

## EXPERIENCED TEACHERS' THOUGHTS AND THE TEACHING OF ORAL COMMUNICATION

**KOH SOO LING**

Academy of Language Studies  
Universiti Teknologi MARA, 40450 Shah Alam, Malaysia  
(kohsl@salam.uitm.edu.my)

### ABSTRACT

A teacher's thoughts are very much influenced by his knowledge systems and beliefs. These two components will certainly have an impact on the way he performs in the classroom. These will influence the conception of the teaching tasks, the teachers' teaching strategies and classroom decisions. These two components need to be studied in greater detail, identifying how they interact with each other and influence teachers' classroom practice. The researcher's purpose in this current investigation on oral communication is to construct a context to enable us to see the influence of experienced teachers' thought processes on their classroom practices. Predominant categories are thoughts pertaining to students' behaviour, classroom management, students' participation in classroom tasks and self improvement.

Teachers' thoughts, influenced by their knowledge systems and beliefs need to be studied in greater detail. How knowledge systems and beliefs interact with each other and the effects teachers' beliefs have on student outcomes are worthwhile areas of research. A comparison between novice teachers' thoughts and experienced teachers' thoughts can also shed more light into what governs good classroom practice.

### INTRODUCTION

Experienced teachers have their own beliefs about teaching and learning that influence their teaching strategies and classroom management styles which are very different when compared to novice teachers. This research mirrors the studies of Lucy Loretha Lyla (1996) on "Master Teachers' Beliefs, Decisions and Practices in the ESL Reading classroom," and Gatbonton (2000) on

"Investigating Experienced ESL Teachers' Pedagogical knowledge."

Studies on the characteristics of experienced teachers show that experienced teachers provide models of successful teaching that could serve as the scaffolding for novice teachers to achieve a greater degree of competence. (Berliner, 1992; 1995) However, not much research has been done on experienced teachers' thought processes. The number of studies (in ESL) that are carried out unfortunately trail behind their counterparts in the field of general education.

Research done on experienced teachers' knowledge systems also far outweighs that on teachers' beliefs for the simple reason that attitudes, values, expectations and assumptions about teaching and learning that teachers gather over time (Richards 2001) are subjective and difficult to measure quantitatively. However, both knowledge systems and beliefs are interrelated and they collectively influence teachers' classroom behaviour.

These two components need to be studied in greater detail, identifying how they interact with each other and influence teachers' classroom practice. The researcher's purpose in this current investigation is to construct a context to enable us to see the influence of experienced teachers' thought processes on their classroom practices. Predominant categories are thoughts pertaining to students' behaviour, classroom management, students' participation in classroom tasks and self improvement.

### Objectives of the Study

This study investigates the hypothesis that access to the experienced teachers' Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK) is possible through qualitative analyses of teachers' verbal protocols and

videotaped segments of teachers' classroom teaching. PCK is defined as teachers' own personal theories on learning and teaching which are then used in classroom teaching in a variety of situations. (Shulman, 1987)

This research focusses on a need for an analysis of experienced teachers' thoughts so that a more meaningful description of the area of cognition that influences teaching can be portrayed. The relationship between the experienced teachers' mental acts and their classroom actions and behaviour can then be established. It is with this in mind that the researcher hopes to explore the following in this paper:

1. What is the set of pedagogical thoughts that experienced teachers have when they teach oral communication?
2. Which of these pedagogical thoughts are more dominant than others?
3. If teachers refer constantly to certain ideas in pedagogy as they teach, what thoughts would be translated into their classroom behaviour?

This study aims at investigating the experienced teachers' thoughts when teaching oral communication in an ESL classroom. Teaching oral communication includes planning, classroom management as well as post active decisions. Probing into the thought processes will complement the overt studies of teachers' actions in the classroom.

#### **Rationale of the Study**

*"Teacher candidates have a broad knowledge of instructional strategies that draws upon content and pedagogical knowledge and skills delineated in professional, state, and institutional standards to help all students learn. They facilitate student learning of the subject matter through presentation of the content in clear and meaningful ways and through the integration of knowledge."* (NCATE, Standards, 2002 p. 15)

Teaching is indeed a complex and demanding process that involves many inter-related tasks (Clark and Peterson, 1986; Richards and Lockhart, 1994). As there are many different

classroom challenges and difficulties, how then does the experienced teacher cope with them? How closely does his classroom methodology and behaviour mirror his personal beliefs and conceptions?

How he goes about transmitting that knowledge is influenced by factors like, his experience, personality and classroom management. Why he chooses that particular style of teaching is reflective of his conceptions of learning theories and how he envisages students learn. It is thus necessary to probe experienced teachers' thought processes or mental acts which influence classroom teaching as this has a direct influence on students' learning (Clark and Peterson, 1986).

Extensive research has been done on the pedagogical content knowledge of experienced Maths and Science teachers but hardly any on the ESL teacher (Higgins 1999; Alevan, Popescu and Koedinger, 2001). Like the classic case of appreciating the gift and not the giver, the focus of ESL research seems to centre on teaching and learning strategies rather than on what propels such strategies to take place. As not much has been done to understand a teacher's cognition in relation to the ESL teacher, it is therefore pertinent not to depend heavily on mainstream educational research findings but to research further into the ESL teacher's cognition processes for new insights (Richards, 1993).

Schulman (1987) states that effective teachers are usually known for their classroom management skills, which is only a fraction of what an effective teacher is. In order to improve the education of young minds, he advocates that more in-depth studies be done in relation to the teacher's cognition. This study hopes to provide comprehensive examples of good instructional practice to further shape the future of education.

There is also a lack of data on what effective teaching is. He points out that "the best creations of its practitioners are devoid of a history of practice (Schulman, 1987). By creating a data bank where prized information about ESL teaching and learning practices is pooled together, there will be a rich resource especially for teacher trainees