

Subject-matter Knowledge and Teachers' Planning and Teaching: An Interpretivist Qualitative Study of Western Australian TESOL Teachers within the ELICOS Setting.

By

Ti Foong Yuen

This thesis is presented for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy undertaken at the University of Western Australia.

January: 2005

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my father, Lee Ah Choy, and my mother, Lai Siew Ti, who taught me the value of education and who made sacrifices for us, their children, so that we could have the opportunities they did not have.

Declaration

In accordance with the regulations for presenting theses and other work for higher degrees, I hereby declare that this doctoral thesis is entirely my own work and that it has not been submitted for a degree at any other university.

Ti Foong Yuen
University of Western Australia
January: 2005

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the following people for their role in making this study possible:

Professor Tom O'Donoghue, my first supervisor, for being there from start to finish, providing me with valuable guidance and advice. I am especially grateful to him for giving me the freedom and space to explore and discover things for myself, while keeping his ever-watchful eye from a distance.

Dr Marie-Eve Ritz, my second supervisor, for her valuable comments and suggestions, and for accepting the way I work with grace and patience. Her gentle reassurances and encouragement at various times in the course of my study are very much appreciated.

Dr Katie Dunworth, my Head of Department, for quietly doing everything possible for me to work and study at the same time. A large part of my ability to complete the study within this time was due to her efforts in managing my workload and her support for my application for study leave.

Ms Charlie Hermann, the Director of Studies of the ELICOS program, for providing me with free access to ELICOS documents and materials, and the opportunity to approach and obtain valuable information from the teachers on the program.

The ELICOS teachers, and especially the seven participants, for finding time in their busy schedules to provide me with valuable data for this study, and, above all, for their tremendous patience and good humour in enduring, week after week, the detailed scrutiny required by this study. I am extremely grateful for their participation.

My colleagues, and in particular those on the third floor of Building 208, for their moral support, the words of encouragement and the tremendous amount of goodwill. My spirits were sustained by their sympathy in the most frustrating moments of this pilgrimage, and by their sharing of my joy (relief?) whenever I completed a chapter.

Last but not least, my husband and my two sons for their support of my study. Without the stability and security provided by their love and encouragement, this study would not have been possible.

Abstract

What teachers understand to be the subject matter knowledge (SMK) of the subject discipline that they are teaching is an integral part of the teaching/learning process. It is an assumption within this thesis that SMK can help shape and orientate teachers' planning, selection of teaching materials, classroom teaching and the assessment of student learning. Although SMK is an essential aspect of teaching, it was not the focus of sustained research until the mid-1980s. Since then, there has been a growing number of studies on SMK of teachers in subject disciplines such as mathematics, English literature, history, biology and social science. However, relatively little is known about the SMK of TESOL teachers. In particular, very little is known about TESOL teachers' perspectives on SMK.

The study reported in this thesis addresses the deficit. It investigated the perspectives of Teaching-of-English-to-speakers-of-other-languages' (TESOL) teachers on SMK in language teaching in the ELICOS setting. As the study was located within the interpretivist paradigm, the primary modes of data collection were those that elicited qualitative data. Thus, semi-structured interviews, document analysis, non-participant observations and field notes formed the main methods of data gathering. They provided the bulk of the data for the study and were analysed using the grounded theory method.

The findings are presented as a series of inter-related propositions. These propositions deal with:

1. How TESOL teachers see their role as ELICOS within the set conditions of the workplace;
2. How TESOL teachers see their role as ELICOS teachers in terms of developing teaching strategies that accommodate the constraints posed by the way ELICOS programs are organised, managed, and operated;
3. How language for TESOL teachers is a complex system consisting of non-verbal and verbal codes;
4. How language for TESOL teachers, is tool, which is used predominantly for communication and that communication is concerned with the expression, interpretation and negotiation of meaning;
5. How meaning can only be fully realised when language is taken within its socio-cultural context;
6. How TESOL teachers view the physical, affective and social environment as affecting good teaching;
7. How TESOL teachers perceive that three types of needs have to be addressed in their teaching, namely, knowledge, affective and behavioural needs;

8. How TESOL teachers' perceive that two sets of strategies need to be employed in the learning/teaching process, namely strategies based on an understanding of the nature of the SMK and strategies based on an understanding of learning in general.

It is recognised that the research findings, based as they are on in-depth study of a select group of participants, do not have generalisability in the statistical sense. On the other hand, sufficient detail of the research context, data collection and data analysis is laid out so that readers can make their own judgements about transferability to other settings. Finally, implications are proposed for theory, for practice and for future research.

Acronyms

Ac - Academic English
ALLP - Australian Language and Literacy Policy
ALPR – Australian Language Proficiency Ratings
ANALPR - A National Language Policy for Australia
ASEAN – Association of South-East Asian Nations
ASLPR - Australian Second Language Proficiency Ratings
AMES - Adult Migrant Education Service
ARELS - Association of Recognised English Schools
CELTA - Certificate in English Language Teaching to Adults
CIC – Curtin International College
CMEP - Child Migrant Education Program
DE - Developing English
DEET - Department of Employment, Education and Training
DELTA - Diploma in English Language Teaching to Adults
DILGEA - Department of Immigration, Local Government and Ethnic Affairs
DoLIE - Department of Languages and Intercultural Education
DoS - Director of Studies
EA - English Australia
EAP - English for Academic Purposes
EFL - English as a foreign language
ELBC - English Language Bridging Course
ELI - English Language Institute
ELICOS - English language intensive courses for overseas students
ELP - English language proficiency
ELT - English language training
ESL – English as a second language
ESOS - Education Services for Overseas Students
ESP - English for Specific Purposes
FS – Foundation Studies
G/P - General/Professional
HECE - Higher Education Contract of Employment
HOD - Head of Department
IATFLA - International Association of Teachers of English as a Foreign Language
L1 – First language
MMPI - Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory
NES - native English speakers
NEAS - National ELICOS Accreditation Scheme
NNES - non-native English speakers
NPL - National Policy on Languages
PCK - Pedagogical content knowledge
RELC – Regional English Language Centre
RSA - Royal Society of Arts
SES - socio-economic status
SMK - subject-matter knowledge

TAS - Tuition Assurance Scheme

TESOL - Teaching-of-English-to-speakers-of-other-languages

UCLES - University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION	ii
DECLARATION	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iv
ABSTRACT	v
ACRONYMS	vii
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	1
The Background: An Overview	2
The Literature: An Overview	9
The Research Approach and Methodology	14
Theoretical background	14
The guiding questions	15
Research context	16
The participants	17
Data collection	17
Analysis of data	19
Conclusion	20
CHAPTER 2: RESEARCH CONTEXT	22
The History of TESOL	22
TESOL Today	34
The spread of English and TESOL	34
The provision of TESOL today	37
Factors affecting the quality of TESOL	44

TESOL in Australia	47
An historical account of TESOL in Australia	47
The ELICOS industry	54
The ELICOS colleges	56
ELICOS teachers	59
Conclusion	62
CHAPTER THREE: LITERATURE REVIEW	63
A Review of Literature on Effective Teaching	63
Teacher personality	64
Process-product research	69
Teacher cognition	74
Teacher knowledge	79
Teacher beliefs	81
Review of Literature on Subject-matter Knowledge	83
Early studies on SMK	84
Research on SMK of teachers from the 1980s onwards	85
Effects of SMK of teachers on planning and classroom teaching	95
Review of Literature on SMK in TESOL	102
Definition of SMK in TESOL	103
Studies on TESOL teachers' SMK	107
Conclusion	113
CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY	114
Theoretical Underpinnings	114
Central research question	119
The guiding questions	120
Research Site	121
Selection of Participants	123
Data Collection	126
The proposed research plan	126

The original data-gathering plan	127
The actual data collection process	129
Analysis of Data	130
Open coding	131
Axial coding	135
Development of propositions	137
Data Recording and Storage	138
Criteria for Trustworthiness	139
Ethical Considerations	140
Conclusion	141
CHAPTER FIVE: FINDINGS: PROPOSITION 1	142
Proposition 1	
The ELICOS Employment Conditions	142
The ELICOS syllabus	151
Developing English syllabus	151
Academic English syllabus	152
G/P syllabus	153
Assessments	153
Electives syllabus	154
Conclusion	155
CHAPTER SIX: FINDINGS: PROPOSITION 2	157
Proposition 2	157
Strategies to Maximise the Use of Class Time	157
Strategies for addressing the lack of homogeneity of students' knowledge and goals	162
Strategies to Deal with Co- and Parallel Teachers	166
Strategies for Selecting the SMK in the Syllabus to be Taught	169
Conclusion	176

CHAPTER 7: FINDINGS: PROPOSITIONS 3, 4, and 5	178
Proposition 3	178
Language as a System of Non-verbal Codes	179
Language as a System of Verbal Codes	180
Vocabulary	181
Grammar	184
Pronunciation	187
The macro-skills	189
Proposition 4a	192
Proposition 4b	195
Meaning Expression	195
Clarity	197
Relevance	205
Appropriateness	207
Meaning Interpretation	209
Literal comprehension	209
Inferential comprehension	214
Evaluative comprehension	218
Meaning Negotiation	221
Checking comprehension of meaning	222
Reaching consensus in meaning	223
Collaborating to refine or modify meaning	224
Proposition 5	225
Conclusion	230
CHAPTER 8: FINDINGS: PROPOSITIONS 6, 7 and 8	231
Proposition 6	231
The Physical Environment	232

The Affective Environment	234
The Social Dimension	238
Proposition 7	241
Knowledge Needs	242
Sources of knowledge	242
Strategies to address knowledge needs	246
Affective Needs	254
Strategies for dealing with affective needs	256
Behavioural Needs	258
The autonomous learner	259
The active learner	261
The receptive learner	263
The disciplined learner	264
Proposition 8	267
Learning Strategies Specific to Language	267
Learning activities	267
Teaching materials	270
Teacher role	272
General Learning Strategies	277
Cohesive and coherent lessons	277
Communicating teacher expectations	282
Keeping the learning atmosphere in balance	285
Learning as a pleasant experience	287
Conclusion	291
CHAPTER 9: SUMMARY and CONCLUSION	292
Summary of Findings	293
Transferability of Findings	299

Implications of Research Findings	302
Theory development	303
Improvement of practice	304
REFERENCES	308