

# **Developing ‘My Way’ in Chinese Language Teaching**

**Qualitative case studies of  
teachers’ personal practical knowledge**

By

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A thesis

submitted to the Victoria University of Wellington  
in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy  
in Applied Linguistics

Victoria University of Wellington

2010

## Abstract

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Much of L2 teacher cognition research has focused on L2 English education with native speakers teaching adult students at private institutes and tertiary levels. The present study was set up to investigate Chinese language teachers' personal practical knowledge (PPK) in teaching Chinese in New Zealand secondary schools. Taking qualitative case study as the approach, the present study selected three teachers as participants – two native Chinese speakers (immigrants) and one non-native Chinese speaker with Chinese heritage background – to explore the characteristics of their PPK, and to identify the factors shaping that PPK. The purpose of the study is to gain insight into teacher professional development processes.

The data for the present study are mainly interviews with the teachers, supplemented with classroom observations of their teaching, post-lesson discussions, and my field notes. Data analysis and interpretation revealed that each teacher developed her own unique characteristic of PPK, which was captured by a dominant image, an overriding perspective that guided her practice. The factors shaping their PPK and practice are shown to be their prior knowledge, particularly ideologies originating from their native culture, their awareness of their status as native and non-native speakers, their teaching experience, and the institutional context. However, the extent of the impact on each teacher differed depending upon their personal background and level of professional development. The present study supported the view that a teacher's PPK is the dynamic integration of her prior knowledge and understanding of the situation, is oriented toward practice, and is constructed and reconstructed out of the narratives of a teacher's life. Based on this study, a number of implications have been identified for teacher development, as well as suggestions for further study of teachers' PPK.

## Acknowledgements

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First of all, I would like to thank Dr. Duncan Campbell. Without his support and encouragement, I may not have started the journey of undertaking this PhD programme.

I would like to thank the three Chinese language teachers for agreeing to be part of this study, for sharing their thoughts with me, and for opening the door to their classrooms. Thanks also go to the principals and the students of the three schools for their support.

I would like to show my great gratitude to my two supervisors, Dr. Rebecca Adams and Associate Prof. David Crabbe, for their guidance, encouragement, and inspiration.

I want to thank Victoria University of Wellington (VUW) for a PhD scholarship and research funding to finance my study, as well as the School of Languages and Cultures at VUW for facilities and a tutor's office with a spectacular view of evergreen hills and the harbour of Wellington.

I want to thank Ms. Gail Spence, former Senior Adviser Languages in the New Zealand Ministry of Education, and Ms. Margaret Hardiman, current Senior Advisor Languages in the New Zealand Ministry of Education, for their information about New Zealand education systems and language policies; Dr Axel Laurs, Programme Manager of the International Languages Aotearoa New Zealand, and Dr. Xi Han, National Adviser of Chinese at the International Languages Aotearoa New Zealand, for discussion about the international language education in general, and Chinese education in particular in New Zealand schools.

I am also grateful to my colleagues: Dr. Peter Gu, Dr. Jonathan Newton, and Dr. Xiaoyan Xie at Victoria University of Wellington; Dr.

Ruying Qi at the University of Western Sydney, Australia; Dr. Mei Sun at National Central University, Taiwan; and Dr. Lan Yang at the University of Leeds, UK, for their input to my research; to Dr. Penelope Ann Hacker at the University of Auckland, New Zealand, for the useful references about narrative inquiry methodology; to Mr. Tony Quinn, Librarian at VUW, for his help with bibliographic searches.

I am indebted to Dr. Lisbeth Gronbaek for her comments and proofreading, which have no doubt increased the readability of this thesis.

Finally, my special thanks go to my wife Qiong and our daughter Susan for their unflagging love and support.

# Contents

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<b>Abstract</b>	<b>i</b>
<b>Acknowledgements</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>List of abbreviations</b>	<b>xi</b>
<b>List of tables and figures</b>	<b>xiii</b>
<b>Chapter 1: Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Chapter 2: Cognition Research on Teachers' Mental Lives</b>	
<b>- Literature review</b>	<b>7</b>
2.0 Introduction	7
2.1 Scope of teacher cognition research	10
2.2 Studies of teacher cognition and classroom practice in L2 education	15
2.2.1 Teachers' maxims in L2 teaching	16
2.2.2 Relationships between principles and practices in L2 teaching	18
2.2.3 Teachers' pedagogical knowledge	22
2.2.4 Teacher in-class decision-making in L2 teaching	26
2.2.5 Intercontextuality of teacher thinking and beliefs	28
2.2.6 Summary	31
2.3 Studies of teachers' personal practical knowledge (PPK)	33
2.3.1 Study of teachers' PPK in general education	33

2.3.2 Study of teachers' PPK in L2 education	41
2.3.3 Summary	44
2.4 The present study	45
<b>Chapter 3: Research Approach and Context</b>	<b>47</b>
3.0 Introduction	47
3.1 Establishing an approach	49
3.1.1 The qualitative case study	49
3.1.2 Selecting narrative inquiry	51
3.2 Narrative inquiry as a methodology	55
3.2.1 Defining narrative	56
3.2.2 What is narrative inquiry	57
3.2.3 A framework of narrative inquiry	60
3.3 New Zealand context	66
3.3.1 Primary and secondary school education	67
3.3.2 Language education in New Zealand	70
<b>Chapter 4: Research Methods and Procedures</b>	<b>76</b>
4.0 Introduction	76
4.1 Participants	76
4.1.1 The teachers	76
4.1.2 The researcher	79
4.1.3 Establishing a relationship with the teachers	81

4.1.4 Ethical considerations	83
4.2 Data collection	84
4.2.1 Classroom observations	84
4.2.2 Interview structures and schedules	85
4.2.3 Interviews with individual teachers	87
4.2.4 Factors influencing the interviews	93
4.3 Data analysis and interpretation	96
4.3.1 Transcription and translation	97
4.3.2 Data coding and analysis	104
4.3.3 Searching for the 'soul' of the cases	106
4.3.4 Interpretation	108
4.4 Reporting	111
4.4.1 The audience	111
4.4.2 The voices	112
4.4.3 Presentation	114
 <b>Chapter 5: Adapting 'My Way' in Teaching Chinese</b>	
<b>- <i>Dongmei's case</i></b>	<b>116</b>
5.0 Introduction	116
5.1 Personal profile and teaching context	117
5.2 Trying to find a way	
- Dongmei's struggle in the first year of teaching	119
5.2.1 Dongmei's self-evaluation of the first year of teaching	119

5.2.2 Factors influencing Dongmei's 'My Way' of teaching	122
5.2.3 Getting strategic positioning right	
– A plan for the second year	128
5.3 Trying to achieve a balance	
– Dongmei's dilemmas in the second year of teaching	130
5.3.1 Getting to know the students	132
5.3.2 Improving classroom management	135
5.3.3 Developing teaching methods suited to the local context	137
5.3.4 An emerging vision	140
5.4 Summary	143
 <b>Chapter 6: Nurturing Student Confidence</b>	
– <i>Julie's case</i>	<b>147</b>
6.0 Introduction	147
6.1 Personal profile and teaching context	148
6.1.1 Learning Chinese	149
6.1.2 Establishing a Chinese programme from scratch	149
6.1.3 Taking leave to gain qualifications	152
6.1.4 Returning to teaching Chinese	153
6.1.5 Summary	154
6.2 Julie's 'My Way'	155
6.2.1 Reducing student anxiety	155
6.2.2 Starting with the basics and progressing slowly	160



6.2.3 Encouraging students to participate	164
6.2.4 Summary	168
6.3 Factors shaping Julie's 'My Way'	169
6.3.1 Personality – 'I was very shy'	170
6.3.2 Learning experiences – 'I was totally ignored'	171
6.3.3 Concern about Chinese competence – 'I'm a non-native speaker'	173
6.4 Summary	175
 <b>Chapter 7: Everything Going Smoothly</b> – <i>Wenying's case</i>	 <b>178</b>
7.0 Introduction	178
7.1 Personal profile and teaching context	179
7.2 Wenying's 'My Way'	181
7.2.1 Being accepted by students – winning their trust	182
7.2.2 Building a <i>qi</i> -field – managing the classroom	188
7.2.3 'Going smoothly' – 'My Way' in practice	192
7.2.4 Summary	200
7.3 Factors shaping Wenying's 'My Way'	200
7.3.1 Teacher as virtuoso – the model of Wenying's 'My Way'	202
7.3.2 Knowledge base – the foundation of Wenying's 'My Way'	206
7.4 Summary	210

<b>Chapter 8: Developing ‘My Way’ in Language Teaching</b>	<b>212</b>
<i>– A cross-case discussion</i>	
8.0 Introduction	212
8.1 Summary of the three cases	212
8.2 ‘My Way’, image and teacher development	217
8.3 Influence of cultural heritage on ‘My Way’	223
8.4 Impact of NNS complex on ‘My Way’	229
8.5 Affective dimension of PPK	232
8.6 Thought processes and teacher development	234
8.7 Summary	239
 <b>Chapter 9: Conclusion</b>	 <b>242</b>
9.0 Introduction	242
9.1 Challenges inherent in the study of PPK	242
9.2 Implications for teacher development	248
9.3 Concluding comments	253
 <b>References</b>	 <b>255</b>
 <b>Appendices</b>	 <b>276</b>
Appendix A      Documents of ethics consideration	277
Appendix B      List of the classroom observations	284
Appendix C      List of the interviews	287

Appendix D	Samples of transcripts	289
Appendix E	Samples of transcripts and translations	291
Appendix F	Samples of initial coding	293
Appendix G	Samples of 'tree nodes' in Nvivo7	295

## List of abbreviations

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AMEP	Australian Adult Migrant English Program
BAK	Beliefs, Assumptions and Knowledge
CELTA	Cambridge Certificate in English Language Teaching to Adults
CHC	Confucian-Heritage Cultures
CLT	Communicative Language Teaching
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
ELT	English Language Teaching
ERO	Education Review Office
ESL	English as a Second Language
ILANZ	International Languages Aotearoa New Zealand
IRD PX	Input, Recognition, Discrimination, Production, and eXtension
NCEA	National Certificate of Educational Achievement
NNS	Non-Native Speaker
NS	Native Speaker
NZALT	New Zealand Association of Language Teachers
NZTC	New Zealand Teachers Council

OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
PPK	Personal Practical Knowledge
PT	Pedagogical thought
SLA	Second Language Acquisition
TESOL	Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages

## List of tables and figures

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Table 2.1	Teachers' practice identified with the teachers' stated principle of enabling students to remember and recall new information
Table 3.1	Number of students studying languages at New Zealand schools (from primary school to secondary school)
Table 8.1	Summary of the three cases
Table 8.2	Berliner's five-stage model of teacher development
Table 8.3	Different emphases in culture of learning: CHCs & Western
Figure 2.1	Elements and processes in language teacher cognition
Figure 6.1	Transformational effect of Julie's PPK
Figure 7.1	Multiple dimensions of Wenying's 'My Way' in teaching Y9
Figure 8.1	Dongmei's problem-solving process

## *Chapter 1*

### **Introduction**

---

*'I don't want them to just keep using wrong stuff – this is not my way. I have my ways to correct [students' errors] immediately.'*

*'If I teach the same things next time I [will] still use that way. Yeah. I do my own way.'*

Extracts from interviews with Chinese language teachers

While reviewing the transcripts of interviews undertaken in a preliminary study investigating Chinese language teachers' teaching practice in New Zealand secondary schools, I was struck by their use of the terms 'my way' and 'my own way' in the above quotations. It seemed that each teacher had her *own* very personal way of teaching the language. This observation made me ponder: What did these teachers mean by 'My Way'? What role

does their 'My Way' play in their teaching practice – how does their 'My Way' shape, and how is it shaped by, their teaching practice? Could their 'My Way' be a window into their professional development processes?

The research on teacher cognition – the study of teachers' 'mental lives' (Walberg, 1977, cited in Freeman, 2002, p. 2) – began in general education in the 1970s (Calderhead, 1996; Carter, 1990; Clark & Peterson, 1986; Woolfolk Hoy, Davis, & Pape, 2006), and emerged from the field of second language education in the 1990s (Borg, 2003; Freeman, 2002; Freeman & Richards, 1996; Johnson, 2006). It is based on an assumption that 'teachers are active, thinking decision-makers who make instructional choices by drawing on complex, practically-oriented, personalised, and context-sensitive networks of knowledge, thoughts, and beliefs' (Borg, 2003, p. 81). A number of studies in both general and second language education focus on what I refer to as teachers' 'My Way'. These studies use the terms 'practical knowledge' (Elbaz, 1983) or 'personal practical knowledge' (Clandinin, 1985, 1986; Clandinin & Connelly, 1987; Golombek, 1998), and it is the latter that will be used in this thesis.

The present study is an exploration of Chinese language teachers' personal practical knowledge (PPK). PPK is 'knowledge which is experiential, embodied, and reconstructed out of the narratives of a teacher's life' (Clandinin & Connelly, 1987, p. 490). Clandinin has summarized the characteristics of teachers' PPK as follows:



It is knowledge that reflects the individual's prior knowledge and acknowledges the contextual nature of that teacher's knowledge. It is a kind of knowledge carved out of, and shaped by, situations; knowledge that is constructed and reconstructed as we live out our stories and retell and relive them through processes of reflection. (Clandinin, 1992, p. 125)

While the above gloss provides a succinct description of the characteristics of PPK, as a research construct PPK has created a challenge for people outside the tradition to understand because of its abstraction, as Fenstermacher (1994, p. 12) points out. I shared the same concern with Fenstermacher and felt that language teachers might find the concept even harder to comprehend. I therefore rephrased PPK as 'My Way' in the present study. I believe that 'My Way', used by teachers to describe their personal practical knowledge, lends itself more to a narrative account. The use of 'My' in 'My Way' highlights the personal account of teachers' personal practical knowledge, an important perspective of PPK. PPK and 'My Way' are used interchangeably in this thesis: while PPK is used to discuss this research tradition in a general sense, 'My Way' is adopted to present and discuss the case teachers in this study. The present study thus sets out to gain understanding of language teachers' PPK by examining three Chinese teachers' 'My Way', guided by two research questions:

(1) What are the characteristics of these teachers' PPK?

(2) What factors shape their PPK?

The purpose of the present study is through understanding of the Chinese teachers' PPK in teaching Chinese in the New Zealand context to gain insight into teachers' professional development processes, in order to better support their professional development.

As we will see from the literature review in the next chapter, research on teacher cognition is a diverse, dynamic and promising area, and has become a well-established domain of enquiry. One of the central issues that has emerged from the research is the role of context. As Borg (2003) points out, 'the study of cognition and practice without an awareness of the contexts in which these occur will inevitably provide partial, if not flawed, characterisations of teachers and teaching' (p. 106). He also observes that much research has focused on native speaker teachers teaching small groups of motivated adult learners, either at universities or in private institutions. He stresses that research needs to be extended to classrooms in primary and secondary schools, as well as to classes taught by non-native speaker teachers. In his analysis of specific research topics, Borg (2003) finds that decision-making has attracted a lot of interest. These studies often take teachers' thinking-processes as a research focus, with a view to understanding the immediately antecedent reasons for teachers' decisions. Borg (2003) maintains that research on PPK 'would contribute to a more

holistic understanding of language teachers' practices and cognitions' (p. 98), because this research tradition also takes the less immediate factors, such as teachers' prior knowledge and affective dimensions into consideration.

The present study of Chinese language teachers' PPK is a timely response to the call for the scope of research on teacher cognition to expand to include a wider variety of contexts. The context of the present study is the teaching of Chinese as a foreign language in New Zealand secondary schools. The learners are secondary school students, and the teachers include both native and non-native Chinese speakers. This work fills a gap in the research on the PPK of teachers teaching Chinese as a foreign language in secondary schools. In addition, it is anticipated that this research will help teacher educators, school administrators and researchers better understand and support teachers' professional development, just as it will help language teachers reflect on their teaching beliefs and practice.

To effectively answer the two research questions posed above, a qualitative case study approach was taken and three language teachers teaching Chinese in three different secondary schools in New Zealand were selected. Narrative inquiry (Chase, 2005; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Connelly & Clandinin, 2006; Golombek & Johnson, 2004; Kramp, 2004) was used as a methodology to generate and present the data. This thesis is structured as follows: following this Chapter 1, Chapter 2 presents a

review of literature on teacher cognition; Chapter 3 discusses the research approaches and presents the context. Chapter 4 describes research methods and procedures. The reports of the three case studies are presented in chapters 5, 6 and 7 respectively. Chapter 8 is devoted to cross-case discussions, while also addressing the research questions. The thesis concludes with discussions of implications and suggestions for further research in Chapter 9.

## *Chapter 2*

# **Cognition Research on Teachers' Mental Lives**

## **- Literature Review**

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### **2.0 INTRODUCTION**

In discussing the trends of language teacher education, Crandall (2000) states that language teacher education has experienced four major shifts which 'derive from theory and practice in general teacher education' (p. 34). These include shifts (1) from transmission/product-oriented theories, to constructivist/process-oriented theories of learning, teaching, and teacher learning; (2) from decontextualized theory, to classroom-situated teacher cognition and practice; (3) from ignorance of the importance of teacher prior learning, to a recognition of the powerful role teachers' prior learning experiences play in shaping their assumptions about effective learning and teaching; and (4) from viewing teaching as a craft, to viewing it as profession.

Corresponding to these shifts, the orientations of language teacher education have also shifted from a focus on training and, later, education,

to an increased emphasis on teacher development. Crandall (2000) points out, a *training* orientation emphasizes the development of skills and an *education* orientation addresses the development of knowledge. She argues that in both these orientations a teacher is viewed as 'a passive recipient of transmitted knowledge' and 'omitted is any understanding of the role that language teachers play in their own development' (p. 36). In contrast, a teacher *development* orientation, Crandall holds, stresses 'a life-long process of growth which may involve collaborative and/or autonomous learning, but the important distinction is that teachers are engaged in the process and they actively reflect on their practice' (p. 36). While acknowledging both training and education orientations have their role to play in teacher education, a *development* notion is strongly recommended to be integrated and maintained in a teacher education programme (Mann, 2005, p. 105). Teacher professional development is 'increasingly viewed as something which is self-directed, inquiry-based, and directly relevant to teacher's professional lives' (Burns & Richards, 2009, p. 6), with the aim of developing teachers' 'multi-dimensional awareness' and 'the ability to apply this awareness to their actual contexts of teaching' (Tomlinson, 2003).

The study of teachers' 'mental lives' or cognition, an exploration of the nature of teacher knowledge and teacher thought processes, is driven by the desire to improve teacher education and to promote teacher

development, with the ultimate goal of enhancing teaching and learning (Borg, 2006; Freeman, 2002; Timperley, Wilson, Barrar, & Fung, 2007). This exploration began in the 1970s in general education (Calderhead, 1996; Carter, 1990; Clark & Peterson, 1986; Woolfolk Hoy, et al., 2006) and has recently become more prominent in L2 education (Borg, 2003, 2006; Freeman, 2002). Johnson (2006) explains the importance of research on teacher cognition to the field of L2 teacher education:

Many factors have advanced the field's understanding of L2 teachers' work, but none is more significant than the emergence of a substantial body of research now referred to as teacher cognition (in L2, see Borg, 2003; Freeman, 2002; Woods, 1996). This research has helped capture the complexities of who teachers are, what they know and believe, how they learn to teach, and how they carry out their work in diverse contexts throughout their careers. (p. 236)

Timperley et al.'s (2007) synthesis of teacher professional learning and development indicates that teaching practice is based on a coherent and integrated set of beliefs and values held by the teacher. However, these beliefs and values are often tacit to teachers and hard to change. To facilitate teacher learning and to bring about changes to teaching practice, it is necessary to engage teachers in evaluating the effect of their tacit knowledge and routines. Moreover, as Bransford et al. (2001) point out,

teachers, just like others, come to learning with preconceptions about how the world works. If their initial understanding is not engaged, they may fail to grasp the new concepts and information that are being taught, or may learn them superficially and revert to their preconceptions in real situations (cited in Timperley, et al., 2007, p. viii). Teacher cognition research, with its focus on the study of teachers' mental lives, can help raise the awareness of their tacit knowledge and provide insights into the processes of teacher development, which can in turn lead to improvements in teacher education and professional development.

In the literature review that follows, I will begin by presenting an overview of teacher cognition research (2.1), followed by a discussion of current thought and research on teacher cognition and teaching practice (2.2). The next section will focus on studies of teachers' personal practical knowledge, the area of teacher cognition focused on in the present study (2.3). Finally, this chapter will conclude with an introduction to the present study (2.4), contextualizing the research with reference to prior research.

## **2.1 SCOPE OF TEACHER COGNITION RESEARCH**

As a developing research field, teacher cognition research in L2 education is characterized by a diversity of different terms, such as *BAK* (beliefs, assumptions and knowledge, (Woods, 1996), *beliefs* (Basturkmen, Loewen,



& Ellis, 2004), *maxims* (Richards, 1996), *pedagogic principles* (Breen, et al., 2001), *pedagogical knowledge* (Gatbonton, 1999; Mullock, 2006), *practical knowledge* (Meijer, Verloop, & Beijaard, 1999), and *personal practical knowledge* (Golombek, 1998). This diversity is not surprising, as Golombek (2009) argues, given the fact that researchers were writing almost simultaneously, borrowing terminologies from general education 'to legitimate this line of research within L2 teacher education scholarship' (p. 158). While different terms may represent different research foci and perspectives, collectively, Borg (2006) points out, 'they highlight the personal nature of teacher cognition, the role of experience in the development of these cognitions and the way in which instructional practice and cognition are mutually informing' (p. 49). Following the convention adopted by Borg, the present study and this review take 'teacher cognition' as an inclusive term which embraces the complexity of teachers' mental lives.

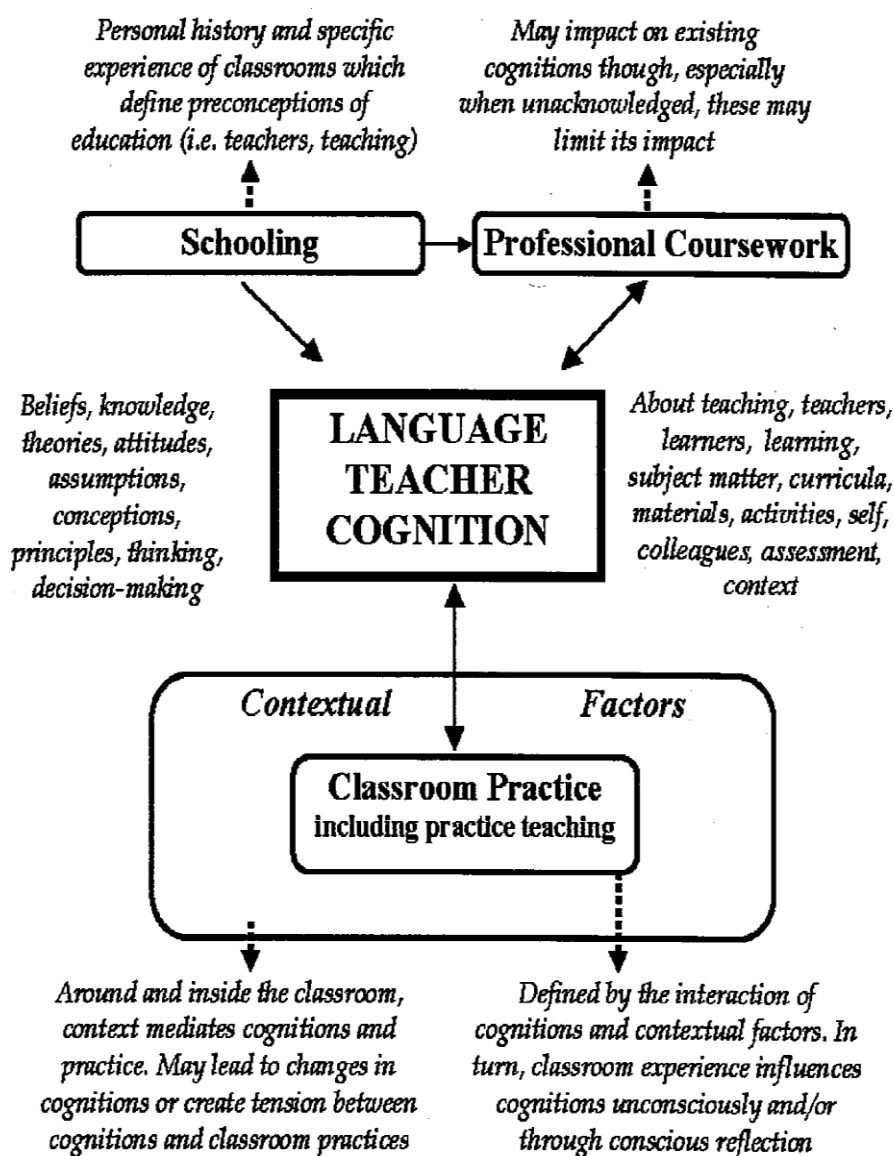
In discussing the scope of teacher cognition research, Freeman (2002) points out that the exploration of teacher learning and teacher knowledge is central to the understanding of teacher cognition, with efforts to answer the following questions: (1) How do teachers learn content and teaching practices? (2) How are teachers' mental processes conceived? (3) What is the role of prior knowledge in learning to teach? (4) What is the role of social and institutional context in learning to teach? Freeman takes these

four questions as four themes to map out the research on teacher cognition conducted in the period from the 1970s to 2000, and explains: the first question addresses the theme of *what* and *how* of learning to teach, the second is about the theme of *thought processes* involved, which has to take into consideration the third theme – teacher’s *prior knowledge*, and the fourth theme – how *context* shapes teachers’ learning and thinking processes (Freeman, 2002, p. 3). By isolating these four themes Freeman in fact presents a framework for teacher cognition research.

Using a diagram, Borg (2006) presents a visual framework to represent the key elements and processes involved in language teacher cognition, which is reproduced in Figure 2.1 on the next page.

In Figure 2.1 we can see themes similar to those identified by Freeman: teacher cognition is influenced by teachers’ prior knowledge, which includes schooling, language learning experiences and any professional training in Borg’s framework. The figure also shows that teacher cognition and classroom practice are mutually informing, and that contextual factors play an important role in shaping this process. Teacher cognition therefore involves the interactions between a teacher’s prior knowledge, teaching practice, and social and institutional contexts. It is a dynamic process, shifting over time.

Figure 2.1: Elements and processes in language teacher cognition (Borg, 2006, p. 283)



Teacher cognition research covers a wide range of areas and has produced a rich literature on diverse themes (Borg, 2006). In the area of *pre-service* teacher education, teacher cognition research has been conducted on themes such as the influence of prior language learning experience on pre-service teacher education (Bailey, et al., 1996; Farrell, 1999; Johnson, 1994; Urmston, 2003; Warford & Reeves, 2003); the impact of teacher-education programmes on student-teacher cognitive and behavioural change (Borg, 2005; Gutierrez Almarza, 1996; Peacock, 2001); the effect of the practicum on shaping pre-service teacher cognition (Farrell, 2001; Johnson, 1996; Numrich, 1996).

In the area of *in-service* teacher cognition, the research focus has been on the exploration of the generic cognitions and practices of novice language teachers learning to teach languages (Farrell, 2003; Grossman, 1989; Richards & Pennington, 1998; Spada & Massey, 1992); the cognitions and *reported* practices (Allen, 2002; Flores, 2001; Kern, 1995; Richard, Tung, & Ng, 1992) and the cognitions and *actual* practices of in-service language teachers; cognitive change in in-service teachers (Freeman, 1992, 1993); comparisons of the cognitions of expert and novice language teachers (Johnson, 2005; Mok, 1994; Tsui, 2003); as well as on the study of specific curricular areas such as the teaching of grammar, reading, and writing (Borg, 2006, p. 75).

The interest of the present study is in *in-service* teacher cognition and professional development with a focus on teacher cognition and practice. This literature review is therefore concentrated on studies of the relationship between teacher cognition and classroom practice of in-service teachers.

## **2.2 STUDIES OF TEACHER COGNITION AND CLASSROOM PRACTICE IN L2 EDUCATION**

Several studies have been carried out to determine how teacher cognition shapes language teachers' classroom practice. These studies examine different aspects of the relationship between cognition and practice. This includes investigating the kinds of beliefs, maxims or principles teachers hold; the relationship between teachers' principles and their practices; the different domains of teachers' pedagogical knowledge; teachers' in-class decision-making; and the influence of context on teachers' beliefs and practice. While each study has its focus, they all share a similar assumption, that is, that teachers' in-class decisions and actions are guided by a set of rules – referred to as 'maxims', 'principles', or 'pedagogical thoughts' in different studies – which are influenced by different factors, as we will see below.

### **2.2.1 Teachers' maxims in L2 teaching**

Richards (1996) is one of the first researchers (Burns, 1992; Kern, 1995; Woods, 1996) to examine the role of teachers' belief systems in ESL, with a focus on identifying teachers' maxims. Richards asserts that teachers' belief systems guide their teaching practices. These belief systems, he argues, develop over time and connect to teachers' theories of language, the nature of language teaching, the role of the teacher, effective teaching practice and teacher-student relations. On the basis of their belief systems, Richards concludes, teachers develop a set of personal principles. These principles help teachers to interpret their responsibilities and implement their plans, and motivate their interactive decisions during a lesson. In this way, these principles 'function as maxims which guide the teacher's actions' (p. 286).

Based on the above assumptions, Richards analysed cases and narratives from teachers teaching in different contexts with different backgrounds: some are native English speakers teaching in Canada and New Zealand, others are non-native English speakers teaching in Hong Kong. As a result of his analysis, Richards identified eight maxims held by ESL teachers: (1) Involvement: Follow the students' interests to maintain their involvement; (2) Planning: Plan teaching and try to follow the plan; (3) Order: Maintain order and discipline throughout the lesson; (4) Encouragement: Seek ways to encourage student learning; (5) Accuracy: Work for accurate student output; (6) Efficiency: Make the most efficient

use of class time; (7) Conformity: Make sure the teaching follows the prescribed methods; and (8) Empowerment: Give the students control.

Richards points out that while it seems that each teacher has a set of maxims guiding their teaching, the classroom situation sometimes imposes constraints which restrict the teacher's options. This means teachers are sometimes unable to practice what they preach, and they therefore constantly adjust maxims during teaching practice, although this may not be a conscious process.

Richards also holds that the notion of *maxims* is more specific and practical than the concept of *images* used by other researchers such as Clandinin (1985) and Johnston (1990, 1992) to describe what teachers are doing and why (see also 2.3.1). In Richards's view, maxims could be regarded as images that have been transformed into models for practical action, a point also discussed by Elbaz (1981, 1983) (see 2.3.1). Richards suggests that teachers' experience of teaching, learning and their teacher education, as well as their own personal beliefs and value systems, all have an impact on the development of their maxims, and that all of these factors should therefore be taken into account in teacher development. In this way, Richards's study not only helped introduce research on teachers' belief systems to L2 education, but also suggested a direction for further study.

### **2.2.2 Relationships between principles and practice in L2 teaching**

While Richards (1996) focuses primarily on the nature and role of teaching maxims in teachers' instructional decisions, drawing evidence from ESL/EFL teachers with different teaching backgrounds teaching in different contexts, Breen et al. (2001) focus on the relationships between teacher practice and underlying principles within groups of teachers in one country, Australia. This approach allows them to explore how educational contexts influence teacher cognition, to ascertain whether teachers in similar contexts share a particular set of principles, and further, to discover whether there is 'a clear relationship across the group between principles and practices that may reflect a collective language pedagogy' (Breen, et al., 2001, p. 471).

In order to achieve these goals, Breen et al. worked over a period of 5 weeks with 18 experienced ESL teachers teaching migrants in Australia: 10 teachers teaching adults and 8 teachers teaching children at primary schools. Data were collected through multiple interviews with these teachers and classroom observations of each teacher, using the grid procedure adopted for the study of maths and science teachers in general education. As a group, the 18 teachers described over 300 practices and listed almost 200 underlying principles for these practices. Following earlier categorizations of teachers' knowledge and concerns in general education, and previous studies of language teachers' conceptualizations



of their work (e.g. Breen, 1991), the researchers grouped the 200 principles into five categories: (1) the learners' learning process; (2) particular attributes of the learner; (3) optimal use of the classroom and its human and material resources; (4) the subject matter being taught and learned; and (5) the specific contributions that they can make in their role as a teacher (Breen, et al., 2001, p. 484).

The findings of Breen et al. (2001) show that the relationships between teachers' practices and their underlying principles are complex. On the one hand, a practice widely adopted across the group appeared to be based upon diverse principles, with the 18 teachers justifying their use of pair or group work in the class with reference to 23 different principles, and their practice of explicit teacher modelling and explanation on the basis of 29 different principles (p. 494). On the other hand, a single principle that was commonly shared among the teachers could be associated with a wide range of practices. For example, the principle of accounting for individual differences was associated with over 30 distinctive classroom practices (p. 489), and the principle of enabling the student to best remember and recall what is taught was related to 24 distinctive practices, as listed in Table 2.1 on the next page.

*Table 2.1: Teachers' practices identified with the teachers' stated principle of enabling students to remember and recall new information (Breen, Hird, Milton, Oliver, & Thwaite, 2001, p. 492)*

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*Practices of teachers of adults*

- At start of lesson explains explicitly form & functions of language to be focused on.
- Exemplifies appropriate vocabulary/sentences working step by step from word to sentences.
- Provides and explains handouts which list & exemplify vocabulary & sentence or utterance types.
- Students encouraged to write down oral input from the teacher and supportive visual input from the board.
- Reviews previous lesson at start of current lesson by hearing input from students.
- Students undertake homework for consolidation of the lesson.
- Students told to mark with highlighters any problems identified in handout.
- Students advised to write things down that they'll need in later dialogue/role play activity.
- Students encouraged to chorally repeat & drill pronunciation.
- Students do dictation.
- Requires repeated listening to tape.
- Gives memory test of particular objects dealt with in previous topic.
- Repeats new input & students orally rehearse it.
- Students share oral responses/dialogues with whole class after group task.
- Uses repetition and emphatic intonation on focused input.
- Provides synonyms alongside new work.
- Writes all new words on board.
- Explains meaning & several usages of new word.
- Makes explicit links to homework/recapitulates previous lesson.

*Practices of teachers of children*

- Provides opportunities to hear & practice correct usage.
  - Points out recurrence in new input material of previously learned vocabulary ('metamorphosis'; 'proboscis').
  - Encourages students to use previously learned words in new activity.
  - Uses mainstream content but calls upon students' knowledge of concepts from L1.
  - Closely monitors students' understanding and production.
-

Nevertheless, the data suggests that, despite individual diversity among teachers, there appears to be 'a finite range of principles that were widely shared across the group of teachers' teaching in similar contexts (Breen, et al., 2001, p. 495). Breen et al. consider this evidence of a collective pedagogy to be significant in a number of ways. Firstly, within teacher education, a collective pedagogy could serve as a focus for training pre-service teachers who are going to work in similar contexts. Secondly, research on collective pedagogy would help teacher educators examine the extent to which their rationales for a particular practice are consistent with teachers' rationales derived primarily from their teaching experiences. Thirdly, such research would also help teacher educators and researchers explore and address the relationship between the individual's experiential pedagogy and the collective pedagogy of the wider professional community.

Breen et al. (2001) further argue that, as much current research on English language teaching tends 'to affirm western educational ideologies concerning the relationships between subject matter, teacher, student, and classroom practices' (p. 499), there is a need for cross-cultural and inter-cultural studies of language pedagogy to better understand factors shaping a collective pedagogy. This suggestion is echoed by current advocacy for more attention to the role of context in teacher learning (Burns & Richards, 2009, p. 4).

### **2.2.3 Teachers' pedagogical knowledge**

Studies undertaken by Gatbonton and Mullock take a different perspective, investigating ESL teachers' pedagogical knowledge through an analysis of their pedagogical thoughts. Following the work of Feinman-Nemser and Flodden (1986) and Shulman (1986, 1987) in general education, Gatbonton (1999) investigates teachers' pedagogical knowledge, defining it as 'the teacher's accumulated knowledge about the teaching act (e.g., its goals, procedures, strategies) that serves as the basis for his or her classroom behaviour and activities' (p. 35). Gatbonton (1999) explains that while previous studies examine teachers' pedagogical knowledge with a focus on teacher behaviour, such as decision making and planning, her study attempts to discover 'what patterns of pedagogical knowledge operate when experienced ESL teachers teach', and 'whether there is consistency among teachers in their use of these patterns' (p. 36).

The participants in this study were 7 experienced teachers teaching ESL courses to immigrant adult learners at low-intermediate level in two courses: 3 teachers in course I and 4 teachers in course II. Both ESL courses were organized specifically for this study, and all the teachers were asked to use unfamiliar modules from a textbook unpublished at the time, which provided guidelines for the teachers to follow, even though they were encouraged to adapt the materials to their individual situation. The teachers' lessons were video-recorded, and each teacher was asked to view

1 hour of his or her video-recorded lesson. During the viewing, the teachers were asked to recollect aloud what they were thinking as they were teaching the segment in question. Their recollections were recorded to constitute the data for the study.

Qualitative and quantitative analyses of the data were performed. These revealed that the same set of 20 to 21 categories of pedagogical thoughts (PTs) were described by the two sets of teachers, even though they taught different groups. Of these 20 to 21 categories, the same subset of 7 to 8 categories emerged as the most frequently reported by both groups of teachers. For example, the PT categories 'Language Management', 'Knowledge of Students', and 'Progress Review' fell into the top 5 for both sets of teachers.

While the findings of this study lead Gatbonton to argue that there might be a particular pedagogical knowledge shared by ESL teachers, she is aware of the dangers of generalizing on the basis of a study with so few (seven) participants. Gatbonton therefore recommends that larger numbers of teachers should be studied in order to verify the assumption. She also recommends including consideration of factors such as student characteristics, teacher characteristics (gender, personality) and training in future studies.

Mullock's study (2006), which is a partial replication of the work carried out by Gatbonton (1999), could be viewed as a response to

Gatbonton's call for research on teacher pedagogical knowledge to be expanded. The purpose of Mullock's study is to further investigate teachers' pedagogical knowledge, as defined by Gatbonton. Mullock, like Gatbonton, uses stimulated recall methodology. Gatbonton's coding features are also adopted. However, there are a number of differences regarding the research context and the learner participants in these two studies.

Mullock's study involves intact classes in two private commercial language schools in Sydney, Australia. No effort was made by the researcher to control or direct the content of the lessons. The learners in this study were attending courses in general English, business English, and exam preparation, and were at three different language proficiency levels. Four teacher participants had different levels of TESOL experience, ranging from 3 months to 12 years. All were trained primary school teachers and had taught at primary level for periods ranging from 2 months to several years. All held the Cambridge Certificate in English Language Teaching to Adults (CELTA).

The findings of Mullock's study show that the rankings of teachers' reported pedagogical thoughts are broadly similar to those in Gatbonton's study, with 'Language Management' ranked as number one in both studies (25% in Mullock's study, 18% in group A, and 22% in group B in Gatbonton's study). However, there are some notable differences. For

example, the category 'Knowledge of Students' is ranked second in Mullock's study (21%), and is far more frequently reported than in either of Gatbonton's groups (14% and 7%). Mullock suggests that this difference may be due to the fact that Gatbonton's learner groups were constituted for the purposes of research, and were therefore not naturally occurring intact classroom groups (Mullock, 2006, p. 57).

Within Mullock's study, there are also some striking differences between the teachers. For example, only 3 thought units were shared by all 4 teachers ('Elicit Possible Answers', 'Conduct Classroom Activity', and 'Correct Errors'), and only 12 thought units were shared by any 3 teachers. Mullock observes that 'this lack of shared variance is a surprising result, and one that points to the complexity of the teaching act' (Mullock, 2006, p. 60). Nevertheless, Mullock (2006, p. 63) concludes that her study supports Gatbonton's findings in general terms, confirming 'there is a degree of shared pedagogical knowledge among teachers of TESOL courses', and claims that this shared knowledge even transcends geopolitical context.

Gatbonton's and Mullock's studies have enriched teacher cognition literature with detailed micro-analysis of teachers' pedagogical thoughts, and demonstrated that teachers have an extensive repertoire of teaching knowledge. In addition, the findings of these two studies support the argument put forward by Breen et al. (2001) that there might be a shared pedagogical knowledge in L2 education in English speaking countries

where English is taught as a second language. However, the claim made by Mullock that this shared knowledge appears to transcend geopolitical contexts needs to be supported by more empirical evidence. Further study needs to be conducted in foreign language contexts and with non-native language teachers to test the claims made based on studies of ESL in English-speaking countries with native English-speaking teachers. Such research would deepen our understanding of language teaching in different geopolitical contexts, and answer the call for cross-cultural and inter-cultural studies of language pedagogy made by Breen, et al. (2001).

#### **2.2.4 Teacher in-class decision-making in L2 teaching**

While the studies of teachers' pedagogical knowledge viewed above are focused on teachers' pedagogical 'thoughts', studies of in-service teachers' in-class decision-making in L2 teaching (Bailey, 1996; Nunan, 1992; Woods, 1996) attempt to explore the factors influencing their instructional decisions. For example, an influential study by Smith (1996) investigates how experienced ESL teachers approach instructional decision-making, with the aim of discovering whether teacher decision-making is influenced by individually held beliefs about L2 teaching-learning; how context (institution, setting, students) affects ESL teachers' decisions about planning and implementation; and whether teachers' instructional decisions are consistent with theoretical ideas about planning and



instruction. Using observations, post-observation conferences and interviews, Smith analysed the decision-making of nine experienced ESL teachers working in three adult education institutions (three teachers from each institution). The study shows that these teachers' decision-making was related not only to their expressed beliefs about teaching ESL, but also to their accumulated experience in using particular techniques and strategies in the classroom.

For example, a striking theme that emerged from the data is that all the teachers in this study emphasized the need to *build* a positive and supportive learning environment. Smith emphasizes that the word 'build' is significant here because these teachers believed that such a learning environment could only be fostered by using student-centred, cooperative activities and appropriate teaching materials. Smith (1996) points out that this belief in the importance of classroom climate was central to these teachers' decision-making about tasks, and was based on their success with classes in which there was a 'social gathering atmosphere' (p. 209). The teachers found that this kind of atmosphere made students feel they were classmates as well as friends, and motivated and encouraged them to participate.

Smith claims that this study supports earlier findings that underlying any teaching approach there is a consistent set of principles guiding activities and techniques. However, this study shows that such consistency

is more teacher-based than theoretical, that is, Smith (1996) argues, 'teachers select and modify theoretical ideas in ways that are consistent with their personal beliefs about teaching and learning and their practical knowledge of the ESL instructional context' (p. 214). This study thus highlights the importance of teachers' beliefs and experiential knowledge in their instructional decision-making, which is the central concern of the research on teachers' personal practical knowledge reviewed later.

#### **2.2.5 Intercontextuality of teacher thinking and beliefs**

Taking contextual factors as a focus, Burns (1996) sets out to answer the following research questions in her study of teacher thinking and beliefs: (1) What kind of thinking and beliefs do experienced teachers bring to classroom processes, and what impact do these beliefs have on classroom practice? (2) How might changes and developments occur in teachers' beliefs through reflection on practice? Burns addresses these questions within a framework of the intercontextuality of teacher thinking and beliefs. The intercontextuality framework has three levels: institutional, classroom, and instructional. The *institutional* level, which forms the institutional culture, represents the broadest level and creates the cognitive frameworks within which teachers think about their specific teaching programmes and classes. The *classroom* level includes the personal beliefs the teacher has developed about language, learners and learning. These beliefs shape the

overall planning. The most specific level, the *instructional*, covers thinking and reflections on what actually happens in the classroom: management, tasks, resources and texts. The three levels are interdependent. Following qualitative research procedures, Burns selected one teacher, Sarah, in the Australian Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) to illustrate the interactions between these levels.

Sarah was an experienced teacher of advanced learners, but had just begun to teach beginners. The study found that Sarah's understanding of the contextual factors had an impact on her lesson planning and her choice of lesson content. At Sarah's institute, more traditional, structural teaching models which included much written practice were adopted within large classes. In these classes, those students at lower levels tended to become passive and quiet. When Sarah started teaching a small 'withdrawal group' – the slower learners withdrawn from the large classes – she wanted to integrate her learners' everyday lives into teaching in order to meet their needs at the classroom level. To this end, she planned her lessons more loosely so that she had more flexibility to incorporate students' daily experiences into classroom activities. In this way, Sarah displayed her central philosophy, that is 'learners should be self-directed' and language use in the classroom should be 'communicative'. At the instructional level, Sarah took tasks as the major concepts informing her structuring of lesson planning, rather than the course goals or objectives.

Another aim of this study was to help the teacher make the implicit explicit. For example, through examining the data together with the researcher, Sarah discovered that she 'controlled' much of the classroom interaction, which she thought reduced the opportunities for her students to participate. She thus decided to integrate the students' daily lives outside the classroom into classroom communicative activities in order to make the learning more meaningful to her students. To help achieve this goal, Sarah allowed the students to draw on their first language resources in classroom activities. This example suggests that, as Burns (1996) points out, 'close engagement with data from teachers' own classroom was an enlightening process and a significant means of professional growth' (p. 174).

The findings of this research lead Burns to propose that, for the purpose of teacher education, the notion of 'theories *for* practice' as distinct from the 'theories *of* practice' would be a useful concept, because, she argues, exploratory approaches and collaborative relationships between the researcher and the practitioner 'would greatly facilitate our knowledge of the reflexivity between theory and practice' (Burns, 1996, p. 175). Indeed, in L2 education there has been advocacy for the use of exploratory approaches and collaborative relationships in language teaching research and practice (e.g. Allwright, 2003, 2005, 2006; Gieve & Miller, 2006). Reflection as a tool for professional development has also been adopted in

L2 education, for example, by Richards and Lockhart (1994) and Farrell (2007), since it was further explored by Schon (1983, 1987).

### **2.2.6 Summary**

In this section I have reviewed studies of the relationship between teacher cognition and teaching practice from different perspectives, in the hope of presenting a general picture of the research in this area. Richards (1996) has showed that teachers hold a set of maxims guiding their practice. Breen et al. (2001) have revealed the complex relationships between teachers' principles and their practices. Gatbonton (1999) and Mulluck (2006) presented teachers' pedagogical knowledge in detail in their studies. While these studies investigated teachers' principles and knowledge, Smith (1996) and Burns (1996) paid more attention to factors influencing teachers' principles and their in-class decision making, with Smith focusing on the role of experiential knowledge, and Burns focusing on the contextual factors and the role of reflection in teachers' change of practice. Although the foci and research methods are different in the studies reviewed above, all provide evidence that supports the general assumption that teachers are active decision-makers in their teaching practices; that teachers hold relevant knowledge and have theories to guide their practices, these theories being referred to as 'maxims', 'principles', 'beliefs', or 'assumptions'.

The studies reviewed also show that there seem to be shared knowledge and principles among teachers teaching in the same or similar contexts (Breen, et al., 2001; Gatbonton, 1999; Mullock, 2006; Smith, 1996). These findings suggest that there may be collective ideologies in language teaching in certain professional communities. These ideologies may be shaped by education (Gatbonton, 1999; Richards, 1996), by prevailing theories and pedagogies (Breen, et al., 2001), by teaching context (Burns, 1996), and by teaching experiences (Smith, 1996). This collective 'know-how' could help pre-service and novice teachers to integrate themselves into the teaching profession, and help in-service teachers to reflect on their teaching practice (Breen, et al., 2001; Burns, 1996). For researchers and teacher educators, these findings raise the following questions: How do an individual's experiential pedagogy, theories from education, and teaching context all interact to influence teaching practice and professional development? How can knowledge of this interaction be used to support a teacher's professional development? The studies also highlight a need to extend the research scope to include different geopolitical contexts, as well as cross-cultural and inter-cultural studies of language pedagogy (Breen, et al., 2001).

The studies reviewed also draw attention to the *differences* between language teachers and indicate that this diversity is partly attributable to the teacher's personal background, such as education, beliefs and value

systems (Richards, 1996), partly to the context in which they are teaching (Burns, 1996; Mullock, 2006), and partly to their teaching experiences (Smith, 1996). In fact, the studies indicate that teachers' principles are practice-oriented and adjusted to suit the teaching context (Richards, 1996; Smith, 1996). In this way, teachers' principles not only guide their practice, but are in turn shaped by their practice (Burns, 1996; Smith, 1996). These personal and practical characteristics of teacher cognition are central to the study of teachers' personal practical knowledge, the theme of the next section.

## **2.3 STUDIES OF TEACHERS' PERSONAL PRACTICAL KNOWLEDGE**

In this section I will examine the research on teachers' personal practical knowledge (PPK) to provide a background for the present study. I will start with the research on teachers' PPK in general education, followed by the research in L2 education.

### **2.3.1 Study of teachers' PPK in general education**

Research on teachers' PPK starts with Elbaz's (1981, 1983) seminal study of the practical knowledge of a very experienced high school teacher, Sarah. Elbaz began her study with the following assumption:

[W]hile teachers' knowledge may be largely unarticulated, teachers do have a broad range of knowledge which guides their work – knowledge of subject matter; of classroom organization and instructional techniques; of the structuring of learning experiences and curriculum content; of students' needs, abilities, and interests; of the social framework of the school and its surrounding community; and of their own strengths and shortcomings as teachers. (Elbaz, 1981, p. 47)

Based on this assumption, Elbaz undertook five interviews with Sarah, and two periods of class observation to explore Sarah's teaching practice. Elbaz found that Sarah held a special kind of knowledge, which she refers to as 'practical knowledge' because the term 'focuses attention on the action and decision-oriented nature of the teacher's situation, and construes her knowledge as a function, in part, of her response to that situation' (Elbaz, 1983, p. 5).

Based on her work with Sarah, Elbaz devised a complex framework to help describe and construct Sarah's practical knowledge. First she constructed the *content* of practical knowledge in five categories: knowledge of subject matter, knowledge of curriculum, knowledge of instruction, knowledge of self, and knowledge of the schooling milieu. Elbaz then developed five *orientations* of practical knowledge to discuss the ways teachers hold and use their practical knowledge: situational, personal,



social, experiential, and theoretical. Elbaz (1981, p. 49) described these orientations in the following way: *situational orientation* reflects the fact that teachers' knowledge is practical and directed to 'the various situations of teaching'; *personal orientation* reflects an assumption that teachers use their knowledge 'to work in personal meaningful ways'; *social orientation* refers to the relationship between teachers' knowledge and the social context, and the fact that teacher knowledge shapes and is shaped by the social setting of teaching; *experiential orientation* implies that teachers' knowledge 'is structured by and directed to their own experiences'; *theoretical orientation* refers to a teacher's 'general orientation to theory which pervaded her knowledge and conditioned its use'.

Elbaz also proposed three *degrees of generality* to structure teachers' practical knowledge: the rule of practice, the practical principle, and the image. *The rule of practice* is, Elbaz (1981) explained, 'simply a brief, clearly formulated statement of what to do or how to do it in a particular situation frequently encountered in practice' and 'may be highly specific' (p. 61). It could be said that the rule of practice is akin to the 'pedagogical thoughts' in Gatbonton's and Mullock's studies described above (see 2.2.3). Elbaz defines *the practical principle* as 'a broader, more inclusive statement than the rule', it embodies 'purpose in a deliberate and reflective way' (p. 61), and could be regarded as similar to what Richards calls a 'maxim' (see 2.2.1 above) and Breen et al. refer to as a 'principle' (see 2.2.2 above). Of these

three degrees of generality, Elbaz (1981) regards *the image* as 'the least explicit and most inclusive', because it combines the teacher's feelings, values, needs and beliefs, and serves 'to guide the teacher's thinking and to organize knowledge in the relevant area' (p. 61). Elbaz (1981) holds that all of these three degrees embody the teacher's purposes in varying ways: 'the rule of practice may be followed methodically, while the principle is used reflectively, and the image guides action in an intuitive way' (pp. 49-50). Elbaz takes Sarah's knowledge of communication to illustrate how these three degrees of generality function in her practical knowledge:

[T]he rules of practice she followed are indicated in a statement like, 'I certainly try very hard to listen very actively to the kids, [...] to encourage them [...] to express their concerns without judging them.' The principle that orders these rules is that students should be provided with a class atmosphere in which they are able to take risks and thereby come to communicate more openly. The image that captures in a metaphoric way the purpose toward which Sarah works is found in the statement that she wanted 'to have a window onto the kids and what they're thinking,' and, in turn, she wanted her own window to be more open. (Elbaz, 1981, pp. 61-62)

Elbaz found that, for Sarah, the image was the most powerful factor in structuring her knowledge, and it seemed that Sarah used images to

order her thinking and extend her knowledge. Elbaz therefore adopted the images Sarah used as a means of describing Sarah's cognitive style – her practical knowledge in use. For example, Sarah's practical knowledge of 'subject matter' was expressed by the image of 'intellectual and practical space': the intellectual space allows for the expression and clarification of intellectual content; the practical space provides both students and teacher with the common context in which to share in the instructional process. Elbaz (1981, p. 63) points out that the use of this image also suggests that Sarah was more concerned about classroom interaction with her students than with the subject matter itself.

Elbaz (1981) states that the motivation for the study came from her concern with 'the prevailing view of the teacher as a passive transmitter of knowledge' (p. 43). Her intention was to demonstrate that teachers are the holders and users of practical knowledge, knowledge that is 'broadly based on their experiences in classrooms and schools and is directed toward the handling of problems that arise in their work' (p. 67). Sarah's practical knowledge provided evidence to support this view. Moreover, as Borg (2006, p. 13) points out, Elbaz's study presented 'a different, more holistic perspective on the study of teachers' work', at a time when teacher decision-making was a dominant focus in research on teacher cognition. Clandinin (1986) also remarks that 'Elbaz's work on practical knowledge opens the way for looking at knowledge as experiential, embodied and

based on the narrative of experience' (p. 19).

While Elbaz's study focuses on the practical perspective of teacher knowledge, the work of Clandinin and Connelly (Clandinin, 1985, 1986; Clandinin & Connelly, 1987; Connelly & Clandinin, 1985) extends to include the 'personal' aspect of teacher knowledge. Clandinin (1985) argues that 'this use of "personal" draws attention to the individual local factor which helps to constitute the characters, the past, and the future of any individual' (p. 362).

The study of teachers' personal practical knowledge (PPK) focuses on teachers' experiential knowledge. The assumptions behind PPK are that the knowledge teachers develop about teaching is both theoretical and practical, and that it is 'blended by the personal background and characteristics of the teacher and expressed in particular situations' (Clandinin, 1985, p. 361). To understand PPK, teachers' experiential history – both professional and personal – must be taken into account. This is best done by studying PPK 'through interpretations of observed practices over time' and 'through reconstructions of the teacher's narratives of experience' (Clandinin, 1985, p. 363).

Based on these assumptions, Clandinin and Connelly advocate and adopt an ethnographical approach to the study of teachers' PPK through the examination of teachers' narratives. In contrast to Elbaz, their interests are not in categorizing teachers' practical knowledge, but in understanding

teachers' experience. In order to do so, they too use images to capture and conceptualize teachers' PPK. They define image as 'a personal, meta-level, organizing concept in personal practical knowledge in that it embodies a person's experience; finds expression in practice; and is the perspective from which new experience is taken' (Clandinin, 1986, p. 166), and argue that image can be seen as 'a central construct for understanding teachers' knowledge' (Clandinin, 1985, p. 363).

In her study of two primary school teachers in Canada, Clandinin (1985) used images to represent the PPK of the two teachers. For Stephanie, one of the two teachers in Clandinin's study, the dominant image was 'classroom as home'. In the interviews, Stephanie described the classroom as 'a group of people interacting and cooperating', where both students and teacher 'should feel comfortable' and 'have a feeling for the place because [...] it shows in how you work with the children, it shows in the children themselves, how they relate to each other' (Clandinin, 1985, p. 370). This image not only captured Stephanie's knowledge of the instructional process, of herself as a teacher and person, of the subject matter appropriate to primary school, but also linked her personal life with her professional teaching life. The image of 'classroom as home' had its roots in her schooling and home experiences, as well as in her professional experience: as a child at school she felt 'left out' by the education system, and as a student teacher in Teacher's College, she felt 'out of step' with the

way student teachers were being taught (Clandinin, 1985, p. 372). Stephanie therefore wanted her own classroom to be more friendly and personal to both the teacher and the students.

While it is important to recognize the image of 'classroom as home' as a link between Stephanie's personal life and professional life in order to understand her PPK, Clandinin maintains that it is the affective dimensions of the image, both emotional and moral, that bring life to Stephanie's PPK. Describing the classroom, Stephanie used words such as 'closeness', 'interacting', 'cooperating', and 'living'. When she described her childhood school experiences, she used terms such as 'bitter', 'terrible', and 'desperately unhappy' (Clandinin, 1985, pp. 376-377). In addition, Stephanie made frequent use of the terms 'should' and 'should not' indicating that teaching to her has a moral dimension, or as Clandinin puts it, she had set 'a judgmental standard for her practices' (Clandinin, 1985, p. 377). Clandinin summarizes by stating that, coloured with emotionality and morality, the image functions as 'the glue that melds together a person's diverse experiences, both personal and professional' (Clandinin, 1985, p. 379).

The significance of this study of PPK is the fact that it brings the personal aspect of teachers' knowledge to the fore. Through their studies, Clandinin and Connelly show that teachers' personal lives and professional lives are intimately connected, and that it is therefore

necessary to attend to both the emotional and moral dimensions of teachers' knowledge – dimensions which have hitherto been neglected. By employing 'image' to express a teacher's PPK, Clandinin and Connelly also illustrate that PPK 'need not be clearly articulated and logically definable in order to exert a powerful influence in teachers' lives' (Clandinin, 1985, p. 383). Methodologically, Clandinin and Connelly have not only introduced narrative inquiry to research on teachers' PPK, but also demonstrated that teachers' PPK would be better studied narratively, because it is through stories that teachers reconstruct their experiences. Their study has had a strong influence on later studies of teachers' PPK in L2 education, as we will see below.

### **2.3.2 Study of teachers' PPK in L2 education**

There is some research on L2 teachers' pedagogical knowledge (Gatbonton, 1999; Mullock, 2006), but very little on their PPK, as Borg's (2003, 2006) reviews confirms. Tsang (2004) uses the term teachers' 'personal practical knowledge' in the title of her study, but she operationalizes PPK narrowly as teaching maxims.

Paula Golombek (1998) examines language teachers' PPK using the frameworks adopted by Elbaz and Clandinin and Connelly. Her study addresses two questions: (1) What are the characteristics of L2 teachers'

PPK? (2) How does L2 teachers' PPK inform practice? The participants were two teaching assistants who were teaching an English course under supervision as a part of their MA programme. Both were native English speakers in their early 20s without any formal teaching experience. With after-class and scheduled interviews, stimulated recalls and daily nonparticipant observation field notes as data sources, Golombek used narratives as a reconstruction of teachers' experiences. Golombek first constructed these two teachers' PPK as four categories: knowledge of *self*, knowledge of *subject matter*, knowledge of *instruction*, and knowledge of *context*, which are similar to the categories identified by Elbaz. Knowledge of *self* includes the identities to which the teachers refer such as language learner, teacher, and spouse. Knowledge of *subject matter* focuses on the disciplinary knowledge, while knowledge of *instruction* represents the pedagogical knowledge. Knowledge of *context* includes the institutional and sociopolitical setting. These categories overlap and interact, and are expressed as tensions in each participant's teaching practice.

Golombek adopts the notion of image from Clandinin (1986, p. 166, see 2.3.1) to characterize these tensions. For example, the PPK of Jenny, one of the two teachers studied by Golombek, was captured in the image of 'balance' – the tension between the two instructional objectives of fluency and accuracy. This tension had its roots in her language learning experience in a Russian programme. She believed that the teacher



'silenced' her as a student by correcting her; therefore she did not want to do the same thing to her students. Jenny's PPK 'was thus shaped by her experiences as a learner and shaped what she did as a teacher' (Golombek, 1998, p. 454).

Golombek (1998, p. 459) argues that teachers' PPK serves as an interpretative framework to help them make sense of their classrooms as they recount their experiences and make their own knowledge explicit. PPK functions in two ways: it 'filters experience so that teachers reconstruct it and respond to the exigencies of a teaching situation'; it also gives physical form to practice, 'it is teachers' knowledge in action'. Because this knowledge is used in response to a particular context, it is reshaped by that context. 'In this way, L2 teachers' personal practical knowledge shapes and is shaped by understandings of teaching and learning'.

In summarizing, Golombek holds that L2 teachers' PPK is similar to that of the L1 educational teachers as described by Elbaz (1983), Clandinin (1986), and Harrington (1994), in that it is 'personally relevant, situational, oriented toward practice, dialectical, and dynamic as well as moralistic, emotional, and consequential' (Golombek, 1998, p. 452). Golombek argues that viewing knowledge as consequential extends the construct of PPK in a fundamental way to take account of education as a social process, and the classroom as a form of community life, as noted by Dewey (1916). L2

teachers' PPK, therefore, needs to be examined in terms of how they perceive the moral and affective consequences of L2 instruction for themselves and their students (Golombek, 1998, p. 449). Indeed, as Clandinin (1989) points out, emotionality and morality are two dimensions of teachers' PPK which have not attracted enough attention in L2 education research. Golombek's study has helped to raise the awareness of this gap.

### **2.3.3 Summary**

Golombek (2009) observes that the study of teachers' PPK 'has challenged the separation of knower and knowledge, experience and science, and subjectivity and objectivity' (p. 156). The research already conducted has helped raise the value of teachers' experiential knowledge, legitimate the teacher as the knower, and acknowledge the emotional and moral dimensions of teachers' knowledge. It has also introduced narrative inquiry as a research methodology to help teachers construct and reconstruct their PPK through telling and retelling their teaching stories, and it has adopted the concept of 'image' to present teachers' PPK. As a result, the notion of PPK provides an integrated and holistic framework for the exploration of teachers' experiential knowledge and their mental lives. It is thus taken as a research framework for the present study.

## 2.4 THE PRESENT STUDY

In this chapter, I have attempted to locate the present study in the landscape of teacher cognition research. From this review we have seen that teacher cognition research has helped alter our perception of teachers. Instead of viewing them as transmitters of other people's ideas, the research encourages us to view them as knowledge holders and decision-makers. The research has also helped deepen our understanding of the complexity of language teaching practice, and factors influencing language teachers' beliefs, thinking processes and classroom actions, just as it has helped broaden the scope of research on teacher professional development to include affective factors such as values, emotionality and morality.

However, much of current L2 teacher cognition research has focused on L2 English education and tended 'to affirm western educational ideologies concerning the relationships between subject matter, teacher, student, and classroom practices' (Breen, et al., 2001, p. 499), as indicated above (2.2.2). There are calls for cross-cultural and inter-cultural studies of teacher cognition to better understand factors shaping non-English language teaching practice. In addition, as Borg (2003) observes, much current research is also limited to native speaker teachers teaching motivated adult learners in small classes. He therefore calls for the research agenda to be broadened to include primary and secondary schools, as well

as classes taught by non-native speaker teachers.

Taking Chinese as a foreign language, New Zealand secondary schools as the contexts, and both native and non-native Chinese speaker teachers as the participants, the present study of Chinese language teachers' PPK is undertaken to respond to these calls for expansion of the research scope. As no such research has been done before, it is hoped that the present study will enrich the understanding of teacher cognition in general, and the understanding of teachers' PPK in particular.

As already stated, the purpose of the study is to gain insight into teachers' PPK and their professional development by exploring three Chinese language teachers' 'My Way', particularly the factors shaping their 'My Way', with reference to the following research questions:

- (1) What are the characteristics of these teachers' PPK?
- (2) What factors shape their PPK?

The study takes teachers' PPK as its framework, because this research tradition strives for a holistic understanding of teachers' experiential knowledge, and is sufficiently broad to include 'the teacher's personal past history, personal understanding of human affairs, and all of the cultural understanding any teacher brings into the classroom situation' (Johnson, 1989, p. 362). In the chapter that follows I will discuss the research approaches and present the research context.

## *Chapter 3*

### **Research Approach and Context**

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#### **3.0 INTRODUCTION**

*It has become fairly commonplace in educational research to point out that how one observes and collects data shapes what one sees; however, this caveat is particularly apt in research on teacher knowledge. Indeed, because it deals with a cognitive world that is unseen, unheard, and only indirectly knowable, research on how teachers think and what they know is critically dependent on the conceptual frameworks it uses and the research methodologies it employs to gather data within those frameworks.*

*(Freeman, 1996, p. 465)*

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the research methodologies used in the present study of teacher cognition among teachers of Chinese. Elaborating on the concerns raised above, Freeman identifies three

fundamental methodological questions which researchers must answer before embarking upon a study of teacher knowledge and thinking:

1. What are the data, and how are they linked to the purposes of the study?
2. How are the data gathered?
3. How are the data analysed and interpreted, and by whom?

Freeman points out that 'together these questions provide a framework for determining the general appropriacy of the research methodology in the study of language teacher thinking and learning' (Freeman, 1996, p. 367).

Taking the above questions as a guide, the present study adopted a qualitative, multiple-case study approach, drawing on narrative inquiry in order to investigate the characteristics of three Chinese language teachers' 'My Way' and the factors shaping their 'My Way'. In what follows I begin explaining why I chose this approach (3.1). I then describe the research approach in detail (3.2), before concluding with a brief introduction to language education in the New Zealand context (3.3).

### **3.1 ESTABLISHING AN APPROACH**

#### **3.1.1 The qualitative case study**

As stated in Chapter 1, it is my hope that this research will increase our understanding of the teaching of Chinese in New Zealand schools: what actually happens in the classroom, and, more importantly, how Chinese language teachers think and act in response to the New Zealand context. I believe that a better understanding of these issues will enable us to provide better support for Chinese language teachers in New Zealand. A case study approach was adopted to achieve this goal, because, in delimiting the object of research to a few Chinese language teachers, this method offers a focus 'on holistic description and explanation' (Merriam, 2001, p. 29), which helps illuminate and understand the phenomenon under study (Hays, 2004, p. 218).

*Multiple* case studies were undertaken in order to explore how teachers with different backgrounds and teaching experience develop their 'My Way' of teaching Chinese in New Zealand secondary schools. A purposive sampling strategy – sampling for a specific purpose rather than for probability (Merriam, 2001, p. 61; Stake, 2005, p. 451) – was adopted to select three cases for the present study. More details about selection of the research participants will be give in 4.1.1.

Not all case studies are qualitative. Yin's (2003) quantitative approach to the case study is in contrast to the qualitative approach adopted by many other case study methodologists, such as Merriam (2001) and Stake (1995, 2005). A 'case study is not a methodological choice but a choice of what is to be studied' and a case study can be carried out both quantitatively and qualitatively (Stake, 2005, p. 443).

Yin prefers a positivist stance in doing case study. For example, in contrasting logical case study to more interpretive, ethnographic case study, Yin (2003) advocates basing case study research 'within the framework of the scientific method - to develop hypotheses, collect empirical data, and develop conclusions based on the analysis of such data' (p.47). It appears that Yin, unlike most contemporary case study methodologists, 'does not favour a more interpretive, less positivist, approach to case study' (Duff, 2007, p. 28). To highlight the *qualitative* approach to this study, the word 'qualitative' was put in front of 'case studies' in the subheading of this thesis.

I have chosen a *qualitative approach* in undertaking this case study, because, as Patton (1985) states:

[Qualitative research] is an effort to understand situations in their uniqueness as part of a particular context and the interactions there. This understanding is an end in itself, so that it is not attempting to predict what may happen in the future necessarily, but to understand



the nature of that setting – what it means for participants to be in that setting, what their lives are like, what’s going on for them, what their meanings are, what the world looks like in that particular setting – and in the analysis to be able to communicate that faithfully to others who are interested in that setting... The analysis strives for depth of understanding (p. 1). (Cited in Merriam, 2001, p. 6)

As the purpose of my research is to develop our understanding of Chinese language teachers’ ‘My Way’ and their professional development in the New Zealand context, a qualitative research approach was deemed to be most suitable to the present study.

### **3.1.2 Selecting narrative inquiry**

Under the umbrella of qualitative study there are numerous different traditions. Those most commonly used in the field of general education include ‘basic’ or ‘generic’ qualitative study, ethnographic study, phenomenology, grounded theory, and case study (Merriam, 2001, p. 12). In the field of L2 education, Richards (2009) lists the following categories of qualitative study: ethnographies (including linguistic ethnographies), case studies, interactional studies (and conversation analysis), introspective methods (including diary studies), life history/narrative research (and in-depth interview studies) and action research (including exploratory

practice) (p. 150). Obviously there is some overlap among these traditions. They differ from each other, Merriam (2001, p. 20) explains, 'in terms of disciplinary orientation (ethnography, phenomenology), function (grounded theory), or form (case study, basic or generic qualitative study), and they 'can, and often do, work in conjunction with one another'.

My initial approach to this research fell into the category of basic qualitative study. I used the qualitative interview and classroom observation as my two main means of collecting data. I did not at that early stage consider narrative inquiry as a possible research methodology, even though it had been used in other work on teachers' personal practical knowledge (PPK), particularly by Clandinin and Connelly (Clandinin, 1985; Clandinin & Connelly, 1987, 2000; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). The main reason for not considering narrative inquiry was my own lack of familiarity with it, due partly to the fact that it is seldom discussed in methodology texts in the field of Applied Linguistics. For example, narrative inquiry is not mentioned by Richards (2003) or Dörnyei (2007) in their highly regarded texts on methodology.

However, when I started interviewing the three teachers in my study, I found that they tended to tell me stories. This observation led me to focus more closely on narrative inquiry. I contacted Dr. D. Jean Clandinin for guidance and was advised to start with *Narrative inquiry: Experience and story in qualitative research* (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) and a journal

article 'Navigating sites for narrative inquiry' (Clandinin, Pushor, & Orr, 2007). I also contacted Dr. Gary Barkhuizen at the University of Auckland regarding his work on narrative inquiry into language teacher development.

The more I read, the more I became convinced of the relevance of narrative inquiry as a methodology to study teachers' PPK. I therefore decided to use narrative inquiry as the methodology for the present study, changing the subheading of the thesis from '*Qualitative case studies of teachers' personal practical knowledge*' to '*Narrative inquiry into teachers' personal practical knowledge*'.

However, because narrative inquiry is still in its infancy, protocols and framework for its use have yet to be developed. Therefore, as Connelly and Clandinin (2006) point out, 'each inquirer needs to develop the criteria appropriate to her or his work'. I found myself in what they describe as 'both an exciting and frustrating time because of the shifting criteria and the variety of work that comes under the heading of narrative inquiry' (p. 476). I was unsure if I was using narrative inquiry in an accepted sense. This feeling of uncertainty grew even stronger when I read Hacker's PhD thesis: *Understanding the nature of language teacher educator learning: Substance, narrative essence and contextual reality* (Hacker, 2008). In her thesis, Hacker documented in detail her experience in using narrative inquiry into the understanding of the nature of language teacher educator learning.

Narrative inquiry to Hacker seems to be both an inquiry into a phenomenon, in her case, the nature of language teacher educator learning, and an inquiry into learning to carry out narrative inquiry. The latter is given prominence in a journal article Hacker co-authored with her supervisor: 'Inquiring into learning about narrative inquiry in language teacher education' (Barkhuizen & Hacker, 2008), in which they document in detail their inquiry process.

While I was certainly inquiring into teachers' PPK using a narrative perspective, I was not inquiring into learning to carry out narrative inquiry. It also became apparent to me that my research was not purely designed as a narrative inquiry, because it included classroom observation as a data source, and interview data that is not narrative in nature (e.g. discussion about approaches to teaching). For these reasons, I changed back to the more generic subheading: 'Qualitative case studies of teachers' personal practical knowledge'.

Nevertheless, in carrying out the present study, I shared the fundamental assumptions underlying narrative inquiry: a narrative is a story of experience, and narrative inquiry is a study of experience (see also 3.2.2). My subsequent data analysis, interpretation and reporting were guided by these assumptions. Given that narrative inquiry is still under development, I now present a brief overview of the methodology.

### 3.2 NARRATIVE INQUIRY AS A METHODOLOGY

Narrative inquiry is distinctly interdisciplinary, including elements of literary, historical, anthropological, sociological, psychological, and cultural studies (Casey, 1995/1996; Chase, 2005; Riessman, 2008). Chase (2005) traces contemporary narrative inquiry back to the studies of early life histories in sociology and anthropology during the first half of the 20th century, through to the use of personal narratives in feminism during the liberation movements of the 1960s and 1970s, and oral narratives in sociolinguistics in the mid-1960s. Riessman (2008) summarizes the development of narrative study in this way: 'Narrative study buds early, but flowers in the mid-1980s with challenges to realism and positivism. Today, the field is a veritable garden of cross-disciplinary hybrids' (p. 14). She further indicates that the narrative turn is clearly 'part of larger moves in the social sciences away from discipline-specific and investigator-controlled practices' (Riessman, 2008, p. 15), asserting that:

The mechanical metaphor adopted from the natural sciences – investigators provide an objective description of the world and position themselves outside the field of study to do so – has given way to narrative studies that position the investigator as part of the field, simultaneously mediating and interpreting the 'other' in dialogue with the 'self'. (Riessman, 2008, p. 17)

Because of its cross-disciplinary roots, narrative inquiry takes many forms. The following discussion describes the way in which narrative inquiry is applied in the present study.

### **3.2.1 Defining narrative**

As an ordinary word, 'narrative' comes from the verb 'to narrate' or 'to tell (as a story) in detail' (Creswell, 2008, p. 512). However, as an academic term, 'narrative' carries many meanings and is used in a variety of ways by different disciplines, but often synonymously with 'story' (Riessman, 2008, p. 3).

Riessman (2008) regards 'contingent sequences' as a key ingredient common to all narrative and quotes Salmon (2008) to elaborate on this idea:

A fundamental criterion of narrative is surely contingency. Whatever the content, stories demand the consequential linking of events or ideas. Narrative shaping entails imposing a meaningful pattern on what would otherwise be random and disconnected. (Cited in Riessman, 2008, p. 5)

Riessman (2008, pp. 5-6) goes on to explain that the narrative concept is operationalized along a continuum. At one end lies the very restrictive

definition used in sociolinguistics, 'here narrative refers to a discrete unit of discourse, an extended answer by a research participant to a single question, topically centred and temporally organized'; at the other end lies the use of the term of narrative in social history and anthropology, where it 'can refer to an entire life history, woven from threads of interviews, observations, and documents'; in the middle of this continuum of working definitions of narrative, Riessman places research in psychology and sociology, 'here personal narrative encompasses long sections of talk – extended accounts of lives in context that develop over the course of single or multiple research interviews or therapeutic conversations'. This is the definition of narrative adopted in the present study.

### **3.2.2 What is narrative inquiry?**

Although there is no single cross-disciplinary definition of narrative inquiry<sup>1</sup>, the various disciplines that employ narrative inquiry as a research methodology share two fundamental assumptions (Chase, 2005; Riessman, 2008; Squire, Andrews, & Tamboukou, 2008). The first assumption is that

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<sup>1</sup> Pavlenko (2002, p. 213) points out that there is a difference between 'narrative inquiry' and 'narrative study'. While the former is usually understood to be 'an ethnographic approach to eliciting understandings', the latter 'has a greater focus on narrative construction from a variety of perspectives'. However, it seems this difference is becoming blurred, and 'narrative inquiry' is adopted as an umbrella term to cover both 'narrative study' and 'narrative research'. One example is that the key journal of narrative study has changed its name from *Narrative Study of Lives* to *Narrative Inquiry*. In the present study 'narrative inquiry' is used as a generic term for this research tradition.

humans, individually and socially, lead storied lives: 'We dream in narrative, daydream in narrative, remember, anticipate, hope, despair, plan, revise, criticize, gossip, learn, hate and love by narrative', Hardy (1968, p. 5) asserts. The second assumption is that narrative is a way of knowing: 'Essential to utilizing narrative inquiry as a method of research is the understanding that narrative is a way of knowing. As such, it is natural to us and is part of our cognitive repertoire' (Kramp, 2004, p. 106).

Connelly and Clandinin (2006) provide the following definition which concisely summarizes these essential elements of narrative inquiry:

Arguments for the development and use of narrative inquiry come out of a view of human experience in which humans, individually and socially, lead storied lives. People shape their daily lives by stories of who they and others are and as they interpret their past in terms of those stories. Story, in the current idiom, is a portal through which a person enters the world and by which his or her experience of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful. Viewed this way, narrative is the phenomena studied in inquiry. Narrative inquiry, the study of experience as story, then, is first and foremost a way of thinking about experience. Narrative inquiry as a methodology entails a view of the phenomena. To use narrative inquiry methodology is to adopt a particular view of experience as phenomena under study. (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 477)



This is the definition I have adopted in the present study. As we have already seen in Chapter 2, teachers' PPK is embodied in their life experience and reflects a nonpropositional dimension of human knowledge (Johnson, 1989, p. 362), that can only be accessed indirectly. Narratives can provide a window into teachers' beliefs and experiences, and narrative inquiry can help understand those beliefs and experiences. It can, as Bell (2002) posits, allow researchers to 'get at information that people do not consciously know themselves', and allow 'deeply hidden assumptions to surface' (p. 209).

Another advantage of using narrative inquiry to investigate teachers' PPK is its integration of multiple factors, such as context, temporality, and space; and its ability to capture affective dimensions, such as emotions, values, and morals (Clandinin, et al., 2007, see also 2.3.1). Narrative inquiry thus provides researchers with a tool to examine teachers' PPK in a holistic way. Moreover, by involving teachers in the telling and retelling process, narrative inquiry helps teachers reconstruct their experiences. This process of reconstruction in turn assists them to broaden and deepen their understanding of their own teaching practice (Barkhuizen, 2008; Johnson & Golombek, 2002).

In sum, because of its focus on understanding of experience, its attention to the nonpropositional dimension of knowledge, and its ability to present multiple factors, narrative inquiry is a natural choice for the

study of teachers' experience and their PPK (Bell, 2002; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Connelly & Clandinin, 2006; Johnson & Golombek, 2002). Narrative inquiry was therefore chosen as the methodology for the present study, which is qualitative in nature, with a focus on exploring the experiential knowledge of three Chinese language teachers.

### **3.2.3 A framework of narrative inquiry**

As mentioned earlier, there are as yet no established frameworks or protocols for the application of narrative inquiry. Chase (2005) offers a set of five analytic lenses through which the researcher can approach empirical material. These five lenses, described below, served as a framework to guide the present study.

#### ***Lens 1: Narrative as meaning making***

The first analytic lens Chase presents is the treatment of narrative as a distinct form of discourse, which is 'retrospective meaning making – the shaping or ordering of past experience' (Chase, 2005, p. 656). This view of narrative is also shared by Kramp, who argues: 'A narrative connects events, actions, and experiences and moves them through time. The narrator or storyteller constructs a story by structuring and framing

relationships' (Kramp, 2004, p. 110). Indeed, connecting events, framing relationships, and constructing meaning over time are distinct forms of narrative, which contrast with other discourses, as Chase explains:

Unlike a chronology, which also reports events over time, a narrative communicates the narrator's point of view, including why the narrative is worth telling in the first place. Thus in addition to describing what happened, narratives also express emotions, thoughts, and interpretations. Unlike editorials, policy statements, and doctrinal statements of belief, all of which also express a point of view, a narrative makes the self (the narrator) the protagonist, either as actor or as interested observer of other's actions. Finally, unlike scientific discourse, which also explains or presents an understanding of actions and events, narrative discourse highlights the uniqueness of each human action and event rather than their common properties. (Chase, 2005, pp. 656-657)

### ***Lens 2: Narrative as a verbal action***

The second analytic lens has narrative researchers view narratives as verbal action – 'as doing or accomplishing something', with the narrator's voice, Chase (2005, p. 657) claims. She stresses that it is the combination of what the narrator communicates and how and where he or she

communicates that makes the voice particular. 'Furthermore', Chase states, 'when researchers treat narration as actively creative and the narrator's voice as particular, they move away from questions about the factual nature of the narrator's statements. Instead, they highlight the versions of self, reality, and experience that the storyteller produces through the telling' (Chase, 2005, p. 657).

In the same vein, Kramp holds that 'the storyteller translates knowing into telling': 'It is in the telling that meaning is given to experience. It is in telling that we come to understand' (p. 110). Kramp brings our attention to the fact that 'there is no already existing story for the narrator to tell; rather, the story comes to be in the act of telling, where meaning is assigned to experience, and intentionality becomes apparent' (Kramp, 2004, p. 110).

### *Lens 3: Stories viewed within a range of social circumstances*

When viewed through this analytic lens, Chase (2005, p. 657) states, stories are read as 'both enabled and constrained by a range of social resources and circumstances', such as the narrator's community, local setting, organizational and social membership, and cultural and historical location.

In discussing the narrator's point of view, Kramp (2004) emphasizes the importance of contextual factors in particularizing the narrative and enhancing perspective. She points out that while the narrator 'tells' the

story from a point of view, he or she also 'situates' it in a particular social, cultural, or political context. Researchers need to attend to this context or setting in order 'to interpret the story and understanding its meaning' (p. 109).

Attention to context is central to Clandinin's approach to narrative inquiry and that of her associates. They identify three commonplaces – temporality, sociality and place – as a conceptual framework to specify dimensions of an inquiry space for narrative inquiry. They argue, 'the study of any one or a combination of these commonplaces might well take place in some other form of qualitative inquiry. What makes a narrative inquiry is the simultaneous exploration of all three' (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 479). Elsewhere, they stress that the focus of narrative inquiry is 'not only a valorizing of individuals' experience but also an exploration of the social, cultural, and institutional narratives within which individuals' experiences were constituted, shaped, expressed, and enacted' (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 42).

#### ***Lens 4: Narratives as socially situated interactive performances***

When applying this analytic lens, 'narrative researchers treat narratives as socially situated interactive performances – as produced in this particular setting, for this particular audience, for these particular purposes' (Chase,

2005, p. 657). In other words, Chase explains, the 'same' story would be told differently to an interviewer in a quiet relaxed setting than to a reporter for a television news show. Through this lens, it becomes apparent that the narrator's story is flexible, variable, and shaped in part by interaction with the audience. That is, 'a narrative is a joint production of narrator and listener, whether the narrative arises in naturally occurring talk, an interview, or a fieldwork setting' (Chase, 2005, p. 657).

The researcher, Kramp reminds us, must therefore be aware that 'the story you hear is constructed, as a researcher using narrative inquiry, you accept the story "as told." The story as told, as it is constructed, becomes your object of analysis in narrative inquiry' (Kramp, 2004, p. 121). Citing Eisner, Kramp (2004, p. 121) reminds us that 'there is no telling it like it is, for in the telling there is making', the researcher's task is 'to do justice to the situation and yet to recognize that all stories, including those in the natural sciences, are fabrications – things made' (Eisner, 1991, p. 191).

#### ***Lens 5: Researchers as narrators***

The last analytic lens Chase describes is the researchers themselves. Chase (2005) points out that, like many other contemporary qualitative researchers, narrative researchers 'view themselves as narrators as they develop interpretations and find ways in which to present or publish their

ideas about the narrative they studied' (p. 657). Consequently, when presenting their report, narrative researchers tend to use the first person to emphasize their own narrative action. As such, Chase argues, 'the four lenses just described make as much sense when applied to the researcher as they do when applied to the researched' (p. 657). Moreover, Chase (2005, pp. 657-658) indicates, 'the idea that researchers are narrators opens up a range of complex issues about voice, representation, and interpretive authority.' It is therefore important for narrative inquirers to be mindful and reflective of what they do.

To summarize, each lens discussed above has its focus and helps the narrative inquirer to examine different aspects of the phenomenon under study. With its attention to meaning making, the first lens helps the inquirer to use narrative inquiry to study human experiences – a fundamental starting point in doing narrative inquiry. With its focus on verbal action, the second lens brings the narrative inquirer's attention to the telling process and to the narrator's voice revealed in this process. With its emphasis on social circumstances, the third lens highlights the importance of contextual factors in understanding and interpreting the narrator's narratives and experiences. The fourth lens underscores the role the listener (the researcher) plays in narrative and the fact that the object of analysis in narrative inquiry is the story as told. Finally, the last lens helps

to examine critical issues such as the researcher's ethical position and trustworthiness. These are inherent in qualitative research in general and narrative inquiry in particular, because in such studies the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis.

Theoretically, it is possible to treat these five analytic lenses as distinct, but in actual research these lenses are interconnected: 'researchers may emphasize one or another lens or their intersections, or they may shift back and forth among the lenses, depending on their specific approaches to empirical narrative material' (Chase, 2005, p. 658). The five lenses discussed above, together with guidelines for doing basic qualitative study, served as a framework for the present study. Before describing the research procedures in the next chapter, I will briefly present the context in which the present study was conducted.

### **3.3 NEW ZEALAND CONTEXT**

Located in the South Pacific Ocean, 2,000 kilometres south-east of Australia, with a total land area of 269,000 square kilometres, New Zealand is an increasingly multicultural country. The 2006 national census carried out by Statistics New Zealand (2006a, 2006b) showed that the population of New Zealand was just over 4 million (4,143,279) in 2006, with European as the



largest ethnic group (67.6%), followed by Māori (14.6%), Asian (9.2%), and Pacific Island (6.9%). New Zealand's changing ethnic composition and the impact of migration is also reflected in the increasing diversity of languages spoken. For example, the number of people in New Zealand who claimed that they were able to have a conversation in Hindi almost doubled in the period from 2001 to 2006. The same is true of Mandarin Chinese speakers, those numbers have increased from 26,514 to 41,391 between 2001 and 2006.

### **3.3.1 Primary and secondary school education**

Schooling is compulsory in New Zealand for all children from ages 6 to 16, and most enrol on their fifth birthday. The New Zealand school year usually runs from the end of January to mid-December, and is divided into four terms (10 weeks per term), with two-week breaks between terms. The school day usually begins at 9am and finishes at 3pm (3.30pm for secondary schools). Both single-sex and coeducational schooling options are available and state (public) schools are secular.

Primary education starts at Year 1 (age 5) and continues until Year 8 (age 12), with Years 7 and 8 offered at either a primary or a separate intermediate school. Secondary education covers Years 9 to 13 (generally ages 13 to 17). Most secondary students in New Zealand attend

government-funded schools, which are known variously as secondary schools, high schools, colleges, or area schools. In most schools, classes are taught in English, but some schools conduct classes in Māori. In the OECD's PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) 2000 study, which assessed 15-year-old students, New Zealand was among the six best performing countries for reading literacy, mathematical literacy and scientific literacy (Ministry of Education).

### *The National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA)*

Since 1992, education in New Zealand has been based on an outcomes-focused curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 4). The National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA, <http://www.nzqa.govt.nz/ncea/>) was progressively implemented between 2002 and 2004, as the national senior secondary school qualification. Students are able to achieve the NCEA at three levels via a wide range of courses and subjects, including languages, taught both within and beyond the traditional school. For most students, three levels of the NCEA correspond to the final three years of secondary schooling (Year 11-13, ages 15-17).

NCEA Level 1 is comparable to the following qualifications: the British General Certificate of Secondary Education; Canadian or United States Grade 10; and Year 10 awards in a number of Australian states –

School Certificate, Junior Certificate and Achievement Certificate. NCEA Level 3 is comparable to the following qualifications: the British A level, and Year 12 awards in a number of Australian States, for example the New South Wales Higher School Certificate (Ministry of Education).

### *Administration and quality assurance*

Individual schools in New Zealand have considerable responsibility for their own administration and management, while working within the framework of the guidelines, requirements and funding arrangements set by central government. A school authority may only employ a teacher who holds either a current practising certificate, or a limited authority to teach issued by the New Zealand Teachers Council (NZTC, <http://www.teacherscouncil.govt.nz/>). NZTC is a government agency which registers teachers, renews their practising certificates and approves teacher education programmes that lead to registration. The Education Review Office (ERO, <http://www.ero.govt.nz/>), a government audit agency, oversees quality assurance of education at school level. To ensure that all schools meet their students' needs and provide good quality education, ERO carries out three-yearly compliance inspections of each school. ERO's reports on individual schools are freely available to the public (Ministry of Education).

### **3.3.2 Language education in New Zealand**

Currently there are two official languages in New Zealand: Te Reo Māori and New Zealand Sign Language. English is a de facto official language by virtue of its widespread use, and it is the medium for teaching and learning in most schools (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 14). According to the 2006 census, 95.9% of the population use English, followed by Te Reo Māori, 4.1%. The percentage of people who can speak two or more languages has gradually increased from 13.6% in 1996 to 17.5% in 2006.

As far as international language education is concerned, since the early 1990s the Government has implemented a number of initiatives to encourage schools to develop language programmes, particularly supporting the introduction of language learning in Y7 and Y8 (Spence, 2004, p. 390; Sun, 2008). 'The numbers of students taking second languages, and the range of languages being offered by schools, have increased overall in the last decade' (Spence, 2004, p. 390). For example, according to the statistics from the New Zealand Ministry of Education, from 1997 to 2009 the number of secondary school students (Y9-Y13) learning French (the most commonly taught L2) increased from 21,166 to 27,059, while the number of students enrolled in Chinese programmes (a less commonly taught L2) doubled, from 948 to 2,007.

### *Languages in the New Zealand Curriculum*

Before the new national curriculum was launched on 6 November 2007, the *New Zealand Curriculum Framework* published by the Ministry of Education in 1993 served as 'the overarching policy framework that guides the teaching and learning in Years 1–13 in schools' (Spence, 2004, p. 393). The new national curriculum, entitled *The New Zealand Curriculum* (<http://nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz/>), added Learning Languages as a new learning area, 'to encourage students to participate more actively in New Zealand's diverse, multicultural society and in the global community' (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 4). All schools are encouraged to provide Y7-Y10 students with international language education, but the curriculum does not make the learning of international languages compulsory. Based on the *Common European Framework for Languages* (Council of Europe, 2001), the new curriculum provides a generic framework of language standard from Level 1 to Level 8 for the learning of languages in New Zealand schools, with communication as the core strand, and language knowledge and cultural knowledge as two supporting strands (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 24).

### *Support for language education in New Zealand*

Currently a number of organizations facilitate language education in New

Zealand schools. At the national level, language advisors in the Ministry of Education coordinate language education nationwide. A special agency called International Languages Aotearoa New Zealand (ILANZ, <http://www.ilanz.ac.nz/>) works with the National Language Advisor experts (who are normally sent by the target language countries) to administer a range of international education and exchange programmes on behalf of the New Zealand Ministry of Education. ILANZ supports the teaching and learning of international languages, providing assistance with language programme development, teacher professional development, resource, networking and language promotion.

At the non-government level, the New Zealand Association of Language Teachers (NZALT, <http://www.nzalt.org.nz/>), a professional association of over 550 teachers of languages (other than English or Māori) from the primary, secondary and tertiary sectors, serves as a nationwide network of language teachers and provides professional support. In addition, there are many language associations, e.g. the New Zealand Chinese Language Association, which operate both nationally and regionally to promote and support teaching and learning of their particular language.

### *Chinese language education in New Zealand*

Compared with other international languages, Chinese language education

started very late in New Zealand. Chinese was first taught at the tertiary level by the University of Auckland in 1966. Six years later, Victoria University of Wellington started to teach Chinese at Stage One (Gong, 2001, p. 14). It is not clear when Chinese began to be taught at primary and secondary school levels, but according to Mary Gray, former Chairperson of the New Zealand Chinese Language Association, 'Chinese first appeared in 1989 in the Ministry of Education Statistics for foreign language study with 61 students' (Gray, 2000, p. 14).

Chinese language education in New Zealand schools started to develop in the early 1990s, as a result of a series of government initiatives to extend the learning of foreign languages in New Zealand schools. In 1992 the Ministry of Education requested the development of a curriculum for Chinese. This was published in 1995 with the title *Chinese in the New Zealand Curriculum*. In 1994 a protocol which included 'an agency-to-agency specific arrangement on co-operation on the introduction of Modern Standard Chinese (Mandarin) into the New Zealand school curriculum' between the New Zealand Ministry of Education and the State Education Commission of China was signed. In accordance with the protocol the first Chinese National Language Advisor from China arrived in New Zealand in September 1995 (Gray, 2000, p. 14).

In 1997, a handbook entitled *Developing Teaching Programmes in Modern Standard Chinese* (Ministry of Education, 1997) was published, with

the intention of helping teachers of Chinese to plan and implement programmes based on *Chinese in the New Zealand Curriculum*. In 2004, a teaching kit, entitled *Hǎo! An introduction to Chinese*, was produced to support the Learning Languages Series Chinese course. This course is designed for year 7 and 8 students, and supports the *Chinese in the New Zealand Curriculum* achievement objectives for level 1 and level 2 (KTI). More significantly, the first Chinese Bursary Examination took place in 1999. This meant that, for the first time, the Chinese language was recognized as a subject in the national qualification system.

Chinese programmes in New Zealand schools have been increasing over the last ten years or so. However, as Table 3.1 shows, Chinese is still a less commonly taught language than French, German, Japanese and Spanish.

**Table 3.1:** *Number of students studying languages at New Zealand schools (from primary school to secondary school)*  
(Source: Ministry of Education, New Zealand)

	2000	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Chinese	3597	3569	4733	4602	6303	6253	6915
French	37063	50211	52519	55050	55851	59315	53038
German	15682	18206	19055	18040	17729	17754	14915
Japanese	44580	45126	41653	38318	42167	38093	34951
Spanish	16321	23713	25475	25694	31434	34527	34898



With regard to Chinese language teachers in New Zealand schools, according to Dr. Han Xi, the present Chinese National Language Advisor, there are currently (2010) about 50 Chinese language teachers nationwide, not all of whom are employed full-time. In terms of their language background, these teachers fall into four different categories: native Chinese speaking teachers (immigrants) from Mainland China, native Chinese speaking teachers (immigrants) from outside Mainland China (e.g., Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, and Malaysia); non-native Chinese speakers with Chinese background (Chinese descent), and non-native speakers with non-Chinese background. Generally speaking, teachers at secondary school level tend to be native speakers and those at primary and intermediate levels tend to be non-native speakers. All three teachers selected in the present study are secondary school teachers. Two of them are native Chinese speakers and one is a non-native Chinese speaker with Chinese background. Reports on each of these case teachers are contained in chapters 5, 6 and 7 respectively.

## *Chapter 4*

# **Research Methods and Procedures**

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### **4.0 INTRODUCTION**

Following the general discussion of my research approach in the last chapter, in this chapter I present my research methods and procedures so as to provide an ‘audit trail’ (Merriam, 2002a, p. 18) for the present study. I begin by describing the process for selecting case teachers (4.1), and outlining my data collection procedures (4.2), before describing the methods of data analysis and interpretation (4.3). The chapter concludes with a section on reporting (4.4).

### **4.1 PARTICIPANTS**

#### **4.1.1 The teachers**

Three Chinese language teachers were selected from three different New

Zealand secondary schools for the present study. The selection of the participants for the present study was based on both the purpose of the study and feasibility issues (Dörnyei, 2007; Merriam, 2002b). Because the purpose of the present study is to gain understanding of Chinese language teachers' PPK in teaching at New Zealand secondary schools, initially four Chinese language teachers were identified. Among them, two were native Chinese speakers (immigrants), one was a non-native Chinese speaker who was Chinese by ethnicity, and one was a non-Chinese non-native speaker. These three categories are the most common among Chinese language teachers at New Zealand secondary schools and, broadly speaking, across the world. When I approached each teacher to ask them to participate in the research project, I discovered that the non-Chinese teacher would not be teaching Chinese at his school from 2007, because the school was going to close the Chinese language programme. He was the only non-Chinese teacher of Chinese language in the region. It was decided for pragmatic reasons that there would be no case study of non-Chinese teachers in the present study. What follows is a brief description of each of the three teachers who participated. More detailed information about each individual teacher will be presented in the case reports in the later chapters.

*Dongmei* (pseudonym) is a native Chinese speaker and an immigrant to New Zealand. Before moving to New Zealand in 2001, she had taught

English to Chinese university students in China for 12 years. When she participated in this study (2007-2008), she was a part-time Chinese teacher teaching Y7 to Y10 students at a private girls' college, with 2 years' experience of teaching Chinese at a New Zealand state school for girls. Her case illustrates the experiences of teachers from Eastern countries adapting to teaching in Western countries, a very different context.

*Julie* (pseudonym) is the daughter of immigrants to New Zealand from Hong Kong, and was born and raised in New Zealand. While her home language is Cantonese, her dominant language is English, and she learned Mandarin Chinese as an adult. She had 8 years' experience teaching Chinese<sup>2</sup> in New Zealand to Y9-Y13, in a state public girls' college. Her case illustrates the experiences of a non-native Chinese speaker who has had on-going teacher education but has more limited Chinese language proficiency.

*Wenying* (pseudonym) is a native Chinese speaker and an immigrant to New Zealand. At the time of this study she was a full-time Chinese teacher, with 7 years' experience teaching Y9-Y13 Chinese at a state public girls' college. Her case illustrates the experiences of a very experienced teacher who was trained in New Zealand and started her teaching career in New Zealand.

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<sup>2</sup> Chinese is used to refer to Mandarin in this thesis.

All three teachers hold a Postgraduate Diploma in Secondary School Teaching issued in New Zealand. Together, their experiences provide us with an in-depth understanding of Chinese language teachers' practice and their professional development in the New Zealand context.

#### **4.1.2 The Researcher**

I am a native Chinese speaker and an immigrant to New Zealand. I hold a B.A. in Chinese Language and Literature from Hubei University, and an M.A. in Chinese Linguistics from Nanjing University, China. I taught Chinese language and literature to pupils at a primary school in China for two years before I started my undergraduate study. After I gained my M.A. degree, I worked at the Beijing Language and Culture University for over 10 years, teaching and conducting research on teaching Chinese as a second language.

Since 2000 I have been employed by Victoria University of Wellington as a part-time teacher of Chinese to students in regular courses, and in special programmes designed for staff from New Zealand central government agencies. I have also taught Chinese for a number of years to young learners and adults at a community Chinese language school in Wellington, and assisted the development of a Chinese language teaching kit for Y7 and Y8 students, funded by the New Zealand Ministry of

Education. In addition, I have coordinated a training programme for Chinese primary school principals from minority areas in Gansu Province, China, funded by the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade. The programme was delivered in China, with two primary school principals from New Zealand as trainers.

Before embarking upon the present study I carried out an overview of language education in New Zealand (Sun, 2008). I also spent a number of weeks observing non-native Chinese-speaking teachers teaching Chinese to Y7 and Y8 in a New Zealand primary school. After my enrolment at the end of 2006, I conducted a preliminary study which involved classroom observations and interviews with two Chinese language teachers at two New Zealand secondary schools. As indicated in Chapter 1, the present study was shaped by this preliminary study.

As the researcher is the primary agent for data collection and data analysis in qualitative research in general, and narrative inquiry in particular, an indication of the researcher's philosophical orientation is needed to help the reader better understand the research (Dörnyei, 2007; Merriam, 2002b). Generally speaking, there are three distinct research orientations (Duff, 2007, p. 33): (1) the positivist and post-positivist orientation, which aims 'to find external truths and ultimately be able to make predications'; (2) the interpretive or constructivist orientation, which aims 'to understand the how and why of phenomena from a holistic,

participant-informed perspective'; and (3) the critical theorist orientation, which aims 'to understand the social, political, and economic (material) conditions (e.g., related to race, gender, power, class, age, immigrant status) that [...] may systematically disadvantage certain people'. In undertaking the present study I have taken a predominantly constructivist stance, while at the same time sharing some of critical theorists' concerns about disadvantaged groups. It is my opinion, for example, that the role played by language teachers in generating professional knowledge in language education has been undervalued and that their 'voice' has, to some extent, been silenced, although this issue was not discussed in this thesis.

#### **4.1.3 Establishing a relationship with the participants**

As the research aim of the present study was to understand teachers' experience and their mental lives, it was crucial to first establish a good relationship with the teachers involved and to win their trust and confidence. It was also essential to provide the teachers with sufficient information about the research project to help them make an informed decision, and to acknowledge their right to withdraw from the project at any time without giving any reason.

I first met Dongmei in May 2006 at a regional 'Chinese Day' organized by a branch of the New Zealand Chinese Language Association.

In April 2007 I approached her to request her participation in this study. In June 2007 we met to discuss the research. During this meeting we also talked about our backgrounds, families, and the feelings associated with being an immigrant in New Zealand. This meeting provided us with a good opportunity to get to know each other and to establish mutual trust and respect.

Julie and I had been acquainted for many years before I started my PhD research project. When I was preparing my proposal (July 2006), I sought her perspectives on Chinese teaching in New Zealand schools. In September 2006, I observed her teaching Chinese at a primary school for two hours. The teaching was a part of the practicum for her Post-graduate Diploma for Secondary School Teaching at New Zealand schools. We had a preliminary meeting before the formal interview to discuss my research and arrange the interviews and classroom observations.

I knew Wenying through a research project on oral interactions in second language classrooms carried out in December 2006. The research project was conducted under the supervision of the Second Language Acquisition and Pedagogy working group from the School of Linguistics and Applied Language Studies at Victoria University of Wellington. As a research assistant, I observed and video-recorded 6 periods of Wenying teaching a Y10 Chinese class and attended a half-hour interview between Wenying and a researcher from the research project. I approached her



again for participation in the present study when I was preparing my full research proposal for my PhD project in early 2007, and she accepted my invitation.

Thus, before the research began, I had built a good relationship with all three teachers and this ensured all the interviews and classroom observations were conducted in a friendly and relaxed atmosphere. All three teachers confessed to me at the end of the project that they had been a little reluctant to participate when I first approached them, mainly because of their busy lives. However, once the research was under way they found that the project helped them to reflect on their thinking and teaching practice.

#### **4.1.4 Ethical considerations**

All research activities were approved by the Human Ethics Committee of Victoria University of Wellington in accordance with the University's Human Ethics Policy. Permission from school principals, consent from teachers, students and parents for classroom observations and the video-recording were all obtained before the project proceeded. In one case, a parent did not want her daughter to be video-recorded. We therefore arranged for the student to sit outside the coverage of the camera. The approval letter from the university, together with consent

forms for both the teachers and the parents/students are attached in Appendix A.

## **4.2 DATA COLLECTION**

The data for the present study are the interviews with the three case teachers, supplemented with my notes from classroom observations of their teaching, my own field notes, and other relevant documents, e.g. teacher lesson plans, worksheets, and samples of student work. A description of the classroom observations and the interviews is contained in the following sections.

### **4.2.1 Classroom observations**

Because the present study focuses on constructing the teachers' PPK, and is thus more interested in the cognitive aspects of teaching than in teaching behaviour, the classroom observations served to help me understand and interpret the teachers' teaching practice and their PPK as revealed in the interview data. The aims of the observation sessions were to: (1) become familiar with the teaching environment: the students, the facilities and the teacher-student relationships; (2) get a better understanding of teaching practice: procedures/routines, teaching styles, and teacher-student

interactions; and (3) identify 'events' (clips) for after-class discussion with the teacher. To achieve these aims, a non-participant open observation approach was adopted. All the classes observed were video-/audio-recorded. The list of classroom observations are attached in Appendix B.

#### **4.2.2 Interview structures and schedules**

Qualitative interviewing was adopted because this type of interviewing not only provides the interviewees with the opportunity to tell their stories/experiences, reveal their thoughts, and express their feelings, it also offers the researcher the chance to probe and discuss issues with the interviewees. The purpose of the qualitative interview is 'to understand the meaning of respondents' experiences and life worlds' rather than to discover facts or laws, as Warren (2002, p. 83) indicates (see also deMarrais, 2004, p. 52; Rubin & Rubin, 2005, pp. 2-3). Interviewees participating in a qualitative interview are viewed as meaning-makers, not as passive conduits for retrieving information from an existing vessel of answers (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995).

Initially, five semi-structured interviews were scheduled for each teacher, with each interview having a particular focus:

Interview 1 focused on background information, both about the teacher, their own schooling and work experience, and the schools they were teaching at, including the Chinese language programme. The purpose of this interview was to create a profile of each teacher and their work context to serve as a backdrop and starting point for the case study.

Interview 2 centred on teaching practice, exploring issues such as how the teacher developed the Chinese language curriculum at the school, the teacher's beliefs and concerns about teaching, how lessons were planned and delivered, as well as the teacher's experiences and stories about classroom teaching.

Interview 3 was a discussion about the teacher's classroom teaching based on the video recordings of the observed sessions. This interview was conducted after the classroom observations, which followed the second interview. In this interview, the teacher and the researcher reviewed the video-clips from the video recordings and the teacher was asked to comment on what was going on at the time. The process is similar to 'stimulated recall' (Gass & Mackey, 2000), but differs from it in that the purpose was not for the teacher to recall her actual thoughts during teaching, but rather to better understand her perspectives on teaching. To this end, the reviewing was followed by a brief discussion about her classroom teaching.

Interview 4 was designed to discuss the teacher's way of teaching, as well as to explore her professional development in general, and factors that could be considered to shape her 'My Way' in particular.

In interview 5 teachers were to have been presented with the report on their 'My Way', and asked to comment on the report. The aim was twofold: to enable member-checking and to give teachers the opportunity to reflect on their 'My Way' with relevance to the observed practice. However, due to their busy life, they declined this interview when I approached them.

A list of the interviews conducted with individual teachers are attached in Appendix C. Detailed information about the interviews with each teacher is provided below.

#### **4.2.3 Interviews with individual teachers**

The qualitative interview, particularly the narrative interview, is shaped by many factors. Quite apart from the subject and purpose of the research itself, the participant's personality, the researcher's personal style, and the relationship between participant and researcher all have an impact on the shape of the interview (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). In order for the interview to work well, the researcher needs to 'customize' the questions for each interviewee: 'Asking everyone the same questions makes little sense in

qualitative interviewing', Rubin and Rubin (2005, p. 14) assert. They propose 'responsive interviewing', arguing that 'the term responsive interviewing is intended to communicate that qualitative interviewing is a dynamic and iterative process, not a set of tools to be applied mechanically' (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 15).

The interviews conducted in the present study were 'responsive' in nature. Although, as shown above, each interview had its general focus, interviews with individual teachers were adjusted in response to their own situation and/or to take account of what had happened in preceding interviews. Although I had a list of questions grouped into a few different categories at hand, I normally followed the flow of the interview, picked up leads from the interviewee, and probed if needed. I found, after the interview, that many of the questions on my list had been answered without being asked. The following sections describe the interviews carried out with each teacher.

### *Interviews with Dongmei*

In our first face-to-face meeting in June 2007, Dongmei and I agreed to start her case study from term 3 (July 2007). However, because Dongmei had many personal commitments, the case study was postponed to term 4 (October 2007). At the beginning of term 4, both Dongmei and I realized that it was not the right time to do the research. As they were approaching

the end of the school year the students had many examinations. In addition, the teaching hours for Chinese had been reduced from 3 hours a week to 2 hours a week. I felt that both the teacher and the students were not in the mood for a research project. In consultation with my supervisors, we decided to postpone the research to the following year.

However, as my interest is in teacher professional development, I thought it would be valuable to learn how Dongmei experienced her first year of teaching at this school. We therefore met in early November 2007 for an informal talk. I had already learned about her background, the school and the Chinese programme at the school from our first informal meeting in June 2007, and this meeting (subsequently counted as the first interview with her) was dominated by Dongmei's reflections on her first year of teaching. It was an open-ended interaction lasting about 2 hours.

The second interview with Dongmei was carried out in February 2008, during term 1 of the 2008 school year. This interview was semi-structured and lasted about one hour. The focus was on what Dongmei was thinking/doing and challenges she was facing in her teaching. Before the second interview I visited her school and observed her teaching of Y9 in order to familiarize myself with the context and the students. After the second interview I undertook a series of classroom observations of her teaching of Y8 (one period), Y9 (three periods) and Y10 (one period). The observations of Y9 were video-recorded. Following the classroom

observations, we had the third interview in March 2008, in which we discussed some events picked up from the classroom observations and the key points from the first two interviews.

The fourth interview with Dongmei was undertaken in the second term, in June 2008, about 14 weeks after the third interview. It was open-ended and lasted one hour. The reason for this interval between the third and fourth interview was that Dongmei wished to postpone this interview to the second term. Before this fourth interview I conducted another three consecutive classroom observations of Dongmei teaching Y9, which were audio-recorded. In the fourth interview, while Dongmei told me more about what she was thinking and doing in classroom, we also spent time talking about her professional development and the in-service training programme she was participating in. We agreed to have a fifth and final interview towards the end of the school year to reflect on what happened in her second year of teaching at this school. However, when I approached her in early December 2008 to arrange this interview, she declined saying she was too busy.

All the interviews with Dongmei were undertaken in Chinese, took place in a local community library, not far from the school, and were audio-recorded with an Olympus Digital Voice Recorder.



### *Interviews with Julie*

Compared with Dongmei's case, the case study with Julie went more smoothly. Of the three case studies, this one corresponded most closely to my initial plan. This was perhaps because Julie's was the first case undertaken, but also because she was willing to adapt to my plan for the research. We had our first formal meeting in May 2007, following a series of emails and phone calls to discuss the possibility of her participation in this study. During that meeting I briefed her about the research project and explained the consent form, which had been emailed to her before the meeting. After Julie had signed the consent form we discussed the timing for the interviews and the classroom observations.

The first two interviews were undertaken in May 2007. Both interviews were conducted in the French classroom at Julie's school, after school hours. The first interview focused on background information and the second on teaching practice, as outlined in 4.2.2. After the first two interviews I carried out a series of classroom observations late May 2007, which included one period each of Y9 and Y11, and 6 periods of Y10. The six Y10 classroom observations were video- and audio- recorded. Each of the six Y10 observations was followed by a post-lesson discussion with Julie, which lasted 10-20 minutes. These were not undertaken in either Dongmei's or Wenying's case studies, because Dongmei was unwilling and Wenying simply had no time to do so.

The third interview with Julie – a discussion about her teaching, based on video clips taken from the classroom observations, was undertaken in June 2007, followed by the fourth interview in July 2007. Both the third and the fourth interview took place in an office on a university campus. All the interviews, including post-lesson discussions, were conducted in English and audio-recorded with an Olympus Digital Voice Recorder.

### *Interviews with Wenying*

Overall, the case study with Wenying went as initially planned. She did not accept immediately when I formally invited her to participate in April 2007, but got back to me after about a week. Later in an interview she revealed that, at first, she had been reluctant to participate because her timetable was so full. She finally accepted my invitation because she thought, given her teaching experience, her participation might contribute to the understanding of Chinese language teaching in New Zealand secondary schools.

The first two interviews with Wenying were conducted during the second term break (July 2007), in a local community library close to where she lived. The first interview focused on her background and the institutional context, the second on her teaching practices, as scheduled (see 4.2.2). Both were semi-structured. However, once they began, they

became quite open-ended, dominated by Wenying's lengthy talk. In the second half of the second interview she expressed considerable emotion. She said she had been 'buried in teaching' for years and had never been asked to talk about her work. It was the first time she had taken the time to look back on her teaching career. She felt very proud of what she had achieved, feeling that her hard work had paid off.

The third interview, in July 2007, was a discussion about her classroom teaching based on episodes from the classroom observations of Y9 conducted over two weeks (total 5 lessons) early in the third term (July 2007). The last interview took place in August 2007, and focused on her professional development. Both the third and fourth interviews took place in a study room at her school after school hours. All the interviews were conducted in Chinese and audio-recorded with an Olympus Digital Voice Recorder.

#### **4.2.4 Factors influencing the interviews**

'Qualitative interviewing is forgiving', Rubin and Rubin (2005, p. 17) remind us, because it recognizes 'that researchers as well as conversational partners are individuals with emotions, biases, and interests'. The researcher must therefore be alert to factors that might influence the interview (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 17). In the case of the present study, the

following factors are worthy of mention, because they might in one way or another have influenced the depth of the interviews.

### *Influence of language and cultural background*

Diversity of language and culture plays an important role in narrative studies (Pavlenko, 2002; Riessman, 2008), and it certainly did so in the present study. The interviews with Julie were conducted in English – her native language but my second language. While there were no obvious misunderstandings caused by this language difference during the interviews, it undoubtedly had a subtle influence on the interaction between us. For example, we rarely used colloquial expressions and metaphors. More significantly, even though Julie is Chinese by ethnicity, because we were educated and grew up in two different cultures, we had little in common other than teaching. Therefore, the interviews were rather business-like. In contrast, with Dongmei and Wenying, the interviews were conducted in our native language – Chinese. The vocabulary and expressions used were therefore richer and more colourful than those used in the interviews with Julie. Moreover, as we were immigrants from the same country, with a shared cultural background, we felt closer to each other, and might therefore have been more open with each other.

### *Influence of time pressure*

Constraints on time affected the mood of the participants and this in turn influenced the interviews. The first two interviews with Julie were undertaken at her school after school hours, which meant that they could only go on for about one hour. Both of us were aware of this time constraint. In fact, at the end of the second interview, when we were about to leave, Julie seemed to have more to say. I restarted the recorder and the interview continued, but could not go on for long because the school had to be locked up. The fourth interview with Julie took place during a mid-term break. Both of us felt more relaxed. As a result, the interview took about two hours and Julie talked more freely. In the case of Wenying, the first two interviews took place during mid-term break when there was no time pressure. In fact, the second interview went on for about two hours. In contrast, the third and fourth interviews were undertaken after school hours during term 3. Due to the time pressure, each lasted for less than an hour. The same was true of the interviews with Dongmei: while the first two were not subject to time pressure, the last two had to be completed within an hour. When under time pressure the teachers tended to simply respond to my questions rather than to extend and/or initiate topics.

### *Influence of case teachers' self-confidence*

Perhaps the most important factor influencing the interviews in the present

study was each teacher's level of self-confidence. Julie, a non-native Chinese speaker, was not confident about her Chinese language proficiency. As a consequence, she was not confident about teaching Chinese, even though she had 6 years of experience. She might therefore have felt vulnerable when talking to me – a native Chinese speaker and a university Chinese language teacher – about her teaching. 'I'm not sure' is a phrase she used often in the interviews. Her lack of self-confidence might help explain her tendency to answer my questions rather than to raise topics – an imbalance of power commonly observed in interview-based studies (deMarrais, 2004). In sharp contrast, Wenying, a very experienced teacher, was very confident and always sure of herself. She talked at length and without hesitation, and in many cases answered my questions before they could be asked, resulting in fewer turn-exchanges in the interviews. As for Dongmei, a new teacher still trying to find her feet, everything she did seemed to be on trial and under development. This meant that the interviews were more exploratory and less structured.

#### **4.3 DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION**

In a qualitative study, data analysis usually goes hand in hand with data collection and is an on-going process (Merriam, 2002b, p. 14). However, a systematic and detailed analysis normally starts after most primary data

have been collected. If the original data are oral, and/or in other languages, they usually need to be transcribed and/or translated. This is what happened in the present study. This section therefore begins with discussion about transcription and translation processes.

#### **4.3.1 Transcription and translation**

##### *Transcription*

Transcription is ‘not simply a technical process’, argue Lapadat and Lindsay (1999, p. 68), but is ‘theory laden’, and influenced by research purposes. In the course of transcription, ‘the researcher is already making coding decisions through the transcription focus and conventions that he or she chooses’ (p. 69). The challenge that researchers face in transcription is therefore ‘to selectively reduce the data in a way that preserves the possibility of different analyses and interpretations’ (Lapadat & Lindsay, 1999, p. 69). Because of this selectivity, ‘researchers must strive to explicate their decision making’ (Lapadat & Lindsay, 1999, p. 69) (see also Oliver, Serovich, & Mason, 2005, pp. 1273-1274). This is what I have done below.

Before commencing transcription, a few distinct decisions must be made. The first involves whether to fully or partially transcribe. In order to preserve the integrity of the interviews, I opted for a full transcription. This ensured that potential themes were not lost in the transcription stage and

preserved the context, making it easy during data analysis to check connections between themes/categories.

The second decision concerns transcription conventions. As there is no universal convention for transcription (Lapadat & Lindsay, 1999; Oliver, et al., 2005; Poland, 1995, 2002), each researcher must decide what to include and exclude during transcription. Oliver et al. (2005, pp. 1273-1274) suggest that transcription modes can be viewed on a continuum which has 'naturalism mode' at one end and 'denaturalism mode' at the other end. In 'naturalism mode' every utterance is transcribed in as much detail as possible, while in 'denaturalism mode' idiosyncratic elements of speech (e.g., stutters, pauses, nonverbals, involuntary vocalizations) are removed. In practice, there are many variations between these two modes. As the emphasis in the present study is on content analysis rather than discourse or conversation analysis, transcription was carried out in a denaturalism model.

The third decision to be made involves identifying who should transcribe the interview: researchers themselves or others, such as research assistants or hired professional transcribers. As transcription also involves interpretation of content, transcription is best done by the researchers, who are usually also the interviewers (Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005; Lapadat & Lindsay, 1999). In reality, however, it is common practice to hire others to transcribe interviews, particularly in those research projects that include a



large number of interviews. This involves a compromise, because threat to transcription quality is greater when transcription is carried out by others (Oliver, et al., 2005; Poland, 1995, 2002). In order to save time and ensure transcription quality, the present study combined both strategies mentioned above. A research assistant, fluent in Chinese and English, was paid to do the initial transcription. Her role was similar to that of voice-recognition software, that is to help convert oral data into written text. I then thoroughly checked and corrected all the transcripts against the original audio files. Both of us used a free digital transcription software *Express Scribe* distributed by NCH (<http://www.nch.com.au/scribe/index.html>) to do the transcription.

The final decision concerns the end product – whether the transcripts should be edited, and if so, to what extent. This is not simply a pure technical decision, but also an ethical decision, as Poland (2002, p. 633) points out. He argues, because of the differences between verbal interactions and written prose, if ‘all pauses, broken sentences, interruptions, and other aspects of the messiness of casual conversation are faithfully reproduced’ by ‘verbatim transcription’, this practice would make respondents ‘appear inarticulate as a result of the liberal use of verbatim quotes in the published results of a study’, which ‘has important ethical implications’. ‘In addition’, Poland goes on, ‘verbatim quotes often make for difficult reading’, and ‘the impact of quotes from respondents can

often be greater if the researcher subjects them to a little skilful editing, without substantially altering the gist of what was said' (Poland, 2002, pp. 633-634). For these reasons Poland suggests some 'tidying' of quotations used in publications, but stresses that: 'this should occur after the analysis has taken place and should be done by the researcher (not the transcriber), who should take care that what is removed does not appreciably alter the meaning of what was said' (Poland, 2002, p. 634). I have followed Poland's advice in this regard. In the present study, I carried out editing at two different stages. During transcription I not only removed idiosyncratic elements of speech (e.g., stutters, pauses, involuntary vocalizations), but also excluded elements such as false starts, repetitive parts. In the interests of readability, I edited those quotations which appear in the thesis, working with my English editor. Samples of the transcripts, including examples of my editing, are attached in Appendix D.

Central to the discussion about transcription quality is the question of the trustworthiness of transcripts. It is suggested that researchers remain reflective during the decision-making and transcription processes, and that they are mindful of particularly problematic areas, such as those related to pronunciation, nonverbal vocalization and grammar, as identified by both Poland (2002) and Oliver, et al. (2005). Reviewing the transcripts against the original audio files and presenting the transcripts to the interviewees for member-checking are also recommended as a means of assuring

trustworthiness. In the course of transcription of the interviews in the present study, all these concerns were taken into consideration and transcripts were sent to the three teachers for their comments. None of them replied.

### *Translation*

My interviews with Dongmei and Wenying were conducted in Chinese, as it did not feel natural to use English, our second language. More importantly, employing our native language meant that we were able to easily express and share experiences. The ‘disadvantage’ of adopting this approach was that the interviews then had to be translated into English to fulfil the requirement of a PhD degree at a New Zealand university, a challenge faced by many non-native English speakers pursuing postgraduate degrees in English-speaking countries (Lincoln & González-y-González, 2008).

The challenges and issues surrounding translation are similar to those surrounding transcription. The translation process also involves interpretation. Decisions about how best to translate the source language into a target language all depend on the research purposes and questions.

First I had to decide whether to translate the interviews into English at the same time as listening or whether to transcribe the interviews and then translate from the written transcripts. Tsui (2003), for example, chose

the former in her case studies of ESL teachers' expertise. She had the interviews in Cantonese translated into English directly from the recording, and then carried out her analysis on the English translation.

It is recognized that much information is lost in the course of translation, because it is often difficult, if not impossible, to find equivalent vocabulary, syntax, idioms and concepts in source language and target language (Sechrest, Fay, & Zaidi, 1972). Therefore, there is a risk of arriving at incorrect conclusions if the analysis is based on a translation. This was demonstrated in Twinn's (1997) exploratory study of the influence of translation on the validity and reliability of qualitative data in nursing research.

In Twinn's (1997) study, in-depth interviews were undertaken in Cantonese with six women to explore their perceptions of factors influencing their uptake of Pap smears. All the interviews were translated into English independently by two translators, and into Chinese by a third researcher, resulting in three data sets, two in English and one in Chinese. Content analysis of the three data sets was carried out to identify categories and themes. The categories and themes generated from the data sets were then compared. The comparison revealed differences in the themes generated, and demonstrated 'the complexity of managing data when no equivalent word exists in the target language and the influence of the grammatical style on the analysis' (Twinn, 1997, p. 418). Taking into

account Twinn's findings, I decided to carry out data analysis on the interviews with Dongmei and Wenying using the Chinese transcripts. Only the themes/categories and the quotations cited in the thesis were translated into English.

I did the translation myself. Even though it was only a partial translation, I faced many challenges when attempting to represent these two case teachers' experiences in English – the challenges experienced by others undertaking cross-cultural studies: 'How does one capture [...] in English the emotions and the expressions that have been relayed in non-English?' 'Within the complexities of such translations, how should researchers ethically speak about what is told to them?' (Subedi & Rhee, 2008, p. 1087). At first I kept my translation close to the Chinese, but this produced text that was not easily understood by native English speakers. For example, one of my supervisors found some of Wenying's narratives hard to understand because they did not conform to the way Westerners narrate. I therefore translated the quotations again, this time more freely. Sample transcripts and translations are attached in Appendix E.

Central to translation, is, once again, a concern about trustworthiness. Mindful of the potential pitfalls inherent in translation, I worked closely with my English editor to check the translations. I also conferred with a native English scholar who has a near native command of Chinese. Despite my efforts to assure the trustworthiness of the translation contained in this

thesis, I share the felling of guilt expressed by Yang (2005) when she was undertaking her PhD project on Chinese education:

When you translate every sentence [from Chinese to English], you feel so guilty, because you lose much information, which can only be expressed and understood with one's own language and cultural tacit knowledge'. (Cited in Lincoln & González-y-González, 2008, p. 802)

#### **4.3.2 Data coding and analysis**

Formal coding started with the reading of the transcripts. A bottom-up open-coding approach (Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005) was adopted. First, as I read the transcripts I highlighted those units (e.g., key words, phrases, or sentences) which help make sense of the data, and put notes on the margin to indicate the concepts or themes these units reveal, with some on electronic files, and others on the hard copies. Samples of this initial coding are attached in Appendix F. The aim of this initial reading and coding was two-fold: to get an idea of the concepts/themes contained in the data so as to produce a set of temporary categories for 'tree nodes' to be used in the qualitative research software Nvivo7; to identify portions of text for further line-by-line coding.

Following the initial reading, I then started coding the data using Nvivo7. At this stage, crucial passages were coded line-by-line, as suggested by Charmaz (2006) and Strauss and Corbin (1998). Line-by-line coding not only ensured themes grounded in the data, but also helped avoid missing important themes, as Hays (2004) points out, 'occasionally a single occurrence [of a theme] provides meaning and makes sense of all the patterns' (p. 232). To help organize the codes, a set of temporary 'tree nodes' was produced to group the concepts into different categories. For example, Wenying's data were initially coded into categories such as PERSONAL PROFILE, SCHOOL PROFILE, TEACHING AT [SCHOOL] W, W'S PPK, and PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT, each of which had its own subcategories. A sample of these tree nodes is attached in Appendix G.

With these temporary categories established, I used my research questions to guide a search 'for relationships between and within categories' (Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005, p. 268). In doing so, I encountered some problems. Firstly, not all the concepts could be neatly categorized, and there were some overlap between categories which were hard to separate out. Secondly and more importantly, once categorized, each teacher's 'My Way' became compartmentalized. The solution to my problems came from an unexpected quarter: the film *Copying Beethoven*. In the film, the character playing Beethoven states that for work to be a

masterpiece, be it a symphony or a construction, there must be a soul inside it. This statement made me realize that what I was looking for in order to make sense of the concepts and categories was the 'soul' of each case.

#### **4.3.3 Searching for the 'soul' of the cases**

In searching for the 'soul' of each case, I found Chase's (2005, p. 663) suggestions for interpreting narratives collected from interviews to be very helpful. She suggests starting with narrators' voices and stories and listening to the voices *within* each narrative, rather than trying to locate distinct themes *across* interviews. Following this suggestion, I spent a significant amount of time listening to all the interviews again to hear the dominant voices of each case, watching the video-recorded sessions of classroom teaching on videos to sense the primary concerns about their teaching, and reading the transcripts to identify key words used by the teacher. This process proved to be very effective. I eventually felt that there were dominant voices in each case, which conveyed the teacher's concerns. I also found the concept of 'image' adopted by Elbaz and Clandinin and Connelly (see 2.3.1) to be a useful means of capturing and characterizing the essence of each teacher's 'My Way'.



In Dongmei's case, as she was new to the school, she struggled to find her way. In describing her first year of teaching at the new school she used terms such as 'got lost', 'disoriented', 'couldn't find the way', and 'frustrated'. To help keep herself on track, she chose to 'stuff the students with intensive content'. The notion of 'stuffing' could be seen as the image that captures her 'My Way' in the first year. While she seemed more confident in her second year of teaching, she was trying to keep a number of things balanced, therefore the image of 'achieving a balance' could be used to describe her 'My Way' at this later stage.

In Julie's case, her 'My Way' was characterized by the image of 'nurturing student confidence' and attending to their feelings. She used a set of key words that reinforced this image, such as 'confidence/ confident', 'encourage/ encouraging/ encouragement', 'support/ supportive', 'scare/ scary', and 'anxious/ anxiety', etc.

In Wenying's case, her 'My Way' was characterized by the image of 'ensuring everything goes smoothly'. A set of key words around this image are 'smooth/ smoothly', 'gradual/ gradually', 'organized', and 'step-by-step', etc.

I felt that my decision to look for each case's 'soul' – the dominant image – represented a breakthrough. Once the image of each case emerged, it provided me with the thread with which to weave in the themes identified in the coding phase, and thus guide further data analysis and

interpretation. At this stage, I found the thematic narrative analysis proposed by Riessman (2008), and the thematic networks suggested by Attride-Stirling (2001) to be useful tools to help structure each teacher's 'My Way'. Each teacher's 'My Way' can be captured by an image, which functions as a *global theme* that encompasses 'the principal metaphors in the data as a whole' (Attride-Stirling, 2001, p. 389). Underneath this global theme are a number of *organizing themes* that summarize the principal assumptions of a group of *basic themes* – the themes that are 'simple premises characteristic of the data' (Attride-Stirling, 2001, p. 389). This structure is very similar to three varying *degrees of generality* used by Elbaz (1981) to structure teachers' practical knowledge: the image, the practical principle, and the rule of practice (see also 2.3.1). Thus, in the present study, generally speaking, each teacher's image functioned as overarching guidance (*global theme*), and was expressed as a set of principles or concerns in their teaching practice (*organizing themes*), which in turn were translated into the rules of practice for their in-class decisions and actions (*basic themes*).

#### **4.3.4 Interpretation**

The process described above enabled me to identify the characteristics of each individual teacher's 'My Way'. But I needed to go one step further to find out what had shaped each teacher's image in order to achieve my aim

of better understanding teacher development. At this time, one of the two guiding questions Stake (2005) poses for qualitative case study helped me to stay focused: 'What specially can be learned about the single case?' (p. 443). Discussions with my supervisors helped open my eyes to different ways of understanding these case teachers. Discussion of Dongmei's case in particular drew my attention to the influence of cultures of learning and teaching.

As a result, I proceeded to examine Dongmei's case in light of the research literature on cultures of learning and teaching, particularly cross-cultural research in general education and L2 English education between the Western cultures and the Eastern or Confucian-heritage cultures (CHCs) (Watkins, 2000; Watkins & Biggs, 1996, 2001). It soon became evident that Dongmei's thinking and teaching were strongly influenced by the assumptions rooted in CHCs, as a result of her many years of teaching English in China. At the time of the present study, Dongmei was becoming aware of the ideological conflicts between these two cultures, and was starting to develop ways to integrate both cultures and adapt to the local context.

Encouraged by this experience, I started viewing Julie's case with reference to research on non-native speaker teachers. This choice was reinforced by the fact that during the interviews and the post-lesson discussions, Julie repeatedly stated 'I'm a non-native [Chinese] speaker'.

This perspective helped me to better understand Julie's experience of the 'inferiority complex' (Medgyes, 1994) shared by many non-native speaker teachers. Interestingly, while most non-native speaker teachers would prefer not to be labelled a non-native speaker, Julie, on the contrary, preferred to be labelled a non-native speaker. As a New Zealand Chinese she was easily mistaken for a native Chinese speaker, but her Chinese language proficiency was limited. By labelling herself a non-native Chinese speaker she lowered people's expectations, thereby reducing the pressure on herself.

Following the same practice, I found Wenying's case would be better interpreted via the research on expertise (Tsui, 2005), particularly the research on expert teachers (Berliner, 1994, 2001). Having taught more than 5,000 hours over seven years, Wenying had become highly routinized and taught almost effortlessly. She believed this state to be the natural outcome of years of teaching and when asked to comment on it she claimed that 'there is not much to say'. This statement was initially alarming, because for a while I feared that there would not be much to write about this case. However, when I re-viewed her case in light of the research on expertise, I realized that the very statement 'there is not much to say' made her case worthy of exploration.

To sum up, the linking of central images to prior research perspectives in order to interpret the data in each case constituted another

breakthrough. These perspectives not only helped to make sense of these teachers' teaching practice, but also helped shed light on the factors that shaped their 'My Way' and practice, and make the links between the present study and the literature on teacher cognition and teacher development. While analysing and interpreting data are the foundation of research, reporting the results in a manner that optimizes audience understanding is equally important. This is the topic of the final section of this chapter.

## **4.4 REPORTING**

While one of Stake's two guiding questions served to guide my data analysis and interpretation (see 4.3.4), the other question 'How to optimize understanding of the specialties of this single case?' (Stake, 2005, p. 443) offered me a focus on reporting. There are several considerations to be taken into account when transforming research analysis into a research report in narrative inquiry: the audience, the voice and presentation.

### **4.4.1 The audience**

Firstly, one must answer the question 'Who is the audience?'. Connelly and Clandinin (2006) explain why this is so important:

There are multiple audiences – participants, imagined reading audience, inquirer. Research texts that emphasize any one to the exclusion of others lose impact. Inquirers who forget their participants and their reading audience, writing only for themselves, become narcissistic; inquirers who write for their imagined audience and neglect their participants run the risks of being unethical and invalid; and inquirers who write only for participants or themselves run the risk of being unable to answer the questions ‘Who cares?’ and ‘So what?’ (p. 485)

The audience of the present study, is, of course, in the first instance the examiners and the research committee. However, language teachers, particularly Chinese language teachers, teacher educators, school administrators and policy makers were all considered to be potential readers. In reporting the results of the present study I have therefore attempted to achieve a balance between academic rigour and accessibility to a wide audience.

#### **4.4.2 The voices**

Secondly, one must decide whose voice should be louder, the researcher’s or the participant’s? As Stake (2005) indicates, the decision must be made

whether to 'convey the storyteller's perception or to develop the researcher's perception of the case' (p. 457). In this regard, Chase (2005) identifies three voices, or narrative strategies, that contemporary narrative researchers have adopted to deal with the question of how to use their own voice(s) to interpret and represent the narrator's voice(s) (p. 664). They place researcher voices on an imaginary continuum, with the *authoritative voice* at one end, the *supportive voice* at the other end, and the *interactive voice* in between.

According to Chase (2005), researchers use an *authoritative voice* when 'they have a different interest from the narrators in the narrators' stories' (p. 664). In contrast, they employ a *supportive voice* when the aim is to push 'the narrator's voice into the limelight' (p. 665). Finally, the *interactive voice* is used to convey the complex interaction – the intersubjectivity – between the researcher's and the narrator's voice (p. 666).

In the presentation of the findings from the present study, the authoritative voice and the supportive voice alternate. While the authoritative voice allowed me to make taken-for-granted practices, processes, and cultural features of the case teachers' worlds visible and audible, the supportive voice allowed me to 'make room for readers' alternative interpretations' (Chase, p. 665). The interactive voice did not apply to the data of the present study.

#### 4.4.3 Presentation

Thirdly, one must address how much information to provide and how to present the information.

Merriam (2001) states that case studies 'must contain enough description to provide a vicarious experience for the reader' (p. 243). Stake (2005) is in agreement with this statement. He argues that because 'people make some generalizations entirely from personal or vicarious experience' (p. 454), it is helpful for case study researchers to provide readers with experiential and contextual accounts to assist them in the construction of knowledge. Moreover, Stake holds, 'experiential descriptions and assertions are relatively easily assimilated by readers into memory and use' (Stake, 2005, p. 454). Based on these assumptions about human learning, Stake advocates for what Geertz (1973) called 'thick description' – description with sufficient contextual information for the reader to learn from another's experience.

As for the method of presentation, Merriam (2001) identifies two common patterns: one is to begin with a descriptive narrative, followed by analysis and interpretation; another is to integrate descriptions and vignettes with commentary (p. 243). I initially followed the first method, but in later revisions found the second one more appropriate. Particularly as I was presenting local cases to an international audience, both the anticipatory and the subsequent commentary are necessary to avoid



leaving the reader 'lost in a thicket of uninterpretable detail' (Erickson, 1986, p. 152).

Based on the above considerations, in the present study I adopted an integrated method to present three case teachers' reports employing 'thick' descriptions, but varying the structure of each report to adapt to the individual case. Three cases are reported in chapters 5, 6 and 7 respectively.

## *Chapter 5*

# **Adapting ‘My Way’ of Teaching Chinese**

## **- Dongmei’s case**

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### **5.0 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter is a report on Dongmei’s case. As indicated in chapter 3, Dongmei is an immigrant to New Zealand, who is experienced in teaching English to adults at university level in China, and who started teaching Chinese for the first time in a New Zealand secondary school. In this chapter, I start by providing Dongmei’s personal profile and her working context (5.1). I then present Dongmei’s adaptation of her ‘My Way’ to the New Zealand context at two different stages: first, her reflection on her first year of teaching in New Zealand (5.2), second, an account of the challenges she faced in her second year of teaching in New Zealand (5.3). Dongmei’s case allows us to witness the challenges faced by an experienced teacher starting to teach in a very different social, cultural, and educational context.

## 5.1 PERSONAL PROFILE AND TEACHING CONTEXT

Dongmei was born in Northern China. She was trained as an English teacher in China and taught English to university students there for 12 years before immigrating to New Zealand in 2001. Upon her arrival in New Zealand, she enrolled in a postgraduate diploma course in secondary school teaching. Having gained her diploma, she started her Masters degree in TESOL at a New Zealand university. While in the middle of this masters programme, she accepted a position as a relief teacher at a girls' college, teaching Chinese from Y9-Y13 (ages 13-17). She taught there for two years, which provided her with sufficient teaching hours to be granted a certificate qualifying her to teach at secondary school level in New Zealand<sup>3</sup>. After completing her term as a relief teacher, at the beginning of the 2007 academic year (late February) Dongmei was employed as a part-time Chinese language teacher at School D, and had been asked to establish the school's Chinese language programme.

School D is a private girls' school with about 800 students from Y1 to Y13 (ages 5-17). Located in the heart of an urban district, with more than 100 years' history, this school enjoys a long-standing reputation for academic excellence. Dongmei regarded School D as an 'elite' school. The

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<sup>3</sup> To be qualified as a secondary school teacher in New Zealand, a teacher is required to have at least two years of teaching experience with a minimum of 12 teaching hours per week, after she or he has gained a diploma in secondary school teaching.

school offers a number of foreign languages, but has a policy of offering only one Asian language. When, in 2007, the decision was made to discontinue Japanese and introduce Chinese instead, starting from Y8 and Y9, Dongmei was employed to establish and teach the Chinese programme.

Thus in the beginning of the 2007 academic year, Chinese teaching started at School D in Y8 and Y9. Y9 had three contact hours of Chinese a week. In Y8, Chinese was taught as a rotation course, a 'taster' course popular in Y7-Y9 at many New Zealand schools. The purpose of taster or rotation courses is to allow students to 'dip into' a variety of different foreign languages before they choose one language to continue with in the years to come. Normally, students on a taster course take one foreign language for a term (10 weeks) or two terms (20 weeks), for one to two contact hours a week, before switching to another language for one or two terms. In this way, by the end of a four-term academic year, students have had the opportunity to experience two to four foreign languages. Students then decide which language they wish to commit to in the following years. At School D, the foreign language rotation courses offer only one contact hour per week and run for only one term.

## **5.2 TRYING TO FIND A WAY**

### **- Dongmei's struggle in the first year of teaching**

This section is based mainly on the first interview with Dongmei in which she reflected upon the first year of teaching at School D. The interview was undertaken just after Dongmei had learned from the Head of the Language Department that, out of 16 students in Y9, only 6 wished to carry on with Chinese in Y10. Given that it was her first year teaching at School D, and she had been responsible for the new Chinese programme, this news was a blow to Dongmei and had a significant impact on her evaluation of her first year of teaching. She interpreted the low re-enrolment as a personal failure and blamed herself. This sense of failure set the tone for the interview, as we will see below.

#### **5.2.1 Dongmei's self-evaluation of her first year of teaching**

As noted above, Dongmei had only 4 contact hours a week in her first year at School D. With such a limited number of teaching hours, she had very little time to get to know the students. She described her feelings about the first year of teaching, particularly the first half year, as 'senseless', 'couldn't find out my way', and 'anxious and worried'. She considered that her teaching of Y9 in the first year involved 'too much content', some of which

was 'too difficult' for the students, 'in a serious (*yánsù*, 严肃) way' and did not allow enough time to practice.

By 'too much content', Dongmei meant that she had included too much cultural content, having introduced the students to the four most famous Chinese classical novels, to well-known Tang Dynasty poetry and the popular festivals in China. By 'too difficult', Dongmei meant that she had taught some language points which are only required learning at higher levels. For example, she taught a set of words which are usually not tested before NCEA level 2 (Y12).

When Dongmei stated that she had taught in 'a serious way', she was referring to the fact that she had chosen to teach school children using the same methods she had applied in the past when teaching adults at university: an academic, knowledge-based lecture model. She also used the word 'to stuff' (*guànshū*, 灌输) to describe her way of teaching, which involved transmitting large amounts of content. Dongmei admitted that it was not until the middle of term 3 that she suddenly realized that her students were still children. This realization was prompted by the response from an advanced student to a song Dongmei taught. Having introduced the twelve animal years in Chinese culture, Dongmei taught Y9 students a song about two tigers. The song goes: 'Two tigers, two little tigers, running so fast, so very fast, one without eyes, the other with no tail, how strange,

how very strange.’<sup>4</sup> Kay, a very advanced student in Dongmei’s eyes, found this song very funny and liked it very much. As a result of Kay’s reaction to the song, Dongmei suddenly realized that ‘they are still children and they like having fun in class’.

Dongmei came to the conclusion that she had made a strategic mistake in her first year of teaching, in that she had tried to teach the students too much content and included material that was too difficult. This, she summarised, must have scared many students away from the Chinese programme. She said in hindsight: ‘I was too impatient and too ambitious.’

Dongmei’s ‘My Way’ in her first year of teaching can be captured by the image of ‘stuffing students’. Why did Dongmei teach in this way? What factors made her impatient and ambitious? There seem to be a number of reasons: her conception of an elite private school and its students; her dedication to projecting a positive image of China; the pressure of creating a new Chinese programme at the school; and confusion about her students’ responses, in other words, her lack of understanding of the local context: the school and the students. I now examine each of these factors in detail.

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<sup>4</sup> The original Chinese version of the song is as follows: 两只老虎，两只老虎，跑得快，跑得快，一只没有眼睛，一只没有尾巴，真奇怪，真奇怪.

### 5.2.2 Factors influencing Dongmei's 'My Way' of teaching

#### *Some misconceptions*

As it was her first year at School D, Dongmei did not have much knowledge of the students or the school. As she was starting a new programme from scratch, she had no point of reference either. Therefore, like most new teachers, Dongmei drew on her prior knowledge – which, in her case, consisted of a set of assumptions:

I assumed that students at private schools would be highly motivated to learn and that they would be bright, therefore I set my expectations high – I introduced many Chinese classical works and cultural elements. Later I found out that, of the 16 students, one third were bright, one third slow, and one third average. As far as their attitude is concerned, more than half are OK, the rest don't care. Thinking back, my expectations were too high.

This excerpt summarizes Dongmei's misconceptions about an elite private school and its students, that is, she assumed that an elite private school only has good students who are not only bright, but, more importantly, willing to learn and motivated to study hard. It seems that her assumption about a good student stemmed from the Chinese culture and tradition in which Dongmei grew up, was educated, and had worked until



her arrival in New Zealand. In fact the excerpt below reveals that in planning her teaching for the students at School D, Dongmei was mistakenly using the 'good' student in China as a model:

I also found later that the students in New Zealand, even the students at this kind of school, are *not like the students in China who are committed to study*. More than half want to have fun in class. Compared with the students at other schools, the students at this school are well-behaved. If a teacher asks them not to talk, they show respect and stop talking immediately. But *their drive to learn is not as strong as in students in China*. They are still thinking of how to have fun. (Emphasis added.)

Dongmei was comparing her New Zealand students with Chinese students. Central to this comparison is her conclusion that New Zealand students are not as motivated to learn as Chinese students. Why was she so concerned about students' willingness or desire to learn? To answer this question, it is necessary to briefly examine the role played by *diligence* in the Confucian-heritage cultures (CHCs).

In CHCs it is believed that it is effort and will power, not intelligence or ability, that lead to success (Lee, 1996). It follows, then, that in CHCs students must take responsibility for their own success or failure, and learning is associated with diligence and hard work on the part of the student. Dongmei's conceptions of learning and teaching were influenced

and shaped by the Confucian tradition, but the excerpts above show that she gradually became aware of the gaps between her assumptions and the reality of teaching in a Western context, where students' ability is considered to contribute to success (Watkins, 2000), and teachers should take responsibility to arouse and maintain students' interest in learning by making learning 'fun'. In other words, while 'learning' and 'having fun' seem to be a dichotomy in CHCs, they are viewed as two sides of the same coin in Western educational culture.

### *A mission to promote the image of China*

Another reason why Dongmei taught so much cultural content was her desire to promote Chinese culture and to change the way her students and their parents perceived China:

This year my main focus was on how to promote Chinese culture. That's where I put my energy. Because it's an elite school I wanted them to see the good side of China. I didn't want them to think of China negatively. I really wanted to change their view. So I filled the students with a lot of cultural content.

Implicit in this statement is Dongmei's assumption that at least some New Zealanders view China negatively and that the students and parents of an elite school are able to influence a nation's view of China. Research

(Cortazzi & Jin, 1996a; Gardner, 1985) shows that the attitude of students and their parents towards the people and culture of particular language influences their choice of language at school, and it also affects student achievement in learning that language. It is therefore crucial to establish in the students and their parents a positive attitude towards the culture and people of the target language.

However, it seems that many immigrant Chinese language teachers have a much more patriotic reason for projecting a positive image of China and its people. They regard image-building as a part of their responsibility. Later in the same interview, when talking about promoting the Chinese language in New Zealand, Dongmei stated that promoting Chinese language was also about promoting Chinese culture, and she made it clear that she regarded this as a 'commitment' (*zérèn*, 责任). Similar ideas were expressed by Wenying, another of the teachers in this study, and in Yang's (2006) report of a Chinese teacher in USA. The concerns held by these immigrant Chinese teachers about promoting a positive image of Chinese culture seems to stem from a heightened awareness of their own culture, now that they are living outside China, and from a perception that Westerners misunderstand China. Interestingly, Chinese government officials have the same concerns: a Confucian Institute president recently commented: 'What is soft power? The best soft power is to let people know

you, understand you, and love you.’<sup>5</sup> These teachers show us that a teacher’s sense of cultural identity and values influence key elements of teaching, such as the selection and presentation of content.

### *The pressure of creating a new language programme*

The pressure of creating an entirely new programme also influenced Dongmei’s way of teaching. As explained above, School D only allows one Asian language to be taught at any time. For a long time that language was Japanese. However, in 2007 Chinese was introduced to replace Japanese from Y8 and Y9. In fact, Dongmei reported that many Y9 students thought they were going to be learning Japanese and only found out on the first day back at school that they would be learning Chinese instead. Some students and their parents were not happy about the change. Dongmei said: ‘They are watching how this Chinese programme goes, whether it is successful. So I felt great pressure.’ This pressure made her all the more eager to impress the school and the parents, by showing them how much the students had learned from the Chinese programme.

In addition, establishing a successful Chinese programme would increase Dongmei’s sense of pride in being a good language teacher at a prestigious school, as she said, ‘this is a good school with good students, so

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<sup>5</sup> <http://chinadigitaltimes.net/2009/03/china-worries-too-few-foreigners-learning-chinese/>, retrieved 30 Mar. 2009.

you as a teacher should be good too'. It would also, Dongmei assumed, be good for the promotion of Chinese language in the region and throughout New Zealand. Dongmei assumed that since her school was a prestigious school, it would have considerable influence on other schools in promoting Chinese language in New Zealand.

### *Misled by student response*

Just as Dongmei misunderstood the role of a teacher in the New Zealand context, Dongmei also misinterpreted the reactions of her students to her way of teaching. She said that in Y9 there were five or six students who had a strong desire to learn Chinese. She therefore felt obligated to meet their needs by providing them with more content, 'like a selfless Chinese teacher would do', she said. For example, Kay, the most advanced student mentioned before, found the Chinese language very challenging and very exciting and she was very interested in learning the language. Kay's parents were also very happy with the Chinese programme. However, later Dongmei realized that 'more than half of the students were not so willing to learn', therefore she should not have taught at a high level all the time.

However, Dongmei was also confused by the feedback from some students about her teaching style, particularly from one she identified as a slow learner:

One very slow learner in my class likes my teaching very much. Her mum told me in an email: 'She likes your teaching style very much.' How strange. Here I am blaming myself for being in such a mess, not knowing where I should start, however, the student says that she likes my teaching style. I didn't get it.

With so much pressure, so many goals, and so many concerns, combined with numerous misconceptions and confusion, it is not surprising that Dongmei's feelings about her first year at the school were expressed in terms such as 'anxious and worried', and 'too ambitious and impatient'.

### **5.2.3 Getting strategic positioning right – A plan for the second year**

To summarize, at the end of her first year of teaching, Dongmei realized that her prior experiences of teaching were not to be relied on for her new teaching challenges. Her CHC-based assumptions about students did not help her find a positive way of teaching in her new context. Dongmei admitted that she had got used to teaching university students in China and did not know how to work with her New Zealand students: 'What are these girls thinking? Particularly the girls at this school, I don't know much about them.' She acknowledged that she had not made the effort to get to know her students and to establish a good teacher-student relationship in

the first year. Now, with the second year ahead of her, she realized the importance of getting to know the students and developing a good relationship with them: 'Only if they like you will they select your course', she concluded.

By critically examining her first year of teaching, Dongmei gained an insight into what had gone wrong and why some students may have been scared away, and was able to develop a plan to put her teaching on the right track for the second year. She realized that she had made a strategic mistake by not focusing on promoting the Chinese language programme in the first year, she therefore set 'retaining students' as a goal for the second year. In order to achieve this goal she planned to focus on: (1) simplifying the course content, (2) making the learning of Chinese more fun, and (3) getting to know the students and building a good teacher-student relationship.

By reflecting on her first year of teaching, and by laying a clear plan for the second year, Dongmei also regained her confidence in her ability to become a good teacher and to find a suitable way to teach at School D in the coming years. As she stated toward the end of the interview, 'I'm confident that I will find a suitable way [to teach these students] in the next few years'. It seems that while Dongmei's reflection helped her to understand what had gone wrong and what she should do to remedy the situation, the interview process also provided her with a way to release the

negative feelings caused by the news that only 6 students wanted to continue with Chinese, and eventually to rebuild her confidence.

### **5.3 TRYING TO ACHIEVE A BALANCE**

#### **- Dongmei's dilemmas in the second year of teaching**

When the new academic year began in February 2008, the Chinese programme at School D was expanded to include Y7 and Y10, with one contact hour for Y7 and Y8 each a week (rotation course) and three contact hours for Y9 and Y10 each a week<sup>6</sup>. In addition, Dongmei also had two contact hours of study class, which involved supervising senior students (Y12 and Y13) when they were doing self-study. She thought this would be a good opportunity to get to know senior students. In that year, Dongmei enrolled in an in-service professional development programme in languages for Y7-Y10 teachers. At the beginning of the second year, Dongmei was more confident and had clear ideas about what she was going to do for each level: for Y7 and Y8, the focus was to be on developing student interest and having more fun; for Y9, a large class, it was on classroom management, with attention to establishing routines; and for

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<sup>6</sup> Unlike public schools, many private schools in New Zealand provide schooling from pre-school (aged 2) to secondary school (aged 17).



Y10, as the students were moving to senior levels, the focus would be on learning more content while maintaining student interest.

Two things helped boost her self-confidence. First, the number of students in Y10 was higher than expected, with 12 rather than 6 of the 16 students from the previous year carrying on with Chinese. Although Dongmei was pleased with this result, she did not take the credit for it, considering instead that other factors had played a role, such as support from the principal, the novelty of the Chinese programme, and the prospect, for students, of a school trip to China. Particularly, Dongmei pointed out, the visit to the school the year before of an Opera Troupe from a primary school in Beijing had greatly increased the students' interest in Chinese culture. Whatever the reasons, the increase in numbers was certainly an encouraging sign and it cheered her up.

The results of a survey of her students also provided Dongmei with a pleasant surprise. As mentioned earlier, Dongmei had thought she had taught too much content, some of which was too difficult. She had also been worried about giving instructions in English, as she was concerned that she was not able to express herself clearly in English. However, a survey of Y9 students carried out by the Head of Language Department at the end of Dongmei's first year showed that the students did not feel that there was too much content or that it was too difficult for them; they also felt that her instructions were clear. The students' only criticism was that

there were not enough exercises to consolidate what was taught and she did not give homework regularly. This feedback was a source of great relief to Dongmei and greatly increased her confidence as a non-native English speaker teaching in an English context.

Based on the results of the survey, Dongmei re-directed her strategic focus in the second year. She changed her goal from retaining students to improving teaching efficacy, focusing her effort on the areas of: (1) getting to know the students; (2) improving classroom management; and (3) developing teaching methods suited to the local context. Although her way of teaching in the first year was valued more highly than she thought, Dongmei felt strongly that she had not found a suitable way to 'teach these New Zealand girl students'. In her search for this 'way' in the second year, Dongmei was confronted by a number of 'dilemmas' that had to be balanced.

### **5.3.1 Getting to know the students**

Dongmei realized that one problem she had had in her first year was that she had not got to know her students. She therefore set this as a task to achieve in the second year. The interviews and the classroom observations reveal the various ways in which she was trying to achieve this goal. She was paying more attention to the students' feelings. She was particularly

careful to build the students' confidence with a lot of encouragement. For example she was cautious when introducing Chinese characters. She said she did not want students to feel that characters were hard to learn. One Monday, she had told the Y9 students that they would have a test on the Friday. However she changed her mind on the Friday, because she noticed one girl crying during the week because she was nervous. Dongmei thus found herself faced with a dilemma: the need to achieve a balance between challenging students and motivating them. She believed that for students to learn they should be challenged. 'However', she said, 'you must also let the students feel success, a sense of achievement'. One day she held a test on characters. She planned to test 10 characters but only tested 5. When the students got all 5 right they felt very proud of themselves. 'No success no motivation', Dongmei commented, and went on: 'but if it is too easy for them, they may have no motivation either.' Dongmei was trying to find out how to achieve a sound balance between motivating and challenging her students.

Dongmei was also actively identifying the students' needs by seeking their opinions about content. For example, when the topic was 'daily routines', she surveyed the students to find out which daily tasks they liked and disliked so that she could make the teaching more meaningful to them. In the meantime Dongmei was also being more responsive to the students' learning styles. She reported that some students responded well

to auditory input, some preferred visual input, and others liked to have interactive input. She found that many of the girls were sensitive to sound because they were learning music, therefore she began to develop activities using auditory input – ‘to take advantage of this sensitivity’, in her words.

As she was trying to get to know her students, Dongmei felt an increasingly good rapport with them: ‘I feel much more comfortable in the classroom, so do the students.’ She recalled that in the first year she felt strongly that she did not get along well with a couple of the students. Looking back, she thought that she might not have given those students enough attention because she was herself struggling to ‘survive’. She had also been unsure as to how close she should get to the students, another balance she was trying to achieve in the second year. The following story is very illuminating.

When, in Dongmei’s first year, a Y8 girl came to her and said ‘I want to give you a hug’ at the end of the Chinese programme, Dongmei did not know how to respond. She simply smiled back at the girl, but did not let the girl hug her. She said in the interview, ‘we Chinese people are not used to doing this’. However, in the second year, before her three Y9 students departed for a competition with a teacher from another school in another city in New Zealand, she said ‘I want to give each of you a big hug’. While she was praising the students ‘you’re so brave, you’re great, and I am really proud of you’, she hugged each of them. Dongmei said: ‘I would

have hugged that girl naturally if it had happened this year. Poor little girl.' She sighed with a little regret. This story also demonstrates how a lack of understanding of the local culture can influence the teacher-student relationship.

### **5.3.2 Improving classroom management**

In her second year, Dongmei had 20 students in her Y9 class, and this meant that classroom management was very important. One dilemma she faced was to keep a balance between building a routine and retaining a flexibility. She had become aware that without routine in classroom, students did not know what steps to follow. However, if classroom activities become so routine that the students knew exactly what would happen next, 'teaching would be so boring'.

This dilemma relates closely to another balance Dongmei wanted to achieve, that is, between encouraging the students to be active and at the same time keeping them under control. She wanted to have role-plays in class so that students had opportunities to practise being in different situations. However, Dongmei thought that students also needed to do written work quietly sometimes. To Dongmei, the problem was that 'once they start talking they become excited and it is difficult to get them to quieten down quickly'. She was concerned about losing control because

she was worried that 'things would turn to chaos if students are not under control.'

It is interesting to note that Dongmei appeared to be very concerned about keeping classes under control, a concern shared by other teachers from China teaching in a western context. Once again, this concern comes from different expectations about student behaviour in different cultures.

Cross-cultural educational research has discovered that Confucian-heritage cultures (CHCs) and Western countries have quite different approaches to preparing children for schooling. In CHCs, children are educated from a very young age to be patient, diligent, obedient and compliant with authority. In contrast, in Western societies, children are generally raised to be assertive, independent and curious, and are encouraged to explore on their own terms (Biggs, 1996; Hess & Azuma, 1991). Biggs (1996, p. 58) argues that it seems that CHC socialization procedures help develop children's 'docility dispositions' which ease them into the world of school by making them more docile, or, literally, 'teachable'. These 'docility dispositions' create in the students 'a sense of diligence and receptiveness' (Hess & Azuma, 1991, p. 7). As a consequence, Watkins (2000, p. 171) points out, teachers in CHCs do not have to spend the time and energy Western teachers do on motivating their students, getting them on task and coping with classroom behavioural problems.

These research findings help explain why Dongmei and many other Chinese language teachers educated in China teaching in the West find classroom management challenging. These teachers may have become accustomed to the authority conferred upon them as teachers in China, and to sharing a mutual expectation, with their students, of student behaviour at school. It is in this context that, in China, classroom management is not a focus in teacher training. The issue only began to be given attention recently in L2 Chinese teacher education, as increasing numbers of Chinese teachers have left China to teach at schools in Western countries. Dongmei's concern reveals the challenges a teacher from CHCs faces when she comes to teach in Western contexts. At the time of the present study, Dongmei was just began to identify the cultural differences between teaching in China and in New Zealand, and was in the process of devising solutions.

### **5.3.3 Developing teaching methods suited to the local context**

Reflecting on her first year of teaching, Dongmei concluded that her teaching had included too much content, and too little practice to consolidate what students had learned. In the second year she was trying to make her teaching more fun to facilitate learning: 'to get them engaged and focused, so they can learn more in class'. However, as Dongmei had realized in the first year, the students were not all at the same level. As the

students moved from Y9 to Y10, she noticed that 'the gap between the fast students and the slow ones was widening'. She was trying hard to find a way to help those at the bottom to catch up and felt it was 'very very hard' to do so. Not only was she trying to find a balance between going too fast and going too slow, she was also trying to achieve a balance between teaching too much content and teaching too little content: 'if you teach too little, the students might find it too easy; if too much, they might find it too hard'.

These challenges were particularly acute to Dongmei. In China, teachers are required to follow textbooks developed to meet curriculum requirements, and they are expected to teach to the average level across the class (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996a). By contrast, in New Zealand, teachers only receive guidelines on the content to be covered in Chinese language teaching. For example, *Chinese in the New Zealand Curriculum*, produced and published by the New Zealand Ministry of Education, provides no more than a general outline of the language skills to be developed from level 1 to level 8 (for Y7 to Y10). The only specific reference to language content is the vocabulary lists for NCEA Levels 1-3, starting from Y11 to Y13. For Y7-Y10, it is left to individual schools and teachers to decide what linguistic content should be taught. This meant that when she started developing the new Chinese programme, Dongmei had no points of references and no suitable materials. One strategy she employed to solve



these problems was to get feedback from her students regularly, an area she had neglected in the first year. She did this in two ways. One was a regular check of students' homework and classroom exercises and tests; another was to schedule about 10 minutes in each class, where, while students did their exercises, she could work with individual students.

At the same time, Dongmei was also experimenting with different ways to improve her teaching practice. For example, in Y9, she was using more Chinese for calling the roll and giving instructions, where previously she had done this in English. Dongmei explained that this practice was based on the principle that in order to learn a language, students must be provided with sufficient meaningful input. This principle, she said, was taken from a TESOL paper at a university here in New Zealand, and had been emphasised during the in-service teacher training programme she was taking.

In Y10, Dongmei chose 'helping students to learn characters' as an action research project for her in-service teacher training programme. The focus was on using word-cards and other strategies to help students learn Chinese characters, because she had found that as written work increased, characters had become a bottleneck which prevented further progress.

It seems that as Dongmei became more immersed in the Chinese programme at School D, and more engaged in adapting to the local context, teaching became more complicated and challenges increased. From a

teacher professional development point of view, this is a positive sign, because it shows that Dongmei was reflecting on her practice and developing her 'My Way' suited to the local context, as we will see from the next section.

#### **5.3.4 An emerging vision**

In the middle of the second year, Dongmei felt that a vision of an 'ideal class' was emerging:

My ideal class is to get the students engaged and focused, so they can learn more language in a unit time effectively. I can't articulate it clearly, kind of to make the students feel interested, and then to grab their attention, so that they can learn more language while having fun.

Further discussion revealed that when Dongmei talked about the 'ideal class' she actually had a model in mind, that is the French classes at School D. She thought that the French programme had been well developed in New Zealand schools. The French programme integrated many games that made teaching very attractive to students. In contrast, the Chinese classes were still very serious and lacked fun.

The essence of her vision appears to be that students can enjoy the class and have fun while at the same time learning Chinese. It may seem odd that Dongmei viewed having fun and learning as a dichotomy, but underlying this perspective is once again the CHC's view of hard work as the most important contributor to success.

As discussed before, in CHCs learning is always associated with diligence. If students spend time playing around, they are considered to be wasting their time. This view is shared by the students themselves, as evidenced by Chinese students' response to Western ELT methods, particularly CLT (the Communicative Language Teaching). As Cortazzi and Jin (1996b, p. 72) report, Chinese students of English tend to view CLT as 'games', not as serious learning. A Chinese English teacher called Minfang in Tsui's (2007) case study provides an example. While Minfang was claimed as a successful product of CLT, he himself believed that, as a student, it was his hard work that made the difference. In fact, both he and his classmates felt that they had not learned much in the CLT lessons. Tsui reports: Minfang 'liked Intensive English which required rigorous text and grammatical analyses and learning new vocabulary. These learning tasks made him feel that he had learned *something solid*' (Tsui, 2007, p. 665), emphasis added). Dongmei seemed to share this view of 'serious learning' and the need to teach 'something solid'.

However, as we have seen, Dongmei had become aware of the differences between CHCs and Western cultures and was making an effort to adapt to the Western context. She said:

My ideas have also changed. Previously I thought the students were spending a lot of time playing without learning. But that's their culture. Here students are learning through lively activities. There is no need to drown the students with huge amounts of homework and assignments, writing, writing, writing. In fact there is still a lot of writing in my worksheets now. It looks scary. The worksheets in French programmes are full of pictures with few words.

This excerpt shows that whereas previously she had viewed 'having fun' as unrelated to teaching and learning, Dongmei had started to realize that having fun is part of Western educational culture. However, while she was making changes, she also noticed that her teaching was still 'content-oriented', that is, she still cared about teaching 'something solid', as her worksheet showed. She found it hard to work against her personal and cultural disposition: 'As Eastern people you're not that kind of humorous person, however you have to make teaching fun. Sometimes you simply feel you can't do it, but you have to do so.'

To summarize, after her first year struggle for survival Dongmei felt more confident in the second year. With her focus on teaching efficacy,

Dongmei had found herself facing a number of dilemmas, many of which came from the ideological gulf between her native culture and Western cultures. 'Achieving a balance' was thus central to her efforts in adapting herself to the Western context, and can be used as the image to capture her 'My Way' in her second year of teaching.

#### **5.4 SUMMARY**

In the preceding sections I presented Dongmei's 'My Way' at two different stages and the factors shaping her 'My Way'. The development of her 'My Way' provided us with a case to understand the characteristics of teachers' personal practical knowledge (PPK), that is, it is dynamic, reflects the individual's prior knowledge, and is carved out of the situation (Clandinin, 1992, p. 125).

We have seen that Dongmei's PPK was being reshaped during the study. Dongmei was not a novice language teacher when she started to teach at School D, given her 12 years experience teaching English in China, and 2 years experience teaching Chinese in New Zealand. However, she was new to School D and felt she had started all over again. As reported above, when Dongmei started teaching at School D she had little knowledge of the school and the students, but only knew that it was a prestigious private girls' school with a well-known reputation for

academic excellence. She therefore started her first year of teaching with a set of assumptions about an elite school and its students. To Dongmei, these assumptions seem to go like this: the students at an 'elite' school are highly motivated; highly motivated students are willing to study hard; studying hard leads to high achievement; and high achievement is exhibited in a great amount of content students have learned, thus she 'stuffed' the students with intensive content. Many of these assumptions came from Dongmei's prior knowledge, particularly her native culture – Confucian educational tradition, as I have indicated in the report. Dongmei's 'My Way' in the first year of teaching, which was captured by the image of 'stuffing' students, was primarily assumption-based.

As she became more familiar with the school and the students, Dongmei started to realize that many of her assumptions were not appropriate to the context. She therefore made efforts to adjust her assumptions and adapt her 'My Way' to the local context in her second year of teaching, paying particular attention to getting to know the students and building a good teacher-student relationship; to improving classroom management; and to the development of teaching methods suited to the local context. During the course, however, Dongmei encountered a number of dilemmas between, such as, challenging the students and motivating the students; encouraging students' participation and keeping them quiet; teaching too much and teaching too little; and

having more fun and learning more 'things'. As I have indicated the tension between these opposites was increased by Dongmei's awareness of the ideological gulf between the Confucian educational tradition – her native culture, and the Western culture – the local context. In striving to achieve a balance between various opposites Dongmei was attempting to integrate her prior knowledge into her understanding of the local context, and to bridge the ideological gulf between CHCs and the Western cultures. Her 'My Way' in the second year can be captured by the image of 'achieving balance', and it was more attuned to the local context.

Dongmei's case shows that teacher development is a process of constant 'deconstructing, and then reconstructing ingrained practice and long-held beliefs' in response to the local context (Pennington, 1995, p. 705), with establishing her own 'My Way' as a goal. Dongmei's adapting process helps draw our attention to the strong influence of teachers' prior knowledge, particularly the influence of culture of learning and teaching rooted in their native culture, and the impact of the local context on shaping the immigrant teacher's 'My Way'. While Dongmei's prior knowledge provided her with guidance for initiation, it was the local context that helped her prior knowledge be adapted and integrated into teaching practice. In this way, her PPK shaped and was shaped by the local context and her teaching practice. Underneath this process was her constant reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action (Schön, 1983). From

the preceding sections it is evident that Dongmei was involved in active reflecting processes. In doing so she was in fact engaged naturally in practitioner research (Robinson & Lai, 2006), or exploratory practice (Allwright, 2003, 2005). These points will be further discussed in Chapter 8.



## *Chapter 6*

### **Nurturing Student Confidence**

#### **- Julie's case**

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#### **6.0 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter is a report on Julie's case. As mentioned in chapter 3, Julie is a non-native Chinese speaking teacher. She started teaching Chinese without any professional training or teaching experience and with limited Chinese language proficiency. This case illustrates a non-native speaking teacher's struggle, and the frustration caused by her perceived Chinese language deficiency. We will see how Julie's sense of inferiority about being a non-native speaker, her schooling, language learning experience, and personality all influence her 'My Way'. This chapter begins with a presentation of Julie's personal profile (6.1), followed by a report on her 'My Way' (6.2), and the factors shaping her 'My Way' (6.3), and a summary (6.4).

## 6.1 PERSONAL PROFILE AND TEACHING CONTEXT

Julie was born in New Zealand to Chinese parents. She is a second generation New Zealand Chinese and the youngest in a family of five children. She completed her primary and secondary schooling in urban New Zealand. Julie said she was shy: 'Chinese girls were very shy in those days'. In fact, she said that she was so shy that she didn't go to university after finishing high school, but instead went to a secretarial school for one year. She then worked for two years as a legal secretary, first in New Zealand, then in London. Upon returning to New Zealand she married. She said that in those days Chinese parents always wanted their daughters to marry young.

After bringing up three children, Julie went back to work. In 1994 she started as a part-time office secretary at School J, her current school. School J is a public secondary girls' college which, at the time of this study in 2007, had around 1,000 students from Y9 to Y13 (ages 13–17). It is a multicultural school and has many students from low-income families. Julie said 'it is a school that encourages the girls to do many things'. She felt very comfortable working at this school and remained in her secretarial job until 1998, when the school offered her a position as a Chinese teacher with a limited authority.

### **6.1.1 Learning Chinese**

Although born into a Cantonese family, like many second generation Chinese, Julie could only speak a little Cantonese and spoke no Mandarin Chinese at all. When she was growing up, Chinese was not an L2 at New Zealand schools, nor was it the language used in Chinese communities in New Zealand. Julie started to learn the language at around the age of 30, when she enrolled in an evening class in spoken Chinese. In the late 1980s she went on to learn Chinese more formally, completing first and second year papers at a New Zealand university. In 2001 Julie attended a training course at Beijing Normal University, China, having won a 6-week scholarship: 'The course was for university lecturers and consisted only of lectures. It was really hard', she recalled. Nevertheless, she felt it was a valuable experience because she was immersed in Chinese for 6 weeks: 'I was able to go shopping, catch the bus and that sort of thing in Chinese, I think it helped me to keep going'. Basically, Julie learned Chinese all by herself: 'I'm really interested, so I guess that's probably why I kept learning', she said.

### **6.1.2 Establishing a Chinese programme from scratch**

At the end of 1997, School J decided to introduce a Chinese programme from the academic year 1998, and Julie was asked if she would teach. Her

initial response was to decline on the grounds that her Chinese language proficiency was very limited. However, the principal and the Head of Language Department encouraged her to accept, arguing that it was an advantage that she was born and educated in New Zealand and understood Kiwi students. Her mother-in-law, who had been a kindergarten teacher in China before she came to New Zealand, also urged Julie to take the position, saying that she would help her along the way. Buoyed by the school's faith in her and the encouragement from her mother-in-law, Julie accepted the offer. Sadly, however, her mother-in-law died two weeks before the teaching year began. Thus, Julie started the Chinese programme from scratch in February 1998, without teaching experience, without formal training – except one paper called ‘cooperative learning’ – and without much support. She recalled: ‘I had nobody to help me. I only had a textbook and some old tapes to listen to from my community class. So that’s how I started.’

In 1998 very few schools in the region taught Chinese, so the possibilities for obtaining collegial support were also limited. With limited teaching resources, Julie started teaching a Y9 class of seventeen students for two contact hours a week. Julie taught Y9 to Y11 as the programme advanced, but did not teach Y12 and Y13. The school hired another teacher to teach these two levels because Julie did not think her Chinese language proficiency was advanced enough to teach the advanced classes.

In fact, from day one Julie was very conscious of her non-native Chinese speaker status and did not feel confident about her level of Chinese language proficiency. She was particularly worried about her tones and characters. She said: 'I had to learn, re-learn the characters because I hadn't used Chinese for such a long time. Every day I was practising, practising to make sure I knew what I was doing, and listening to tapes to make sure I heard the right tones.' The account that follows reveals Julie's lack of confidence in her own language ability.

When the Chinese programme started, one of the students in the Y9 class was a Chinese girl. When Julie learned that the girl's mother was a Chinese lecturer at a polytechnic and a native Chinese speaker she became quite stressed: 'because I thought, oh, here I am a non-native speaker, I've only learned Chinese for two years or so and I'm saying I'm teaching Chinese'. However, Julie found the mother very nice and supportive when they met. In fact, the mother told Julie that her daughter really enjoyed Julie's classes. The mother went on to explain that when she and her daughter had come to New Zealand from China they had lived with an English family. As time passed, the mother realised that her daughter was speaking less and less Chinese and she persuaded her to attend a local community Chinese school. But her daughter did not enjoy these classes and refused to go in the end. In contrast, the mother told Julie, her daughter really liked being in Julie's class and she was learning Chinese.

‘That girl went right through to the end of secondary school learning Chinese’, Julie stated proudly.

This story reveals not only Julie’s initial concern about her Chinese language proficiency as a non-native speaker but also the sense of achievement she got from seeing students enjoy learning Chinese.

### **6.1.3 Taking leave to gain qualifications**

While teaching, Julie also took more university papers, one per semester. They were mainly to do with Chinese, linguistics, and education because she thought these subjects would help her with teaching. In 2005 Julie took leave to complete her BA in Chinese Studies. She said the motivation for completing the degree programme was to obtain a tertiary qualification, for she had been teaching on what was known at the time as a ‘limited authority to teach’. Even so, during 2002-2004 she had been involved in the development of a national *Chinese Teaching Kit* for Y7-Y10 and contracted by the New Zealand Ministry of Education to train Y7-Y8 Chinese language teachers to use this *Chinese Teaching Kit*. In 2006, after she received her degree, Julie enrolled for a postgraduate diploma in secondary school teaching, majoring in TESOL and Chinese. She successfully completed this programme and returned to School J to continue her Chinese language teaching in 2007, teaching at all levels from

Y9 right though to Y13 for the first time.

#### **6.1.4 Returning to teaching Chinese**

After her two-year leave of absence, Julie came back to teaching with mixed feelings. She was worried that she might have lost confidence. She was also worried that she might not have taught at the level of her relief teacher, a native Chinese speaker. Sharing these fears with me Julie said:

I had a look at the students' last year's work to see what they'd learned and I looked at all the work that they had in their book and I thought my goodness! I didn't teach as much as she taught before I left to study, and I thought I'm just not giving them enough work, or something I'm not quite sure. It scared me because I thought I'm not teaching enough, yet all my students before I left had passed everything really well and here I was feeling that I was teaching inadequately.

In addition, it was Julie's first time teaching Y13 and she was very anxious. She explained to the students: 'I'm teaching Y13 for the first time, there's not a lot of teaching material around. I have some good colleagues who are helping me and I will do my utmost to teach you to the best of my abilities.' To make things worse, Julie had a number of native speakers of

Chinese in her Y12 and Y13 classes. She said: 'I was very nervous when I came back this year, having native speakers in the class.' She said to the classes: 'I'm not a native speaker, the other girls in the class are native speakers, so we can help each other. We can help them with their English, and they can help us with our Chinese.' It was in this situation that Julie took part in the present study. The fact that I was a native Chinese speaker and a Chinese language teacher at university level might have made her feel even more vulnerable as a non-native Chinese speaker.

#### **6.1.5 Summary**

As is evident from this brief biography, Julie was both a self-taught student of Chinese and a self-made Chinese teacher. Even though she had established the Chinese language programmes at School J and had successfully taught Chinese, Julie continued to be concerned about her Chinese language proficiency. At the time of the data collection for the present study (2007) she still perceived her level of Chinese as a significant constraint, and her anxiety at being a non-native Chinese speaker had a considerable impact on her 'My Way'.



## **6.2 JULIE'S 'MY WAY'**

In the interviews Julie said that she believed that teaching should be student-centred with the teacher playing the role of a facilitator, helping to develop students as independent learners. In Julie's view, to be an independent learner a student must have a certain level of self-confidence. Julie therefore placed a great importance on building student confidence through her teaching practice. In fact, 'nurturing student confidence' was a recurring theme in the interviews and can be used as the image to capture Julie's 'My Way'. Guided by this image, Julie insisted on (1) reducing students' anxiety, (2) starting with the basics and progressing slowly, and (3) encouraging students to participate. These are the three organizing principles guiding Julie's teaching practice, and the three key components of her 'My Way'. Julie's application of each of these three principles is described below.

### **6.2.1 Reducing student anxiety**

For most people, learning a foreign language is a daunting experience. For Westerners learning Chinese characters and tones is particularly challenging. Both the American and Australian governments rank Chinese

as one of the hardest foreign languages for their diplomats to learn<sup>7</sup>. This reputation often causes beginners to be apprehensive. Aware of this fact, Julie made every effort to reassure new students, believing, based on her own experience, that if students were anxious they couldn't learn. She elaborated:

If students get anxious they don't listen, they don't pay attention, and they just worry about what will be happening. So when I start year 9, I always assure them that we're going to be going slowly, I will be teaching them lots of new things that are different from English but we'll go step by step, and most important of all, if they're worried or if they need to ask questions they must ask, they don't have to sit there thinking 'oh I'm too scared to ask, I will sound silly, I will sound stupid'. That's how I start.

This excerpt reveals the first principle of Julie's 'My Way' – reducing students' anxiety. As we will see below, Julie took great pains to overcome students' anxiety and create a positive learning environment.

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<sup>7</sup> The Foreign Service Institute in Washington DC estimates 'that it takes a native English speaking beginner learner approximately 600 hours to become proficient in a European language such as Italian or French, and 2200 hours to reach the same standard in Chinese' (Orton, 2008, p. 14).

### *Establishing a positive attitude*

To Julie's mind, the fundamental way to reduce student anxiety was to cultivate a positive attitude to learning. To this end, Julie never allowed her students to say the words 'hard' or 'difficult' in her classes, believing that these words reinforced a negative attitude. She explained: 'If students say "this is hard" or "this is difficult" their mind really switches off, and it's very hard to re-activate their interest.' To help cultivate a positive attitude, Julie took every opportunity to encourage her students.

Indeed 'encouraging students' is a re-iterated theme across all the interviews and the post-lesson discussions with Julie. One of the techniques Julie employed was to take advantage of having been a Chinese language learner herself and sharing her own feelings with her students, telling them 'I learned it just like you, so I know what it's like learning a new language, and I refuse to say it's hard'. Similarly, she would share her own learning experience to help her students develop a positive attitude towards learning Chinese. For example when, in her Y12 class, students were writing down their prepared talks in Chinese and one student said: 'Oh these characters, I wish I could write like the native speaking girls.' Julie responded: 'So do I.', and went on to explain: 'when I look back at my books, when I first started writing characters, it looked like a pre-schooler had written them'. She encouraged the students: 'I know what it's like, it just takes time and practice.' Here we see that Julie, a non-native speaker

teacher, was drawing from her own experience in learning Chinese to help with her daily teaching.

This practice is also found in the literature. Research on non-native speaker (NNS) teachers has found that their own second language learning experience gives them certain advantages: they can put themselves forward as successful models of learning the language to encourage their students; they can anticipate and prevent language difficulties; they are better able to empathise with their students (Medgyes, 1992, 1994). Ellis (2006), in discussing the contributions of second language learning experience to teacher cognition and practice, highlights the importance of NNS teachers' sharing insights from their own experiences with their students. In her case study, Ellis (2002) reported how one of her case teachers, Lidia, used her experience learning English as a second language as a key resource in motivating, reassuring and encouraging her students:

I know how they suffer, and how frustrated they are when they can't really get something. And I normally tell them that I went through the same thing ... so for them to see me teaching it ... is encouraging, so I just say 'look, if I could do it, you can do it too'. (L. Ellis, 2002, p. 80)

Both Lidia and Julie were non-native speaker teachers, and both understood how to draw upon their own learning experience to motivate

and encourage their students. Furthermore, 'it is not just the experience as a language learner', as Auerbach (1993) argues, 'but the experience of sharing the struggles with a newcomer that is critical' (p. 26). This sharing had become a part of Julie's 'way' of reducing student anxiety.

### *Avoiding demoralizing students*

While Julie considered it important to reinforce positive experience in learning Chinese, she regarded it as equally important to avoid damaging students' self-confidence during the learning process. Julie, again, from her own experience, had found that language learners, particularly beginners, are sensitive to others' response to their language performance, and their confidence can be very fragile. Julie was aware that correcting students' mistakes is one of those sensitive areas, because if handled inappropriately it can discourage students. Julie therefore tried not to correct students too often: 'if you always correct them they think "I'm always saying it wrong"', she said. Instead she would repeat what students had said, explaining to them: 'If I say the word after you it's not because I'm correcting you. I'm only doing it so you can hear it more often.'

Julie acknowledged, however, that making mistakes is part of learning, and she worked to help students develop a positive attitude to mistakes. Julie assured her students that it was perfectly fine to make mistakes, pointing to the fact that 'we speak English, we write English, and

we communicate in English but we don't know how to spell every word'. In fact, Julie was quite happy to have her students point out the mistakes she herself made, and to turn them into learning opportunity for the students. If students pointed out: 'Oh miss you've written that [character] wrong', Julie would say: 'Oh dear!' Julie explained: 'I don't think it matters because they realise that the teacher can make mistakes and they can correct them or be aware of them.' Here again Julie was taking advantage of the shared experience of being a language learner to not only help establish in her students a positive attitude to learning, but also to build a rapport with them.

### **6.2.2 Starting with the basics and progressing slowly**

The second principle of Julie's 'My Way' - 'starting with the basics and progressing slowly' - is about presenting the right amount of teaching content at the right pace. Guided by her image of 'nurturing student confidence', Julie was adamant that teaching should start with basic Chinese and should progress slowly and gradually, otherwise, Julie said, students would become 'anxious and panic'.

#### ***Starting with the basics***

We have seen that Julie's status as a Chinese language learner and a

non-native Chinese speaker helped her to empathize with her students. She felt that native speakers often do not appreciate the difficulties non-native speakers experience when learning Chinese, and assume that the language can be learned or understood quickly. 'But that's not the case', Julie argued, and went on: 'being a non-native speaker I try to break the language down to the simplest for people who are starting to learn'. She emphasized: 'You have to make small beginnings, just very small beginnings.' Classroom observations and post-lesson discussions confirmed that Julie did indeed follow this principle. For example, when she taught the topic 'shopping' in Y10, she started with a very basic dialogue for the students to practise. It went like this:

Customer: *How much is the jersey?*    Shopkeeper: *Five kuai [dollars]*

Customer: *Here is the money*                      Shopkeeper: *Thanks, bye.*

Customer: *Bye.*

She commented, 'I try to make it as simple as possible' at this stage, 'otherwise students may get scared'.

Julie's principle of starting from basics and keeping it simple also meant not teaching too much language content at once, a point illustrated by Julie's decision to introduce only one word of unit of Chinese currency:

We started with the money and I've taught them *kuài* (块, dollar), *máo* (毛, dime), and *fēn* (分, cent). But it was too much for them, it was far too much, and they got a bit anxious. So I decided that I will not use *máo* and *fēn*, I will just use *kuài*, because I thought they would grasp it more easily. I think they did, and I think they were happier.

Again we have evidence that Julie was very conscious of not putting her students in a situation where they felt anxious. We can also see that she was actually monitoring the students' mental state and kept adjusting her presentation according to their affective states, to facilitate their understanding and assimilation of the content.

### *Progressing slowly*

With regard to the pace of teaching, Julie insisted on going slowly and gradually, building on what students had already learned, in order to increase their sense of achievement. 'As a language teacher you need to use what they know and slowly build on it', Julie said, 'you can't go too fast. I'd rather be slower.' This was, of course, yet another way to reduce student anxiety. To ensure that she went at an appropriate pace, Julie constantly checked if the students understood what she was teaching. She stated: 'I don't always assume that students have learned what I've taught them and understood what I've taught them. If they don't say anything you can't



always assume that.’ Therefore, when she was teaching she always looked at the students’ faces to see if they were puzzled and always checked with them if they had any questions. Julie thought it best to check for understanding frequently and regularly to ensure that students did not lose interest. If she noticed that too many students were asking the same question she would go back to the beginning and start all over again, telling the students ‘I’m going to start from the beginning again and we’ll go through it again’. ‘That’s what I always do’, Julie claimed.

To help determine the pace, Julie said she always looked for signs of students’ readiness to move to the next level and would strive to create as many moments as possible where students could say ‘Oh I know that!’. Julie noticed that these moments were a very powerful way to boost students’ confidence, therefore, for the Y9 students, Julie explained, she often did not give them textbooks at the beginning of the year. Instead, she concentrated on getting them talking in the first term without having to worry about the characters. When the students began to ask questions such as: ‘What about those picture things (characters)? Are we going to learn that?’ Julie said that she knew the students were ready to learn the characters. She then started teaching characters and gave them textbooks to read. As the students had learned many words in *pinyin*<sup>8</sup> they often found out with pleasant surprise: ‘Oh I know that word!’ Julie reported. She

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<sup>8</sup> *Pinyin* is an alphabetic system used to transliterate Chinese sounds.

thought if new content was introduced in response to students' curiosity and readiness it would help increase their morale and motivation. 'This is my philosophy of how to teach them', Julie stated. It was, she argued, the students' pleasure at being able to recognize characters and ask 'Miss, is that the character we've learned?' that made learning more exciting for them. Once again, Julie's main concern was about how her students were feeling about learning the language.

### **6.2.3 Encouraging students to participate**

The decision to start from basic Chinese guided Julie's selection of teaching content, and her commitment to progressing slowly dictated her teaching pace. The third principle of Julie's 'My Way' – encouraging students to participate – is more student-oriented. Julie believed that creating a variety of opportunities for students to practise was an important part of teaching. It would help give students the confidence to speak Chinese outside the classroom. Julie had noticed that many students, particular Y9 students, thought people would laugh at them if they said something wrong in Chinese. It was evident to Julie that students had overcome their shyness when they passed her in the school grounds and greeted her with *Lǎoshī nínhǎo!* (老师您好! Hello teacher!). Often their friends would ask: 'What are you saying?' then the students would proudly reply: 'Oh that's our

Chinese teacher. We're saying hello in Chinese.' Julie believed that this kind of pride would greatly increase the students' confidence in speaking Chinese outside the classroom. However, to get to this stage, she felt students needed opportunities to practise in the classroom first, which is why she introduced what she called 'starting phrases' and 'exit phrases' in her Y9 and Y10 classes.

### *Creating practice opportunities in classroom*

To help increase opportunities for students to practise, Julie asked students to start using Chinese from the moment they entered the classroom and introduced what she called 'starting phrases'. When she called the roll, Julie would ask each student a question in Chinese which they were required to answer in Chinese. In Y10, for example, she would ask the students questions such as *Nǐ zhùzài nǎr?* (你住在哪儿? Where do you live?), or *Nǐ xǐhuan shénme yánsè?* (你喜欢什么颜色? What colour do you like?). Julie explained how this strategy improved learning: 'as soon as they start class they become immersed in spoken Chinese – they say it once but they hear it quite often. The purpose is just to keep those language items practised all the time. It's repetitive but when they've heard the same question 15, 16 times they understand it better and they can answer quickly.' My classroom observations confirmed that the students enjoyed this exercise, and that they tried to give different answers to the question. Moreover, this

activity helped set the tone for the class and created a Chinese language atmosphere from the moment the class started.

While the 'starting phrases' focused on setting the tone, the use of what Julie termed 'exit phrases' aimed at ensuring the students walked out of the class with a sense of achievement. Julie described, in her Y9 and Y10 classes, just before the students left the classroom, she would position herself at the door. As they left, each student had to say in Chinese a word or a phrase that they had learned or used in that class – more than a simple *zàijiàn* (再见, bye-bye). This is what Julie called an 'exit phrase' or 'exit word'. 'At first they didn't like it', Julie said, 'but they're so used to it now they'll stand at the door and wait for me to come if I'm not quite there'. Julie pointed out, eventually the students would say phrases to her really quickly as they went out the door, leaving the class laughing and talking about what they had learned, which is what I witnessed during my classroom observations. Julie was certain that this feeling of accomplishment would make them feel more confident about speaking Chinese.

### ***Supporting student participation***

During the lesson Julie not only gave the students plenty of time to practise but also provided support for their practice. For example, in one Y10 class, one activity was to get the students to carry out a little role-play on

shopping in front of the class. To support this role-play, Julie put the dialogue on the board so those students who needed a script could refer to that. With this backup, all the students were confident enough to get up and do the role-play. Even two students who whispered 'we don't want to do it' took part, once they were told they could use the sentences on board. I was in that class observing the lesson and I found that the students did feel secure about going to the front to do the role-play. Some of them did take advantage of the backup and they all did well.

However, Julie said, whether or not to put something on board depended on whether it met students' needs. She explained:

Previously I didn't put words or sentences on the board because I just wanted students to hear me say them and then to practise them without reading them, so they didn't have to worry about too many things. I think it's coming to a stage where sometimes they do need words or sentences written on the board to help remind them of little new bits, so I write in Chinese [characters] and *pinyin* to keep them used to seeing the characters.

In addition, while the students were practising, Julie tried to get around the classroom to see most of them individually. Julie explained that some students were shy and did not want to put up their hands in front of the class to ask questions, therefore she tried to provide these students with

the opportunity to ask questions privately, because she wanted to make sure that everybody had a chance. Similarly, Julie always gave those students who had been absent a chance to catch up, spending a few minutes revising what had been done and asking the students who had been in the class to help. For slower learners, Julie said she tended to give more wait-time when asking them questions. All of these strategies helped to assure the students that they were well-supported.

#### **6.2.4 Summary**

From the above report, it is evident that ‘nurturing student confidence’ – the image of Julie’s ‘My Way’ – served as an overarching goal. Each of the three principles described above is reflection of one aspect of her teaching practice. The first principle, reducing student anxiety, is about lowering what Krashen (1982) refers to as student’s ‘affective filter’, and sees Julie’s establishing a positive attitude toward learning Chinese, and avoiding hurting students’ feelings. The second principle, starting with the basics and progressing slowly, is about the presentation, and sees Julie’s ensuring that teaching was delivered with appropriate content and at the right pace. The third and last principle, encouraging students to participate, is about student participation, and sees Julie’s creating opportunities to help students rehearse the language, and providing the support they needed to do this. Under the umbrella of the image of ‘nurturing student confidence’,

these three principles formed a framework guiding Julie's teaching practice.

Julie's 'My Way' is characterized by her concern about the students' affective dimension and their wellbeing. It appeared to be very important to her that students have positive experiences while learning Chinese and she cared deeply about the quality of classroom life (Allwright, 2006; Gieve & Miller, 2006). Why was Julie so attentive to the students' feelings? The previous sections have indicated that her personal background had a strong influence on her 'My Way'. I now move to the next section to examine closely the factors that helped shape her 'My Way'.

### **6.3 FACTORS SHAPING JULIE'S 'MY WAY'**

From her personal profile contained in the beginning of this chapter (5.1) we have learned that Julie started teaching Chinese without any teaching experience or training in language teaching. Like most of those teachers who start their teaching career without any experience and training, Julie had drawn on her prior knowledge gained from her own schooling and language learning experiences, the same tendency found by Tsui in her case studies of ESL teachers (Tsui, 2003). Julie's personality and her acute awareness of being a non-native Chinese speaker also helped shape her 'My Way'. The influence of each of these factors is discussed below: her

personality (5.3.1), her learning experience (5.3.2), and her non-native Chinese speaker status (5.3.3).

### **6.3.1 Personality – ‘*I was very shy*’**

Julie’s report on her personality suggests a reason why she made such an effort to nurture student confidence. Julie said, ‘as a student at school I was very shy and I was always too scared to ask questions and was afraid I’d say the wrong thing’, therefore when she started teaching Chinese she always encouraged her students to ask questions, saying to them ‘Don’t feel “Oh I’m too scared to ask, I will sound silly, I will sound stupid”’. That is also why Julie always encouraged her students to enter competitions held by the local Chinese community:

I’m always so pleased when they say ‘I’ll enter’. I say to them ‘it doesn’t matter whether you win or lose’. I tell them they’re so brave to stand up in front of people to give a speech. When they come back, even if they haven’t won, they come off the stage, after they finished exclaiming: ‘Oh we’ve done it!’ That’s so satisfying for me. And especially if they made an individual speech I find it amazing because I don’t think I could do it. Because I was shy I want them to be confident, not like I was.



It is interesting to note how eager Julie was to persuade her students to enter competitions. Perhaps she realized that she had herself missed many opportunities, because of her shyness and lack of confidence when she was a student, so she did not want the same thing to happen to her students.

Related to Julie's shyness is her feeling of anxiety. In talking about her way of teaching, Julie said that she would ensure that the students were not anxious about what they were going to learn and about how they were going to learn it, because 'if they get anxious they don't listen, they don't pay attention and they just worry about what will be happening' (see 5.2.1). This practice also stemmed from her personal experience. In the interview Julie revealed her anxiety about teaching Y13 for the first time in 2007 when she came back from the training courses. She said: 'at the beginning of the year it was really hard to cope because I was anxious. If I'm anxious I can't even write simple characters which is why I don't want my students to be anxious.' Here we see a source of her efforts to reduce her students' anxiety about learning Chinese.

### **6.3.2 Learning experiences – *'I was totally ignored'***

As we have seen, in order to nurture student confidence, Julie always encouraged students and gave everyone a chance to participate. Julie's

own schooling experiences, particularly her positive experience in learning French and negative experience in doing English, led her to adopt these practices. She said French was her favourite subject and her best subject at school. She was always among the top five in her class. She really loved French, in fact, Julie recalled, their whole class enjoyed French because of the teacher's attitude: 'She was very encouraging'. Julie believed that it was really important for any teacher to be encouraging. However, Julie did not feel the same way about her English teachers. On the contrary, she felt that she had been 'totally ignored'. She recalled her own experience in the third person as follows:

There was a Chinese girl in the class who was shy – Chinese girls were shy in those days – crying from her heart: Pick me! Pick me! But never being called. I always remember that. So in my teaching I make sure that everybody has a chance.

It seems that this negative experience had left Julie with a very unpleasant memory, even though about 30 years had passed, she still remembered it vividly. It is little wonder then, that she was so keen to have all her students involved, and always gave those girls who were too shy to put their hands up a private opportunity to ask questions.

When talking about her experience learning the Chinese language at university, Julie remembered her lecturer as a very kind person: 'She was

always nurturing us and encouraging us.’ Julie could even recall what the lecturer had said to them: ‘Yes we can do it. You know it does take time but we can get there.’ Julie pointed out: ‘That’s what I say to my students. If you learn the work little bit by little bit as we go along, it will not be nearly so hard.’

### **6.3.3 Concern about Chinese competence – ‘I’m a non-native speaker’**

Julie’s awareness of her non-native Chinese speaker status was another powerful factor that helped shape her ‘My Way’. In a post-lesson discussion Julie revealed:

I do worry about how I’m teaching my students and how I’m presenting things to them. Because I’m a non-native speaker and I’m always aware of whether I’m doing things accurately or not. I’m always concerned about what I’m teaching, how I’m teaching it. It’s always in the back of my mind: ‘I’m a non-native speaker.’

From this excerpt it is clear that a lack of confidence about her Chinese language proficiency was the main source of her lack of confidence in teaching Chinese. This, in turn, motivated her to focus on developing her students’ confidence. This lack of confidence also led her to worry about her job security. She completed her qualifications very late.

One of the reasons for the delay was that she was not sure how long she would be teaching Chinese because she thought 'the principal might get somebody better to teach'.

After about 7 years of teaching Chinese, Julie still regarded her level of Chinese as a constraint. Julie said, 'I know I can teach really well at Y9, Y10, and Y11. Still good at Y12. But I want to be better at the next level (Y13).' Julie said that she needed help with preparing her written teaching materials, and more time to learn the grammar and devise ways of teaching it at higher levels. Julie was aware that good language proficiency is fundamental to being a good language teacher, she had been making every effort to improve her Chinese: 'I play tapes in my car to and from work most days so I can practise. It's got nothing to do with what I teach but at least I'm practising my tones, things like that.' She also had some Chinese friends with whom she could speak Chinese. Her obsession with her concern about her Chinese language competence meant that she was disappointed that the teacher education programmes at the College of Education had not addressed her language needs but focused instead on general subjects relating to teaching practice, such as classroom management.

## 6.4 SUMMARY

In the previous sections I have presented Julie's 'My Way', which was expressed by the image of 'nurturing student confidence', and the factors that helped shape her 'My Way'. While Julie's contextual knowledge, such as the knowledge about the school and the students, certainly played a role in shaping her 'My Way', it was her personality, schooling and language learning experience, and awareness of being a non-native Chinese speaking teacher that all came together to help shape her 'My Way'.

What makes Julie's PPK notable is the striking play of opposites that occurs as she transformed her predominantly negative feelings about herself into a positive learning environment for her students, as illustrated in Figure 6.1 on the next page.

Overall, Julie viewed her experiences negatively and therefore she wanted her students to be positive: because she felt she could not do anything when she was anxious, Julie wanted her students to be relaxed and tried hard to reduce their level of anxiety; because she had been shy and too scared to ask questions at school, Julie encouraged her students to be brave and to put up their hands if they had any questions; because she had at times felt ignored and discouraged during her schooling, Julie wanted to ensure that every student in her class had a chance to participate and felt encouraged. Above all, because she lacked confidence in using

Chinese, Julie wanted her students to be confident. It could be considered that Julie's empathy for her students enabled her to transform her own misfortune into opportunities for them.

*Figure 6.1: Transformational effect of Julie's PPK*

<b>Julie (Self)</b> <i>Negative</i>	<b>Students</b> <i>Positive</i>
Anxious	Relaxed
Shy/scared	Brave
Ignored/discouraged	Involved/encouraged
<b>Lack of confidence</b>	<b>Being confident</b>
<p>EMPATHY</p> <p>(Affective dimension)</p>	

Julie's case has also demonstrated that teaching is 'an anxiety-provoking activity' (Kennedy & Barnes, 1994, p. 202) and 'a highly emotional enterprise' (Richert, 2002, p. 57), and a teacher's personal practical knowledge is 'blended by the personal background and

characteristics of the teacher' (Clandinin, 1985, p. 361). While Julie's personality and schooling experiences had led her to lack confidence as a student, her continual source of anxiety resulting from an 'inferiority complex' (Medgyes, 1994) as a non-native speaker teacher constantly undermined her confidence as a Chinese language teacher, and became the main source of her feeling of anxiety about her teaching. This point will be further discussed in Chapter 8.

## *Chapter 7*

# **Everything Going Smoothly**

## **- Wenying's case**

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### **7.0 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter is a report on Wenying's case. As introduced in Chapter 4, Wenying, like Dongmei, is a native Chinese speaker and an immigrant to New Zealand. Unlike Dongmei, Wenying started her teaching career in New Zealand. When this study took place, she had been teaching Chinese for seven years. During that time she had developed extensive expertise. Central to her way of teaching was the desire for everything to go 'smoothly', and her teaching was characterized by a strict routine and the need to be in control most of the time. Wenying's case allows us to see a 'virtuoso' model (Paine, 1990) applied in a Western context. In this chapter I will begin by providing information about Wenying's personal profile and her teaching context (7.1), before closely examine Wenying's 'My Way' (7.2), and factors shaping her 'My Way' (7.3).



## 7.1 PERSONAL PROFILE AND TEACHING CONTEXT

Wenying was born in a coastal city in Northern China. She grew up and completed her undergraduate education in the same city, with French as her major and English as her minor. In the last year of her four-year undergraduate study Wenying worked as an intern interpreter in a French company in a city in Southern China, and continued working there as a French interpreter for another two years after graduation. Wenying immigrated to New Zealand in 1995. At the end of 2000 she received her Postgraduate Diploma for Secondary School Teaching from a Teachers College in New Zealand, with an award for '*Being Thoroughly Wonderful Ambassadors for the Profession*'. As only about 10% of the students in her year received this award upon graduation, Wenying was very proud of her achievement.

Wenying worked as a relief teacher at two local secondary schools from February 2001. In August 2001 she was employed as a full-time Chinese language teacher by School W, one of the schools where she had done a practicum. School W is a state girls' college with a roll of about 1,200 students. The majority of the students are European New Zealanders from middle-class families. The school was established 120 years ago and prides itself on the high academic achievement of its students. Wenying said that she had spent her practicum in three different schools, and thought School W was the best, her dream school in fact. She commented:

The students at this school have the right attitude: they are committed to learning and would like to put effort into it. Of course, as teenagers, sometimes they are naughty, but they behave themselves if you remind them. They respect you. My first practicum was at a boys' college. Boys are not as well-behaved as girls. The third school was a co-ed school. Generally speaking I think girls are better-behaved.

The Chinese language programme at School W was already fully-developed when Wenying took the position in 2001. Chinese was taught at each level, from Y9 to Y13, with 4 contact hours per week at Y9 and Y10, and 5 contact hours per week from Y11 to Y13. Like the other two teachers in the present study, Wenying was the only Chinese language teacher at her school. She taught from Y9 up to Y13, and was responsible for the development of the Chinese language programme at the school. By 2007, the number of students taking Chinese at each level had increased to between 14 and 30. The Chinese programme was stable and had been expanding ever since Wenying started working at School D, and she was very happy with what she had achieved. She commented: 'There is a class at each level with an ideal student number. The students' behaviour and achievement are also very good. There are no big issues to worry me. It's very good.' Wenying was selected as a supervisor by the Teachers College where she completed her diploma in 2003, and had supervised eight student-teachers by 2007.

To sum up, Wenying felt very proud of, and satisfied with, what she had achieved. She showed great confidence with herself, and had a strong sense that everything was under control.

## 7.2 WENYING'S 'MY WAY'

When in Wenying's classroom, I observed that everything went as planned – students were well-behaved, teaching went step-by-step, everything was in order, and there were rarely any interruptions. Everything went smoothly, as she said. Indeed, 'everything goes smoothly' is a recurring theme in Wenying's reflection on her teaching practice, and can be regarded as the dominant image to capture her 'My Way'.

A number of metaphors related to this dominant image emerged from the interviews with Wenying. One is '*qi-field*' (*qìchǎng*, 气场), which she used to describe the classroom ambiance or atmosphere (see 7.2.2). Another one is 'on the right track' (*shànglù*, 上路), which she frequently used to refer to good learning habits. We will see later that these metaphors guide her classroom and student management.

In addition to these metaphors, Wenying's account of her teaching indicated a strong concern about '*being accepted*' (*jiēnà*, 接纳) by the students. I was puzzled by this concern for a while, because Wenying appeared to be

a very confident person and to have everything under control. Why, then, was she so conscious of being accepted by students? Further data revealed, as we will see later, that it had to do with winning students' trust – a foundation for building the teacher-student relationship.

From a structural perspective, Wenying's 'My Way' appears to consist of three layers. The first layer is 'being accepted' by students. This is the fundamental one. The second layer is managing students and creating a '*qi-field*' – a positive learning environment. Both the first and second layers aim at supporting the third layer: teaching goes 'smoothly' in the classroom – the ultimate goal of Wenying's 'My Way'. I now present a detailed description of each of these layers.

### **7.2.1 Being accepted by students – winning their trust**

For Wenying, it remained extremely important that students accepted her as a teacher and that they had a high opinion of the Chinese language programme. She was very sensitive to the fact that information passed from student to student by word-of-mouth would have a significant impact on the decision of would-be students to select Chinese as their language subject. Wenying told me that many of her students were actually sisters, with the older sister in her Y12 or Y13 class, and the younger sister in her Y9 or Y10 class. Many others were friends, had been

classmates at primary school, or were neighbors. Wenying pointed out: 'They are all local Kiwi kids. These students might have consulted with others before they decided to select Chinese.'

Wenying's emphasis on 'being accepted' by students permeated the interviews. She re-iterated the word *jiēnà* (接纳, to accept, acceptance), and words like *jiēshòu* (接受, synonymous with *jiēnà*), and *páichì* (排斥, to reject, to exclude). The excerpt below illustrates how these words were used. When she was asked what suggestions she would like to give teachers from China coming to teach in New Zealand secondary schools, Wenying said:

I would suggest that teachers from China establish a good relationship with students to *get accepted* by students. That is you're not only a teacher to them, but also a friend. If students feel you're friendly, very nice, they will *not reject* you, they will *accept* you. (Emphasis added)

This excerpt shows us that for Wenying, 'being accepted' is related to building a good relationship between teacher and students. Why did such a seemingly straightforward matter, integral to all teaching practice, become such a big concern for Wenying? It seems, as we will see below, that Wenying's awareness of her identity of being an 'outsider' – a new teacher to the school and an immigrant teacher to the host country and its

culture – lies at the heart of her need to be accepted by the students.

### *Awareness of being an 'outsider'*

We have learned that when Wenying started teaching at School W the Chinese programme had already been fully developed. While her predecessor had laid a good foundation for Wenying to build upon, at the same time she had also set a high standard for Wenying to meet – a big challenge for a new teacher. Even though Wenying tried hard to ensure the transition went smoothly, she had a strong feeling in the first year that some students did not accept her as their teacher, and that they treated her as an 'outsider' (*wàilái kè*, 外来客), to use Wenying's words.

This feeling was heightened by the action of one particular student. When Wenying started teaching at School W, there was a senior student who stared at her all the time with a defiant expression. That expression made Wenying feel very uncomfortable, sometimes to the point of panic. When Wenying tried to talk to the student to ascertain what the problem was, the student denied that she was staring at her and told her that everything was alright. However, back in the classroom the student continued to stare at Wenying with the same expression. Wenying assumed that the student might be missing her previous teacher, and was constantly comparing Wenying with her. While the relationship between Wenying and this student improved as time went by, the fact that she still

recalled this incident after seven years indicates that it represented a personal challenge to Wenying.

While the students might have treated her as an 'outsider', just as they would with any new teacher, Wenying seemed to read more into their behaviour: she felt that, as an immigrant teacher, she was an 'outsider' to her host country and to the Western culture. This interpretation could be explained by her particular sensitivity to Western students' reactions to her, which was apparent in the language she used during the interviews. When, for example, Wenying talked about the student who she thought was challenging her at the beginning of her teaching, she stressed that the student was 'a Western kid'. Then, when she mentioned that many of her students were sisters, she again referred to them as 'Kiwi kids'. Again, when she mentioned that every year towards Christmas, she received a lot of Christmas cards and flowers from her students, she highlighted the fact that 'many of them are Kiwi kids', and added, 'it means they accept me'. When Wenying used the term 'Kiwi kids' she actually meant Western (*yáng rén*, 洋人) students. The Chinese word *yáng rén* (洋人) is commonly used in Chinese communities, both in China and overseas, to refer to a foreigner in general, and a Westerner in particular. Wenying's frequent use of this term highlighted her sense of being an 'outsider' in a Western society, and her acute awareness of her immigrant identity.

### *Winning students' trust*

Central to the notion of 'being-accepted' is for Wenying being accepted as a *native Chinese speaker*. Her comments about her predecessor's contribution to the Chinese programme at School W reveal how important this was to her:

I think that my predecessor had made a good start in the Chinese programme here at School W. She helped develop the right attitude in students, encouraged good behaviour. *She was Chinese*. Through her teaching she had built the students' *trust in Chinese teachers*. The teacher made the students feel that Chinese teachers are well-organized (*yánjǐn*, 严谨), hardworking and well-prepared for their teaching. Therefore they *accept* Chinese teachers and feel lucky to have a *native Chinese speaker* to teach them Chinese. They think Chinese teachers are committed (*rènzhēn*, 认真), and they *trust the Chinese teacher*. (Emphasis added)

In this excerpt, while Wenying was acknowledging her predecessor's contribution to building a good student attitude towards learning Chinese, she was particularly crediting her for establishing a positive image of Chinese people in general, and of the native Chinese speaker teacher in particular. According to Wenying, it is this positive image of a native Chinese speaker teacher that wins the students' trust, and leads them to



accept a native Chinese speaker teacher. For Wenying, an 'outsider', this kind of trust would help her to be accepted and for this reason, she was very conscious of confirming the positive image that her predecessor had established.

To win students' trust as a teacher, Wenying said, she took her job very seriously, by being dependable (in her word *rènzhēn* (认真) – 'I mean what I say'). For example, if she gave students homework and told them she would check it the next day, she would always follow up the next day. She believed that it is the teacher's attitude and sense of responsibility that helps win student trust: 'If you take your job seriously, your students will take the course seriously and put effort into it. They won't want to let you down.' In the meantime, Wenying believed that a teacher must respect her students and care about them. She argued: 'If you are good to them they will be good to you. If you don't care about them they will not care about you.' Wenying's statement is echoed by a student-teacher's comment in Bailey et al's (1996, p. 17) study of the influence of the 'apprenticeship of observation': 'I felt that she [the teacher] was giving me her best, so I could not possibly give her less than my best.'

To summarize, it seemed that Wenying's emphasis on 'being accepted by students' was strongly influenced by her immigrant teacher identity – her sense of being an 'outsider'. She wanted her students to trust and respect her for being a native teacher who was well-organized and

committed to her students. Moreover, as well as accepting her as an individual, she wanted her students to accept native Chinese speaker teachers as a whole. These strategies seemed to be Wenying's way of establishing her authority in a Western school. In the Chinese context, the teacher's ability to exercise authority – to keep the class under control – is considered a prerequisite to effective teaching. In this Confucian-heritage culture (CHC), teacher authority in the classroom is ascribed, whereas in Western schools this authority must be earned by the teacher (Ho, 2001, p. 109). It is interesting to observe that while Wenying believed in the CHC tradition of teacher authority, she realized that this authority must be earned in a Western context. It is possible that this insight came from the fact that Wenying had been trained as a secondary school teacher in New Zealand and thus had more understanding of the Western culture of schooling.

### **7.2.2 Building a *qi*-field – Managing the classroom**

Wenying believed that if the classroom environment was conducive to learning, then teaching could go smoothly. To Wenying, an environment conducive to learning is characterized by order, therefore, she argued, it is most important for a teacher to keep the class under control. Once the class is under control, a teacher can create what is known as a *qi*-field (*qìchǎng*, 气

场). With this *qi-field* in place, the teaching can then proceed smoothly (*qīngsōng zìrú*, 轻松自如). Otherwise, Wenying said, ‘no matter how perfect a lesson plan you’ve got, you’ll end up as an armchair strategist (*zhǐshàng tánbīng*, 纸上谈兵) – you will never be able to deliver it’.

The *qi-field* (*qìchǎng*, 气场) is a term used in the practice of *Qigong*, a Chinese meditative practice. It is like a field of life energy, and generally refers to a special ambiance or atmosphere created by a master’s *Kungfu*. The master acts as a powerful magnet that can put the *qi-field* in order. In order to achieve a good quality of *qi-field*, it is believed that participants should practise together, make the same movements and concentrate on the same things at the same time<sup>9</sup>.

It is interesting to note that the three prominent components of the creation of a *qi-field* – master-controlled, order in place, all the participants practising in the same way – were all exhibited in Wenying’s classes. Her use of the *qi-field* as a metaphor to describe her ideal classroom environment suggests that she might be aware of these three components and might apply them in her teaching.

Wenying also believed in the Confucian tradition that a teacher should not only teach their subjects but also educate students as people (*jiāoshū yùrén*, 教书育人). She therefore put a lot of effort into getting

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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.zhinengqigong.eu/ArticleEn000343.aspx>, retrieved 28 July 2009.

students on the right track (*shànglù*, 上路) – developing good attitudes and learning habits – from the very beginning. Wenying argued that, if students could develop the right attitudes and habits in Y9 and Y10, teaching would be much easier at senior levels. Therefore, every year, on the first day, Wenying asked her students to copy the classroom rules onto the first page of their notebook.

Developing the right attitudes and habits by reinforcing the classroom rules was an important part of Wenying's teaching in Term One at Y9 level. Wenying had a reason for this: 'Don't be afraid to take the trouble to reiterate the rules at the beginning. If the students get the message your job will be much easier later.' Wenying therefore took every opportunity to gently reinforce the rules. For example, when she was introducing the word 'mobile phone' in class, she used this to remind students of a class rule: 'Remember, you are not allowed to use your mobile phone in class. We have a rule about it.' Wenying believed that it was the teacher's responsibility to create an orderly learning environment, a motto in CHC – 'discipline first, then teach' (Ho, 2001, p. 109).

Cross-cultural research in general education supports the beliefs Wenying held about student management. Studies show that teachers in CHCs are able to conduct their classes with less disruption than their Western counterparts, and that the students show higher academic motivation (Salili, 1996). As discussed in Chapter 4 (4.3.2), this is because

students in CHCs have developed 'docility dispositions' (Hess & Azuma, 1991) from a very young age. Because usually Western students have not developed 'docility dispositions', Western teachers normally need to spend more time on classroom management than their CHC counterparts (Watkins, 2000, p. 168). Therefore, for teachers such as Wenying, who grew up and were educated in CHCs, to be able to employ their very 'teacher-controlled' approach in the Western schools, they need to 'train' their students first.

It appears that Wenying is not alone in 'training' students. Chen's report on a field-trip to Chinese language programmes in American schools seems to provide further evidence that CHC teachers in foreign countries 'train' their students to be taught in the CHC manner. She writes:

Most students in Chinese language classes we observed are very *docile* – they follow the teachers' instructions and participate in learning activities. Their attitude and level of *obedience* in the classroom are both good. (Chen, 2006, p. 125), my own translation, emphasis added.)

The student *docility* and *obedience* that Chen observed in American schools is consistent with the student behaviour I observed in Wenying's classes. It is likely that, like Wenying, the teachers in the programmes observed by Chen, had 'successfully' trained their students to be docile.

### 7.2.3 'Going smoothly' - 'My Way' in practice

From the previous discussion we have seen that Wenying put great weight on gaining students' acceptance, creating a *qi-field*, and developing good learning habits. All of her efforts here aimed at ensuring that teaching went smoothly. The notion of 'going smoothly' is embodied in Wenying's practice and is best examined in her design of the overall Chinese curriculum from Y9 to Y13, and her classroom teaching at each level, both of which will be examined below.

#### *'Going smoothly' in curriculum design - from Y9 to Y13*

The curriculum in New Zealand secondary schools is generally structured in the following way: in Y9 and Y10 the focus is on the transition from primary school to secondary school, with an emphasis on the development of skills required to sit the NCEA examinations which start from Y11. From Y11 to Y13 the focus is on the NCEA examinations. Wenying's design of Chinese language curriculum at School W aligned with this structure, and ensured the smooth transition from one level to the next. She was particularly careful to ensure students have a happy start and develop good habits in learning Chinese, as we can see from the following excerpt:

The focus of Y9 is on increasing students' interest in Chinese, with more fun things – more games, more speaking, because only if they are interested in Chinese will they continue to Y10. In Y10 I would introduce a little about NCEA level 1, but try not to frighten them. In other words, in Y10 I try to ensure teaching would head towards NCEA *gradually* and *slowly*. By the time they are in Y11, they have been *smoothly* led to the NECA examinations, and found that NCEA is not as hard as they had thought. When the students have moved up to Y11, they have been studying Chinese for three years and it's not easy for them to drop it – they can't start a new language programme from Y12. So the first three years are crucial. On the other hand, at Y12 and Y13 they are more mature and they don't need so many games, fun things. If you still fill them with games they feel you're treating them as children. At these levels I focus more on the academic aspect of learning and nurturing their autonomy. In Y13 I let the students learn by themselves as much as possible. (Emphasis added)

This excerpt shows that Wenying had her own well-developed Chinese language curriculum at School W, with clear goals at each level: Y9, increasing student interest in learning Chinese and ensuring a good start; Y10, preparing students for the transition to NCEA; Y11, familiarising students with NCEA by taking NCEA level 1 exams; Y12 and Y13, more

attention to academic work and independent learning. Underlying these goals is the desire to ensure that progress from Y9 to Y13 is gradual and smooth. Wenying employed different teaching strategies at each level: at levels Y9 to Y11 teaching was more teacher-led to provide students with maximum support; at levels Y12 and Y13 teaching was more student-led, with self-study incorporated to develop student independence.

### *'Going smoothly' in teaching practice – Y9 as an example*

The notion 'going-smoothly' is vividly illustrated in Wenying's description of teaching her Y9 class. I have chosen to quote the entire description for the following three reasons. First, Wenying's account presents us with a kind of ethnographic description of her teaching so that we can see how the course was structured and delivered in the classroom. Second, by quoting the entire account I attempt to preserve the wholeness of Wenying's thinking and teaching, and show how different factors and dimensions were integrated into Wenying's 'My Way'. Third, this account serves to show the fluidity that Wenying had achieved in teaching, as this account was given completely without any written notes and without any break. With these factors in mind, let us see how Wenying described the procedures she followed in teaching Y9:



In Y9, as the students know nothing about Chinese, they need a tool to learn the language. I therefore start by teaching *pinyin*. I would rather spend the entire first term teaching them *pinyin*, because if they know *pinyin*, they can speak and be understood.

In the course of teaching *pinyin*, I would use simple everyday greetings, such as 'How are you?', 'What's your name?' etc. Gradually we move to the textbook for the first topic: 'Meeting My Family'. I ask students what they want to learn about this topic – you must respect your students and ask them. Based on what they would like to learn and what I think they should learn, we come up with a vocabulary list of about 20 words, such as 'dad', 'mum', 'older brother', 'older sister', 'aunt', 'uncle', etc., all about people. To help students remember these words, we use different games and activities that make learning more interesting and avoid rote learning.

I usually use about two contact hours to help students get familiar with these new words. Once they have become confident with the words, I introduce some simple structures and teach them how to use the new words within these structures, such as 'She is my mum.' and 'This is my dad.'. We also look at the structural differences between English and Chinese. After that we turn those sentences into questions, such as turning 'He is my dad.' into 'Who is he?'. Once students know how to ask and answer questions, they are able to do

pair work – one student asks a question and the other answers it. These questions and answers are eventually turned into a dialogue. When students become familiar with these dialogues they are now ready to write a passage about their family.

With this foundation we move on to the next topic about pets, because here in New Zealand pets are family members. They care about pets, so animals and family are related. There are also about twenty words about animals and we follow the same procedures.

However, language goes hand in hand with culture. In Chinese culture we have twelve animal years. I would give students a brief introduction to the animal years and then ask them to find out more on the Internet to stimulate their interests, such as: ‘What’s the animal year for a baby born this year?’ ‘Is it the Year of the Pig or the Year of the Dog?’ ‘What are the characteristics of people born in this animal year?’ We then do a lot of games, with worksheets, pictures, photos. With this information, students would be able to add something such as ‘I was born in such and such a year and my animal year is the Year of the Dog which has the following characteristics’ in their self-introduction.

To sum up, we start from simple content and move to slightly difficult content: from ‘My Family’ to other topics, such as ‘My Classroom’ and ‘My School’. As students progress, they are asked not

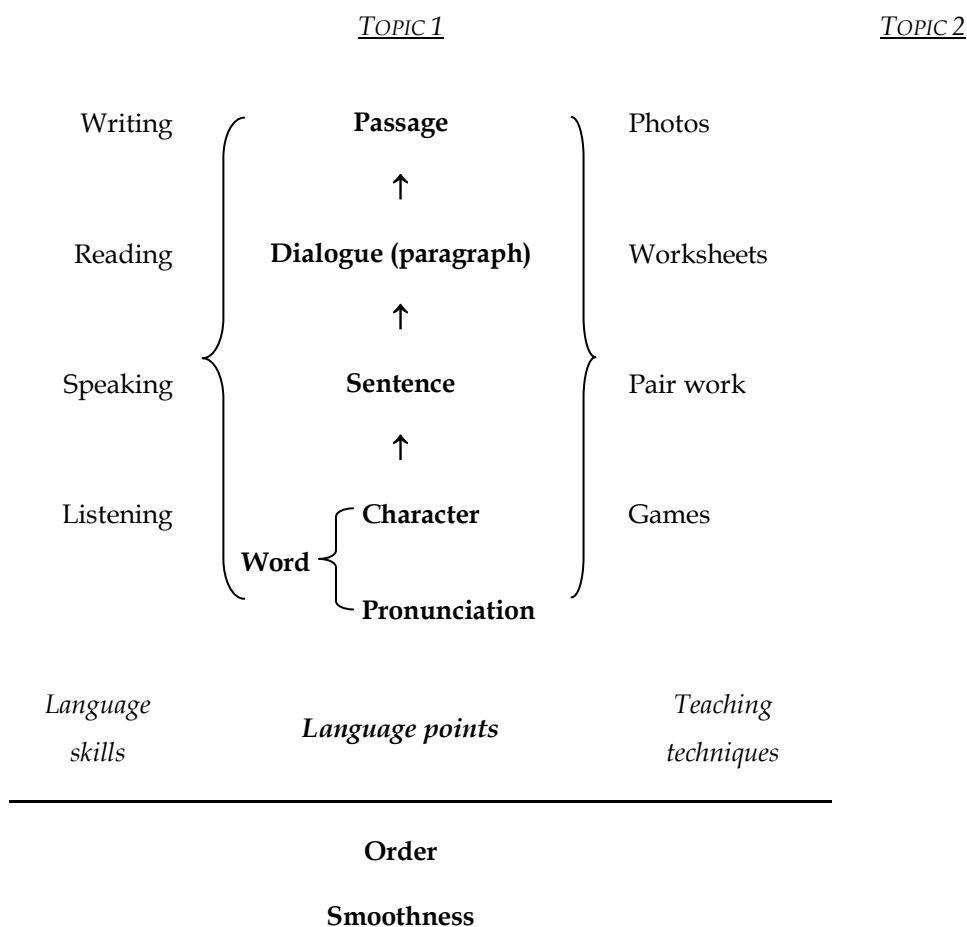
only to introduce their family and themselves but also to describe their parents and to talk about their life at school. In this way, by the end of the first year they should have no problem giving a brief talk about themselves.

This description reveals the intertwined multiple dimensions of Wenying's 'My Way' in teaching Y9, which include:

1. *Unit topics*: relevance/personal connection from family members to pets, classroom, school life, etc, all relates to 'my' topics, foci of students' daily life, to make language learning meaningful.
2. *Language points*: progression from pronunciation to characters, words, sentence structures, dialogues, and a passage, all built upon from the previous ones.
3. *Language skills*: progression from listening to speaking, reading and writing, in that order.
4. *Teaching techniques*: a variety of activities – involving games, programmes, cultural elements, worksheets, photos, to make the learning more interesting.

These multiple dimensions are illustrated in Figure 7.1 on the next page.

Figure 7.1: Multiple dimensions of Wenying's 'My Way' in teaching Y9



From Figure 7.1 we can see that the course of Y9 was structured around topics. For each topic, teaching was around development of language points, starting from words (pronunciation and characters), then moving to sentence structures, dialogues, and concluding with writing a passage. Four language skills – listening, speaking, reading and writing – were integrated into the teaching procedures. Various teaching techniques, such as games, worksheets, and pair work, were employed to facilitate acquisition of language points and language skills. Underneath the

framework was an order in place to ensure smooth progression from one to the other.

During my pilot study of Wenying's teaching at the end of 2006, she summarized her way of teaching in English in the following way:

I think my teaching is quite, you know, *just going smoothly*. Yeah, not just this topic and change to another topic immediately. I want them to move on *smoothly*, you know, words and memorize words, give clues to memorize and then doing some games to memorize everything. And then form the sentence, you know, make up a sentence and practise sentence [word] order, yeah, and make their own sentence or something like that. (December 2006, emphasis added.)

My classroom observations of Wenying's Y9 and Y10 classes confirmed her description of the procedures she went through: teaching started from new words, with a focus on characters and their pronunciation, and then moved to helping students get familiar with these words and memorize them through various activities. Sentence structures were introduced once students were confident with the new words. After that students learned to do dialogues in pairs and the unit concluded with writing. Indeed, step-by-step, one follows the other.

#### **7.2.4 Summary**

It is evident that ensuring everything goes smoothly is central to Wenying's 'My Way'. To Wenying, in order to make teaching flow smoothly it is necessary to have order in the classroom and, in Wenying's opinion, it is a teacher's responsibility to create order. To do this successfully, a teacher must have authority over the class. While this authority is usually automatically granted to teachers in CHCs, in Western schools, it must be earned. This presented a real challenge for Wenying. To Wenying, winning student trust and being accepted by them was the first and foremost task in starting to teach in a new context.

How was Wenying's 'My Way' developed, and what factors shaped her 'My Way'? These questions are examined in the next section.

### **7.3 FACTORS SHAPING WENYING'S 'MY WAY'**

Wenying's description of her teaching of Y9 brings to mind the Chinese story 'Cook Ding cutting up oxen' (*Páodīng jiěniú*, 庖丁解牛). The story was written by Zhuangzi (369 BC - 286 BC), a famous representative of philosophical Daoism in the Warring States Period (475 BC - 221 BC) of ancient China. It goes like this:

Cook Ding was cutting up an ox for Lord Wen-hui. At every touch of his hand, every heave of his shoulder, every move of his feet, every thrust of his knee – zip! zoop! He slithered the knife along with a zing, and all was in perfect rhythm, as though he were performing the dance of the Mulberry Grove or keeping time to the Ching-shou music.

‘Ah, this is marvelous!’ said Lord Wen-hui. ‘Imagine skill reaching such heights!’

Cook Ding laid down his knife and replied, ‘What I care about is the Way, which goes beyond skill. When I first began cutting up oxen, all I could see was the ox itself. After three years I no longer saw the whole ox. And now – now I go at it by spirit and don’t look with my eyes. Perception has come to a stop and spirit moves where it wants. I go along with the natural makeup, strike in the big hollows, guide the knife through the big openings, and follow things as they are. So I never touch the smallest ligament or tendon, much less a main joint.

(Translated by Watson, 1968)

This story can be viewed as a classical case of the expert, who has acquired ‘unique skills’ and usually performs ‘appropriately and effortlessly’ (Berliner, 1994, p. 162). There are a number of similarities between Cook Ding and Wenying. Like Cook Ding, Wenying felt that after

seven years' experience her teaching had become very fluid. She described her feel for teaching using the idiom *yóurèn yǒuyú* (游刃有余), which originates from the story 'Cook Ding cutting up oxen', and means to handle a butcher's cleaver skillfully – to do a job with skill and ease. Just as Cook Ding claimed that he cut oxen by spirit and did not look with his eyes, Wenying stated 'I can teach with my eyes closed'.

Also like Cook Ding, who took years to reach such a stage, Wenying spent years accumulating the knowledge and skills to achieve fluidity in teaching. When talking about the development of her 'My Way', Wenying said that she truly believed in two words: 'professionalism' and 'experience'. The former was her goal, the latter the means to achieve that goal. In what follows I will examine these two factors shaping Wenying's 'My Way'.

### **7.3.1 Teacher as virtuoso – the model of Wenying's 'My Way'**

Wenying's 'My Way' seems to have strong roots in the Confucian educational tradition – her native culture. In this tradition, the primary focus is not on learning, but on the teacher's performance. This approach prevails in schools in contemporary China, as Cortazzi and Jin (1996a) have observed:



[T]he teacher instructs from the front; she presents careful clear models for the children; she shows them what to learn and how to learn it; the learners all perform the same tasks at the same time; there is clear discipline, uniform attention and concentration, punctuated by varied activities. As we talk to teachers in different schools they repeatedly emphasize conformity and co-operation, communication and confidence, meaningful models and memorization through analysis, step by step repetition, reproduction and recitation. (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996a, p. 176)

We can see many similarities between Wenying's 'My Way' described in 7.2.3 and the approach described above: the careful presentation of clear models for students to follow; emphasis on memorization; step by step repetition, and reproduction and recitation. Cortazzi and Jin (1996a) conclude from their study that in the Chinese culture of learning and teaching there is great 'consistency' nationwide (p. 176). Paine (1990) characterizes this 'consistency' as a 'virtuoso' model, that is, Chinese view teaching as 'virtuosity' and the teacher as 'virtuoso'.

Paine (1990, pp. 53-54) observes that in the Chinese context 'teaching involves much of the dynamic of actor, stage, and audience'. The model teacher, in this Confucian tradition, is one who performs for the class as a whole and is able to reach the whole group. 'The virtuoso certainly interprets and responds to the feel of the audience', Paine goes on, 'yet the

chief activity – the teaching act – does not alter for individual members in the auditorium’. Paine concludes that the virtuoso teacher is one ‘who has so mastered the technical knowledge of the text that she or he is able to transcend it, adding a piece of one’s own self, one’s own interpretation, in organizing the presentation, communicating it (transmitting the knowledge), and rendering it understandable for the audience’ (p. 54). This view of the teacher as a performer and a virtuoso is a ‘deeply held perspective’ among Chinese practitioners, and this is, Paine points out, the ultimate goal of teachers in China to perfect this role (p. 74) .

Paine’s characterization of the teacher as virtuoso in the Chinese context is based on five years of field research in China from 1982 to 1987. During this period she observed classes and interviewed faculty in eighteen elementary and secondary schools and interviewed teacher educators in twenty teacher education institutions. Even though there were regional differences and individual differences between teachers, ‘the strong similarities between classrooms were more salient’ (Paine, 1990, p. 51). To western teachers, who advocate communicative approaches and view memorizing as rote learning, this model may be viewed as lacking interaction and individualization, lacking creativity and self-expression, lacking personal interpretation and experiential learning, as Cortazzi and Jin (1996a, p. 176) suggest. However, as Cortazzi and Jin (1996a, p. 177) also point out, there are cultural norms, philosophical positions, and

organizational factors underlying this model. The fundamental one is that in Chinese tradition, teaching is based more on mastery than on discovery.

This emphasis on mastery is built on an assumption about the order of learning-related activities. Biggs (1996, p. 55) observes that Chinese people believe in knowledge/skill development first, after which there is something to be creative with. The end is a product, not a process. In contrast, Biggs notes, western education is more concerned with the process than with the product; exploring and creating are seen as more important than honing the specific skills.

Related to this 'knowledge-first' assumption in the Chinese tradition is the emphasis on the systematic nature of knowledge and a belief that knowledge should be presented and learned as 'a systematic process that goes through predetermined stages' (Paine, 1990, p. 52). This conception of teaching and learning is reflected in the Chinese tradition of literacy education, which begins with teaching characters (*zì*, 字), then proceeds to words (*cí*, 词), sentences (*jù*, 句), paragraphs (*duàn*, 段), and ends with a passage (*piān*, 篇). This is considered to be the fixed order of teaching and learning the Chinese language in Chinese schools. This approach is still widely used in China today, even in English classes, as observed by Cortazzi and Jin (1996a, pp. 182-183). This is also exactly the order Wenying followed in her teaching of Y9, as presented in 7.2.3.

Being well-organized and progressing step-by-step are the very skills most highly appreciated in Chinese teacher training and evaluation. The Chinese phrase *yǒubǎn yǒuyǎn* (有板有眼), which means ‘doing something *rhythmically*, in an *orderly* and *measured* way’, is often used to describe the model teacher. It is interesting to notice that, the words *bǎn* (板) and *yǎn* (眼) in the phrase *yǒubǎn yǒuyǎn* (有板有眼), are terms used as measures in traditional Chinese music. Teaching in Chinese tradition is indeed regarded as an art akin to that of making music virtuosity, which is characterized with order in place, going smoothly and rhythmically.

It may be safe to say that the professionalism Wenying pursued was the one originated from the view of teaching as virtuosity and the teacher as a virtuoso in the Chinese educational tradition where she was educated. Wenying’s predecessor too modeled this tradition, and Wenying appreciated the way her predecessor taught, claiming that was the way she would like to follow.

### **7.3.2 Knowledge base – the foundation of Wenying’s ‘My Way’**

While the ‘teacher as virtuoso’ model drove Wenying’s pursuit of professionalism and guided the development of her ‘My Way’, Wenying believed that it was her teaching practice over the years that helped her accumulate knowledge and skills to teach as a virtuoso, in her words, to

teach smoothly.

Wenying recalled that there was a big learning curve in her teaching at the beginning. Taking lesson planning as an example, in the first year she wrote everything in the plan, even what she was going to say in English in class. 'I was very nervous', she recollected. In the second year she had a better idea of what needed to be written in the lesson plan, and what could be left out. In the third year the lesson plan was just about teaching content and it became unnecessary to put everything in 'just in case'. Eventually she built her own syllabus. Wenying felt that in the third year she became confident with teaching and her teaching pedagogy started to take shape. In the fourth and fifth year she improved and polished her teaching pedagogy and felt she had reached a stage where she was teaching with skill and ease. After seven years, teaching had become so natural to her that she could visualize it with her eyes closed.

Studies have found that experience alone does not make an expert teacher (Tsui, 2003). It is, as Feiman-Nemser and Floden (1986) argue, the integration of knowledge of students, contexts, curriculum and pedagogy that functions as an organized whole to orient the teacher to her situation and to let her act, and thus helps shape an expert teacher. Wenying appeared to have similar view of the importance of an integrated knowledge base and to have developed such a knowledge base. When she claimed that she had reached the stage of teaching with her eyes closed,

what she actually meant was that she had gained rich mental scripts and could visualize how the lessons would flow – ‘everything is in my mind’, as she stated.

Wenying considered that in order to successfully teach Chinese in a New Zealand secondary school, a teacher needs different forms of knowledge. In addition to knowledge of curriculum, particularly NCEA, a Chinese language teacher needs a good command of Chinese for the levels she teaches, especially if she is a non-native Chinese speaker. If a teacher is a non-native English speaker, her English must be good enough to communicate with students so that she can deliver subject matter effectively.

Other kinds of knowledge, such as contextual knowledge of social-culture, school and students, are also a necessity. For example, Wenying held that a Chinese language teacher should be familiar with Kiwi life and the way people behave, and therefore knows that she could not say ‘I *want* you to do such and such’, as is done in China, but should instead say ‘I *would like* you to do such and such’ or ‘*Could* you do such and such’. Wenying believed that it is this integrated knowledge that distinguishes a professional teacher from a student-teacher or a relief teacher: ‘A professional teacher is not only familiar with what she has to teach inside the classroom, but also has rich background knowledge’, particularly knowledge about the students. She elaborated:

When you talk about this student, 'bang', her various aspects are flashing in your mind: Where does she sit? What does she look like? How does she behave in class everyday? What's her attitude? How is her homework? What's her achievement?

Wenying commented that a student-teacher or a relief teacher normally did not have such knowledge because of their short and limited contact with the students. It is obvious that Wenying, an immigrant Chinese language teacher, put great weight on contextual knowledge – knowledge of New Zealand society and its culture, knowledge of the New Zealand education system, and knowledge of the school and its students. As she said, as a native Chinese speaker teacher, she was confident with her Chinese language competence – the subject matter knowledge, but, as an immigrant teacher, she had much to learn about the local context.

At the time of this study (2007), Wenying was in her seventh year of teaching, and was teaching with skill and ease. She was beginning to ask herself if she would become bored if she kept on, or whether she should do something different. She decided that she should take advantage of her experience and do something to facilitate Chinese language teaching in New Zealand, something different from classroom teaching. In this way she could make a contribution to this area while also challenging herself. That was why Wenying started to accept the role of organizing workshops for Chinese language teachers in 2007. She felt that it was time for her to

challenge herself: 'I should have the confidence and ability to take this role now so I would like to have a go.' She added, not only was she more experienced but she was also becoming more mature and resilient as she was getting older. All of this is evidence that she was very satisfied with her classroom teaching, had reached a plateau in her career and was ready to invest her energy in other areas.

#### **7.4 SUMMARY**

We have seen that at the heart of Wenying's 'My Way' is to ensure everything goes smoothly, which was strongly influenced by the role played by the teacher in Chinese educational tradition – teacher as virtuoso. This virtuoso model is characterized by order, rhythm and smoothness. It is interesting to note that, in order to apply this CHC model in a Western school, Wenying 'adapted' her students to the model, by winning their trust and creating a '*qi-field*' in the classroom. However, to teach as a virtuoso, a teacher must develop extensive expertise in the subject area. In Wenying's case this expertise was gained mainly from teaching practice. Wenying's development of her 'My Way' could be summarized as this: it was guided by the Confucian educational tradition – her prior knowledge, backed up by the accumulated knowledge of the local context, which was gained through teaching practice.



Wenying seemed to be in what Huberman (1993) identified as 'serenity' stage, in which teachers feel more relaxed and self-accepting, with gradual loss of energy and enthusiasm. Wenying appeared to be satisfied with the way she taught, thinking to invest her energy in other areas. What support should be provided for teachers like Wenying in their professional development? This issue will be discussed in the next chapters.

## *Chapter 8*

# **Developing 'My Way' in Language Teaching**

## **- A cross-case discussion**

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### **8.0 INTRODUCTION**

Chapters 5 – 7 were devoted to the presentation of the three teachers' 'My Way' and the factors shaping their 'My Way' respectively. This chapter presents a cross-case discussion with the purpose of facilitating the further understanding of each case and highlighting the insights gained from the study. Thus this chapter starts with a summary of the three cases, which will be followed by discussion of the issues which emerged from each of them.

### **8.1 SUMMARY OF THE THREE CASES**

The three teachers' personal profiles, working contexts and their 'My Way' are summarized in Table 8.1.

Table 8.1: Summary of the three cases

<i>Categories</i>	<b>Dongmei</b>	<b>Julie</b>	<b>Wenying</b>
<i>Identity</i>	Immigrant (China); Native Chinese speaker; Non-native English speaker	NZ Chinese; Non-native Chinese speaker; Native English speaker	Immigrant (China); Native Chinese speaker; Non-native English speaker
<i>Education</i>	B.A. English (China), Postgraduate Diploma Secondary School Teaching (NZ)	B.A. Chinese, Postgraduate Diploma Secondary School Teaching (NZ)	B.A. French (China), Postgraduate Diploma Secondary School Teaching (NZ)
<i>The school</i>	Private girls' college, most students from Western mid-class families	Public girls' college, many students from multicultural low-income families	Public girls' college, most students from Western mid-class families
<i>Prior Chinese programme</i>	None	None	Fully developed

<i>Prior teaching experience</i>	12-years teaching English to Chinese university students (China);  2-years teaching Chinese at secondary school (NZ)	None	3 five-week teaching practica (NZ);  Relief teacher for two-months at two secondary schools (NZ)
<i>Years at the school</i>	First year; part-time	Eighth year <sup>10</sup> ; full-time	Seventh year; full-time
<i>Professional development stage</i> (Berliner, 1994)	Novice (as a Chinese language teacher)	Competent	Expert
<i>Image of 'My Way'</i>	Still evolving and changing:  1 <sup>st</sup> year: 'Stuffing students'  2 <sup>nd</sup> year: 'Achieving a balance'  Emerging vision: Fun + learning 'things' (content)	'Nurturing student confidence'	'Everything going smoothly'

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<sup>10</sup> But the first year since formally qualifying.

As the table shows, there are many differences between these three teachers. They differ in terms of their identities – both Dongmei and Wenying are immigrants whereas Julie is a New Zealander by birth. As immigrant teachers, both Dongmei and Wenying had a sense of being an ‘outsider’, and this feeling was particularly strong for Wenying. For this reason, both Dongmei and Wenying were conscious of establishing and maintaining a positive image of China in general, and native Chinese-speaking teachers in particular, and they regarded this as part of their responsibility. In contrast, Julie, ethnically Chinese but a New Zealand born citizen, did not explicitly express that it was her role to promote China.

Moreover, both Dongmei and Wenying completed their undergraduate study in China. This educational background had a strong influence on their beliefs, assumptions, and way of teaching. Although both received their teacher training in New Zealand, their native culture seemed to remain the dominant influence on their ‘My Way’. Dongmei was trying to adapt to the Western context, but her teaching practice – teacher-centred and performance-oriented – remained very ‘Chinese’, whereas Julie’s way of teaching was more student-centred.

The school contexts in which the three taught were also quite different. Both Dongmei’s and Wenying’s schools are ‘elite’ schools, with predominantly Western students from middle-class families. Julie’s school

is dominated by students from multi-cultural low-income families. Awareness of the school's status had an influence on both Dongmei's and Wenying's way of teaching. It raised their expectations about levels of student achievement and this in turn put pressure on them to do well. Julie never mentioned this kind of pressure.

The status of the Chinese programme at the school also created different challenges for the three teachers. Both Dongmei and Julie were employed to start a Chinese programme from scratch, while Wenying was employed to carry on a well-developed programme. This meant both Dongmei and Julie had no point of reference and fell back on their prior knowledge: while Dongmei drew on knowledge from her previous experience in teaching English to adult students in China, Julie, who initially had no training and teaching experience whatsoever, had to draw on knowledge from her schooling and language learning experiences. In contrast, Wenying took over a Chinese programme which was fully developed, and she felt that everything was on the right track. More importantly, Wenying had had her practicum at this school and therefore had some understanding of both the school and the students. In addition, Wenying found that her predecessor's way of teaching matched her own teaching style perfectly. So for Wenying it was, to a certain extent, a matter of carrying on 'the way' that her predecessor had already established.

The three teachers were also at different professional development stages with different levels of teaching experience. As a result of these differences, the three teachers present us with an opportunity to understand teacher development from different perspectives. In what follows I will discuss these perspectives, starting with 'My Way' as it relates to teacher stages of development (8.2), and then examining the influence of cultural heritage on immigrant teachers' 'My Way' (8.3), followed by a discussion of the impact of the non-native speaking teacher's 'complex' on their 'My Way' (8.4), and the affective dimension of PPK (8.5). I will then discuss the mechanisms that appear to drive teacher development (8.6). The chapter will conclude with a summary of this study (8.7).

## **8.2 'MY WAY', IMAGE AND TEACHER DEVELOPMENT**

The path of teacher professional development has long been a research area in general education. The study of teacher expertise, which compares the behaviours and knowledge base of experts, experienced performers and novices is also well established. Drawing together the findings from expertise research in teaching and in other domains, Berliner (1994, pp. 164-167) proposes a five-stage model of teacher development, which is succinctly summarized by Andrews (2007) and reproduced in Table 8.2.

Table 8.2: Berliner's five-stage model of teacher development (based on Berliner, 1994) (Andrews, 2007, p. 120)

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<b>Stage 1: Novice level</b> [all student teachers and 1st-year teachers]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Needs context-free rules/procedures about teaching</li> <li>• Operates rationally, but fairly inflexibly, in following such rules/procedures</li> <li>• Starts to learn the objective facts and features of situations and to gain experience</li> </ul>
<b>Stage 2: Advanced beginner level</b> [many 2nd-year and 3rd-year teachers]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Experience begins to be melded with the verbal knowledge acquired in Stage 1</li> <li>• Starts to acquire episodic and case knowledge, and to recognize similarities across contexts</li> <li>• Still unsure of self and of what to do when experience / case knowledge is lacking</li> <li>• May still have little sense of what is important in a specific situation</li> </ul>
<b>Stage 3: Competent level</b> [many 3rd-year and 4th- year teachers + more experienced teachers]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Personally in control of events going on around him/her</li> <li>• Makes conscious choices about what to do</li> <li>• Has rational goals and is able to set priorities, decide on goals and choose sensible means for achieving those goals</li> <li>• When teaching, is able to determine what is or is not important</li> <li>• Still not very fast, fluid or flexible in behaviour</li> </ul>



<b>Stage 4: Proficient level</b> [a modest number of teachers, from around 5th year of teaching onwards]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intuition and know-how become prominent</li> <li>• Is able to view situations holistically and to recognize similarities between events</li> <li>• Can therefore predict events more precisely</li> <li>• Is able to bring case knowledge to bear on a problem</li> <li>• Still analytic and deliberative in deciding what to do</li> </ul>
<b>Stage 5: Expert level</b> [a small number of teachers, after at least 5 years]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Has an intuitive grasp of situations</li> <li>• Seems to sense in non-analytic and non-deliberative ways how to respond appropriately in classroom situations</li> <li>• With routine, repetitive tasks, acts fluidly, effortlessly and without consciously choosing what to do or to attend to</li> <li>• When a problem arises, and with non-routine tasks, is able to bring deliberate, analytic processes to bear</li> <li>• Is willing and able to reflect on and learn from experience</li> </ul>

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This model provides us with a framework, or a continuum, showing the characteristics of teachers at different development stages. It is not difficult to place the three teachers in the present study on this continuum: Dongmei was at about stages 1 or 2 in teaching Chinese, although she was

an experienced teacher in teaching English (see below), Julie at about stages 3 or 4, and Wenying at about stages 4 or 5.

Dongmei presents an interesting case, because even though she was experienced in teaching English to university students, she was a novice in terms of teaching Chinese at New Zealand schools, and her teaching practice was dominated by the characteristics of teachers at stages 1 and 2, such as following rules – assumptions in her case – learning the objective facts and features of situations, gaining experience, and still being unsure of herself and of what to do. For example, she had less knowledge about the Chinese language curriculum. She was unsure how much the language points should be covered and at what pace the language content should be presented to the students, her teaching was therefore dominated by trial and error.

Julie is another interesting case, because of her non-native Chinese speaker background. Judged by teaching experience and skills alone, she shared many characteristics of teachers at stages 3 and 4, even though she was less confident with teaching Y13. She was personally in control, had goals and was able to set priorities, able to predict events. For example, she had a good understanding of NCEA Chinese and knew the language proficiency each level should achieve. Moreover, she exhibited the ability and skills to teach with improvisation. However, she was still not very fast or fluid in teaching the Chinese characters and providing feedback about

Chinese grammar, which was very likely caused by limited Chinese language competence rather than a lack of teaching experience.

Wenying's case is more straight forward and she clearly falls into the category of an 'expert' teacher. With seven years of teaching experience she had an intuitive grasp of situations, well-established routines, acted fluidly and effortlessly, without consciously choosing what to do or to attend to. She had a well-developed knowledge base about the Chinese language programme – 'everything is in my mind', as she claimed, and her teaching went 'smoothly', in her words.

Berliner's model examines teacher development from a *behavioural* perspective, the present study, however, attempts to understand teacher development from a *cognitive* perspective. While Berliner focuses on what expertise teachers have gained at different stages, the present study focuses on what 'My Way' teachers have developed to guide their teaching practice. Berliner's model offers a check list of what teachers can or cannot do at different stages – behaviours observable from the *outside*, the present study tries to understand the development of teachers' 'My Way' – factors shaping this development from the *inside*.

The present study demonstrates that, from a teacher point of view, teacher development is about developing their own 'My Way' – the personal practical knowledge. This 'My Way' can usually be captured by a dominant *image*. The dominant image serves 'to guide the teacher's

thinking and to organize knowledge in the relevant area', and it is 'generally imbued with a judgment of value and constitutes a guide to the intuitive realization of the teacher's purposes' (Elbaz, 1981, p. 61). The present study suggests that, just as people usually develop an overarching value or sense of purpose to guide their lives, teachers also develop an overarching image to guide their teaching practice – even though many may not be aware of the image they have developed, and may not be able to articulate it, or name it.

This overarching image is very similar to what Prabhu (1990) called a teacher's 'sense of plausibility' about teaching (p. 172). Prabhu argues: 'Teachers need to operate with some personal conceptualisation of how their teaching leads to desired learning – with a notion of causation that has a measure of credibility for them' (p. 172). The present study shows that a teacher's dominant image functions as a 'root' to anchor teaching practice. Experienced teachers, such as Julie and Wenying, have already established their 'roots'. Julie's 'nurturing student confidence' and Wenying's 'everything goes smoothly' help them organize their teaching practice and give them confidence. By contrast, Dongmei, like other novice teachers, or teachers new to a particular teaching environment, often felt disoriented and frustrated, perhaps because she lacked an established dominant image to guide her actions. We have seen that Dongmei was in the process of developing her dominant image, and that it changed from

‘stuffing students’ in the first year to ‘achieving a balance’ in the second year. Both of these two images were temporary and Dongmei was not yet happy with her ‘My Way’. She therefore kept working to develop an image suitable to her new teaching context. In the middle of her second year, Dongmei felt a vision of her expected ‘My Way’ emerging, even though she could not articulate it at that stage and it was not clearly visible to the observer. But, from her description, a glimpse of the image could be seen of what it might be: a certain combination of ‘having fun’ and ‘learning things (language content)’.

To summarize, the present study provides a view of teacher development that complements Berliner’s model. By drawing attention to the development of an overarching image, or ‘My Way’, we are able to gain a greater understanding of the teacher as a *person*. Moreover, exploration of the factors shaping teachers’ ‘My Way’ presents us a fuller picture of their professional development process. Many factors helped shape the ‘My Way’ of the three teachers in the present study, but I have chosen to discuss three prominent ones: cultural heritage, non-native speaker identity, and the affective dimension.

### **8.3 INFLUENCE OF CULTURAL HERITAGE ON ‘MY WAY’**

Dongmei and Wenying, the two immigrant teachers in the present study,

allow us to examine the influence of cultural heritage on the shaping of their 'My Way'. The challenges they experienced in adapting to the New Zealand context result from the meeting of two very different cultural blocks – the East and the West. We have seen, in chapters 4 and 6, how strong this cultural influence is. Even though both Dongmei and Wenying had received training in New Zealand, through their postgraduate education, their way of teaching was strongly influenced by the Chinese educational tradition. To help further understand the ideological underpinnings of their practice, it is necessary to provide a brief overview of the cultural differences between Eastern or Confucian-heritage cultures (CHCs) and Western cultures in regard to learning and teaching.

### *Cultures of learning and teaching: CHCs vs. Western*

Cross-cultural research in general education (Watkins, 2000; Watkins & Biggs, 1996, 2001) and in L2 English education (Coleman, 1996; Cortazzi & Jin, 1996a, 1996b, 2001; Jin & Cortazzi, 1998; Tsui, 2007) has identified a number of fundamental ideological differences between CHCs and Western cultures with regard to learning and teaching. These differences can be presented as a set of dichotomies, which are summarized in Table 8.3 on the next page. While these dichotomies help capture the differences between CHCs and Western cultures, they are better viewed as trends rather than two opposites.

Table 8.3: Different emphases in culture of learning: CHCs & Western (adapted from Cortazzi & Jin, 1996b, p. 74)

<i>Categories</i>	<b>CHCs</b>	<b>Western cultures</b>
<i>Factors attributing to success</i>	Diligence	Ability
<i>Priority of learning</i>	Knowledge/skills first	Exploration first
<i>Learning mechanism</i>	Repetition/memorisation	Enlightenment
<i>Student behaviour disposition</i>	Docility	Independence
<i>Role of student</i>	Study hard	Exploration
<i>Role of teacher</i>	Expert, presenter	Motivator, organizer
<i>Teaching approach</i>	Teacher-centred	Student-centred
	Pace, presentation, and virtuosity	Activities, tasks
<i>Teacher-student relationship</i>	Hierarchical: agreement, harmony, respect	Horizontal: discussion, argument
	Formal	Informal

The categories used in Table 8.3 are interdependent and integrated. Thus, in CHCs, where personal effort is believed to play a decisive role in success, students have a greater sense of responsibility for their own achievement, and study is therefore always associated with hard work. Because knowledge and skills are viewed as important, teachers must have deep knowledge of their subject and are expected to teach 'content' in class. Teaching is therefore more knowledge-transmission-oriented; pace, presentation and 'virtuosity' are regarded as good teaching performance, and learning is more repetition- and memorization-dominant. Because students have been taught to be docile in society, they are expected to be compliant in the classroom. This in turn leads teacher-student relationship in CHCs to be more hierarchical and formal, with an emphasis on agreement, harmony and respect (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996b; Ho, 2001). As a result, as Ho (2001) points out, 'teacher-centred pedagogy and student compliance are still prevalent in many modern Chinese societies', despite the fact that some of them such as Hong Kong have a long history of Western influence (p. 99).

In contrast, in Western schools, because the emphasis is placed on ability and exploration, because students tend to have independent dispositions, it is the teacher's responsibility to motivate students and maintain their interests. Teaching is therefore more student-centred with attention given not only to the details and strategies of presenting subject



matter, but also to engaging the interest of the class, as Hess and Azuma (1991, p. 7) point out. Teacher-student relationships in Western schools tend to be more horizontal and informal, with more discussion and argument permitted in the classroom (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996b).

### *Interpreting Dongmei and Wenying - the 'Chinese Way'*

While care should be taken to avoid stereotypes, in general the dichotomies between CHCs and Western cultures help us to better understand Dongmei's and Wenying's 'My Way' and the challenges they faced when teaching in Western contexts.

For example, when Dongmei and Wenying talked about a 'good' student, they were referring to a student with the desire to learn and willingness to study hard, one who exhibits good behaviour and respect for teachers. Even the language they used was very similar. By contrast, Julie, even though Chinese by ethnicity never mentioned these particular student traits. When teachers from CHCs, such as Dongmei and Wenying, come to teach in Western schools, their expectations of what constitutes a 'good' student are often not met. As a result, classroom and student management become their biggest challenge and top priority. Their first job is to 'train' their students to behave like 'Chinese' students. This training is necessary if they wish to retain their teacher-centred teaching

approach in Western schools.

On the subject of teaching itself, during the interviews, Dongmei and Wenying focused more on their own performance than did Julie. In Dongmei's case, her concern was about finding her way and achieving a balance in teaching, while in Wenying's case, she was committed to assuring everything went smoothly and she was proud of the virtuosity she had attained. Their attention to performance has its roots in CHCs, where a 'good' teacher is always expected to present content in an orderly and smooth fashion. Julie, on the other hand, was much more concerned about her students. She spent most of the time talking about how to nurture student confidence.

In the study of the influence of personal history on teachers' beliefs and practice, the 'apprenticeship of observation' phenomenon has been a focus, which normally examines the influence of 'teacher factors', such as teachers' personality and style, and respect for their students (Bailey, et al., 1996, p. 15). The cases of Dongmei and Wenying both suggest that the influence of culture on teaching practice is deeper and stronger than the impact of these 'teacher factors'. This influence becomes more prominent when teachers are teaching in different cultural contexts.

#### 8.4 IMPACT OF NNS COMPLEX ON 'MY WAY'

The debate about the relative merits of native-speaker (NS) and non-native-speaker (NNS) teachers of language has been passionate in language education in recent years (Braine, 1999; Kamhi-Stein, 2004b; Llurda, 2005; Moussu & Llurda, 2008; Samimy & Kurihara, 2006). Some criticize the NS versus the NNS dichotomy as overly simplistic (Kamhi-Stein, 2004a, p. 3), others warn of the dangers implicit in this dichotomy. For example, Seidhofer (1999, p. 237) points out the danger of simply assuming that a 'competent speaker' will be a 'competent teacher'. With these precautions and reservations in mind, we must nevertheless recognize the pressure that NNS teachers suffer. Julie's case in the present study shows the impact that the NNS complex can have on the teacher and a teaching.

In most cases it is not difficult to determine whether a person is a NS or a NNS. However, in some situations the identity of NS/NNS becomes very complex, particularly when ethnicity is taken into account (Liu, 1999). For example, Braine (2005) indicates that some students may view all Caucasians as NS of English. Other students, especially Asian students, 'may not consider American-born Asians to be native speakers of English simply because they are not Caucasian' (Braine, 2005, p. 22). Julie provides us with an example of the NS/NNS identity confusion caused by ethnicity. She started learning Chinese in her 30's. Given her limited Chinese, she

was definitely a non-native Chinese speaker. However, her physical appearance led the outside world to assume that she was a native Chinese speaker. Her native-like pronunciation of Chinese strengthened this impression. Interestingly, in contrast to other NNS teachers, who tend to prefer not to be labelled as a NNS, Julie wanted to be regarded as a non-native Chinese speaker, because this would help reduce expectations about her level of Chinese proficiency. Being Chinese by appearance and ethnicity, but with limited Chinese language proficiency, was one of the main sources of her anxiety and frustration as a Chinese language teacher. It did not help that all the other Chinese language teachers at the secondary schools in the region were native Chinese speakers. Julie certainly felt overwhelmed by her native speaker counterparts, and once in a group discussion at a language conference, she made the statement 'I'm intimidated by you native speakers'.

Studies have found that NNS teachers have certain advantages over NS teachers. As indicated in Chapter 6, they provide a good learner model, teach language learning strategies more effectively, anticipate and prevent language difficulties better, and show empathy to the needs and problems of learners (Medgyes, 1994, p. 51). Julie, in the present study, exhibited a number of these characteristics. In addition, she had grown up and been educated in New Zealand and thus had a better understanding of New Zealand society in general and the local students in particular. She was

therefore in a better position to build a rapport with students.

However, as reported in Chapter 6, Julie clearly expressed a lack of confidence in her Chinese proficiency. As with many other NNS teachers, Julie's NNS 'complex' (Reves & Medgyes, 1994) stemmed from concerns about her linguistic competence, and these concerns 'often lead to feelings of inadequacy and self-doubts' (Moussu & Llurda, 2008, p. 323), resulting in more feelings of anxiety, which in turn has an influence on teaching approach. Indeed, in Julie's case, it was her feeling of inadequacy and her acute awareness of the disadvantage of being a NNS that had a strong impact on her self-confidence as a Chinese language teacher. Her lack of confidence as a Chinese language teacher became one source of her dominant image of building student confidence in her 'My Way', which is quite a positive influence from a language teaching point of view. It is also interesting to note that, paradoxically, while Julie encouraged her students not to use words such as 'hard' and 'difficult' when talking about learning Chinese – because she believed that these words would breed negative attitudes about learning Chinese – she constantly engaged in negative 'self-talk', reminding herself: 'I'm a non-native speaker.' Julie's case shows how great an impact a teacher's self-perception can have on her 'My Way' and her teaching practice, and how complex this impact could be – Julie's self-perception is negative for her confidence in her teaching, but ultimately positive for her teaching effectiveness.

## 8.5 AFFECTIVE DIMENSION OF PPK

Teaching is 'an anxiety-provoking activity' (Kennedy & Barnes, 1994, p. 202), 'a highly emotional enterprise' (Richert, 2002, p. 57). But, as Richert (2002) points out, 'ironically, the emotional side of teaching that is ubiquitous in the work is seldom identified or discussed by people who talk about teaching' (p. 57). Since the emotional state of teachers provides the barometer that heralds the puzzles of practice (Dewey, 1933), the emotional side of teaching is seen as not only legitimate, but essential. One contribution the study of teachers' personal practical knowledge (PPK) has made is that it has helped to bring teachers' affect into the spotlight. As summarised in Chapter 2, it is the affective dimension, that brings life to PPK. In Clandinin's case studies (1985, 1986, 1989) the teachers' images were all coloured with affect. In Golombek's study (1998), her two case teachers' PPK was expressed as tensions. It was the tensions these teachers felt that forced them to search for solutions and try to achieve a balance.

The affective dimension permeated all three case teachers' PPK in the present study, as reported in chapter 5, 6 and 7 respectively. Dongmei's first year of teaching was accompanied by feelings of being disoriented, worried, anxious, and overwhelmed. Her awareness of the school's prestigious reputation and her desire to succeed all created a great pressure on her, which made her feel 'anxious' and 'impatient'. As her PPK developed, her second year of teaching was characterized by a sense of

frustration and anguish as she struggled to achieve balance and to establish 'her way' of teaching.

Julie was troubled by an 'inferiority complex' due to the fact that she was a non-native speaker. This was the source both of her anxiety about teaching and of her ability to empathise with her students. We have seen that Julie's feelings of anxiety, as well as a desire to protect her students from similar feelings influenced Julie's way of teaching, leading her to proceed slowly and provide ample support to her students. Julie's feelings of not being 'good enough' also drove her to take every opportunity to improve her Chinese language skills.

Wenying, a very experienced teacher, could be described as being in what Huberman terms a state of 'serenity' (Huberman, 1993). She had seven years of teaching experience and believed that she had found the effective formula for teaching smoothly. Nevertheless, in her pursuit to professionalism she had been on what she herself called a 'mental journey' (*xīnlù lìchéng*, 心路历程). In order to reach her state of serenity, she had had to overcome feelings of inadequacy and anxiety.

Golombek & Johnson (2004) view teacher development as an on-going process, that is 'socially situated and socially mediated, non-linear, dialogic, and without an endpoint' (p. 323). They argue that throughout their careers teachers constantly search for 'mediational tools' to help them externalize their experiences interwoven with cognition and

emotion. It is their emotional dissonance that initiates the recognition of cognitive dissonance, a recognition of contradictions in their teaching context, therefore, 'emotions are actually a driving factor in teacher development' (p. 324) (see also Timperley et al., 2007).

## **8.6 THOUGHT PROCESSES AND TEACHER DEVELOPMENT**

We have seen that 'My Way' of teaching provides a strong top-down perspective on teacher development. We have also seen that a teacher's 'My Way' is influenced by many different factors: context, cultural heritage and identity in particular, play crucial roles. On a much more fundamental level, however, a teacher's thought processes function as the mechanisms that drive teacher development. The three cases presented here, particularly Dongmei's case, allow us to distinguish two basic modes of teacher thought processes: the problem-solving mode and the practical reasoning mode. In what follows I will discuss each of these.

### ***Problem-solving mode***

The problem-solving mode is solution-oriented, that is, it is adopted to find solutions to solve identified problems (Anderson, 1993). It is therefore a deliberate mental process and usually follows clear steps. We saw

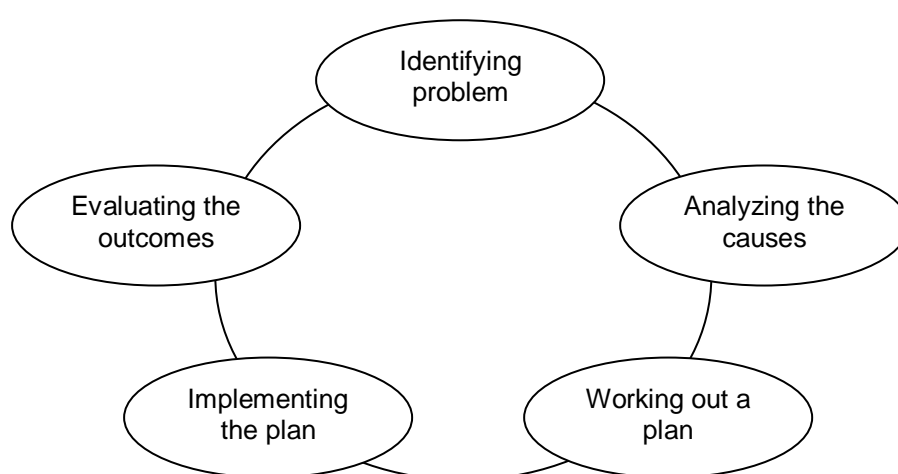


Dongmei problem-solving naturally during her reflection on what went wrong in her first year of teaching at School D. First she identified low re-enrolment as the problem. She then searched for causes by analysing the situation. When she decided the causes were her 'way' of teaching and her lack of attention to building a teacher-student relationship, she set 'retaining students' as a goal for her second year of teaching, and made a plan to make learning Chinese easier and more fun, and to get to know her students better. Before implementing this plan, however, Dongmei received more information about her first year of teaching. She therefore adjusted her plan accordingly, re-setting 'teaching efficacy' as a goal for her second year of teaching. During her implementation of this new plan in the second year, Dongmei constantly evaluated the outcomes based on the feedback from her students and other sources, such as feedback from the in-service training programme. The problem-solving process Dongmei went through can be illustrated in Figure 8.1 on the next page.

Julie and Wenying also produced examples of this problem-solving mode. In the interview, Julie told a story about how she came to use IRDPX to help her students remember Chinese words. IRDPX is an abbreviation of *Input, Recognition, Discrimination, Production, and eXtension*, all the techniques used to help learn vocabulary. Julie said she noticed that her students found it hard to remember Chinese words – a *problem*. In searching for solutions to solve this problem, Julie discovered the IRDPX

method and decided to try it out in her class, warning her students that she was treating them as guinea pigs. The students liked the method and found it helpful, she therefore kept using this method.

Figure 8.1. Dongmei's problem-solving process



When Wenying started teaching at School W, she was troubled by certain mistakes students kept making – a *problem*. In her attempt to solve this problem, she decided that these mistakes were the result of first language transfer – her students were using English structures to form sentences in Chinese. To help the students adopt the correct word order, Wenying began experimenting with using formulae to assist students to remember the Chinese word order. Wenying found these formulae worked well and had used them ever since.

Even though their perceived problems were perhaps not as big or as complex as Dongmei's, both Julie and Wenying followed the same problem-solving process as Dongmei: (1) identifying the problem, (2) analysing the problem, (3) searching for solutions; (4) implementing solutions, and (5) assessing the outcomes.

### *Practical reasoning mode*

While the problem-solving mode is *solution*-oriented, employed to seek solutions to problems, or to work out the means for an end, and usually results in a deliberate action, the practical reasoning mode of thinking is *justification*-oriented, often applied to provide rationales (reasons) for choosing certain actions to achieve a certain goal (Fenstermacher, 1994). The rationale is not necessarily a principle. It could be experience, case knowledge, or the only best choice among many other options. Moreover, in many situations the rationale is not mentioned, it is implicit in the context, or actions. A teacher may even not be aware of the reasons for some actions, particularly when she follows customary practices. Yet it is to bring these reasons into the spotlight that helps to make the implicit explicit – to help teachers examine their rationales for their actions.

The practical reasoning mode can be employed by teachers to articulate the rationales behind their day-to-day teaching practice. For

example, in Dongmei's case, in order to show the success of the Chinese programme, she chose to teach the students 'intensive content'. One reason behind this action is an assumption she held, that is, one significant indication of a successful language programme is that students have learnt a lot of content.

Julie used IRDPX for helping student learn vocabulary. When I asked why she adopted this technique, she said:

Some students are visual learners, some students are tactile, some students are good at listening, so I think it [IRDPX ] covers most of those. They were able to touch them or hold them up and see them as well. And I think that also worked for me, so if it worked for me I thought well I had to try it on the students.

In this excerpt Julie justified her choice of an action – using IRDPX – with reasons based on theories about learning styles and on her own experience – the method worked for her.

As reported in 7.2.3, Wenying placed importance on students' becoming familiar with words before introducing sentence structures. Normally she allocated about two contact hours to teaching words. When I asked her why she spent so much time on it, she said 'words are building blocks, if students have not got blocks how can they build a structure?', thus providing a rationale for her action.

In sum, problem-solving and practical reasoning can be viewed as two different yet complementary modes of the thought mechanisms, with each serving different purposes. If we take means-end analysis as ‘an innate part of the cognitive machinery of humans’, as Anderson (1993, p. 39) holds, problem-solving mode focuses on *finding* the means for an end, and addresses the question of ‘What means to be taken for the end?’ – starting from identifying the end; whereas practical reasoning focuses on *justifying* the means against the end, and addresses the question of ‘Why use this particular means for the end?’ – starting from exploring the means. Julie’s adoption of IRDPX serves as a good example to further clarify the relationship between these two modes: while the problem-solving mode helped her to finding a means (IRDPX) for an end (assisting students to learn vocabulary), the practical reasoning mode helped to justify the means for that end – it was based on theories and her own experience. This example also shows that both modes are essential to teacher thinking and teacher development.

## 8.7 SUMMARY

The present study set out to explore personal practical knowledge (PPK) of the three Chinese language teachers, by two guiding questions: (1) What are the characteristics of these teachers’ PPK? and (2) What factors shape

their PPK? The aim was to gain insight into teachers' professional development processes, in order to better support their professional development.

Through the examination of the three teachers' 'My Way', the study found that the PPK of these L2 Chinese teachers shares similarities with the characteristics of PPK of L1 teachers (Clandinin, 1985, 1986; Elbaz, 1981, 1983) and L2 English teachers (Golombek, 1998): personal, experiential, situational, and dynamic.

The study also found that teachers' PPK is shaped by a combination of different factors. The extent of the influence of these factors differs, depending on teacher background. The present study highlights the experiences of two special groups of teachers: teachers from Eastern countries coming to teach in Western contexts, which show the strong influence of cultural heritage on their PPK; and non-native speakers, particularly those heritage non-native speakers, which supports earlier studies showing the powerful impact of the NNS complex on their 'My Way'.

Furthermore, the present study presented cases to help meet the need identified in the study of teacher cognition, as indicated in the literature review (Chapter 2), that is, a need to broaden the research scope of teacher cognition study in L2 to include different geopolitical and cross-cultural contexts, non-English language teaching practice, primary and secondary

schools, and classes taught by non-native speaker teachers. The present study has showed that, like L2 English language teachers, the immigrant Chinese language teachers and non-native Chinese teachers at secondary schools all held their own maxims (Richards, 1996), or principles (Breen, et al., 2001), or pedagogical knowledge (Gatbonton, 1999; Mullock, 2006), to guide their practice. These teachers' cultural background played an important role in influencing or shaping their maxims, principles, or pedagogical knowledge, as in Dongmei's and Wenying's cases. This finding provides evidence that supports the argument that there is collective 'know how' in different educational cultures (Breen, et al., 2001).

Whatever different background each teacher has, from a cognitive point of view, all teachers share one thing, that is their thought mechanisms. The mechanisms help connect past experience to the present situation, connect theory to practice, and link planning to implementation. It is through these interactive processes that a teacher develops. It follows from this that attention should be given to the fostering of these interactive processes in teacher education and teacher development programmes.

## *Chapter 9*

# **Conclusion**

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### **9.0 INTRODUCTION**

Following the cross-case discussion in Chapter 8, this chapter discusses the challenges involved in studying teachers' (personal) practical knowledge (9.1), presents implications of the study (9.2), and concludes the thesis (9.3).

### **9.1 CHALLENGES INHERENT IN THE STUDY OF PPK**

The study of teachers' personal practical knowledge (PPK) has helped acknowledge the teacher as the knower, and legitimate the values of the teacher's experiential knowledge. Nonetheless the study of PPK presents a number of challenges which will be discussed below.



### *Developing an operational concept*

The first challenge in the study of PPK is to establish an operational concept to organize the research project. In the literature of teacher knowledge research, a number of concepts are used to refer to teacher practical knowledge, or PPK: craft knowledge (Grimmett & MacKinnon, 1992), practitioner knowledge (Hiebert, Gallimore, & Stigler, 2002), and practical theory (Handal & Lauvas, 1987). There are overlaps between these terms - 'A deeper examination of these terms would show similarities', but they would also 'uncover essential differences', as Golombek (2009, p. 158) observes.

The present study followed the research tradition initiated by Elbaz's study of teachers' practical knowledge, Clandinin's study of teachers' PPK in general education, and Golombek's study of teachers' PPK in L2 education. PPK was taken as a framework because it presents an integrated and holistic way of exploring teachers' experiential knowledge and their mental lives, and it takes teachers' personal history and cultural background into consideration (see 2.3 and 2.4).

However, as the project progressed, I found that, as a concept, PPK was very abstract for teachers to understand; as a framework, PPK was very difficult to operate within because earlier studies provided no clear model to follow. I therefore rephrased PPK as 'My Way' in the present study (see Chapter 1) to enhance the accessibility to this concept, and

adopted the concept 'image' to capture the essence of each teacher's 'My Way' and to help me organize and analyse the data. It was at the stage of data analysis that I started to understand why Elbaz, Clandinin and Golombek had adopted the concept of 'image' to capture teachers' practical knowledge and PPK: because this research tradition is 'more about the characteristics of teachers' knowledge than about what teachers know' (Carter, 1990, p. 302), and image, as 'a brief, descriptive and sometimes metaphoric statement' (Elbaz, 1983, p. 254), is therefore a suitable concept for capturing the characteristics of teachers' knowledge.

### *Holistic understanding or codification*

In studies of PPK, narrative inquiry is widely used as a method to collect and analyse data and present PPK. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) believe that narrative inquiry is 'the best way of representing and understanding experience' (p. 18). The present study also adopted narrative inquiry as the main research methodology. However, during the course of the study, I was troubled by the ever-present tension between holistic understanding and codification. Grimmett and MacKinnon (1992) in their review of studies of teachers' 'craft knowledge' note the same dilemma, quoting Tom and Valli (1990):

In what ways can tacit knowledge from the craft tradition be codified? Which forms of codification make this knowledge accessible to other practitioners? Or is the codification of craft knowledge, knowledge sensitive to various contexts and to contrasting conceptions of good teaching, a contradiction in terms? (cited in Grimmett & MacKinnon, 1992, p. 440)

While Grimmett and MacKinnon (1992, pp. 437-438) say they 'would resist the temptation to formulate craft knowledge in a propositional manner', they at the same time ask an important question: 'How, then, can craft knowledge be used productively in teacher education?' I asked the same questions with respect to PPK. In the present study, I adopted the particular form of narrative inquiry known as thematic analysis to help organise themes of each case and at the same time maintain the holistic understanding of each case.

From a teacher knowledge research point of view, the tension between holistic understanding and codification parallels tensions between different views about presentation of teachers' practical knowledge, about how to access this practical knowledge (Black & Halliwell, 2000; Richardson, 1994), and how to unpack or capture teacher knowledge (Carter, 1990; Grimmett & MacKinnon, 1992; Munby, Russell, & Marin, 2001). While different methods could be experimented with in different studies (Grimmett & MacKinnon, 1992), mixed-method research

programmes would be encouraged for the further study of teachers' practical knowledge.

### *Addressing issues of warrant and justification*

In his review of research on teacher knowledge, Fenstermacher (1994) raises concerns about *warrant* and *justification* of research into teachers' practical knowledge, that is teachers' practical knowledge must be 'subject to *evidentiary scrutiny*' if it is 'to count as knowledge in any useful sense of the term' (p. 28, emphasis added). While he acknowledges that the notion of 'practical knowledge' has great potential to broaden and deepen our understanding of teachers and teaching, and even more importantly, 'the potential for changing and advancing the practice of teaching in ways never open to conventional social science', Fenstermacher reminds us that, in order to realize this potential, 'all who would study it [practical knowledge] face an obligation to take seriously the fact that they are studying notions of knowledge and, as such, must work through matters of warrant and justification' (Fenstermacher, 1994, p. 49). He points out that research on teacher practical knowledge has not taken these issues seriously. He is particularly critical of Connelly and Clandinin's work, stating that it 'exhibits the least attention to warrant and justification of any of the research reviewed' (Fenstermacher, 1994, p. 49).

Fenstermacher (1994, pp. 33-34) further argues that, quoting Feiman-Nemser and Floden (1986, p. 515), it does not follow 'that everything a teacher believes or is willing to act on merits the label knowledge'. Fenstermacher warns that this practice would devalue the term 'knowledge' to a '*purr*' word, and, ultimately, devalue the study of teachers' practical knowledge.

I believe that Fenstermacher's concern about the use of the term 'knowledge' is legitimate and his warning alerted me to this pitfall. Nevertheless, Fenstermacher's criticism of Connelly and Clandinin's work is tenuous, especially as he later posits teachers' *practical reasoning* as an acceptable way of justifying practical knowledge: 'Yet another way to justify that we know something is to offer good reasons for doing or believing it. Indeed, this form of justification might be called the "good reasons" approach' (Fenstermacher, 1994, p. 44). Clandinin's case studies are based on precisely this kind of practical reasoning. This practical reasoning was also presented in the three cases of the present study, and helped address the issues of warrant and justification, as discussed in 8.6.

In relation to the concern about justification, I felt a tension between *understanding* and *judging* teachers' practical knowledge. While the purpose of the present study was to understand, it was difficult to avoid evaluating the three teachers' 'My Way'. With the ethical concern about possible effects my judgements would have on the feelings of the teachers

involved, I decided it was necessary to avoid all judgement in the study and in any case I would have struggled to decide what criteria I should evaluate them against. How to deal with these issues is another challenge for the study of teachers' practical knowledge, because part of the motivation for understanding is to gain insight into how to bring about change and change requires evaluation of current practice, as discussed below (9.2)

To summarize, the study of teachers' practical knowledge in general and PPK in particular is full of challenges and tensions (Munby, et al., 2001). Tolerance, patience and innovation are needed in order to carry out this kind of research.

## **9.2 IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHER DEVELOPMENT**

The present study presented three cases to help understand professional development processes of language teachers, particularly those teaching at secondary schools. The study has found that each teacher developed their own 'My Way', or PPK, in teaching Chinese language, and demonstrated the peculiarity of each teacher's dominant image of their 'My Way' in conducting their teaching. The image was influenced by their personality, identity, cultural background, learning and teaching experiences, and

teaching contexts, and served as overarching top-down guidance for their practice, and helped to organize their teaching activities.

These findings would suggest taking an exploration of teachers' 'My Way' as a starting point in a teacher development programme, by engaging teachers in examining their dominant image of their 'My Way'. It is because, as discussed in 8.2, each teacher works with their personal image of what they should be doing in the classroom, and that image is probably more dominant than anything else. Yet most teachers might not be aware of the image they have developed, or have been developing. The explicit examination of the dominant image would therefore help them better understand their own guiding beliefs and assumptions about language learning and teaching. In this way, they can start to see a big picture of their 'My Way'. This raising of *self-awareness* would have an effect of *gāngjǔ mùzhāng* (纲举目张) – once the headrope of a fishing net is pulled up, all its meshes open; or once the key link is grasped, everything else can fall into place in a teacher's holistic understanding of their practice.

It is equally important for teacher educators to gain an understanding of what images teachers bring to a teacher education programme. Because, without explicitly addressing what sort of classrooms teachers want to run, what is their main goal, and what they would like to see happening in their classroom, teacher education programmes might strike a wrong chord: the principles introduced in the programme might be at odds with the images

teachers hold. If the principles do not match teachers' images of what they are trying to do, they are very likely to be taken superficially, and the teachers tend to fall back on what they have been doing already.

To help teachers better understand their 'My Way', they need to be encouraged in *self-analysis*, examining underlying rationales and the factors shaping their dominant image and their 'My Way'. In this regard, it would perhaps be beneficial to engage teachers in complementary problem-solving and practical reasoning processes. As discussed in 8.6, it is crucial to develop teachers' skills in self-analysis for them to become the knowers of what they have been doing. For example, even though Dongmei felt that she had a number of dilemmas in her second year of teaching at School D, and tried to achieve a balance in dealing with these dilemmas, it appeared that she did not know the main sources of these dilemmas – many of which came from the ideological differences between the Confucian-heritage cultures (CHCs) and the Western cultures. Similarly, Wenying seemed not aware of the influence – the 'virtuoso' model in CHC education tradition – on her dominant image 'smoothness' of her 'My Way'. However, without understanding of the rationales and factors shaping their image and 'My Way', teachers cannot start the process of self-assessing their 'My Way' in order to see the needs for changes.

Studies have found for teachers to initiate any changes they need to first identify dissonance (e.g. Timperley, et al., 2007). In order to do so,



teachers need opportunities and skills for *self-assessment* of their 'My Way'. While we acknowledge that each teacher develops the dominant image of their own 'My Way', it does not follow that their 'My Way' should be taken as it is without scrutiny. This self-assessment is particularly crucial for those very experienced teachers, as there is a risk of becoming 'fossilized' in their teaching career, a danger that when teaching has become automatic and routinized, they may not see the needs, or not be willing to 'problematise what appears to be routine or unproblematic' (Tsui, 2005, p. 179). Taking Wenying's case as an example, she seemed to be very proud of and satisfied with her image of 'smoothness' in her 'My Way', and she appeared unlikely to reinvest her energy in improving her 'My Way', but to look for challenges outside classroom teaching. Yet, there is some dissonance between Wenying's practice and findings from the study of second language acquisition (SLA) about how languages are learned. For example, Wenying was preoccupied with avoiding learner errors, while SLA has found that it is through trying out forms and receiving more input/feedback that learners are able to build knowledge structures. It is thus important to empower learners to take risks with the language – a necessary process for learners to learn new forms as well as to create automaticity in language acquisition (Skehan, 1998; Swain, 2005). Wenying's case shows that expert practice does not necessarily equate to research-based practice for language learning and teaching.

However, teachers, particularly teachers like Wenying, who have their firmly defined image of their 'My Way', might be resistant to any changes imposed on them. By involving them in the processes of self-analysis and self-assessment of their own 'My Way', they could be encouraged to identify the dissonance and to see the areas that might be productive for reflection and exploration. Working with this inside-out approach, they may be more likely to take constructive feedback. In this way, we can also solve the researchers' dilemma between understanding and judging stated in 9.1.

The three cases in the present study have showed that these teachers' images of 'My Way' primarily focused on managing a social event. All the images – from Dongmei's 'achieving a balance', to Julie's 'building student confidence' and Wenying's 'smoothness' – related to managing human beings, which is a social concern. In other words, a social event was their main focus and took precedence over the consideration about language learning processes. Possible explanations include: (1) in teaching at primary and secondary schools, classroom management tends to be the first consideration for teachers, because students are less mature than adult students at tertiary levels; (2) these teachers were trained as general secondary school teachers first, and as foreign language teacher second. The focus of the courses and the practicum in their pre-service training was

therefore more on general teaching practice and less on language acquisition.

From a viewpoint of applied linguistics, this consideration of social event first and language learning second raises a concern about the role that applied linguistics research, particularly SLA research, should play in language teachers' teaching practice and their professional development. It seems that these language teachers need feedback/input for their professional development, and teacher educators and researchers can serve as the critical 'others' to facilitate teachers' self-analysis and self-assessment by providing them with feedback/input. The challenge is how both sides reach each other to form the collaboration needed for teacher professional development, which still remains as a gap that the field of applied linguistics has been trying to bridge (see Allwright, 2003, 2005), as evidenced by the theme of 14<sup>th</sup> annual symposium of the Applied Linguistics Association of New Zealand held on 29 November 2008: *Bridging the gap between theory, research and practice*.

### **9.3 CONCLUDING COMMENTS**

Language teacher development is about learning to teach a language and making changes in teaching practice. Study of teacher cognition has found that there are two levels of changes: a behavioural level and a cognitive

level, and suggested that changes happening at a cognitive level would be stronger and more sustainable (S. Borg, 2006, p. 65). The present study has demonstrated that teachers' images of their 'My Way' are central to teacher cognition in language teaching. For professional development, teachers should therefore be engaged in the examination of their image and 'My Way'.

The present study suggested involving teachers in what we might call a *triple A* process of reflection: self-*Awareness*, self-*Analysis*, and self-*Assessment* of their 'My Way', in order for them to achieve self-improvement in their teaching practice and professional development. The present study also suggested that it would be more productive if researchers in applied linguistics and language teacher educators could serve as facilitators working along with language teachers in enhancing the process of teacher development.

It is hoped that the three cases presented in this thesis would provide other language teachers with vicarious experiences to reflect upon, and provide language teacher educators and researchers with the impetus to find better ways of supporting teacher learning and professional development processes.

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# APPENDICES

## Appendix A: Documents of ethics consideration

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### *A1: Ethical approval from Victoria University of Wellington*



## MEMORANDUM

Phone 0-4-463 5676  
Fax 0-4-463 5209  
Email Allison.kirkman@vuw.ac.nz

TO	Dekun Sun
COPY TO	Associate Professor David Crabbe, Dr Rebecca Adams
FROM	Dr Allison Kirkman, Convener, Human Ethics Committee
DATE	6 May 2007
PAGES	1
SUBJECT	<b>Ethics Application: No 54/2007, Developing 'My Way' in Language Teaching – Case studies of teachers' personal practical knowledge.</b>

Thank you for your application for ethical approval, which has now been considered by the Standing Committee of the Human Ethics Committee.

Your application has been approved and this approval continues until 30 August 2009. If your data collection is not completed by this date you should apply to the Human Ethics Committee for an extension to this approval.

Best wishes with the research.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Alli Kirkman'.

Allison Kirkman  
Convener

*A2: Consent form for teachers*



**Project: Developing personal practical knowledge  
in language teaching: Case studies**

**Investigator:** Dekun sun

**Telephone:** (04) 463-4687

**E-mail:** [dekun.sun@vuw.ac.nz](mailto:dekun.sun@vuw.ac.nz)

**Dear [teacher's name],**

Thank you very much for your willingness to participate in this research. This sheet describes the research and is followed by a consent form. The decision for you to participate is yours. We would appreciate return of the attached form to the school in the enclosed envelope by **[date]**. Thank you.

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**About the research project**

The study is my PhD project under the supervision of Associate Prof. David Crabbe and Dr. Rebecca Adams at the School of Linguistics and Applied Language Studies, Victoria University of Wellington. The study will involve 4 secondary schools in the Greater Wellington Region and your school is one of those. The study will focus on the language teachers' personal practical knowledge: what they think, believe and do in the classroom and I will therefore undertake several interviews with you and observe and record your teaching in the classroom for up to 2 weeks. The purpose of this study is to gain understanding of teachers' PPK and the factors that shape it in order to provide a window into the processes behind teacher development. The outcomes of this research should help teacher educators, school administrators, and researchers better understand how to support the development process.

### **Confidentiality**

All of the information collected will be confidential and will only be used for research purposes. This means that your identity will be anonymous, in other words, no one besides the researchers will know your name. Whenever data from this study are published, your name will not be used. The data will be stored in a computer, and only the researchers will have access to it. Five years following the conclusion of this research all electronic recordings will be erased. The researchers will not discuss any aspect of your teaching with any administrators, supervisors, or other teachers from your school.

### **Risks and Benefits**

There are no risks associated with your participation in this research. We believe the discussions about your teaching during the interviews would help your reflection on your teaching. We will provide you with a summary of our findings following this project.

### **Your Participation**

Participating in this study is strictly voluntary. If at any point you change your mind and no longer want to participate, you can tell me. If you have any questions about the research, you can contact me at:

Telephone: (04) 463-6487

Email: [dekun.sun@vuw.ac.nz](mailto:dekun.sun@vuw.ac.nz)

### **Approval Body**

The Victoria University of Wellington Human Ethics Committee has given approval for this research project. For information on your rights as a research subject, contact the Convener, Dr Allison Kirkman (ph. 463 5676).

**Project: Developing personal practical knowledge  
in language teaching: Case studies**

Consent to Participate in Research

I have read the information provided in this letter.

I agree/do not agree (please delete one) to participate in this study. The researchers can record my class, interviews, and use those recordings and other relevant documents such as course plans in the analysis and reporting of this research.

Teacher's name \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

☐ I would like to receive a summary of the results of this research at the following email address:

Please return this form to the school by **[date]**.

Thank you for your time.

Dekun Sun

Telephone: (04) 463-6487

Email: [dekun.sun@vuw.ac.nz](mailto:dekun.sun@vuw.ac.nz)

### *A3: Consent form for parents and students*



#### **Project: Developing personal practical knowledge in language teaching: Case studies**

**Investigator:** Dekun sun

**Telephone:** (04) 463-4687

**E-mail:** [dekun.sun@vuw.ac.nz](mailto:dekun.sun@vuw.ac.nz)

**Dear parent/guardian**

I would like to include your child's class in a research study being carried out on language teaching in second language classrooms in secondary schools in the Greater Wellington Region. This sheet describes the research and is followed by a parental consent form and a student assent form. The decision for your child to participate is yours and your child's. We would appreciate return of the attached form to the school in the enclosed envelope by **[date]**. Thank you.

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#### **About the research project**

The study is my PhD project under the supervision of Associate Prof. David Crabbe and Dr. Rebecca Adams at the School of Linguistics and Applied Language Studies, Victoria University of Wellington. The study will involve 4 secondary schools in the Greater Wellington Region and your child's school is selected. The study will focus on the language teachers' personal practical knowledge: what they think, believe and do in the classroom and I will therefore observe and record the teacher's teaching in your child's class for up to 2 weeks. The purpose of this study is to gain understanding of teachers' PPK and the factors that shape it in order to provide a window into the processes behind teacher development. The outcomes of this research should help teacher educators, school administrators, and researchers better understand how to support the development process.

## **Confidentiality**

All of the information collected will be confidential and will only be used for research purposes. This means that your child's identity will be anonymous, in other words, no one besides the researchers will know your child's name. Whenever data from this study are published, your child's name will not be used. The data will be stored in a computer, and only the researchers will have access to it. Five years following the conclusion of this research all electronic recordings will be erased. Your child's teachers and school administrators will not be informed of anything said or written as part of this research. Your child's participation (or non-participation) in this research will in no way influence your child's marks in this course.

## **Risks and Benefits**

There are no risks associated with your child's participation in this research. Benefits to your child include more efficiency of teaching practices.

## **Your Child's Participation**

Participating in this study is strictly voluntary. If at any point you change your mind and no longer want your child to participate, you can tell the researcher. Your child will not be paid for participating in this study. If you have any questions about the research, you can contact Dekun Sun at:

Telephone: (04) 463-6487

Email: [dekun.sun@vuw.ac.nz](mailto:dekun.sun@vuw.ac.nz)

## **Approval Body**

The Victoria University of Wellington Human Ethics Committee has given approval for this research project. For information on your child's rights as a research subject, contact the Convener, Dr Allison Kirkman (ph. 463 5676).



**Project: Developing personal practical knowledge  
in language teaching: Case studies**

Parental Consent to Participate in Research

I have read the information provided in this letter.

I agree/do not agree (please delete one) for my child to participate in this study. The researchers can record my child, and use those recordings in the analysis and reporting of this research.

Child's name \_\_\_\_\_

Parent/Guardian signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Assent by Student Participant

I have read the information provided in this letter.

I agree/do not agree (please delete one) to participate in this study. The researchers can record me, and use those recordings in the analysis and reporting of this research.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Please return this form to the school by **[date]**. Thank you for your time.

Dekun Sun

## Appendix B: List of the classroom observations

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### *B1: Classroom observations – Dongmei*

#	Grade	Date and time	Topics/activities
1	Y8 (11) <sup>11</sup>	3 Mar. 2008 1.35-2.25pm	Family members
2	Y9 <sup>12</sup> (20)	25 Feb. 2008 9.30-10.25am	Self-introduction
3	Y9 (19)	5 Mar. 2008 1.35-2.30pm	Nationalities
4	Y9 (20)	7 Mar. 2008 8.35-9.30am	Self-introduction
5	Y9 (19)	16 Jun. 2008 9.30-10.25am	Birth signs of family members
6	Y9 (15)	18 Jun. 2008 1.35-2.30pm	Likes and dislikes
7	Y9 (19)	3 Mar. 2008 9.30-10.25am	Everyday phrases
8	Y10 (12)	5 mar. 2008 10.45-11.40am	Transport

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<sup>11</sup> Number of students turned out in the class.

<sup>12</sup> These classes in shadow were video- and audio-recorded.

***B2: Classroom observations – Julie***

#	Grade	Date and time	Topics/activities	Follow-up interview
1	Y9 (17)	22 May 2007 1.30-2.30pm	Numbers Knowing people	
2	Y10 (15)	21 May 2007 8.45-9.45am	Clothing Likes and dislikes	21 May 2007 11.30-11.55am
3	Y10 (17)	24 May 2007 1.30-2.30pm	Shopping - asking for price	24 May 2007 3.50-4.00pm
4	Y10 (16)	24 May 2007 2.30-3.30pm	Checking homework Shopping - bargaining	24 May 2007 3.45-3.55pm
5	Y10 (16)	29 May 2007 2.30-3.30pm	Cultural content (TV clips) Role-play	29 May 2007 3.45-3.55pm
6	Y10 (17)	30 May 2007 1.30-2.30pm	Students producing posters about clothing (1)	30 May 2007 3.40-3.55pm
7	Y10 (17)	30 May 2007 11.30am-12.30pm	Students producing posters about clothing (2)	30 May 2007 2.20-2.35pm
8	Y11 (6)	21 May 2007 10.20-11.10am	Shopping	

***B3: Classroom observations – Wenying***

#	Grade	Date and time	Topics/activities
1	Y9 (30)	24 July 2007 8.45-9.30am	Likes and dislikes
2	Y9 (30)	25 July 2007 1.40-2.30pm	Classroom (1) - introducing the new words
3	Y9 (28)	27 July 2007 11.57am-12.45pm	Classroom (2) - practising the new words
4	Y9 (28)	30 July 2007 2.30-3.20pm	Classroom (3) - talking about classroom
5	Y9 (30)	31 July 2007 8.45-9.30am	Nationalities
6	Y10 (22)	24 July 2007 10.50-11.35am	Directions
7	Y10 (22)	25 July 2007 9.30-10.25am	Describing classroom
8	Y12 (13)	24 July 2007 9.30-10.15am	Dinning in a Chinese restaurant - drafting passage
9	Y12 (13)	25 July 2007 8.45-9.30am	Dinning in a Chinese restaurant - giving feedback and revising

## Appendix C: List of the interviews conducted

#	Date/time	Venue	Focus	Format
<i>C1: Interviews with Dongmei</i>				
1	1 Nov. 2007 11.30am-1.20 pm	Community Library	Dongmei's reflection on her first year of teaching at School D	Open-ended
2	29 Feb. 2008 11.00am-12.noon	Community Library	Teaching practice at the beginning of the second year of teaching at School D: concerns/challenges	Open-ended
3	7 March 2008 10.40am-11.30am	Community Library	Discussion about classroom teaching based on the events picked up from the classroom observations	Semi-structured
4	18 June 2008 2.40-3.40pm	Community Library	Teaching practice in the middle of the second year of teaching at School D, and professional development	Open-ended
<i>C2: Interviews with Julie</i>				
1	10 May 2007 4.00-4.50pm	French language classroom  School J	Background information, e.g.: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>About the teacher</li> <li>The school</li> <li>The language programmes</li> </ul>	Semi-structured

2	17 May 2007 3.50-5.00pm	French language classroom  School J	Teaching, e.g.: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Beliefs/concerns</li><li>• Curriculum</li><li>• Planning</li></ul>	Semi-structured
3	27 June 2007 4.40-5.40pm	Office at the University	Discussion about classroom teaching, based on the events picked up from the classroom observations	Semi-structured
4	5 July 2007 10.10-11.50am	Office at the University	Discussion about 'My Way' and professional development	Semi-structured /open-ended
<b><i>C3: Interviews with Wenying</i></b>				
1	10 July 2007 1.20-2.30pm	Community library	Background information, e.g.: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• About the teacher</li><li>• The school</li><li>• The language programmes</li></ul>	Semi-structured
2	13 July 2007 1.20-3.10pm	Community library	Teaching, e.g.: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Beliefs/concerns</li><li>• Curriculum</li><li>• Procedures</li></ul>	Semi-structured /open-ended
3	27 July 2007 3.20-4.10pm	A meeting room  School W	Discussion about classroom teaching, based on the events picked up from the classroom observations	Semi-structured
4	22 August 2007 3.30-4.20pm	A meeting room  School W	Discussion about 'My Way' and professional development	Semi-structured

## Appendix D: Samples of transcripts

As recorded on audio recording	As recorded on transcript	As recorded on the thesis
<i>Sample A</i>		
<p>If they get anxious <del>they</del>, they don't listen, they don't pay attention, and they just worry about <del>{SD: um} what can,</del> what will be happening. <del>{SD: um, eng} So my,</del> when I first started at year 9 I always assure them that we're going to be going slowly, <del>{SD: um}</del> I will be teaching them, <del>um,</del> lots of new things that are <del>different, um,</del> different from English, but we'll go step by step and, most important all, if they're worried or if they need to ask questions they need to ask them, they don't have to sit there thinking 'oh I'm too scared to ask, I will sound silly, I will sound stupid.' <del>{SD: um} ah,</del> that's how I start.</p> <p>(interview 4: 1:13-1:40)</p>	<p>If <u>they</u> get anxious they don't listen they don't pay attention and they just worry about what will be happening. So when I first started at year 9 I always assure them that we're going to be going slowly I will be teaching them lots of new things that are different from English but we'll go step by step and most important all, if they're worried or if they need to ask questions they need to ask them, they don't have to sit there thinking 'oh I'm too scared to ask, I will sound silly, I will sound stupid.' That's how I start.</p> <p>(interview 4: p.2)</p>	<p>If <u>students</u> get anxious they don't listen, they don't pay attention, and they just worry about what will be happening. So when I start year 9, I always assure them that we're going to be going slowly, I will be teaching them lots of new things that are different from English but we'll go step by step, and most important of all, if they're worried or if they need to ask questions they must ask, they don't have to sit there thinking 'oh I'm too scared to ask, I will sound silly, I will sound stupid'. That's how I start.</p> <p>(quoted in the thesis, p. 156)</p>
<i>Sample B</i>		
<p>CH: and <del>I'm,</del> I'm always so pleased when they say 'I'll enter'. <del>{SD: um}</del> I said 'it doesn't matter whether you win or lose,' <del>it's just, I think,</del> I tell them that <del>they,</del></p>	<p>CH: and I'm always so pleased when they say 'I'll enter'. I said 'it doesn't matter whether you win or lose,' I tell them they're so</p>	<p>I'm always so pleased when they say 'I'll enter'. I say to them 'it doesn't matter whether</p>

<p>they're so brave <del>[SD: um]</del> to stand up in front of people to present a speech. <del>[SD: um]</del></p> <p>SD: because today I saw [a colleague's name] is preparing some kind of poster for <del>the coming</del>, the coming cultural day. <del>[CH: ah, right, yeah]</del> Is that august? <del>Sometime?</del></p> <p>CH: <del>august</del>, <del>[SD: august, yes]</del> <del>august</del>, yes, towards the end of august I think. <del>Ah</del>, I think <del>they</del>, they come back, even if they haven't won, <del>they</del> come, they come off the stage <del>or they</del>, after they finished [SD: mimic] 'oh we did it! <del>We did it!</del> <del>[SD: um]</del> and, that's so satisfying for me. <del>[SD: um, good.]</del> <del>um</del>. And especially if they do an individual speech I think <del>that's</del>, that's just [pause 3''] that's amazing for me because I don't think I could do it. <del>Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha</del> [laughter].</p> <p>SD: <del>ha, ha</del> [laughter], you said <del>you</del>, you were shy when you were young.</p> <p>CH: <del>exactly</del>, exactly. <del>And</del> because I was shy I want them to be confident, not like I was.</p> <p>(interview 2: 62:00-63:13)</p>	<p>brave to stand up in front of people to present a speech.</p> <p>SD: because today I saw [a colleague's name] is preparing some kind of poster for the coming cultural day. August?</p> <p>CH: yes towards the end of august I think. I think they come back, even if they haven't won, they come off the stage, after they finished 'oh we did it' that's so satisfying for me. And especially if they do an individual speech I think that's just... that's amazing for me because I don't think I could do it.</p> <p>SD: you said you were shy when you were young.</p> <p>CH: exactly. Because I was shy I want them to be confident, not like I was.</p> <p>(interview 2: p.20)</p>	<p>you win or lose'. I tell them they're so brave to stand up in front of people to give a speech. When they come back, even if they haven't won, they come off the stage, after they finished exclaiming: 'Oh we did it! We did it' That's so satisfying for me. And especially if they made an individual speech I find it amazing because I don't think I could do it. Because I was shy I want them to be confident, not like I was.</p> <p>(quoted in the thesis, p. 170)</p>
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## Appendix E: Samples of transcripts and translations

As recorded on audio recording	As recorded on transcript	As translated on the thesis
<b>Sample A</b>		
<p>而且我现在观念也转变了，原来说老玩根本就不学东西，<del>[孙：嗯]</del>人家就是这么个文化，人家就是寓教于乐，<del>[孙：对]</del>你一节课程人家在学就，就行了，你用不着那么像中国的题海战术，<del>哗啦啦</del>，写写写。<del>[孙：嗯]</del>实际上现在我，我的那个 worksheet 还是写的很多，<del>[孙：嗯，嗯]</del>哗啦一大篇 worksheet 挺吓人的，人家那个又是画又是图的，完了就写几个字。<del>[孙：嗯]</del>呵呵呵呵[笑声]</p> <p>(interview [dongmei] 3: 35:54-36:19)</p>	<p>而且我现在观念也转变了，原来说老玩根本就不学东西，人家就是这么个文化，人家就是寓教于乐，你一节课程人家在学就行了，你用不着那么像中国的题海战术，写写写。实际上现在我的那个 worksheet 还是写的很多，一大篇 worksheet 挺吓人的，人家又是画又是图的，完了就写几个字。</p> <p>(interview [dongmei] 3: p. 12)</p>	<p>My ideas have also changed. Previously I thought the students were spending a lot of time playing without learning. But that's their culture. Here students are learning through lively activities. There is no need to drown the students with huge amounts of homework and assignments, writing, writing, writing. In fact there is still a lot of writing in my worksheets now. It looks scary. The worksheets in French programmes are full of pictures with few words.</p> <p>(quoted in the thesis: p. 142)</p>
<b>Sample B</b>		
<p>就是，我就觉得前面一个老师呢她开了一个好头，</p>	<p>就是我觉得前面一个老师她开了一个好头，这个学</p>	<p>I think that my predecessor had made a good start in</p>

<p>嗯,这个学生呢就是说她抓得很好,她从这个 behaviour, 从学生的 这个 effort 努力, 和各方面她自己的教学呢就是让学生信任这个老师, <del>王孙: 嗯</del> 而且她是一个中国人, 就觉得中国人很严谨, 很 hardworking, <del>王孙: 嗯</del> 而且中国人呢就是说他不是乱来的, 今天我都没有 lesson plan 我就教, <del>王孙: 嗯</del> “哎呀, 今天, 昨天教什么?”, 老师还, 老师还问学生“哎呀, 教了什么?”她不是这样的, <del>王孙: 嗯</del> 所以她就接纳中国人, 这个 native speaker 教了中文, 我们做学生的就很 lucky, 有他们, 他们很认真, 甚至就是觉得比别的 Kiwi 老师呢, 她, 因为我们毕竟语言不行, 就更多了一份自己的准备, <del>王孙: 嗯</del> 很充分, 她就觉得啊中国人就很好, 所以她就觉得很信任你。 <del>王孙: 嗯</del></p> <p>(interview [wenying] 1: 25:30-26:17)</p>	<p>生她抓得很好, 她从这个 behaviour, 从学生的 这个 effort 努力, 从各方面她自己的教学就是让学生信任这个老师, 而且她是一个中国人, 就觉得中国人很严谨, 很 hardworking, 而且中国人就是说他不是乱来的, 今天我都没有 lesson plan 就教, 今天, 昨天教什么, 老师还问学生。她不是这样的, 所以她就接纳中国人, 这个 native speaker 教了中文, 我们做学生的就很 lucky, 有他们, 他们很认真, 甚至就是觉得比别的 Kiwi 老师, 因为我们毕竟语言不行, 就更多了一份自己准备, 很充分, 她就觉得啊中国人很好, 她就觉得很信任你。</p> <p>(interview [wenying] 1: p. 10)</p>	<p>the Chinese programme here at School W. She helped develop the right attitude in students, encouraged good behaviour. She was Chinese. Through her teaching she had built the students' trust in Chinese teachers. The teacher made the students feel that Chinese teachers are well-organized (yánjīn, 严谨), hardworking and well-prepared for their teaching. Therefore they accept Chinese teachers and feel lucky to have a native Chinese speaker to teach them Chinese. They think Chinese teachers are committed (rènzhen, 认真), and they trust the Chinese teacher. (Emphasis added)</p> <p>(quoted in the thesis: p. 186)</p>
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## Appendix F: Samples of initial coding

### F1: As on electronic files

PhD Project – D. Sun, Victoria University, 2007–2009

worked really well in class every now and then I'd say 'right, you don't have any homework, for writing, but I just want you to look at the characters to make sure you remember how to say them for next time.'

Comment [D18]: T: steps to go

Sd: do you have a textbook or just a workbook?

Ch: year 9 I've made up a workbook and I said I had to revise it. I wanted to do it for the year 10 as well, but that all takes time. And they've asked 'do we have one?' and I said 'well I would try and put together one.' Even if it's towards the end of the year, or maybe in the 3<sup>rd</sup> term, they will have it as... to do as revision for their exams at the end of the year. Textbooks, we have textbooks, we use 汉语 and we use 你们

Comment [FN19]: T: textbooks

Sd: so students have one or just few copies?

Ch: no we have class sets. The year 9, I've only just handed them now, because I wanted them to do lots of speaking in the first term without having to worry about the writing. Now we're into writing, the pinyin and writing the characters and we're using the textbooks to read and they say 'oh we know that word!' and I think that's important because if you give them pinyin and the characters and the reading they just can't cope. This is my philosophy of how to teach some. And when I can hear them say 'miss, is that the character we've learnt for...?' and it's things like that that makes it more exciting for them. Because if they see the word straight away from the textbook, they look it and they think it's too hard. So that's how I do it. At the moment the year 10 don't use the textbook, I just want them to learn the words and be able to speak and then we will do that again.

Comment [FN20]: T: hold up – one thing at a time, speaking preceding writing

Comment [FN21]: P: not too much in one time

Comment [FN22]: T: hold up & reasons

Sd: so each class you give them some handouts

Ch: I get them to do a lot of the work themselves because I think that's important. If you just give out handouts they're not going to look at them, they'll stick them in their books and they won't look at them.

Comment [FN23]: T: students do the work

Sd: what about year 11 to 13?

Ch: 11, 12, and 13, they are expected to learn the characters because they have to have them for the exams, NCEA. We do a lot of reading with passages and this year, now that I came back, I want to give them more examples of structures.

Comment [FN24]: T: foci of Y11-13 and why - NCEA

Sd: so do you follow a certain textbook or you just produce some teaching material?

Ch: no I get text I find that are suitable, there's a book that one of the previous teachers from Wellington College wrote when NCEA first

chlu-intv2-trans\_with notes.doc

5/22

## F2: As on hard copies

PhD Project - D. Sun, Victoria University, 2007-2009

王：一说其实她本来就是没有那些 focus 那节课，或者是 lack 一些 interest 比如说 lazy 或懒，或有什么事，她这样一问她会回答这个问题，在回答当中她不自觉地就会被带动了，就是有这个再尝试说一遍这个词，总比跟着我读这一遍，她不自觉地已经发音了，多说一次你就多记住一次。  
*increasing interest  
add variety  
meaningful practice*

孙：然后接下来你就用前面学生做的 flash cards，那这个就是这一届学生前面做的还是你——

王：前几年的。

孙：你觉得，你怎么想起用这个 idea，就是让学生，前面的学生——

王：也是根据当时的那个课程的进度。比如说当时的课程进度我觉得跟我去年前一年的比已经快了那我就可以 slow down 一下，那么就给她们一些 relaxing 的一些 time，然后我知道这个班里比如说有画画很好的，或是别的 subject 挺好的像画画或是什么的 art 方面，你也给她一个机会展示在中文课程里边，然后比如说我学了二十个单词，班里有二十个学生，一人选一个她喜欢的就是她挑一个 pick up 一个，那么大家就是在 drawing 这些东西的同时就是说她也能记住我今天画的是 map，那 map 就是地图，就是在背面就写上汉字，另一边就画上画，就是就像觉得就是说中文不单是孤立的，它有的时候会和别的一些 subject 结合起来，比如说我画画好我也可以展示也能用到，就是这个意思相关，而且？？课程我还可以慢一点让她们画让她们写然后大家很有兴趣参与的。  
*adjusting teaching pace  
building connection  
learn by doing  
connecting to other subjects  
increasing interesting*

孙：我觉得这是个很好的创意，让这些学生觉得她们给她们一种鼓励，那种。

王：对啊，而且也比较省 budget，因为我们就是搞那种很复杂很精致的那种 resources，你这样学生自己可以创造，然后拿来给她们使用她觉得很自豪，而且会鼓励下一届学生，你看她们的 work，就是刺激她们更不甘落后，反正就是这样。  
*One stone - three birds  
1. saving budget  
2. increase st's pride/self-confidence  
3. challenge other students*

孙：那除了那种 flash cards 比如说前面有没有学生写的作文好像其它的范文这样子的？

王：有这样的就是说把它们做成一个 poster，比如说她们写我的学校如果写得好的话大家可以插图三个人四个人一个 group，几个人画图那个人就是把这个写上去然后放到 notice board 在教室后面这样的，展示给别人看，或者留下来在 open night 学校有 open night 的时候给她们展示给她们看。  
*increasing st's sense of achievement*

孙：那接下来完了以后你就是让她们学生你给她们看那个 flash card 让她们说，是语音练习，接下来完了以后你就是问一个学生哪些汉字她们比较难写，你给她们再示范。

## Appendix G: Samples of 'tree nodes' in Nvivo7

Printed at  
Tree Nodes [6.00pm, 24 Nov 2007] [Record 3]

Name	Sources	References
tree nodes	0	0
tree nodes	0	0
wang_tree nodes	0	0
1 PERSONAL PROFILE	0	0
beliefs on life	1	7
biologists	2	9
2 SCHOOL PROFILE	0	0
chinese programme	3	10
language programmes	1	2
school in general	2	5
3 TEACHING AT WGC	0	0
chinese curriculum	3	9
nces	4	12
teaching 4 skills	2	4
sole teacher	1	3
teaching routine	3	12
4 WANG'S PPK	0	0
Teaching Concerns	0	0
building good habit	4	16
building trust [acceptance]	4	12
creating practice opportunity	1	9
developing qi-field [氣, 場]	4	13
moving fear of hardness	3	3
stimulating interests	4	17
Teaching Strategies	0	0
teaching interestingly	2	9
teaching on condition	3	9
teaching relevantly	2	9
teaching smoothly	3	21
teaching subjects	4	16
teaching style	2	5
5 PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT	0	0
Feelings As A Teacher	0	0
busy life	4	8
self	3	19
stress-pressure	2	4
Learning To Teach	1	1
being an associate teacher	2	5
developing process	3	17
practicum	2	9
reflecting on teaching	3	6
teacher education	1	3
On...	0	0