

Centre for Language in Education & Graduate Programmes Office

ACADEMIC WRITING SEMINAR SERIES for POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS & ACADEMIC STAFF



Seminar (4)

Collecting and analysing data for educational research

In this session we will consider methods of data collection and analysis in educational research. Ways of analysing comparative and descriptive data, as well as data obtained from interviews, print texts, online discussion forums, classroom discourse, and textbooks will be addressed with specific examples. This session will be useful to those who are interested in research on language and education in general.

Speaker: Dr. Marc Xu

Date: 24 Mar 2010 (Wed)

Time: 6 pm – 7:30 pm

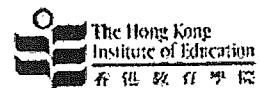
Venue: B1-LP-06

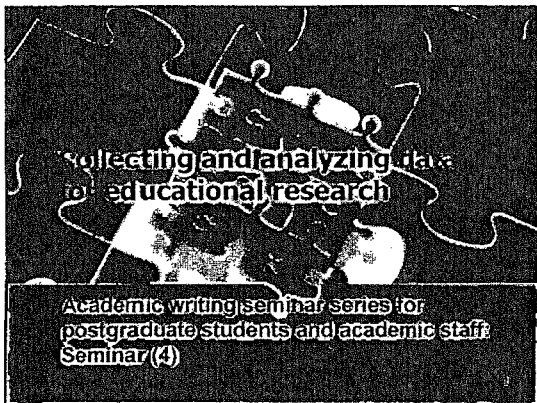


Dr. Marc Xu

Marc Xu is Assistant Professor in the Department of English at the Hong Kong Institute of Education, from a disciplinary background in Applied Linguistics and Intercultural Education. He is Associate Department Programme Coordinator of Master of Arts in Teaching English as an International Language (MATEIL). Dr. Xu is also the Principal Investigator of a TDG project on developing an Academic Writing Handbook for Students of Language and Education Programmes. He has published book chapters, and articles in international journals including *English Australia Journal*, *World Englishes*, and *Asian Englishes*.

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A 'Teaching' Story (Narrative)

October 1992 ... teaching English ...
30 students ... power failure ... check
out ... dismiss the class ... surprised ...
candles ... 'Teaching by Candlelight'.

2

One 'story', two styles

- **Teaching by candle-light:**
- It happened in October 1992 when I was teaching English to a class of about 30 students in the evening. There was a power failure about half an hour after I started teaching. So it was completely dark because it was late autumn. Being a one-month-old inexperienced teacher, I was at a loss what to do, and thought the students would be "excited" because they wouldn't be "bored" by the classroom teaching. I raised my voice in the dark and told the students that I would check what was happening and that I would be back very soon.

3

One 'story', two styles

- I rang the electrical service department on campus and was informed that unfortunately the failure would last for the whole evening, and that I could dismiss the class. So, I came back to the classroom ready to do so, only to have found that there were lighted candles on each of the students' desks, and that there was one on the teacher's desk as well. The monitor of the class stood up and said to me that the whole class would enjoy learning English with me! I was moved. I don't remember what exactly I taught in that class, but I do remember how I felt and how I am still feeling about that class. Since then, I haven't been taking myself seriously, but I have been taking my job seriously.

'Story' as data

- **The incident involved an electricity failure that required him to leave the classroom in search of help. On his return, instead of finding the class with their books packed away waiting to be dismissed, as he had expected, he found the students sitting with lighted candles waiting for him to continue the lesson (Senior, 2006, p. 71).**

5

Data as evidence (the 'use' of data)

- A language teacher from China had vivid memories of a single incident that changed for ever his perception of himself – providing him with concrete evidence that his teaching skills were appreciated and enabling him, in his own words, 'never to look back'.

6

Data to support arguments / theses / statements

- It may be that regular affirmation of their teaching skills is something that all teachers need. For novice teachers who are as yet unsure of their teaching skills, receiving positive feedback from students can mark an important turning point.

7

argument – evidence – data

- Data are generally used as 'evidence' to support the major arguments of your thesis.

8

Qualitative Vs. Quantitative data

- Qualitative data: data is in the form of words, pictures or objects.
- Quantitative data: data is in the form of numbers and statistics.
- A blend of both qualitative and quantitative data, based on the assumption that: *All quantitative data is based upon qualitative judgments; and all qualitative data can be described and manipulated numerically.*

9

Case study 1

- Qualitative/Comparative data
- East meets West ... (Senior & Xu, 2001)

10

Chinese Teaching Styles

- Lessons are typically **teacher fronted**, with the students sitting in rows, taking notes.
- The authority of the teacher is paramount and knowledge is expected to be **transmitted** rather than **discovered**.
- In English language classes, teachers prefer **direct instruction and correction** rather than providing opportunities for creative language use.
- Teaching approaches are to a large extent determined by **external examinations**.

11

Chinese Teaching Styles

- Information is largely transmitted through a **core textbook** that is carefully designed so that language points are presented progressively.
- During class time teachers organise a range of activities including choral reading, recitation, dictation, translation, vocabulary and grammar exercises and **exam practice tests**.
- As English teachers and their students generally share the same first language the **use of the mother tongue** in the classroom is inevitable.

12

Australian Teaching Styles

- Teachers are **relatively free** to organise their courses as they think fit.
- Many teachers use a **coursebook as an informal framework**, but not necessarily requiring their students to complete all or even the majority of the activities in the book.
- Most teachers routinely introduce additional materials. They build up a **file of tried-and-tested favourites** that require minimum preparation and that can be photocopied quickly.

13

Australian Teaching Styles

- A key feature of classes in Australia is **the level of informality** that most teachers encourage. Teachers tend to behave as friendly and helpful facilitators rather than as distant authority figures.
- Although teachers may monitor student performance and give immediate corrective feedback, **they often let students interact with one another freely** while they themselves move around the room encouraging interaction.
- Many English language teachers in Australia **prioritise the development of speaking skills** in their lessons. They make regular **use of humour**, encouraging class group laughter.

14

Case study 2

- Qualitative & quantitative data: interviews, print texts (newspaper articles, short stories), questionnaires
- Analysis of Syntactic Features of Chinese English (Xu, 2009)
- Chinese pragmatic norms and China English (Kirkpatrick & Xu, 2002)

15

Case study 3

- Qualitative & quantitative data: online discussion, classroom interaction (recordings/transcriptions), questionnaire surveys
- Discourse analysis on hybrid learning and teaching (Xu & Wang, 2010)

16

