

## **Module Five Assessment Task**

**MN/05/02**

Describe a curriculum change you would like to see introduced in your teaching context. Explain, with justification, how you would create the conditions for the change to be successful, including a consideration of cost-benefit analysis in your explanation.

I would like to acknowledge the willing help of colleagues and students at Merikoski Vocational Training Centre in completing questionnaires and answering questions in order to provide me with sufficient data on which to base this essay.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The way in which an innovation is introduced into a system is critical to the success or otherwise of that innovation. In an ELT context this indicates that ‘...the process [of innovation] needs to be carefully managed (Hayes 2000: 136).’ Underpinning careful management should be an understanding of the context in which the innovation will be carried out, and in particular of the teachers and any other stakeholders who make up that context. Allwright (2003: 128) highlights the importance of situational understanding when contemplating change; ‘...only a serious effort to understand life in a particular setting will enable you to decide if practical change is necessary, desirable, and/or possible.’ Williams and Burden (1994) focus on the critical role of the evaluation which occurs *before* a project begins in determining the success of any innovation.

This essay explores the possible process of introducing a change in the way English courses are timetabled and taught in a vocational college in northern Finland. The first section describes the context for the proposed change. The introduction of *compact courses* (Stern 1985: 13) and the reasons giving rise to this proposal are then outlined, with the next section detailing ways in which the changes could be initiated and monitored. A cost-benefit analysis follows, taking into account both teachers and students who are seen as the people who would be most affected by the proposed changes. Finally the paper discusses whether this innovation is likely to be initiated in view of the results of the cost-benefit analysis, before offering my conclusions. The words *change* and *innovation* are used interchangeably in this essay, and the change being referred to is discontinuous change as opposed to incremental or continuous change.

## 2. THE CONTEXT FOR CHANGE

In the literature there seems to be general agreement that a thorough understanding of context is crucial to the successful implementation of any innovation. White (1988: 137) asserts that ‘innovations do not occur in isolation; they take place in a context’, and Hayes (2000: 136) advocates the studying of the context in which teachers work so that the innovation process will be informed. Allwright (2003: 129) goes so far as to suggest that situational understanding will ‘[help] practitioners resist immediate and thoughtless change, [and] act as a force

for fundamentally long-lasting and profound change'. In appreciation of the importance of a situational understanding, the following subsections describe the context for my proposed change in some detail.

## **2.1 Merikoski Vocational Training Centre**

Merikoski Vocational Training Centre is a special educational institute in Finland which provides vocational upper secondary and adult education and training, as well as preparatory and rehabilitative training. The broad aims of this institution include: 'promot[ing] students' vocational competence, working and functional abilities, successful studies and placement in further education and employment (Merikoski Vocational Centre prospectus, nd).' To try and achieve these goals the education and training provided by the centre is 'student focused and its activities emphasize instruction in small groups, stimulation towards lifelong learning, personal guidance and diverse provision of education and training (ibid).' The courses offered at Merikoski are aimed at people who, for reasons of poor health, disability, learning and/or social problems require special support, guidance and counselling in their studies and placement in jobs.

## **2.2 ELT in Merikoski overall**

Merikoski Vocational Training Centre belies its name, and consists of several centres in different locations in northern and southern Finland which function relatively independently. The main centre in Oulu is also divided into distinct units according to the courses run and programs offered. There are a great variety of vocational courses taught throughout Merikoski, from gardening to media studies, and whereas the vocational and practical study programs differ widely depending on the focus, all students are required to take a core number of general (or theory) subjects such as maths. English is included as a compulsory general subject along with the second national language, Swedish. Until about ten years ago the timetable throughout Merikoski was constructed in the same way, with a consistent number of hours for each theory subject per week, throughout the academic year. Depending on the course, students could study English for two or more hours per week, more or less regularly.

About ten years ago in line with changes made within vocational colleges generally in Finland, Merikoski *Oulu* adopted the system of teaching in blocks of six weeks. This means there are six periods, each with its own timetable, covering the academic year, and students can focus on a few general subjects within each period, rather than having to cope with the whole range of subjects (including two foreign languages) over the whole year. The students therefore, depending on their course requirements for English, may only need to study English for 18 weeks (three periods) during one school year, although it could be longer, depending on how the courses are arranged. In Oulu, on average, each student would be required to obtain one credit unit from each of the following two courses: *Everyday English* and *English at Work*. This change in timetabling was not made compulsory throughout Merikoski, and students studying in other locations still have English for a regular amount of hours a week throughout the year.

### **2.3 ELT in Merikoski, Muhos**

I work in the Muhos base of Merikoski, and as this is where I would like to explore the innovation of introducing compact courses, it seems relevant to outline the context in a little more detail.

Merikoski *Muhos* provides vocational education for about 180 students on a spread out ‘campus.’ I am one in a department of two language teachers within a team of seven general subject teachers providing general subject teaching during the first two years of all the vocational courses. We are peripatetic in the sense that the teachers move rather than the students, and we may teach in two or more separate locations each day. In Muhos, students are required to complete three credit units of English: two in *Everyday English* and one in *English at Work*, usually within the first two years of study. The courses are generally timetabled so that there are one or two hours of English per week for the whole year, (an hour being equivalent to 45 minutes) but if a particular student is having difficulties they may receive extra support. The classes are small, and the majority of the students are male and aged between 16 and 22. Many of the students have been unsuccessful learners in previous schools, and have a low ‘language ego (Brown 1994: 62).’

Having outlined the general and specific context for the proposed changes, the next section will describe the nature of those changes.

### **3. PROPOSED CHANGE: COMPACT COURSES**

Stern (1985: 18) asserts that it is largely a matter of tradition as to how much time is allocated for a language course, and he also raises the question as to whether ‘concentrating [the allocated] time over a shorter overall time span is beneficial (Stern 1992: 351).’ I have often wondered if the introduction of compact EFL courses in my work situation is a curriculum change that should be seriously considered. By compact courses in this context I mean distributing the number of hours for English in a more concentrated form, as suggested by Stern.

Kennedy (1988: 331) asserts that change is systemic, ‘tak[ing] place in an environment which consists of a number of interrelating systems’, and therefore whatever is implemented in one part of the system or organisation will inevitably have an effect on other parts of that organisation. In my context it would not be realistic to consider the EFL timetable completely separately from that of the other compulsory general subjects and as, within the limits of this essay, it is not possible to go into detailed questions of curriculum design and timetabling, I will confine my exploration to the introduction of compact courses for EFL against the broader background of introducing compact courses for all the general subjects, with the exception of sports. Sports were not included within the scope of the proposed changes, as in Merikoski sports are offered as an opportunity for the students to have regular physical exercise, and compact courses would mitigate against that regularity.

#### **3.1 Reasons for the consideration of change**

Kennedy and Edwards (2001: 38) suggest that the need for change should be complemented by the desire for change. They also acknowledge that one person’s perceived need for change is not necessarily recognised by everyone else, as people have different priorities. There may also be tension between the perceived need for change and inherent inertia as a particular feature of institutions (Hayes:

2000: 135). The following table shows my own list of practical reasons which give rise to the idea of exploring this particular curriculum change.

Reasons for considering a change in ELT timetabling in Merikoski Muhos from the point of view of the potential benefits of that change

Motivation

- Student motivation often appears to decrease well before the end of the school year. In parallel, attendance and interest seem to fade. Would compact courses aid student motivation, and could students sustain more energy for language learning over shorter periods?

Focus

- The timetable could be arranged so that students would not have to study two languages at the same time (Swedish and English are both compulsory languages in the curriculum). This can be a particularly difficult situation for students who do not find language learning easy.

Compensating for extended absences

- Periods of work experience (where students are away from school) could in theory be programmed more easily into the curriculum, and relieve teachers and students from the problem of how to compensate for extended absence.
- If a student was ill or had to be away for an extended period, it could be possible for them to join in a similar course to the one they missed, but with another group of students.

Course/lesson planning

- As a teacher it may be easier to plan teaching for more concentrated courses focusing on fewer student groups in a week.

Flexibility

- Within a 'period' system of timetabling, it might be possible to offer language courses for different levels of ability. At present all general subjects are taught to students on the same course which gives rise to heterogeneous groups in the main.

*Table 1: Reasons for considering curriculum change in Merikoski Muhos.*

### 3.2 Compact courses: a broad outline

Despite seeing the potential need for change I would be reluctant to impose my vision on my colleagues wholesale, as it is impossible for any one person to have an understanding from every perspective. The question of ‘ownership’ is an important one when considering change, and will be discussed more fully in section 4.1 below. A study by Williams and Burden (1994: 22-27) shows, among other things, how the realisation of a project can change when it is allowed to pass into the hands of those who have the role of actually implementing the innovation. Change in an ELT context should be a team process in order to increase the chance of success, and Sikes (1992: 50) underlines the importance of involving teachers fully as they are at the heart of the educational process: ‘[a]n uncommitted and poorly motivated teaching body will have disastrous effects for even the best intentions for change (OECD 1989, in Sikes: 50).’ I will therefore, just outline here what I see as the main features to be encompassed by any system of compact courses, before considering how best to implement any changes.

Compact EFL courses as I envisage them in Merikoski Muhos would have two main features: language classes would be scheduled for more than once a week, and the number of weeks for teaching a specific course would be defined. The lessons themselves could remain as at present, as double or single lessons, but their frequency would increase and teachers could see a particular group two or three times a week. As the total allocation of time for language classes is unlikely to change the number of teaching weeks for a course must therefore be reduced. It would seem logical to group the lessons under the existing course framework of: ‘*Everday English*’ and ‘*English at Work*’, which could be given in separate terms during the first two years of study. The following section considers how it may be possible to initiate and monitor the changes described, focusing on the roles of ownership and evaluation.

## **4. INITIATING AND MONITORING CHANGE**

### **4.1 The role of ownership**

The role of ownership is an important one in the context of innovation, and Kennedy (1988: 338) finds much of the literature suggesting that the degree to which participants feel a particular innovation belongs to them ‘has a considerable influence on the likelihood of [that] innovation establishing itself.’ In my situation this suggests that a process of consultation would be a priority (both with the staff who would be affected by the changes, and possibly with the students as well), to see if the idea itself is one which would be positively received, before even considering what form the implementation could take. The consultation could, and maybe should, take many forms, but one simple way of initially assessing the receptivity of those involved towards this kind of change is through the use of a questionnaire. As part of my cost-benefit analysis, to be presented and discussed below, a survey was administered in order to ‘test the water’.

Taking the idea of ownership further, Fullan (1993: 31) writes about ‘deep ownership [which] comes through the learning that arises from full engagement in solving problems.’ He sees ownership as ‘a process as well as a state’ where participants can become more involved as the project progresses and takes shape. In initiating ‘local change’ (change that has not been imposed from outside) there is great potential for individual involvement in determining the actual process, the direction, the methods and the timescale, and thus it is probably important not to have too fixed an idea of what form a particular project will take, in order to achieve the agreed goals. Not specifying in advance the final form that compact courses might take, may help facilitate the process of adoption.

Jennings and Doyle’s (1996) project on curriculum innovation seems to demonstrate many of Fullan’s ideas about deep ownership, while also acknowledging that ‘genuine commitment can only be generated through an understanding of and real participation in, the process of change (ibid: 170).’ If the concept of compact courses was agreed to be a desirable change in Merikoski Muhos, I would want to encourage the staff concerned to become actively involved in any process of deciding what form these courses might take, including the timetable changes. In this way I would hope that staff could feel that they had



themselves created an appropriate framework for enabling any agreed change to have the best possible chances of success. Williams and Burden (1994: 26) stress that the success of any innovation depends on adequately tackling the anxieties and concerns voiced by teachers, including the teachers' views of "what's in it for us". In addition to ownership, incorporating mechanisms for evaluation from the outset could also help inform this process.

#### **4.2 The role of evaluation**

Formative evaluation can be used as a tool in setting up a project, in order to give the project greater clarity and help avoid problems later on. This kind of evaluation '...involves evaluating the project from the beginning. It is ongoing in nature, and seeks to form, improve and direct the innovation rather than simply evaluate the outcomes (Williams and Burden *ibid*: 22).' One way in which this could be done is through the use of an evaluator who is closely involved with a particular project on a daily basis, and attempts to gather data from all aspects of the system, thus enabling a broad working insight to be gained in order to help achieve clarity in the interpretation of any complex situation (Partlett, in Williams and Burden, *ibid*: 23). I envisage using this type of evaluation in exploring the introduction of compact courses, both from the point of view of what the evaluation could yield in terms of data and also from the stance of facilitation. I would predict that the initial survey would throw up a lot of questions, and an outside evaluator may be in the best position to facilitate the necessary discussion with the staff (and possibly the students) involved in order to determine whether the project should go forward, and if so, what further groundwork would need to be done before implementation could begin. Using an outside evaluator/facilitator would also be taking heed of Jennings and Doyle's (1996: 171) assertion that '...people support what they have helped to create...but [their participation] needs to be facilitated'.

Before making any firm plans for initiating and monitoring a proposed change it would be advisable to conduct a cost-benefit analysis in order to ascertain the potential viability of the project. Formative evaluation could be used as part of any such analysis, and Burden and Williams (1994: 27) argue convincingly that their study suggests evaluation which occurs *before* a project begins is 'crucial to

the success of any innovation.’ Accordingly, the essay continues by looking at a possible cost-benefit analysis for my context.

## **5. COST-BENEFIT ANALYSIS**

A cost-benefit analysis in an ELT context is a way of weighing the predicted costs or disadvantages of introducing a particular change against the predicted benefits or advantages of that change, to try and determine what the chances are of such an innovation succeeding in practice. Kennedy and Edwards (2001: 41) state that ‘if the benefits outweigh the costs, the desire to change will be promoted.’ Such an analysis should address, among other things, the questions of feasibility, acceptability and relevance.

In an attempt to investigate receptivity to the idea of changing to a system of compact courses, questionnaires were administered to three different groups of staff and students in Merikoski Muhos, as part of my tentative cost-benefit analysis. These groups were seen as representative of the main stakeholders when considering this particular innovation.

### **5.1 Students**

A simple survey comprised of three questions, in both Finnish and English, was given to 40 students from seven different vocational courses. The questions aimed to see whether the students were satisfied with the form their English courses took at the moment and/or whether they felt some form of compact courses would give them a better opportunity for learning English. This questionnaire can be seen in table 2 below.

Ways of learning English: Student Survey

English is taught in Meakk, Muhos 1-2 hours/week over the whole year.

1. Do you think this is a good way to learn a language?

Yes  No

Why/Why not?

2. If the system was to change, so you could learn more intensively for shorter periods, do you think this would be better than the system we have at the moment?

(for example: 4 hours English/week for six weeks , then 2 hours/week for six weeks = 1ov [1 credit ]

4 hours English/week for two periods of six weeks plus 3 hours English/week for six weeks = 2ov [ 2 credits ]

Yes  No

Why/Why not?

3. Have you any other comments?

Thank you for your help.

*Table 2: Ways of learning English: student survey (compressed)*

The results of the questionnaire, if taken as a whole, clearly showed the majority of students questioned were satisfied that continuous courses in the form that they are offered in Merikoski Muhos provide a good way to learn a language. This result is also substantiated by the majority of students in five courses out of seven.

When looking at overall responses to the question of whether compact courses would be a better way of learning a language, the results are much less clear cut. Exactly half the students thought that a system of compact courses would not be better than the present system and just under half thought compact courses would be better. However, the majority of the students in four out of the seven groups questioned felt that compact courses would be better than the present system. The results are summarised in table 3 below, and the possible implications from these results for the introduction of compact courses will be discussed in section 6.

**Results of student questionnaire on different ways of language learning**

Respondents

Number of students questioned:	40
Number of different groups:	7
Age of respondents	16-45

**1-2 lessons/week is a good way to learn a language**

	<u>Individual students</u>	<u>groups</u>
Agree:	33	5
Disagree:	7	2

**A compact course system of learning a language would be better**

	<u>Individual students</u>	<u>groups</u>
Agree:	16	4
Disagree:	20	3
Unsure:	2	-
No response:	2	-

*Table 3: Summary of results of student questionnaire on language learning*

**5.2 Teachers**

A longer questionnaire was given to five general subject teachers, and a slightly adapted version of this was given to three members of staff responsible for teaching different vocational subjects (metalwork, catering and electronics). The staff questionnaires were designed to look more deeply at the idea of changing to a system of compact courses for all general subjects, rather than focusing solely on ELT (as explained earlier a change in ELT would probably have to be part of a more general change), and were seeking information about staff attitudes to such a change. The questionnaires were also designed to obtain information about the advantages and disadvantages staff might be able to foresee, both for themselves and for their students, should such a change be introduced. Both staff

questionnaires can be seen in the appendices. In addition to the surveys, I contacted three members of the ELT staff (from two different units) in Merikoski Oulu to establish how their (compact course) timetabling works in practise and what they feel about teaching in this way.

### 5.2.1 General Subject Teachers

The overall conclusion from the general subject teachers' responses was that the majority were predisposed towards at least trying a new system of timetabling, with the proviso that everything was carefully thought through, and planned with optimum student learning opportunities as a priority. The comments included:

'it could be very good at least sometime'

'I would be willing to try the new system'

'It depends on how it is planned. A system of block teaching is criticized in many ways, but maybe there is something new waiting for us.'

The perceived *advantages* for *teachers* under a system of compact courses included: variety, easier work for the teachers, students remembering more, and better use of classrooms; against the projected *disadvantages* of: tiredness of students, timetable complications causing frustrations, and lack of room in the current course for repetition of things covered previously.

Looking at things from the *students'* point of view, included these *advantages*: variation, students not having to concentrate on many things at the same time, more time for lessons and less time to forget. The *disadvantages* included: students not being able to cope or concentrate, lack of room for extra support lessons if something is not understood, too many general lessons in one week and concern over students failing courses due to illness, lack of concentration or a difficult life period. A fuller consideration of the general teachers' perspective will be taken up in section 6.

### 5.2.2 Vocational subject teachers

The three vocational teachers were much more reserved, if not resistant to the suggestion of initiating compact courses for general subjects. They expressed

doubts about how the vocational subjects would be fitted in and were concerned that some of their students were already at maximum stretch regarding the amount of time spent on general subjects. The only perceived advantage for teachers or students was thought to be that some subjects may go better with breaks in between. The projected disadvantages included concerns that student motivation for studying would drop still further, that special students would not be able to cope with such an intensive program, and the observation that the faster learning takes place, the more quickly things are forgotten. It was suggested if any changes were to be made that they should be made as gradually as possible; a concern highlighted by Sikes (1992: 42). 'It is in the nature of imposed change...that teachers are rarely given much (i.e. 'sufficient') time in which to acquaint themselves with the change and to plan and prepare for it. Yet time, as a component of conducive conditions, is crucial.'

## **6. DISCUSSION**

The questionnaires and other communications yielded data which would seem to have a direct bearing on the particular innovation in question; however, the answers were not conclusive as to the preferred direction of change, or even whether any change should be adopted at all. The following discussion examines the responses in terms of feasibility, acceptability and relevance, and also comments on some of the apparent shortcomings of the survey.

### **6.1 Feasibility**

Feasibility refers to the practicality of carrying out a particular change in a given context. The responses from the general subject teachers showed that they considered this change to be a practical possibility in the Merikoski situation in Muhos, but questions were raised which would need to be fully addressed before proceeding further in any process of adoption. The practical issues to be resolved included: preparing different material for students so that lessons would have more variety, giving enough time to planning the new timetable so it would address the needs of both the students and the staff, and considering extremely carefully how integration of general subjects with the ongoing vocational studies would be realised.

There is not space within this discussion to do much more than make the observation that the concept of compact courses would possibly have different implications for different subjects. This is to do with the perceived inherent nature of the subjects themselves: for example maths and physics could be seen as being more factual and therefore easier to arrange into short courses, whereas all the language staff questioned mentioned the importance of the ongoing nature of learning a language.

‘language learning is a process’

‘language learning is not like learning to ride a bike, [it] needs constant repetition and brushing up.’

Stern (1992: 351) seems to reflect this concern when he writes: ‘...a compact foreign language course at secondary school level is seen as attractive at first sight because it offers relief from the “relentless inflexibility of the monotonous long-term language course (Stern 1985: 18)”...but little is known about how it would work out in practice.’

Even more consideration of the practical issues would have to be taken in order to allay the doubts of the vocational teachers. Most of their predicted practical disadvantages seemed to concern timetabling: whether in the shape of how the general subjects would be fitted in or, on the other hand, how the students would cope with what was understood (by the teachers) to be an extra amount of time given for general subjects.

## **6.2 Acceptability**

Acceptability is concerned with teachers ‘...match[ing] their teaching beliefs against the beliefs underlying the change.’ Problems of acceptability are seen to be of a deeper nature than those of feasibility, and may be less easy to solve (Kennedy and Edwards, 2001: 39). While most of the reservations would appear to be practical, some of the doubts expressed by both groups of teachers could be seen to come under the heading of acceptability, and if not addressed could negatively influence any implementation process.

‘That kind of block teaching I know, I’m against.’

‘I’m not against changes, but this is so big thing that we should criticize it in detail’

‘Is there something safe in the old system?’

The teachers’ past experience is also of relevance here. ‘This is not to say that teachers get stuck in time warps, they do change their experience if it seems appropriate and beneficial...but rather to acknowledge certain experiences can be formative (Sikes, 1992: 40).’

‘When I taught in periods I noticed that we didn’t work so much; maybe students can’t learn so much in a shorter time.’

There seem to be a range of attitudes concerning the perceived effectiveness of compact courses. Two out of the three ELT teachers contacted in Merikoski, Oulu (where compact courses were introduced ten years ago) said they would prefer to return to the old system, while at the same time mentioning that seeing students twice a week was beneficial. An outside facilitator may be able to tap the underlying reasons for the attitudes expressed in order to ascertain how easy it would be to find a way forward.

### **6.3 Relevance**

Relevance concerns the degree to which teachers perceive a proposed change to be relevant for their students. They may not however, see things from the same perspective as their students, which is why it could be important to directly involve the students. The vocational teachers’ doubts on behalf of their students seem to fall into the category of relevance.

‘[this would] not be suitable for my students.’

‘Effective learning would be reduced.’

‘The time for general subjects is already at maximum for year one students.’

‘Students would get bored and fed up.’

‘The motivation for studying would reduce still further.’



However, if we look at the students' own responses they seem to fall into two distinct groups; those which mainly express attitudes confirming their teachers' concern at the proposed changes;

'This amount of hours is enough at the moment.'

'Not too heavy to study.'

'Not too much [information], so I can cope.'

'If you have English the whole year you don't forget so easily.'

and those which express a rather different viewpoint.

'Study faster, get it over faster, and more time in the workshop'

'I'd like to study English more than 1-2 hours [per week].'

'I could learn better if we had periods'

'I would remember things better if we had 4 hours per week.'

'You wouldn't forget things and you could continue on from the last lesson and go naturally forward.'

Taking the range of student opinions into account would give a rather different basis from which to look at creating conditions for the successful introduction of compact courses, than if only the teachers' perspective was considered.

The responses given by both the teachers and the students reveal one of the shortcomings in the way these particular questionnaires were formulated. It has become apparent while reading the data that there is no clearly expressed formulation of what compact courses would mean in concrete terms. Examples of what shape, time wise, the courses could take were given, but these were only examples. The responses seemed to indicate that compact courses mean different things to different people, whether to do with preconceptions or past experience or both, and at this point there cannot be said to be any 'shared vision'. I noticed that my questionnaires only really tapped responses to the idea of block versus continuous teaching, but the form block teaching would take was left ambiguous.

In both the student and the staff questionnaires the word *intensive* was used:

‘The subject area I am interested in is **changing** the way general subjects (except sports) are taught in Merikoski, Muhos **from...to** teaching in **blocks of six weeks** and **more intensively**.’

(staff questionnaire)

‘If the system was changed so you could learn more intensively for shorter periods...’

(student questionnaire)

The word ‘intensive’ itself seemed to set off a train of thought in respondents’ minds which was completely unintended. For example, it became clear that one group of students thought that they would have to study English for more than two successive hours on the same day, rather than twice a week.

‘There would be too much information, we would get mixed up.’

Other people seemed to take the word intensive to mean a vast amount of hours per week, and indeed, part of the vocational teachers’ comments would seem to be rooted in a misperception of what compact courses could mean. The intention was not to increase the amount of theory hours per week, but just to redistribute them. This indicates the importance of piloting a questionnaire (which in this case was not done as it did not seem feasible), but it also seems to show that discussion of a shared vision is vital, and that part of the process of moving towards any kind of ownership of this project, including the practical way in which a new timetable is worked out, would be critical to the conditions for successful change. ‘Such communication is... a means of creating ownership (Kennedy and Edwards 2001: 42).’

## 7. CONCLUSION

Researching and writing this essay have underlined the fact that the process of adopting and implementing even an apparently simple change can be much more complex than at first appears. The most important finding from my initial survey of teachers and students in Merikoski Muhos seemed to highlight the necessity of

using terms that are easily understood by all concerned, or to ensure that the terms used are sufficiently explained. It became clear that the proposed change I was exploring, compact courses, was not well enough defined in my questionnaire to be unambiguously understood by those who were answering it. In addition, the tentative explorations I have carried out in Merikoski Muhos have shown that if this particular innovation was to go ahead, the conditions for making successful change should include extended consultation and close involvement with all concerned in order to develop a system that the whole team would feel workable for our situation. It would also seem advisable, when managing a project for introducing an innovation in an ELT context, to be aware of the importance of formative evaluation, including appropriate facilitation of those involved, as part of the ongoing process of encouraging 'deep ownership'.

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## APPENDIX 1: Questionnaire given to general subject teachers

Survey on how general subjects could be taught in the future in Merikoski,

Muhos

*General subject teachers*

I am currently doing an essay for my MA on the subject of introducing an innovation into the curriculum. The subject area I am interested in is **changing** the way general subjects (except sports) are taught in Merikoski, Muhos: **from** one to two hours/week over six or twelve months as it is at present, **to** teaching in **blocks of six weeks** and **more intensively**. For example: a 1ov [1 credit unit] course could be taught for 4 hours/week in 2x6 week blocks, or 6 hours/week over approximately 6 weeks. This is the kind of system which is used in Merikoski, Oulu.

I would appreciate your replies to the following questions.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

1. If it happened that our unit adopts a system of block teaching, with all general subjects (except sports) taught more intensively, what would your reaction be?
2. What would you consider to be the advantages for the teacher (what would you gain)?
3. What would you consider to be the disadvantages for the teacher (what would you lose)?
4. What do you think would be the advantages for the students (what would the student gain)?
5. What do you think would be the disadvantages for the students (what would the student lose)?

6. What sort of preparation (if any) for this kind of change would you consider that you need?
7. Taking what you have written into consideration, would you be willing or unwilling to change the system of teaching we have at the moment to more intensive blocks?
8. Would it make any difference to your active support for implementing the changes if they were introduced for a period of 1-2 years and then evaluated by everyone involved?
9. Do you have any other comments?

## APPENDIX 2: Questionnaire given to vocational teachers

Survey on how general subjects could be taught in the future in Merikoski,

Muhos

*Professional teachers*

I am currently doing an essay for my MA on the subject of introducing an innovation into the curriculum. The subject area I am interested in is **changing** the way general subjects (except sports) are taught in Merikoski, Muhos: **from** one to two hours/week over six or twelve months as it is at present, **to** teaching in **blocks of six weeks** and **more intensively**. For example: a 1ov [1 credit unit] course could be taught for 4 hours/week in 2x6 week blocks, or 6 hours/week over approximately 6 weeks. This is the kind of system which is used in Merikoski, Oulu.

I would appreciate your replies to the following questions.

Name/s \_\_\_\_\_

1. If it happens that our unit adopts the system of intensive courses for all the general subjects (except sports), how do you think it would affect you as a subject teacher?
2. What do you think would be the advantages of such a change (for your department and your students)?
3. What do you think would be the disadvantages of such a change (for your department/for the students)?
4. What kind of training, meetings etc (if any) for this kind of innovation do you think would be needed?
5. Would you be supportive of such a change in principle?
6. Have you any other comments?

