

## Teacher Development in Action: Understanding Language Teachers' Conceptual Change

by Magdalena Kubanyiova  
Palgrave Macmillan 2012  
978-0-230-23258-7

This is a courageous book. Rather than trumpeting a success story, it documents and analyses the 'failure' of a project designed to radically restructure teachers' conceptual understanding of their teaching. The study lasted one year and was conducted with eight volunteer teachers in Slovakia. Although all were well-qualified and initially highly-motivated, the course did not achieve the transformative effect hoped for. The book is a frank and determined attempt to find out why.

The introductory chapter puts the study in context. It is written for 'anyone working with or researching language teachers'. Chapter 2 reviews the work on teacher change and reveals that for all the many studies conducted, the yields have been disappointing, and that the field remains confused and poorly organised. And all too often, words are not matched by deeds: 'embracing the language of change does not always imply embracing its mindset'. The author argues for a more rigorously theoretical framework for teacher cognition research.

In Chapter 3, she examines *Theories of Learning and Change in Psychology*. She looks specifically at *Attitude change, Conceptual change and Possible selves theory*. She outlines two routes to attitude change: the systematic, which involves effort and a willingness to engage deeply with the change, and heuristic, which is a short-cut based on prior experience, knowledge and beliefs, mood and feelings. The impact of the heuristic route is generally superficial and temporary. This links with conceptual change, which can either involve *assimilation* or *accommodation*. Assimilation involves simply adopting a new idea without it really impacting on our current state, whereas accommodation involves a deep process of self-questioning. Possible selves theory posits an *actual self* (who

we are now), an *ideal self* (who we would like to become) and an *ought to self* (who we feel we are expected to become).

Chapter 4 presents a model integrating the ideas so far explored. The Language Teacher Conceptual Change Model is explained in some detail. Essentially, unless a teacher has some vision of who they want to become, feels they are implicated personally at a deep level, can recognise that there is a dissonance between where they are and where they want to be, and then systematically engages with it, there will be no change in their beliefs.

The methodology of the project is outlined in Chapter 5, along with information about the Slovak context and detailed biographies of the eight teachers involved. The combination of formal input, classroom observation, field observation, formal and informal interviews, detailed field notes and student focus groups yields a 'thick' description for analysis.

Having cleared away the theoretical undergrowth, we now come to the nitty-gritty part of the book, which for many non-specialist readers will be the most interesting and accessible. Chapters 6 to 9 document in detail the different reactions of the eight subjects/teachers to the course. Three metaphors emerge: 'Nice but not for me', 'Couldn't agree more' and 'Nice but too scary'. The main concerns of one group of subjects ('Nice but not for me') were 'centred around their expertise in the subject matter and maintaining a positive self-image', rather than in engaging with the new concepts. The programme did not, therefore, implicate their 'ideal



language teacher self' and simply slid off them like water off a duck's back. Another subject ('Couldn't agree more') was convinced that she was already doing what the course was advocating. Hence there was no sense of emotional dissonance, no problem to confront, so no change resulted. The new was assimilated into the old on the assumption that it was the same. Others ('Nice but too scary') sensed in the message of the course a threat to their sense of self. They felt threatened by the discrepancy between 'what I do, and what the course says I ought to do'.

Chapter 9 explores the development of one teacher in fine detail, and reveals that the process is not linear but cyclical. This teacher's trajectory involved a number of U-turns and false starts, yet ultimately, she did emerge as someone for whom the course had made a change. Her realisation – 'I've got to teach differently' – offers hope for her future development.

# Reviews

The final chapter explores the metaphor of teacher change related to 'complexity theory'. To account for it, we need to take into consideration the multiplicity of factors and their varied inter-relationships. Kubanyiova's conclusion is: 'If you want to walk on water, you've got to get out of the boat.' To do this we need to inspire a vision, rock the boat by provoking dissonance and spread a safety net.

This book will primarily be of interest to teacher trainers and researchers, but teachers will also find much to reflect on, especially in the sympathetic and detailed analysis of the human data.

**Alan Maley**  
Fordwich, UK

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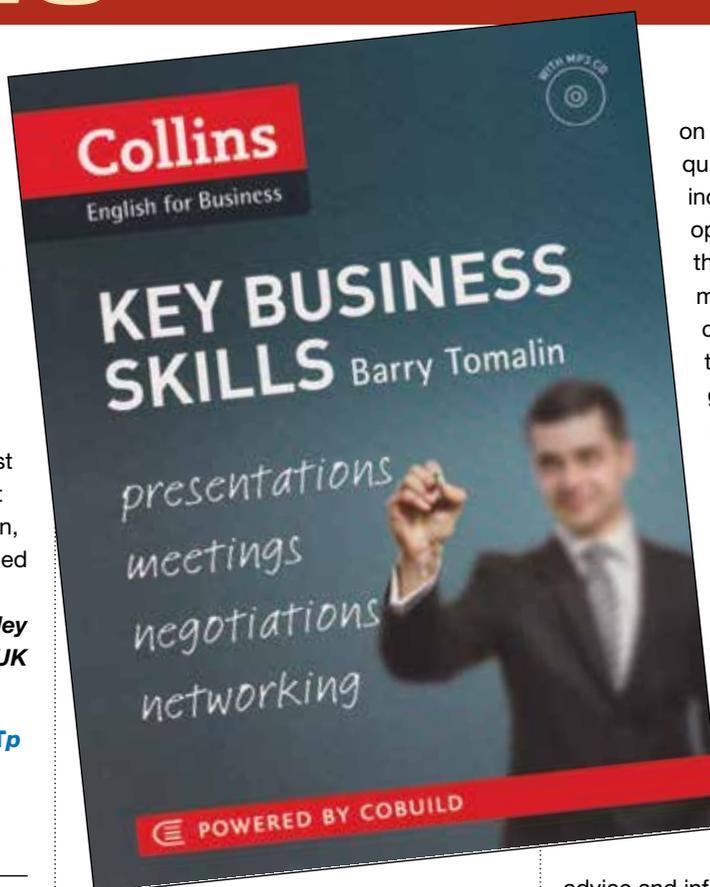
## Key Business Skills

by Barry Tomalin  
Collins 2012  
978-0-00-748879-7

This book is aimed primarily at students looking for a self-study business communication course, but it would also make a useful resource for any teacher-led business English course. It has 12 units divided into four key skills areas: networking, presentations, meetings and negotiations. Each unit is then subdivided into two parts, which follow the same basic structure in all the units.

Part A has: aims (unit objectives), a quiz to activate prior knowledge, a briefing section presenting the target communication skills, a listening section with the opportunity to interact with a speaker on the accompanying CD, a business practice section, which presents key language and gives speaking and vocabulary practice, and a business culture section, with information on how the target communication skills may differ in various international situations.

Part B has: a briefing section to present the target skills in this part, a



listening section giving the opportunity to hear the skills being used, a business practice section with the key language accompanied by speaking and vocabulary practice, and a business writing section with tasks associated with the unit topic. This part ends with a reflection section to encourage students to record what they have learnt and to make plans for how and when they will implement their new skills.

At the back of the book is an answer key to the activities, the transcripts of all the listening material and a business file, which gives additional reference material for some sections of the units.

Books with a rigid unit structure, although very easy to find your way around, often risk appearing rather dull and inflexible. However, I think there is plenty of variety in the tasks and activities to avoid this accusation. It is also important for a self-study book to be very transparent in its structure so it is easy for students working on their own to navigate their way through the different sections and to locate the material that is most relevant to them quickly and easily.

Students will find the focus on listening and speaking quite challenging but incredibly helpful. The opportunity to interact with the speakers on the CD by means of cunningly-conceived exercises, where the speaker's words are given and the student is provided with short clear instructions about how to respond, will also be very welcome to those with few opportunities for speaking practice. The fact that they can repeat the activity again and again until they are happy with their performance will be a great confidence booster, I believe.

There is plenty of helpful advice and information in this book and I think that students at B1 to C1 level of the CEFR will find it extremely useful.

**Kelly Davies**  
Bournemouth, UK

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