Experiential Teacher Education – Preparing Preservice Teachers to Teach English Grammar through an Experiential Learning Project

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Abstract: The paper explores and describes the kinds of learning attained by a group of Hong Kong preservice teachers who worked collaboratively to develop online grammar teaching resources for school teachers worldwide. Based on the quantitative and qualitative data collected during the ongoing collaboration, lesson tryouts, and post-project evaluation, the project results reflect the value of experiential learning in preservice teacher education. The themes that detail the student teachers' experiences include textbook evaluation, professional knowledge, core competencies of teachers, and understanding of English language teaching outside the Hong Kong context.

Introduction

Second/foreign language education is characterized by the interlocking relationships between contexts, learners and teachers (Çapan, 2014). The present paper focuses on the teacher factor. Previous studies report that grammar teaching has been a problematic domain for language teachers and many of them still follow transmission-based, focus-on-forms approaches despite worldwide curriculum innovations through meaning-focused communicative approaches in recent decades (Çapan, 2014; Uysal & Bardakci, 2014). Wasserman (2009) argues that "business as usual" pedagogies, by which beginning teachers continue to employ traditional methods of teaching, will be perpetuated if the training they receive fails to help them think differently about literacy development. There are widely held views that teachers' beliefs affect their perception and judgement, and play a major role in shaping their classroom practices and curriculum innovation (e.g., Çapan, 2014; Johnson, 1994). Consequently, recent efforts to improve teacher education have focused on changing prospective teachers' beliefs and improving their learning process through experiential learning.

Experiential learning is based on what Dewey (1938) called a "theory of experience", which has long been used for teaching practicums in teacher education programs. Novice teachers reflect on their need for more field-based experiences to enhance classroom practices (Smeaton & Waters, 2013). This study attempts to address prospective teachers' need for better grammar instruction preparation. The community project described in this paper aimed to provide an avenue through which prospective teachers could develop pedagogical grammar knowledge and skills for more effective teacher-student interactions. The study was an attempt to examine how the experiential learning cycle that the student teachers undertook facilitated their understanding of grammar pedagogy.

Experiential Education

Based on the work of influential scholars who gave "experience" a key role in their theories of human learning and development (e.g. John Dewey, Carl Jung, Jean Piaget, Carl Rogers), Kolb (1984) developed experiential learning theory, highlighting that learning is a process whereby knowledge is created through the combination of grasping and transforming experience. According to Kolb, learning is a four-stage cyclic learning process, with two dialectically related modes of grasping experience – Concrete Experience and Abstract Conceptualization – and two dialectically related modes of transforming experience – Reflective Observation and Active Experimentation (see Figure 1). A learner can start from any stage but the sequence of the stages remains the same. The transfer of learning via experience is the key element in this model.
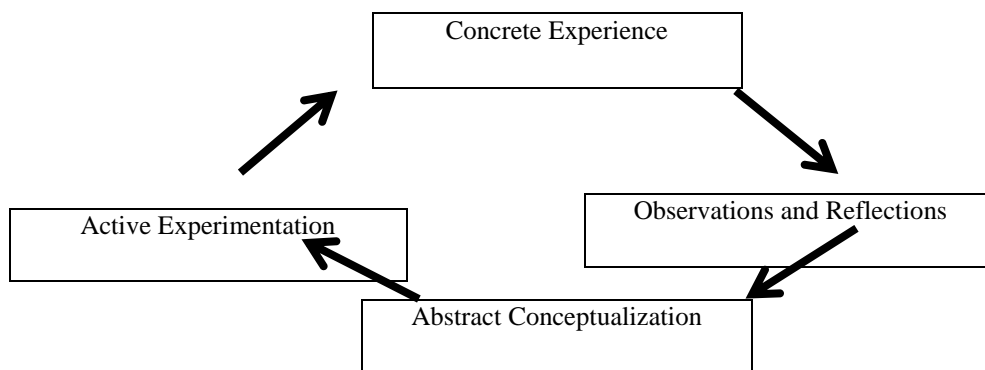
Figure 1: Kolb's experiential learning cycle

The cycle of experiencing, reflecting, thinking and acting is recursive. At the stage of "Concrete Experience" (experiencing/doing), learners participate in learning activities and get hands-on experience on problem-solving tasks. At the stage of 'Reflection", learners observe others' behaviours and reflect on their learning activities. They then assimilate and distill their reflections into abstract concepts at the stage of "Abstract Conceptualisation", and apply them for "Active Experimentation" in later occasions. Kolb's experiential learning theory model is based on six propositions (Kolb & Kolb, 2005, p. 194):

1.   Learning is best conceived as a process that includes feedback on the effectiveness of learning efforts, not in terms of outcomes.
2.   All learning is relearning, facilitated by a process that examines and tests learners' preexisting beliefs and ideas, which are then modified and integrated with new, more refined ideas.
3.   Learning requires the resolution of conflicts between dialectically opposed modes of adaption to the world (reflection and action, and feeling and thinking). Conflicts, differences and resolutions drive the learning process.
4.   Learning is a holistic process of adaptation to the world, involving the integrated functioning of the total person: thinking, feeling, perceiving and behaving.
5.   Learning results from synergetic transactions between the person and the environment, i.e., through equilibration of the dialectic processes of assimilating new experiences into existing concepts and accommodating existing concepts to new experience.
6.   Learning is a process of creating knowledge, which is in contrast to the "transmission"

model, whereby preexisting fixed ideas are transmitted to the learner.

Experiential learning that combines community service and academic instruction within teacher education can enrich student teachers' hands-on experience in an area that is beyond their comfort zone (Colby, Bercaw, Clark & Galiardi, 2009). Previous studies have reported that involvement in experiential learning can impact positively on the development of preservice teachers personally, academically, professionally and culturally (e.g., Chambers & Lavery, 2012; Colby, et al., 2009; Hallman & Burdick, 2011; Kaye, 2004; Lasen, Tomas & Hill, 2015; Pittman & Dorel, 2014; Russell-Bowie, 2013; Slavkin, 2002). Russell-Bowie's (2013) study of music education students suggested that discipline-specific experiential learning can advance prospective teachers' subject knowledge and subject-specific pedagogy.

The present study aims to explore the potential benefits of experiential learning on grammar teaching, an area that merits particular attention and investigation in view of the long-standing challenges and problems plaguing grammar instruction (Celce-Murcia, 2016; Ellis, 2002, 2006; Lee, 2003; Lee & Collins, 2009; Nunan 2005; Thornbury, 1999; Wong, Wong, & Tang, 2010/11).

Grammar Instruction

Previous studies on teacher beliefs and grammar instruction have found that while most English language teachers recognise the importance of grammar teaching and learning (Borg, 2001; Borg & Burns, 2008), many of them admit to having insufficient grammatical awareness and skills to impart grammatical knowledge effectively to learners (Brinton & Holten, 2001; Gordon & Harshbarger, 2003; Petraki & Hill, 2011). For example, in Petraki and Hill's (2011) study of 72 ESL and EFL teachers, 47% acknowledged their lack of confidence in teaching grammar. The factors responsible were: (1) lack of subject matter knowledge, which involves an inadequate understanding of sentence level grammar; (2) lack of pedagogical content knowledge, which includes awareness of various grammar teaching skills, an understanding of the role of grammar in context, appropriate use of teaching materials, effective classroom preparation, and continuous learning and reflection; and (3) individual and contextual characteristics, which include the participants' interest in analysing language, teaching experience and knowledge of a second language.

Grammar instruction has been a controversial issue, with long-standing debates on whether and how it should be taught. In the 1980s it was Stephen Krashen (1981) who dominated the debate over grammar teaching. According to his "input hypothesis", language acquisition requires the provision of comprehensible input in low anxiety situations with meaningful interaction in the target language, and therefore language acquisition does not require extensive learning of grammatical rules. One consequence of abandoning grammar teaching at that time is the presence of a number of English language teachers nowadays who have no or little knowledge of English grammar and do not demonstrate an ability to teach grammar effectively (Payton, 2013). This problem has become particularly noticeable when grammar is back in recent years, with the wide acknowledgement that grammar plays an important role in the development of ESL / EFL learners' language accuracy for effective communication (Hadjioannou & Hutchinson, 2010; Jean & Simard, 2011; Liu & Master, 2003).

Without adequate training in grammar instruction, many teachers are inclined to adopt a didactic, teacher-centred approach, and to emphasize form over meaning through mechanical

drills at the sentence level (Borg, 2001; Grossman, Wilson, & Shulman, 1989; Shulman, 1987). One possible reason for their adoption of this traditional approach is that it often provides a "safe" teaching environment because it emphasizes contrived student responses that are homogenous and predictable (by contrast with the student-centred communicative approach, which encourages spontaneous student responses that could lead teachers into "unknown territory" (Grossman, Wilson, & Shulman, 1989, p. 28). Another plausible reason is that many of the grammar practice books that school teachers rely on still adopt the traditional approach, emphasising the deductive explanations of grammar rules, and application of the rules in disconnected exercises and drills rather than in purposeful communication (Lee & Collins, 2009). This conventional focus-on-forms approach has been criticized for demotivating students and failing to help learners develop communication skills. Grammar instruction is often perceived by both students and teachers as "oh so boring" (Jean & Simard, 2011, p. 467).

Various English language teaching scholars (e.g., Lee, 2016; Richards & Reppen, 2016) have expressed the need to teach grammar not as an end in itself but as a means to help learners master language for communication. In other words, grammar should not be taught in isolation, but should be taught within a context meaningfully, with integration of the four language skills. There has been ongoing discussion about the need to improve language teaching standards and the professionalism of language teaching (Andrews, 2007a, 2007b; Kirkpatrick, 2007). Andrews' (1994, 2007a, 2007b) research on teacher language awareness has identified the knowledge and qualities required of a language teacher, including: knowledge of terminology, ability to anticipate learner difficulties, ability to exemplify grammar in simple terms, ability to analyse grammatical problems, awareness of differences between L1 and L2, ability to evaluate the use of grammar, among others. The concerns that confront teacher educators include what types of grammar to cover and how to enable student teachers to translate what they have learned in the teacher education program into effective classroom practices in their future teaching (Liu & Master, 2003).

The Present Study

Given the complexity of the subject matter and the difficulty of approaching it effectively, teaching grammar remains a great challenge to many teachers. There is an urgent need for enhancing grammar instruction in teacher education in the preparation of prospective teachers to become agents of change (Marchel, Shields & Winter, 2011; Price & Valli, 2005; Van der Heijden, Geldens, Beijaard & Popeijus, 2015). The present study is geared to finding solutions through a community project undertaken by a group of prospective teachers. The project is an attempt to address our dearth of knowledge as to the impact of experiential grammar learning on preservice teachers.

One major aim of the community project was to develop grammar teaching resources for school teachers. To achieve this, the participating student teachers were required to: (1) evaluate how their selected grammar items were presented and practised in contemporary grammar books; (2) develop lesson plans and instructional materials on the chosen grammar topics for different levels of students; (3) try out some selected plans and materials in local schools to evaluate their effectiveness; and (4) disseminate the project outputs to school teachers.

Participants

The research team comprised of the present author as the project supervisor and six Year 4 Bachelor of Education (English Language) student teachers, four females and two males, aged 21-22. All the student teachers joined the project voluntarily. Four of them enrolled in the four-year program[1] and completed the teaching practice of around 14 weeks (either a full semester, or two block practices of six and eight weeks each). The other two enrolled in the five-year program, with one having completed a six-week teaching practicum, and the other one not yet undertaking any teaching practice, though he was engaged in class observation and school attachment in early years, as well as in part-time teaching in after-school classes at the time of the study. One participant was a non-local student teacher from mainland China. She belonged to the secondary strand of the program, while the other five participants had received local education and belonged to the primary strand (see Table 1).

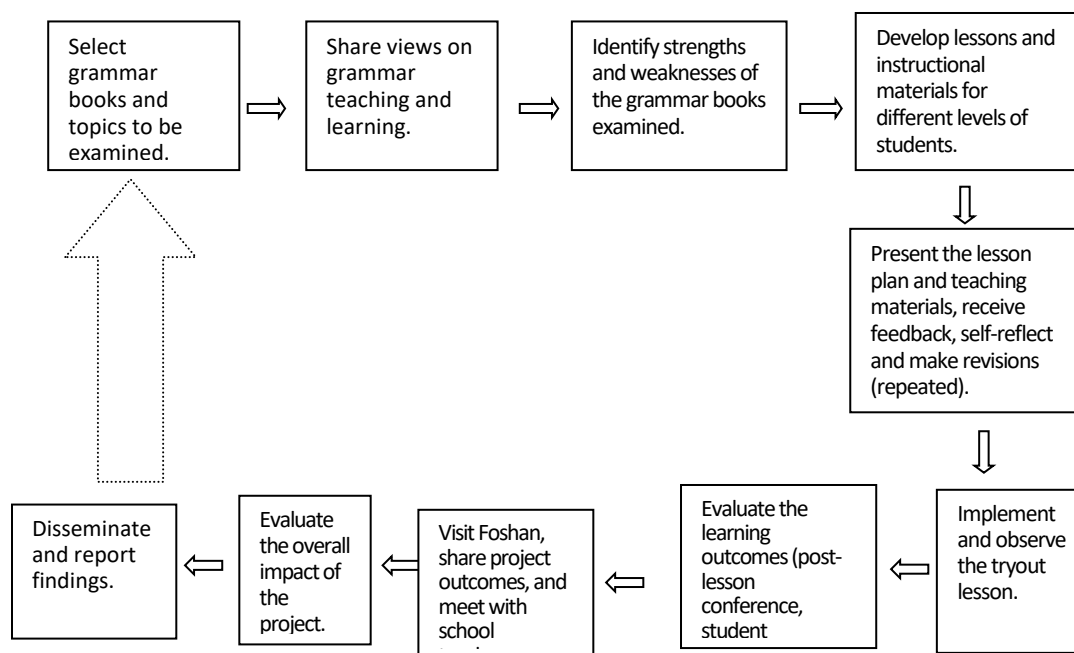| Participant (Pseudonym)	Program	School Education	Teaching Practice Completed	Topics Selected
Joyce Jack	5-year Secondary 5-year Primary	China Hong Kong	6-week No	Articles Imperatives Reported speech
Chris Nancy	4-year Primary 4-year Primary	Hong Kong Hong Kong	Full semester Full semester	Gerunds & infinitives Passive voice Phrasal verbs
Kitty Amy	4-year Primary 4-year Primary	Hong Kong Hong Kong	Full semester 6-week & 8-week	Modal verbs Present perfect Pronouns

Table 1: Participants' demographic backgrounds and selected grammar topics

All the teacher candidates completed two English grammar courses in Year 1 and 2, through which they developed grammatical knowledge and learned some basic grammar teaching strategies. Four student teachers (excluding Nancy and Joyce) also completed the elective "Teaching Grammar and Vocabulary" and acquired some pedagogical knowledge and skills for grammar instruction.

Procedures

This project involved a total of 17 meetings held over six months, with different focuses at different stages, including: (1) selecting grammar books and grammar topics to be examined; (2) sharing views on grammar teaching and learning in school; (3) evaluating grammar textbooks; (4) lesson planning and materials development; (5) presenting lesson plans and receiving feedback from project members, self-reflecting and making revisions; (6) conducting three tryout lessons in local schools; (7) project evaluating; (8) disseminating project findings in public seminars in Hong Kong and in mainland China; and (9) sharing the project outcomes at a website accessible to the public (see Figure 2).

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[1] The four participants in the 4-year Bachelor of Education Program completed 7-year secondary education while the two participants in the 5-year Bachelor of Education Program completed 6-year secondary education.

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Figure 2: Steps in an experiential learning cycle

The project included an investigation of the student teachers' perceptions of how grammar is taught in locally produced grammar practice books. Three series of grammar books for different levels of students (16 books in total) were selected. They are *Progressive English Grammar Exercises (Primary 1-6)* for primary students, *Longman Elect (JS 1-3)* for junior secondary students, and *Longman Elect: New Senior Secondary* for senior secondary students (see Appendix 1). They are all published by Pearson, a popular publisher in Hong Kong, and are widely adopted in Hong Kong schools. It was anticipated that an examination of different series by the same publisher might offer us a useful perspective on how the same grammar items are presented and practiced at different learning stages.

The six participating student teachers were divided into three pairs, each pair choosing three grammar topics to work on. Their task was to evaluate the presentation and practice of the grammar items in the three series of grammar books. Taking into consideration the shortcomings identified in the books and the developmental sequence of learners, they had to design lessons and materials on their chosen topics for learners at different stages (e.g., senior primary, junior secondary). At the regular meetings, each student teacher took turns to present their plans and lesson materials while the other team members gave feedback for revision.

To evaluate the usefulness of the materials developed, three plans were selected for tryouts: "present perfect" with a Primary 5 class; and "imperatives" and "gerunds and infinitives" with a Secondary 4 (Year 10) class. A post-lesson conference was held after each tryout. The plan and instructional materials were then revised based on self-reflections, peer suggestions and learner feedback collected through questionnaires at the end of each tryout lesson. All the finalized lesson plans and teaching resources were disseminated through a website for public access. The project outcomes were also shared with school teachers at a public seminar. To enhance the project impacts and the participants' experiential learning, the team (except Kitty) undertook a 3-day visit to Foshan, China, where we did the following: (1) we gave presentations about the project outcomes to over 300 teachers from Guangdong, a province in

southern China; (2) we observed a local teacher's lesson demonstration on grammar teaching and gave feedback; and (3) we visited two primary schools to share ideas with the school teachers on English language teaching.

Data Analysis

In order to investigate the kinds of learning that the student teachers experienced in the project, data were collected systematically by various means. An evaluation survey was conducted at the end of the study. The participants were asked to provide written responses to eight open-ended questions and to rate five statements on a 4-point likert scale, ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree". They were then interviewed to elaborate on their responses orally. The eight open-ended questions were:

1. What have you gained from the project?
2. What do you think about the weekly meetings in which student teachers present their lesson plans and teaching materials? Are the discussions useful for your professional development?
3. What do you think about the need to revise the lesson plans and teaching materials? What have you learned in the process?
4. What have you learned from the tryout lessons, as an observer and as a teacher?
5. What have you learned from the Foshan talk for teachers and the meetings with the English teachers in the two primary schools in Foshan?
6. What do you think about the grammar textbooks examined in terms of language presentation and practice?
7. How has the project changed you as an English language teacher?
8. Have you noticed any difference in you because of the project?

The five statements for rating were:

1. The project has enhanced my understanding of grammar teaching and learning.
2. The project has enabled me to develop better pedagogical knowledge and skills to teach English grammar.
3. My confidence in grammar teaching has been strengthened through the project.
4. My participation in the project has enhanced my ability to adapt grammar textbooks to meet the needs of my students in future.
5. My ability to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of grammar books has been enhanced through my involvement in the project.

Another major kind of data was based on student teachers' discussions at meetings, during which the participants discussed the strengths and weaknesses of the selected grammar books, presented their own lesson planning and materials design, received feedback from team members, and made revisions. All meetings were videotaped. Detailed written records of each meeting were made by a research assistant, and cross-checked by the project supervisor and the project team members. All the drafts of the teaching plans and materials were kept to record the revisions made. Because of the space limitations of the paper, only selected meeting notes and drafts will be reported below to illustrate the teacher candidates' professional growth in the experiential learning cycle.

The qualitative data collected in interviews and at meetings were analysed following Corbin and Strauss's (2015) grounded theory approach. The records and transcriptions were

analyzed repeatedly with the intention of identifying the themes that emerge. Representative segments of responses were arranged under different categories. The emerging themes as well as the quantitative findings form the basis for the examination of the value of experiential learning for preservice teachers in grammar instruction, and in teacher education in general.

Findings and Discussion

The experiential learning process that the prospective teachers went through in the project integrated Kolb's (1984) four modes of learning (experiencing/doing, watching/reflecting, thinking, experimenting). The findings support the view that experiential learning is a valuable component of preservice teacher education (Chambers & Lavery, 2012; Kucukoglu, 2011). The emerging themes of the qualitative data substantiate the participants' gains in various domains, including textbook evaluation, enhancement of professional knowledge, development of teachers' core competencies, and understanding of the trends and challenges of English language teaching in mainland China.

Textbook Evaluation

Each group had to present their views at regular meetings on how the three grammar topics chosen were taught in the three series of books, and give their overall comments at the post-project evaluation. Both the quantitative and qualitative findings suggest that the student teachers' skills in textbook evaluation were enhanced through the process. All of them either agreed or strongly agreed with the statements: "My ability to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of grammar books has been enhanced through my involvement in the project", and "My participation in the project has enhanced my ability to adapt grammar textbooks to meet the needs of my students in future". While some of them commented that the grammar books for the secondary level include detailed explanations, they all identified some weaknesses, such as the focus on forms rather than meaning and use, inclusion of a lot of mechanical drills at the sentence level, and choice of inappropriate context, if any. They realized that these shortcomings would prevent learners from developing communicative competence, and that adaptations should be made. The following are some of their comments:

> I think some textbooks have provided students with rich and detailed explanations, but in terms of the exercises that follow, they are not as well-designed as the explanations. The mode of exercise is just like: sentence, sentence, sentence. We have to design our own materials to teach. We need to adapt the textbook because we know our students. We know what suits them and what they are interested in. (Chris)
> Some questions are set in a way that students can finish the exercise without thinking. For example, there are exercises where students only need to put the base verb at the beginning of a sentence to finish an imperative sentence, which requires little thinking and understanding of grammar from students. (Joyce)
> I think the grammar textbooks in Hong Kong are very mechanical. Very dull and very similar ways of teaching grammar… They are not teaching the students to

> *think about the purpose of using a particular grammar item, but it is just
> teaching them the form most of the time. (Kitty)*
> *When students do the grammar exercises, they can do them very well, but when
> it comes to writing or speaking, and have to produce some genuine output, they
> fail to apply what they have learned, because they cannot internalize the
> grammar knowledge they have acquired. (Jack)*
> *I think the learning contexts are also important. Most of the grammar textbooks
> don't have the context for students to learn, but if we design our own materials,
> we can have more learning context for students to motivate them to learn. (Amy)*

Another problem noticed by the student teachers was the use of similar exercises for the same grammar items in different grades, which fails to advance students' learning at different learning stages. Jack noted that the major difference was merely on the choice of vocabulary:

> *I think the level of difficulty varies in terms of the use of words, but not the
> forms. They have chosen some more difficult vocabulary, but actually in terms of
> grammar, maybe that's more or less the same.*

Supporting Jack's view, Nancy indicated the importance of developing a vertical curriculum in different graded books to cater for leaners' needs according to their cognitive development. She said, "I think they [the grammar books] focus on just one level of students. They are not considering what we are concerned about, like the vertical curriculum."

Enhanced Professional Knowledge

According to Shulman (1987), highly effective teachers need knowledge of the materials they are teaching, the student population and pedagogical content knowledge. Pasternak and Bailey (2004) confirm that teachers need both declarative and procedural knowledge to function effectively in their classrooms. Declarative knowledge refers to subject knowledge whereas procedural knowledge refers to pedagogical knowledge. The findings of the present study revealed the prospective teachers' professional growth in both declarative and procedural knowledge.

Declarative Knowledge

Some student teachers reported a better command of the grammatical structures that they worked on, both forms and functions, through the guidance of the project supervisor and reading more grammar books. The following are some remarks:

> *I was given opportunities to have deeper learning about some grammar topics
> such as pronouns, modal verbs and present perfect tense through reading some
> grammar books sent by Dr Lee and the discussion in the meetings. (Kitty)*
> *While we are designing the lessons for a certain grammar item, we are also
> revisiting or exploring the grammar item and its related concepts. For example,
> I didn't know that "like + gerund" and "like + to-infinitive", to some people,
> actually have slightly different meanings until I worked on it. (Nancy)*

> *I am more "knowledgeable" about the functions of different grammar items*
> *such as articles, imperatives and reported speech. I am playing the role not only*
> *as an L2 English teacher, but also as an L2 English learner. (Jack)*

When asked to elaborate on the declarative knowledge gained, Jack mentioned that as a Chinese learner of English, he did not have solid knowledge of the use of English articles. However, in the process of designing instructional materials in the project, he developed a better understanding of how definite and indefinite articles function. In respect of reported speech, Jack said that he used to be only conscious about the forms and the rules to transform sentences from direct speech into reported speech. Yet in the study he learned how direct speech and reported speech are used differently and how language choice reflects the writers' intentions. As for imperatives, Jack recognized the need to design authentic contexts for learners to see how imperatives are used naturally and meaningfully. He observed the association of different clause types (e.g., imperatives, interrogatives) with different interpersonal meanings in directive-giving. Through the project, Jack began to understand that language use is not simply concerned with grammatical accuracy, but also with appropriateness in particular contexts.

Procedural Knowledge

Grammar teaching and learning is a complex and multifaceted process, and there is no single pedagogical approach that can claim priority (Ellis & Shintani, 2014). Language teachers need to acknowledge learners' different learning style preferences: some may prefer direct teacher explanations, and others may prefer an inductive approach involving examination and comparison of the grammatical features of texts provided by teachers (Richards & Reppen, 2016; Thornbury, 1999). The present project offered the prospective teachers opportunities to develop a repertoire of teaching strategies to effect a change in grammar instruction. In the post-project evaluation, all the participants either agreed or strongly agreed, saying: "The project has enhanced my understanding of grammar teaching and learning", "The project has enabled me to develop better pedagogical knowledge and skills to teach English grammar", and "My confidence in grammar teaching has been strengthened through the project". When asked what they gained from the project, all of them remarked upon the development of their pedagogical skills, including (1) materials development, (2) grammar instruction that emphasizes the relationship between form, meaning and use, (3) lesson planning, (4) learning to take a learner's perspective, and (5) bridging the theory-practice divide. These gains are discussed below.

Materials Development

Some teachers regard textbooks as immutable authorities, to be followed closely rather than used as a resource for creativity and inspiration (Cunningsworth, 1995; Lee & Collins, 2009). In view of the identifiable weaknesses in the grammar books examined in this project, the student teachers realized the need to develop their own teaching materials. Tailored-made instructional materials can cater for the diversity of student needs and interests existing in most language classrooms (Allwright, 1981; Swales, 1980). Through this experiential learning project, the student teachers learned to use authentic materials, familiar contexts and a range of teaching aids and strategies, such as games, songs, YouTube videos, dictogloss, etc., to teach grammar in

a context that is related to students' daily lives. Jack summed up his professional growth as follows:

> *I learned that using authentic or semi-authentic materials will help students learn more meaningfully and naturally because they are engaged with authentic language use. As a teacher, I have to be wise in selecting appropriate materials and resources as input. They should be closely related to the target language form, so that students will know the focus and explore the relationship between forms and use more easily. I should also select materials which are interesting to students. Themes which are closer to our students' daily lives should be chosen to arouse their interests, and they will then find themselves less distant to the target language. I should make good use of a wide variety of materials, such as songs, videos and games. These may add fun to my grammar lessons. (Jack)*

Grammar Instruction that Emphasizes the Relationship between Form, Meaning and Use

As remarked by Lee (2003), many grammar books nowadays still adopt the structural approach, which focuses on teaching forms through repetitive drills, grammatical transformation and unrelated sentences without paying heed to meaning and use. This kind of exercise does not help learners see how and why various forms (e.g., passive voice and active voice) exist. To heighten learners' consciousness about the relationship between form, meaning and use, the prospective teachers believed that teachers should give learners opportunities to explore the meaning and use of particular grammar items. This requires contextualization and selection of appropriate materials. The following are Jack's remarks:

> *I realised that it is important for students not simply to recognise the forms of different grammar items, but to understand the meaning conveyed through the use of these items. It is important that a meaningful context should be adopted when introducing grammar items, so that students know in what situations these items are naturally used to enhance the meaning conveyed.*

This project also heightened the student teachers' awareness that various forms are not always interchangeable, and that different grammatical choices can make a difference in the meanings created. To illustrate this, an excerpt of a lesson design made by the student teachers is presented below.

The lesson aims to help learners understand the relationship between grammatical choices and discoursal contexts when giving instructions. Students have to compare what clause type and modality are typically used in recipes, cooking demonstrations and requests.

(a)   Compare the following instructions. Which set of instructions is normally found in a recipe? Why?

	A	B	C
1	Put the salmon fillet on the foil.	Could you please put the salmon fillet on the foil?	If you want to taste the delicious lemon baked salmon, the first step you need to do is to put the salmon fillet on the foil.

2	Season salt, fresh ground pepper and Greek seasoning on the salmon fillet.	Could you please season salt, fresh ground pepper and Greek seasoning on the salmon fillet?	The next step is to season salt, fresh ground pepper and Greek seasoning on your fresh, salmon fillet. This easy step will make your salmon fillet very delicious. This is a step you can't miss!

(b)   Watch the cooking demonstration and answer the following.
When Kelsey is doing the cooking demonstration, why doesn't she use imperatives all the time? (e.g., She says: "What I'm going to do first is season this"; "I'm going to make a foil packet. And that's going to lock in the moisture and the flavour, and make your salmon nice and flaky, and, oh, just so flavourful and intense").

This lesson extract illustrates how the student teachers learned to design discovery learning, and comparison and contrast activities, in which learners compare the use of particular grammatical features in different kinds of texts. Learners can then consider language differences that may reflect differences in mode (e.g., spoken vs written), purpose (e.g., to instruct or to request), or genre (e.g., a recipe vs a cooking demonstration).

Lesson Planning

Every successful teacher should display meticulous, well-structured lesson planning skills (Ewing, Lowrie & Higgs, 2010), which include establishing challenging learning goals, structuring and sequencing relevant learning activities, using effective teaching strategies, selecting appropriate teaching resources, using effective classroom communication and employing appropriate methods to evaluate teaching effectiveness. In the present project, the participating student teachers learned to develop their own teaching plans and materials for the selected grammar topics. They presented their teaching ideas at meetings and obtained feedback from members. The feedback received ranged from teaching mechanics such as PowerPoint designs, animations, font colors and font sizes, to the intellectually more demanding skills such as the teaching strategy, activity design, sequence and transition, as well as teacher-student interaction. Each plan was discussed and revised several times before it was finalized. Although this process could be tiring, the student teachers found the ongoing conferencing and revisions useful for the development of their lesson planning skills. They made the following comments:

Through the process of revising the lesson plans and materials, I have learned how to perfect and enhance my skills of lesson planning. After every amendment on the same lesson plan, I am more aware of the weaknesses and problems I neglected at the first place, which helps me to become more alert and careful when I plan for the next lesson. Thus, it is like a process of practising; we become more skilful and experienced in planning grammar lessons and designing grammar activities and teaching materials. (Chris)

It helps me understand some common problems I overlook when I design a lesson, such as sequence of the teaching procedures, questioning skills, selection of materials, and so I can further work on those areas. I also learn that small changes, such as sequencing, word choice, and even the colour choice, can actually make a lesson run more smoothly, and possibly more effectively. (Nancy)

During the cycle of group discussion and lesson plan revision, the student teachers learned to perceive their plans from other perspectives and recognised the importance of practicability. Kitty remarked on the significance of finding a balance between creativity, effectiveness and applicability in lesson planning:

The most important thing I learned in the process is how to strike a balance between creativity, effectiveness and applicability of the lesson planning. Originally, I emphasized creativity most. But after times of revising my lesson plans, I began to relate my ideas to real-life teaching situations. This allowed me to think critically about how to put new ideas into practice and maximize the effectiveness of the plan to the largest extent.

Learning to Take a Learner's Perspective

Teachers need to know about their learners' needs and abilities when planning lessons, to ensure that the plans can be put into practice successfully. The present project provided opportunities for the participating student teachers to see learning from students' perspectives, and make learning relevant to student needs when they acted as students or observers during the group presentations and lesson tryouts. The tryouts also enabled the student teachers to experience the diverse factors that can affect teaching and learning effectiveness in actual classrooms, such as teachers' instructions and leaner abilities. The following are some student teachers' reflections:

Clear instructions are important for students. In the board game part, I did not instruct the students well beforehand. Students did not understand what to do if they fell on the "jail" box or the "lottery" box. Fortunately, my partner Kitty told students more clearly what to do and made sure they knew the game rule. (Amy)

During my observation and teaching in the tryout lessons, I recognized that being flexible in the implementation of the lesson plan is as important as the content of the lesson planning. Since we did not have much understanding about the students in the tryout lessons, we overlooked the students' ability and their prior knowledge. These two factors are crucial for implementing a lesson plan successfully. (Kitty)

We can plan and picture the lessons however we want. But in practice when we actually teach what we plan, a lot more factors need to be taken into account: the actual levels of the students, the learner diversity, students' learning motivation, their socio-cultural backgrounds, etc. Therefore, not only do we need to be flexible when planning lessons, we also need to make some adjustments according to the students when we teach what we plan. (Nancy)

Bridging the Theory-practice Divide

The teaching of language learning theories should not occur in a vacuum. Such theories should be inextricably linked to their application (Hughes, 2006). The prospective teachers were provided with opportunities in the project to connect theories with realities. Such learning-in-context allowed the student teachers to reflect on what they had learned in their undergraduate studies, and how to address the gap between theory and practice (Brookfield, 2017). It was during this experiential learning cycle of inquiry, practice, reflection and change that professional development occurred. The three lesson tryouts, in particular, allowed the prospective teachers to evaluate the viability and effectiveness of their lesson designs, in other

words, to bridge the gap between theory and practice. As Chris put it: "The tryout lesson has encouraged me to reconsider the difference of planning on paper and actually teaching the lesson." Meanwhile, recognizing the need to consider factors such as learning effectiveness, lesson objectives, physical space and safety, Kitty learned to put theories of cooperative learning and game-based learning into practice:

There are many theories, like cooperative learning, like context-based teaching. But if we only focus on the theory and ignore the students' needs, it will not be effective… For example, when I was trying to design the board game, I was thinking about having four students in a group. However, if I carried out this activity, I think the lesson would not be very effective because students may not have enough opportunities to talk with others. So sometimes when we put theory into practice, we also have to think about the reality…When we talk about game-based teaching, we want to use games to increase students' motivation. But somehow students may only enjoy the game and they don't know what they have learned. So I think the project has let me think more deeply… how do we make students really learn instead of just playing the game?... This is what I have learned from this project – how to put theory into practice.

Strengthening Core Competencies of Future Teachers

Traditionally, teaching has been an isolating job that does not require much collegial cooperation among educators given the fact that their busy schedules, heavy teaching loads and administrative duties do not allow them to find time to regularly talk or work together (Flinders, 1988; Heider, 2005). Teachers nevertheless need opportunities to collaborate, to learn from one another and to self-reflect (Lee, 2008). Healthy and strong collegial relationships between school teachers are considered essential for teacher enhancement, job satisfaction, professional commitment, student performance as well as school effectiveness (Shah, 2012). When asked what they had gained from the project, a number of participants mentioned teamwork, cooperation skills and friendships. During the project, student teachers worked closely with their partners on the grammar topics chosen. They presented their plans and then revised them after receiving feedback from project members. In the process, they learned how to give and receive comments. The collegial relationships established were considered healthy and positive. The generic skills developed such as communication skills, problem solving skills, cooperation skills as well as the positive work attitudes will subsequently turn out to be useful for their future teaching careers. The participants valued these personal and professional gains highly, and made the following comments:

I improved my cooperation skills through cooperating with my partner to make the lesson planning more coherent throughout different levels. During the discussion in the meetings, I gained a lot of teaching insights from my professor, her assistant and other team members in this project. I was able to learn from others' lesson plans, experience and comments on my lesson planning. Most importantly, I gained the enjoyment of working with others as a team… I think the project is also a case of what we will do in the future… we will have meetings with other teachers and we will also receive some comments. It is likely that we will not receive good comments all the time, so we have to learn to work in such an atmosphere, be willing to listen to other comments and also learn from others. The attitude is important. I think most importantly for me…we have become more professional after the project. (Kitty)

When I present my lesson plans and materials, I gain a lot of useful comments and insightful suggestions from the project team. I know how to revise my lesson plans and materials, and how I may improve my work. They also identify my strengths and weaknesses in terms of materials development and presentation, and the planning of lessons as a whole. When I listen to other teammates' presentations, I have learned from them how to plan grammar lessons... I notice a variety of strategies adopted by my teammates when they develop their lessons, some of which should be useful in my future teaching… Some of our team members like using video clips to teach, some of them like designing attractive PowerPoint, some like utilizing cute cartoon and some like presenting in an informative way. (Amy)

The top four core competencies identified by educators in the survey of core competencies of future teachers conducted by the Education University of Hong Kong (2015) are "positive personality", "positive work attitude", "cooperation and teamwork", and "interpersonal skills". The experiential learning project described in this paper was evidenced to have strengthened the participating student teachers' core competencies, both as a person and as an educator.

Understanding the Trends and Challenges of English Language Teaching in Mainland China

The Foshan visit was highly treasured by the student teachers. They indicated that it broadened their horizons about how English learning was being promoted in mainland China in the past decade. They were appreciative of the teaching strategies adopted by some mainland educators, especially the movie voiceover to develop learners' speaking skills. The teacher candidates learned to value the many resources available in Hong Kong when they realised the limited resources that mainland teachers had. The following is a comment made by Chris:

The Foshan trip has brought to me insights and understanding of the current education development and concerns in China. The meetings with the English teachers in Foshan have exposed us to new ideas which are not widely used in Hong Kong, such as asking students to voice over their favourite cartoons as a kind of speaking task. Also, despite limited resources and access to internet resources, the teachers in Foshan are very passionate and determined to enhance their English teaching. This prompts me to treasure the resourceful education support we have in Hong Kong as well as to keep enhancing our English teaching.

Conclusion

The project findings point to the value of experiential learning in the professional and personal development of preservice teachers. Through their engagement in the project on the development of grammar teaching resources for school teachers, the prospective teachers developed their knowledge and skills in a range of areas, including textbook evaluation, grammatical knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, core competencies, and how English language teaching was conducted outside Hong Kong. Through the experiential learning cycle of experiencing, reflecting, thinking and acting (Kolb & Kolb, 2005), the prospective teachers learned to see textbooks as learning tools only, not as their masters. They realized the need to adapt grammar textbooks and develop their own materials to achieve more compatibility

between the learning goals and the needs of their students. They experienced the lesson planning process: producing lesson plans and instructional materials, receiving feedback on the effectiveness of their efforts, resolving conflicts by means of self-reflection, group discussion, consulting scholarly books and searching for relevant resources for inspiring ideas. The student teachers also experienced applications of the plans in actual classrooms and learned to be resilient when facing gaps between theory and practice. They realized the need to adopt learners' perspectives and to be more empathetic. In other words, instead of being told directly how to teach grammar through transmission, the experiential learning cycle enabled the prospective teachers to create their own knowledge. These findings suggest that experiential learning programs are valuable in teacher education: they enable student teachers to assimilate new experiences into their existing knowledge and to accommodate existing knowledge to new experiences.

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Acknowledgements

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