

# How Action Research Can Complement Formal Language Teacher Education

Anita Y. K. Poon

Hong Kong Baptist University, Hong Kong SAR, China

apoon@hkbu.edu.hk

The present study addresses the question of how to support the professional development of English teachers with no subject-specific training apart from the formal channel of pursuing a Diploma of Education. This paper aims at finding out whether it is possible to employ action research as a means of professional development. It reports the cases of how three primary school English teachers with no subject-specific training grow professionally and change their methodology in teaching English through action research. Qualitative research method is adopted. Pre-interviews and post-interviews conducted by the researcher with the teachers and the students, journals written by the teachers, class observation reports written by the researcher, and post-lesson observation conferences between the researcher and the teachers are used to collect data. Triangulation is employed in data analysis. The findings suggest that action research can be an effective means to help non-subject trained teachers improve English teaching. This provides an option for professional development of language teachers.

**Keywords:** action research, teacher education, English language teaching

The concept of teacher education has undergone fundamental changes amid the debates pertaining to education reform in the last decade or so (Elliot, 1993; Griffin, 1999; Grimmett & Neufeld, 1994; Quicke, 1998). First and foremost, the scope of teacher training has been broadened. The content used to be curriculum-based focusing on the training of teachers in a specialized subject while the recent view links education to society and the world around us. Griffin (1999) argues that teacher education institutes “seek out prospective teachers who are not narrowly focused on pieces of school curriculum or approaches to teaching or ways of knowing but, instead, have come to see the world around them as connective, as an amalgam of thoughts and actions and events and

artifacts that together compose the cultures and societies we share” (p. 9). It follows that this shift in conceptualization of teacher education calls for some re-visiting of the ways teachers are trained.

There was a debate in the early 1990s about the models of teacher development. On the one hand, proponents of the ‘content model’ emphasize the importance of competence “defined as the knowledge, skills and understanding to manage classrooms and promote student learning successfully” (Hargreaves, 1993, p. 88). Different teacher competencies are developed through distinct content domains. This model is practical and useful especially for pre-service teachers because the teacher trainees are required to take a certain number of courses from specific content

domains, such as educational psychology, philosophy in education, sociology in education, curriculum studies, classroom management, IT in education, etc., with a view to acquiring the knowledge and skills needed for classroom teaching within a short time frame. However, the 'content model' is technocratic and limited in scope because teaching involves more than skills and knowledge in specific domains. Teacher education is "a matter of facilitating the development of teachers' capacities for situational understandings as a basis for wise judgment and intelligent decisions in complex, ambiguous and dynamic educational situations" (Elliot, 1993, pp. 18-19), according to the proponents of 'process model'. It is in the light of the shift from 'content' to 'process' that the concepts of action research and reflective teaching are brought into teacher education.

Action research was first introduced by the social psychologist Lewin in 1946. This concept was applied to education and has been widely used in educational research in the U.S.A. (e.g. van Manen, 1984), the U.K. (Elliott, 1978), Australia (e.g. Carr & Kemmis, 1986; Kember, 2000; Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988) since the 1970s. Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) define action research as "a form of collective self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own social or educational practices, as well as their understanding of these practices and the situations in which these practices are carried out" (p. 5). Kember (2000) points out the seven attributes of action research: concerned with social practice; aimed towards improvement; a cyclical process; pursued by systematic enquiry; a reflective process; participative; and determined by the practitioners (p. 24). From the list we can see that reflective teaching is a built-in component of action research although it may stand out in its own right as a method of educational research.

A further changing concept of teacher education is the time factor. Teacher education was traditionally perceived as one-off training for pre-service teachers. However, with the drastic

changes in the world as a whole and in education in particular, teacher education has become a continuing process for all - prospective teachers, novice teachers and experienced teachers. It is in this light that I initiated a series of action research projects between September 2002 and June 2005 to investigate how three in-service non-subject trained English teachers develop professionally in the rapidly changing educational context of Hong Kong.

This article reports only the development of the teachers concerned throughout the research from the perspectives of the teacher educator and the teachers themselves.

## RESEARCH PROBLEM AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

### *Problems in the English teaching force in Hong Kong*

Hong Kong has long been suffering from the insufficient supply of qualified English language teachers. A survey on the qualifications held by serving language teachers was conducted by the former Education Department of Hong Kong<sup>1</sup> (SCOLAR, 2003). It shows that 'subject trained' English language teachers (i.e. with relevant first degrees and relevant teacher training qualifications) account for approximately 20% of the English teaching force.<sup>2</sup>

The Western saying that 'Rome was not built in one day' can truly depict the current scene of English language teaching in Hong Kong. Traditionally the so-called 'English majors' (those doing English literature and/or English linguistics in the English Department) had ample career opportunities upon graduation, such as joining the civil service, the financial sector, the multinational enterprise. Only a small percentage of them entered the teaching profession. The supply of 'English majors' in education was particularly short in the heyday of economic boom in Hong Kong in the 1980s and the early 1990s. The Hong Kong government's policy pertaining to teacher qualifications further aggravates the situation. Until

recently any individual with a degree (or even without a degree) has been permitted to teach in schools prior to receiving any formal teacher training.<sup>3</sup> This accounts for the fact that there are still approximately 46% and 34% respectively of primary and secondary English teachers without relevant teacher training in the teaching force.

The English teaching force having no subject-specific training is a contributing factor to the declining English standards of Hong Kong students. There are other factors such as 9-year compulsory education, large class teaching, an inappropriate approach to English language teaching including ineffective implementation of Communicative Language Teaching, and the like. Although the Hong Kong government is reluctant to admit that the English standards have declined<sup>4</sup> (Education Commission, 1994, p. 15; Education Commission, 1995, 1996; SCOLAR, 2003, pp. 4-5), it has, nonetheless, made strenuous efforts to curb the falling language standards since the early 1980s.

The Hong Kong government is indeed very anxious about the quality of the English teaching force. On the one hand the government has set a language benchmark test to bar those whose English is below standards from joining the profession effective September 2004 and provide more support for pre-service teachers (e.g. a 6-8 week English Immersion Programme in an English speaking country). On the other hand the government has to speed up the training for serving English teachers through various measures (e.g. fulfilling Language Proficiency Attainment Test through training, increasing the quota of part-time Postgraduate Diploma in Education). However, apart from the formal channels, are there any other ways to improve the quality of teaching of serving English teachers?

### ***Research questions***

Drawing on the analysis of the current situation of the English teaching force in Hong Kong, it is found that quite a large proportion of the English teachers are not subject-specific trained and that the quality of serving English teachers in both the primary and secondary sectors needs

improvement.<sup>5</sup> My general research question is as follows: How can we support the professional development of English teachers with no subject-specific training apart from the formal channel of pursuing a Diploma/Postgraduate Diploma in Education? In particular, is it possible to employ action research as a means of professional development? Within the action research framework, I would like to frame my research question specifically as follows: How do three primary school non-subject trained English teachers grow professionally and change their methodology in teaching English through action research? 'Non-subject trained' represents 'those without an English degree and without teacher training in the English subject' as defined by the Education and Manpower Bureau of Hong Kong (Education and Manpower Bureau of Hong Kong, 2004).

This paper focuses on the teacher education aspect of the issue in question from the perspectives of the teachers, the teacher educator and researcher. The new method of teaching English and the effect of using this method will be briefly described below. The pedagogical aspect of the studies will not be discussed in this paper.

## **RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS**

The three case studies employ the same research design and research methods as depicted below:

### ***Research design***

Action research is adopted as a common framework for the three case studies. The reason for using action research is twofold: Action research is concerned with social practice and because of its flexible approach it can capture the complexity of teaching and learning better than the positivist technical-rational approaches (Kember, 2000); action research aims towards improving practice through participation, reflection and evaluation (Kember, 2000; Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988; Nunan, 1990; Richards & Lockhart, 1996).

**Table 1.**  
**Design and data collection methods of the study**

	<b>Data collection methods</b>	<b>Data derived</b>
1	a. Pre-interview of teacher	The teacher's background and experience in English language teaching, her teaching methods and view of English language teaching
	b. Post-interview of teacher	The teacher's experience in trying out the integrative-narrative method, and changed views of English language teaching
2	a. Pre-interviews of students (3 subjects: 'low', 'mid' and 'high')	The students' background and experience in English language learning at school, and their views of English teaching methods used in class
	b. Post-interview of students (3 subjects: 'low', 'mid' and 'high')	The students' experience in learning English through the integrative-narrative method, and their changed views of English language learning
3	Lesson observations	The researcher's informed comments on how the integrative-narrative method is carried out
4	Pre- and post-lesson conferences with teacher	The researcher and the teacher's discussion on how the integrative-narrative method should be carried out in each lesson, and how the lesson can be improved
5	Teacher journals	The teacher's reflections on the implementation of integrative- narrative method and student responses

As a teacher educator and researcher, I initiated the action research based on my informed knowledge of the education policy scene and the ELT (English Language Teaching) field in Hong Kong. Bearing the research problem and research questions in mind, I approached the three teachers, who were not my students and whom I did not know previously. Being non-subject trained English teachers, they were aware of their limitation and have always wanted to improve their teaching but did not know how to achieve this end. The strangers (i.e. the researcher and Teacher A, the researcher and Teacher B, and the researcher and Teacher C respectively) thus joined hands and

worked towards a shared goal at different periods of time from September 2002 to June 2005.

### **Research methods**

Qualitative research methods were employed in this study. Data were collected through pre- and post-interviews, lesson observations, teacher journals, and post-lesson conferences. Some general analytical strategies and techniques (e.g. comparing and contrasting, aggregating, content analysis) were adopted to analyse the data. Triangulation was also used to perform quality checks on the credibility, dependability, and confirmability of the data as

there are multiple sources of evidence in the research.

In each case study, semi-structured interviews were conducted by the researcher on both the teacher and the students before and after the study to solicit their views on the English lessons and the use of narratives (for details of questions asked in pre-interviews and post-interviews, see Appendices 1-4). Each interview with the teacher lasted 30 minutes, and each interview with the student lasted 10 minutes. Altogether, three students in each case were selected for both pre- and post- interviews based on their English standards: one high, one average and one low. Both male and female students participated. The interviews were audio-taped.

Lesson observations were also conducted by the researcher. The first case study (Case A) lasted two months. Both the second (Case B) and the third (Case C) case studies lasted five months each. Altogether, 25 lessons were observed<sup>6</sup> with each lesson being a double period comprising 70 minutes. The teacher’s teaching methods, interaction with the class and students’ responses were all observed (for details of the observation plan, see Appendix 5). Fieldnotes were taken down by the researcher.

The teachers were asked to keep a journal and record their reflections after each lesson. There are altogether 25 journals (see Appendix 6 for samples of teacher journals).

A conference was held between the researcher and the teacher both before and after each lesson observed. There were altogether 25 pre-conferences and 25 post-conferences, each lasting 30-60 minutes. The design and data collection methods of each study are shown in Table 1.

**PROFILES OF TEACHERS**

The subjects of the studies are three different teachers with similar backgrounds. They are non-English subject trained primary English teachers who have been striving hard to upgrade their formal professional qualifications in the past few years in response to the Hong Kong government’s teacher education policies. One reason for taking part in the studies is their belief in professional development through informal channels. Table 2 shows the profiles of the teachers.

The students taking part in the studies are senior primary students from Band 1 schools<sup>7</sup> in the New

**Table 2.**  
**Profiles of teachers**

	Teacher A	Teacher B	Teacher C
Gender	Female	Female	Female
Qualifications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Dip.Ed. obtained from local teacher training college (Major: Social studies)</li> <li>Pursuing B.Ed. at local university on P/T basis</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bachelor in Law obtained from U.K. by examination</li> <li>Pursuing ostgraduate Dip.Ed. at local teacher training institute on P/T basis</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Dip.Ed. obtained from local teacher training college (Major: Art &amp; Chinese History)</li> <li>B.A.in Ed. From British university through distance learning on P/T basis</li> </ul>
Teaching experience	6 years	More than 2 years	More than 10 years
Number of years teaching English language	2 years	More than 2 years	More than 10 years

Territories<sup>8</sup>: Primary 4, Primary 5 and Primary 6 students taught by Teacher A, Teacher B and Teacher C respectively.

## INTERVENTION

In this series of studies the same intervention – the same teaching method (i.e. the integrative-narrative method) – is applied but with different foci. Case A focuses on the teaching of writing, Case B on the teaching of listening and Case C on the teaching of reading. The aim of trying out the new teaching method is to improve teaching and learning and gain insights into the ways the individual teachers cope with changes in teaching.

The following is a description of the traditional English class (i.e. the usual way that the teachers teach the English lessons) and the new English class (i.e. the integrative-narrative method advocated by me).

### *The traditional English class*

Like most primary schools in Hong Kong, School A, School B and School C adopt textbooks for the English lessons. The English skills are taught separately in the assigned lessons, e.g. the listening lesson, the oral lesson, the reading lesson and the composition lesson. The method that the teachers normally use is one-way direct teaching. The medium of instruction is a mixture of English and Chinese. The rationale behind this is that students' English standards are not high and they would have difficulty in understanding the lessons if the teacher taught in English only. For details of how the traditional English writing, listening and reading classes are run in Hong Kong, please see Appendix 1.

### *The new English class*

The new method – the integrative-narrative method – uses children's literature as teaching material for the English class because stories are interesting and motivating for young children (e.g.

Goldilocks, the Snow Queen, Dick Whittington). While focusing on a specific skill area (e.g. reading skill) in a lesson, other English skills (e.g. listening, speaking and writing skills) are taught integratively with the focused skill area. This method draws on the communicative view of language as language is acquired holistically rather than discretely (Brumfit, 1979, 2001; Littlewood, 1981; Widdowson, 1978). The medium of instruction in the new English class is English only. The rationale behind this is that students need more exposure to the target language in the process of second language acquisition (Ellis, 1985, 1994; Krashen, 1982; Skehan, 1996; Towell and Hawkins, 1994). For details of how the new English writing, listening and reading classes are run using the integrative-narrative method in the studies, please see Appendix 2.

### *Pre-conferences*

The new method requires a new set of teaching materials, which are: stories taken from classic children's literature with audiotapes/CD's, worksheets and the Teacher's Guide. The stories and audiotapes/CD's are easily available in the market, but the worksheets and the Teacher's guide are not because the tasks and activities are specially designed to address the objectives of the lessons as well as those of the studies. Therefore, I had to develop the worksheets and write the Teacher's Guide for the teachers' use. During the research period, every week about two days prior to my lesson observations I would hold a pre-conference with the teacher over the phone. We would discuss the suitability of the tasks and activities in the worksheets and make adaptations based on the teacher's knowledge of the students accordingly. We would also discuss the overall approach of the lesson, the English language teaching methods to be adopted and the procedures of the lesson as suggested in the Teacher's Guide. The discussion would not touch on the details of the interpretation of the contents of the story, the application of English language teaching methods and the integrative-narrative method, and the teaching strategies, techniques and

teaching aids used because these are the areas that the teachers should be encouraged to explore themselves.

### ***Post-conferences***

After each lesson observation I would hold a post-conference with the teacher immediately. I would give the teacher detailed feedback on the following aspects of the lesson: the teacher's motivation skills; teaching methods, strategies and techniques; students' interest and participation; interaction in the classroom; learning outcome (for details of the observation plan, please refer to Appendix 5). We would then discuss how teaching can be improved.

### ***Reflective journals***

During the research period the teachers were asked to write a reflective journal after each lesson trying out the new method. They were encouraged to reflect on different aspects of their teaching, for instance, whether the lesson was effectively run and well received by the students, what problems were encountered, how to resolve the problems, how to improve teaching and learning, etc.

## **FINDINGS**

Through trying out a new method of teaching English, the teachers have gradually developed the specific skills of teaching English. In fact, the changes have gone beyond the skill level. In their own reflections as evident in the teacher journals, the pre- and post-interviews and the post-lesson conferences, they all admit that action research enables them to gain some new insight about English Language Teaching (ELT) specifically, and about teaching and learning more generally. My lesson observations corroborate such claims. Each teaching unit is an action research cycle that covers a period of two weeks, during which the teacher and the researcher are involved in the planning of the lessons in the pre-conferences, the teacher has to carry out the teaching (action), and the researcher together with the teacher evaluates the

lessons in the post-conferences. The teacher's knowledge and skills are gradually strengthened throughout the repeated cycles. Below are the findings pertaining to the advantages of action research that the teachers have benefited from: i.e. enhanced knowledge in ELT, boost in confidence, improved teaching strategies and skills, and broadened mind.

### ***Teachers' enhanced knowledge in English Language Teaching***

In the pre-interviews, all three teachers admitted that they do not know much about the theories of English Language Teaching. Teacher B has heard of the term 'Communicative Language Teaching' but does not know much because she has just started her study in a Postgraduate Diploma in Education programme specializing in English Language Teaching. Teacher A and Teacher C, however, have never heard of the term 'Communicative Language Teaching' although they have had two and more than ten years' experience in teaching English, respectively. Their approach to English Language Teaching is rather traditional: i.e. English skills are taught separately. Their view is basically a structuralist one rather than a communicative one.

The teachers are not satisfied with the traditional approach to English Language Teaching. Teacher A says in the pre-interview, "I don't think students learn anything except passing tests and exams." This is echoed by Teacher C's criticism of excessive drilling in the pre-interview – "Most of the time the schedule is already tightly packed. There are lots of homework, exercises and worksheets." When asked in the pre-interviews what they can do to remedy the situation, Teacher A answers, "I want very much to change my teaching method, but how? I'm afraid I have no answer to this question ... Probably this is why I agreed to participate in your study. Somehow I want to try something new, something more challenging. I hope I can gain more knowledge about ELT through your study." Teacher B says, "I find your project very interesting. I think both the students and I will benefit from it. I really see

the need for professional development.” Teacher C, being the most experienced teacher among the three, sees the pressing need for changing the situation in her school. “We’ve been talking about using stories to teach English language in our school for several years, but this has never been put into practice. As a curriculum officer in my school, I’d like to bring some new methods to the school. Somehow I feel a bit inadequate because I’m not English major. I hope through participating in this research project I can improve my English teaching skills and better equip myself for the curriculum change in my school.”

In the first pre-conferences I explained to the teachers the concept of ‘Integrative-narrative method’ and how it can be applied to the teaching of different English skill areas. The teachers found it quite challenging to teach the story while incorporating the teaching of a specific skill (e.g. listening) on the one hand and on the other hand integrating the focused skill with other skills. One common problem with the teachers that I have pointed out repeatedly in the first few post-conferences based on my lesson observations is that they tend to focus on the specific skill only and ignore the importance of integrated skills. Moreover, we spent a lot of time in the post-conferences discussing how certain aspects of English language should be taught. For example, all three teachers (as well as many teachers in Hong Kong) have a misconception about vocabulary teaching. They believe using Chinese to explain the meaning of words is more direct and efficient. However, they do not realize the importance of the factor of exposure to the target language in the process of second language acquisition (Ellis, 1985, 1994; Krashen, 1982; Skehan, 1996; Towell & Hawkins, 1994) because their knowledge in ELT is insufficient. They were then encouraged to explore different ways to teach vocabulary other than explaining the meaning of words directly through either Chinese or English. They then came up with some interesting methods in other lessons: e.g. Teacher A used realia (i.e. real objects) and shows to students what a dry pea looks like; Teacher B performed the action

of ‘losing balance’ herself to the class, and also invited a student to come out to demonstrate the meaning of ‘hide’ by hiding himself behind the door; Teacher C showed the meaning of ‘greedy’ by referring to a character in a text that they have studied previously.

My lesson observations indicate that the students in these teachers’ classes enjoyed the stories tremendously. Some even requested their parents to buy them those stories that have been covered in class. Teachers A, B and C admitted in the post-conferences that they had never thought of using children’s literature to teach writing, listening and reading respectively, and that they did not realize the impact of stories on children. Except for a few, their students were on the whole not very interested in English lessons prior to the studies, just like many students in Hong Kong. But their interest in English language learning has been enhanced. The students of all three schools interviewed do not want to switch back to the textbook-only approach. The teachers have now experienced the importance of motivation in English language learning, a notion that I kept conveying to them throughout the pre- and post-conferences.

Above all, the teachers declared in the post-interviews that they have learnt more about ELT methodology through action. They now understand the true spirit of the Communicative Approach and have had a taste of it through their own lessons – Teacher A writes in the journal: “...I could never imagine writing can be taught in this way – the narrative-integrative approach is so lively and so imaginative! The students are very interested in the stories. I used to think writing is writing, listening is listening, and speaking is speaking. Now I know these skills can be integrated in the same lesson” (Journal A4, 22 October 2002). Teacher B writes, “I have learnt a lot in the listening research ... The integrative-narrative method of teaching listening is entirely new to me. ... I think the real challenge for a teacher in adopting this teaching method lies in three areas, i.e. teaching a lot of vocabulary, teaching various listening strategies and explaining the answers of some tricky questions ... It is a breakthrough in my teaching.... I think there are

few schools that teach listening skills in English....” (Journal B10, 30 April 2004). Teacher C writes, “I’ve been teaching in a rather traditional way, always focusing on the textbook only. I’ve learnt different English teaching approaches through this research. I’m happy I have a chance to use children literature in my reading lessons. Teaching students some micro reading skills such as scanning is very useful. Honestly I have never thought of teaching reading together with speaking, listening and writing...” (Journal C8, 23 May 2005). The teachers have also learnt that the Communicative Approach can be applied to all aspects of English Language Teaching, including those that are considered boring, for instance, grammar, pronunciation, dictation, vocabulary.

### ***Teachers’ boost in confidence and sense of satisfaction***

Confidence building is a valuable gain according to the teachers. As Teacher A has little training in ELT, she treasures the opportunity of supervision by an English professional and teacher educator. “It’s a real challenge to me to hear how an English professional from the university comments on how I teach English. I’ve never received such feedback in the past two years of teaching English,” she admits in the post-interview. Teacher B admits in the post-interview: “I used to panic when I suddenly didn’t know how to explain a new word in class. But now I think it’s OK checking the meaning of a word in a dictionary in front of the class when I have some doubt about its meaning.” Although Teacher C is an experienced teacher, she writes: “Sometimes I find it stressful to be observed in class. I’ve learnt to be open-minded and take different opinions. I see growth in myself” (Journal C3, 14 March 2005). In every post-lesson conference the teachers listened carefully to my comments, jotted down notes and discussed with me how certain aspects of their lessons can be improved. They all tried hard in the following lessons to improve those areas that I have pointed out. My lesson observations reveal that they have become more and more confident in implementing the narrative-integrative approach

to teaching English during the process of the studies.

Another gain is their confidence in English language use. In the traditional English class, English is used mixed with Chinese. The medium of instruction of the new English class was English only. The teachers then had more opportunities to use English in class and thus their English became more fluent than before as evident in my lesson observations. As a matter of fact, the teachers appreciated very much my pointing out some grammar and pronunciation errors that they make in the lessons.

The teachers expressed their dissatisfaction in the pre-interviews because they found the traditional English class mechanical and lacking in creativity. This view was echoed by the students in the post-interviews: e.g. “Oh we don’t want the old composition lesson. We want to listen to stories and then write our own endings. We can draw pictures in our stories. I love drawing very much” (SA2, 29 October 2002); “The listening class before was very easy but boring, only putting ticks here and there. Now we listen to stories. Some are quite difficult but very interesting. Sometimes I can’t catch some words but I will try to guess what they mean” (SB3, 2 April 2004); “I like the story class very much. It’s very interesting and stimulating. We don’t just read the stories. There are follow-up speaking activities also. It’s fun to role play and imagine myself being one of the characters. I particularly like ‘The Wizard of Oz’ – the most difficult story” (SC1, 23 June 2005).

Teacher A frankly admits that she could not get any sense of satisfaction out of the old writing class. But she is very pleased to find more and more hands up when she is helping students to comprehend the main points of the story through listening. “I’m amazed that they can think of such endings. Some drawings are so wonderful. Some are very shy when they present their endings but at least they dare to speak up in front of the whole class – something that they never dreamed of doing before” (Journal A3, 15 October 2002). Teacher A gets a sense of satisfaction from the students’ active participation and response: “The response

of the students this time is very good. They all participate in the group discussion. They enjoy discussing with their classmates. I did not realize until now that the element of interaction is so important in the English class ... I think both students and I enjoy this lesson tremendously” (Journal A3, 15 October 2002).

Teacher B has a great sense of satisfaction when her new strategies or techniques prove to be effective, for example, “It was the first time that I had used the ‘big book’ that I had made on ‘Sly fox and red hen’. I asked students to read it while listening to the story the third time. Most of them were attracted to it and became more attentive than before ... More than 10 students got the ‘excellent’ grade this time. They really performed much much better. I’m so pleased” (Journal B7, 13 February 2004). The students’ changing attitude towards English learning is beyond Teacher B’s expectation: “One day or two later, to my surprise, they joked with each other in English! They have never done that before. A fat boy called himself a king. A classmate said that the fat boy was a queen. Another boy said that the fat boy was a fat girl. I can see that the stories and the follow-up speaking activities did inspire them to communicate in English. How amazing!” (Journal B4, 12 December 2003).

For Teacher C, teaching stories is an exciting new experience. “I am happy that I have a chance to teach stories in my lessons. We do not have reader lessons in our school. I always spend all the time teaching the textbook only. The ‘funny reading’ is supposed to be the most interesting part in a unit, but it is actually not very funny. Students don’t really enjoy it. I’m glad to find that the students love the stories so much” (Journal C1, 28 February 2005). “For me, how to motivate students to learn English is the most important thing. I’ve taught English for a number of years and I find myself get stuck. Now we use this new method to teach reading integrated with listening, speaking and writing. When I see students apply the reading skills such as scanning and inference, and are able to finish reading a story within a very short time, I’m very impressed. From their responses in class

I can see that they’ve become more and more devoted to their English class. This is what I’ve been trying to achieve” (Post-interview of Teacher C, 23 June 2005).

### ***Teachers’ improved teaching strategies and techniques***

A further change in the teachers is their teaching strategies and techniques. In the old English class teaching is essentially one-way direct teaching. The traditional teaching materials, for instance, the sample composition, the listening tasks and the reading comprehension passages in the textbooks, are fairly easy so the teachers do not need too much effort to make the students understand the lessons. However, the children’s literature used in the new English class is much more complex and difficult in terms of the content and the language for the students. Therefore, in each post-lesson conference I would give the teachers a lot of input on various teaching strategies and techniques aimed at improving students’ motivation, classroom interaction and learning outcome, for example, questioning techniques, solicitation skills,<sup>9</sup> inference skills,<sup>10</sup> use of realia.<sup>11</sup> The teachers are encouraged to apply the strategies and techniques used in the field. The teachers have the following feedback: “Before, I thought the quickest way to explain the meaning of a new word to students is to give them the Chinese explanation. In our last post-observation conference ... [the researcher] enlightened me with some other ways. Today when I explain the word ‘lamp,’ I point at the lights in the classroom. The students immediately understand this word. We can really make use of the classroom environment to explain the meanings of words. I think I’ll try out some other ways next time” (Journal A3, 15 October 2002); “My skills of teaching English have improved. I have more interactions with the students than before because they now talk more in class. Now I’ve tried out different strategies such as using the realia, asking students to act out the meaning of the new word, making use of the classroom environment, etc.” (Post-interview of Teacher B, 2 April 2004).

The teachers are also encouraged to explore their own strategies and techniques. Teacher C says, “In the past I did not think deeply about my teaching because I thought I had already taught more than ten years. I used to talk most of the time. Now I realize the need to use more visual aids to help students to grasp the meaning of the text” (Journal C8, 23 May 2005). Teacher C complains that her students are afraid to speak up and no one is willing to present the stories. We have worked out some possible ways to encourage the students to share their ideas, e.g. inviting the whole group to come out instead of only one person, encouraging them to recite the story together, etc. In a post-conference Teacher A sought my advice on how to sustain the interest of students in writing stories because she finds that students are getting bored after writing three stories. She then tried out a new ‘trick’ – i.e. asking students to draw out the story and write some captions for each drawing. The students’ interest was re-kindled. Likewise, Teacher B has thought of other ‘tricks’ to sustain the interest of her class, e.g. giving out some small gifts, organizing some competitions, etc.

### *Teachers’ broadened mind*

Despite the short time frame of the case studies, which ranged from two months to five months each, the teachers involved claim that their horizon has been broadened in three ways. First, they now have a much broader and more in-depth perspective of viewing English language teaching and learning, as reported above. Second, they see the need of re-examining their view of the status of teacher in the classroom. In my lesson observations I found that all three teachers always uphold their image of a teacher. When the class gets a bit noisy (actually they are not really very noisy by my standard), the teacher stares at them or even scolds a few students quite loudly. Then the class becomes absolutely quiet. I asked the teachers in the post-conferences whether it is necessary to handle the class in such manner. Teacher A answers, “You know, the principal patrols at least once a day in the corridors.” “Primary students easily get out of control if you don’t discipline them,” echoes

Teacher B. Teacher C says, “If my class is noisy, they will disturb the classes next door. So there is a risk in letting students play games in the English class.” To the best of my knowledge about the school culture in Hong Kong, indeed the teachers would be in trouble if the students are too noisy because the principals normally take this as a sign of poor classroom management rather than active participation of students in an interactive English class. The teacher being perceived as the authority is part of the Chinese culture and this value is not likely to be changed within a short period of time, especially when it involves the appraisal of the teachers by the principals. Anyway, these teachers are alerted and have begun to realize there are other ways to handle noise in the classroom, and exerting the teacher’s authority is not necessarily the best way.

Third, they have learnt to view teaching and learning more from the perspective of the students, i.e. more student-centredness. That is why they kept modifying their ways of teaching during the process of the studies based on the needs of the students identified in the post-conferences. Fortunately, the flexible nature of action research renders the changes possible. For example, after five or six lessons, Teacher B found that she needs to change the way of doing the third listening because the students seemed to be bored after having heard the same story twice. After some discussion with the researcher in the post-conference, Teacher B decided to let the students read the story while doing the third listening, so she needed to spend some time making the big books. The students tell me in the post-interviews that they enjoy listening and reading the stories at the same time because in the first and second listening they have to struggle hard in order to grasp the main ideas of the story. Likewise, after two lessons Teacher A found that “The students are rather quiet in the first part of each lesson ... most of them don’t know how to answer my questions. Even after I’ve given them some hints, they still don’t know the points that I want them to know and understand. ...” (Journal A2, 17 September 2002). In the post-conference the researcher

makes Teacher A realize that the crux of the problem lies with the type of questions asked – they’re so minor and local that the students will not find interest in. More global and important questions should be asked at the initial stage. The purpose is to see whether the students understand the gist of the story, not the details. Teacher A, therefore, needs to adjust the type and level of her questions. Furthermore, Teacher B has detected some problem in her way of providing feedback: “I also found that today the class didn’t pay much attention to my explanation after I had told them the right answers. Most of them were only concerned about whether they got the correct answers” (Journal B2, 28 November 2003). In the post-conference the researcher suggested reversing the order so as to engage the students more in getting the answers. Teacher B writes in her journal: “Next time I will not tell them the answers at once. I will try to analyse all possible answers with them first. Then I will help them to find out the right answers by themselves in the very last minute” (Journal B2, 28 November 2003). In addition, when Teacher C reflected on the quality of students’ output after eight lessons, she seems quite satisfied: “Different groups present different ways of solving the problem after the group discussion today. Their solutions look fine, e.g. Group 1 suggests buying more cats to kill the rats, Group 2 suggests putting a mouse trap at the door” (Journal C8, 23 May 2005). In the post-conference the researcher challenges her with the following questions: Are the students’ suggested solutions really interesting? Or too banal? Why are the other groups so quiet and not very enthusiastic when they listen to the presentations? Teacher C agrees and says, “Next time I should free students’ minds and encourage them to use more imagination and think of some ‘creative’ solutions.”

## DISCUSSION

### *Action research and teacher development*

Let us now revisit the research questions of the study in reverse order. The two specific research

questions are: How do three primary school non-subject trained English teachers grow professionally and change their methodology in teaching English through action research? Is it possible to employ action research as a means of professional development? The general research question is: How can we support the professional development of non-subject trained English teachers apart from the formal channel of pursuing a Dip Ed/PGDE?

The findings above indicate that the teachers involved in the studies have experienced some changes pertaining to their enhanced knowledge in English Language teaching, the boost in their confidence and sense of satisfaction, their improved teaching strategies and techniques, and their broadened mind. Their professional growth is realized through participation in an action research project undertaken by a teacher education professional and researcher. Due to their limited training, the teachers had little knowledge about ELT methodology before the studies. Teacher A and Teacher C had not even heard of the term ‘Communicative Language Teaching’ – an approach that has been in use in the field for three decades (Brumfit, 1979, 2001; Littlewood, 1981; Widdowson, 1978). However, through engaging in actual teaching, getting feedback from the teacher education professional in the pre- and post-lesson observation conferences, responding to the feedback and reflecting on own teaching through teachers’ reflective journals, the teachers gradually realized the importance of the following components in English language teaching: interaction between the teacher and students, and among students; the natural sequence of language acquisition - listening, speaking, reading and writing; speaking as an indispensable component in every English lesson; an integrative skills approach rather than a separate skills approach; the use of a variety of activities and language arts. The most important gain of all is awareness of the importance of student needs in learning, i.e. making teaching more student-centred. All these are, in fact, major attributes of Communicative Language Teaching (Brumfit, 1979, 2001; Littlewood, 1981;

Widdowson, 1978). So the teachers have learned the current English teaching methodology through different action research cycles – planning, action and evaluation of the action result (Carr & Kemmis, 1986; Edwards & Brunton, 1993; Kember, 2000; Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988; Lewin, 1946) – rather than through formal training or mere experience in teaching. The action research cycles refer to the ten 2-week lesson cycles, during which the teacher and the researcher plan the lessons in the pre-conferences, the teacher undertakes the lessons, and the teacher and the researcher evaluate the lessons in the post-conferences. Obviously one does accumulate experience and learn on the job as what the teachers said in the pre-interviews, but mere teaching without guidance and reflection will not lend itself to a higher level of professional development.

Action research provides a framework for teacher development (Ashcroft & Griffiths, 1991; Smylie, Bay & Tozer, 1999; Zuber-Skerritt, 1991), which follows a cyclical path – i.e. planning, action, evaluation, re-planning, further action, further evaluation and the like. I argue that reflection and mediator guidance are the two key elements in the process of cyclical development of a teacher, be s/he a pre-service or in-service teacher, within the action research framework. Reflection has been widely commended as “an intrinsically good and desirable aspect of teaching and teacher education” (Calderhead & Gates, 1993, p. 1). One espoused aim of reflection is “to enable teachers to analyze, discuss, evaluate and change their own practice, adopting an analytical approach towards teaching” (Calderhead & Gates, 1993, p. 2). Reflection involves not only technical skills, but also attitudes, beliefs and values (Calderhead & Gates, 1993; Proctor, 1993; Quicke, 1998). Proctor (1993) advocates the ongoing nature of reflection, which should include reflection during the entire process of teaching. In the light of action research, reflection takes place before, during and after each cycle of action. The teachers in the present studies remain very alert and are constantly required to examine their own teaching through a number of mechanisms, such as the pre-interviews, the pre-

and post-lesson observation conferences, the teacher journals and the post-interviews. For each case after each lesson (cycle), the teacher had to adjust her planning and prepare for the next cycle of action in the following lesson, i.e. to repeat the cycle of applying the integrative-narrative method after getting feedback from the researcher and teacher educator. The outcome of the teachers’ ongoing reflection throughout the cyclical process of action research is four-fold, viz. the teachers’ enhanced knowledge in English Language Teaching, boost in confidence and sense of satisfaction, improved teaching strategies and techniques, and the broadened mind. On the other hand, from the point of view of my entire research around the theme of integrative-narrative method, there are three cases (cycles), each involving the professional development of one teacher.

Mediator guidance is a related key element in teacher development. It refers to the support provided for the teacher by a supervisor or mentor. As mentioned above, reflection is crucial in the cyclical process of teacher development. Edwards and Brunton (1993) argue that “Reflection on practice has to be more than solitary activity if learning is to occur” (p. 158). In other words teachers should not be left alone doing their self-reflection and self-evaluation. They need the support of the teacher education professionals or supervisors, just as the students need the support of their teachers in the forms of guided participation, scaffolding and apprenticeships when they attempt tasks within their Zone of Proximal Development – the methods suggested in the learning theory of Vygotsky (Vygotsky, 1978). In the present cases of three primary school teachers, they do not have any formal training in either the discipline of English linguistics or TESL (Teaching English as a Second Language). Requesting them to do reflection on teaching in the absence of support will not render much fruitful yield. It is in this context that my role as a supervisor is important (Edwards & Brunton, 1993; Griffin, 1999; Proctor, 1993). Formally they are not my students and as a matter of fact I did not know any of them before the research. However, they all treated me as their

mentor during the research. Throughout the entire process of the study, I have given them feedback and suggestions pertaining to English teaching methodology, teaching strategies and techniques and the roles of teacher and students in the classroom during the pre- and post-lesson conferences. Their prompt reaction after the informed reflection enables them to proceed, develop and reach a higher plateau in the cycles of action research.

Hence the answer to the two specific research questions of the present study is thus: It is possible to employ action research as a means of professional development for a non-subject trained English teacher with the support of an English teacher education professional. Although the results of case studies are not meant for generalization, the three teachers who participated in my studies have benefited from the action research in the following respects: the teachers' enhanced knowledge in English Language Teaching, boost in confidence and sense of satisfaction, improved teaching strategies and techniques, and the broadened mind.

### ***A way out for the English teaching force in Hong Kong***

The general research question – ‘How can we support the professional development of non-subject trained English teachers apart from the formal channel of pursuing a Dip Ed/PGDE?’ - is framed based on the research problem of the insufficient number of subject trained English teachers in the teaching force in Hong Kong. The phenomenon of having vast numbers of non-professionally trained English teachers runs counter to the current global trend of education reform, in which teachers are inevitably assigned the role of agents of student change, curriculum change and school change (Smylie et al., 1999). Traditional teachers, according to Bartlett and Burton (2003), are hardworking and conscientious practitioners who care about their students, but they are ‘restricted professionals’ who are “basically concerned with the practical and not with theoretical aspects of their profession” (p. 108).

Modern teachers, however, are ‘extended professionals,’ who constantly seek to link theory to practice through engaging in research and learning from others. In this time of rapid changes and knowledge explosion, teachers need to enhance their professionalism in all senses of this term including knowledge and teaching methodology in their own fields, communication skills, reflexivity, awareness of various forces at play in both the smaller environment (i.e. the school, the education sector involving the participation of stake-holders) and the wider environment (i.e. the society, the world), and capability of linking theories to practice. It is, therefore, imminent to upgrade the teaching force of Hong Kong in general, and in particular the English teachers, approximately 80% of whom are non-subject trained (SCOLAR, 2003).

The findings reported above suggest that action research under the supervision of an English professional can be a viable means to supporting the professional development of non-subject trained English teachers (Bartlett & Burton, 2003; Edwards & Brunton, 1993; Griffin, 1999; Proctor, 1993; Smylie et al., 1999; Winch & Foreman-Peck, 2000). However, there are envisaged problems encountered by teachers and staff on the use of action research as a means of professional development. First of all, if it is done on a large scale, it will be costly to have each school English teacher attached to a university staff to supervise them to try out alternative methods of teaching English. Supervision is labour intensive, and it is impossible to find sufficient teacher educators at universities to supervise all English teachers in Hong Kong. A further problem lies with the nature of action research, which involves the cycles of planning, action and evaluation. It is time consuming to undertake such processes. Besides, it will add further burden on English teachers, who are already overloaded. Therefore, it is recommended to incorporate action research into the existing programmes/projects.

Where might we solicit supervision for the teachers apart from enrolling them in the Dip Ed/PGDE courses? The following are some possible avenues in the context of Hong Kong:

- The Education Bureau and some teacher education providers offer refresher courses for in-service teachers. Action research can be built in such courses, and the instructors can serve as supervisors (for details of the courses, see the homepages of the Education and Manpower Bureau, the Hong Kong Institute of Education, the Faculty of Education of the University of Hong Kong, the Faculty of Education of the Chinese University of Hong Kong and the Department of Education Studies of Hong Kong Baptist University).
- The Curriculum Development Institute of the Education Bureau provide funding for school teachers to try out new methods or materials in the SEED Projects. The English subject specialists of the Curriculum Development Institute can serve as supervisors (for details of the SEED projects, see the homepage of the Curriculum Development Institute of the Education Bureau).
- The Education Bureau is implementing the policy of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) for teachers. Action research can be built in such courses, and the instructors can serve as supervisors (for details of CPD, see the homepage of the Education Bureau).
- There are a number of university-school partnership projects funded by the Research Grants Council (RGC) and the Quality Education Fund (QEF). The English subject specialists of the university can serve as supervisors (for details of the RGC and QEF projects, see the homepages of the RGC and QEF).
- The English panel chair or the experienced English teacher can supervise the novice teachers in the school.

## CONCLUSION

In this paper I have reported the professional growth of three primary school English language

teachers in Hong Kong who took part in a series of action research projects undertaken by me. Prior to the studies the teachers did not have much knowledge about English Language Teaching owing to their non-English subject trained background. After the studies, they gained more knowledge about Communicative Language Teaching in the context of teaching various English skills (i.e. writing, listening and reading) using a narrative-integrative approach. They also built up their confidence in teaching English, improved their teaching strategies and techniques, and broadened their mind. Although the findings of these qualitative case studies cannot be generalized, the implication is that action research supervised by an English professional can be an effective means of teacher development apart from formal teacher education. As a vast majority of English teachers are non-English subject trained, it is suggested to adopt guided action research to promote teacher development with a view to enhancing the quality of the English teaching force in Hong Kong. This is in line with the current education reform and the new concept of teacher education, which is no longer seen as a one-off and static training activity, but an ongoing process throughout the life span of a teacher.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to the participants of these studies, and particularly the teachers, without whose support the studies would not have been possible.

Thanks are also due to my colleague, Dr. Arthur McNeill, for his valuable comments on the manuscript.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The Education Department and the Education and Manpower Bureau of Hong Kong were merged in January 2003. The Education and Manpower Bureau was re-named as the Education Bureau in July 2007.

<sup>2</sup> The survey was conducted in 2001. With the current rate of output of 'subject trained' English language teachers, the percentage of 'non-subject trained' English language teachers should be smaller, but there is no official figure.

<sup>3</sup> This deviates from the normal practice in more developed countries, which require all teachers to be professionally trained before they commence teaching. Starting September 2004 all new English teachers in Hong Kong are required to obtain relevant teaching qualifications plus passing the English benchmark either by exemption or by taking the Language Proficiency Attainment Test (LPAT) prior to joining the profession. As for other subjects, a deadline is yet to be set.

<sup>4</sup> Prominent leading figures from different professions have commented on the declining English standards of Hong Kong people, e.g. the former Chief Secretary for Administration, Anson Chan (The Standard, 26 January, 2005); Michael Tien, a businessman and Chairperson of the Standing Committee On Language Education and Research (South China Morning Post, 29 February 2000); Eden Woon, Hong Kong General Chamber of Commerce Director (South China Morning Post, 29 February 2000); Yam Yee Kwan, a judge of the Supreme Court (South China Morning Post, 21 June 2001).

<sup>5</sup> It was against this background that the Education and Manpower Bureau encouraged teachers to take diploma courses in English subject knowledge (e.g. grammar, phonetics and phonology, lexis) (Education and Manpower Bureau circular, March 2004).

<sup>6</sup> Although only a number of lessons have been observed by the researcher, the teachers have been encouraged to use the integrative-narrative method in other English lessons both during and after the research.

<sup>7</sup> Schools used to be categorised into five bands. Starting the academic year 2001 – 02, the number of categories of schools has been reduced to three, Band 1 being the top school, and Band 3 being the bottom in the region.

<sup>8</sup> The suburban area.

<sup>9</sup> The skills used to solicit more or better answers/responses from students, e.g. by asking students to elaborate on what they have said through exemplification, provision of further details, etc.

<sup>10</sup> This is an important skill in the teaching of listening and reading. Students are taught how to make sensible guesses through some contextual clues, e.g. the meaning of words, the relationship of the characters, and the attitude of the speaker / author.

<sup>11</sup> 'Realia' means the use of 'real objects' in English language teaching, e.g. bringing some fruit to class to demonstrate the taste of different kinds of fruit.

## REFERENCES

- Ashcroft, K., & Griffiths, M. (1991). Action research in teacher education. In O. Zuber-Skerritt (Ed.), *Action research for change and development* (pp. 139-156). Avebury, UK.: Gower Publishing Company.
- Barlett, S., & Burton, D. (2003). The professional development of teachers through practitioner research: A discussion using significant cases of Best Practice Research scholarships. *Teacher Development*, 7 (1), 107-120.
- Brumfit, C. J. (1979). 'Communicative' language teaching: An educational perspective. In C.J. Brumfit & K. Johnson (Eds.), *The communicative approach to language teaching* (pp.183-191). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Brumfit, C. J. (2001). *Individual freedom in language teaching: Helping learners to develop a dialect of their own*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Calderhead, J., & Gates, P. (1993). Introduction. In J. Calderhead & P. Gates (Eds.), *Conceptualizing reflection in teacher development* (pp. 1-10). London: The Falmer Press.
- Carr, W., & Kemmis, S. (1986). *Becoming critical: Education, knowledge and action research*. Brighton, Sussex: The Falmer Press.
- Education Commission (1994). *Report of the working group on language proficiency*. Hong Kong: Government Printer.
- Education Commission (1995). *Education Commission report No. 6 (Draft)*. Hong Kong: Government Printer.

- Education Commission (1996). *Education Commission report No. 6*. Hong Kong: Government Printer.
- Education and Manpower Bureau of Hong Kong (2004). EMB circular memo, no. 54/2004.
- Edwards, A., & Brunton, D. (1993). Supporting reflection in teachers' learning. In J. Calderhead & P. Gates (Eds.), *Conceptualizing reflection in teacher development* (pp. 154-166). London: The Falmer Press.
- Elliott, J. (1978). What is action research in schools? *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 10, 355-357.
- Elliott, J. (1993). Introduction. In J. Elliott (Ed.), *Reconstructing teacher education: Teacher development* (pp. 1-12). London: The Falmer Press.
- Ellis, R. (1985). *Understanding second language acquisition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Ellis, R. (1994). *The study of second language acquisition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Griffin, G.A. (1999). Changes on teacher education: Looking to the future. In G.A. Griffin (Ed.), *The education of teachers: Ninety-eighth yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education* (pp. 1-17). Chicago: The National Society for the Study of Education.
- Grimmett, P.P. & Neufeld, J. (1994). (Eds.). *Teacher development and the struggle for authenticity: Professional growth and restructuring in the context of change*. New York: Teachers College, Columbia University.
- Hargreaves, D.H. (1993). A common sense-sense model of the professional development of teachers. In J. Elliott (Ed.), *Reconstructing teacher education: Teacher development* (pp. 86-92). London: The Falmer Press.
- Kember, D. (2000). *Action learning and action research: Improving the quality of teaching & learning*. London: Kogan Page.
- Kemmis, S., & McTaggart, R. (Eds.) (1988). *The action research Planner*. Melbourne, Australia: Deakin University Press.
- Krashen, S. (1982). *Principles and practices in second language acquisition*. Oxford: Pergamon.
- Lewin, K. (1946). Action research and minor problems. *Journal of Social Issues*, 2, 34-46.
- Littlewood, W. (1981). *Communicative language teaching: An introduction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Nunan, D. (1990). Action research in the language classroom. In J. C. Richards & D. Nunan (Eds.), *Second language teacher education* (pp. 62-81). New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Proctor, K.A. (1993). Tutors' professional knowledge of supervision and the implications for supervision practice. In J. Calderhead & P. Gates (Eds.), *Conceptualizing reflection in teacher development* (pp. 93-112). London: The Falmer Press.
- Richards, J. C., & Lockhart, C. (1996). *Reflecting teaching in second language classroom*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Quicke, J. (1998). Towards a new professionalism for 'New Times': Some problems and possibilities. *Teacher Development*, 2 (3), 323-338.
- SCOLAR (2003). *Action plan to raise language standards in Hong Kong*. Hong Kong: SCOLAR, Education and Manpower Bureau.
- Skehan, P. (1996). Second language acquisition research and task-based instruction. In Willis, J. & Willis, D. (Eds.), *Challenge and change in language teaching* (pp.17-30).. Oxford: Heinemann.
- Smylie, M.A., Bay, M. & Tozer, S.E. (1999). Preparing teachers as agents of change. In G.A. Griffin (Ed.), *The education of teachers: Ninety-eighth yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education* (pp. 18-62). Chicago: The National Society for the Study of Education.
- Towell, R., & Hawkins, R. (1994). *Approaches to second language acquisition*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Van Manen, M. (1984). *Action research as a theory of the unique: From pedagogic thoughtfulness to pedagogic tactfulness*. Paper presented at the American Educational Research Association Conference, New Orleans, Louisiana.

- Vygotsky, L.S. (1978). *Minds in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Widdowson, H. G. (1978). *Teaching language as communication*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Winch, C., & Foreman-Peck, L. (2000). Teacher professionalism, educational aims and action research: The evolution of policy in the United Kingdom. *Teacher Development*, 4 (2), 165-176.
- Zuber-Skerritt, O. (1991). Action research as a model of professional development. In O. Zuber-Skerritt (Ed.), *Action research for change and development* (pp. 112-135). Avebury, UK.: Gower Publishing Company.

## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1.

#### Pre-interview with the teacher

1. How do you usually teach writing?
2. Is this the standard approach adopted by other English teachers in your school?
3. Is writing taught as a separate skill in the English curriculum of your school?
4. What do you think of the idea of using narratives to teach writing in primary school?
5. What made you agree to participate in this study?
6. What outcome do you anticipate upon completion of the study?
7. What is your view of ELT?

### Appendix 2.

#### Pre-interviews with the students

1. Do you get support from the family regarding English learning?
2. Do you like the English subject?
3. How was writing taught last year?
4. How was English taught last year?

5. How was writing taught in P.1-3?
6. Do you like stories? Do you want to learn writing through stories?
7. Do you think writing should be learnt through listening, speaking and writing?
8. Do you think you can learn English through English only? Do you think there will be any difficulty?

### Appendix 3.

#### Post-interview with the teacher

1. What do you think is the outcome of this study?
2. Do you think you have achieved what you anticipated in the pre-interview?
3. What problems/difficulties did you encounter throughout the study?
4. Is the use of narratives feasible in your class? How about applying it to other classes? What are the greatest advantages of this approach?
5. Is the use of integrative method feasible in your class? How about applying it to other classes? What are the greatest advantages of this method?
6. Will you recommend the narrative method to other colleagues?
7. Will you recommend the integrative method to other colleagues?
8. Have you changed (or modified) your view of ELT?

### Appendix 4.

#### Post-interviews with the students

1. Did you enjoy the writing class? Why?
2. How do you compare the writing class like this with what you had before? Which one do you like best?
3. What do you think of the use of stories to learn English?
4. What do you think of using listening, speaking and writing to learn writing? Is it more effective than having writing only in the class?
5. What problems/difficulties did you encounter in this writing class?

6. Would you like to shift back to the writing only method?
7. Are you now more interested in English learning?

### **Appendix 5.** **Observation plan**

1. The teacher able to help students to comprehend the story? Questioning techniques? Solicitation skills? Provision of vocabulary and sentence patterns?
2. The teacher able to solicit ideas from students about the ending of the story? Responding to student initiatives? Stretching students' imagination? Helping students to express in English?
3. The teacher able to arouse students' interest in the lesson? Motivation skills?
4. Teaching methods? Communicative? Integrative? Innovative? Inductive or deductive? Able to strike a balance between accuracy and fluency?
5. The teacher's ability to communicate?
6. Students' response? Willing to participate? Interested? English proficiency? Confidence in using English?
7. Interaction? Between the teacher and class? Between the teacher and students? Between students?
8. Students' written work? Interesting? Imaginative? Accurate?

### **Appendix 6.** **Samples of teacher journals**

#### *Journal 2 (17 September 2004)*

This is the second lesson that I've been observed. Today I face the technical problem again, this time even worse than last time. The computer doesn't work!!! I ask our lab technician to help me and he has spent quite a lot of time on it. Luckily it's finally fixed.

The students are rather quiet in the first part of the lesson. When I ask them some questions after they've listened to the story twice, most of them don't know how to answer my questions. Even after I've given them some hints, they still don't know the points that I want them to know and understand. Dr. Poon told me after the lesson that the problem lies with those questions that I ask – they're too minor and detailed. I should ask them more global and important questions next time. The purpose is to see whether they understand the gist of the story, not the details. Actually I've spent quite some time preparing those questions before the lesson, but I did not realize detailed and minor questions should not be asked at this comprehension stage. Maybe at a later stage.

As Dr. Poon said last time, there wasn't enough interaction among the students. The students only listened to me and answered my questions. They wrote their own endings individually. Today I've tried to group them together and let them do group discussion. Students seem to enjoy group work more, so I think I will keep on using this next time. Why didn't I think of this before? But one thing is not very good. They talk very loudly and they're getting more and more excited when they do the group work. I'm afraid they may affect the other classes. What's worse, if the principal sees this, what will he think?

I think I still spend too much time on helping students to understand the story 'Peter Pan'. Dr. Poon commented on this last time. I must try to spend more time on the writing part because this is supposed to be a writing class. Students need more time to discuss and share their ideas, and also to write out the ending. I also need to draw their attention to the language used, not just the ideas.

#### *Journal 3 (15 October 2004)*

My planning in this lesson is much better than before. I've tried to shorten the first part on comprehension so that students can have more time for discussion and writing. I think I will keep this up next time.

I continue to let students work in groups. They seem to have lots to discuss with their classmates. Again, they're getting noisier and noisier. I have to stop them from time to time. I'm really afraid that they may be out of control. Then I'll be in trouble.

In our conversation after the last lesson, Dr. Poon said I could use some other ways to arouse students' interest in the composition lesson, for example, asking them to draw pictures, to role play the ending, etc. I've decided to try asking them to draw some pictures when they write the ending. I'm amazed that they can think of such endings. Some drawings are so wonderful. Some are very shy when they present their endings but at least they dare to speak up in front of the whole class – something that they never dreamed of doing before.

Another thing that I've tried out today is about explaining the meanings of words. Before I thought the quickest way to explain the meaning of a new

word to students is to give them the Chinese explanation. In our last post-observation conference Dr. Poon enlightened me with some other ways. Today when I explain the word 'lamp', I point at the lights in the classroom. The students immediately understand this word. We can really make use of the classroom environment to explain the meanings of words. I think I'll try out some other ways next time.

On the whole I'm quite pleased with this lesson. The response of the students this time is very good. They all participate in the group discussion. They enjoy discussing with their classmates. I did not realize until now that the element of interaction is so important in the English class. No wonder every time when I discuss with Dr. Poon, she encourages me to have more interaction with the students, and let students interact more among themselves. I think both students and I enjoy this lesson tremendously.