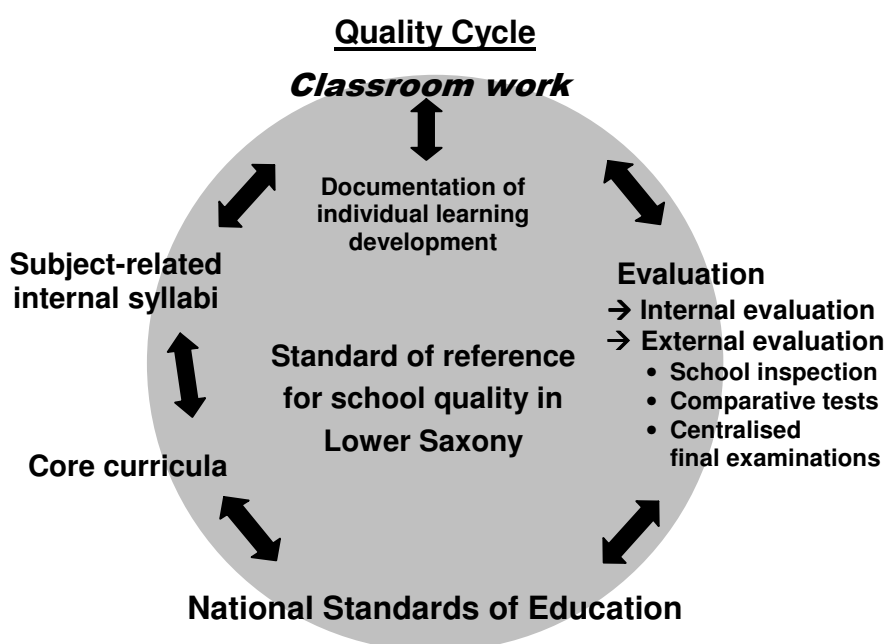


Fig. 3: Quality Cycle
 (Graph: Niedersächsisches Kultusministerium, 2005; translation by the author of this essay)

To ensure the desired quality, Lower Saxony was the first 'Land' to institute the NSchI (Niedersächsische Schulinspektion – *School Inspection of Lower Saxony*) to design and evaluate school inspections, implemented from 2006 by specially trained local school inspectors. However, headteachers and teachers, fearing scrutiny and judgment, perceived these adopters as threatening and therefore rejected the innovation, as described by Kennedy (1988) and White et al. (1991) A more democratic process with evaluative dialogue between LSchB and institutions might have improved acceptance.

3.3.2 Teacher recruitment

Initial plans to employ more teachers were greeted with enthusiasm by teachers' unions and parents' councils. However, after three decades of extremely restrictive employment policy, 53% of teachers were older than fifty; overworked and burnt-out, many applied for part-time work or early retirement (Initiative Neue Soziale Marktwirtschaft, 2005). Due to the unpopularity of the new bachelor/master programmes (cf. section 3.2) and a general lack of attraction to the largely rural region, recruitment of young teachers proved difficult. The MWK resorted to employing 'Quereinsteiger': professionals like engineers, IT specialists or translators for teaching subjects chronically understaffed at schools, e.g. physics, mathematics or languages. Without special retraining besides the weekly seminars for trainee teachers, 'Quereinsteiger' taught independently.

While the expertise and work experience of many 'Quereinsteiger' are an asset to teaching, their pedagogic inexperience has caused problems concerning classroom discipline or methodology. Moreover, a disparity between salaries – 'Quereinsteiger' receive substantially less than 'regular' teachers – often affects their motivation. A more successful programme in North Rhine-Westphalia in the 1960s, where 'Quereinsteiger' received full salaries while studying in a special two-year course before teaching independently (Neumann, 2003), proves that the problems described above might be avoided, given appropriate time and funds.

3.3.3 Restructuring the school system

Before 2004, children were educated comprehensively during primary school (years 1-4) and OS (Orientierungsstufe, an orientation stage for years 5-6), then selected to attend either HS, RS or 'Gymnasium' (Hauptschule, Realschule and grammar school for lower, middle and higher education, years 7-10), or comprehensive school; 'Gymnasium' and comprehensive school also offered higher secondary education for years 11-13 (cf. fig. 4a below). All school forms, except comprehensive schools, were half-day schools; English was taught from year 5 and second foreign languages from year 7.

In 2004, the new conservative government of Lower Saxony abolished the comprehensive OS to be replaced by selective school forms (cf. fig. 4b below). While the latter were gradually transformed into day schools, any development of comprehensive schools was frozen; the freeze was cancelled, however, after the UN's Special Correspondent for Education, Vernor Muñoz, harshly reprimanded the German education system for its selectiveness (Deutscher Bundestag, 2008). Furthermore, higher secondary education was shortened from three to two years (cf. fig. 4b), while ELT now starts in year 3 and other languages in year 6.

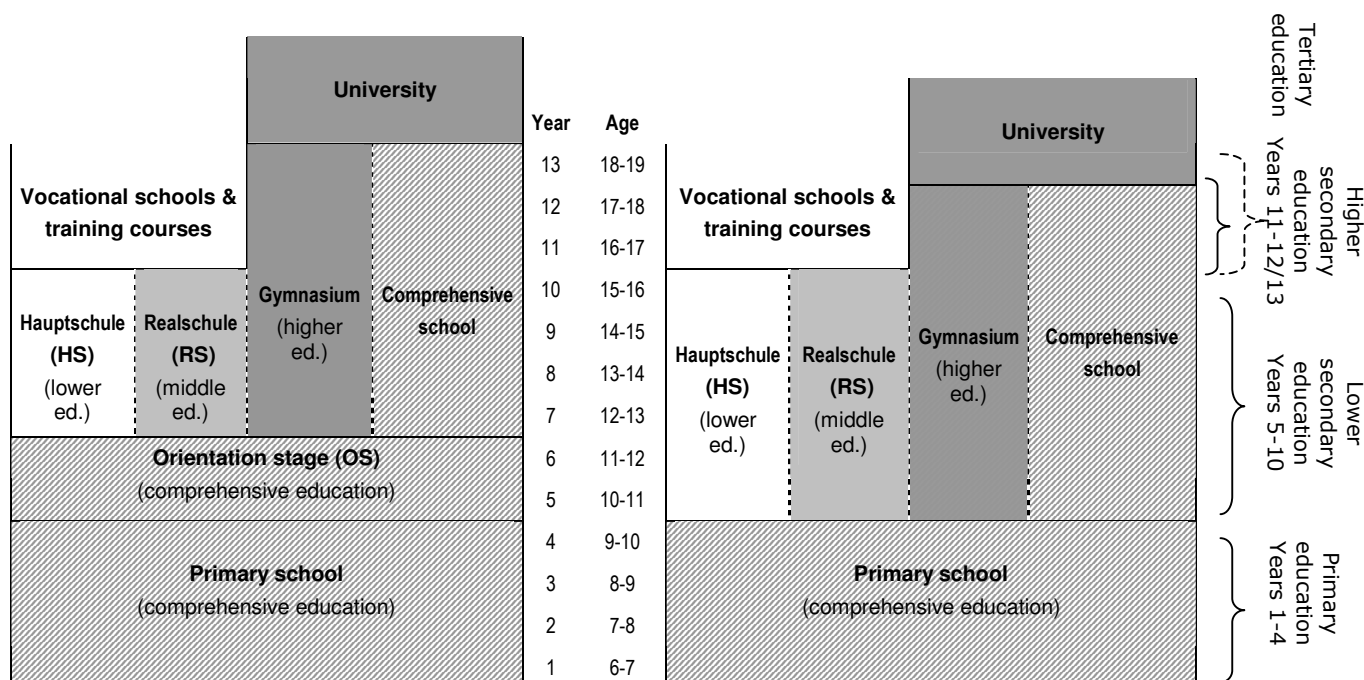


Fig. 4a: The public school system of Lower Saxony before 2004

Fig. 4b: The public school system of Lower Saxony today (Graphs by the author of this essay)

Although improving students' international competitiveness by reducing school attendance was certainly a desirable aim, not all of the changes described above were readily accepted by implementers and clients. At primary schools, parents' fears and teachers' scepticism about 'categorising' children too early increased, while teachers, untrained in ELT, felt unable to cope with the new subject. Secondary students and parents feared the pressure involved in learning nine years' lesson content in eight, and language teachers in year 6 had to use textbooks designed for year 7. Finally, parents who for years had been fighting for more comprehensive schools were outraged at their freeze.

To my mind, some of these conflicts might have been avoided if, again, the lower stakeholders had been given time to adjust and opportunities to influence the change by expressing their values and fears. Parents demanding comprehensive education are supported by its success in most European countries (and indeed worldwide); consequently, the innovation would gain plausibility by opening itself more to external influences, as suggested by Kennedy (1988), not only strengthening comprehensive schools but phasing out the selective school forms, perhaps with consultants from other European education systems as entrepreneurs.

3.4 Local level: Curriculum development at the David Fabricius School in Westerholt

Westerholt is the municipal centre of a small community of villages in the rural region of East Frisia, Lower Saxony, economically dependent on agriculture and tourism; not far from the North Sea coast, it is hundreds of miles from the LSchB in Osnabrück, the MWK in Hanover and the BMBF in Berlin. The inhabitants of this remote area usually distrust strangers and do not welcome change, especially not if imposed. In the following sections I will describe how these characteristics have affected the adoption of the innovation process.

3.4.1 The effects of restructuring

Like all secondary schools, the 'Hauptschule Westerholt' underwent the structural changes shown in fig. 4a-b above. The HS and a neighbouring OS

merged in 2004 and integrated an RS to become the 'Haupt- und Realschule Westerholt'. All of a sudden the number of students increased from 150 to 500 and that of teachers from 18 to 37, including three 'Quereinsteiger', myself one of them, having joined the previous year. French and computer science were introduced, as well as a number of school clubs supervised by freelance staff.

Not surprisingly, these changes incurred a high degree of conflict. The staff developed a tendency to form cliques, former OS and HS teachers expressing misgivings about each other and about teaching unfamiliar age groups. The village school having suddenly been transformed into a large education centre, communication has become more difficult and the cherished familiarity has given way to anonymity and formality. These problems might have been avoided if the staff's values and preoccupations had been clarified in advance (White, 1988).

Although teachers were encouraged to become 'actively involved' in the innovation by asking questions or making statements on the CuVo webpage (Niedersächsischer Bildungserver, n.d.), there was no possibility of actually influencing the entirely prescriptive process. A general feeling of being rolled over prevailed, preventing teachers from adopting the change. As Kennedy (1988) points out, a less top-down, more democratic process with sufficient time for adjustment might have led to a sense of ownership and higher acceptance.

In 2007, the school became one of the first day schools of Lower Saxony and again changed its name to 'David-Fabricius-Ganztagsschule Haupt- und Realschule Westerholt' (for the sake of simplicity called 'David Fabricius School' in this paper). Subsidised by EU funds, its buildings were renovated and enlarged to improve learning conditions; a canteen was added to enrich social life and provide supervision and regular meals for neglected children. However, in this rural area with traditional family structures and a high unemployment rate, many parents reject day schools and the 'unnecessary expense' of school meals. It would have been advisable, therefore, to take into account the specific needs and characteristics of the clients in that region, as suggested by Kennedy (1988), e.g. by first offering day schools on a voluntary basis, as an opportunity of free learning under supervision or with help from older students.

3.4.2 Teaching materials

Due to the changes in 2004 (cf. section 3.4.1), the English department introduced two new textbook series gradually from year 5 while continuing to use the old series in the years above (a procedure prescribed by the MWK). To comply with the new ELT curriculum, the department acquired two new, CEFR-designed series in 2009, again to be introduced gradually. Furthermore, publishers distributed free materials specifically designed for training examination skills (cf. section 3.4.3). At the David Fabricius School teachers individually decide which of these materials to use besides the textbook.

Although these changes may all aim at improving learning, for teachers they entail familiarising themselves with four different textbook series and the new examination training materials simultaneously, leaving not much room for pedagogic freedom or time to concentrate on the students. According to Hutchinson and Torres (1994, p.321),

the disturbance that change inevitably brings must be kept within manageable limits. If it exceeds these limits, it will engender feelings of anxiety and insecurity and thereby provoke [...] a determination to resist the change and maintain the existing context within which the individual feels secure.

To my eyes, therefore, introducing new textbooks less often and at once, not gradually, would reduce teachers' workload and promote adoption, probably more so if accompanied by special training for teachers unacquainted with the CEFR descriptions. Correspondence between textbooks and assessment procedures would lead to more effective learning, while the students, usually eager for change, would probably welcome the introduction.

3.4.3 Centralised final examinations and comparative tests

To comply with the 'quality cycle' (cf. section 3.3.1), all secondary schools in Lower Saxony introduced centralised examinations in German, mathematics and English for year 10 in 2007. The English examination is a written test assessing reading, writing, listening and mediating skills as shown in fig. 5 below, the results of which are submitted to the MWK.

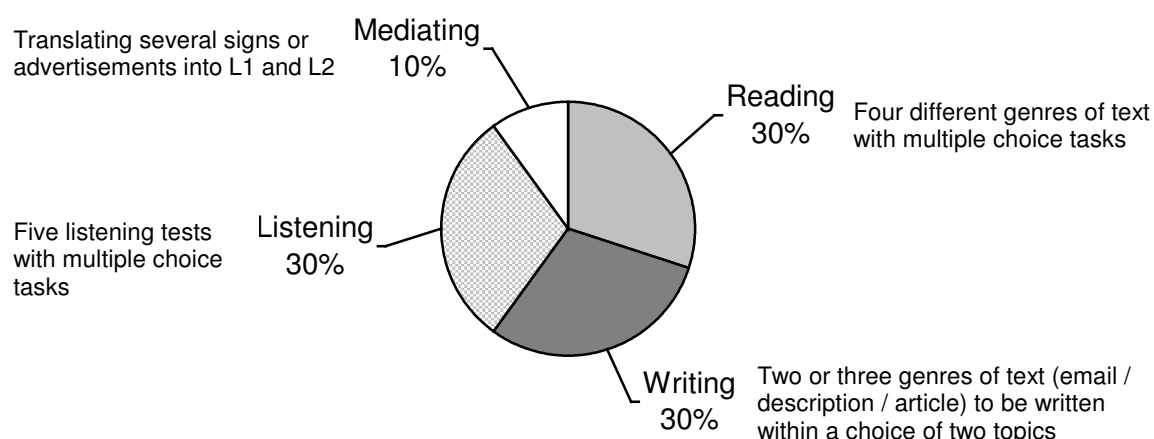


Fig. 5: Competences tested in the final examination
(Graph by the author of this essay)

From teachers' view, there are several drawbacks to the examinations. Although students are accustomed only to tests about recently learnt structures, examination content is randomly selected and unfamiliar; consequently, learning becomes a routine of studying previous examinations, leaving no room for "teaching practices that promote and broaden learning" (Effiong, 2009, p.4). During the examination, instructions forbid teachers to give explanations (e.g. for unfamiliar wording of questions), which increases students' anxiety and may affect their performance; most teachers, of course, adapt instructions to the perceived needs of the students, thus possibly compromising designers' aim of comparability (Lamb, 1995). Regardless of students' performance throughout the year, the examination results then determine their overall mark by one third. The greatest disadvantage, however, is the complete failure of teaching materials and examinations to promote and assess speaking and interactive competences according to CEFR descriptions, as defined by Tranter (2003, p.5):

Kommunikation findet nicht nur auf der Satzebene statt. Einen sprachlich richtigen Satz zu bilden, ist für sich nur selten als gelungene Kommunikation zu verstehen. Der GER geht daher von fünf (statt wie üblich vier) Fertigkeiten aus, und zwar wird zu Hören, Lesen, mündlicher und schriftlicher Produktion als fünfte Fertigkeit Interaktion hinzugefügt. Konsequenz: Ein am GER orientierter Unterricht muss methodisch auch die Interaktionsfähigkeit der Lernenden schulen.

(Communication does not only take place at sentence level. To form a grammatically correct sentence in itself only seldom means communicating successfully. The CEFR is therefore based on five (instead of the usual four) competences, i.e., listening, reading, oral and written production are supplemented by interaction as a fifth competence. Consequently, teaching according to the CEFR requires procedures that promote learners' interactive competences as well.)

Similar criticism applies to the VERA8 tests (Vergleichsarbeiten in Jahrgang 8 – *Comparative Tests in Year 8*) for reading and writing competences, which ignore other skills and of which only the reading results are actually submitted and compared.

Clearly, there is a discrepancy between the aims of "Fachpromotor (expert)" and "Machtpromotor (power holder)" (Hofstede, 1994, p.200), i.e. between the process-based theory of language learning advocated on the one hand and its product-based targets regarding accountability and quality assurance on the other. A compilation of materials for language teaching (Niedersächsisches Kultusministerium, 2008, pp.8-9) states that

Sprachen sind komplexe mentale Prozesse, bei denen unterschiedliche Fähigkeiten, Fertigkeiten und Einstellungen jeweils verschieden zusammenwirken. Der Englischunterricht an allen Schulformen muss diese unterschiedlichen Lernausgangslagen und Lerndispositionen berücksichtigen und individuelle Lernprozesse ermöglichen. Er basiert auf der Annahme, dass die Schülerinnen und Schüler die englische Sprache nicht linear und in gleicher zeitlicher Abfolge erlernen, sondern vielmehr individuell und kumulativ.

(languages are complex processes in the mind, in which different abilities, skills and attitudes work together in different ways. English language teaching at all school forms must take into account these different starting points and dispositions in learning and enable individual learning processes. It is based on the assumption that students do not acquire the English language in a linear way and in the same order but rather individually and accumulatively.)

However, the CuVo determine which competences are to be acquired and when, and achievement is measured by the uniform tests described above, leaving no room for individuality.

The curriculum concept might have been more convincing and acceptable for teachers if assessment, although not entirely dispensable at institutions accountable to the public, had taken a more process-orientated shape, e.g. individual testing at times suited to specific learning stages, with appropriate procedures to measure individual competence. To promote the abilities and skills for communicative interaction suggested by the CEFR, I consider oral training and assessment a priority. Acknowledging "ein enormes Interesse (*enormous interest*)" in speaking assessment, the MWK is actually planning an oral examination in order to meet the requirements of the curriculum (Starkebaum, 2010, p.16), unofficially scheduled for the coming school year. In that case,

notwithstanding the indisputable benefits for the students, the innovation will again leave implementers little time to adjust, thus reducing its chances of being adopted and foreshadowing problems similar to those previously described.

4 What has been achieved?

At first glance, the results of the PISA survey of 2006, with Germany now ranking within the field of OECD average, confirm that the performance of German students, although still far from being excellent, has at least slightly improved (OECD, 2007) and that, if elevation in international ranking were the main goal of the innovation, politicians and educators might again lean back complacently.

However, several factors raise doubts about the apparent success of the innovation. Williams and Burden (1994) point out that this kind of summative evaluation may be debatable regarding variables and conclusive information – the PISA survey of 2006 involved different students and twice as many countries (OECD, 2007), which affected the correlation between average and ranking as compared to 2000. Furthermore, Kennedy (1988) and White (1988) emphasise the importance of continuous evaluation during the entire course of the innovation from problem identification to implementation, a process called 'illuminative evaluation' (Parlett, 1981), which was obviously not a feature of the reform. Moreover, any genuine success of an innovation depends on its sustainability, which correlates with its adoption (Stephenson, 1994). The following sections will show to what extent the ELT curriculum change may be sustainable in terms of adoption by teachers and clients and discuss its targets and outcome in terms of improvement in student performance.

4.1 Adoption and sustainability

Change should be viewed as a solution to a perceived problem, and the success of change depends on whether the problem is identified and agreed on by all participants in the change and whether the latter, down to the lowest stakeholders, develop a sense of ownership (Kennedy, 1988). However, while teachers and students as well as ELT experts in the MWK perceive a need for improving students' abilities to interact communicatively in English, this is evidently not a priority in a politically motivated innovation aiming primarily at

enhancing the public image of the education system. Another conflict lies in the fact that, notwithstanding the KMK's assurance of classroom autonomy, the prescribed textbook and examinations design leaves teachers hardly any freedom for teaching the CEFR competences of communicative interaction.

The imposed change is therefore unlikely to develop a sense of ownership with implementers and clients. Teachers may either adopt the change and obediently follow prescriptions against their conviction, or reject the innovation and secretly continue to teach according to their own beliefs and learners' needs; both responses, however, are likely to lead to further conflict and lessen the chance of sustainability (Lamb, 1995).

4.2 Targets and results

Indubitably, the main target of the politically motivated innovation was to present convenient results to the public quickly after the 'PISA shock'; despite the curriculum change in ELT, there was obviously no particular interest in evaluating students' actual performance in English before and after the change. However, a comparison of the final English marks of the 213 students who left the David Fabricius School between 2007 and 2009 with their average performance during the years before shows that a large majority did not improve: 73 declined during their last year, 121 stagnated and only 19 improved (cf. fig. 6 below). Although the marks do not provide information about the students' actual communicative competences, they do confirm that the innovation has not been very successful in terms of accountability to the public.

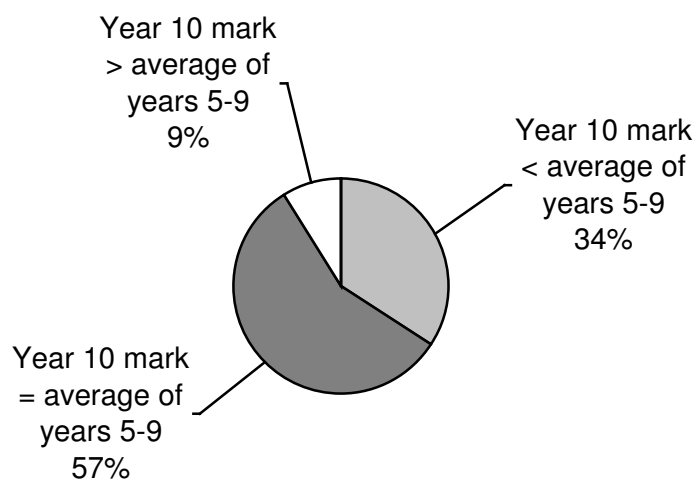


Fig. 6: Development of student performance in English at the David Fabricius School between 2007 and 2009
(Graph by the author of this essay)

It remains to be shown to what extent the inclusion of CEFR goals in the ELT curriculum affects classroom work for the learners' benefit. While Artelt et al. (2003) emphasise learners' need for self-regulation and its close relationship to performance, Tranter (2003, p.4) suggests autonomy of the implementing institution: "Der Gemeinsame europäische Referenzrahmen hat deskriptiven, nicht präskriptiven Charakter, d. h. jede Einrichtung, die sich mit Sprachunterricht befasst, kann selbst entscheiden, wie sie mit den Inhalten des GER umgehen will. (*The character of the Common European Framework of Reference is not prescriptive but descriptive, i.e., any institution involved in language teaching may decide for itself in which manner it wishes to apply its contents.*)" However, the essential procedures of the new ELT curriculum – teaching materials and assessment – are prescribed by the MWK. As has been shown in the previous sections, they offer students no new opportunities to improve their communicative competences; on the contrary, focussing mainly on reading, writing and listening skills, they completely disregard two competences considered essential for communicative interaction by the CEFR – speaking and interacting.

Since the curriculum as yet provides no procedures for measuring speaking and interactive competences, no empirical statement can be made about students' actual performance in this field. Nevertheless, from my informal conversations with seventeen English teachers from all secondary school forms recently encountered at a seminar I recollect a distinct consensus, however subjective, that students' communicative competences, especially their speaking skills, are far from satisfactory and have not improved over the last three years, and that students themselves are even less confident about them.

5 Conclusion

Ten years after the first PISA survey an entire education system has been reformed, a new ideology of language learning has been introduced and hundreds of thousands of teachers have been toiling to implement the reform. But have all these changes united the participants in their efforts and led to significant and sustainable improvement?

With political aims as motor of the reform process, the coercive power of the hierarchical system has designed and implemented the desired innovation speedily and efficiently, and, if one bases the definition of success on the PISA results, successfully. However, the innovation has until now missed the chance to meet the actual needs perceived at the bottom of the system, i.e., improvement of language learning processes: while the MWK description of ELT goals does advocate a 'paradigm shift' towards process orientation, this conflicts with the highly product-orientated government policy regarding accountability. The strategy therefore may have led to adoption, but only through obedience, not through a sense of ownership.

Creating the latter, for better adoption – and thence success and sustainability – of the innovation, would require some amendments in terms of feasibility, acceptability and relevance (as defined by Kennedy, 1988):

- Feasibility:
 - greater resources of funds and staff;
 - appropriate teacher training;
 - sufficient time for implementers and clients to adjust;
- Acceptability:
 - procedures taking into account implementers' and clients' characteristics and values;
 - 'illuminative' evaluation on the basis of dialogue between all stakeholders;
- Relevance:
 - procedures conforming to ELT goals;
 - innovation aims taking into account learners' actual needs, not only at the level of the ELT curriculum, but also with a general view to the selective school system.

After the numerous changes of the last decade, however, any amendments would require some sensitivity with regard to implementers and clients, who are unlikely to greet any further changes – imposed or not – with enthusiasm, unless they include obvious and immediate benefits for the classroom.

Reference list

- Artelt, C. et al. (2003) **Learners for Life: Student Approaches to Learning; Results from PISA 2000.** (Paris: OECD)
- Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung (2010) **Ministerin Schavan: Starkes Signal für bessere Lehre. (Minister Schavan: Strong signal for improvement of university teaching.)** [online] <http://www.bmbf.de/press/2858.php> (Accessed May 18, 2010)
- Deutsche Bundesregierung (2010) **Bologna-Studiengänge nachbessern. (Amending the Bologna programmes.)** Interview of the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (FAZ) with the Federal Minister of Education Annette Schavan. [online] http://www.bundesregierung.de/nn_1500/Content/DE/Interview/2010/03/2010-03-11-faz-schavan.html (Accessed April 13, 2010)
- Deutscher Bundestag (2008) **UN-Sonderbeauftragter Muñoz wartet weiter auf Antwort der Bundesregierung. (Special correspondent of the UN, Muñoz, still waiting for the Government's response.)** Hearing of the Committee for Education, Research and Estimation of the Consequences of Technology, Feb 22, 2008 [online] http://www.bundestag.de/presse/hib/2008_02/2008_055/02.html (Accessed April 13, 2010)
- Effiong, O. (2009) Testing a test: A near native-speaker's attempt. **The Language Teacher** 33,11 (Tokyo: The Japan Association for Language Teaching)
- Hofstede, G. (1994) **Cultures and Organizations.** (London: HarperCollins)
- Hutchinson, T. and Torres, E. (1994) The textbook as agent of change. **ELT Journal** 48/4 (Oxford: Oxford University Press)
- Initiative Neue Soziale Marktwirtschaft (2005) **Niedersachsen verbessert sich beim Bildungs-TÜV. (Education check finds Lower Saxony improved.)** (Berlin: INSM Initiative Neue Soziale Marktwirtschaft)
- Kennedy, C. (1988) Evaluation of the Management of Change in ELT Projects. **Applied Linguistics** 9/4 (Oxford: Oxford University Press)
- Köhler, H. (2010) Wir müssen uns eigentlich vor unseren Kindern schämen. (*We ought to be ashamed of ourselves in front of our children.*) Interview. **Focus** 12/2010 (München: Focus Magazin Verlag)

- Kultusministerkonferenz (2003) **Bildungsstandards für die erste Fremdsprache (Englisch/Französisch). Beschluss der Kultusministerkonferenz vom 04.12.2003. (*Standards of Education for the first foreign language [English/French]. Decision of the Conference of Ministers of Education; Dec 04, 2003.*)** (Bonn: Sekretariat der Ständigen Konferenz der Kultusminister der Länder in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland)
- Lamb, M. (1995) The consequences of INSET. **ELT Journal** 49/1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press)
- Neumann, Dr. G. (2003) **OECD-Aktivität (OECD Activity) "Attracting, Developing and Retaining Effective Teachers"**. (Düsseldorf: Ministerium für Schule, Jugend und Kinder des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen)
- Niedersächsischer Bildungsserver (n.d.) **Curriculare Vorgaben in Niedersachsen. (*Curricular Guidelines in Lower Saxony.*)** [online] <http://www.nibis.de/nibis.phtml?menid=203> (Accessed March 29, 2010)
- Niedersächsischer Bildungsserver (n.d.) **Englisch.** [online] <http://www.nibis.de/nibis.phtml?menid=2179> (Accessed March 29, 2010)
- Niedersächsisches Kultusministerium (2005) **Bildungsstandards und niedersächsische Kerncurricula. (*Standards of Education and the core curricula of Lower Saxony.*)** (Hannover: Niedersächsisches Kultusministerium)
- Niedersächsisches Kultusministerium (2008) **Materialien für den kompetenzorientierten Unterricht im Sekundarbereich I. (*Materials for competence-orientated teaching at secondary schools [years 5-10].*)** (Hannover: Niedersächsisches Kultusministerium)
- Niedersächsisches Ministerium für Wissenschaft und Kultur (2008) **Mit Bachelor- und Masterstudiengängen in das Lehramt. (*The new bachelor and master programmes for trainee teachers.*)** Brochure. (Hannover: Niedersächsisches Ministerium für Wissenschaft und Kultur, Niedersächsisches Kultusministerium)
- OECD (2007) **PISA 2006: Science Competencies for Tomorrow's World – Executive Summary.** [online] <http://www.pisa.oecd.org/dataoecd/15/13/39725224.pdf> (Accessed April 05, 2010)
- Parlett, M. (1981) 'Illuminative evaluation'. In: Reason, P. and Rowan, J. (eds.) **Human Enquiry.** (Chichester: Wiley, pp. 219-226)

- Stanat, P. et al. (2001) **PISA 2000: Die Studie im Überblick; Grundlagen, Methoden und Ergebnisse. (PISA 2000: The survey at a glance; foundations, methods and results.)** (Berlin: Max-Planck-Institut für Bildungsforschung)
- Starkebaum, K. (2010) Mündliche Prüfungen im Fach Englisch. (*Oral examinations in English.*) **Praxis Schule** 1-2010 (Braunschweig: Westermann)
- Stephenson, H. (1994) Management and participation in ELT projects. **ELT Journal** 48/3 (Oxford: Oxford University Press)
- Tranter, G. (2003) Der Gemeinsame Europäische Referenzrahmen - Warum? Wie? Was? (*The Common European Framework of Reference – Why? How? What?*) **Klett VHS Tipps, Sprachenservice Erwachsenenbildung** 36/2003 (Stuttgart: Klett)
- White, R.V. (1988) **The ELT Curriculum.** (Oxford/New York: Basil Blackwell)
- White, R.V. et al. (1991) **Management in English Language Teaching.** (Oxford: Oxford University Press)
- Williams, M. and Burden, R. (1994) The role of evaluation in ELT project design. **ELT Journal** 48/1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press)

German terms and acronyms

BMBF	Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung – <i>Federal Ministry of Education and Research</i> (formerly <i>Federal Ministry of Education and Culture</i>)
CuVo	Curriculare Vorgaben – <i>Curricular Guidelines</i>
Gymnasium	– <i>Secondary school for higher education; ≅ grammar school</i> (Years 7-13/5-12 [before/after 2004])
HS	Hauptschule – <i>Secondary school for lower education</i> (Years 7-10/5-10 [before/after 2004])
KMK	Kultusministerkonferenz der Länder – <i>Conference of the Ministers of Education of the 'Länder'</i>
Land / Länder	– <i>Partly autonomous federal state/s</i>
LSchB	Landesschulbehörde – <i>Administrative Education Authority of a 'Land'</i>
MWK	Ministerium für Wissenschaft und Kultur; Kultusministerium (<i>until 2008</i>) – <i>Ministry of Science and Education of a 'Land'</i>
NSchI	Niedersächsische Schulinspektion – <i>School Inspection of Lower Saxony</i>
OS	Orientierungsstufe – <i>Orientation stage, comprehensive education</i> (Years 5-6 [before 2004])
Quereinsteiger	– <i>Person without formal qualification as a teacher but otherwise professionally qualified to teach understaffed school subjects</i>
RS	Realschule – <i>Secondary school for middle education</i> (Years 7-10/5-10 [before/after 2004])
VERA8	Vergleichsarbeiten in Jahrgang 8 – <i>Comparative Tests in Year 8</i>