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Developing teacher awareness of language use and language knowledge in English classrooms: Four longitudinal cases

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Abstract

This paper presents a two-year longitudinal study of a collaboration between four researcher-and-teacher pairs. The ultimate goal is to raise the quality of English language teaching in Hong Kong by first improving teacher understanding of language knowledge and language use, then second, guiding teachers on how to adjust their English lesson planning accordingly. Methods used to evaluate the four teachers' growth in understanding included comprehensive interviews at the beginning and end of the study, and stimulated recall interviews immediately following the teaching of the lesson. Findings indicate that teaching behaviours indeed improved as a result of the collaboration. Areas of change included a deeper understanding of the concepts of language knowledge and language use; a better balancing of language knowledge and use in lessons; a greater use of inductive teaching methodology; and a differentiated use of error correction according to the focus of the lesson -- whether on language knowledge or language use. Factors contributing to change included the focus in discussions on pedagogical and content knowledge, as well as the collaborative, immediate and long-term reflective nature of intervention.

1. Introduction

Hong Kong ESL teachers place heavy emphasis on addressing language knowledge in classrooms. Indeed, language knowledge is often regarded by school teachers as the very foundation of learning English (Fullilove, 1992 & Richards, Gallo & Renandya, 2001, Karavas-Doukas, 1996). However, teachers are well-aware of the importance of language use during the process of teaching and learning a second language (CDC & HKEAA, 2007; Ellis 2003; Samuda, Johnson & Ridway, 2000; Samuda 2001; Swain & Lapkin 2001). A teacher's ability to reflect plays an important role in bridging the gap between concepts and practice. As Knezedivc (2001:10) claimed, "developing awareness is a process of reducing discrepancy between what we do and what we think we do." The present study, therefore, investigates the experience of four Hong Kong ESL teachers and their collaboration with researchers studying the development of teachers addressing language knowledge and language use in classrooms. It also aims to find out how well the collaboration will help translate what they believe into teaching practice.

The following questions guided this study:

RQ1: After collaborating with researchers, can teachers take their new concepts of the importance of language knowledge and/or language use in classrooms and truly implement them in their teaching practice?

RQ2: In what ways were teaching practices altered?

RQ3: What factors contribute to bringing about changes in teaching practices?

2. Theoretical framework

2.1 Language knowledge and language use

In this paper, two operational definitions were adopted. *Language knowledge* refers to the outward appearance or structure of language. Attributes are technical and practical knowledge that must be explicitly acquired by thoughts and actions, and are also transmittable. Learning situations of such should not involve unpredictability, i.e. of the target language application – it must be predictable. According to Chomsky (1968: ix), "knowledge of language is normally attained through brief exposure, and the character of the acquired knowledge may be largely predetermined." The meaning of "level of predictability" is two-fold. First, it refers to the degree to which the language is predictable. Second it also refers to the degree to which new (or predictable) messages and meanings are communicated. For example, grammar drills or question-and-answer practice involve no unpredictability because the kind of language knowledge and messages communicated can be predicted by the users. Explicit teaching of grammar, introduction of meta-language, comprehension checking and teaching vocabulary acquisition -- including meaning and pronunciation -- are examples of how teachers address language knowledge.

Language use, on the other hand, involves language production and the use of the physical (i.e., spoken or written) form of the target language, of which new meanings and information are conveyed by the forms in context. It involves the process of interpreting, processing incoming language data in some form for language development to take place. Such language application involves some or high degree of predictability which requires spontaneity from learners. For example, activities like creative role-plays, group discussions or drama plays involve high levels of unpredictability because the language needed to perform the tasks and the meanings to be communicated are unpredictable.

Figure 1, modified from the work of Littlewood (2000), shows the developmental continuum of language knowledge and language use which were adopted as the theoretical framework of this

study. Whether a learning activity assigned by a teacher is categorised as focusing on language knowledge or language use is determined by a) the degree to which the language used is predictable, and b) the degree to which learners use language to communicate new information and meanings. At one end of the continuum is non-communicative learning (language knowledge) and at the other end is authentic communicative practice (language use).

2.1.1 Types of language knowledge

Non-communicative learning refers to activities focusing on language forms such as substitution exercises. Pre-communicative language practices refer to activities that aim to practice language with some attention to meaning, but not communicating new messages with others. Examples of such are question-and-answer (Q/A) practice. Since these classroom activities do not involve any degree of unpredictability in terms of language and meaning; they are language knowledge-based classroom activities.

2.1.2 Types of language use

Communicative language practice refers to activity that aims to practice language in a context where it also exchanges new information, for example, information gap activities. *Structured* communication practice refers to activity that are intended to enable students to use language to communicate in situations that elicit pre-learnt language, but with some unpredictability, for example, structured role-play and simple problem solving. *Authentic* communication practice refers to activity which allows learners to use language to communicate in situations where the meanings are unpredictable – again, drama, role-plays and group discussions are good examples. All these classroom activities involve varying degrees of unpredictability in terms of language and meaning. They aim to allow students to use the language in order to exchange meaning, therefore they are language use-based classroom activities.

Non-communicative learning	Pre-communicative language practice	Communicative language practice	Structured communication practice	Authentic communication practice
Focusing on the forms of the language	Practicing language with some attention to meaning but not communicating new messages to others	Practicing language in context where it communicates new information	Using language to communicate in situations which elicit pre-learnt language with some unpredictability	Using language to communicate in situations where the meanings are unpredictable.
e.g. Grammar exercises and drills	e.g. "Question and answer" practice	e.g. Information gap activities	e.g. Structured role-play, simple problem solving	e.g. Creative role-play, complex problem solving
No unpredictability	No unpredictability	Low unpredictability	Some unpredictability	High unpredictability
Language knowledge ⟷ Language use				

Figure 1 Developmental continuum of language knowledge and language use

2.2 Content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge

This study was also grounded on the assumption that teachers need to possess content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge in order to be effective (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999). *Content* knowledge refers to knowledge about the subject matter being taught, which is critical for all teachers (Hollon, Roth & Anderson, 1991; Leinhardt, Putman, Stein & Baxter, 1991). *Pedagogical* knowledge refers to knowledge about how to teach. Scholars

have had long debates on the value of content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge (Newton & Newton, 2001). Shulman (1987) proposed that pedagogical content knowledge is of most importance and pointed out that *pedagogical content* knowledge represents the blending of content and pedagogy into an understanding of how particular topics, problems or issues are organised, represented and adapted to the diverse interests and abilities of learners and presented for instruction. The term pedagogical content knowledge was coined by Shulman to describe "that special amalgam of content and pedagogy that is uniquely the province of teachers, their own special form of professional understanding" (1987: 8). Pedagogical content knowledge is not the sum of content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge but the multiplication or synergy of the two factors. Using researcher-teacher collaboration, this study will examine how teacher knowledge could then be improved.

3. Research design and data collection

3.1 Design

This study adopted the qualitative paradigm principles (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2001) which helped capture the fluidity of a teacher's professional development progress. This project was initiated by the research team, and the design of the study is presented in Figure 2.

To ensure the study outcomes were sustainable in the long term, this study repeated the research cycle three times from 2005 to 2007. A complete phase of the study was tried out in the pilot study, which aimed to adjust the research methodology if necessary. After the completion of the pilot study, the researchers found that the research methodology was feasible and well-set, hence no changes were necessary.

3.2 Participants

Four researcher-teacher pairs were involved in the main study. Each researcher had one specific English teacher she observed and collaborated with throughout. That is, each researcher would work with the same teacher and observed six of her lessons from Phase 1 to Phase 3, i.e. two lessons per phase. The project schools were both located near the researchers' workplace, and the four participating teachers were randomly selected by the principals of the partner schools. There were three secondary school English teachers and one primary school English teacher involved in this project. The four researcher-teacher pairs conducted each phase of the project simultaneously within the same period of time.

3.3 Data to be collected

Data to be collected by each researcher-teacher pair included six observed lessons, researcher's observation notes, two in-depth teacher interviews, two joint planning meetings, two e-mails, and six stimulated recall interviews. In total, there were 24 lessons observed, four sets of researcher's observation notes, eight teacher interviews, eight joint planning meetings, eight e-mails, and 24 stimulated recall interviews to be collected in the entire study.

3.4 Procedures

3.4.1 Phase 1

In Phase 1 of the main study, two research lessons (each approximately 1.5 hours) were observed and video-recorded. Lessons were chosen based on times convenient to both teacher and researcher. The time lapse between the two lessons concerned was one month. During lesson observation, the researcher would make notes as they liked. The two observed lessons were used as baseline data for future comparative analysis. Researchers did not conduct any interventions in Phase 1. After completion of the second Phase 1 research lesson, each researcher used stimulated

recalls and semi-structured interviews to ask their teacher (N=4) how they perceived their own teaching.

3.4.1.1 Stimulated recall interviews

In the stimulated recall interviews, the researcher would play back the recorded lessons that the teacher had just completed. Before starting, the researcher briefed the teacher that the focus of the stimulated recall was to discover the teacher's thoughts while she had been when directing student attention to language knowledge or to language use. The teacher would take the initiative to pause the video and recall what was in her mind at that point. The researcher could also pause the video any time and ask the teacher about her thoughts at that particular moment.

3.4.1.2 Semi-structured, in-depth interviews

As for the semi-structured interview, the researcher asked teachers about their general conceptions on teaching. The same questions were set for Phase 1 and Phase 3 for the sake of comparing any changes. Questions regarded major considerations when planning English lessons; how to prioritise those considerations, with reasoning; teacher perceptions on language knowledge and language use; when and how to address language knowledge and language use; and what criteria to use when deciding whether to correct student errors during English lessons.

3.4.1.3 E-mail correspondence

After each lesson observation, in-depth interview and stimulated recall, each researcher would, via e-mail, communicate issues arising from the preliminary analysis so that the teacher could brainstorm ideas for the next observed lesson. Topics at issue could range from correcting linguistic errors to new ideas to improve content and procedures.

3.4.1.4 Joint planning sessions

After one month, a joint planning session was to be held between each researcher-teacher pair -- this intervention would also be repeated before Phase 3 began. In this joint planning session, the researcher would co-plan content and teaching methods for the upcoming research lesson with the teacher. However, the teacher would have also prepared a lesson plan that drafted her teaching objectives and procedures. The role of the researcher would then be to offer advice on how the teacher's concepts of language knowledge and language use could be best translated and implemented into their lessons.

3.4.1.5 Researcher team meetings

The four researchers also convened once per month for 2.5 hours to share findings and adjust the methodology of the main study if necessary.

3.4.2 Phase 2 & 3

In Phase 2, the research procedures were in principle the same as Phase 1. Two lessons were observed. Stimulated recall interviews were also held after each lesson observation. Each joint planning session (intervention) was conducted before the implementation of Phase 3. However, in-depth interviews were not conducted for Phase 2. In Phase 3, stimulated recall interviews were held immediately after the two observed research lessons. In-depth interviews were conducted, but delayed one month from Phase 3 completion -- this allowed identification of perception changes in a teacher's attention focus and evaluation of the sustainability of teaching practice.

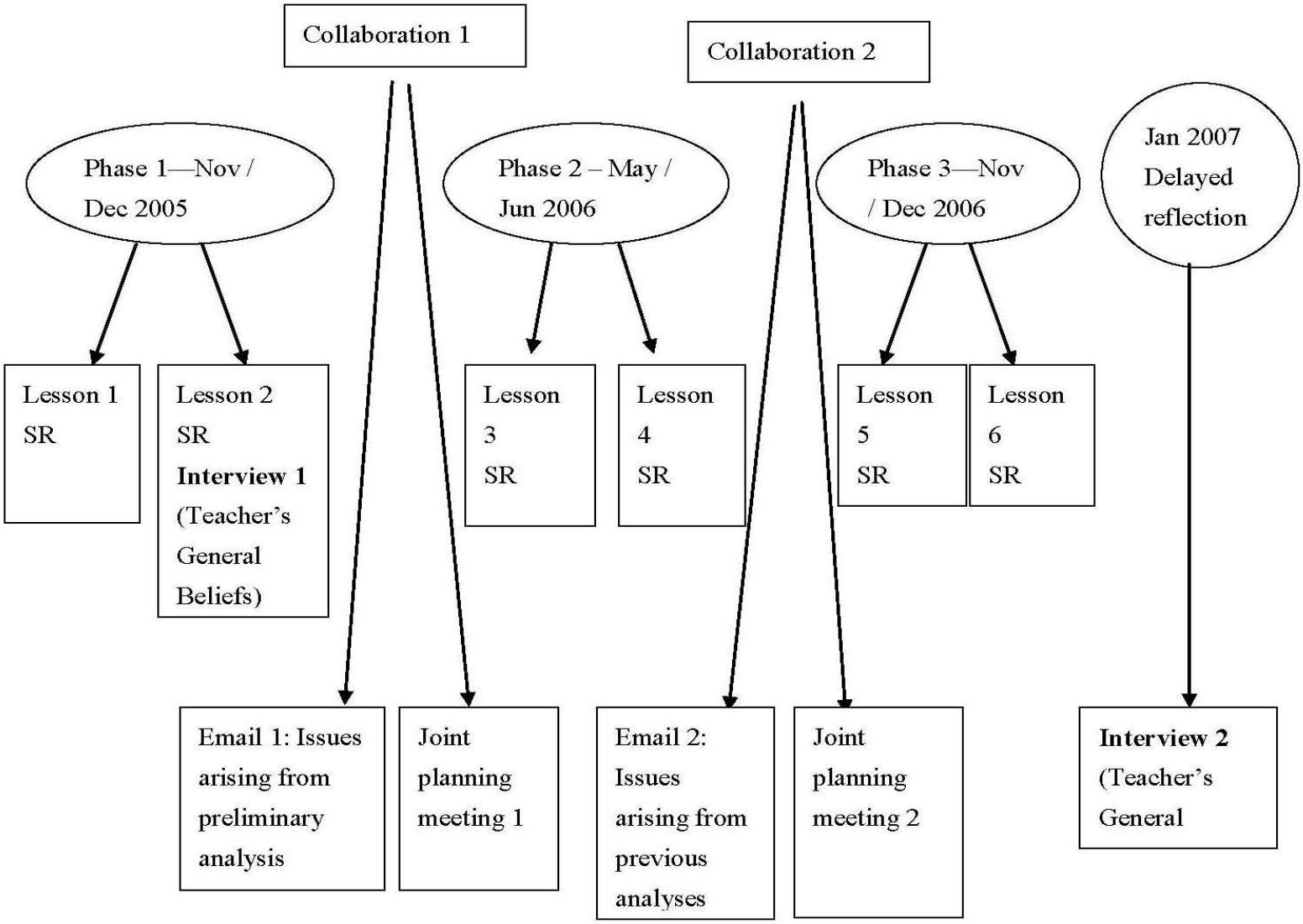

Figure 2 Work flow of the present study

Data collected from each case's lesson observations, in-depth interviews, simulated recalls and meetings were first transcribed in full from Cantonese to English by a research assistant, then analysed qualitatively and thematically by the researcher. Data was commonly shared among the whole project team.

For their comfort, all teacher interviews were conducted in their mother tongue, Cantonese. All interviews were audio-recorded, then transcribed into English by research assistants. Notes produced by each researcher from all lesson observations and from joint planning meetings with teacher were also analysed. The author and researcher of this paper was paired with the teacher named Rose. As with all pairs, Rose's data was analysed and cross-checked with other researcher-teacher pairs for further comparative analysis. All analyses followed the thematic approach analysis in order to discover overarching themes that emerged from data from individual participant teachers and across participant teachers (Daly, Kellehear & Gliksman, 1997). The process involves the identification of themes through "careful reading and re-reading of the data" (Rice & Ezzy, 1999, p. 258). It is a form of pattern recognition within the data, where emerging themes become the categories for analysis.

To ensure the data analysis was reliable, all data (including videotaped lessons, lesson summary and transcripts) were made available to the entire project team. Data analysis relating to the way teachers addressed language knowledge and language use was shared within project team meetings to see if other researchers would interpret them in the same way.

3.6 Participants

3.6.1 Rose

Rose (each teacher's name is a pseudonym) had been teaching for seven years. She deeply believed that grammar was the foundation to the proper learning, and effective use, of English. She admitted to spending substantial amounts of time addressing language knowledge, while also agreeing that language use was crucial to learning a foreign language. Before her participation in the study, she usually taught the grammar and vocabulary explicitly needed for that lesson, then went through several examples as consolidation. The remainder of the exercise would then be assigned as homework and consolidation.

3.6.2 Annie

Annie had been teaching English for 17 years. She believed in a communicative approach, and felt that language use was the most effective way to learn. Annie pointed out that task activities were best for high achievers, while exercises were more suitable for low achievers. (For distinctions between task and exercise, see Nunan, 2004.) Annie considered good language knowledge to be foundational for performing a language task. Hence, for junior forms she emphasised grammar, while with senior forms she aimed to develop language use abilities. Thus, for this study, she aimed to focus on improving her teaching with senior form students.

3.6.3 Winnie

Winnie had taught in several different schools, with over a decade of service. She believed language use was more important because of its ability to help students expand their knowledge. However, she admitted that in her teaching she focused more on language knowledge. Winnie usually taught the students the specific grammar or language knowledge needed before she assigned each exercise to them.

3.6.4 Mandy

Mandy was a relatively young teacher who was in her mid-20s. She had been teaching for three years in a primary school and believed in task-based teaching and learning because of her own teacher training. She believed TBL was the best approach to teach and learn English because being able to use the target language was the primary objective of learning a second/foreign language. However, she focused more on language knowledge in lessons and assignments because of pressure to do so from parents and schools.

4. Findings and discussions

All data offered and collected by the participant teachers was analysed in line with key guiding questions. The four teachers all displayed a clear attitudinal change on addressing language knowledge and language use in classroom practice.

4.1 (RQ1) After collaborating with researchers, can teachers take their new concepts of the importance of language knowledge and/or language use in classrooms and truly implement them in their teaching practice?

To answer Research Question 1 (RQ 1), it is important to first uncover the concepts that participant teachers held about teaching and learning -- particularly in the aspects of language knowledge and language use -- before the commencement of the project. Interviews from Phase 1, therefore, served as the starting point of analysis. The second step then, is to objectively examine each teacher's practice to see whether they truly follow what they believe. If not, examining whether collaboration with researchers can help teachers implement what they believe more consistently into their teaching practice will help to answer RQ 1.

4.1.1 Phase 1

Participant teachers all agreed that language use was more important than language knowledge in language learning at Phase 1. The representative views were expressed as follows during the in-depth interview 1 (IDI1):

> Excerpt 1:
>
> Language use is more important because it is the purpose of acquiring knowledge. (Winnie IDI1, 24)

> Excerpt 2:
>
> I pay more attention to language use because I was trained to use communicative approach in my study. (Annie IDI1, 35)

However, three participant teachers, those other than Annie, admitted that they did not put what they believe into practice. Instead, for various reasons, they put substantial amounts of time and attention into language knowledge in their classrooms. The reasons given for focusing more on language knowledge were: time constraints (Excerpt 3); student English proficiency (Excerpt 4); and assessment (Excerpt 5).

> Excerpt 3:
>
> It is necessary to acquire language knowledge to master its proper use…Earlier, I considered drilling exercises to be more important than tasks. When I did not have enough time in a lesson, I often made the students finish the drilling exercises and skipped the tasks…although the school adopted task-based teaching and learning approach. (Rose IDI1, 48)

> Excerpt 4:

> I prefer to focus on one thing at a time. My students are not at the high level of English ability. I think they will not feel confused if I teach them step by step. If I require them to use the language without an understanding of the forms, it will de-motivate them to learn. (Winnie IDI1, 52)

> Excerpt 5:
> I focus on teaching form more than meaning. I have to provide some revision exercises for them because I hope they can do well in the assessment. I am very worried that they will make the same mistakes in the assessment as they do in the exercises. (Mandy IDI1, 39)

The above teachers, i.e. all except Annie, admitted that they spent more time on addressing language knowledge in their lessons. According to Annie's own account, she reiterated her strong beliefs on employing language use in her teaching. However, based on the observation of the researcher, the opposite was found. This echoed what Breen, et al (2001: 496) indicated, "…despite individual diversity in the teachers' enacting of their role, *as a collective* there is an underlying and consistent pattern between the ways they think about their work, and the ways in which they act in the language class."

In Annie's lesson, she went through some new vocabulary with the help of phonics, then introduced phrases and sentence patterns used in the video before the students watched a TV programme about Hong Kong tourism. After watching the video, an error corrections task -- which was focused on the use of preposition, singular/plural, adjectives/adverbs and articles -- was assigned to the students after her demonstration. Finally, she assigned students to write about six Hong Kong attractions as homework. (For lesson summary, see Appendix 1.)

Annie's lesson at Phase 1 was largely focused on addressing language knowledge, which was non-communicative learning and pre-communicative language practice-based. This showed that teachers working in the same context might believe in a set of shared principles but implement them through diverse practices.

4.1.2 Phases 2 & 3

After Phase 1 and the joint planning session with researchers, participant teachers all indicated that their awareness of addressing language use in classroom teaching had been enhanced. Rose gave a representative view on the importance of language use (Excerpt 6).

> Excerpt 6:
>
> From my experience in planning lessons jointly with you a few times, I found that it was good to make the students do authentic activities and tasks right after I gave input to them. (Rose IDI2, 50)

In Phase 2 & 3, teachers not only indicated that their awareness of addressing language knowledge and language use was enhanced, but Winnie, Mandy and Rose's lessons also transformed into both structured and authentic communication practices, which involve high levels unpredictability. Rose's lesson was the most representative (For lesson summaries of Rose, Winnie and Mandy, see Appendix 2-4).

Rose asked students to plot a life chart of Jackie Chan's ups and downs after reading several pieces of news about him. In order to fulfil the tasks, students were required to read three news cuttings and translate their understanding into a chart. Student presentations also involved

authentic communication and a high level of language use. This lesson involved a high degree of unpredictability.

Annie, whose teaching was largely language knowledge-based at Phase 1, had also switched to a more language use-based teaching after Phase 1 and 2. In Annie's lesson, she cited, as background information, three examples that showed students the methods for rearranging sentences. Students then worked in groups to rewrite their classmates' work. Annie's lesson could be defined as structured communicative language practice, as it required students to use language to communicate in situations that elicit pre-learnt language with some predictability. (For lesson summary, see Appendix 5.)

RQ 1 intended to investigate whether teachers' concepts on the importance of addressing language knowledge and language use in classrooms could be translated into their teaching practices with the collaboration of researchers. The following table summarises the findings of RQ1:

Table 1: Summary of teachers' beliefs on language knowledge & language use

	Phase 1							
	Rose		***Mandy***		***Annie***		***Winnie***	
LU is more important than LK	IDI1, 41		IDI1, 33		IDI1, 35 (Excerpt 2)		IDI1, 24 (Excerpt 1)	
Admitted focused more on LK	IDI1, 48 (Excerpt 3)		IDI1, 39 (Excerpt 5)		Did not admit but was observed otherwise (IDI1, 42)		IDI1, 52 (Excerpt 4)	
	Phase 2 & 3							
LU awareness enhanced	Lesson 5 (Ph3) (Figure 3) / IDI2, 50 (Excerpt 6)		Lesson 4 (Ph2) (Figure 6)		Lesson 5 (Ph3) (Figure 5)		Lesson 4 (Ph2) (Figure 7)	
	Changes between Phases							
Type of lessons	***Phase 1***	***Phase 2***	***Phase 1***	***Phase 2***	***Phase 1***	***Phase 2***	***Phase 1***	***Phase 2***
	PCLP & CLP	SCP & ACP	PCLP & CLP	SCP / ACP	NCL & PCLP	SCP	PCLP & CLP	SCP / ACP

NCL: Non-communicative learning

PCLP: Pre-communicative language practice

CLP: Communicative language practice

SCP: Structured communication practice

ACP: Authentic communication practice

4.2 (RQ2) In what ways were teaching practices altered?

4.2.1 Teaching practice

This study found that changes to teaching practice by participant teachers included: *teaching procedures; time allocation to language knowledge and language use; use of inductive methodology;* and *correction of students' errors and mistakes*.

Language use was undeniably important in the eyes of participant teachers, but language knowledge was still considered important in classroom teaching. However, the teaching procedures were changed. All participant teachers felt that language knowledge had to be presented before language could be used in context. Teachers believed that teaching language knowledge first provided students with the necessary language input which enabled them to perform given tasks later in the lesson. All four teachers had similar views on integrating language knowledge and language use in their lessons during simulated recall interviews (SRI) and in-depth interviews 2 (IDI2).

> Excerpt 7:
>
> I teach the language knowledge essential for the students to do the tasks when they are not able to do so. (Annie SRI4, 46)

> Excerpt 8:
>
> Now my teaching procedures are: language input, task, then consolidation. For consolidation, it can be workbook or worksheets. Before, the procedures were: language input, drills, then consolidation. Task, to me, is optional and let students to have fun. (Rose IDI2, 72)

Excerpt 9:

I usually focus on teaching forms at the beginning of a lesson. I make students use the language afterwards… I design the activities and tasks in such a way that the students would have an opportunity to use the language items. (Winnie IDI2, 50)

Excerpt 10:

It [this project] made me aware of my teaching approach. That is, I introduced the form and gave the students an opportunity to practice it by arranging communicative activities for them. (Mandy IDI2, 82)

4.2.2 Time allocation of language knowledge and language use

After taking part in the project, one obvious change among all participant teachers was in the time they allocated to language knowledge and language use when teaching. In Phase 1, according to the researcher's observational notes, Rose spent the full lesson teaching present perfect tense in the first lesson – similarly, Winnie spent more time on language knowledge than language use. Taking Rose as an example, the researcher noted her teaching procedures, then categorised each teaching step as language knowledge or language use. The observational notes revealed that all Rose's teaching steps were addressing language knowledge. (For lesson summary, see appendix 6.) In the last in-depth interviews, Winnie and Rose reflected on their changes.

Excerpt 11:

I will reconsider the amount of time that I spend on language knowledge before I make them use the language in the future. For example, when I taught past tenses in the previous lesson you observed, I thought that it was not enough for the students to learn the forms and do the exercise correctly. They should also be able to use the appropriate

tense to write a story. I did not think in this way earlier. I think I have become more aware of language use. (Winnie IDI2, 73)

Excerpt 12:

Now, I usually move the step of doing tasks before doing grammar exercises. I also felt that I became more flexible in planning a lesson. (Rose IDI2, 66)

4.2.3 Use of inductive methodology

In Phase 1, teachers used the inductive methods less. The researcher's notes indicated that when introducing tenses, Rose adopted a direct instruction approach in several teaching points. (For lesson summary, see Appendix 6.) However, all participant teachers later indicated that they adopted inductive methods when addressing language knowledge instead of explicit direct teaching. This showed that the teachers' practice of addressing language knowledge had slowly evolved from non-communicative practice to communicative practice (see Table 1). During the stimulated recall interviews, Mandy, Winnie and Rose explained how they had adopted this approach.

Excerpt 13:

When I teach at the stage of input at the beginning of the lessons, I cite examples to teach sentence structures and form. When the students work in pairs and in groups, I focus on teaching meaning. (Mandy SRI4, 83)

Excerpt 14:

I would prefer making the students explore the forms on their own because they will have an opportunity to think. Besides, they will remember the forms better if they figure them out on their own. (Winnie SRI4, 27)

Excerpt 15:

I seldom show them the rules at the beginning. I often cite some examples and ask students to observe the rules. I tell them the rules afterwards. (Rose SRI4, 44)

4.2.4 Correction of student errors and mistakes

Teachers' reflective accounts indicated that they had learnt not to pay much attention to student errors or mistakes when the lesson focus was on language use. In Phase 1, teachers would correct student mistakes whenever possible. In Rose's lesson, she corrected her students' pronunciation mistakes while she was checking a comprehension exercise with the class.

Rose:	Okay. So look at Part B, the first question. Not difficult, the e-mail message is about … What is about? It's about …
Student:	A.
Rose:	A, very good, a visit to a shopping centre. Which shopping centre? Andy Chan, which shopping centre?
Student:	New …
Rose:	New … New …
Student:	New Torn …
Rose:	New Torn? Is it Torn? New Town …
Student:	New Town Pi…
Rose:	Pizza? New Town Pizza? (Students laughed). Is it New Town

Pizza? New Town …Try, try. You can say that. (wrote 'pla' on the blackboard, and showed the student 'la'). This is … this is … 'la' is …

Student: /la:/.

Rose: /la:/. (showed 'pla'.) Okay, here.

Student: …/ta:/…

Rose: Hah? /ta:/? (Students laughed). All right. 'la' is /la:/. 'pla' is /pla:/. (wrote 'za' on the blackboard.) /pla:/, this is …

Student: /z□/.

Rose: /z□/, very good. Say it. New … (the student was laughing). What's wrong. Tell me, New … (the student was still laughing and Rose let him sit down). Okay, Class, together, New Town Plaza.

Student: New Town Plaza.

(Rose's research lesson 1 Phase 1)

Rose later explained that 'worry' was what drove her to correct student errors while teaching.

Excerpt 16:

Earlier, I focused more on teaching knowledge. Therefore, I dominated most of the teaching time in class and students had less opportunity to use the language in terms of speaking and writing. I worried that they made too many mistakes so I gave them a lot of drilling exercises. Now I think that I should give students an opportunity to use the language. In this way, they can really master the knowledge. (Rose IDI2, 69)

Other teachers also admitted that they would correct student errors if the mistake was made on language knowledge and was necessary to perform a task and/or crucial for language use. Annie and Winnie explained their reasoning.

> Excerpt 17:
>
> I do not correct their mistakes when they discuss. In this lesson, since they wrote their ideas on transparencies and they would do another writing task, I felt that it was necessary to correct their mistakes. (Annie IDI2, 82)

> Excerpt 18:
>
> I usually correct their grammatical errors, but I do not correct the mistakes that they make in preparing for oral presentation. (Winnie IDI2, 61)

RQ 2 aimed to examine which teaching practice would be altered. Table 2 summarises the findings.

Table 2: Summary of teachers' concepts of language knowledge & language use

	Annie	Rose	Winnie	Mandy
Teaching procedures: language input → tasks	SRI, 46 (Excerpt 7)	IDI2, 72 (Excerpt 8)	IDI2, 50 (Excerpt 9)	IDI2, 82 (Excerpt 10)
Time allocated to both LK & LU	Not mentioned	IDI2, 66 (Excerpt 12)	IDI2, 73 (Excerpt 11)	Not mentioned
Using inductive methodology	Not mentioned	SRI4, 44 (Excerpt 15)	SRI4, 27 (Excerpt 14)	SRI4, 83 (Excerpt 13)
Not to correct student errors during tasks	IDI2, 82 (Excerpt 19)	IDI2,69 (Excerpt 16)	IDI2, 61 (Excerpt 20)	IDI2, 77 (Excerpt 18)

4.3 (RQ3) What factors contribute to bringing about changes in teaching practices?

Participant teachers were generally receptive to the collaboration with researchers in order to enhance their awareness of addressing both language knowledge and language use in their

classroom practices. Evidence showed that teacher lessons evolved from non-communicative learning and pre-communicative language practice to communicative language practice, structured communication practice and authentic communication practice. Results found echoed previous studies (e.g. Flores, 2005; Kerkes, 2001; Lederman, 1999). The contributing factors to these changes can be attributed to the following three items.

Pedagogical content knowledge indicates how much a teacher understands the relationship between content and pedagogy, and how to blend them into a language lesson which meets the needs of learners of with differing abilities. Participant teachers in this study seemed to possess sufficient content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge due to their academic training; however, pedagogical content knowledge was deemed insufficient at the beginning of the research stage. Annie was a typical example. She possessed the relevant and necessary teaching qualifications and understood the communicative language teaching approaches and methodologies gained through her training, knowledge that she also demonstrated during her in-depth interviews. However, her teaching practice, as observed by the researcher, lacked this feature. (For Annie's lesson summary, see Appendix 1.) The pre-, while-, and post-task were all language knowledge based even though she emphasised the importance of language use. The development and application of pedagogical content knowledge requires the necessary subject knowledge, awareness of pedagogical issues associated with the students being taught, and the ability to bring the two together through appropriate instructional activities. As Turner-Bisset (2001) concluded, one characteristic of successful teaching is the usage of the "fullest form" of pedagogical content knowledge (p.141). As her researcher observed, Annie's ability to bring the two together was absent in the beginning.

After joint planning sessions with researchers, participant teachers' pedagogical content knowledge was better mastered and applied in Phase 2 lessons, and especially in Phase 3. This

suggested that the pedagogical content knowledge of teachers was greatly enhanced with the help of a third party. This idea was also supported by Grugeon, Inskip, Cox, Scrivener, Shaw, Smith & Symonds (1989). In one of Annie's Phase 3 lessons, she required students to underline the incorrect sentences in their own work individually without explaining anything first. She then stopped their work and cited some incorrect sentences as examples and pointed out some student common errors regarding verbs. Subsequently, she required the class to work in groups to find and correct four incorrect sentences, which would then be shared with the class. This lesson showed that her pedagogical content knowledge had turned a new page, as her teaching objective had become clearer and the task procedures were set to meet a variety of student needs. She knew a teacher's explanation must come after students attempted to work on their own -- otherwise student learning styles would become passive and reactive. And indeed, at the lesson's end, the researcher observed that Annie's students were able to achieve the learning objective.

This study also found that the sufficiency of a participant teacher's pedagogical content knowledge did not solely depend on their teaching experiences, but also on their willingness to reflect and adapt to changes in classroom situations. Teachers should be motivated to self-analyse to improve their teaching practice. ***Immediate reflection*** after lessons is another factor contributing to a teacher's professional development, a finding which is echoed by other studies. (For recent examples, see Bullough, Jr. & Pinnegar, 2001; Kennis & McTaggart, 2000; Lee & William, 2005; and Swartz, 2004.) Reflections, according to Cruickshank & Applegate (1981: 553) "help teachers to think about what happened, why it happened, and what else could have been done to reach their goals." Self-understanding in the form of reflection on one's own pedagogical content knowledge should come before improving substantial content knowledge or pedagogical knowledge. Developing a teacher's pedagogical content knowledge did not automatically occur from experience. It should be cultivated through experimental learning in combination with timely reflective practice, as suggested by Merriam & Caffarella (1991).

Immediately after their lessons, teachers participating in this study reflected on their teaching through stimulated recall interviews in which they and researchers selected and viewed episodes of the classroom teaching showing evidence of attention to language knowledge and language use. Each project teacher was prompted to reflect on *what* she was doing, and *why* she was doing it in the hope that such practice could positively influence teacher development. Teachers who frequently self-reflect are more likely to become teachers who understand diverse students needs and thus adopt appropriate pedagogical and instructional means to deliver an effective lesson. As Bartlett (2000) suggested, experience alone is not sufficient for professional growth, while experience coupled with reflection is a powerful impetus for professional development.

Teacher reflections in this study were also enabled by ***collaboration with researchers.*** Other studies have found similar results (see Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Fullan, 1995; Hargreaves, 1995; Lieberman, 1995; Smylie, 1995; Smylie & Hart, 1999; Zeichner, 2003). Teachers' comprehension of their own practice -- such as how to address language knowledge and language use -- was deepened when they shared it with a researcher who had similar values and sought similar changes. Participant teachers were invited to take part in a joint planning session with a researcher to brainstorm what and how to deliver the focus of the next research lesson. Researchers then helped teachers to translate what they believed into practical pedagogical actions in the lesson plan. These joint planning sessions also engendered a non-isolated and collaborative classroom which welcomed dynamic pedagogical inputs which could then be incorporated into classroom practice. Both Briscoe (1996) & Day (1999) believed that a teacher's professional growth was associated with teacher learning and professional development. After joining the project, all participant teachers noticed positive changes in their teaching practice.

Excerpt 20:

I learned to focus on a few episodes in teaching. I used to focus on content and words earlier when the students used readers as learning materials. In the lessons you observed for the project, I focused on talking about other issues, such as reading between lines. (Winnie, IDI2, 62)

Excerpt 21:

The project stimulated me to think of the effective methods for helping students understand language knowledge and complete tasks. (Annie, IDI2, 55)

Excerpt 22:

In my early days of teaching, I often made the students do drilling exercise after I gave them input. For example, I asked the students to do drilling exercises to assess their understanding of vocabulary and grammar items. From my experience in planning lessons jointly with you a few times, I found that it was good to make the students do authentic activities and tasks right after I gave input to them. (Rose IDI2, 47)

Excerpt 23:

It made me be aware of the two terms – language knowledge and use. That is, I introduced the form and gave the students an opportunity to practice it by arranging communicative activities for them. (Mandy, IDI2, 42)

Overall, it was found that the keys to effective teacher development were pedagogical content knowledge combined with immediate post-lesson reflection and/or collaboration with researchers – all with the goal of enhancing teacher awareness of language knowledge and

language use. Figure 3 illustrates a simple pathway to guide both novices and experienced teachers how to better reflect on their teaching skills.

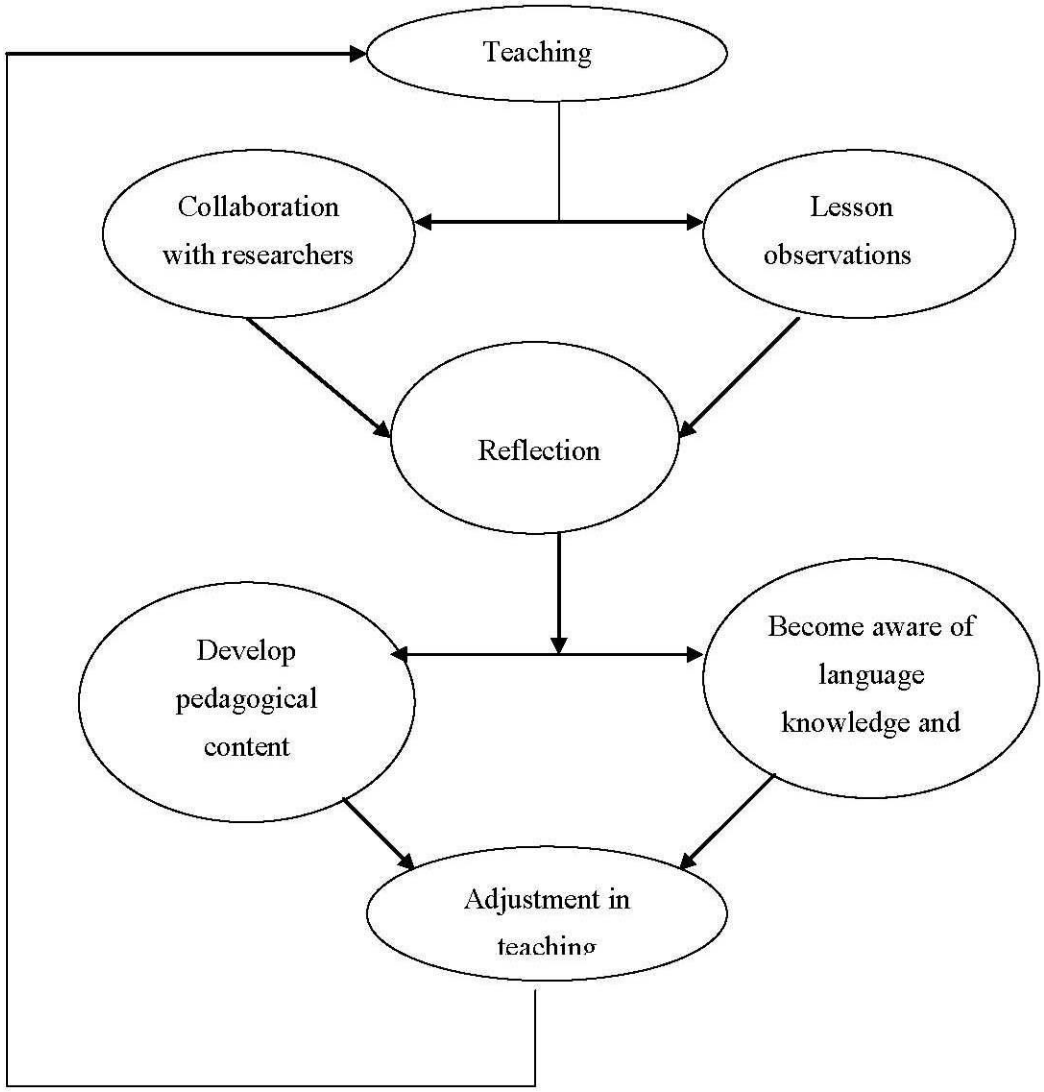

Figure 3 Pathways to teachers' professional development

5. Concluding remarks

What determines how well teachers teach is based on their personal experience, the experience of their own education, and their teaching environment. Teacher expectations for their students are shaped by their own beliefs toward teaching and learning, which are projected throughout their instructional practices. However, not all EFL teachers are true to their own beliefs when it comes

to their teaching practice. Thus, how closely a teacher adheres to their personal teaching philosophy is a crucial factor in the success or failure of their teaching practice. Importantly, although teachers considered language use a crucial element in language acquisition, they could not convert their teaching beliefs and concepts into pedagogical practices. However, on an encouraging note, with various types of researcher collaboration, teaching practices can be improved.

Through a series of immediate post-lesson reflections, interviews and joint planning meetings, teacher pedagogical content knowledge was enhanced. That is, teachers were able to better self-reflect and convert their beliefs into more effective ways to address and teach both language knowledge and language use -- despite constraints they felt in early stages of the study. They also became more flexible in lesson planning, and were willing to change their original plans due to contextual variations. In addition, teacher procedural knowledge was enhanced. They were more aware that they should allocate more time to language use and less to correcting student errors. An additional breakthrough was the use of inductive methods to integrate language use and language knowledge..

At last, EFL students can be led into a promising land of successful language acquisition, thanks to the critical guidance of informed researchers and reflective, devoted teachers.

Appendix 1: Researcher's summary of observation of Annie's Lesson 1 (Phase 1)

Lesson focus

Video viewing about Hong Kong tourism

Start

T checked answers on the worksheets about a video by helping students with the *spelling of words* (sometimes with the help of phonics), *explaining words* (sometimes with the help of Chinese) and *introducing phrases and sentence patterns.*

Pre-task

Task 1

- T made Ss *read the questions* on worksheet
- T played the video

Task 2

- Assigned an *error-correction task* to Ss
    - Explained the four kinds of mistakes that Ss would have to identify – preposition, singular/plural, adjectives/adverb, and use of articles a/the
    - Emphasised there were no tense errors in the article provided
    - T demonstrated the correction of mistakes in the first part of the article by using Q/A

Task

Task 1

- T *introduced words with the help of phonics* while talking about three Chinese cultures mentioned in the video
- T *introduced the words in the vocabulary list*
- Ss followed T to *read aloud the words* in the vocabulary list

Task 2

- Ss worked on the second part of the article and T allowed them to discuss
- T checked answers with Ss by using Q/A

End

- T assigned a homework writing task to Ss: Write about six attractions in Hong Kong

Appendix 2: Researcher's summary of Rose's Lesson 5 (Phase 3)

Lesson focus

Reading

Pre-task

T distributed three pieces of unfavourable news about Jackie Chan to Ss and Ss read them individually

Task

- T explained the meaning of 'ups and downs' and plotted a chart of the ups and downs in Jackie Chan's life on a slide by Q/A
- Ss plotted their own charts of ups and downs individually and shared the work with their friends in groups

End

- Two Ss shared their work in front of the class
- T shared her ups and downs in life

Appendix 3: Researcher's summary of Winnie's Lesson 4 (Phase 2)

Lesson focus

Reading

Pre-task

- T explained to Ss the meaning of 'reading between the lines' and three steps for helping Ss understand the hidden meaning of lines
- T introduced the background and relationship between two characters and read Conversation A between the two characters
- Ss thought about the hidden meaning of a line in Conversation A individually and T checked their level of understanding by Q/A afterwards

Task

- T read Conversation B and required Ss to work in pairs to answer the guided questions and write a conclusion by following the sentence pattern given
- Ss formed groups and chose a line for analysing its hidden meaning and T checked their level of understanding by Q/A afterwards

Appendix 4: Researcher's summary of Mandy's Lesson 4 (Phase 2)

Lesson focus

Reading a poem

Pre-task

- Ss read the poem aloud by following T.
- T demonstrated examples of action verbs for snowflakes and people, as well as words for body parts -

- Ss then looked for these words in the poem and thought of others by Q/A

- T provided a sentence pattern for Ss writing their own poems and showed an example

Task

- Ss worked in groups
- 5 groups shared their work by reading their own poems aloud, along with motions

Appendix 5: Researcher's summary of Annie's Lesson 5 (Phase 3)

Lesson focus

Writing

Pre-task

- As background information, T cited three examples to teach Ss methods for rearranging sentences in the first two paragraphs

Task

- Ss worked in groups and tried to rewrite the first two paragraphs of three essays written by their classmates
- T and Ss worked together on the three essays by Q/A

Appendix 6: Researcher's summary of Rose's Lesson 1 (Phase 1)

Lesson focus

Tenses

Task

- *Ss followed T in reading vocabulary aloud* from an e-mail
- T guided Ss to do the exercise following the text of an e-mail:
    - *T introduced the basic elements of an e-mail* by comparing it with a homepage
    - Individual Ss gave answers for the exercise
    - T asked Ss to point out the places of the text where they found the answers; introduced words with the help of Chinese and phonics; and corrected grammatical mistakes made by Ss

- T asked Ss two questions which were not included in the textbook to help them understand the meaning of the logos used in an e-mail, and to identify the tense used (past tense)
- T required Ss to underline the verbs in the e-mail that were in the past tense form, and the time words for the past tense; Ss performed task individually
- T required Ss to compare their work with other Ss and they did so
- T checked answers with Ss and revised the rules for the use of the simple present tense by using Q/A
- *T drew a figure and demonstrated with examples to explain the time lines for using the simple present and past tense*, and asked individual Ss to figure out the time words for the past tense
- T posted word cards on the blackboard and asked individual Ss to write the past forms of the verbs, and also required Ss to categorise these verbs into groups by using Q/A afterwards
- *T introduced the categories of regular and irregular verb forms for the past tense*
- Ss worked on the worksheet, writing the past forms of verbs
- T checked answers by asking Ss to read them aloud
- *T taught Ss the methods of using an auxiliary to form negative sentences in the past tense*

Post-task

- Ss worked on an exercise in the grammar book about the use of the past tense
- T checked answers by using Q/A

End

- T brought up the structure of 'verb + to be' and required Ss to read the notes in the book
- T assigned homework

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