

Second Language Teachers' Conceptions of Teaching Literary Texts

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Abstract

The present article lies at the intersection of research on teacher cognitions and the rising importance of literary texts in second language learning. It is a qualitative analysis of teacher reports on integrating Language Arts (LA) in the context of New Senior Secondary (NSS) English Language Curriculum in Hong Kong. In particular, this study explores three English teachers' conceptions of teaching literary texts. Juxtaposing teachers' views of LA integration and their personal experience of English language learning offers teacher educators a useful lens through which to view the personal practical nature of teacher cognition. It also unveils the factors influencing their conceptions of the place of literary texts in the English Language Curriculum. The results portray teachers as individuals with unique personal characteristics and backgrounds. It is hoped that the study will offer insights into the development of teachers' personal practical knowledge (PPK) by highlighting their personal learning experience. The study suggests a reconsideration of the relationship between teacher knowledge and belief from various perspectives.

Keywords: Teacher cognition, Language Arts, personal practical knowledge

Introduction

Teacher cognition is defined as “the store of beliefs, knowledge, assumptions, theories and attitudes” that teachers have about their work (Borg, 1999, p.19). A review of teacher cognition research points to a glaring disparity between the volume of studies on grammar and literacy (Borg, 2003, 2006, 2009) and other realms of language teaching (such as listening, speaking, phonics and literary texts). The focus on grammar and literacy teaching could stem from its dominance in the language curriculum. English Language Teaching in Hong Kong has been characterized by its preoccupation with form-focused instruction and teacher-centered pedagogies (Adamson & Morris, 1998; Evans, 1997; Morris et al, 2000; Lee, 2005). This has led to the neglect of the value of literary texts in the language learning process. However, literary texts have come to prominence in second language curriculum

since the 1990s (McRae, 1991; Carter, 1996; Education Department, 1991; CDC, 1999, CDC & HKEAA, 2007). This broadens teachers' conceptions of the medium of language learning and necessitates an expansion of teacher cognition research to keep pace with this development. To this end, the present paper explores a relatively uncharted terrain in the field of second language teacher education, namely teacher cognition on Language Arts (LA) integration.

Traditionally, literary texts have been viewed as less prized than standard texts in the English Language Curriculum (Carter & Long, 1991; McRae, 1991, 1996). This might account for the paucity of empirical studies examining certain aspects of English language teaching (e.g., the effect of teaching phonics and language arts) in Hong Kong (Poon, 2009). However, since the 1990s, literary texts are believed to facilitate students' exposure to a "wider range of knowledge and human experience" (Education Department, 1991, p.1). Four LA elective modules (i.e. Poems and Songs, Short Stories, Drama, and Popular Culture) are introduced in the New Senior Secondary (NSS) English Language Curriculum for the purposes of "language enrichment," "cultural enrichment," and "personal enrichment" (CDC & HKEAA, 2007, p.87).

The unique appeal of the present study lies in its context of in-service secondary school English teachers in Hong Kong, where little research on language arts and teacher cognition has occurred (Borg, 2009). Given that "thinking has come to be recognized as a central part of what language teachers do" (Freeman, 2016, p.120), the field of teacher cognitions has shown attempts to explore teacher thinking from a qualitative paradigm which highlights the complexity of teachers' mental lives. In this light, teacher thinking is located in specific sociocultural and historical context (Kubanyiova, 2014). Based on a qualitative analysis of three teachers' reports, this study sheds light on the meaning teachers make of integrating LA in the NSS English Language Curriculum. Through elucidating the contextual influences that mediate teacher practices of integrating LA, this study also uncovers the dialectic relationship between teachers' beliefs and practices in times of curriculum innovation. Moreover, by scrutinizing the critical incidents guiding their personal practical knowledge (PPK), this study provides a portrait of how sociocultural factors (Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1991) pervade teachers' thinking. Finally, through a comparison and contrast of three teachers, this study demonstrates clear differences between teacher knowledge and belief as proposed in Woods' (1996) notion of BAK (belief, assumptions, knowledge).

Conceptual framework

The Importance of Teacher Belief and Knowledge in Curriculum Innovation

Due to the increasing recognition of the role that teachers play in education reform, researching the cognitive basis of teachers' decisions appears to be gaining acceptance (Borg, 2006). The significance of teacher belief in curriculum innovation is evidenced in Carless' (1998) and Tong and Adamson's (2008) studies, where teachers' implementations of Target-oriented Curriculum (TOC) and Task-based Language Teaching (TBLT) are associated with their beliefs regarding the usefulness of reform initiatives. This stands in stark contrast with teachers' disbelief in the advantages of using tasks as the core units in the instruction process in Chan's (2014) study, leading to its limited implementation. These findings underscore the importance of aligning teacher belief with implementing curriculum innovation. Teacher

knowledge influences their beliefs and teaching practices (Hashweh, 1987; Wilson & Wineburg, 1988; Stein, Baxter, & Leinhardt, 1990). Grossman et al's (1989) study provided an example of teachers with little content knowledge in grammar employing avoidance strategy in grammar teaching. Teachers in Wright's (2005) and Li's (2013) studies reverted to traditional pedagogies when they lacked confidence in the subject matter being taught. Therefore, teacher knowledge on the ideas promoted in the innovation affects their belief and willingness to implement the ideas in the reform. In this sense, it is likely that teacher knowledge of LA (i.e., knowledge of the conventions and use of various LA texts, as well as knowledge of utilizing literary texts for language learning purposes) will affect their conceptions of integrating LA.

Woods' (1996) Notion of Belief, Assumptions, and Knowledge (BAK)

In light of the nexus between teacher knowledge and belief, Woods (1996) proposed the notion of belief, assumptions, knowledge (BAK) as a schema to explain the interplay between teacher thinking and behavior in structuring classroom teaching. He argued that each teacher has a unique set of BAK, based on personal preferences and views of language teaching, which affects the ways he/she reacts to curriculum innovations. This uniqueness of BAK also explains each teacher's different operationalization of the same concept in curriculum innovation. In the NSS English Language Curriculum, Carless and Harfitt (2013) claimed that the School-based Assessment (SBA) of the LA electives, similar to the cases of TOC and TBLT, was being interpreted and implemented according to the teachers' own personal assumptions and experiences (i.e., their unique BAK). It is likely that teachers will integrate LA based on their own understanding of LA texts, as well as on their personal perceptions of the use of literary texts in the language learning process. The idiosyncrasy of each teacher's BAK is mediated by various factors and evolved through different contexts and experiences (e.g., early language learning experiences, early teaching experiences, and teacher education). This points to the personal practical nature of teacher cognition.

Personal Practical Knowledge (PPK)

The notion of personal practical knowledge (PPK) (Elbaz, 1983; Clandinin, 1986; Clandinin & Connelly, 1987; Golombek, 1998, 2009) highlights the interplay of teachers' various life experiences with their immediate teaching context. These experiences include their learning experience as students, what Lortie (1975) coined "apprenticeship of observation." Elbaz (1983, p.5) characterizes personal practical knowledge as "integrated by the individual teacher in terms of personal values and beliefs in his/her practical situation." The personal practical nature of teacher knowledge assumes that each teacher has a personal narrative that partly shapes his/her state and identity as a teacher (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988). Each teacher's personal pedagogical system is dynamic, evolving, and pragmatic in nature and is influenced by his/her experience of what has worked well in the classroom (Borg, 1998). This type of knowledge is not separated into typologies, but connects various types of knowledge to address problems of practice (Johnson, 2009). Based on these theories, teachers' PPK of LA integration includes their experiences of learning literary texts as students, their exposures to various pedagogies related to integrating LA in teacher education courses, and their experiences of teaching LA.

Continuous classroom experience helps teachers develop their PPK, which affects their instructional decisions (Borg, 1998). Tsui (1996) provided evidence of this relationship by reporting on how a teacher's practice of teaching writing was influenced by her changing experience in the classroom. Tsang (2004) remarked that PPK "is open and developing rather than stable and exhaustible" (p.194). These characteristics of teachers' PPK align with the evolving notion of BAK (Woods, 1996), which points to the malleability of teacher cognition, developed through their teaching and learning experiences and emerged over time. Golombek (1998) exemplified different aspects of teachers' PPK by describing the tensions faced in the classroom by two in-service ESL teachers. One teacher avoided correcting students' pronunciation errors because of her negative experience of being corrected as a student. However, that teacher admitted that "there has to be a place for fluency" (p.454) in the pronunciation course since her supervisor emphasized the monitoring of students' pronunciation and the course assessed students on the intelligibility of their speech. Eventually, that teacher tried to provide feedback on the accuracy of students' pronunciation in a non-disturbing way (i.e., without embarrassing students by correcting them too much or correcting them in front of their peers). The implication here is that different factors influenced that teacher's PPK: the negative feelings of being corrected in the language learning process (i.e., the affective factor), her knowledge of subject matter regarding the competing demands of accuracy and fluency, and the consequences of her actions on both herself and her students. Golombek (1998) showed that teachers' PPK includes a narrative reconstruction of their experiences as students and teachers, as well as their moral and affective perspectives combined with the consequences of their teaching practices. Therefore, it is reasonable to predict that teachers' PPK of LA integration could be a result of their effort to strike a balance between various contextual demands and their personal beliefs.

The influence of the personal practical aspect of teacher cognition is evident in previous attempts of curriculum innovation. The three teachers in Carless' (2004) study struggled with the tensions between traditional expectations of classroom rules and student-centred learning in TBLT. Only one teacher managed to resolve this dilemma and did so by accepting some in-class noise and preventing students from drifting off-task. The teachers reacted to the implementation of TBLT according to their own understandings of tasks, the situational realities of the classroom, and their own personal teaching beliefs. The different contexts faced by the teachers in Carless' (2004) study led to a situation in which each teacher possessed unique PPK in implementing TBLT. The idiosyncratic nature of teachers' PPK is an interwoven feature of their BAK, which influences their perceptions and teaching practices and explains their different conceptualization of the same method or approach (Woods, 1996). In light of the unique nature of teachers' PPK as shown in Carless' (2004) study, teachers may react to the integration of LA electives in unique ways based on their personal characteristics, experiences, teaching contexts, knowledge of LA, and beliefs about teaching LA.

Method

Participants

This study adopted maximum variation approach of sampling, which chooses individuals who display different dimensions of the characteristics to build complexity and exhibit the multiple perspectives of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2005, 2007; Patton, 2002). Participants

were 10 ESL teachers with varying years of teaching experience and academic backgrounds. The study focused on three of these teachers because they were able to provide information-rich samples that offer useful manifestations of the phenomenon of interest under study (Patton, 2002). These three teachers with differing years of teaching experience, academic training, and teaching context, fit Tsui's (2003) typology regarding the expertise of teachers. They also represented sufficient variations of cases recommended by Rubin and Rubin (1995) to gain a broader picture of LA integration. Each teacher was identified by a pseudonym. The information of the three teachers is summarized in Table 1 below:

Table 1. Information of Teachers

Teacher	Academic Qualification	Years of Teaching Experience
Andy	BA (1st honour) in English PGDE in English	9 years
Betsy	BA in Music PGDE in English MA in Music MEd in English Language Studies Postgraduate Diploma in Business	16 years
Catherine	BA in English & BEd in Language Education (English)	6 years

Remarks: BA=Bachelor of Arts, BEd=Bachelor of Education, PGDE=Postgraduate Diploma in Education, MA=Master of Arts, MEd=Master of Education

Data collection procedures

Data were collected through qualitative open-ended interviews, which allowed the participants to determine the content and direction of the interview in an informal manner (Merriam, 2009; Mischler, 1991). The researcher met and interviewed them on a one-on-one basis. Open-ended interviews do not include a predetermined set of questions and are often used when little information about a phenomenon is available (Merriam, 2009). The open-ended interviews aimed to elicit general information regarding teacher conceptions of LA integration. Based on the nature of teacher cognition presented in the conceptual framework, the topics explored with teachers in the open-ended interviews are listed here:

- Teachers' previous experiences of learning LA
- The context of integrating LA
- The tensions in the process of integrating LA or the factors that facilitate LA integration

- Their views and feelings on integrating LA
- The factors that affect the teaching practice of integrating LA

Prior to each interview, participant consent on tape-recording the conversation was obtained. Each interview lasted from 30 to 45 minutes. Data collection and analysis were simultaneous and iterative (Calderhead & Shorrock, 1997; Merriam, 1998). The data were reviewed immediately after each interview. Transcriptions of interviews and preliminary data analyses were conducted to highlight the important points and jot down questions or reflections, which led to continuous refinement of the questions.

Data Analysis

Interview transcripts were the sole source of data in the study. Analysis proceeded simultaneously with data collection so that insights gleaned from earlier interviews could be put to later participants. Transcript coding, which refers to the process of examining a text thematically according to certain predetermined or emergent categories from the data (Wilson, 2008), was employed to generate an overview of teachers' conceptions of LA integration. The codes were first culled deductively from the topic outlined in the conceptual framework and then generated inductively from the participants' data (i.e., the patterns and themes that emerged from the participants' responses). This strategy of developing deductive codes etically to inductive codes emically (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Hennink et al, 2011; Patton, 2002; Marshall, 2011) aligns with the process of categorization of meaning (i.e., coding interviews into inductive or deductive categories) in analyzing interview data (Kvale, 1996). Three strategies were adopted to enhance the trustworthiness of the data. Firstly, member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), which means the participants' comments on the data collected were incorporated in the research process to check the validity of the researchers' interpretations. Secondly, the interview data was demarcated clearly from the researcher's interpretation (Holliday, 2002). Thirdly, peer debriefing (Creswell, 2007) occurred when the data was shared with a trusted colleague familiar with the research context and methodology, and who then discussed and commented critically on what had been and analyzed.

Results

Andy

Andy learned LA through exposure to English language resources when he was a secondary school student. His view, "LA also involves English," closely paralleled his experience of learning LA subconsciously in the process of learning English. This instantiates the "personally-held" nature of teacher cognition (Borg, 2006), arising from various experiences in teachers' lives. Majoring in linguistics and literature equipped him with adequate knowledge to teach English through LA. The knowledge he gained from this experience enabled him to see language not only as communication of meanings but also expression of emotions. Therefore, he would "go beyond the textual meaning of words to the overall emotional output of songs." This gives credence to the link between teachers' belief, assumptions, and knowledge in Woods' (1996) notion of BAK.

Students' weak language proficiency pervaded Andy's comments when he mentioned the difficulties of integrating LA. His students could not state the meanings of simple words. Another constraint he alluded to was students' lack of motivation. Andy remarked, "They are not even motivated to play, let alone study English and LA." Students' limited language proficiency, coupled with their lack of motivation, compelled Andy to rethink his practices of integrating LA based on "students' interest and ability." As a result, he began to employ "songs" and "short stories" to a greater degree. This was based on his belief that "songs and short stories are more manageable or achievable to students." His choice of LA texts is an example of his PPK from continuous classroom experience (Borg, 1998). He underlined the importance of the flexibility granted by the school administration to facilitate his development of a personal pedagogical system based on students' needs. The high degree of flexibility is the internal context (Woods, 1996), which enables him to make use of his personality (instead of pedagogical strategies) to engage students. He accorded great significance to teachers' personality in students' learning outcomes. "If you are energetic, if you have good relationships with your students, you don't need many pedagogical strategies to attract them, because after all they are attracted to the person yourself, not the way you teach."

Betsy

Betsy expressed a lack of confidence in her own knowledge of LA despite recognizing the use of LA to generate emotional responses and provide comprehensible language input to students. She was hesitant to teach LA in senior forms, and this feeling of professional inadequacy was linked to her wavering confidence and fear of not being able to provide instructions clearly and concisely. The lack of confidence in her knowledge of LA and the desire to impart the best knowledge to students caused Betsy to experience goal incongruence (Schutz et al, 2007), which gradually led to her negative emotions (e.g., she expressed feeling "frustrated"). However, she persisted in enriching her LA knowledge through extensive reading. Self-exploration was her pivotal means of enhancing her knowledge of LA. The self-exploration process suggests that Betsy was willing to embrace the challenges in her teaching, instead of dwelling on her lack of confidence in her own knowledge of LA. Betsy's data sheds new light on Woods' (1996) notion of BAK. On the one hand, Betsy's lack of confidence to teach LA suggests that teacher knowledge is linked to the belief in one's ability to teach the subject matter. On the other hand, she reacted to LA integration by learning literary texts through self-exploration. The self-exploration process inevitably led to her enhanced knowledge of LA. In this sense, teacher belief and teacher knowledge seem to mutually influence each other, resulting in an extended definition of each element in Woods' (1996) notion of BAK. Based on Betsy's data, teacher belief includes the willingness or unwillingness to change one's practices while teacher knowledge includes teacher confidence in the subject matter taught. Betsy's desire to equip herself with knowledge of literary texts is woven into her positive views on LA integration, and this desire seems to outweigh the negative effect of her perceived lack of knowledge in integrating LA.

Betsy revealed that her practice of integrating LA was constrained by her students' weak language proficiency. "LA texts are quite boring to weaker students because they do not know most of the words." This suggests that students' ability will affect their motivation to learn LA. Therefore, the relevance of the LA materials to students' interests appeared to

occupy a central place in Betsy's choice of LA texts. This gradually became part of Betsy's PPK in integrating LA. Her PPK of LA integration was further enhanced by the collaborative culture of sharing LA materials in the school, which involves several teachers identifying suitable LA texts together. While students' language proficiency was a concern in the process of LA integration, Betsy believed that literary texts could be taught to students of all levels and could even be integrated as early as kindergarten. "LA integration can be done at a very early stage. Even in primary schools, they learn poems with simpler language. Kids learn nursery rhymes in kindergarten." Betsy related this point to her personal experience of studying LA in the early stages of her literacy development. Therefore, her PPK of integrating LA included her exposure to literary texts in her early childhood years, the self-exploration process of learning literary texts, knowledge of students' ability and interests, and collaboration with peers. This reinforces teacher learning in "complex socially, culturally, and historically situated contexts" (Johnson, 2009, p.20-21) and reflects the socially constructed nature of teacher thinking (Freeman & Johnson, 1998; Johnson, 2006; Johnson, 2009).

Catherine

Catherine's conceptions of LA was hugely influenced by her learning experience. "My teachers taught in very traditional ways. They did not bring in a lot of LA. So, I do not integrate LA as well." These quotes revealed an imprint of Catherine's learning experience in her teaching practice, which proves that teachers' previous experience of second language learning influences their disposition to act in their teaching (Hird et al, 2000; Numrich, 1996; Farrell, 2009). Even though Catherine was exposed to ideas of LA integration in her teacher training, she was still hesitant to integrate LA. This echoes Goodman's (1988) argument that teachers' pre-training belief derived from their learning experience is equally influential or even more powerful than formal teacher education. The knowledge from Catherine's learning experience impinged on her conception of LA, which became a part of her PPK in view of the connection between teacher belief and knowledge in Woods' (1996) notion of BAK. For example, her quote, "We only integrate LA for the sake of SBA" suggests that the importance of consolidating students' language skills for exams was deeply ingrained in Catherine's mind. While this echoes the findings of other studies highlighting the significance of SBA due to its place within the assessment (Luk, 2012; Carless & Harfitt, 2013, p.183), it also points to the effect of being brought up in a traditional exam-oriented curriculum on Catherine's PPK of LA integration.

The interaction with colleagues might have contributed to Catherine's PPK that LA is ancillary. She admitted to having negative feelings when she saw the NEST (Native English-speaking teacher) organize different LA activities. However, the interaction with other colleagues soon outweighed the negative feelings and reinforced her belief that LA was not important: "Most of my colleagues are not very into LA. Therefore, I would feel that LA is not essential." This resonates strongly with Sato's (2002) view that teachers tend to reinforce their existing belief and teaching practice when collaborating with others in the same context. Catherine mentioned that LA is for "entertainment" and "enjoyment," which confirms the findings of previous studies that view LA as extra-curricular activities (Mok et al, 2004), a "welcome break" (Carless & Harfitt, 2013, p.182), and a space for relaxation (Lin & Cheung, 2014).

Catherine's experiential emotion (i.e., teacher emotions arising from communication with students) (Zembylas, 2005) may also have hindered the development of her PPK in LA teaching. Catherine recalled that her students were not very happy when they had to stay after school to watch a drama show. The disappointment caused Catherine to refrain from further attempts of LA integration. Asking students to watch a drama show during after-school hours also indicates that LA was not treated as part of the formal syllabus. The prescribed school syllabus is a kind of "social, institutional setting" that exerts an influence on teacher practice (Borg, 2006, p.275). "In our syllabus, most of the time is spent on teaching reading and grammar. We do not have much time left for LA." This lends credence to the findings of previous studies on curriculum innovations in Hong Kong which listed the tight teaching schedule as a constraint on enacting reforms (Cortazzi, 1998; Carless & Gordon, 1997; Carless, 2003; Tong, 1996). Therefore, Catherine's development of PPK in LA integration was deeply hindered by her learning experience, interaction with colleagues and students, and the limited time available for teaching literary texts in a syllabus dominated by the drilling of traditional language skills.

Discussion

The expositions of teacher belief and practice of integrating LA demonstrate an array of views that requires further explorations. This section begins by examining the salient issues pertaining to the area of dissonance and proceeds to advance its implication for the development of teaching expertise.

It is evident that teachers are influenced by their experience in language learning (Hird et al., 2000; Numrich, 1996). While some teachers' conceptions of LA have their roots in their experience in the classroom as students, others extend their learning experience beyond the confines of schools to their personal learning experience in various contexts. The former is perfectly illustrated by Catherine's preoccupation with grammar translation pedagogy, and a prime example of the latter is Andy's conception that students can learn LA subconsciously in the process of learning English, which is exemplified by his own learning of LA through exposure to authentic English materials (e.g., songs and stories) in various out-of-school contexts. This finding hints at the role of teachers' personal learning experience in shaping their conceptions of LA. Betsy's positive views of LA integration manifested themselves when she recalled her exposure to rhymes and poems during her early literacy experiences. Her positive views of LA integration were imbued with the role of LA in providing comprehensible input and generating emotional responses from students. Such intertwining of teachers' learning experience with teachers' conceptions of LA reveals the socially constructed nature of teacher cognition (Freeman & Johnson, 1998; Johnson, 2006; Johnson, 2009).

Of particular interest in Catherine's data is the long-lasting effect of apprenticeship of observation (Lortie, 1975). Underpinning her conception of LA integration is that LA is for "entertainment" and "enjoyment" except in the case of SBA. She acknowledged her need to focus on traditional language skills before leaving room for LA integration. This emanated from the grammar translation syllabus she was brought up with and focused on the skills and content assessed in the exams as hallmarks of her teaching. These features are reminiscent of the teachers in Freeman's (1992) and Hayes' (2005) studies which report that teachers' experience in the apprenticeship of observation influenced their pedagogical styles

throughout their careers and functioned as a de facto guide for teachers' practice. This points to one difficulty in integrating LA. Most English teachers in Hong Kong were educated as students via a syllabus that emphasized structural accuracy (Walker, 2000). If English teachers lack exposure to literary language in their learning experiences, LA integration may cause them tension when they attempt to expose their students to the creative and imaginative appeal of literary texts. Therefore, it is important to consider teachers' previous learning backgrounds when integrating LA.

The assumptions underlying Andy's thinking is that LA integration is all about teachers' categorization. His entire belief regarding LA integration was driven by his view that LA cannot be categorized as something different from language. This is supported by his subscription to the more natural way of exposing students to LA elements in the past, instead of creating separate modules of LA in the current syllabus. His assumption that LA texts were previously included in the textbooks attested to his experience of learning LA through his own initiative to learn English. Betsy's understanding of LA integration can best be described as a constant struggle stemming from her lack of confidence in her own knowledge of LA. A cursory examination of her beliefs reveals that her view of LA integration revolved around the notion that LA can generate emotional responses from students and provide them with comprehensible input, even at the early stages of language learning. This belief is buttressed by her arguments that students are exposed to poems in primary school and learn nursery rhymes in kindergarten. The premise that LA is beneficial to students' language learning pervaded every aspect of her thinking.

These conceptions of LA integration convey a sense of the teachers' differences and capture the essence of their PPKs. Table 2 summarizes the assumptions underlying the teachers' conceptions and their related beliefs.

Table 2. The Images and Corresponding Beliefs of the Participants

Assumptions	Corresponding Beliefs
Andy: Learning English involves learning LA	LA integration can be implemented subconsciously
Betsy: LA is beneficial to students' language learning	LA can generate emotional responses and provide comprehensible input to students LA integration can be implemented at the early stages of language learning
Catherine: LA is for entertainment and enjoyment, except with regard to SBA	Her practice of LA integration is mainly affected by the content assessed in traditional exams The traditional language skills assessed

in the exams are
more important than LA in students'
language learning

This study also sought to explore the contextual influences underlying teacher conceptions of LA integration. In this regard, every teacher mentioned how their views and practices of integrating LA were affected by students' abilities, interests, and needs. Similar to the teacher in Rahimi & Naderi's (2014, p.657) study who views "students' competency, level and knowledge" as more important than the preplanned syllabus, it is apparent that the teachers in the present study adjusted their practices of integrating LA based on their views of what worked best for their students. The cornerstone of Andy's thinking was the idea that students are more influenced by the teachers' personality, rather than pedagogy, when they lack motivation to do anything. Therefore, he tried to engage students using his charisma while choosing texts that were comprehensible to them (i.e., texts that are reminiscent of the advantages of literature with a small "l") (McRae, 1991). On the other hand, Betsy focused on the relevance of LA materials to arouse students' interests in learning. In fact, students' weak language proficiency for learning LA texts emerged as her main concern. As for Catherine, what pervaded her thinking on LA integration was that students were not interested in LA activities (e.g., the drama show after school). Nevertheless, it must be pointed out that all three teachers expressed hesitations in exposing students to literary elements. While the points mentioned by the teachers signify their awareness of the potential difficulties in teaching literary texts to less-academically-inclined students, it also indicates their lack of awareness of the potential of LA for students' language enrichment. As suggested by the curriculum guide (CDC & HKEAA, 2007), LA can be used as one of the means to enhance students' exposure to the English language. Therefore, more thought should be directed at the utilization of LA to enhance students' exposure to authentic English texts and boost their proficiency.

Another result that emerges from the data is the difference between subject matter knowledge and PPK. Even though Catherine may have received input of literary knowledge as an English major, she still expressed lack of confidence in her own knowledge of LA. It seems that the input of literary knowledge as an English major during her university education did not affect her views on LA integration. While this implies that (subject matter content) knowledge and belief may not be related to each other as indicated in Woods' (1996) notion of BAK, it underscores the power of teachers' experiences and views derived from the apprenticeship of observation (Freeman, 1992) in contributing to their PPK. The relationship among various components in Woods' (1996) notion of BAK also depends on how knowledge is conceptualized. If knowledge is defined only from the perspective of subject matter content knowledge, as Catherine's case suggests, the connections among the various components of BAK may not be directly linked. However, if knowledge is defined from the perspective of PPK, there would be stronger links between the various components of BAK. For example, even though Catherine was an English major and should have received certain input of literary texts in her university education, she still expressed lack of confidence in her knowledge of LA. This can be contrasted with Betsy: Although she expressed a similar lack of confidence in her own knowledge of LA, her views of LA integration seemed to be more positive than Catherine's. One possibility for this is that the literary knowledge that Catherine

possessed was subject matter content knowledge while Betsy acquired more PPK of teaching literary texts in her teaching experience. Comparatively speaking, Betsy was more determined to overcome her perceived lack of subject matter content knowledge in LA to facilitate her teaching while such determination was absent from Catherine's data. This not only points to the possibility of a teacher's BAK being affected by his/her previous learning experience, but also highlights the influential role of the teacher's personal characteristics in shaping his/her BAK. Applying the concept of BAK (Woods, 1996) in analyzing Betsy's and Catherine's data, one can argue that teachers whose BAK displays the emergent nature of their PPK (e.g., Betsy) tend to have more positive understandings of the benefits of LA integration, while teachers whose BAK shows influences of their previous learning experiences may be more reluctant to change and not react to the integration of LA in an enthusiastic way (e.g., Catherine).

Furthermore, the relative importance accorded to previous learning experience merits attention. The experience of learning in a school-centered context proved to weigh heavily with Catherine, whereas Andy mentioned his learning experience in out-of-school contexts. Betsy recalled her memory of learning nurse rhymes in her pre-school years. Their various learning experiences contributed to their unique PPKs and led each of them to react to LA integration in a different manner. Andy's unintended experience of being exposed to LA while learning in an out-of-school context most likely gave birth to his conception that integrating LA is not a special or even new pedagogical strategy. Catherine's learning experience of being taught in grammar translation pedagogy contributed to her preference to stay in her comfort zone and her reluctance to change. Betsy's memory of being exposed to LA elements in her early literacy experience led to her view that LA can be introduced to students at an early stage of their educational experience. It is noteworthy that the teachers who expressed a lack of confidence in their knowledge of LA integration (e.g., Betsy and Catherine) tended to be more hesitant to integrate LA, while teachers who displayed confidence in their knowledge of LA (e.g., Andy) tended to view LA integration more positively. It is likely that the knowledge teachers acquired from their learning experiences affected their confidence in their knowledge of the subject matter being taught, which consequently affected their cognition and teaching practices. The findings also revealed that teachers' interest and confidence in their knowledge of LA, particularly those developed from their learning experience, arose as threads and interwove with their views on LA integration. Therefore, the knowledge component in Woods' (1996) notion of BAK can be extended to include not only subject matter content knowledge, but also teachers' interests and confidence in the subject matter being taught. In addition, Woods' (1996) notion of BAK can be utilized to consider teachers' developing PPK. The evolving nature of teachers' PPK contributes to each teacher's unique BAK and mediates their reactions to curriculum innovation.

One final feature mentioned by all three teachers was the influence of school policy on LA integration. Andy mentioned that the flexible policy surrounding his school's syllabus enabled him to adopt pedagogies that reflected his personal style in integrating LA (and teaching English in general). Betsy noted that the collaborative culture in her school facilitated her LA integration, which somehow motivated her to improve her practices of integrating LA through self-exploration. On the other hand, the tight teaching schedule at Catherine's school, as well as her colleagues' lack of knowledge about LA integration, reinforced her conception that LA was not an important part of the curriculum. The scenarios reported by these teachers resonate with Tong's (2005) finding that school leadership is an

important catalyst for effective curriculum innovations to occur. The successful implementation of innovative ideas advocated in the reforms also hinges on the existence of a professional exchange culture at the school. It can be argued that the flexibility and collegial support given by the school also affect the development of teachers' PPK, which affects their conceptions of LA integration.

Limitations of the study and future research

This study only focuses on teachers' conceptions of teaching literary texts and their stated practices. However, it did not extend to explore their actual practices based on observation. Future studies have to integrate this dimension to get a more comprehensive perspective of teaching literary texts based on actual snippets from the classroom. The present study is based in Hong Kong, where English is taught in a second language in mainstream schools. Future research can explore how teachers in EFL (English as a foreign language) contexts integrate literary texts in the standard language curriculum.

Conclusion

This study sought to scrutinize an under-explored domain in teacher cognition by analyzing three teachers' accounts of integrating LA, thereby shedding light on certain factors mediating teacher belief and practice in times of curriculum innovation, as well as uncovering distinct elements that underly the teachers' PPK. As one of the few studies to explore teacher cognition on integrating LA in Hong Kong, it contributes significantly to closing the gap that stems from lack of research among in-service teachers in second language contexts in the area of teacher cognition (Borg, 2009). Additionally, this study contributes to our understanding of the development of teachers' personal practical knowledge from various facets. In this sense, it is a valuable resource for researchers interested in the area of teaching literary texts in second language contexts.

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