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

By

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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.

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January: 2005

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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

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