Process and Product of English Language Learning in the National Education Act, Ministry of Education Standards and Recommended Textbooks at the Secondary Level

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Abstract
The need to reform Thai education has been apparent for several years, and the National Education Act of 1999 (NEA) has provided a driving force and rationale for the reform process. The NEA includes product and process goals for Thai education, such as the need for Thai students to be ethical and for training in thinking skills. In this paper, we examine the implications of the NEA for English language learning at secondary level. We then compare these implications with the Ministry of Education (MoE) standards and with the content of MoE recommended textbooks for secondary schools. It is found that the process objectives in the NEA and the MoE standards are similar, but that many of the NEA product objectives are not

included in the standards. Furthermore, very few of either the product or the process objectives of the NEA are covered in the recommended textbooks. Although recently published textbooks provide a greater coverage of the objectives, there are still several objectives which are not considered in textbooks. We therefore suggest ways in which the full range of the NEA objectives can be incorporated into the teaching/learning process in secondary level English education. We also highlight certain objectives, such as community-oriented learning, which have received almost no attention in English language teaching and which warrant research.

The National Education Act of 1999
There is widespread agreement that Thai education in general and English language education in particular need to change. Much current education is still based on rote learning and memorisation (Suwanwela, 2002; United Nations, 1999), and such a teaching methodology is particularly inappropriate for the teaching of foreign languages. Furthermore, the content of English language education in Thailand does not prepare students for the requirements of the workplace (United Nations, 1999; Wiriyachitra, 2002). There are, then, problems with both the process and the expected products of English language teaching in Thailand.

These problems have led to serious attempts to reform Thai education, culminating in the promulgation of the National Education Act (NEA) of 1999 (Office of the National Education Commission, 1999). This Act attempts to tackle the weaknesses of Thai education head-on and has been described as "an ideal law that upholds the philosophy of education [and] makes the process of learning the priority" (Bangkok Post, 2002: 11). With idealistic goals, it might be expected that the NEA would largely be ignored by vested interests. However, as the overriding piece of legislation concerning education in Thailand, the Act has taken centre stage in the reform process, and any examination of Thai educational reform must start from the Act.

To keep our investigation manageable, we do not intend to look at all of the possible effects of the Act. Instead, we intend to restrict our investigation in two ways. Firstly, we will only look at the implications of the Act on English language teaching in Thailand. Secondly, we will restrict the levels of education that we examine to the secondary levels, since these are the levels where inadequate provision of English education is probably most acutely felt.

Teaching and learning goals in the National Education Act
As well as reforming the teaching/learning process, the NEA aims to merge three Thai governmental entities, to change funding for schools, and to create a system of institutional and teacher evaluation (Watson Todd, 2000). Because of this, the guidelines in the Act directly relating to the teaching/learning process form a small part of the overall Act, but it is these guidelines that we shall concentrate on in this paper.

The key sections of the NEA which concern the teaching/learning process are Sections 7, 22, 23, 24, 26, 27, 28, 29 and 66. These sections are reproduced below.

> **Section 7**
> The learning process shall aim at inculcating sound awareness of politics; democratic system of government under a constitutional monarchy; ability to protect and promote their rights, responsibilities, freedom, respect of the rule of law, equality and human dignity; pride in Thai identity; ability to protect public and national interests; promotion of religion, art, national culture, sports, local wisdom, Thai wisdom and universal knowledge; inculcating ability to preserve natural resources and the environment; ability to earn a living; self-reliance; creativity; and acquiring thirst for knowledge and capability of self-learning on a continuous basis.
>
> **Section 22**
> Education shall be based on the principle that all learners are capable of learning and self-development, and are regarded as being most important. The teaching-learning process shall aim at enabling the learners to develop themselves at their own pace and to the best of their potentiality.
>
> **Section 23**
> Education through formal, non-formal, and informal approaches shall give emphases to knowledge, morality, learning process, and integration of the following, depending on the appropriateness of each level of education:
> (1) Knowledge about oneself and the relationship between oneself and society, namely: family, community, nation, and world community; as well as knowledge about the historical development of Thai society and matters relating to politics and democratic system of government under a constitutional monarchy;
> (2) Scientific and technical knowledge and skills, as well as knowledge, understanding and experience in management, conservation, and utilization of natural resources and the environment in a balanced and sustainable manner;
> (3) Knowledge about religion, art, culture, sports, Thai wisdom, and the application of wisdom;
> (4) Knowledge and skills in mathematics and languages, with emphasis on proper use of the Thai language;
> (5) Knowledge and skills in pursuing one's career and capability of leading a happy life.

Section 24

In organizing the learning process, educational institutions and agencies concerned shall:

(1) provide substance and arrange activities in line with the learners' interested and aptitudes, bearing in mind individual differences;

(2) provide training in thinking process, management, how to face various situations and application of knowledge for obviating and solving problems;

(3) organize activities for learners to draw from authentic experience, drill in practical work for complete mastery; enable learners to think critically and acquire the reading habit and continuous thirst for knowledge;

(4) achieve, in all subjects, a balanced integration of subject matter, integrity, values, and desirable attributes;

(5) enable instructors to create the ambiance, environment, instructional media, and facilities for learners to learn and be all-round persons, able to benefit from research as part of the learning process. In doing so, both learners and teachers may learn together from different types of teaching-learning media and other sources of knowledge;

(6) enable individuals to learn at all times and in all places. Co-operation with parents, guardians, and all parties concerned in the community shall be sought to develop jointly the learners in accord with their potentiality.

Section 26

Educational institutions shall assess learners' performance through observation of their development; personal conduct; learning behaviour; participation in activities and results of the tests accompanying the teaching-learning process commensurate with the different levels and types of education.

Section 27

The Basic Education Commission shall prescribe core curricula for basic education for purposes of preserving Thai identity, good citizenship, desirable way of life, livelihood, as well as for further education.

Section 28

The substance of the curricula, both academic and professional, shall aim at human development with desirable balance regarding knowledge, critical thinking, capability, virtue and social responsibility ... higher education curricula shall emphasize academic development, with priority given to higher professions and research for development of the bodies of knowledge and society.

Section 29

Educational institutions in co-operation with individuals, families, communities, community organizations, local administration organizations, private persons, private organizations, professional bodies, religious institutions, enterprises, and other social institutions shall contribute to

strengthening the communities by encouraging learning in the communities themselves.

Section 66
Learners shall have the right to develop their capabilities for utilization of technologies for education as soon as feasible so that they shall have sufficient knowledge and skills in using these technologies for acquiring knowledge themselves on a continuous lifelong basis.

The aims stated in these nine sections are of two types. Sections 7, 23, 27 and 28 focus on the expected product of the teaching/learning process, or what the students should learn. Sections 22, 24, 26 and 29, on the other hand, concern the learning process itself, or how the students should learn. Section 66 contains both product and process goals.

Because its prime purpose is to act as legislation, the NEA is written in legalese, making it frequently long-winded and repetitive. It is therefore useful to try to summarise the key objectives from the Act.

Product objectives in the National Education Act
The key product objectives from an English language teaching perspective are:
1. knowledge of languages (Section 23)
2. skills in languages (Section 23)
3. Thai identity, national culture, local wisdom (Section 7)
4. universal knowledge, scientific and technical knowledge and skills (Sections 7 and 23)
5. understanding of politics, democracy and human rights (Sections 7 and 23)
6. environmental awareness (Section 7)
7. knowledge about oneself (Section 23)
8. knowledge and skills useful for careers and further study (Sections 23 and 27)
9. a desire and capability to learn by oneself (Section 7)
10. good citizenship, social responsibility and self-reliance (Sections 7 and 27)
11. ability to use technology (Section 66)
12. critical and creative thinking and problem-solving skills (Sections 7 and 28)
13. morals, virtue and the capability to lead a happy life (Sections 27 and 28)

Some suggestions for how these objectives may be attained in English teaching are:

1. Language objectives in curricula should focus on authentic English for careers and further education (objective 8)
2. The carrier content of English teaching should concern Thai and local culture and issues (objective 3) or general and scientific knowledge (objective 4)
3. Ethical, environmental and political dilemma such as values clarification tasks (see e.g. Blair, 1991; Green, 1975; Marr, 2000) should be used (objectives 5, 6 and 13)
4. Locally-oriented projects with individual accountability (see e.g. Barro et al., 1998; Stoller, 2002) should be used (objectives 3, 6, 10 and 12)
5. There should be activities where students have control over their learning, such as self-access learning (see e.g. Gardner and Miller, 1999; Rujiketgumkorn, 2000) (objectives 9 and 10)
6. Thinking activities (see e.g. Greene, 2001; Watson Todd, forthcoming) should be used (objective 12)
7. Reflective activities (see e.g. Bruning et al., 1999; Rogers, 2001) should be used (objective 7).
8. Learning should involve computer use (see e.g. Keobke, 1998; Shrum and Glisan, 2000) (objective 11).

Before we turn to the process objectives, it is worth pausing and comparing the product objectives with objectives in the literature. Most work on types of objectives in the English language teaching literature concerns types of syllabuses. The various product syllabuses include structural, lexical, functional, notional, situational and skills-based (see e.g. Dubin and Olshtain, 1986; Graves, 2000; Krahnke, 1987). All of these, however, concern only the first two of the product objectives identified in the NEA – knowledge of and skills in languages.

A more applicable categorisation in the literature concerns the carrier content of a course, in other words, the content of the reading texts, listening passages etc. which are used as the input for language teaching. Ur (1996) identifies nine types of carrier content:

1. the language itself
2. the home culture
3. world or general knowledge
4. moral, educational, political or social problems
5. the learners themselves
6. another subject of study
7. the culture associated with the target language
8. the literature of the target language

9. zero or trivial content (such as invented dialogues of the Brown family at the breakfast table).

Of these, the first five clearly match the product objectives stated in the NEA, while the sixth objective may be related to integrating subject matter in different courses (Section 24). The last three types of carrier content suggested by Ur (1996) are not included in the Act. Although we should not expect the Act to be promoting the use of trivial content and English language literature may be most suitable for advanced level students, the omission of the culture of the target language from the Act warrants consideration.

The NEA explicitly states that Thai culture should be stressed in Thai secondary education, but it is silent concerning other cultures. However, it could be argued that the objective of knowledge and skills useful for careers and further education means that British and American cultures, for example, need to be taught. After all, many students going to work in business and tourism will need to communicate with native speakers. This, however, is a fallacy. Although such students will use English, only a small part of this will be with native speakers. Taking the tourism industry as an example, from January to September 2001, over 60% of tourists were from East Asia with another 22% coming from Asean countries (Intarakomalyasut, 2001). Although English may be the *lingua franca* with such tourists, communication needs no understanding of English-speaking cultures. We would therefore argue that there is little or no need for English teaching to use target language cultures as the carrier content.

Process objectives in the National Education Act
Let us now turn to the process objectives stated in the NEA. The Act includes two overriding principles which should guide the teaching/learning process. These are firstly, that learners are the most important people in education (Sections 15, 22 and 24), and secondly, that learners should become capable of learning for themselves (Section 15). These principles are the basis for the current move in Thai education towards student-centred learning. While these principles provide a basis to work from, most teachers probably need more specific objectives which they can apply in their classrooms. The process objectives in the NEA can be summarised as:
1. imparting knowledge, practising, drilling for mastery (Sections 4 and 24)
2. creating a learning environment (Section 24)
3. training in thinking skills and problem solving (section 24)

4. learning through authentic experience (Section 24)
5. using technology for learning (Sections 24 and 66)
6. reading extensively to acquire the reading habit (Section 24)
7. learning in the community (Section 29)
8. use of continuous assessment procedures (Section 26)

While there are few lists of potential process objectives in the literature, there are suggestions for tasks and approaches to teaching and learning which meet the principles and objectives stated in the NEA. These include:
1. Activities incorporating learner training (see e.g. Tudor, 1996; van Lier, 1996) where learners have control over their learning, such as self access (see e.g. Gardner and Miller, 1999; Rujiketgumkorn, 2000) and reading portfolios (see e.g. Damnet, 2000; Day and Bamford, 1998) (principles 1 and 2; objectives 2 and 6)
2. Tiered tasks for mixed-ability classroom learning (see e.g. Bowler and Parminter, 2002; Millrood, 2002) (principle 1)
3. Thinking activities (see e.g. Greene, 2001; Watson Todd, forthcoming) (objective 3)
4. Locally-oriented project work (see e.g. Barro et al., 1998; Stoller, 2002) (objectives 4 and 7)
5. Computer-based learning (see e.g. Keobke, 1998; Shrum and Glisan, 2000) (objective 5)
6. Teacher explanations and controlled practice (objective 1)

The first five of these approaches involve different students potentially learning different language points. Because of this, the use of exams may be inappropriate and continuous assessment (see e.g. Kohonen, 2001; Puhl, 1997) a more valid method of evaluating students.

Comparison of product and process objectives in the National Education Act
The product and process objectives in the NEA are by their nature different. It is noticeable, however, that there are some similarities (e.g. critical and creative thinking as a product objective and training in thinking skills as a process objective). The relationship between the two types of objective, then, is an inter-relationship whereby the product objectives affect the processes, and vice versa.

This inter-relationship can be seen even more clearly when we look at the suggestions for how both sets of objectives can be reached in English language education. We find that both sets of objectives lead to suggestions of activities where students have control over their learning,

thinking activities, locally-oriented projects, and computer-based learning. These parallels between the two sets of suggestions do not mean that the suggestions specific to one kind of objective should be ignored, but they do highlight important directions for the development of Thai education.

While the suggestions provide useful guidelines, a lot of work still needs to be done before they can be put into practice in Thai schools. There are two ways in which this work can be completed.

Firstly, specific samples of materials following the suggestions can be designed. Examples of such materials for Thai secondary schools can be found in Watson Todd et al. (2002). While these materials allow immediate classroom implementation, their specific nature does not encourage the generation of generalised principles on which teachers can base the design of new sets of materials.

Secondly, the broad suggestions we have made above could be specified into principles usable for materials design through the setting of standards for secondary levels English and through the use of set texts which are amenable to incorporating the suggestions.

In this paper, we intend to investigate the second of these approaches. More specific and practice-oriented versions of the product and process objectives of the NEA may be found in the Ministry of Education (MoE) standards for secondary level foreign language education. We therefore intend to compare the objectives in the Act against these standards to see if the latter provide clearer guidelines for the implementation of the objectives.

We also intend to examine the textbooks and resources recommended by the Ministry of Education to see the extent to which they incorporate the objectives stated in the Act. Doing this, we hope to be able to highlight areas on which more work is needed if the reform of English language teaching at secondary level in Thailand is to become a reality.

Comparison of the National Education Act and Ministry of Education standards
The objectives in the NEA apply to all subjects across the curriculum and to all levels of education. In this paper, however, we are focusing on English language teaching at secondary level. We therefore need to see how the broad objectives can be applied to a more specific situation. To guide us, we can examine the curriculum standards set by the Ministry of

Education (2001a), which specify the objectives for foreign language learning in schools.

As with the NEA objectives, the MoE standards can be divided into product and process standards. We will look at these in turn and compare the standards against the objectives in the NEA.

As might be expected given that the standards are specific to foreign language learning, they give far more detail concerning knowledge of and skills in language than the NEA. For example, the standards include certain aspects of language and several broad functions that students are supposed to learn:

> **Substance 2 Standard 2.2**
> Understand the differences between Thai and English languages in terms of words, phrases, expressions and different types of sentences.

> **Substance 1 Standard 1.2**
> Ask for and give information, describe, compare, exchange ideas and knowledge about current problems and issues.

Perhaps more surprisingly, many of the other non-language-focused product objectives of the NEA are also included in the MoE standards. Table 1 below shows the product objectives of the NEA with sample quotes from their more specific manifestations in the standards.

NEA objective	Relevant quotation from the MoE standards
Thai culture	Understand the similarities and differences between Thai culture and the culture of the target language (Substance 2 Standard 2.2)
	Use English language in searching for knowledge relevant to other subjects to widen world knowledge (Substance 3 Standard 3.7)
Understanding of politics	-
Environmental awareness	-
Knowledge about oneself	Search for an effective way of learning a foreign language and for one's own effective learning style (Substance 1 Standard 1.2)
Careers and further study	Use English specifically for communication, management in learning, further education and careers (Substance 4 Standard 4.2)
Learning by oneself	Search for an effective way of learning a foreign language and for one's own effective learning style (Substance 1 Standard 1.2)
Good citizenship	Use English to work with other people harmoniously by being able to control oneself, respect other people's thoughts and ideas, express one's own feelings

	appropriately, and negotiate with and convince other people rationally (Substance 4 Standard 4.2)
Technology	Be able to communicate appropriately without interruptions through technology (Substance 1 Standard 1.2)
Thinking skills	Be capable of applying knowledge critically (Substance 1 Standard 1.1) Be capable of communicating ... creatively, efficiently and aesthetically (Substance 1 Standard 1.3)
Morals	-

Table 1   Product objectives in the Act and the standards

From Table 1, we can see that, while most objectives are considered in the standards, three of the NEA product objectives do not appear to be satisfactorily covered in the MoE standards, namely, understanding of politics, environmental awareness, and morals. However, the standards include two potential objectives which are not mentioned in the Act.

The first of these concerns the culture of the target language. The standards, for instance, state that students should be able to "express opinions about the culture, traditions, beliefs and lifestyles of the target language community" (Substance 2 Standard 2.1). As we saw above, however, the target language culture may be overemphasised in terms of its usefulness for Thai students.

The second potential objective mentioned in the standards but not the Act may have great long-term benefits for students. The standards include the need for students to "recognise the advantages of knowing English" (Substance 2 Standard 2.2) and to "realise the value of the language" (Substance 2 Standard 2.2). In other words, the standards argue that the teaching/learning process should aim to positively change students' attitudes towards learning English.

While matching the NEA product objectives with the MoE standards is relatively straightforward, attempting to match the two sets of process objectives is fraught with problems. The process objectives in the Act are stated as broad principles or approaches to guide the teaching/learning process. Earlier in this article, we suggested some tasks or procedures that could be used to put these principles into practice. While the standards also aim to put the principles into practice, the underlying rationale appears to be that methodological suggestions, or suggestions at the level of design, are most appropriate. Thus, the process-oriented standards tend to stress methodologies rather than principles or procedures (see Brown,

1994; Richards and Rodgers, 2001 for a discussion of these terms). Given the different bases behind the two sets of objectives, matching them is somewhat problematic and in the following discussion, there may be more inconsistencies between the two sets identified than would truly be apparent in practice. With this caveat in mind, we will attempt to compare the process objectives in the NEA with the MoE standards.

Despite the differences in the bases behind the objectives, there are some strong parallels between the NEA process objectives and the standards (taken from pages 20 and 21) as shown in Table 2.

In addition to the matches between the objectives and standards shown in Table 2, other NEA objectives are also considered in the standards, albeit in sections not directly addressing the teaching/ learning process. For example, learning in the community is emphasised in "using English to publicise and disseminate information and news about the community (Substance 4 Standard 4.2) and "present one's own ideas and thoughts about events, activities, goods or services in one's own community" (Substance 1 Standard 1.3); and using technology is mirrored in Substance 1 Standard 1.2 which states that students should "plan for learning using technology".

NEA objective	Relevant quotation from the MoE standards
Imparting knowledge, practising, drilling	Practice in memorisation and the act of doing something
Training in thinking skills	Linking knowledge and skills from various subjects to solve problems
Learning through authentic experience	Linking knowledge gained to real life; integration of new knowledge with existing knowledge by focusing on first-hand experience
Continuous assessment	Groupwork, self-evaluation, peer evaluation, assignments
Learner control over learning	Self-directed learning
Project work	Completing various activities and research collaboratively as project work

Table 2   Process objectives in the Act and the standards

From the analysis, we can see that most of the process aspects of the NEA which are not included in the standards concern the more specific and probably less important level of procedures (tiered tasks, ethical dilemmas and reflective activities). Most of the principles of learning, on the other hand, are included, with the exceptions of creating a learning environment and extensive reading. As with the product objectives, there are some

additional process objectives in the standards which do not appear in the NEA. Most notable among these are cooperative learning and content-based instruction (pp. 20-21). Despite these differences, there does seem to be a reasonable match between the NEA process objectives and the MoE standards.

Comparison of objectives and standards with recommended teaching materials

While the objectives in the NEA and the MoE standards provide broad guidelines for teachers to follow, their applicability to teaching is one step removed from the actual classroom. For many teachers, a bigger influence on how to teach is the textbook that is used. The Ministry of Education (2001b) recommends a wide range of textbooks and other pedagogic material that English language teachers at secondary level can use as the basis of courses. In this section, we intend to examine a selection of these materials to investigate whether the content and suggested techniques and assessment procedures fit the objectives and standards.

Before we conduct the comparison, it should be noted that the content and procedures in the materials are not the only criterion for their selection by the Ministry. Availability and costs can be a more important consideration, especially for underfunded schools upcountry. After all, no matter how useful and well-designed a book is, if it costs over 1,000 baht and is difficult to obtain, it cannot be used.

The textbooks that we will examine are:
* *Kernel* (O'Neill, 1971/1978);
* *Strategies* (Abbs and Freebairn, 1982);
* *Odyssey* (Kimbrough et al., 1983);
* *Blueprint* (Abbs and Freebairn, 1991).

In addition, we will also briefly consider two CD-ROMs which are recommended for computer-assisted language learning: *LANG Master Interactive English* and *Dynamic English 2*.

To be able to compare the textbooks with the NEA objectives and the MoE standards, we need to set categories for analysing the textbooks. To provide a wide coverage of applicable aspects of the textbooks, we used the following five categories:
* Language (e.g. grammar, skills, functions). The purpose of this category is to identify the types of language objectives focused on in the textbooks.
* Content. This category aims to identify the carrier content of the textbook using the classification of Ur (1996) discussed above.

- Culture. In this category we examine the culture behind the carrier content.
- Techniques. For this category, the student activities in the textbooks are analysed and classified into four types: mechanical drills, closed-ended exercises, interpretative exercises (which are open-ended and require some higher-level thinking), and project work.
- Assessment. Where the textbook includes assessment procedures in addition to student activities, these are classified into grammar tests, vocabulary tests, skills tests, self-assessment, and learning plans.

For the four textbooks we are analysing in this study, the content and procedures of the textbooks can be categorised as shown in Table 3. As with the other tables, information in brackets is marginally included in the textbooks.

From Table 3, we can see that few of the objectives stated in the NEA are put into practice in the recommended textbooks. For the product objectives, the only ones covered in the textbooks are knowledge of the language and possibly universal knowledge. For the process objectives, the textbooks apply imparting knowledge, practising and drilling for mastery in the teaching/learning process. The CD-ROMs add little to this, but do provide coverage of the technology product objective and the technology-based learning process objective.

Textbook	Reference	Language	Content	Culture	Techniques	Assessment
Kernel	O'Neill (1971/1978)	Grammar	Trivial	British	Mechanical drills	-
Strategies	Abbs and Freebairn (1982)	Grammar, (skills)	Trivial	British	Closed-ended exercises	Grammar tests
Odyssey	Kimbrough et al. (1983)	Grammar, functions	Trivial, general knowledge	American	Closed-ended exercises	-
Blueprint	Abbs and Freebairn (1991)	Grammar, (skills)	Trivial, (general knowledge)	British	Closed-ended exercises	Grammar tests

Table 3   Content and procedures in four recommended textbooks

This lack of coverage of the forward-looking objectives of the Act (and similarly of the MoE standards) in the textbooks used as the main shapers of English language curricula in Thailand may be a key factor in the slow progress towards the reform of educational practice. Many teachers feel constrained by a coursebook and it guides much teaching practice (Sparks-Langer et al., 2000). If the coursebook does not encourage

teachers to put the NEA objectives into practice, in most classrooms the objectives are unlikely to be reached.

It is noticeable that most of the MoE recommended textbooks are dated, largely because the practical constraints discussed above preclude the recommendation of more recent textbooks. It would be interesting, however, to know whether any of the more recently published textbooks provide more coverage of the objectives. To this end, we conducted a similar analysis of four more recent textbooks:

- *Atlas* (Nunan, 1995);
- *Cambridge English for Schools* (Littlejohn and Hicks, 1996);
- *English Firsthand* (Helgesen et al., 1999);
- *Opportunities* (Harris et al., 2000).

The findings of the analysis of these more recent textbooks are given in Table 4.

Textbook	Reference	Language	Content	Culture	Techniques	Assessment
Atlas	Nunan (1995)	Grammar, functions, strategies	Trivial, (general knowledge)	US	Closed-ended exercises, interpretative exercises	Self-assessment
Cambridge English for Schools	Littlejohn and Hicks (1996)	Grammar, vocabulary	General knowledge	British/ US	Closed-ended exercises, interpretative exercises, project work	Grammar tests, vocabulary tests, self-assessment, learning plans
English Firsthand	Helgesen et al. (1999)	Grammar, functions, skills	Trivial	US	Closed-ended exercises, interpretative exercises	Grammar tests
Opportunities	Harris et al. (2000)	Grammar, vocabulary, functions, strategies	Trivial	British	Closed-ended exercises, inductive exercises, groupwork	Grammar tests

Table 4   Content and procedures in four recent textbooks

From the summary of the more recent textbooks in Table 4, we can see that more of the objectives of the NEA are covered in these books than in the recommended textbooks. For the product objectives, the more recent textbooks provide coverage of knowledge of the language, skills in the language and some universal knowledge, and there is some attention paid to knowledge about oneself, knowledge and skills useful for careers and

further study, a capability to learn by oneself, and thinking skills. For the process objectives, the more recent textbooks apply imparting knowledge, practising, drilling for mastery, project work, continuous assessment procedures, and possibly training in thinking skills.

Although this coverage of the objectives is wider than in the recommended textbooks, no single textbook provides all of this coverage. Indeed, for the less common objectives, coverage is only provided in one of the books. Furthermore, several objectives are still overlooked in the textbooks, most notably Thai culture, understanding of politics, environmental awareness, good citizenship and morals as product objectives, and learning through authentic experience and learning in the community as process objectives. (It should be noted that it is unreasonable to expect a textbook to provide coverage of creating a learning environment and extensive reading.)

The overall picture in the more recent textbooks, therefore, is more promising. However, given their high price and the fact that they still do not provide adequate coverage of the objectives, recommending these textbooks does not seem to be a valid solution to the problem of how to put the NEA objectives into practice.

Implications of the analysis
Before we attempt to identify directions for future work based on this analysis, it may be helpful to provide a summary of the objectives of the NEA, together with the extent to which they are considered in the MoE standards, the recommended textbooks and the more recent textbooks. Such a comparison is made in Table 5 for the product objectives and Table 6 for the process objectives. In the tables, a tick shows that the objective is considered, a question mark means that it is marginally considered (such as in one of the textbooks only), and a blank space indicates that no consideration is given to that objective.

Product Objective	NEA objectives	MoE standards	Recommended textbooks	Recent textbooks
Knowledge of English	4	4	4	4
Skills in English	4	4		4
Thai culture	4	4		
Universal knowledge	4	4	?	?
Understanding of politics	4			
Environmental awareness	4			
Knowledge about oneself	4	4		?
Careers and further study	4	4		?
Learning by oneself	4	4		
Good citizenship	4	4		

Technology	4	4	4	4
Thinking skills	4	4		**?**
Morals	4			
Target language culture		4	4	4
Attitudes towards English		4		

Table 5 Comparison of product objectives

From Tables 5 and 6, we can see that there is a reasonable match between the NEA objectives and the MoE standards. The two main NEA objectives missing from the standards are the product objective of engendering morals in students and the process objective of extensive reading. The omission of these two objectives in the standards may need to be addressed.

The differences between the NEA objectives and the MoE standards are minor, however, when compared to the paucity of coverage of both objectives and standards provided in the MoE recommended textbooks. These textbooks provide coverage of only about a quarter of the product objectives of the NEA and about a sixth of the process objectives. Such poor coverage may be a crucial factor in the lack of progress of educational reform apparent in Thailand.

Process Objective	NEA objectives	MoE standards	Recommended textbooks	Recent textbooks
Imparting knowledge, practising, drilling	4	4	4	4
Creating a learning environment	4			
Training in thinking skills	4	4		**?**
Learning through authentic experience	4	4		
Using technology	4	4	4	4
Extensive reading	4			
Learning in the community	4	4		
Continuous assessment	4	4		4
Learner control over learning	4	4		**?**
Tiered tasks	4			
Project work	4	4		**?**
Ethical dilemmas	4			
Reflective activities	4			**?**
Cooperative learning		4		**?**
Content-based instruction		4		

Table 6 Comparison of process objectives

Generally this paper has followed a pattern from broad principle to specific practice. The NEA objectives provide the broadest guidelines for Thai education in general, and these are specified somewhat in their application to foreign language teaching in the MoE standards. Both of these should then be concretised for teachers in the form of classroom materials (in this case, the MoE recommended textbooks), but, as we have seen, there is a massive gap between the two sets of objectives, on the one hand, and their practical manifestations in textbooks, on the other. This gap is of the utmost importance when we consider that most classroom teachers have little time for or interest in reading the National Education Act or the MoE standards, and that the content of teaching and assessment in most secondary situations in Thailand is based mostly, and sometimes exclusively, on the textbook used.

How then can we rectify this situation and provide hope for progress in the reform of English language education in Thailand? We will examine three ways in which the NEA objectives may be put into practice in Thai education: replacing existing textbooks with more appropriate ones, supplementing existing curricula, and designing a new curriculum with materials and tasks.

The most obvious solution is to replace the MoE recommended textbooks with others which more closely match the NEA objectives. It would seem, however, that this solution is unlikely to achieve much. The practical constraints on the textbooks which can be used in secondary schools greatly limits the choice of replacement textbooks. Furthermore, even if these practical constraints of availability and costs did not exist, as we have seen the more recently published textbooks provide little more in the way of coverage of the objectives than the recommended textbooks. Indeed, as far as we are aware, some of the objectives (e.g. learning in the community) have never received any coverage in any published textbook.

A second potential solution is to produce and make available numerous learning tasks or procedures that fit the NEA objectives and MoE standards, such as those given in Watson Todd et al. (2002). If these are widely available and easily accessible, teachers could select suitable procedures and use them to supplement their present teaching based on the textbooks. As long as the status quo of inadequate textbooks continues, this solution should benefit student learning, but it is not a solution that is ideal in the long run.

Another solution is to design a new curriculum complete with materials and teaching and assessment procedures to replace the existing textbook-based curriculum. At first sight, it would appear that this is the goal of the new Basic Education Curriculum to be officially implemented nationwide in April 2003. However, in an attempt to increase the independence and ability of teachers and to make curricula more appropriate to each specific school, the Ministry of Education has decided not to prescribe materials and teaching procedures in the new curriculum. Instead, the new curriculum consists primarily of the MoE standards discussed above and each school is expected to produce their own materials and procedures.

At present, the implementation of the new curriculum relying on teachers to produce materials and procedures has led to several problems. Firstly, many teachers are simply too overworked to have time to prepare materials and procedures for the new curriculum (Fredrickson, 2002). Secondly, misconceptions and a lack of understanding about the principles underlying the standards has led to detrimental implementation of student-centred learning in some pilot schools (Bunnag, 2002). Thirdly, many teachers feel incapable of preparing quality materials, and the support training provided may be insufficient. Lastly, as we saw above, the standards need to be concretised before they can be applied to actual classrooms.

Given these problems, it is not surprising that some schools have decided to look for textbooks that closely fit the standards rather than prepare their own materials, with the aim of adding supplementary material to meet those standards not covered in the textbooks. As we have seen, however, given the poor coverage of the standards in both recommended and recently published textbooks, this approach may involve nearly as much preparation of supplementary materials as would be involved in designing a complete curriculum.

The picture, then, is not very hopeful. Textbooks provide little coverage of the objectives and standards; and teachers have little time, ability or understanding to prepare quality materials of their own. In the short run, then, the future of English language teaching at secondary level in Thailand is not promising. However, some brighter points have emerged from this analysis. Of the three potential solutions to the problem of reforming English language education in Thailand, the short-term measure of producing and making available numerous learning tasks or procedures that fit the NEA objectives and MoE standards could provide a way out of the situation in the long term as well.

Whether teachers design all of their own materials or design only supplementary materials, a large stock of tasks and procedures which fit the NEA objectives would be created. If each school designs their own materials, this stock would include a lot of redundancy and a mixture of well-designed and poorly-designed materials. If teachers could add any materials they design to a central database, and if this database were easily accessible by any teacher, teachers would have a wide range of materials, tasks and procedures following the NEA objectives and MoE standards available to them. They could then choose materials appropriate for their situation and students, and even design a whole curriculum from the database. With more communication and sharing between teachers and schools, the short-term measures of designing specific tasks and procedures could become a key direction for the future of English language teaching in Thailand.

A further potentially negative point that could be viewed more optimistically concerns those NEA objectives and MoE standards that are rarely, if ever, considered in existing materials. For example, there is a great dearth of teaching materials available for learning in the community, instilling morals in students, and engendering good citizenship. This lack of existing materials (and research literature) can be viewed as either a problem or an opportunity for Thai teachers. As an opportunity, the lack of materials provides the chance for Thai teachers to move away from the standard practice of adopting teaching ideas from other situations and applying them to Thailand. Instead, Thai teachers can become the generators of ideas in these areas, designing materials and tasks and conducting research into these underdeveloped educational objectives.

In this way, the educational reform process, while primarily aimed at improving students' learning, can also have a wider impact. The need for Thai-oriented materials to meet the requirements of the NEA objectives and MoE standards may lead to Thai teachers becoming more self-reliant and less dependent on the West. In other words, the educational reform process could provide the opportunity for Thailand to become a source of innovation and teaching ideas.

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