PATHS TO NEW CONCEPTUALIZATIONS OF LITERACY
IN CHINESE EFL TEACHERS

A Dissertation in
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by
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In the last 15 years in China, dissatisfaction with the outcome of students’ English studies has led to changes in exams and textbooks, as well as efforts to equip teachers to use new methods. Shifts in public policy, material resources, and understandings of learners’ needs have led to greater expectations that Chinese English teachers should further develop students’ abilities to use English communicatively. However, it is challenging for teachers to alter their approaches to instruction, and little is known about what supports this process. This dissertation investigates how professional development activities can support teachers in developing a new understanding of instruction, specifically, conceptualizing English literacy practices as communicative activities.

In this project, a 21 week seminar was created to support Chinese university teachers in reconceptualizing literacy, utilizing Kern’s (2000) concept that “literacy involves communication.” The seminar was designed to develop what Vygotsky (1986/1934) called “true concepts,” genuine psychological tools that combine theoretical knowledge with practical knowledge. The seminar not only provided teachers with information about literacy and literacy-based instruction, but utilized activities to allow them to interact communicatively through texts. Qualitative methods were used to investigate the ways in which the teachers’ understanding of literacy changed through their participation in the seminar, and sociocultural theory provided a theoretical framework for tracing the conceptual development of three focal participants. The focal participants’ classes were observed seven times during the year. These observations and three debriefing meetings, as well as the seminar discourse, were examined to find how the teachers’ concepts of literacy developed.

This study found that two fundamental concepts impacted the participants’ development of new conceptualizations: their prior understandings of literacy, and the position they assigned
pedagogical theory in relation to their instruction. Each teacher engaged with the means of mediation in the seminar in different ways, but all appropriated some new understandings of literacy and utilized new literacy activities. This study supports teacher educators by revealing differing paths of conceptual development in individual teachers. It also illustrates Vygotsky’s contention that true concepts restructure cognition, allowing teachers to respond flexibly to new situations and preparing for future pedagogical learning.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

As a result of globalization, the ability to interact with others in a foreign language is increasingly important in many countries, and college graduates are expected to acquire the ability to communicate across cultures. In China, the impact of globalization on foreign language study can be seen in a gradual shift in the government’s articulated purpose for learning English. In 1963, the primary goal in English study was to acquire useful information, specifically to “absorb the aspects of science and technology which will help socialist construction” (Hu & Adamson, 2012, p. 9). Currently, the English curriculum for China’s 24 million college students sets forth the ambitious goal that English instruction “develop students’ ability to use English in a well-rounded way, especially in listening and speaking, so that in their future studies and careers, as well as social interactions, they will be able to communicate effectively” (Xu, 2007). China’s one million English teachers play a critical role in this process of developing students’ abilities to communicate. However, these teachers’ own English education is likely to have emphasized communication very little.

As the essential agents in the daily school activities that support student learning, teachers also continually need to learn, particularly when elements of their complex work setting, such as instructional objectives are changing, and no longer resemble the pedagogy the teachers themselves experienced as students.¹ Teachers’ rich knowledge related to their work, including understanding their subject matter, students, instructional routines, and institutional resources and

¹ Many other elements are likely to change with or independently of instructional objectives, such as teaching materials, technologies, or curriculum.
constraints is often an asset in their instruction. However, this knowledge can impede quality instruction if teachers only know how to function in the present transient circumstances and do not know how to adapt their knowledge to new teaching conditions. This dissertation explores how teachers learn to teach in such a way as to be able to adapt instruction to new contexts and purposes. The section below further describes the specific circumstances of Chinese teachers.

1.1 Problem: Meeting the Changing Needs for English Instruction in China

In the early decades of the People’s Republic of China (from 1949 to 1972), English was offered as a subject in schools in a limited way, so that when universal English instruction was resumed in the 1970’s, even students in college had to first learn the alphabet. In the following decades, the resources for English teaching and learning advanced tremendously, and student knowledge of English followed suit. However, in the 1990’s, as the opportunities for Chinese to engage with people from other countries increased, there was widespread dissatisfaction with the relatively poor abilities of college graduates to communicate in English (L. J. Jin, Singh, & Li, 2005; Ng & Tang, 1997; Tsui, 2007). Specifically, the Ministry of Education stated in their 2001 description of curriculum that “English education still cannot match the needs of China’s economic construction and social development.” (Hu & Adamson, 2012, p. 13). Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) had been introduced as a possible solution to this problem in the 1980’s, but its promise of enhancing students’ ability to engage in communication has not been fulfilled.2

In recent decades, the CLT approach has been widely advocated for English instruction in China, but still has been utilized in classrooms in limited ways. Several reasons have been posited for this lack of influence, such as the requirement of high English proficiency for teachers

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2 For more information about the early years of CLT in China, see Ouyang (2000).
and the lack of opportunities to use English outside the classroom (Burnaby & Sun, 1989; G.W. Hu, 2002, 2005a; Rao, 2002). Another reason may be that CLT was conceptualized by teachers as a set of techniques to supplement the existing approach to English instruction, rather than as a fundamentally new understanding of language learning. CLT was recognized by early promoters as a revolutionary understanding in which students learn language by using it rather than through information transmission from the teacher (see Ouyang, 2000). However, CLT has largely been realized as speaking activities which precede and follow the intensive teaching of texts, suggesting that many teachers have perceived it as merely a means intended to improve students’ speaking abilities, with minimal implications for the ways in which texts were taught. Intensive reading, the long-used practice of explicating written texts, has not been significantly altered with the introduction of CLT (Fang, 2010; G.W. Hu, 2002; W. Wu, 2008).

Chinese education, as a part of a Confucian heritage culture (Biggs & Watkins, 2001), tends to emphasize knowledge of the written system of foreign language, as well as utilize a transmission approach to foreign language teaching (Qing Gu, 2010; G.W. Hu, 2002; Kelen, 2002; W. F. Wang, 2008; Zhan, 2008). When CLT was linked to speaking in China, it was not connected with texts, which teachers and students perceived to be a central aspect of language learning. If educational planners and teacher educators were to link communication to the study of texts, this broader reconceptualization of foreign language learning would have the potential to more fully redirect Chinese teachers and students to view all language learning as learning a means of communication. Richard Kern has proposed a literacy-based approach to foreign language instruction that is centered on learning how to utilize texts as means of communication.

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3 This limited understanding of CLT has been noted in other countries (for example, see Sato & Kleinsasser, 1999).
This focus on texts is consistent with Chinese educational practices, while providing a new link between texts and communication.

1.2 Understanding How Teachers Learn

Though Kern’s literacy-based approach to instruction appears to have potential to enhance the instruction of English in China, the earlier introduction of CLT provides a cautionary note concerning conveying pedagogical innovations to teachers. Some scholars (Gorsuch, 2000; Ng & Tang, 1997) have suggested that the test-oriented nature of English instruction is largely responsible for the failure of innovations such as CLT. The Chinese Ministry of Education has shown concern for this problem in the English education system. They have influenced textbook production through extensively revising the college syllabi and particularly exams in order to facilitate a more communicative approach to foreign language instruction (A. Cheng & Wang, 2012; H. Wang, 2006; W. F. Wang, 2008; You, 2010; Zheng & Cheng, 2008). In addition, training courses and development programs have been carried out to support teachers in using instructional approaches that focus on learning to use language (G. W. Hu, 2005; G.W. Hu, 2005b; Ouyang, 2000; W. F. Wang, 2008; Y. A. Wu, 2001; Zhan, 2008). The fact that the changes in daily classroom activities have been limited (Burnaby & Sun, 1989; G.W. Hu, 2002; H. Wang, 2006; Yu, 2001), suggests that in a social system such as education, which is comprised of both material artifacts (e.g., the textbooks and exams) and people (e.g., administrators, teachers, and students), it is easier for government mandate to change the artifacts than to shape the understandings of the participants. Specifically, the failure of CLT in transforming English instruction in China may be related to the way in which this new approach was introduced to

(Kern, 2000). Kern’s (2000) book, *Literacy and Language Teaching*, elaborates the theoretical foundations of this approach, providing arguments for its importance and sample instructional activities for its use. Kern’s approach will be further described in chapter two.
Chinese teachers: the focus was on providing teachers with techniques which they should utilize in instruction (Q. Gu, 2005). When logistical and sociocultural reasons made it difficult for teachers to implement these instructional techniques (e.g., pair work and role plays) in their classrooms, CLT had little other connection to instruction. Though they are encouraged to do so, teachers generally do not use CLT to adapt or create appropriate techniques. Thus, it appears that they have not internalized a conceptual understanding of CLT that would allow them to integrate it with other understandings of instruction. One piece of evidence for CLT’s lack of effect is that the general understanding of language as a collection of facts to be transmitted to students has not substantially changed (Han, 2008; G.W. Hu, 2005a; W. F. Wang, 2008).

To support teachers’ work in education’s ever-changing circumstances, professional development activities should encourage conceptual learning which enables teachers to flexibly use cognitive tools and deepen their understandings of instruction. However, the formation of teachers’ conceptual understandings is not much understood. Scholars have noted that much of teachers’ understanding of instruction does not originate from what they are taught in formal teacher education activities, but is formed through their lived experiences in classrooms as students and teachers (Johnson, 1996; Lortie, 1975; Schon, 1995; Shavelson & Stern, 1981). Consistent with these observations, sociocultural theory (SCT) is a theory of learning that posits learning as taking place through interaction. Vygotsky explained that cognition develops when social activities become internalized as concepts, which then shape a person’s activity. Concepts are developed through all kinds of goal-oriented activities, specifically, in both everyday experiences and in schooled learning. However, concepts learned in formal educational activities (such as teacher education) may or may not be utilized in practical circumstances (such as classroom instruction). SCT suggests that teachers’ instructional activities will be transformed as

5 This understanding of teachers as technicians who carry out others’ plans is not unique to China (Freeman, 2002; Little, 1993).
they develop *true concepts*: genuine psychological tools that link abstract (theoretical) knowledge with experience gained in practical activity.\(^6\) True concepts should allow teachers to adapt their instructional practice to varying situations, more flexibly using instructional techniques guided by concepts than in cases where techniques are not linked to conceptual thinking. From an SCT view, the development of new conceptions of instruction is not merely the cognitive apprehension of new techniques or theories, but arises through the sociocognitive acts that forge links between novel information, previous knowledge (experiential and theoretical), and teachers’ understanding of their contexts (Johnson, 2006).

Vygotsky’s sociocultural understanding of instruction has been increasingly used as a lens for examining teacher education and professional development (Johnson, 2006; Johnson & Golombek, 2011a), but there have been few studies concerning the emergence of true concepts in teacher cognition (Ahn, 2009; Harvey, 2011). Neither those studies nor other studies of teachers’ conceptual development (Allen, 2011; El-Fiki, 2012; Yoshida, 2011) have examined the ways in which teachers reevaluate or link their everyday concepts to newly encountered scientific concepts. Understanding the processes by which teachers develop true concepts will help teacher educators and others involved in in-service professional development to better support teacher learning. This project specifically examines how Chinese teachers participating in a professional development activity developed new understandings of a novel cognitive tool, that is, Kern’s concept *literacy involves communication*.

### 1.3 The Purpose of the Study

In this context there are two pedagogical problems occurring at two levels of instruction: first, Chinese English teachers as they endeavor to improve their students’ abilities to use English,

\(^6\) In this context, “true” does not necessarily indicate that the concepts are correct in substance.
and second, teachers’ own learning in in-service professional development settings. Chinese teachers are expected to utilize effective approaches to enhance their students’ abilities to use English in communication, but CLT has not met this need. Kern’s literacy-based approach to foreign language learning focuses on literacy as a type of communication, and thus appears to offer solutions to the issue of learning to use language. Though there have been no studies of Kern’s approach being used in a Confucian heritage culture, it was created for foreign language learners (rather than second language learners as CLT was) and is consistent with the goal of learning language for the purpose of using it. Thus, this study will have implications as to whether this literacy-based approach has potential as a tool for teachers to both conceptualize and carry out English instruction in China.

The second problem is how teachers can be supported in using a new approach to instruction. For the literacy-based approach to be enacted in Chinese classrooms, teachers would need to have a new understanding, or conceptualization, of English instruction. Studies of teacher learning and of previous attempts to introduce innovations suggest that teachers need more than provision of instructional techniques or explanations of theory offered in isolation; otherwise, they will not be able to adapt their instruction to circumstances different than their current class situation. SCT suggests that teachers need to develop true concepts which are shaped through the linking of theory and practice, but currently we know little about how these concepts are formed. The main goal of the study is to extend our understanding of how teachers develop these new psychological tools.

To expand our understanding of teachers forming true concepts, I created an intervention for teachers, a seminar allowing teachers to interact with Kern’s concept of literacy, and examined how the teachers developed new understandings of literacy. Specifically, I designed a 21 meeting seminar for Chinese university teachers, offering a community in which they were encouraged to link theory to their practice to develop a true concept of literacy involves
communication. Data from three focal participants was collected during this professional development activity, to find if their conceptualizations of literacy were changing. Moreover, the classes of these focal participants were observed to see how they linked their emerging conceptualizations to their teaching practice.

In the context of the challenges facing English teachers in China, this study aims to explore how to support teachers’ learning in ways that will allow them to flexibly and suitably adopt Kern’s approach. Specifically, this study will examine the processes which support teachers developing a true concept of foreign language literacy, as displayed in their discourse and their instructional practices. In addition, the study identifies the mediation from the seminar, and the constraints and affordances that impacted teachers’ expanding understandings of literacy. This study will answer this question: How does participating in a literacy-based teacher development seminar mediate the way that Chinese teachers think about English literacy and engage in English language instruction? This question can be further specified in the following three questions:

1. How did the teachers’ engagement with the means of mediation in the seminar develop their conceptualizations of literacy?
2. In what ways do teachers’ conceptualizations of English language literacy change?
3. What changes are there in the ways in which they engage in English language instruction?

1.4 Overview of the Dissertation

Following the introduction in this chapter, in chapter two I describe the two congruent theories that framed the study and were used as the content of the seminar: sociocultural theory (SCT) and Kern’s literacy-based approach to foreign language instruction. From SCT, I first review three types of mediation: signs, interaction and activity. SCT posits these three forms of
mediation as leading not only to learning but to cognitive development. Signs include concepts, which are central in this study, so I discuss Vygotsky’s three main types of concepts: scientific, everyday, and true concepts. Then, I describe the ways mediation takes place through interaction in the Zone of Proximal Development and the multiple ways that participation in activity mediates cognitive development. This chapter then highlights those studies utilizing SCT that provided the basic understanding of teacher development used in this dissertation. Finally, I review the typical approach to literacy instruction in China and then introduce Kern’s (2000) approach. Here I show how Kern’s concept of foreign language literacy as involving communication enhances current practices and meets inadequacies in the current approaches to English learning.

Chapter three provides the details of the methodology of this study, including the justification for the research design. This chapter describes the research setting, the selection of participants, and the three focal participants. It also introduces the intervention in this project, a year-long seminar for teachers. The research method describes the researcher’s background, providing insight into the position from which the data was analyzed. The research process is described in two phases: the first, collecting data in the seminar meetings, classroom observations, and debriefing interviews; and second, a summative analysis of all the data. Finally, the validity of the study is discussed.

Chapter four further describes the content of the seminar in terms of its activities, and so provides the context in which the focal participants’ conceptual development (presented in chapters five to seven) took place. I describe my goals, and how I aimed to meet them through the structure of the seminar and the intentional use of the three types of mediation described in chapter two. The content of the seminar is also summarized in terms of the overall sequence of themes and descriptions of some key activities, showing how I connected Kern’s concept to other concepts and to teachers’ instructional practices.
Chapter five traces the conceptual development of one of three focal participants, Feng, who demonstrated an interest in learning pedagogical theory. During the study she began to link previously learned concepts to her instructional practices. Feng’s case illustrates the difficulties of linking scientific concepts to instructional practice in a system where knowledge is valued for purposes other than practice. However, structured reflection and the socialization stemming from participating in the group enabled her to gain some new understanding of literacy, which she began to utilize in her instruction.

Chapter six shows conceptual development in Ao, a participant whose minimal experience with scientific concepts, provided her little sense of their value. She had personal experience of English literacy as a communicative activity, but had only utilized that understanding of literacy in her instruction in limited ways. Through participating in the seminar, she began to more extensively link her conceptualization of literacy to instruction when she reconceptualized learning and teaching. Ao began using a number of new instructional techniques in connection with creating instructional goals and looked for new means to meet them.

Chapter seven traces the development of the third focal participant, Bi, who had already been attempting to link theory from her studies in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) to her instruction. Though initially Bi had little understanding of literacy as communication, she had a strong understanding of the purpose of language learning as learning to communicate. She found Kern’s concept of literacy to be a means of further specifying her pedagogical goals and providing her with new means to accomplish them. Through the seminar she reconceptualized literacy and expanded her instructional goals and approaches to meeting them.

In the final chapter, I summarize the most effective means of mediation identified in the study, describe the ways that teachers conceptualizations and instruction changed, and discuss how the three focal participants’ data reveals different paths of developing a true concept of
literacy. Then I consider the implications of how teachers in general develop new conceptual understandings and how professional development activities can foster teacher conceptual development. This study also has implications for teacher development in China, and specifically for the use of literacy-based approaches to instruction. The chapter concludes with my reflections on the study, the study’s limitations, and suggestions for further research.
Chapter 2
Sociocultural Understandings of Cognitive Development, Teacher Development, and Literacy

A critical question for those concerned with teachers’ professional development is how to facilitate teacher learning. Those committed to supporting teachers need to understand how teachers develop a conceptual understanding of their work so that they can assist teachers in forming the flexible understandings that can guide their instruction in changing circumstances. Sociocultural theory (SCT) is concerned with cognitive development, that is, development that shapes the way people think and act, and so is a suitable theoretical framework for examining changes in teachers’ conceptualizations. Moreover, because SCT recognizes the situated nature of all learning, it is especially powerful for investigating how teacher learning takes place while teachers are engaged in instruction, as is the case in this study. Therefore, this chapter first describes the theoretical underpinnings from SCT that guide both the formation of the professional development intervention that I designed and my analysis of teachers’ conceptual development. The second part of the chapter describes what studies using SCT have already shown about teachers’ conceptual development, particularly language teacher education. Findings from these studies were used to shape the intervention and to trace teachers’ conceptual development. The final section reviews literacy instruction in China, and explains how Kern’s concept of literacy was chosen as the concept to introduce to teachers in this study.
2.1 A Sociocultural View of Development

Sociocultural theory (SCT), based on the works of Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934), explains learning and development as not only functions of individuals but as taking place through social interactions that reflect the historical antecedents of the social activity. A salient example of learning-through-interaction is how teachers learn much of the work of instruction through their prior experiences as students, and these experiences strongly influence their approaches to instruction, as was shown by Lortie (1975) in describing the apprenticeship of observation.

According to Vygotsky (1986/1934), development is the transformation of the learner’s cognition (i.e., the creation of new complex mental functions), and is more difficult to achieve than learning, a simpler process that paves the way for development (Vygotsky, 1986/1934). Vygotsky’s unique contribution was to explain that development involves the internalization\(^1\) of cognitive functions gained through social interactions, and these functions are then used without explicit assistance from others (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). Development in a learner cannot be identified through any particular activity in isolation but by examining the history and context of that activity. For example, from a non-historical view, the use of a new instructional activity may appear to indicate that a teacher has a transformed understanding of instruction, but when the teacher’s experiences before and after that point are examined, the activity may be shown to be an imitation of another person. (While imitation of others’ activities may be a useful antecedent to development, it is not a sign of the “radical” restructuring of cognition that most interested Vygotsky, 1986/1934, p.108.) In terms of the process, Vygotsky stated that development was not a series of fixed stages that “unfolded” in a predictable fashion, but was shaped by the particular

\(^1\) Although “internalization” was not used by Vygotsky to explain this process, it is consistent with his ideas to say that processes that began externally to the person (in social activity) may be said to be internalized when the processes later occur in the learner independently of others’ assistance (Lantolf, 2003).
interactions of participants with their particular histories (demonstrated in Aljaafreh & Lantolf, 1994; Brooks, Swain, Lapkin, & Knouzi, 2010; Smagorinsky, Cook, & Johnson, 2003).

Vygotsky indicated there are several different means of mediating human cognition that could be used by others to shape the learner’s activity, and these could then later be employed by the learner to regulate his own activity, and bring the activity under conscious control. Finally, when the means are fully appropriated, they become part of the structure of cognition in the learner. The three types of mediation Vygotsky described as having the potential to transform external activities into internal mental functions were signs (particularly language), interaction with others, and goal-oriented activity (Kozulin, 1995). Among the signs that mediate cognition, concepts are particularly powerful psychological tools for organizing ideas and directing activities (Vygotsky, 1986/1934). For example, teachers’ concepts of the subjects they teach, their teaching materials, and the processes of teaching/learning will shape how they carry out their work. In terms of interaction as a means of mediation, Vygotsky’s zone of proximal development (ZPD) is the space in which a learner develops as she jointly works on a task with an expert, accomplishing more than what she could by herself. The ways that activity mediates cognition was not so much investigated by Vygotsky as by others who have used his work, particularly Leont’ev (1978) and Engeström (1987), who developed different understandings of activity theory. The next three subsections will examine each of these means of mediation, beginning with the development of signs.

2.1.1 Mediation through Signs

Vygotsky regarded signs as a crucial means of mediating human cognition (Valsiner & Van der Veer, 2000; Vygotsky, 1986/1934). He found through his studies that a word (or, more generally, a sign) mediated concept formation by helping the learner to focus his attention on
distinctive features of the concept and then analyze and synthesize these features (Vygotsky, 1986/1934). Kozulin (2003) demonstrated how psychological tools, one kind of sign, are more powerful than two other commonly used educational tools, technical skills and content. These three are sometimes confounded, but psychological tools, or what Vygotsky called “true concepts” (1986/1934, p. 119) are more useful to learners. Psychological tools are the most powerful of the three because they guide cognitive activity in a variety of situations, whereas content does not shape a multiplicity of activities, and technical skills are usually only applied to the same kind of activity in which they were learned. Kozulin notes that during instruction, a concept and particular content are often presented together, and if learners focus on the content, then the concept is not internalized as a cognitive tool. A typical example of this can occur when a teacher demonstrates how to guess a word’s meaning from context, and may aim to simultaneously mediate student understanding in three ways: reconceptualizing the understanding that words’ meanings are known in relation to the words around them (i.e., words do not have meaning in themselves), developing the skill of seeing relationships between different words in a sentence (e.g., verbs and objects), and providing a general sense of the particular word’s meaning (i.e., the content). However, a student may only focus on remembering the meaning of the word, that is, the content, rather than appropriating the concept of word meaning being context dependent or learning the skill of analyzing the relationship between the word and its context.² Even students focusing on the skill of guessing word meaning from context may not become aware of the concept that word meanings change with context. Thus, despite their importance, psychological tools are often not appropriated by learners, so it is vital to further understand various types of concepts and in particular, how true concepts are formed. The following sections

² Kozulin does not elaborate on this example, but this misapprehension of the concept seems to be related to the student’s learning goals. The same problem can occur when the teacher assigns an exercise concerning guessing words from context, and students transform the goal of the activity from reinforcing the contextual nature of word meaning through the practice of a skill, to that of merely completing an exercise (Lantolf, 2000). The role of goals is further discussed in 2.1.3 below.
will overview the various types of concepts, and then more fully examine how true concepts are developed.

2.1.1.1 Types of Concepts

Vygotsky sometimes interchanged the terms *concept* and *word meaning* because concepts are often represented by single words or short phrases, but we must take care to remember that simple words and phrases conceal the innate complexity of signified concepts. Concepts are not fixed objects, but develop over time, and because they are learned through interaction, they are open to revision with new experiences. This section introduces several kinds of concepts: everyday concepts, scientific concepts, rules-of-thumb (a type of everyday concept), and true concepts, which develop when everyday and scientific concepts are intertwined.

In examining the learning of concepts in schooling situations, Vygotsky emphasized the demarcation between spontaneous and scientific concepts. These two types of concepts can be distinguished by what is referred to as their genesis, that is, a historical or genetic view of their development. For a learner, spontaneous or everyday concepts are apprehended directly through lived experience: they are saturated with meaning since they are “deeply rooted in the child’s experience” (Vygotsky, 1986/1934 p. 158). Everyday concepts focus on the effects and properties of an object and are both non-systematic and often unexamined or unconscious. Because their genesis is not in words, these concepts may be difficult to define, and being concrete and connected with particular activities, they are not easily applied to new situations.

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3 This represents Vygotsky’s later framework of types of concepts, which focuses on learning through formal instruction, and appears to be his more fully developed explanation of concepts (Minick, 2005; Vygotsky, 1986/1934). In his earlier studies of concepts, he classified concept-like categories into *heaps, complexes, pseudo-concepts, and concepts* to delineate different stages of pre-conceptual and conceptual thinking in children (Smagorinsky et al., 2003; Vygotsky, 1986/1934).

4 Vygotsky’s reference to these concepts is frequently translated as “spontaneous concepts,” but he also used a term translated “everyday concepts.” The latter is used here to emphasize the link between these concepts and daily activity.
People have an everyday understanding of any phenomena they experience, either objects or activities. For example, a simple word such as “teach” is an everyday concept for many people, carrying unexamined links to specific activities which may or may not include lecturing, testing, or encouraging, and may include rich associations related to particular teachers and classroom events.

In contrast to everyday concepts, the genesis of scientific, or theoretical concepts, is found in other concepts. In other words, a scientific concept is understood in terms of other scientific concepts (Vygotsky, 1986/1934, p. 172), and is typically mediated by experts’ explanations. In form, scientific concepts are more abstract than everyday concepts, and thus can be utilized in a wide range of situations. Being materialized in words, a scientific concept is bounded by a definition that focuses attention on its essential elements and specifies how it relates to other scientific concepts. A scientific concept is part of a system of concepts, including subordinate (more specific) concepts, and superordinate (more abstract) concepts. Teaching methods can exemplify scientific concepts, for example, CLT represents a complex concept because it has been linked with a variety of other scientific concepts, such as speech acts, experiential learning, and situated use of language, or, for example, contrasted with structural competence. An individual’s specific understanding of CLT will depend on how she connects CLT to these other scientific concepts as well as to everyday concepts. For example, one teacher’s everyday concept of CLT might be that the central goal of instruction is for students to talk, whereas another teacher might have a more theoretically-based understanding that students should speak in class because through taking part in activity they gain skill in controlling linguistic resources. When carrying out instruction, the former teacher may conclude that all speaking activities are equally useful, while the latter, because of his conceptualization, helps students learn available linguistic resources and how to use them, in addition to arranging speaking activities.
When Vygotsky described concepts acquired consciously, he mostly focused on scientific concepts, but there is a type of everyday concept which is nonspontaneous because it is taught and consciously acquired, a nonspontaneous everyday concept. Lantolf and Johnson (2007) described these as “rules-of-thumb,” which are used in learning skills, such as cooking or driving. In the foreign language classroom, teachers and textbooks may teach rules-of-thumb about language which fall short of being scientific concepts. For example, English teachers may tell students that passive sentences are more formal than active sentences, without providing a conceptual explanation that passive constructions de-emphasize the actor, and so should be used where the actor is unknown or her role is minimized. In language learning, rules-of-thumb are inferior to scientific concepts because they merely produce shortcuts for learners to find correct answers on instructional tasks and do not reveal how language creates meaning (Lantolf, 2008).

The three types of concepts (scientific, everyday, which include rules-of-thumb, and true) can be differentiated through both their genesis, and the ways in which they are used in the present. According to Vygotsky’s explanation, a scientific concept is precisely defined and has clearly articulated relationships with other concepts. An everyday concept is one derived from the learner’s own experiences, and is often used unconsciously. A rule-of-thumb concept is a type of everyday concept that the learner is aware of and often can articulate. A true concept is one that has the abstract qualities of a scientific concept and the experiential links of an everyday concept, so it is a cognitive tool that can be used flexibly in new situations. Everyday concepts are learned unconsciously through everyday activities, and scientific concepts, rules-of-thumb and true concepts are often learned through schooling, but true concepts are the more difficult to develop. The next section will describe what is known about developing true concepts.

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5 Nonspontaneous everyday concepts appear to include both the skills and content which Kozulin (2003) contrasted with scientific concepts (note: he used the term “concept” exclusively to reference scientific concepts).
2.1.1.2 The Process of Developing True Concepts

Vygotsky (1986/1934) did not give priority to either everyday concepts or scientific concepts, but claimed that the two types provide the most useful psychological tools when they are brought together to form true concepts. A true concept has the abstract and systematic aspects of a scientific concept, but it also has been used by the learner in activity, becoming closely linked to his personal experiences, and can be used by the learner to mediate his thinking and activity. Vygotsky stated that the internalization of a true concept is the key indication of cognitive development. True concepts are formed when scientific and everyday concepts are intertwined: the former should “grow downward,” becoming more connected with the learner’s experiences, and the latter should “grow upward,” becoming more generalizable (Vygotsky, 1986/1934, p. 194). Panofsky, John-Steiner and Blackwell (1990) further explained how the two types of concepts are intertwined: “scientific concepts will eventually acquire concrete meanings for the child, and the spontaneous concepts in time will become rational and accessible to his or her conscious and volitional verbal strategies” (p. 252).

Scientific concepts, which are intentionally learned, are usually introduced through verbal definitions, but this is just the first step of a “long and complex” path to internalizing the concept (Vygotsky, 1986/1934, p. 152). Verbalism, the simple repetition of the definition of a concept, does not necessarily show that the learner is able to use it to organize activities (Vygotsky, 1986/1934). The process of a scientific concept growing down entails using it in activity; as learners connect it with their everyday activity, they enhance their understanding of the features of the abstract concept through seeing how these features can be linked to concrete situations. In order for an everyday concept to grow upwards, it has to be understood as one part of a system of linked concepts; thus, the learner must reflect on the everyday concept, creating relationships with other objects. Reflection contrasts with the typical use of everyday concepts, when the
learner’s attention is focused on the object itself, “not on the act of thought itself” (Vygotsky, 1986/1934 p. 171). Vygotsky said that verbalizing observations is a first step for learners in generalizing activity. Viewing the activity as a generalized process allows for new relationships between the learner and the activity. As the learner begins to think about the object or activity as part of a system of related items, the everyday concept may begin to work upwards to a scientific concept.6

Based on an investigation of the development of scientific concepts by his colleague Shif, Vygotsky (1986/1934) described how an everyday concept may be linked to a scientific concept. This study examined students learning a scientific concept (specifically, a way to express causation), for which they had already been unconsciously using a similar everyday concept. When they learned the scientific version at school, they were able to use it correctly in structured exercises with other scientific concepts. It was only after using the new concept with other scientific concepts that they began to use it correctly in connection with everyday concepts. Thus, Vygotsky claimed that in this path of development, development originated with an everyday concept, which was transformed into a defined concept. The key element in this progression was the instruction which included not only the definition of the target concept, but also linked it to other scientific concepts before linking it to everyday concepts.

Karpov (2003) claimed that the development of concepts requires explicit instruction in not only the concept, but how to use it. First, he claimed the essential elements of the scientific concept must be distilled, reducing attention to details of the immediate context and focusing the learners’ attention on those elements. These essential elements can be organized so that they are more easily internalized as a mental model, making the concept a tool that can be used to mediate further problem solving (Karpov). Sometimes these essential elements can be organized

6 Vygotsky did not claim that each everyday concept could become increasingly abstract and link with a scientific concept.
graphically, creating a complex symbol. For example, the food pyramid, used for several decades in the US to model ideal food consumption by suggesting proportions for each food type, is a graphic representation which was used to show people how to plan their diet. This type of representation focuses on essential elements, conveying the relationships between them. Two such representations were used in this intervention: Kern’s available designs and contextual layers, and Engeström’s graphic of an activity system.

According to Vygotsky, the evidence that a learner has internalized a true concept is the way in which she connects the concept with concrete situations as well as her ability to articulate the reasons for using it. Karpov (2003) further specified indicators of conceptual development as “a high level of mastery, broad transfer and intentional use… [being] able to answer ‘why’ questions, to substantiate the way in which they have solved a problem, and to defend the results obtained” (p. 69). A true concept, such as that described above, allows a learner to use the concept to solve a variety of problems in different situations. Karpov and Haywood (1998) have used Vygotsky’s understanding of concepts to identify two types of learning: conceptual (or theoretical) learning and empirical learning. The first type involves internalizing mental tools, through learning not only content knowledge, but learning how to think about a topic using scientific concepts. In contrast, empirical learning involves making generalizations from observations, which results in everyday concepts. The problem with empirical learning, as Arievitch and Stetsenko (2000) point out, is that “the ‘inner logic’ of a given subject domain remains to a large extent hidden” (p. 77).

When teachers, like other people, are provided with little support in thinking about their work conceptually, they naturally tend to develop empirical understandings of their instruction. Vygotsky’s understanding of concepts suggests that teacher professional development activities should include scientific concepts that can become internalized as true concepts and function as tools for planning and carrying out instruction. Vygotsky claimed that internalization requires
creating links with other concepts, both other scientific concepts and everyday concepts. In particular, as teachers link scientific concepts to their practice, the scientific concepts can become more concrete and meaningful, taking on the immediacy of everyday concepts. In addition, true concepts may develop as teachers’ practical understandings of instruction (i.e., everyday concepts) become more abstract and defined by other concepts, so that they have more of the characteristics of scientific concepts. This suggests that professional development needs to involve and connect both scientific and everyday concepts.

2.1.2 Mediation through Interaction

Because development begins intermentally (i.e., through interaction), human mediation is essential to cognitive development. Vygotsky only sketched his understanding of human mediation, so determining the types of interaction which best mediate learning has been much discussed by others (Brooks et al., 2010; Donato, 1994; Karpov & Haywood, 1998; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006; Wells, 2002). Vygotsky posited that profitable interactions took place in the zone of proximal development (ZPD). The ZPD is a metaphorical space between what a learner is able to do independently, and the most he can accomplish with the assistance of another.

ZPD interactions between an expert and a learner include imitation, modeling, and assisted performance (Chaiklin, 2003). Imitation, as understood by Vygotsky, is not mindless copying, but is unoriginal activity that demonstrates a certain level of understanding of a problem and its solution. In addition to imitation, Vygotsky described other related ZPD activities in which an expert supports the learner in thinking about the problem in new ways, not merely finding a solution, such as modeling thinking and assisted performance. The goal of mediation in the ZPD has been understood in rather different ways, for example, Hedegaard (1990) described the goal as socialization into accepted ways of solving problems, while Engeström (1987)
considered it to be thinking about problems in innovative ways. These two views represent a

dynamic tension, which is also reflected in studies by Aljaafreh and Lantolf (1994) and Cheyne
and Tarulli (2005). Aljaafreh and Lantolf’s study, focusing on the role of the “expert,”
demonstrates the mediational effect of contingent feedback. In this approach an expert provides a
learner with only as much help as she needs, and encourages her to take as much responsibility
for the task as she is able to. Cheyne and Tarulli, emphasizing the role of the learner, critique the
typical view of ZPD as too monologic and unidirectional, and question whose voice sets the
direction for mediation; as a result, they recommend that the learner’s voice be seen as having an
important role in setting direction during teacher-learner interactions. In terms of the participants
in a ZPD, a number of studies examine learning in the ZPD as taking place in a tutoring situation
(e.g., Aljaafreh and Lantolf). However, others have stressed that the ZPD should not be limited
to expert-learner pairs, but can also be used to examine groups, where the whole group shares
resources for solving a problem (such as, Engeström, 1987; Hedegaard, 1990). Recently M.
Poehner (2009) has described two approaches to working within the ZPD of an entire class,
concurrent and cumulative, both of which allow students to learn from the interactions between
the teacher and other students. This research suggests that classroom interactions in the ZPD
allow for multiple voices to be heard, providing more opportunities for innovation to emerge.

Though development in the ZPD is often described as being mediated by an expert,
Lantolf (2000) argues that expertise may be a feature of the group due to the co-construction of
knowledge, allowing some cultural innovation to come from groups rather than experts.
Donato’s (1994) study of scaffolding, for example, demonstrated that students working
collaboratively mediated their classmates’ use of new language features, creating learning
opportunities that would not have existed had students been working alone. Similar findings have
been described in a number of studies (see Belz & Kinginger, 2003; Guk & Kellogg, 2007;
Gutierrez, 2008; Huong, 2007; Storch, 2007; Watanabe, 2008) and give evidence that not all
mediation needs to be provided by an expert, and in fact, several of these studies suggest that peers whose abilities and positions are similar may be able to give more appropriate help to a learner than an expert can. Thus, in some situations the expertise that aids development does not necessarily reside within one person, but can be constructed by a group (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). These findings, together with Engeström’s (1987) discussion of innovation in the ZPD, suggest that utilizing group expertise is suitable when attempting to develop pedagogical innovations. This potential for groups without experts to develop new approaches to problems is especially important for this study in which an instructional approach was introduced in a new cultural setting. Specifically, in the seminar I contributed information about Kern’s approach and its use in the US, while the teachers brought their expertise in teaching within their instructional setting in China (Tsui, 2009).

In addition to those who write specifically about the ZPD, other Vygotskian-inspired researchers have described the characteristics of effective human mediation. Wertsch (2007) claimed that Vygotsky referred to two types of mediation: explicit and implicit. Explicit mediation is intentional intervention by another person, introducing new signs into an activity in order to change the quality of the activity. Implicit mediation takes place as language that is used in the ordinary course of communication begins to change a learner’s understanding of the activity. It differs from mediation using scientific concepts but is also language-based. Kozulin (2003), summarizing a number of studies of mediation through interaction, found that the variety of activities used to mediate learner development defied classification, and that particular types of mediation are valued more in some cultural settings than others (as was also shown in Heath, 1983).

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7 Watanabe (2008) found the effectiveness of peer mediation was based on the interactional style of the person offering mediation rather than the peer’s relative proficiency.
In summary, while much writing about mediation within the ZPD has focused on the interaction of a novice and an expert working on a joint task, classroom interaction also creates a ZPD. In addition, studies have showed that non-experts can also mediate development and that not all mediation is explicit. In groups, different members may bring various types of expertise, and thus development of group members is not necessarily dependent on a single expert. Finally, because interaction is always culturally situated, it can be anticipated that different types of interaction will be suitable in different settings. In particular, mediation that is suitable for teachers in the U.S. will not necessarily be effective for Chinese teachers.

2.1.3 Mediation through Activity

A third meditational means identified by Vygotsky is activity, and although Vygotsky did not specify how it mediates development, Leont’ev (1978) and his followers explained its role in activity theory. Activity theory, as further developed by Engeström (1987, 1999), examines the multifaceted social aspects of activity rather than studying the individual in isolation, analyzing the individual and the setting as a unity. According to Engeström, activity includes these components: the subject of the activity (a person), the object of activity (the subject’s orientation towards the activity), the outcome (the actual results of the activity), artifacts which act as meditational means (including both material tools and concepts), the community in which the activity takes place, the rules of the community and the ways in which labor is divided among participants in the activity (Engeström, 1999). All of these elements are mutually influencing, and thus contradictions will arise both within the system (see Figure 2-1 below) and between interacting activity systems. These contradictions may lead to innovation or failure of innovation, thereby accounting for the potential for either change or stability in a system (Engeström, 1999).
Below I describe some aspects of activity that are important when examining how concepts are utilized in concrete activity.

![Activity System Diagram](image)

Figure 2-1. Activity System (based on Y. Engeström, 1987).

Tasks are one of the important pedagogical activities that take place in classrooms. Research on the ways that learners participate in tasks reveals that there may be discrepancies between the objective description of a pedagogical activity and the participant’s (i.e., subject’s) conceptualization of the activity. Several studies reveal that learners orient to a task in diverse ways (i.e., they have different objects) though they are ostensibly engaged in the same task. Coughlan and Duff (1994) suggest that what is typically referred to as a “task” is a blueprint or plan for the behaviors of students. In their study, although students were engaged in the same task, they understood the goals, the rules, and their own roles in the activity differently, and thus they were not involved in the same activity. More specifically, Gillette (1994) found that students’ orientation to tasks (e.g., in order to receive an acceptable grade, or to enrich understanding) affected how much they learned from participating in the task. Roebuck (1998) also found that when students were given identical tasks, individuals’ backgrounds, goals and abilities influenced their understanding and completion of the tasks. These studies demonstrate that visible behaviors are only one part of activity, and suggest that the participant’s object in an activity is a key to understanding it. In this setting, where teachers are attempting to mediate
students’ reconceptualization of learning, it is important for them to consider the students’ orientation to instructional tasks. In analyzing the data in this study it was also important that I recognize that the teachers participating in the seminar had different objects in the seminar activities, which shaped their actions and outcomes.

From an SCT view, it is ideal for learners to be self-regulated as they engage in activity, in contrast with being object-regulated or other-regulated (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). Being self-regulated includes using a concept to regulate one’s activity and having a metacognitive understanding of the activity that enables the subject to monitor and evaluate the activity (Karpov & Haywood, 1998). An activity system view of learning suggests that there are multiple elements shaping an individual’s activity, including those more directly under her control (such as tools and objects) and others (such as rules and roles in the community) which are less influenced by the learner. As learners develop mental tools (i.e., concepts) to mediate their activity and articulate their objects (i.e., goals), they have the opportunity to increase their self-regulation. Similarly, as teachers develop pedagogical concepts which they can use to shape instruction, they increase their self-regulation as they work in a particular system with its unique constraints and affordances.

Recognizing the importance of goals, Leont’ev (1981) described the aspects of activity related to intention, and others have further developed this line of thinking. Leont’ev posited a motive as being held by the group and a goal as being relevant to the individual or specific to a circumstance, recognizing the importance of both the social setting and the individual in determining the orientation of activity. In activity theory, a central idea concerning this orientation, setting it apart from other theories of motivation, is that motivation arises with participation in activity rather than preceding it (Lompscher, 1999). Because motives and goals

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8 Being self-regulated does not indicate that an individual is autonomous, but that he has the ability to understand his situation, and when options exist, he is able to make choices in accordance with his object.
are integral parts of the activity system, they are not stable but shift as other aspects of the system change. For example, Lantolf and Genung’s (2002) case study of a language learner demonstrated how the learner’s goals shifted in response to the instructor’s instructional activities. Specifically, the teacher’s and student’s understanding of the language learning activity differed so greatly that the student adopted the behaviors desired by the teacher and abandoned her primary object of learning language and focused only on her secondary object of successfully completing the course. Markova (1990) and Hakkarainen (1999) also describe the differences in motive which may occur between teacher and students. Because the social motive is a part of the activity, the teacher’s organization of a classroom task can be crucial to forming the motive of the group, but in some cases the teacher’s motive may not be known by learners. This finding suggest that motives jointly constructed by teacher and learner will generally be known to learners and be more effective (Markova, 1990). The instability of motives suggests the importance of teacher-student intersubjectivity, as well as illustrating that goals are not autonomously set by individuals, either teachers or individual students. Creating intersubjectivity between myself and the teachers was important in carrying out the seminar, and in the seminar we discussed how teachers could create it with their students to make learning activities more effective.

This project analyzes classroom activity and draws on Hakkarainen’s (1999) understanding that teachers’ activities (and instructional thinking) cannot be understood without reference to previous interactions they had with their students. Her study showed that the activity at hand could not be understood without understanding the activity historically, noting in particular that teachers bring to the class their abundant and varied experiences in the activity over time, so that only analyzing the current activity is not sufficient. Therefore, in observing teachers’ instruction, it is useful to gain a genetic view through observing instruction over
extended periods and to obtain an understanding of the teachers’ previous experiences and their
view of the history of interactions in their class.

Affect, or emotions, also play a role in an individual’s orientation towards the activity.
Vygotsky described motivation as being made up of emotion, desires, needs, and interests. Since
he regarded emotions as part of cognition, DiPardo and Potter (2003) point out that from a
Vygotskian understanding, affect should not be contrasted with rational thinking. Therefore,
emotions can be understood as a vital part of cognition that undergoes development. Golombek
and Johnson (2004) demonstrate how emotions, particularly emotional dissonance, may be the
driving force for individual teachers to make changes in their teaching, or to develop new
conceptualizations. In addition, citing Tappan (1998), DiPardo and Potter suggest that important
aspects of mediating interaction are trust and rapport, which are related to affect. In this study I
looked for instances in which teachers’ experiences of emotional dissonance, or positive emotions
resulting from “successful” instructional experiences, furthered their development. In addition,
DiPardo and Potter’s work suggests the importance of creating positive relationships within a
professional development group.

Activity is an important means of mediating cognitive development in teachers because
they work in complex social systems both within the classroom and outside of it. In teaching, a
teacher aims to meet his goals while at the same time bearing in mind students’ abilities and
affect, the motive of a number of other stakeholders, and the affordances of various teaching
artifacts, such as textbooks and concepts. Through a teacher’s carrying out instructional
activities, his conceptualization of the activity develops as he understands how these factors
interact. Thus, a teacher’s classroom can be an important site of his learning (Johnson, 2006), as
will be further discussed below.

In summary, Vygotsky described three important means for mediating cognitive
development: signs, interaction, and activity, all of which were used in mediating teachers’
conceptual development in this study. Teachers need to continue to be learners of teaching in order to teach effectively over periods of time. Thus, in dynamic contexts, SCT suggests both means to mediate teachers’ conceptual development, and ways to look for and trace that development. The following section demonstrates how SCT has been used to understand teachers’ conceptual development and to design professional development activities.

2.2 Mediating Teachers’ Conceptualizations

Traditional professional development activities have often been evaluated by the extent to which teachers utilize instructional techniques with which they have been presented (Martin, 1993). Measured by this standard, efforts to introduce new principles, techniques and technologies to teachers have not often produced the desired results (Clair, 1998; Guskey, 2002; Kennedy, 1998), failure often being attributed to a gap between theory and practice. SCT suggests that teachers need new understandings of instruction⁹ that are created not through practice or theory alone but through activity that links theory to practice in a meaningful way. Knowing how those links are made is essential to creating interventions that can support teachers’ conceptual development.

Although the three types of mediation described above (signs, interaction, and activity) are linked, the findings of studies on mediating teachers’ conceptualizations will be presented according to type of mediation in order to highlight the role that each type plays. I will provide an overview of the ways that concepts (a type of sign), reflection (interaction), and engaging in instruction have been effectively used as means of mediation in other studies, and thus, have

⁹ For ease of reading, the complex activity of teaching and learning will be referred to as “instruction” throughout this paper, but it is not meant to imply that teachers’ actions are autonomous.
informed the design of the intervention used in this project. Then, I will examine the evidence of conceptual development in the few studies that have traced it in language teachers.

2.2.1 Mediating Teachers’ Cognitive Development Using Concepts

The professional development literature has suggested the importance of using scientific concepts to mediate cognitive development. For example, Martin (1993) observed that when teachers who participated in in-service development activities returned to their instructional contexts, they were not using the techniques they had been taught because they could not adapt them to their contexts. These techniques could not be adapted because as rule-of-thumb concepts, they were not flexible mental tools (Arievitch & Stetsenko, 2000; Lantolf & Johnson, 2007; Negueruela & Lantolf, 2006). However, teaching scientific concepts presents challenges. Concept instruction, which is usually an important part of formal teacher education (i.e., degree programs), also has had less impact on teacher’s subsequent instruction than anticipated (e.g., Grossman, Smagorinsky, & Valencia, 1999; Staton & Hunt, 1992). One reason why scientific concepts may not become true concepts is due to a lack of consistency in describing the concept, for example, the existence of varying definitions of a concept within an education program (Cook, Smagorinsky, Fry, Konopak, & Moore, 2002). Another problem with using scientific concepts may be that as Karpov (2003) suggested, when the concept is taught along with techniques, teachers may learn the pedagogical tools without actually learning the concept (see also, Grossman et al., 1999). These studies suggest the importance of a clear articulation of a scientific concept and the insufficiency of pedagogical techniques or rules-of-thumb in mediating teachers’ development of true concepts.

In the area of general education, Grossman et al. (1999) studied the path of development of the scientific concept of constructivism in several teachers. They suggested five levels of
appropriation of a concept: no appropriation of the concept, appropriation of the concept’s label, appropriation of surface features, appropriation of conceptual underpinnings and mastery of concept. These stages reveal four different aspects of knowing a concept: knowing the label (including the definition) which refers to the concept, knowing the surface features (such as pedagogical techniques related to the concept), knowing the underpinnings of the concept (i.e., understanding the purposes for using the concept), and being able to use the concept to evaluate their instruction and students’ abilities. Grossman et al.’s work represents a unique effort to classify the aspects of conceptual development, but these stages have not been substantiated by others.

Some difficulties in mediating teachers’ understanding of concepts arise because scientific concepts, though represented by simple labels, are complex systems of meaning and are not easily materialized. It may be that oftentimes teaching techniques are introduced as the easiest materialization of a concept, but as Kozulin (2003) noted, this could lead to teachers attending to the technique (or skill) instead of the concept itself. Yoshida (2011) showed how metaphors, another kind of sign, can be valuable in materializing abstract concepts when he provided two contrasting metaphors to help teachers conceptualize differences between two approaches to curriculum. As the group developed common metaphors, individuals expressed their emerging conceptualizations of curriculum through creating, reflecting on, and revising their own metaphors. Visual representations of conceptual understandings, called SCOBAs (Schema for the Orienting Basis of Action) have been used in teaching language (Lantolf, 2011; Negueruela, 2003), but this schematic representation approach has not been used in conceptual development for teachers, perhaps because of the complexity of teachers’ work. Thus, the question of how to materialize scientific concepts for teachers by means other than providing pedagogical tools has not been well addressed. This project will utilize more concrete subordinate concepts to bring greater particularity to the relatively abstract core concept (literacy
involves communication), as well as using definitions and graphic representations, discussed further in 2.3.

A variety of situational constraints may influence teachers’ linking of scientific concepts to their instruction. Instructional settings in which the foremost purpose of instruction is preparing students to pass exams tend not to support teachers in instituting change in approach to instruction (Ahn, 2009; Kubanyiova, 2007; Yoshida, 2011). For example, Ahn showed that student teachers in South Korea received little support from mentor teachers or from the curriculum when attempting to use CLT. Other constraints to linking scientific concepts to instruction are institutional assessments that are not aligned with new teaching objectives and textbooks that do not support the use of a new approach, thus adding material creation to teachers’ responsibilities (Allen, 2011). However, the studies by Ahn (2009) and Allen and Dupuy (Allen & Dupuy, 2013) have demonstrated that teachers in the same setting vary in their use of a new concept. This indicates that situational factors are not determinative in individuals’ linking scientific concepts to their instruction: concepts developed in teachers’ prior learning and teaching experiences were shown to be important mediators of their conceptualizations. In Ahn’s study, though all the student teachers had been taught CLT in the same program, those who had little experience of communicative instruction as learners showed few links between CLT and their practicum instruction. Her study confirms the idea that the concepts that mediate a teacher’s understanding of instruction may be formed before teacher candidates participate in teacher education and may remain largely unchanged through an education program. This finding suggests that it is important to identify and compare these prior understandings with the new concepts that are being introduced to teachers.

Several studies have addressed this issue of ways in which prior concepts mediate understanding of a new concept. Allen and Dupuy (2013) observed that for some teachers the content of their prior concepts may more easily accommodate a new scientific concept and
facilitate their understanding of it. In other cases, such as Yoshida (2011), the scientific concepts presented in professional development activities are in tension with the teachers’ everyday concepts. Differences between teachers’ prior concepts and a new concept are not necessarily obstacles, as both Yoshida and Ball (2000a) documented instances where these differences created a cognitive dissonance which led teachers to begin questioning their everyday concepts in light of the new concepts they were learning. Specifically, these studies found that articulating contradictions between everyday concepts and scientific ones is a means of engaging with a new scientific concept. In this project, I recognized the role of prior understandings as I traced teachers’ prior concepts related to literacy to see how they mediate teachers’ understanding of new concepts and utilized techniques to help teachers to articulate contradictions.

2.2.2 Mediating Teachers’ Development through Reflection

Reflection, which has long been considered an important tool in teacher development (Bartlett, 1990; Kamhi-Stein & Galvan, 1997; Wallace, 1996), is the basic activity in several means of mediation in this study. Although popular images of reflection portray an individual engaged in solitary cognitive activity, reflection is in fact an activity that involves externalization. In externalization, a teacher materializes her ideas in language (spoken or written), making them available for conscious examination (Johnson & Golombek, 2011c). Externalization is a type of interpersonal interaction, and so solitary reflection represents internalized relationships; thus, all types of reflection are social practice (Hoffman-Kipp, Artilles, & Lopez-Torres, 2003). The process of externalizing one’s thinking requires selecting details to form generalizations (Burton, 2009). Forming generalizations is a critical step in constructing a concept because it allows for examination of the relationships between an object and other parts of the system (Vygotsky, 1986/1934). Materially, reflection may be directed towards the self or another person (present or
distant), and may be produced as either oral or written texts, but the core activity of externalization is the same.\textsuperscript{10} This section will show how the various forms of reflection, those carried out individually and with others, in written forms and oral forms, and initiated by self or by others, are able to mediate teacher development. Additionally, it will show that those forms including scientific concepts are more likely to lead to conceptual development.

In terms of unstructured, individual reflections (i.e., with no clear second participant), there are only a few studies which cast light on reflections that are written by the teacher for herself and illustrate how even an activity with one person can be said to be learning within a ZPD. Verity’s (2000) analysis of her earlier journal writing demonstrates how a seemingly individual activity is actually interactive. When she found herself in a difficult new setting, she used her journal reflections to construct an other with whom she dialogued. In this ZPD, she adapted her instructional competencies as she consulted her experienced teacher self for guidance, and thus linked her knowledge from prior experiences to her practice in a new setting. Much of the value of Verity’s reflection came from her own extensive knowledge of instruction, but Golombek and Johnson (2004) also showed the mediational value of a journal for an inexperienced teacher who, without specific prompting, reflected in a journal in order to stimulate her professional development. Through rereading her journal and intentionally reflecting on ideas there, this teacher linked themes in her journal to scientific concepts encountered in her academic program. These reflections played an important role in development as they mediated her connecting scientific concepts to her practice, although they did not immediately lead to new teaching activity. These two studies show that independent, unstructured reflection undertaken by teachers, of their own volition, can support conceptual development.

\textsuperscript{10} As with any social activity, the goals of externalizing ideas could be different, for example a person could externalize his ideas with a goal of justifying his activity or solving a problem.
In terms of oral reflection with others, Au (1990) provides an example of the utility of unstructured discussions of instruction. She used a form of stimulated recall (Calderhead, 1981), in which a teacher learning a new instructional method and a more expert teacher, Au, regularly viewed and discussed videos of the first teacher’s lessons together. Au encouraged the teacher to bring up the parts of the lesson that she felt were important, so they were able to discuss the aspects of the teacher’s instructional practice that were ripe for development.11 There are also more structured types of oral reflection that allow the teacher to set the agenda for reflection, in particular with peers who seek to intentionally mediate the teacher’s understanding, utilizing problem-solving approaches. For example, the Critical Friends approach provides a variety of protocols and rotating leadership of meetings that allow a group of teachers to have effective collaborative discussions. P. Poehner (2011) demonstrates how the protocols helped to reframe a teacher’s view of an instructional problem that she had identified and systematically consider alternative actions. Another protocol for peer mediation among teachers is the Cooperative Development approach, in which a teaching peer reflects and focuses a peer instructor’s statements (Edge, 2002). Tasker, Johnson and Davis (2010) show how a peer helped a teacher to reconceptualize his purpose in instruction through mediating him to externalize his thoughts and generalize from specific incidents (see also Golombek, 2011; Golombek & Johnson, 2004). These studies all show how oral interaction with others (either expert or peers), shaped by the individual teacher, can help that teacher to gain the ability to reframe their instructional activity in new ways. However, Clair’s (1998) study found that without a structured approach to reflection, some group reflection might not help teachers to reconceptualize instruction, in particular where teachers expect to be helped by experts rather than peers.

11 Stimulated recall may be arranged such that the teacher or the teacher educator takes the lead in choosing topics for discussion (e.g., Golombek, 2011; Johnson, 1994).
When the impetus for teacher reflection is initiated by others, it is necessary to consider how it will support teacher development. Asking teachers to keep written journals with relatively unspecified contents is a common means of encouraging teachers to reflect (Chamberlin-Quinlisk, 2010; Childs, 2011; Clair, 1998). These unstructured invitations to reflect allow teachers to select the aspects of classroom interactions that they examine (as in Au, 1990), but there are two elements which enhance the probability of conceptual development: scientific concepts and cognitive dissonance. If there is no explicit effort to introduce scientific concepts, teachers’ reflection focused on solving concrete problems is likely to draw on everyday concepts (e.g., Kubanyiova, 2006) and may not lead to new conceptual understandings. Also, if teachers feel satisfied with their instruction, their reflections may only confirm their current approach. In other cases, especially when teachers experience cognitive dissonance (or other contradictions), reflection can be effective in increasing their abilities to make generalizations about instruction, to see the relationships between different elements of instructional activity and especially to seek more resources with which to understand the issue (i.e., Childs, 2011; Golombek & Johnson, 2004; P. Poehner, 2011; Smolcic, 2009; Tasker et al., 2010).\(^{12}\) If teachers reflect on and try to solve contradictions, potentially, their thinking could become more abstract and more closely linked to known scientific concepts. This kind of development would be what Vygotsky described as everyday concepts growing upwards towards scientific concepts. SCT studies have not shown how reflecting on everyday experiences might bring about everyday concepts growing up to scientific concepts.

Other reflective activities are more intentionally shaped by a teacher educator or expert to specifically support conceptual development. In some cases this includes specific direction that reflection should make use of theory; in particular, writing activities can invite teachers to  

\(^{12}\) There are not yet studies of how this practice-focused reflection supports teachers who do not feel they have pedagogical difficulties, or experience emotional or cognitive dissonance.
connect instructional activities with theory (Ball, 2000a, 2009). Johnson and Arshavskaya (2011) demonstrate how questions (both more and less explicit) and suggestions focusing on a particular scientific concept assisted teachers in attending to and later reflecting on that concept in connection with their instruction. Golombek (2011) demonstrates how responsive mediation by an expert teacher guided a teacher-learner to develop a deeper understanding of classroom interactions, which was displayed in how the teacher-learner evaluated instruction, connected concepts with concrete teaching activities, provided rationale for activities, and suggested alternative plans. These studies suggest that more structured reflection will support the linking of scientific concepts to concrete instruction in more robust ways.

Though reflection is a valuable tool in mediating conceptual development, there are several obstacles to overcome in using it in professional development. For many teachers, reflection is not a habitual part of their work experience, which consists of numerous “unanalyzed experiences” (Martin, 1993, p. 79). Specifically, teachers may lack time to reflect on instruction or may feel that reflection has no benefit (Kubanyiova, 2006), perhaps because they perceive that they lack power to change classroom activity or they do not have a goal of changing their instruction. Kubanyiova’s study suggests that teachers require both sufficient time and a sense of the efficacy of reflection in order to carry it out effectively. In addition, as a social activity, the quality of reflection with others will be shaped by the relationship between the participants, and thus depends on the degree of trust between those involved. For example, Yoshida found that teachers were initially reluctant to share their beliefs and experiences with peers because of the possibility of offending others or being evaluated negatively (Yoshida, 2011). Thus, it was important in the intervention in this project to create an environment where teachers could openly reflect in discussion.

From a methodological standpoint, much of the written reflection produced by teachers involved in teacher development is produced for other readers, so teachers’ orientation toward
audience in their reflection activities should be examined. In particular, journal writing is not private writing produced solely to organize thinking (Dicamilla & Lantolf, 1994), but is shaped by writers’ understandings of the purpose and form of the activity. Atkinson’s (2012) review of strategic compliance in teacher reflection is a helpful reminder that reflection that is not self-initiated reflects relationships (and understood expectations) between teachers and those who read their reflections. Thus, the reflections of teachers, particularly written reflections, should not be understood merely as providing a view of teachers’ understandings of instruction, but also as a socially situated response to a particular request or requirement. This issue is particularly important in systems such as Chinese education, where people may often aim to provide the expected answers to questions.

2.2.3 Instructional Activity as a Means of Mediation

Linking scientific concepts to instructional activity is one of the most difficult aspects of conceptual development (Ahn, 2009; Allen, 2011; Yoshida, 2011), but it is essential to developing a true concept since true concepts can only be internalized in relation to goal-oriented activity (Johnson & Golombek, 2011b). Scientific concepts can be linked to instructional activities through reflection, for example, in discussion of hypothetical classroom activities, which is easier than actually using the concept in an instructional activity. Apart from actual classroom instruction, many types of activity may connect scientific concepts to pedagogical practice, for example, tasks such as having teachers create lessons, materials, syllabi or other pedagogical artifacts that may not be immediately used (Allen, 2011; Ball, 2000b, 2006; Yoshida, 2011). The participants in Allen’s teacher development course found presenting a lesson to peers and designing a syllabus to be useful means of learning. These types of activity allow teachers to
link scientific concepts to concrete situations without having to work out the multiple complications of carrying it out in the classroom, thus focusing more attention on the concept.

Teaching practice has been described as a space for development by a number of authors (Ahn, 2009; Au, 1990; Golombek & Johnson, 2004; Smolcic, 2009; Verity, 2000), however, only a few studies have demonstrated the role of teaching activity on conceptual development. Allen (2011) showed that through the teachers’ attempts to structure instruction to meet the students’ needs, they experienced how the scientific concept could be utilized in their instruction. Johnson & Arshavskaya (2011) provided a microgenetic view of how attempting to utilize a scientific concept in microteaching was important in mediating teacher candidates’ understanding of the concept. The teacher educator raised questions concerning the connection of the scientific concept to the teaching plan during the practice teaching. The team of candidate teachers then had the opportunity to rework their lesson plan and teach it to students. The educator’s questions along with the students’ actions mediated their developing a clearer understanding of the concept. The effect of the various means of mediation, (i.e., the scientific concept, the reflection with the teacher, and the activity of carrying out instruction) was different for different teacher candidates: some candidates appropriated both the formal definition and demonstrated an ability to describe its importance, while others merely seemed to have gained a general understanding of the concept in that particular instance.

2.2.4 Conditions and Evidence of Conceptual Development

The above studies suggest several important factors necessary for means of mediation to mediate teacher understanding. First, teachers’ goals for participating in professional

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13 Though Au (1990) claimed that the primary means of promoting her participant’s development was the teacher selecting issues on which to dialogue, the opportunity for the teacher to make repeated attempts to better utilize the concept in her instruction also appeared to mediate her development.
development are of great importance, particularly when they are engaging in reflection at the request of others. The potential for teachers to engage in reflection merely to comply with another’s request and without any learning goal emphasizes the importance of intersubjectivity between a teacher educator and teachers. A space for negotiating the purpose of professional development increases alignment in goals which facilitates professional development (Freeman, 2007). For example, teachers may not desire to change their instruction or may reject an approach to teacher development, and more subtly, they may not be oriented towards developing their own solutions to classroom problems (Clair, 1998). Therefore, in this project I aimed to enhance intersubjectivity between myself and the participants, in particular, through being open about my goals, providing opportunities for them to voice their pedagogical concerns, and presenting ideas in ways that related to their situations.

The above studies also suggest various ways to create links between scientific concepts and instructional practice. Materializing scientific concepts, which may be accomplished through definitions and metaphors, facilitates using abstract concepts as mental tools. Reflection can also be an important way of linking scientific concepts to instruction; however, it should be noted that not all reflection involves scientific concepts and when it does not, reflection remains at the level of empirical thinking. Teaching activity itself can enable teachers to link scientific concepts to practice, but teachers may require assistance in keeping the scientific concept in view as they divide their attention between multiple aspects of instruction. In this project, to mediate the teachers’ understanding of literacy involves communication, scientific concepts were connected to their everyday instructional activities through subordinate concepts, various types of reflection, and discussions and presentations about literacy instruction.

These studies also suggest a number of types of evidence of conceptual development which this study uses to trace individual teachers’ understandings. First, there are ways in which a growing understanding of a concept is shown verbally, including learning the label and
definition of a concept. Also, a concept may be referenced in discussions where teachers are directly asked to provide their understanding of it (Yoshida, 2011). However, as Allen (2011) and Grossman et al. (1999) found, teachers’ mentioning a concept does not indicate their understanding of it. Allen showed how one teacher used terms related to the concept with a clear expression of the concept’s features, while the other teacher’s use was less clear. More complex verbal uses of the concept include integrating it with the teachers’ actual circumstances (Allen 2011, Yoshida, 2011), being able to explain the goals for enacting the concept (Johnson & Arshavskaya, 2011), producing more precise goals (Au, 1990), and evaluating a textbook using the concept (Allen, 2011).

In terms of a new conceptualization being evidenced in a teacher’s activity, different uses of a concept in activity show different degrees of appropriation of the concept. Lantolf & Thorne (2006) differentiate between mimicry and imitation, explaining that mimicking does not involve knowing the purpose of an activity, whereas imitation requires understanding the goal in undertaking it. Thus, mimicking the use of pedagogical tools without understanding a goal related to the scientific concept only creates a weak link between the concept and practice. In contrast, teachers’ clear articulation of goals relating instructional practice and the scientific concept demonstrate their understanding of the concept (Allen, 2011; Johnson & Arshavskaya, 2011). Because scientific concepts, by definition, can be clearly articulated, an evidence of using them in instruction is the ability to provide clear explanations of that use. When teachers find or design materials and instructional activities employing the concept, they show both their understanding of and their commitment to using the concept (Ball, 2009). Both Yoshida (2011) and Johnson & Arshavskaya found that integrating pedagogical content and pedagogical method, that is, teachers being concerned with both what students learned and how they learned, showed teachers’ deepening understanding of the concept in relationship to practice. Several studies demonstrated a teacher’s conceptual development when the teacher populated the concept with
his own intentions, that is, he appropriated a new concept to meet his goals (Allen, 2011; Ball, 2000a; Johnson & Golombek, 2011c; Lantolf & Johnson, 2007). Some of the most complex uses of concepts in instruction involved the creation of student evaluations based on the concept or designing activities to meet student needs using the concept (Allen, 2011; Ball, 2009).

### 2.3 Content of the Seminar: A New Approach to Teaching Literacy

The intervention in this study involved introducing a concept from Kern (2000), *literacy involves communication*, to a group of Chinese university teachers. As mentioned in the previous chapter, this concept was selected because it appears to bridge a gap between the stated goals for English instruction and the typical approach to classroom instruction in China. This section first details typical English literacy instruction, showing why Kern’s concept was chosen, and then describes the subordinate concepts from Kern’s approach that were used in the seminar to materialize *literacy involves communication.*

#### 2.3.1 English Literacy Instruction in China

English learning in China has been centered on learning from texts: the most used method of foreign language instruction in China the last 50 years is represented by the teaching and learning approach called intensive reading. Intensive reading, which was at one time the title of the foundational English course in college, is often described as combining elements of the grammar translation and audiolingual methods (Adamson, 2004; Cortazzi & Jin, 1996; Ouyang, 2000). In China, the Intensive Reading course has been characterized by the teacher’s detailed analysis of short, challenging texts, intended to ensure students’ understanding of the vocabulary.

14 The audiolingual aspect includes learning through habit formation, especially through reading aloud (G.W. Hu, 2002; L. Jin & Cortazzi, 2006; Penner, 1995; Wen & Johnson, 1997).
and structure of the text (for in-depth descriptions, see Cortazzi & Jin, 1996; P. Y. Gu, 2003; G.W. Hu, 2002; Kohn, 1992; Scovel, 1983). The epistemic view of this approach to foreign language learning is that knowledge is codified and transmitted from teacher to student (Han, 2008; G.W. Hu, 2002; Paine, 1990). Although the core English course for college students today is often titled College English, many of the teaching practices associated with the Intensive Reading course still dominate instruction. Teachers tend to focus students’ attention on explanations of words and structures, and providing little opportunity for them to use English (A. Cheng & Wang, 2012; Kohn, 1992; Maley, 1990; Ting, 1987; You, 2010).

This traditional teaching approach has been blamed for students’ low oral proficiency, so in recent decades, the proposed solution has been to direct teachers to increase speaking and listening activities in English instruction (Ruan & Jacob, 2009; Xu, 2007). In fact, it has been observed that students’ abilities to use English with written texts are also lacking, due to teachers’ focus on form over meaning (You, 2004; Zhang, 2010). This suggests that students’ lack of ability to use foreign language is not simply due to an instructional emphasis on particular skills, but rather to their understanding of foreign language learning. Many students’ principle experience of foreign language is as a means of evaluation disconnected from communication.

Kern’s approach was selected for the seminar because of its focus on the communicative nature of texts, which have been the cornerstone of most English study in China. Though initially developed in the North American context, Kern’s literacy-based approach is a heuristic framework rather than a set of particular techniques and thus may be suitable for use in other settings. Various concepts related to Kern’s subordinate concepts (described below) have become part of the EFL discourse or even practice in China, but Kern’s approach and more generally literacy have not been discussed in relationship to foreign language instruction.
2.3.2 Kern’s Literacy-based Approach to Foreign Language Instruction

In this study, the core concept, *literacy involves communication*, and its explanation were taken from Kern’s 2000 book *Literacy and Language Teaching* (2000). In this work, Kern argues for the importance of developing learners’ abilities to think critically and interact with others through texts. To this end, Kern provides a definition of literacy for foreign language instruction that is the foundation for his literacy-based approach to instruction.

To begin our exploration of this approach, I propose as a working definition for an expanded notion of literacy, one that weaves together linguistic, cognitive, and sociocultural strands. This definition is not meant to describe all forms of literacy, but rather to characterize literacy in the specific context of academic second and foreign language education. *Literacy is the use of socially-historically-, and culturally-situated practices of creating and interpreting meaning through texts. It entails at least a tacit awareness of the relationships between textual conventions and their contexts of use and, ideally, the ability to reflect critically on those relationships. Because it is purpose-sensitive, literacy is dynamic - not static - and variable across and within discourse communities and cultures. It draws on a wide range of cognitive abilities, on knowledge of written and spoken language, on knowledge of genres, and on cultural knowledge.* (Kern, 2000, p. 16, italics in original)

This definition of literacy articulated the meaning of literacy utilized in the seminar, but his simplified version of this, *literacy involves communication*, was a more usable label for this core concept.

Four of Kern’s elaborations of the core concept were used as sets of subordinate concepts that made the core concept more concrete. The first set of subordinate concepts was Kern’s three dimensions of literacy: linguistic, cognitive and sociocultural. With these dimensions he eschews views of literacy as either merely existing in individual cognition or only as a social phenomenon. A second set of subordinate concepts were his seven principles, which arise from his definition and provide shape to *literacy involves communication*. These principles are summarized in Table 2-1 below.
Table 2-1. Summary of Kern’s Seven Principles of Literacy.

1. **Literacy involves interpretation**: writers interpret as they write, and readers interpret the writer’s creation; both do this in light of their own experiences.
2. **Literacy involves collaboration**: the work of neither writers nor readers is autonomous; rather, writers create for an audience, who must also contribute their knowledge and interest.
3. **Literacy involves conventions**: the reading and writing of texts are culturally based patterns of activity, though modified individually.
4. **Literacy involves cultural knowledge**: writing and reading function within cultural systems, so that readers or writers outside the system may misunderstand or be misunderstood.
5. **Literacy involves problem solving**: finding the relations between linguistic elements and situational contexts is necessary for understanding and creating texts.
6. **Literacy involves reflection and self-reflection**: readers and writers think about both language and its relationship to themselves and the world.
7. **Literacy involves language use**: reading and writing require knowledge of how language is used in particular contexts to create discourse.

(based on Kern, 2000, pp. 16-17)

A third subordinate concept which Kern employed to illustrate factors from the three dimensions of literacy were the Available Designs and Contextual Layers of Literacy (from the New London Group, 1996). Kern’s explanation of Available Designs (AD) represents writers as utilizing the design elements of a particular literacy to create texts, while readers of the text use a (similar) set of design elements to interpret texts. This understanding of AD positions readers and writers as equally active in creating meaning, rather than readers being passive recipients of messages, and it accounts for how communication is formed between two (or more) persons, based on conventions, situation, and common knowledge. Kern’s graphic representation of the AD and conceptual layers of literacy makes visible the role of culture since designs available to writers and readers are specific to their language and culture (see Figure 2.2 below). The contextual layers of literacy provides a framework for understanding how texts relate to culture, and the AD draw attention to the multiple resources used for interpreting and designing texts. This figure is also a type of sign which could mediate the understanding of this concept, in particular, giving equal weight to resources frequently taught in China, such as vocabulary, and less commonly taught ones, such as genre.
In the fourth set of subordinate concepts which materialized literacy, Kern suggests four necessary components for a pedagogy of foreign language literacy (also based on the New London Group’s 1996 proposals): situated practice, overt instruction, critical framing and transformed practice. *Situated practice* activities allow students to focus on meaning and communication, which in instruction should be balanced with *overt instruction*, activities that utilize metalanguage to teach how Available Designs are used. *Critical framing* activities examine how the writer uses language to accomplish her goals, and *transformed practice* allows learners to use designs in new contexts. These curricular components reflect assumptions that (1) literacy is learned both through form-oriented and communication-oriented practice, (2) that explicit instruction provides metalanguage as well as discrete information and (3) that literacy be used for critical reflection. It is not merely students’ participation in particular instructional activities that will bring about their awareness of using designs. Instead, it is the teacher’s
mediation that frames the instructional activity. By drawing attention to the way that the writer’s purposes influence his choice of design, the teacher demonstrates how texts are communicative. Kern provides numerous example activities from foreign language instruction in the US to illustrate these four components, noting that one instructional activity may utilize several pedagogical components. Many of these activities were not created by Kern, but can be used or adapted to a literacy focus in instruction. Some activities were relatively structured, such as DRTA (Directed Reading Thinking Activity),\textsuperscript{15} which he categorizes as \textit{situated practice}. Other activities were less structured, such as comparing two genres, which, in the example he provides, largely involves \textit{overt instruction}.

Though Kern’s framework is compatible with innovative approaches to linking instruction in foreign language and foreign literature (see review in Paesani, 2011), its use in instruction of intermediate students has not been examined. In another application, Allen (2009) describes how she employed a literacy-based approach in an advanced course in French writing, suggesting that it allowed many of the students to draw a clearer connection between reading and writing, in part through examining texts to find how writers had employed language. Most of the studies using Kern’s approach, have examined its use in developing graduate student instructors’ conceptual understanding of foreign language literacy. Allen and Dupuy’s (2013) study of novices learning this framework found that teachers’ conceptual development was gradual, and even after three years, some participants had not created strong links between Kern’s concept and their instruction. The brief initial introduction to this framework in a methodology course provided teachers with a very limited understanding, suggesting that this was a difficult concept for new teachers to connect to instruction. An advanced course for graduate instructors, after they had taught for a few years seemed to better support teachers’ instruction, but in terms of

\textsuperscript{15} This approach, developed by Stauffer (1969) allows students to establish goals, make inferences while reading, and then evaluate those inferences.
conceptual understanding, teachers still had difficulty explaining links between pedagogical techniques and concepts. This study and Allen (2011) point out the challenges of mediating teachers’ conceptual development, but have not described difficulties with using Kern’s framework.

In terms of the suitability of Kern’s literacy-based approach in China, this approach shares the government’s frequently stated goal of enabling Chinese students to think creatively and critically (A. Cheng & Wang, 2012; G.W. Hu, 2005b; Zhan, 2008). Similarly, Kern’s view of literacy as learning to use resources corresponds with the growing understanding in China that the ultimate goal of foreign language instruction is to communicate (Hu & Adamson, 2012; Xu, 2007). At the same time, Kern’s understanding is a challenge to a transmission-oriented understanding of instruction. Concerning Kern’s specific subordinate concepts, linguistic aspects of literacy have clearly been the most emphasized in China, with a strong focus on the conventions of language. However, an awareness of the importance of cultural knowledge seems to be increasing in the professional EFL discourse in China (Feng & Byram, 2002; Hu & Adamson, 2012; Huang, 2005; Ruan & Jacob, 2009). Both Kern’s principles of using language and problem solving are said to be required in national tests, texts and syllabi, (W. F. Wang, 2008; Zhan, 2008) though their application to the classroom seems to be mixed.\footnote{There have not been many studies of Chinese EFL classroom instruction, so this is based on observations of Cortazzi and Jin (1996), and Hu (2002)} The principles of interpretation, reflection, and collaboration, do not appear to be typical aspects of EFL literacy in China, but traditional Chinese literacy involves teaching students to reflect and interpret (L. Jin & Cortazzi, 2006). From this brief overview we can see that Kern’s approach, while containing new understandings of language and instruction, also aligns with some views of language and instruction in China which are part of or have become ideals for instruction.
2.4 Conclusion

This study utilizes sociocultural theory as the theoretical framework for understanding teacher development because SCT views the learning of an individual (i.e., teacher) as occurring through social activity, thus allowing a multi-dimensional understanding of teacher development. SCT also describes how conceptual development transforms a learner’s understanding of the object of study, allowing the object to be more systematically and broadly connected to other phenomena and situations. For teachers, this kind of development should enable them to adapt their instruction to changing circumstances and needs. However, conceptual development is a complex and extended process which comes through multiple opportunities to engage in activity that links scientific concepts to everyday practice, thus creating true concepts. Although SCT has been used to show some aspects of teacher development, there is still little known about the process of foreign language teachers developing true concepts. This study aims to provide a deeper understanding of this process in order to enable those involved in teacher professional development to better support teachers’ conceptual development.
Chapter 3

Research Design and Method

In this chapter, I introduce the methods undertaken in this study to both organize and then analyze an intervention, specifically a professional development seminar for tertiary EFL teachers in China. In the first section of this chapter I explain the qualitative approach taken in this study, and then situate both the seminar and the study with a description of the setting and the participants involved. Because chapter four describes the intervention itself, it is only briefly outlined in this chapter. I then provide details of how the data for the study was collected and analyzed. The last section demonstrates the validity of the study.

3.1 Research Design

The goal of this study was to shed light on how an intervention mediated teachers’ development of a new concept that they could utilize in their instruction. Specifically, the concept literacy involves communication was chosen as a concept that could be employed by teachers to enhance Chinese college-level students’ ability to use English to communicate. Because teachers’ conceptual development is reflected in discourse and activity, a qualitative approach (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Richards, 2009) was most suitable for showing the subtleties and details of this development. Historically, the study of practice has led researchers to engage in qualitative research because only through sustained contact with research participants in their contexts can practice be understood (Eisner, 2001). Thus, a seminar format, providing a rich source of data in its many hours of group discussions and quantity of written materials generated by the teachers, was chosen as a site for examining conceptual development. In addition, the
seminar provided the repeated opportunities for teachers to engage with the new concept that are necessary for developing true concepts.

In order to trace how a new conceptualization was displayed in teachers’ classroom instruction, the classes of three focal participants were observed, and the teachers were given opportunities to explain their understanding of their instruction. Concept development requires numerous opportunities to engage with the concept (Grossman et al., 1999; Smagorinsky et al., 2003), so data was collected over two semesters in a case study (Duff, 2008; Richards, 2003). Teachers’ learning and instructional activities and their contexts were also explored, so ethnographic methods were used, including participant observation, field notes, and researcher reflexivity (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). This approach allowed for utilizing both emic and etic views of situations, for using a sociocultural theoretical perspective on teacher learning to inform the analysis of data, and for the study to be focused on a particular problem/issue (Watson-Gegeo, 1988). Because they situate the researcher within the context of the study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000), ethnographic methods were appropriate for a study in which I was also the organizer of the seminar.

3.2 Setting, Participants and Activity of the Seminar

This section will first provide relevant background concerning the participants’ context, and then describe the participants in the study. I first describe important factors affecting teachers’ instructional activity: the explicit and implicit instructional requirements teachers had to fulfill in their social setting and the administrative structure in which they worked. After the setting has been established, the following sub-sections provide explanations of the composition of the group, selection of the focal participants, and an overview of the seminar.
3.2.1 Research Site

The research site was chosen because it was a typical mid-level Chinese university, and it offered access to teachers in a setting where I had already developed relationships within the institution. The relationships I had with personnel at the university provided me with a general understanding of the context and made it possible for me to carry out an intervention.

This university, like many others in China, was a site marked by pedagogical tensions due to the large number of students required to study English and the relatively brief pedagogical preparation that most English teachers had received. As in most other tertiary institutions at the time, all undergraduate students were required to study four terms of general English, followed by one or two terms of English reading in their major.¹ Because the number of undergraduate students increased dramatically from the late 1990’s to the mid 2000’s,² the number of English teachers expanded quickly as well. As a result, many of the teachers employed in that period had only completed a B.A. in English, though in the recent decade these teachers were increasingly expected to obtain an M.A.³ Some of the teachers’ degrees were in the field of English Education, but a number graduated from English programs with no pedagogical component, and even those who earned a degree in an education program were unlikely to have had a practicum that involved regular teaching activities. In these programs, class work that linked theory with actual classroom practices was limited. Thus, a majority of the teachers gained their understanding of English teaching only through their experiences as students, a few training workshops, and exchanging ideas with other teachers.

The teachers in this study all taught the same course, College English, though they worked in two different offices. College English is a four-term core English course required for

¹ Students had studied English for at least six years during their secondary education.
³ At the time of the data collection, in 2008, most of the English teachers in this college had completed, or were enrolled in, an M.A. program, with perhaps 15% having completed an M.A. outside of China, while only a handful of the English teaching faculty of more than 100 teachers had PhDs.
all undergraduate students, except those studying foreign language.\(^4\) Each of the two teaching offices responsible for this course consisted of around twenty-five teachers, and they taught English to a whole grade of students. Usually teachers taught each class of students for two years, providing continuity of instruction for students from one term to another.\(^5\) Thus, one office taught all the university’s freshmen students one year and continued to teach those same students as sophomores the following year. Teachers were usually quite familiar with those in their office group because most teachers remained in the same office for many years. The leaders of the two offices were the lowest level administrators in the college and shouldered significant responsibility to ensure the teaching office was effective. Working within a set curriculum, these office leaders determined how to best carry out the teaching goals set by administration at a higher level. Thus, the office leader’s understanding of the teachers’ work and his or her specific instructions created different affordances and constraints for the teachers in that office; for example, the leaders affected the degree of freedom a teacher had in choosing which parts of the text to use. Regular meetings for the teachers in an office, about two times a month, allowed leaders to work out administrative details and teachers to discuss pedagogical issues.

The College English course met for 64 hours most terms (that is, 16 weeks with two classes of 100 minutes each week). A typical teaching assignment was three sections with 50-60 students per section.\(^6\) While teachers could make decisions about day-to-day instructional activities, the following parameters were generally determined by others: textbooks,\(^7\) chapters to teach, proportional attention to various skills, and exams. The textbooks were chosen and the

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\(^4\) Foreign language majors had more specific courses with different goals.
\(^5\) This looping structure is typical of Chinese education in primary and secondary contexts as well: for some subjects teachers instruct the same students for three years to provide continuity in instruction.
\(^6\) Although this class size seems large for language study, for many students this was one of the smaller classes in their first year of university study.
\(^7\) There were at least four English textbooks per term for students, often an integrated set of books including: Extensive Reading, Speaking, Listening and the core textbook, Comprehensive Studies. The core textbooks all had an accompanying CD ROM text which teachers used to varying extent in class. In addition, students had two hours in the computer lab to use a CD ROM of exercises and supplements to the text.
syllabus, indicating the chapters in the text to be covered, was set by higher level administrators, while each term the final exam for the whole grade of students was written and graded collectively by the teaching office. One class meeting each week was designated as a speaking and listening class and was held in a listening lab, while the other meeting focused on reading texts and was held in a multimedia classroom with a computer and projector. Teachers were responsible to prepare students to pass the national College English Test level 4 (CET4). Students had to eventually pass the CET4 in order to receive their university diploma, but teachers felt some pressure to have a high percentage of their students pass the exam on their first attempt, at the end of the third term. Although there were no material rewards for teachers related to the number of students who passed the exam, this appeared to be one of the primary tangible ways of measuring a teacher’s pedagogical abilities.

Although the College English program was fairly structured, teachers appeared to have some autonomy in how they arranged their classes. Teachers’ rights to choose which textbook chapters to cover varied with the teaching office and with individuals’ perceptions of the guidelines. Similarly, there was some flexibility in the time allotted to various skills. Guidelines suggested the time spent for speaking, listening and text study at one hour, one hour, and two hours respectively, but the actual time spent on each textbook seemed to vary among teachers. At the time of the study, the policy in assigning final grades allowed teachers some autonomy: the weight of the final exam had been reduced to 70% of the final grade, giving each teacher control of 30% of students’ grades, which could be based on an oral exam, class assignments or other evaluation.

During the four semesters that teachers worked with a class, there were changing instructional foci that impacted how teachers organized their classes. In the first term, because freshmen students’ levels in speaking and listening varied extremely, in addition to the constant attention to texts, teachers tended to emphasize oral skills. Writing skills were emphasized more
in the last two terms, mostly in preparation for the CET4 or other exams. In the first and second terms, study was focused on the textbooks, but administration and students both expected that up to half of the third term would be spent practicing model exams and learning test-taking techniques for the CET4. In the fourth term (after the CET4), students were divided into new classes according to whether they passed the exam or not. Classes of students who did not pass the exam spent most of their fourth term in test preparation, while the teachers of students who had passed the exam were free to use the textbook or choose to focus on a particular theme or skill. Teachers said they struggled to keep students engaged and attending class in the fourth term, since the students’ central task of passing the exam was completed.\(^8\) While the foci of instruction changed, generally the textbook series and the course structure were the same through the four terms.

### 3.2.2 Participants

The participants for the study were drawn from the teachers who taught the College English course at one university. Choosing a group with a uniform teaching assignment facilitated my understanding of the teachers’ situation and allowed the group to discuss concrete circumstances and plans that teachers felt could be carried out in their context.\(^9\) The participants were volunteers (from about 50 potential teachers in the two College English offices) who committed to attending the seminar and spending an average of three hours a week outside the seminar in reading, written reflection and other activities. At the beginning of the spring term,\(^{10}\)

\(^8\) Another exam, the CET6, could also become a new object of study for students desiring to demonstrate more than basic English proficiency.

\(^9\) Even with many shared characteristics, teachers from the two offices made comments displaying their sense of their dissimilar situations because each office was using different textbook series and had several different management practices.

\(^{10}\) The spring term in China generally proceeds from March to mid-July, and the fall term from September to mid-January.
an invitation was made to teachers to join a seminar on literacy-based instruction (with a follow-
up seminar offered in the fall term). An initial interest meeting was held a week in advance to
provide the broad outlines of the seminar, answer teachers’ questions, and explain and distribute
consent forms. 11 In addition to the regular participants, two teachers who were interested in
participating in the seminar but not in becoming research participants were allowed to join the
group to ensure a large enough community for mutual learning. These two teachers participated
in the seminar, contributing their experiences to group discussions, but their discourse in the
transcriptions was not identified or analyzed, and they did not participate in interviews.

3.2.2.1 General Participants

There were 11 teacher participants who joined the seminar and consented to be part of the
research, as well as the two other members who did not participate in the research study. 12 Of the
11, the majority attended at least 13 of the 14 meetings the first term, but one attended only three
meetings, and another attended seven meetings. In the second term, seven of the research
participants (plus one non-research participant) elected to continue attending the seminar, though
one teacher made it clear that she did not anticipate having time for preparation outside of the
meetings. 13 The length of teaching experience in the group varied from three and a half to 16
years, with the average years of experience being eight and a half. About half the group had
completed M.A. degrees, and several others were in the midst of M.A. studies. The group was
largely female, only having two men, generally reflecting the male/female ratio of English
teachers in the college. Approximately half of the seminar group came from each of the two

11 Several leaders from the college came to demonstrate support, but otherwise, the group who attended this
meeting was largely the same as those who joined the seminar the following week.
12 Two additional teachers attended the first meeting but did not return.
13 The teachers who elected not to take part in the second term included three who had attended less than
half the meetings the first term, two others who had been fairly active participants, and one non-research
participant.
teaching offices, meaning that, for most in the group, half of the teachers were familiar colleagues and the other half were people with whom they had not worked before.

In terms of the nature of my previous relationships with the teachers, I had taught a majority of them for at least one semester in a “teachers’ training course” at some point within the previous eight years, and some of the teachers had participated in as many as three terms of courses I taught (including one whom I had taught as an undergraduate student). In the group there were some teachers with whom I had had extensive contact, and only two whom I had not taught previously.

All the study participants were assigned simple pseudonyms of one letter in the data, and will be referred to as Teacher D, Teacher G and so on, except the focal participants: a family name is given for the focal participants (Ao, Bi, and Feng) in order to assist readers in more easily noting data related to them.

3.2.2.2 Selecting Focal Participants

Extended observations and discussions of teachers’ understanding of their instruction was an important source of data, so in order to obtain fairly complete data for at least three teachers, I planned to obtain data from five focal participants (Duff, 2006). To find these focal participants, in the consent form I asked the general participants if they would be willing to have me come and observe their classes and then participate in debriefing interviews. In the initial interview, I gauged the interest of each teacher who had indicated willingness to be observed, and eliminated one teacher who seemed hesitant. I then selected teachers whose class times did not conflict so that I could observe them during the same weeks. I also attempted to observe teachers with

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14 These training courses varied in content from one term to another, and though aimed at younger, less experienced teachers, they had been open to anyone.
different characteristics and situations, so I initially aimed for diversity in teachers’ gender and in proficiency level of class.\textsuperscript{15} One teacher who had agreed to be a focal participant found her teaching assignment unexpectedly changed to a test preparation class and did not feel comfortable being observed, so an alternate participant was selected.

Of the five potential focal participants, this study analyzed the data of the three for whom there was the most complete data. Halfway through the first term, one of the five potential participants was no longer able to attend the seminar, and so I did not continue to observe his classes. Another of the five decided not to continue participating in the seminar in the second term, so although these two participants were observed in the first term, that data was not analyzed for this project. The eight observations and four debriefing interviews with these two participants, though not analyzed, added to my understanding of the range of teaching situations and teaching approaches of teachers at this site. In summary, although I had used a number of factors in selecting focal participants, ultimately the three focal participants were all teachers whom I knew fairly well.

Each of the three focal participants had patterns of high participation in the seminar. They each attended all but one of the 21 meetings held over the two terms. Additionally, they all completed at least 70\% of the written assignments, well over the average of 50\% for the whole seminar group. All of them were also among the more active participants in the discussions in the seminar.\textsuperscript{16} Feng and Bi had both been formally recognized as excellent teachers, having received prizes in university-wide teaching competitions.\textsuperscript{17} Ao was a less experienced teacher, and had considerable other professional and personal responsibilities during the time of the study. At the

\textsuperscript{15} Students in each year were divided into three proficiency levels according to their test scores, and students of a similar level were grouped together into A, B and C levels. More than half the students were A level (the highest), and more than half the teachers in the seminar group taught A level.

\textsuperscript{16} These teachers’ high participation did not come from a similar understanding of literacy or a similar approach to engaging with new concepts, as will be shown in the analysis chapters.

\textsuperscript{17} The university held annual teaching competitions, in which teachers, in their first ten years of teaching (from all academic disciplines) were judged on the written explanations of their instructional approach and actual demonstration lessons.
beginning of the study, Feng and Ao, were teaching second-term freshmen, and in the fall (the second term of the research study) their students were preparing for the CET4 exam (see Table 3-1 below). Due to scheduling difficulties, Ao’s observations were not completed in the fall, and Table 3-1. Two Year Teaching Sequence for Ao and Feng’s Office.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year/Term</th>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Research Study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2007</td>
<td>Freshman year, 1st term</td>
<td>(no research)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring 2008</td>
<td>Freshman year, 2nd term</td>
<td>1st term, seminar begins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2008</td>
<td>Sophomore year, 1st term (CET4 exam at end of term)</td>
<td>2nd term, seminar continues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring 2009</td>
<td>Sophomore year, 2nd term</td>
<td>3rd term, no seminar 18, 19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

were instead carried out in the beginning of the spring of 2009. Bi, during the first term of the study, was working with second year students in their final term of College English, designing her own curriculum, and in the second term of the study was teaching first-term freshmen (see Table 3-2 below).

Table 3-2. Two Year Teaching Sequence for Bi’s Office.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year/Term</th>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Research Study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2007</td>
<td>Sophomore year, 1st term (CET4 exam at end of term)</td>
<td>(no research)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring 2008</td>
<td>Sophomore year, 2nd term</td>
<td>1st term, seminar begins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2008</td>
<td>Freshman year, 1st term</td>
<td>2nd term, seminar continues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring 2009</td>
<td>Freshman year, 2nd term</td>
<td>3rd term, no seminar 19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All of the participants in the study were volunteers and expended considerable time to participate and seemingly had an interest in professional development. I did not directly inquire about their actual motivations for attending the seminar, but their comments indicated they may have had additional motivations for participating, such as having an extended opportunity to use English, or desiring to increase their professional knowledge (cf. Kubanyiova, 2007). The three

18 Observations for Ao were completed at the beginning of this term.
19 I organized a text teaching discussion group during this term and Ao, Bi and Feng were all active participants in this activity.
20 The second term sophomores that the focal participants taught were those who had passed the CET4 exam and had almost no test pressure in their English studies that term.
focal participants exhibited interest in developing their knowledge and abilities, and also in helping me with the project. I endeavored to discuss my research in general terms, but their comments revealed their desire to cooperate with my research agenda or at least their awareness of the ongoing project, such as when Feng asked directly “What kind of changes do you expect to see?” Because a sociocultural theory lens takes motivation into consideration (Lompscher, 1999; Markova, 1990; Miettinen, 2005), teachers’ varied motivations in participating and assisting me do not invalidate the study, but were considered when interpreting their data.

3.2.3 Seminar

The participants were initially asked to participate in a one term seminar, but were informed there would be a second term which they could attend or not. The seminar was designed for two academic terms because of the time needed to reflect on the concept in multiple ways and especially to link it to situated teaching experiences. The seminar format allowed teachers to bring their experiences, reflections, and approaches to instruction into dialogue with Kern’s concept of literacy. I designed the plan for the first term before the study began, but waited until the conclusion of the first term before planning the second, allowing me to consider how the seminar content could be arranged to correspond with the teachers’ actual concerns and understandings. The seminar was held during the spring and the fall of 2008, and consisted of 14 two-hour weekly meetings in the spring, and 7 two-hour biweekly meetings in the fall. Meetings were held in classrooms at the university, and an LCD or overhead projector was usually utilized.

In the first term of the seminar, I introduced the teachers to the core concept literacy involves communication, Kern’s subordinate concepts, and possible links to instruction, while in the second term we focused more on developing this concept through creating more links to instruction. I utilized readings, presentations, and diverse activities such as discussing a poem,
analyzing textbook introductions, and exploring ways to give feedback to enable the teachers to understand and link Kern’s concept to their everyday concepts and instructional contexts. The specific instructional activities of seminar meetings varied from week to week, but always included guided group discussion, usually based on readings or reflections the teachers had completed before the meeting. Further details concerning the seminar content are provided in chapter four.

3.3 Research method

This study was designed to cast light on how teachers develop new concepts, specifically answering the question of how participating in a literacy-based teacher development seminar mediates the way that Chinese teachers think about English literacy and engage in English language instruction. This question is further specified in the following three questions:

1. How did the teachers’ engagement with the means of mediation in the seminar develop their conceptualizations of literacy?
2. In what ways do teachers’ conceptualizations of English language literacy change?
3. What changes are there in the ways in which they engage in English language instruction?

In order to answer these questions, data was collected which would reveal the unfolding development of focal participants’ conceptualizations and the means that mediated that development. To find these conceptualizations, it was necessary to examine not only the way teachers articulated concepts, but also their instructional activities and their explanations of those activities. Thus, the teachers’ discourse (in seminar activities, interviews and instruction) and their classroom instructional activities were the primary data. The focal participants’ discourse in the seminar revealed how they linked the core concept to other concepts and to their instruction. From the observations, the participants’ instructional discourse and organization of instructional
activities, as well as their reflections on the observed classes, provided insight into how they were linking concepts from the seminar to their instruction. All these data sources contributed to answering the various aspects of the research questions, i.e., showing the changes in teachers’ conceptualizations and instruction as well as the ways in which the seminar mediated those changes.

This study was an intervention in which I aimed to mediate teachers’ conceptualizations over the period of a year. Because my mediation was adjusted on the basis of ongoing, informal analysis, the data collection and data analysis were not wholly distinct phases. Instead, certain kinds of preliminary analysis were going on during the data collection phase and a summative analysis was performed after the data collection was completed (Borg, 2011). Specifically, I began the process of interpreting the data as I transcribed seminar meetings and prepared for new meetings and debriefings, which is consistent with an ethnographic method of data collection in which data is queried as it is collected, forming a foundation for further observation and questions (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). The first phase of data collection and initial processing will be discussed below in 3.3.2 and the summative analysis is described in 3.3.3.

The following section first lays out the background of the researcher because in a qualitative study, the researcher uses a variety of materials and interpretive practices to make sense of the data (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000), so the understandings and experiences of the researcher play an important role in the study (Mauthner & Doucet, 2003). My relationship with the participants has been explained above, so the following section describes my own relevant experiences prior to and during the study.
3.3.1 Researcher’s Background

I began to teach English in China after the completion of an M.A. in TESL (and a minor in Chinese history). I was initially unaware that what I had learned about how to be a “good teacher” in the United States differed from what was expected of me by my Chinese students. After the first shock that those reputed best practices I had learned would not be effective in my current setting, I endeavored to discover instructional approaches that would allow me to integrate western and Chinese approaches to teaching and learning. After I spent two years studying Chinese in China, I spent several years assisting other Americans to learn Chinese. This position provided an opportunity to take on the role of a non-native speaking teacher and to realize some of the challenges inherent in that position. When I returned to English teaching, I was asked to provide support for Chinese colleagues teaching English, through classroom observations, workshops and classes for teachers. These experiences provided opportunities to better understand the complexities of Chinese teachers’ instructional situations.21 After four years of working with these teachers, I returned to the United States to study for a PhD.

When I started work on my dissertation, I returned to this Chinese university because it provided me with a useful research position as both an insider and outsider. Having taught at this school for nine years, I had basic knowledge of the context and found the leaders and individual teachers in the college to be very cooperative. However, I had been absent from the university for more than three years, so changes in the program and new perspectives which I gained while studying in the United States allowed me to be a more focused observer. In general, the college and the teachers who attended the seminar viewed me as a resource person or in some cases a mentor, in part because of the role that I had taken in “teacher training” in the college. Throughout the seminar I emphasized with the teachers our relationship as colleagues to

21 Several obvious differences between the roles of Chinese and expatriate teachers were: students’ expectations, ways of relating to the school administration, and (in many cases) the types of courses taught.
acknowledge their rich knowledge of their contexts, but because I was introducing ideas which I understood and which were new to them, I had more of a teacher role.

Within the seminar itself, my role as the organizer of the seminar was combined with that of researcher. This double role, at the high involvement end on the continuum of participant-observer types, offered affordances and constraints in the research project. This arrangement naturally gave me an insider’s view of the seminar and allowed me great access to contextualized information about the participants. However, it created a challenge in carrying out the role of observer, which necessitated me detaching myself from daily involvement (in planning details of meetings and responding to participants) in order to identify patterns of discourse and activity. I also had a tendency to focus on my performance either in the seminar or as an interviewer, which I had to set aside to examine the teachers’ actual responses. Through taking notes and writing memos, I endeavored to externalize emotional dissonance and begin to view data more analytically, finding connections between events; additionally, through the passage of time and repeated re-reading and analysis of the data, I was eventually able to observe it more objectively.

3.3.2 First Phase: Data Collection and Processing

The data collection took place from March 2008 through March 2009. Table 3-3 below summarizes the three sources of data: the seminar meetings, the observations and debriefings of focal participants, and supplementary sources such as textbooks and administrator interviews. The first source, data from the seminar, included seminar discussions and written assignments, as well as interviews of all participants. This data revealed how the teachers engaged with the means of mediation in the seminar (e.g. concepts, discussions, and tasks). The second source, data related to the observations, included the observations of focal teachers’ instructional activities and discourse, and debriefing interviews with them. This data showed the teachers’
conceptualizations of literacy and how they were enacted in instruction. Supplementary data was used to provide a fuller understanding of the first two data sources. Supplementary data included interviews with administrators, teachers’ textbooks, the national curriculum, and field notes, which were taken after the collection of each item of oral data (i.e., seminar meetings, observations, and all types of interviews), as well as at other times during the data collection phase.

Table 3-3. Overview of Data Collected.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Scope</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Seminar-related Data</td>
<td>Spoken discourse from seminar meetings</td>
<td>21 meetings of the group, over 8 months (See Table 4.1 for details)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Focal teachers’ written work</td>
<td>15 weekly assignments, written reflections in meetings, and two projects (see Table 3-4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interviews with focal participants</td>
<td>2 interviews with each participant, 1st and 4th months (see Table 3-5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observation-related Data</td>
<td>Class discourse</td>
<td>7 – 8 classes for each focal participant (see Table 3-5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Debriefing interviews</td>
<td>3 interviews with each focal participant (see Table 3-5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supplementary Data</td>
<td>Interviews with administrators</td>
<td>1 interview with each of two administrators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Participants’ textbooks</td>
<td>From focal participants: 6 textbooks (or relevant excerpts), 6 teacher’s books</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>College English Curriculum Requirements</td>
<td>2007 version</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Field notes</td>
<td>Written after each oral data episode</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>General participant data</td>
<td>8 observations, 20 interviews, multiple assignments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Materials used in seminar</td>
<td>24 from published sources, others written by author (9 substantial, many brief)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Supplementary data, from the participants in the seminar and from external sources, was used to contextualize the events of the seminar and the observations. From the seminar, data from non-focal participants, including information sheets, written assignments and interviews,
provided insight into teachers’ instructional settings and feedback on how they were understanding the concept *literacy involves communication*. Data obtained outside the seminar included interviews held at the beginning of the study with the administrators of the two teaching offices. These interviews supplied me with the offices’ requirements of teachers and insight into these leaders’ understanding of teachers’ work, as well as the logistical details for scheduling observations. The interviews were roughly transcribed immediately and the two offices were compared in terms of logistical and instructional arrangements, for example, student evaluation. The administrators’ comments provided context for me to understand the teachers’ comments about their working situations. In terms of documents, the English version of the national English curriculum supplied information about what was formally expected of students (and thus of teachers), and copies of the various textbooks and teacher’s books used by the focal participants provided background to understand what was taking place in the observations. In addition, I referenced copies of materials distributed in the seminar, including published handouts, and materials I wrote, such as summaries, reading guides, and assignments. My fieldnotes, recorded after all seminar meetings, interviews, observations, debriefings, and other discussions with participants, also provided contextual information.

The next two sections describe the collection and processing of the main data, organized by the location of data collection: that related to the seminar and that related to observations. As the data was collected, it was transcribed and initially analyzed through organizing a master document for each participant and writing analytic memos.

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22 Observations and debriefings of the two potential focal participants similarly provided a sense of the varied ways in which teachers were carrying out instructional activities.

23 In the next chapter, Table 4.1 includes all the published items I provided to the teachers.
3.3.2.1 Seminar-related data

Data from the seminar included the spoken discourse of the 21 seminar meetings, the written work produced in the seminar, and two interviews for each participant, which took place in weeks 2-3 of the seminar and after week 14. All of the discussions and interviews in the study were largely carried out in English, with the teachers and I occasionally using Chinese to clarify meanings. The discourse of the seminar meetings was recorded in audio and video formats using two voice recorders and a video camera. Meetings largely consisted of group discussion or presentation of ideas to the group and this formed the “discourse” data for the seminar, since recorders were not arranged to capture the small group or pair work discussions. The audio recordings were the primary data source, video recordings being referenced to clarify speakers and their meanings when necessary.24 Transcriptions of the meetings, capturing all comments were started and completed during this phase. Because I had many affective reactions to my own work in guiding the meetings, it was important to externalize these responses, so they would not covertly affect the analysis (Mauthner & Doucet, 2003). After finishing the transcription of each seminar meeting, I externalized my responses to the meeting in two steps: first, I wrote comments on a copy of the transcript which included all types of reactions and interpretations of my own and participants’ contributions, and then I wrote up a one to two page memo on my general impressions of the meeting.25

The written work of the participants was all in English. This work, including my written responses, was copied or scanned before being returned to the teachers. The teachers’ written documents included weekly assignments, several reflections written during the meetings, a project at the end of the first term of the seminar, and a portfolio at the end of the second term.

24 In all but a few cases the speaker in whole group discussions could be determined by the video and most words were clearly discernible.
25 Though these written comments and memos were good first steps, more time and careful analysis were needed to gain objectivity.
The teachers’ reflections during meetings were all handwritten, and the formal assignments (e.g., a summary, the end-of-term project) were all typed. For other assignments (e.g., journal entries), the teachers were encouraged to use the writing mode that was most comfortable for them, and most provided handwritten materials, while a few typed materials and sent them electronically.

(The list of documents can be seen in Table 3-4.)

Table 3-4. Documents Produced by Teachers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data code</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Type of writing</th>
<th>Content</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Insem1</td>
<td>3/11</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Quick writing (during seminar)</td>
<td>Response to “what did you learn today?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asgn1</td>
<td>3/18</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Journal (2 entries)</td>
<td>Reflections on own literacy and teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asgn2</td>
<td>3/24</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Journal (2)</td>
<td>Own topic and a description of a lesson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insem2</td>
<td>3/18</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Quick writing</td>
<td>Response to “How did you read this article?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asgn3</td>
<td>4/1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Journal, Persuasive Piece</td>
<td>Own topic; Why English study is important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asgn4</td>
<td>4/8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Journal (2)</td>
<td>Own topic and find instructional example for each of four pedagogical components</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asgn5</td>
<td>4/15</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Journal, Summary</td>
<td>Own topic; Summary of Kern’s view of teaching foreign language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asgn6</td>
<td>4/22</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Journal (2)</td>
<td>What motivates students; Learning activities commonly used outside of class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asgn7</td>
<td>4/29</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Journal</td>
<td>Examine own teaching using Available Designs or seven principles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asgn8</td>
<td>5/6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Journal (2)</td>
<td>Topic on learning; Account of own process for reading journal article</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asgn9</td>
<td>5/13</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Journal (2)</td>
<td>Reflections on Herndon; Plans for end-of-term project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insem3</td>
<td>5/20</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Quick writing</td>
<td>Response to “What would Kern think…?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insem4</td>
<td>6/3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Quick writing</td>
<td>Response to “What do you want your students to learn?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insem5</td>
<td>6/10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Questionnaire</td>
<td>Feedback on spring seminar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proj</td>
<td>6/17</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Formal Paper</td>
<td>End-of-term project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asgn10</td>
<td>10/9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Plans</td>
<td>Outline of goals and activities for term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asgn11</td>
<td>10/23</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Analysis</td>
<td>Analysis of Chinese textbook introduction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asgn12</td>
<td>11/6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Worksheet</td>
<td>Teaching writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asgn13</td>
<td>11/20</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Worksheet</td>
<td>Survey of own reading strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asgn14</td>
<td>12/4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Analysis</td>
<td>Action research mini-project on reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asgn15</td>
<td>12/18</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Analysis</td>
<td>Use of Available Designs in textbook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Port</td>
<td>1/4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Portfolio</td>
<td>Teacher’s portfolio</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

26 For all assignments before the end-of-term project, the maximum possible number of completed assignments was 11; afterwards, the maximum was 7.
Semi-structured interviews with general and focal participants were carried out at the beginning and end of the first term. The first set of interviews, ranging in length from 60 to 85 minutes, was designed to obtain contextual information about the participants’ own literacy experiences (curricular and extracurricular), their experiences as teachers, and their impressions of their students’ reading and writing (i.e., literacy) abilities. The second set of interviews, ranging in length from 60 to 90 minutes, explored the teachers’ impressions of their teaching during that term and the ideas they gained from the seminar. It also included discussion of their end-of-term project, and individualized follow-up questions from previous discussions. (The timing of interviews relative to other recorded data can be seen below in Table 3-5; interview guides for both interviews can be seen in Appendix A.) The interviews with the focal participants were transcribed in part: all my questions and the teacher’s responses in the two interviews were summarized and the sections relevant to literacy (that is, related to reading, writing, teaching of texts, and the use of English) were transcribed.

For each of the three focal participants a master document was created, and data related to the participant was arranged in chronological order, with labels marking the data source and date. This included all the transcription from their interviews. Written documents were summarized or quoted depending on how closely their contents related to concepts of literacy.27

Table 3-5. Audio/Video Data Collection (Additional to Seminar Meetings).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity (Data Code)</th>
<th>Week of seminar meeting</th>
<th>Participants Involved</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Orienting interviews</td>
<td>1 week before</td>
<td>Admin A and Admin B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview 1 (Int1)</td>
<td>Week 2-3</td>
<td>11 teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observation 1 (Obs1)</td>
<td>Week 3-5</td>
<td>Ao, Bi, Feng, E, Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observation 2 (Obs2)</td>
<td>Week 4-6</td>
<td>Ao, Bi, Feng, E, Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observation 3 (Obs3)</td>
<td>Week 5-7</td>
<td>Ao, Bi, Feng, E, Y</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

27 A large part of the written work was scanned hand written documents.
28 Teacher E and Teacher Y were potential focal participants who were not finally selected because of their discontinuing attendance, see 3.2.2.2.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity (Data Code)</th>
<th>Week of seminar meeting</th>
<th>Participants Involved</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Debriefing Interview 1 (Deb1)</td>
<td>Week 6-8</td>
<td>Ao, Bi, Feng, E, Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observation 4 (Obs4)</td>
<td>Week 12-13</td>
<td>Ao, Bi, Feng, E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observation 5 (Obs5)</td>
<td>Week 13-14</td>
<td>Ao, Bi, Feng, E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debriefing Interview 2 (Deb2)</td>
<td>Week 14 +</td>
<td>Ao, Bi, Feng, E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview 2 (Int2)</td>
<td>After week 14</td>
<td>9 teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observation 6 (Obs6)</td>
<td>Meeting 17-19</td>
<td>Bi, Feng, Ao</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observation 7 (Obs7)</td>
<td>Meeting 17-19</td>
<td>Bi, Feng</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debriefing Interview 3 (Deb3)</td>
<td>Meeting 18-19</td>
<td>Bi, Feng</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observation 7 (Obs7)</td>
<td>(finished)</td>
<td>Ao</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observation 8 (Obs8)</td>
<td>(finished)</td>
<td>Ao</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debriefing Interview 3 (Deb3)</td>
<td>(finished)</td>
<td>Ao</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.3.2.2 Observation Data

The observation data included seven observations and three debriefing interviews in which two or three classes were discussed. Observing classes at three different points (the beginning of the study, the end of the first term, and the end of the second term) provided me with opportunities to see changes in teachers’ thinking and activity over time. To allow the teacher and students to become accustomed to my presence, the first set of observations took place once a week over three consecutive weeks, and then in the following two sets, two consecutive weeks’ classes were observed. Since most teachers taught one unit from the textbook in two to three class meetings, observing consecutive classes allowed me to see a greater

29 I had one more observation and debriefing with Teacher E in the fall, though she did not attend the seminar the second term.
30 By the time I was able to observe Ao in the fall (Obs6) she was in the midst of CET4 preparation, so after I observed one class, we decided to schedule the last set of observations and debriefing early in the following term, in March.
31 There were eight observations for Ao (see previous footnote).
32 Both teachers and students seemed self-conscious during the first visit, though the students had been informed that the focus of the research was their teacher’s activities. By the third visit, the students and the teacher seemed to have become fairly accustomed to me and the video camera.
variety of instructional activities and it more completely displayed teachers’ overall approach to instruction. In addition, I hoped that relatively frequent observations might normalize this activity, reducing teachers’ sense that they should arrange instructional activities merely for display and students’ sense they should perform differently because I was present.33

The timing of the seven observations for the potential focal participants over the course of the year can be seen in Table 3-5 above. Most observations were scheduled for the comprehensive (or reading) section of the classes, which met once a week, rather than the classes scheduled for the listening laboratory.34 The classes were videotaped from a stationary point in the back of the classroom, providing a view of the teacher if she stood at the podium and if she chose to move around the room. A voice recorder was used at the front of the room to ensure a fairly clear audio recording of the teacher. Students’ discourse was minimally captured through both means. In addition to recording the class meetings, I took detailed notes during the 100 minute classes for three purposes: for creating an outline of the lesson segments to plan later viewing of the videotape with the teacher, for noting my questions about interactions and activities, and for recording the general student response to various activities. In addition to these several pages of notes taken during each observed class, there were field notes that included further reflections and summarized important points from after-class discussions with the teacher.35

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33 Though teachers occasionally commented that particular activities had been carried out because of my presence, they also mentioned pedagogical reasons for carrying out the activity.
34 Although literacy was obviously practiced in the Listening/Speaking classes, teachers tended to regard listening as a separate course (utilizing a different textbook and methods), and I assumed that they would be less likely to attempt to use new literacy-related activities there. In one case (Obs6), I observed Bi teaching in the listening lab when she was carrying out activities related to the comprehensive class.
35 Often the teacher and I chatted for up to twenty minutes after class, so important information and impressions were recorded in my fieldnotes. I sometimes asked for background information to understand the events observed, and the teachers often asked my opinion on a particular activity in the class as well.
3.3.2.3 Debriefing Interviews

Each set of two or three observations of a teacher was followed by a debriefing interview. The debriefing interviews, a total of three for each participant, were used to clarify the content of the classroom interactions where recordings or meanings were not clear, and in particular, to allow each teacher to voice her understanding of the activity of the class. These reflections may have represented teachers’ thinking at the time of instruction, but in other cases they clearly represented spontaneous efforts to link their instructional activities to concepts. In fact, some teachers directly commented that while teaching they had not been aware of their purposes in planning or carrying out particular activities. Thus, these interviews not only reflected the teachers’ understandings, but were also opportunities for them to engage with ideas that I raised through questions and comments about their instruction.

In the debriefing interviews, four to six hours of classroom instruction were discussed, and so it was not feasible to watch the entire video with the teacher as is often done in video stimulated recalls (Gass & Mackay, 2000; Kuzborska, 2011; Lyle, 2003). Thus, significant preparation was needed in order to limit the debriefing to 90-120 minutes. Before the debriefing, I examined my notes and the video of the observed classes, and produced a brief outline of the activities of the classes to contextualize the video clips we discussed. In the outline, I segmented the lessons, based on purpose, format and topic (Burns & Anderson, 1987). Then I created a list of significant events which might reveal the teachers’ understanding of literacy, including all types of instructional activities (e.g., giving directions, assigning a new task, or responding to a student). From this list I created an interview guide, noting the sections of the video to view and one or two questions to ask the teacher about that section. (An example of an interview guide for

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36 Some teachers stated that this outline also gave them a new view of their class (and Bi included it in her portfolio). They may have felt that my interpretation of activities was different from theirs or that the outline provided an overview of the class they were not accustomed to seeing.
a debriefing can be found in Appendix B.) Because the participants seemed unsure about what
the debriefing interview might consist of, before the first interview I provided them with a simple
outline of class activities and a few questions. I began the interviews by confirming whether the
outline corresponded with the teacher’s impressions. In the interviews, some questions were
intended to clarify the events or the discourse of the class (e.g., What text-related activities had
been completed in the previous meeting? or What response did the students give to this
question?). Other questions invited the teachers to reflect on their purposes, interpretations, and
other aspects of instruction (e.g., What did you hope the students would learn from this activity?
or What response did you expect from the students?). Additionally, there were global questions
about the class not connected with video clips which were intended to provide more insight into
teachers’ understanding of their instruction (e.g., What do you think of your new textbook? What
will cause students to think in this class?).

To reduce the teacher’s potential difficulty in recalling the events, the interviews were
usually carried out within several days of the last observation of the set. Video clips were viewed
on a computer, and the interviews were audio-recorded. The simple outline of activities I created
served as an organizer for the teacher to recall the context of the clips, and a copy of the textbook
was kept at hand to assist in recalling activities and find references for specific comments.
Though the interview contents were fairly closely planned, sometimes viewing a clip led to
discussion on unplanned topics.37 I attempted to balance discussing the questions I planned with
those topics which the teacher seemed to find most relevant and could make more comments
about.

The first debriefing interview was particularly designed to identify the teachers’ basic
expectations of students and instructional routines. After the first set of observations and

37 The final debriefings (Deb3) for Ao and Bi were both carried out over two days because of the number of
topics we discussed.
debriefing interview, in a memo, I summarized the ways in which literacy was enacted in a teacher’s instruction. These initial observations provided a point of comparison for understanding that teacher’s development in the rest of the year. For example, from Ao’s first set of observations, I made five inferences related to literacy such as “reading aloud seems synonymous with reading” and “different understandings of text may be permitted.” Because I had little time for extensive analysis during this phase, these initial evaluations were re-analyzed in the second phase of analysis. These debriefing interviews were transcribed in the same manner as the earlier interviews.

When the data collection was finished, the master document for each focal participant was expanded by adding the observation-related data to them. At this time, the videos of the teacher’s observations were viewed again in their entirety, and a new set of notes outlining instructional activities, including transcriptions of instructional discourse related to literacy, was added to the document.38 The contents and transcriptions of the debriefing interviews were placed chronologically in the document. Fieldnotes were also reviewed, and information related to each focal participant was added to her document. The master documents were not static, and when a part of a discussion or class became more relevant, a section might be expanded, for example, several minutes of an observation or interview would be listened to and transcribed more closely when needed. Throughout the data collection and processing phase, I also wrote analytic memos to begin to make sense of the data.

3.3.3 Second Phase: Summative Analysis

Using an SCT approach to research, a genetic perspective of a teacher’s concepts (i.e., the development over time) was needed to understand the nature of each concept (Vygotsky,

38 Translations for key instructional discourse excerpts in Chinese were checked by a native speaker.
1986/1934), making it necessary to examine each instance of teachers’ discourse and activity in its chronological context. Ethically derived themes from Kern’s subordinate concepts of literacy involves communication were compared with themes drawn from an inductive analysis of the teachers' spoken data (Bogdan & Biklin, 1998; Creswell, 1998), in which participants’ verbal expressions were emically interpreted (Erickson, 1986; Spradley, 1979).

Though spoken discourse displayed participants’ understanding of scientific concepts and of their classroom activities, it did not merely provide insight into teachers’ cognitive understandings of literacy. Teachers were aware of their audience (their colleagues and myself) and were naturally constructing their identities as, for example, knowledgeable and competent teachers. The audience for the written data was the organizer/researcher, though occasionally I brought excerpts from teachers’ writing back to the group, often anonymously. There were indications that these written pieces also showed teachers’ desires to display their knowledge and/or their responsiveness to the seminar.

In addition to repeatedly examining the data for themes, three analytic processes were utilized: summarizing data gave a broader view of it, while using discourse analysis allowed for more careful examination of participants’ meanings, and writing narrative explanations allowed me to link events to one another. Several types of summary documents made aspects of the data more visible: an outline of instructional activities for each observed class revealed a teacher’s repeated and novel activities; spread sheets for each focal participant’s activities (e.g., the dates of observations, and assignments submitted) enabled me to examine the activities of individuals chronologically; all of a participant’s verbal contributions in the seminar put in one document made themes easier to discern; and a retrospective syllabus of the seminar activities was a resource for contextualizing items in the individuals’ data. The second process used was

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39 Although this phenomenon was not analyzed, in discussions I tended to give less attention to discourse that I felt was display-oriented rather than negotiating meanings. This tendency may have had an unintended influence of discouraging participants from mimicking or imitating others.
discourse analysis, which was carried out on important sections of the seminar transcripts (such as teachers’ presentations) or discussions containing either evidence of conceptual development or puzzling utterances. I created worksheets for these sections, and the discourse was examined carefully to be sure that teachers’ utterances were understood in context and that any misinterpretations that I may have made at the time of the event or in initial analyses could be identified and corrected. After analyzing the data for patterns in teachers’ discourse and activity, I created multiple narratives utilizing SCT as an interpretive lens in research memos and drafts. These narratives helped me to evaluate and link together patterns in the teacher’s utterances and instructional activities, with various narratives focusing on particular topics and events.

The data for each of the focal participants was analyzed in turn using the following detailed procedures. I first read through the participant’s discourse in seminar meetings several times to gain a sense of the individual’s voice in the seminar. Then I created a new document with a thematic arrangement of material for each participant in this way: the data in the master document was examined for discourse reflecting scientific and everyday concepts related to literacy, which were also considered themes. Scientific concepts that were presented in the seminar, in particular, Kern’s principles of literacy, were a priori themes. Kern’s term did not need to be mentioned for the excerpt to be identified as related to a concept; for example, a reference to students’ need to gain different types of linguistic resources would be understood as related to Available Designs. Everyday concepts were identified using grounded analysis, thus emerging from the participant’s discourse (e.g., four macro-skills approach or importance of vocabulary). In this way, utterances reflecting either type of concept were identified and copied into the appropriate section of the thematic document (with source codes). This categorizing of

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40 “Utterances” here refers to discourse segments on one topic.
41 Some scientific concepts which participants held before the time of the study were identified in a similar manner. If a teacher used a concept without displaying a theoretical understanding of it, it was identified as a rule-of-thumb concept.
themes allowed me to identify how different concepts were related to one another, and in particular to examine the relationship between scientific and everyday concepts. After identifying themes, instructional activities of the teacher were examined for similarities to those themes and relevant material from observations was added to the thematic document. Then the teacher’s discourse from the seminar was examined for indications of mediation related to the more robust themes, and this was added to the thematic document. Each key utterance was re-examined in its original context, to clarify the teacher’s meaning within the interaction. The events displaying new instructional discourse, new instructional tasks, and unexpected comments received closest attention. In the case of one participant, Feng, there was relatively little change in the lesson segments she used, but her discourse in the debriefing indicated development of new understandings, so a more careful analysis of her instructional discourse was carried out to identify subtle changes in her instruction and discourse.42

The process of analysis was recursive, in going back and forth between the master document for the individual, the transcriptions of the seminar, and the thematic document, seeking connections between a teacher’s discourse and activity at different times and in different settings (e.g., in reflective writing and in classroom discourse). As possible connections were explored, the teacher’s data was reexamined for how utterances which were previously uncategorized could be related to the various themes. A tentative description of the teacher’s developing conceptualization of literacy was drafted, and the whole data set was revisited in search of disconfirming evidence, and inferences were checked against the data and against current SCT understandings of conceptual development. The analysis was then revised until an

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42 Three samples of Feng’s discourse, taken from the middle segment of the explanation/discussion of texts in Obs1, Obs4, and Obs7, were transcribed and examined to identify the types of questions she employed.
explanation fitting most of the data was found. This process was repeated for each of the three focal participants. Another means of checking interpretations was to compare the analysis of the three teachers, questioning apparent differences and similarities to enhance consistency in the analysis. The most important of the findings are presented in chapters five, six, and seven.

3.4 Validity

The validity of this research can be described using Richard’s (2009) criteria of credibility, transparency, confirmability, dependability, and transferability. Credibility is shown in this study through persistent observation and prolonged exposure (Davis, 1995) which provides opportunity to understand participants’ meanings more fully (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2013). In addition, the use of multiple sources and types (e.g., spoken and enacted) of data (Davis, 1995; Duff, 2006) provides opportunities to engage with teachers’ concepts in a variety of settings to gain a fuller understanding of them. Credibility is further enhanced through concrete descriptions of the analysis process (Borg, 2012) and the use of constant comparison of various parts of the data. Explanations of the researcher’s role and relationships with others in the study provide transparency (Richards, 2009). Confirmability is provided through the extensive use of participants’ own discourse, which allows readers to evaluate the inferences made by the researcher (Brown, 2004). Dependability of the findings is enhanced by the limited claim that this study provides deeper understanding of ways in which teachers’ conceptual development is mediated and how it is observed, rather than explaining how all teachers develop new concepts (Richards, 2009). The transferability of the study is enhanced by having three focal participants with different teaching approaches and experiences (Duff, 2006) and the details provided

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43 Sociocultural theory is concerned with contradictions, expressed in talk and action, which are inherently part of activity. A description of a person’s conceptualization may not be able to explain all the data, but I sought probable sources of contradictions.
regarding the teachers’ context and the seminar allow readers to determine the extent to which findings here will transfer to their situations (Brown, 2004).
Chapter 4

Design of the Seminar

This chapter presents an overview of the seminar designed to mediate Kern’s concept of literacy involves communication. Wertsch’s (2007) explicit and implicit types of mediation were utilized in the seminar, though largely the explicit mediation will be described here. The arrangement of readings, discussions and other activities was planned to enable teachers to utilize Kern’s concept to develop a new conceptualization of literacy. This chapter presents a broad picture of the seminar to provide context for the following chapters in which the conceptual development in the focal participants is genetically traced. The chapter begins with the goals of the seminar and the sequence of themes of the meetings. Then in two sections, I will describe the various types of activities that were intended to mediate the development of the new concept through linking it with other concepts and with teachers’ classroom practices.

4.1 Goals of the seminar

The central goal of the seminar was to allow teachers to interact with a new concept of literacy that could restructure their instruction in ways that would increase students’ opportunities for making meaning. In addition, I hoped the group would develop tools to expand students’ abilities to interpret and design texts. To mediate the teachers’ development of a new concept of literacy, I offered opportunities for them to link their everyday concepts and experiences to the scientific concept of literacy. I organized multiple ways to engender meaningful interactions between the teachers, myself, and published scholars whose texts provided new perspectives on literacy instruction. Because the teachers initially had almost no meaning associated with the
term “literacy,”¹ they were mostly unaware of a link between reading and writing, which they understood as two discrete skills. Explicitly mediating their understanding of literacy involved linking their everyday understanding of reading and writing (as decoding and encoding activities respectively) to a broader scientific understanding of literacy as a complex social interaction, learned through practice and involving situated practices of interpretation and creation.

More specifically, my goals for the seminar were that the teachers would not only understand Kern’s concept, but that they would convey to their students that literacy is communicative, which would involve talking about texts as communicative and structuring activities that would promote that understanding of literacy. I aimed for teachers to know how to make space and provide support for their students to undertake interpretation of texts themselves. In addition, my goal was for the teachers to understand literacy as being dynamic rather than uniform, and to help their students to see how the use of language varies over place, time and circumstance. To mediate their instruction, I also aimed to broaden their understanding of how language learning takes place. I hope they would expand their instructional techniques beyond those of providing students with the text meaning, assigning students to work out text meaning independently at home, and then checking students’ understanding. I envisioned that this would take place as they began to develop their students’ knowledge of and ability to use tools for literacy, that is, various Available Designs.

As shown in chapter two, it was important to develop a community in which teacher learning could take place, which is described next. Then I describe how I aimed to use the three general means of mediation to develop their understanding of literacy.

¹ Teachers were largely unfamiliar with the English word, and had limited experience with the several Chinese words translated as “literacy.”
4.1.1 Creating Conditions for Community

In the seminar, my goal was to create a collaborative structure because I hoped the teachers would contribute the intimate knowledge of their instructional context that was needed to effectively link literacy to their teaching practice. I aimed to structure the seminar so that they would contribute that knowledge. I also hoped a collaborative environment would provide opportunities for them to gain new understandings and new techniques from colleagues. In addition, I wanted to create intersubjectivity with the group, so as to promote the socialization that takes place in a community with shared discourse and goals (i.e., implicit mediation, Wertsch, 2007). The structure of the seminar was somewhat class-like since I was introducing a new concept: I was responsible for the overall arrangement of the syllabus, the activities of meetings, the assignments, and the topics of discussion. However, I also provided much space for the teachers to shape the seminar through their contributions, including sharing information, their understandings and their classroom experiences.

Building a collaborative group required intentional effort because Chinese teachers have been socialized in a culture that assumes learning occurs via information transmission. To create a physical space for exchanging ideas, we moved desks to form one large table around which the group could sit, allowing everyone to see and hear other speakers more easily, as well as materially putting me in a more equal position with the teachers. Participants’ contributions were solicited in multiple ways, such as asking teachers in the first meeting to introduce problems they faced in the classroom. Teachers’ contributions helped shape the substance of discussions, as well as providing the group with concrete situations to which more abstract ideas could be linked. My repeated explicit requests for teachers’ ideas were intended to set their expectations to function as collaborators rather than taking the position of learners. I also aimed to reduce my perceived role as an expert, by referring to myself as a learner and discussing the limits to my
knowledge, in order to recognize their areas of expertise. Nevertheless, teachers sometimes asked me to tell them more directly how to carry out Kern’s ideas.

In addition to many casual contributions the teachers made, in the latter part of the first term, two structured activities allowed them to share classroom practices and understandings of literacy more extensively. First, each teacher presented an instructional activity related to literacy that she had used in class, which was followed by a brief group discussion of that activity and its links to literacy (weeks 11 and 12). In week 14, most teachers also presented their end-of-term project to the whole group. The guidelines for this project were broad: the paper could be either written for publication or used as an opportunity to explore new ideas, but it should link what the teacher had learned in the seminar to some area of her interests and expertise. These two presentations allowed teachers to take the role of knowledgeable professional, and to share their experiences and understandings with others.

The meetings for the first term were planned in advance, but the actual plans for specific meetings were refined according to the teachers’ responses, so the sequence of topics and particular tasks were in many cases shaped by the group’s response.² The final order of activities, and even materials used, was rather different from the original plan: several articles were not used and the introduction of other items was delayed. These changes were made in part because of the difficulty teachers experienced in both understanding new concepts and in understanding the materials written in their second language. After the first term was over, I selected the topics for the second term based on my observations of the types of support the teachers needed to better link the concept literacy involves communication to instruction.

² In addition to attending to the responses of the group, I was particularly influenced by the written and oral comments of one focal participant, Bi. She seemed to quickly grasp aspects of Kern’s concept, and her understandings enabled me to see how to better explain the concept to other teachers.
4.1.2 Utilizing Three Types of Mediational Means

The three types of mediation discussed in chapter two were utilized in the seminar, with some activities utilizing several types. One type of mediation involved a variety of activities to assist teachers to learn Kern’s scientific concept *literacy involves communication* and the subordinate concepts that, being more specific, brought this abstract concept closer to practice. Sometimes I presented new ideas orally, and sometimes teachers who had read Kern and prepared information presented it, but many times the information was introduced through their reading Kern’s texts. For more difficult ideas, the texts were read in the seminar meeting with guidance, and other times teachers read them outside the meetings. Two topics, Available Designs and Engeström’s activity triangle (1987), were introduced using graphic texts rather than prose. Presenting new information often included linking it to teachers’ everyday concepts or their experiences.

Reflection comprised a large part of seminar activities in these forms: written and oral reflection, spontaneous and planned reflection, individual and group reflection. Some reflection activities allowed teachers to externalize their everyday experiences and concepts, such as journal entries describing their students’ activity during class. Other activities were intended to lead to using the concept as a mental tool through linking teachers’ experiences to scientific concepts, such as evaluating which of Kern’s seven principles they had used in their instruction. The most frequently used dialogic forms of reflection were whole group discussion and teacher journals, and teachers utilized these to voice their understandings of concepts and their questions concerning them. The presentations and projects were also a kind of reflection activity, as presenters had to carefully determine what to present. In addition, when there was group
discussion after a presentation, the whole group was able to consider various aspects of the topic together.³

A third type of mediation was instructional activities I organized to expand the teachers’ literacy experiences. Most of the activities of the seminar were carried out at two levels: that of helping to develop teachers’ understanding of the content of literacy involves communication, and that of allowing the teachers to use literacy as a means of communication in an academic setting. Resembling their text-centered classes, the seminar utilized a number of published texts. A variety of approaches to interacting with texts (such as jigsaw reading, comparing texts, and using a graphic organizer) were designed to simultaneously mediate the teachers’ understanding of the text and make them aware of different techniques to support literacy development. Teachers were encouraged to respond to readings in a number of ways, such as small group discussions, informal presentations, large group discussions, written summaries and written reflections on readings. There were also regular opportunities to write for a variety of purposes in order to develop their abilities and confidence in using English to express their ideas, as well as develop their sense of writing to communicate. The formal writing activities consisted of a persuasive piece of writing, a summary, the end-of-term project, and a teacher portfolio.

4.2 Sequence of the Content in the Seminar

The content of meetings in the two terms can be divided into five topics, and though these five topics were not confined to particular weeks, they received more attention at particular times and provide an overview of the content in the seminar. Overall, the first term emphasized developing a basic understanding of Kern’s concept using all three means of mediation described

³ A third major project encouraging reflection was creating a teacher’s portfolio, but it seemed to generate less reflection, perhaps in part because it was an unknown genre, and because there was no associated presentation.
above. The first five meetings were used to orient the teachers to the first topic, Kern’s view of literacy through his definition of literacy and these sets of subordinate concepts: the principles of literacy, the basic dimensions of literacy, the Available Designs and the four pedagogical components. These discussions included examining practical aspects of literacy instruction, but focused mostly on understanding the scientific concept *literacy involves communication* and linking it with everyday concepts and situations.

The second topic, centered in meetings 6 to 9, emphasized the social aspects of literacy and literacy instruction. The key materials in this section were four academic articles concerning learning in general and approaches to teaching reading. Discussion of goal-oriented activity, particularly in classrooms, formed a foundation for discussing both teachers’ instructional goals and student motivation. Two of the articles describing Chinese learning environments were selected to assist teachers in externalizing their understandings of their own instructional settings. During these meetings the group compared other authors’ ideas with those of Kern and linked the concept *learning is a social activity* to classroom activities.

The third topic, which concluded the first semester, meetings 10 to 14, offered teachers more extensive opportunities to connect literacy to specific instructional tasks and to their instructional concerns or research interests. During these weeks we discussed more specific instructional activities designed to develop literacy and analyzed some of the teachers’ instructional practices. Each teacher produced a written project at the end of the term, topics including: an analysis of a listening technique, a review of textbooks, and an overview of an interactive reading model.

The seven meetings in the second term focused on increasing the number of practical links between Kern’s concept and the teachers’ literacy instruction. The fourth topic, meetings 15 to 17, featured tasks which reviewed some subordinate concepts and linked them with the teachers’ instructional practices. In these meetings, the group practiced activities related to
situated practice and critical framing, examining both written and spoken discourse to develop critical framing abilities. Teachers also worked as a group to articulate and sequence teaching goals related to literacy for the four terms of College English, and individually planned semester goals.

The fifth topic, the last four meetings, returned to a focus on pedagogical activities by examining classroom tasks involving reading and writing. In these meetings we examined specific goals for students’ literacy development and instructional activities which would meet these goals. There was significant discussion and analysis of feedback on student writing as well as discussion of possible activities which would orient students to communicating through writing. We discussed practical aspects of reading (reading skills, and reading materials) and evaluated which Available Designs were presented in their textbooks and which designs their students were able to use. Finally, we carried out basic genre analysis to further develop the teachers’ understanding of the texture of texts. Table 4-1 (below) provides a summary of the meeting contents, materials and assignments.

4.3 Means of Linking Literacy Involves Communication to Other Concepts

The initial stages of introducing literacy involves communication included helping teachers understand the definition and Kern’s subordinate concepts. Then his concept was linked to a superordinate concept, learning is a social activity, which was one foundation of the literacy-based approach to instruction. This section briefly introduces selected activities and shows how I linked other scholars’ understandings of literacy to Kern’s.

Typically, a new concept is presented with a formal definition that usually connects the concept with previously known concepts. Because Kern’s formal definition of literacy (see 2.3.2) included a number of new concepts, it was not a suitable first step in mediating the teachers’
### Table 4-1. Outline of Topics and Activities for Each Seminar Meeting.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Meeting (Date)</th>
<th>Main contents</th>
<th>Handouts</th>
<th>Assignment(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1 (3/11)       | - Introductions (participants, syllabus, difficulties)  
                - Definitions of reading, writing, and literacy  
                - Reading about others’ experiences of literacy | Kern (2000) p. 16-19; Shen (1989) | Reflective writings on literacy experiences and teaching |
| 2 (3/18)       | - Teaching applications from discussions  
                - Kern’s definition of literacy and seven principles | Kern (2000) p. 23-41 | Journal entry, description of own lesson; read Kern (one dimension of literacy) |
| 3 (3/25)       | - Pairs explain and give examples for principles  
                - Discussion of three dimensions of literacy | | Journal entry; persuasive writing |
| 4 (4/1)        | - Available Designs and learning how to read figures  
| 5 (4/8)        | - Feedback on the seminar  
                - In depth discussion of four components | | Journal entry, written summary of Kern’s ideas |
| 6 (4/15)       | - Nature of learning, introduction of activity system  
| 7 (4/22)       | - Detailed discussion of Gao (discourse as mediation) and reasons for English study | Paine (1990) | Journal: use Kern to evaluate own teaching; read Paine (1990) |
| 8 (4/29)       | - Examining peers’ summaries  
                - Discourse: Gao and teachers’ persuasive writings  
| 9 (5/6)        | - Situated tool use: discussion of Auerbach & Paxton  
| 10 (5/13)      | - Discussion of Herndon  
                - In depth look at examples of 4 pedagogical components | Kern (2000) 134-139 | Prepare an explanation of an instructional activity |

* In initial journal entries no topic was specified.

b These materials were provided for further information on concepts that we discussed, but the written piece was not explicitly discussed.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Meeting (Date)</th>
<th>Main contents</th>
<th>Handouts</th>
<th>Assignment(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11 (5/20)</td>
<td>- Reviewing understandings of literacy, Kern and sociocultural dimensions &lt;br&gt; - Teacher presentations (4 teachers)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(Work on final project)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 (5/27)</td>
<td>- Discussion on theory and practice &lt;br&gt; - Teacher presentations (5 teachers)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 (6/3)</td>
<td>- Finish examples of pedagogical components &lt;br&gt; - Summary of ideas presented in seminar</td>
<td>Schultz in (Byrnes, 2006)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 (6/10)</td>
<td>- Teacher presentations of final projects (7) &lt;br&gt; - Feedback from teachers</td>
<td>Widdowson (1994)</td>
<td>Create weekly plan of goals and activities for this term; read Widdowson (1994)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 (9/18)</td>
<td>- Readers Theater practice &lt;br&gt; - Review of ideas from previous term &lt;br&gt; - Creating 4 term sequence of instructional goals</td>
<td></td>
<td>Analyze preface to Chinese textbook, transcribe a portion of own classroom discourse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 (10/9)</td>
<td>- Discussion of Widdowson: language as social conventions, has rhetorical use of various voices &lt;br&gt; - Critical framing; review, use with textbook prefaces</td>
<td>You (2004); Gee (2000); McCarthy (1991/2002)</td>
<td>Fill out worksheet on teaching writing; Read You (2004)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 (11/6)</td>
<td>- Discussion of writing in China and You (2004) &lt;br&gt; - Teachers’ writing activities (discussed worksheet) &lt;br&gt; - Giving feedback on writing, examining an example</td>
<td></td>
<td>Begin teacher portfolio; mini-project on student reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19 (11/20)</td>
<td>- Discussion of Gillette: role of goals in learning &lt;br&gt; - Ways to evaluate writing: discussion and practice</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 (12/4)</td>
<td>- Brief discussion of results of reading projects &lt;br&gt; - What reading involves, how to support student reading &lt;br&gt; - Discussion of genre, practice analyzing different genres</td>
<td></td>
<td>Summarize their textbook’s instruction of Available Designs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 (12/18)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Finish portfolio</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*These materials were provided for further information on concepts that we discussed, but the written piece was not explicitly discussed.
understanding of literacy. Introducing literacy through Kern’s summary *literacy involves communication*, was also problematic because in China the term “communication” is usually connected with oral language. I began the introduction of the concept *literacy involves communication* by comparing the new term, literacy, with known (everyday) concepts by soliciting the teachers’ spontaneous understandings of reading and writing. Then, I summarized how literacy related to their understandings, emphasizing comments that linked reading and writing. The teachers commented several times on the novelty of considering reading and writing as related activities involving communication.

Then I introduced Kern’s definition, which was useful in providing the initial exposure to these subordinate concepts that we later discussed: the three dimensions of literacy (i.e., linguistic, cognitive and sociocultural), interpreting meaning, textual conventions, critical reflection, and authors’ purposes. The complexity of the definition offered the teachers much information about literacy, but also necessitated our revisiting it several times, using several techniques to examine it. The situated nature of literacy and of texts themselves was a key concept from this definition, which was recycled throughout the seminar. This subordinate concept drew attention to literacy as an interaction, influenced by conventions, as well as highlighting the settings of texts.

After linking literacy to teachers’ previous concepts and examining Kern’s definition, I utilized the four sets of subordinate concepts to deepen the teachers’ understanding of literacy. These concepts elaborated the core concept *literacy involves communication* by making explicit the implications and assumptions of how literacy was materialized in this literacy-based approach to instruction.
The seven principles - literacy involves interpretation, collaboration, conventions, cultural knowledge, problem solving, reflection and language use⁴ - contained some familiar ideas about which teachers had everyday concepts, particularly cultural knowledge and problem solving. The principles of collaboration, interpretation and conventions highlighted some of the ways that literacy was a social activity, and were novel for some teachers. One of the early activities intended to mediate teachers’ understanding of the principles was having pairs present an explanation of one of the principles along with a concrete example of it (Sem3, 3/25/08). The principles of literacy were the set of subordinate concepts most employed by teachers in later discussions in the seminar. Some of the teachers used the principles in a reflective writing in Assignment 7 to analyze their instruction.⁵ In the 11th and 12th meetings, when teachers were asked to draw connections between Kern’s ideas and their colleague’s presentations, the seven principles were the subordinate concepts most frequently mentioned.

Kern’s three dimensions of literacy were partially familiar to most teachers. The linguistic dimension was generally familiar, and some teachers were aware of the cognitive dimension, but the sociocultural dimension was difficult for most of the group to apprehend. Texts tended to be viewed as self-contained objects for study and not as means of communication,⁶ and most teachers’ only link to the sociocultural dimension was their understanding that a text contains cultural facts that one needs to know in order to comprehend it. The other two sets of subordinate concepts, Available Designs and pedagogical components were largely new to teachers. The AD were introduced using Kern’s figure (see Figure 2-1) to help teachers to see the relationships between various aspects of texts and social factors. A number of

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⁴ For brief definitions, see Table 2.1.
⁵ Teachers were invited to analyze their instruction using the seven principles, Available Designs or the concept of tool mastery. The way in which Feng developed her concept of literacy through this assignment will be shown in chapter five.
⁶ In meeting 7 (4/22/08), Feng raised a similar issue with tests which were also viewed as existing independently rather than being of human design: “so what’s the RELATIONSHIP between assessment tests and sociocultural approach [dimension]. I think it’s really interesting to conclude the assessment as a factor of sociocultural.”
discussions were needed to help the teachers understand the pedagogical components because those categories differed significantly from their usual ways of understanding instructional activities.

Through multiple discussions and assignments I aimed to connect Kern’s subordinate concepts with teachers’ instructional practice. There were several journal assignments in which teachers were asked to find examples of subordinate concepts in their instruction. Another, more formal written assignment asked them to summarize the most important ideas from Kern (Asgn5). This task revealed that, halfway through the first term, most of the teachers were only able to engage in verbalism, that is, repeating phrases from Kern’s explanations without creating their own meaningful connections between ideas.7

Beliefs about how students learn and how teachers should carry out instruction are an important guide in teachers’ instruction, so I introduced an SCT view of learning, specifically, learning is a social activity. This superordinate concept was not introduced by Kern, but was assumed in his presentation. This view that teaching and learning are social activities differed from that of many teachers, who understood learning to be only a cognitive activity involving knowledge transmission. Without an understanding of Kern’s view of learning, teachers could not understand his literacy-based approach to instruction. This was initially introduced through using Engeström’s (1987) activity triangle to contextualize goals, learners, tools, and rules of use, which I introduced with an everyday example (the use of knives), and then an instructional example (students answering questions). Our discussion of the triangle was intended to introduce viewpoints about the social aspects of learning such as teacher/student alignment of goals and the meaning of “learning” as mastering tool use (not simply being aware of a tool). In addition, the concept of learning as a social activity reduces the teacher’s role to just one element in student

7 A notable exception to this was Bi who used this assignment to clarify her understanding of the ideas from Kern that were most relevant to her. Her use of this assignment will be described in chapter 7.
learning and expands the learner’s activity space. I created several activities to allow the teachers to reflect on the extent to which their teaching activities stimulated student learning. Another facet of an SCT view of learning that we discussed was goals and particularly student motivation, which was largely mediated through discussion and will be described below in 4.4.3.8. Thus, I intended that a sociocultural view of learning would provide teachers with another concept which could motivate and support their use of Kern’s approach.

The group also discussed articles that were selected to stimulate discussion of how their authors understood literacy involves communication. Several readings were chosen to develop the scientific concept through elaborating aspects of Kern’s views (Gao, 2006, and Auerbach & Paxton, 1997). Other readings were chosen in order to help make familiar situations strange and facilitate the teachers articulating the current approaches to learning English literacy in China. Specifically, Paine (1990) and You (2004), which included substantial descriptions of Chinese instruction, were chosen for this purpose.9 When reading these articles, teachers were asked to identify points that were similar to their experiences and those that were different. These articles supplemented the teachers’ own observations of their teaching, providing a more abstract view of Chinese instruction through generalized descriptions of familiar instructional activities. Several of the articles presented examples of teacher thinking as well as describing instructional activities related to literacy.

Through interviews with the participants as well as their written assignments and contributions in the seminar, I gained a sense of their understandings of instruction. I emphasized points from Kern that contrasted with these everyday understandings, although I did not always explicitly address them. Some of the contrasts are found in Table 4-2.

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8 I also aimed to draw the teachers’ attention to student learning as the object of teaching so they could more carefully examine how their teaching impacted learning.
9 Gao (2006) also had this function to some extent in that it described the social influences on Chinese students in China, as well as in Britain.
Table 4-2. Contrasts between Kern’s Concept and Observed Everyday Concepts.

a. Literacy involves multiple skills vs. the four macro-skills should be taught in isolation
b. Communication is interaction (and may be textual) vs. communication refers to speaking
c. Readers use multiple resources to interpret texts vs. reading is simply decoding words to find the meaning
d. Students learn through using language vs. most student learning results from listening to teachers’ explanations
e. Teachers help students to form understandings of literacy (and goals for learning) vs. teachers follow students’ understandings (and meet their goals)

For the most part, I did not formally contrast these everyday concepts with Kern’s, but I emphasized these aspects of Kern’s concept and how it differed from some understandings that were voiced in the seminar.

4.4 Means of Linking Literacy to Classroom Instructional Practices

In addition to linking the concept literacy involves communication to other concepts, an important part of the seminar was linking this concept to instructional practices. Four main types of activities were used to accomplish this: modeling, reflection, discussions of student goals, and discussions of the teachers’ classroom practices.

4.4.1 Modeling

Since teachers’ instructional methods are in part shaped by their educational experiences,¹⁰ in the seminar I utilized a literacy-based approach to instruction to provide teachers with experiences of literacy instruction focused on communication. By modeling instructional activities using the core concept, I provided “alternative images” as a resource for

¹⁰ Of course, teachers may tend to either imitate or consciously differ from the teachers they studied with.
teachers to enact a new concept (Johnson, 1994). I modeled numerous techniques while guiding the teachers in meaning-making, sometimes drawing their attention to the technique and how they might use it. One reason we did not frequently discuss the techniques I used was that I was often simultaneously using a new technique and presenting new information, and it was challenging to manage a discussion of the technique in addition to the discussion of the new information. In discussions, I frequently used some simple techniques, such as asking questions to stimulate critical reading (describing the writer’s purpose and providing evidence for conclusions) and eliciting the teachers’ personal response to the text. I also modeled more complex techniques such as the Directed Reading Thinking Activity (DRTA) and Readers Theater.

In the last part of the first term (in Sem10 and Sem13), I drew the teachers’ attention more explicitly to various techniques which I had utilized earlier, as well as others described by Kern. The discussion was organized according to Kern’s four pedagogical components in order to deepen the teachers’ understanding of the components. In addition, new techniques from Kern were introduced in these meetings, some of which were demonstrated using simple (i.e., student-level) materials. Table 4.3 summarizes the techniques which were employed in the seminar to mediate the teachers’ literacy experiences, showing how many times they were used and which techniques were overtly discussed in terms of possible use in the teachers’ instructional practice.

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11 In this case, modeling does not indicate a presentation which teachers watched, but an activity which they took part in.
12 In DRTA a story is revealed sentence by sentence with the group making interpretations and anticipating what will follow one section based on what had been previously revealed.
13 Readers Theater involves groups of students interpreting a text through dividing it into various voices and then rehearsing and performing it in such a way as to make the meaning clearer to themselves and their audience.
14 A nine page handout with explanations and examples of some techniques was used in meeting 10 to provide material support for the teachers’ understanding the techniques.
### Table 4-3. Modeling and Discussion of Literacy-Oriented Teaching Techniques.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Techniques Used in Seminar</th>
<th>Week(s) used</th>
<th>Explicitly Discussed $^a$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Encouraging extensive (not intensive) reading $^b$</td>
<td>(most)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journal writing $^b$</td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading during meeting (with support)</td>
<td>1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 16</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rapid writing (response to text or providing opinions)</td>
<td>1, 11, 13</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comparing own experiences with those in text (Kern’s “reflecting”)</td>
<td>1, Asgn7, 18</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarifying syntactic relationships in a text $^b$</td>
<td>2, 5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jigsaw reading</td>
<td>3, 7</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Readers generate examples to show comprehension</td>
<td>3, Asgn4, Asgn7</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflecting on reading processes</td>
<td>3, Asgn8, Asgn13/Asgn13/Sem20</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing for a particular audience (shifting contextual parameters) $^b$</td>
<td>Asgn3, 13</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introducing metalanguage (specifically, grammar terms) $^b$</td>
<td>4, 5, 10</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarifying ideas through comparison</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setting a purpose for reading a passage</td>
<td>4, Asgn8</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing a summary $^b$</td>
<td>Asgn5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examining discourse structure (research article) $^b$</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previewing and predicting</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparing readers for independent reading</td>
<td>6, 7, 15, 18</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closely guided reading (with questions)</td>
<td>6, 9</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comparing different texts’ viewpoints</td>
<td>8, 16, 17</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Directed Reading Thinking Activity (DRTA) $^b$</td>
<td>9, 10 $^c$</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mapping coherence relations $^b$</td>
<td>10 $^c$</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical focus questions $^b$</td>
<td>10 $^c$, 13 $^c$, 16</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Readers Theater $^b$</td>
<td>10 $^c$, 15</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical reading (identifying author’s views)</td>
<td>Asgn11, 17, 18, 19</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comparing genres</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$^a$ This represents the explicit discussion of the technique in the teachers’ contexts: 0 referring to not at all, 1 referring to a brief several minute discussion, 2 to several discussions, and 3 to several longer discussions.

$^b$ These techniques (from Kern, 2000) were explicitly described to teachers during discussion of techniques in meetings 10 and 13.

$^c$ These techniques (from Kern, 2000) were demonstrated in meetings 10 and 13 using Kern’s examples.
4.4.2 Written Reflection

In the seminar, reflection took place both in written form (in meetings and outside) and in oral form. In terms of oral reflection, discussions of articles, teaching techniques and other topics allowed the group to collaboratively develop ideas, and this oral reflection on practice will be discussed in 4.4.4. Written reflections offered an opportunity for teachers to use literacy as a tool for thinking, and increased the chances that each teacher would actively engage in reflection.

Written reflections in the seminar mostly fell into three levels in a range of spontaneous to carefully produced texts. Several times teachers were asked to quickly write their responses to a question (3-10 minutes), to provide them with opportunities to improve their writing fluency, as well as to provide me with fairly immediate feedback on their understanding of topics. Journal entries allowed more time for teachers to think about the links between concepts and practice, and to clarify their ideas in writing, though they were told that entries did not need to be carefully edited. Depending on other assignments, I often asked them to write two entries a week in the first term. Initially the journal topics tended to be open-ended, but I found that some teachers had limited ability to make new observations concerning their instruction. Thus, after the first several meetings, I began to provide them with several choices of topics to write about. In the second term, I invited the teachers to complete more complex tasks and analyses, some of which required more time to complete, so I did not ask for journal entries. The teachers also created several more carefully edited texts during the first term, which included a persuasive text, a summary of Kern’s ideas, and a written version of their end-of-term project, which encouraged

15 Part of the written instructions concerning journals included this: “The goal of the journal is to help you to think more carefully about your teaching and your students’ learning. You may notice more carefully what you have done, ask yourself questions, and imagine other possibilities for how you might teach.” (Sm2ho2, 3/18/08)
more careful and extended reflection on topics. The end-of-term projects were an opportunity for teachers to extensively link their individual interests and Kern’s concept.\textsuperscript{16}

Although all these types of written activities allowed teachers to link concepts to instruction, the journal entries were particularly valuable because they allowed teachers to recall specific events during their instruction, generalize their understandings of teaching issues, and raise questions concerning teaching. However, the opportunity for reflection was not utilized by every teacher in the same manner: some merely explained their instructional activities, while others analyzed activities or devised alternatives. Some teachers’ comments identified tensions in their instruction, such as understanding that their motives and those of their students were not aligned at both the classroom interaction level (e.g., what language is spoken) and at the motive level (i.e., exam orientation).

\textbf{4.4.3 Discussions of Teachers’ and Students’ Goals}

I had two purposes in carrying out discussions and activities related to goals. In order for teachers to use literacy involves communication as a cognitive tool, they had to have goals in their instruction, so I aimed to help them become more aware of their goals, and create new goals that would incorporate an understanding of literacy. In the first term I repeatedly asked them to identify their goals for particular instructional tasks so they could become more aware of the importance of goals and of forming common objects (i.e., motives) with their students.\textsuperscript{17} In the second term, after a term of discussing how literacy involves more than imparting linguistic information to students, we discussed setting long term instructional goals, including specific goals related to literacy abilities.

\textsuperscript{16}See Table 3-4 for specific writing assignments.
\textsuperscript{17}More will be shown in chapter 6 about how Ao used instructional goals to mediate her approach to teaching literacy.
My second purpose was to help teachers consider how to align students’ learning goals with the teachers’ goals. In particular, the teachers’ discourse throughout the seminar reflected that most had little anxiety about their students’ passing the CET4 exam: most assumed that students would pass with ordinary effort expended.\textsuperscript{18} Instead, their greater concern seemed to be with their students’ exam orientation, which tended to make students reluctant to work on activities that they did not perceive would help in the exam. Because motives and goals are not fixed and teachers could potentially mediate students’ activity through constructing common motives, we had several discussions and assignments related to goals, where I provided space for them to articulate alternative motives and share these with the group.

We also discussed the influence of teacher discourse on student goals in conjunction with Gao’s article about the sociocultural aspects of learning. Later, we analyzed teacher and textbook discourse several times, including examining how the teachers’ discourse conveyed their goals to their students. When we discussed written feedback on student work, the group observed that feedback could influence students’ revision of written work and more broadly how they conceptualized writing as a means of communication.

\textbf{4.4.4 Discussions about Classroom Instruction}

Because a literacy-based approach to instruction, particularly for non-English major students, was novel in China, there was little precedent for how the approach should be carried out in these teachers’ classrooms. Modeling and discussion of techniques were used to introduce new techniques that teachers might utilize. In addition, discussion of their classroom practices, both typical and novel, was essential to helping the group (including me) give substance to the

\textsuperscript{18} Specifically, when asked to mention important teaching problems in meeting 1, a number of issues were brought up but none concerned students’ passing the CET4 exam.
ways in which this concept could mediate their practices. Comments about teachers’ classroom practices were made in many discussions, but the presentations at the end of the first term and meetings 18, 19, and 20 included extensive discussion concerning teachers’ current and potential instructional activities.

Through preparing and giving presentations on a classroom activity (Sem11 and 12), the teachers externalized their understanding of how literacy was enacted in their classrooms. They were invited to describe an instructional activity, either a part of their routine or a novel activity, which the group then analyzed for how it enhanced students’ literacy (cf. 4.1.1). Through this activity, each teacher had opportunity to reflect on and portray links between the subordinate concepts and his own instruction as he planned the presentation. Most teachers explicitly presented the goals of their activities, suggesting that our discussion of goals had mediated their thinking about their classroom activity. (Appendix C provides a brief summary of the participants’ presentations in meetings 11 and 12, using their discourse to reflect their goals, the main actions, and the connections to literacy.) In addition, after each presentation, I asked the whole group to suggest links between Kern’s subordinate concepts and the activity, which also showed their abilities to begin connecting the concepts with concrete situations. The instructional activities were largely based on the teachers’ textbooks, indicating that they were attempting to link literacy to their main teaching task, rather than create stand-alone activities merely for demonstration purposes. Most activities were centered on teaching Text A, the core text in each unit, which was regarded as the most important object of teacher and student attention. Most of the teachers indicated that the activities they presented had been used before and were part of their routine instruction. Thus, the presentations showed that although the teachers were able to link the concept of literacy to their ordinary classroom instruction, in only a few cases did the concept appear to have shaped their instructional activities.
Over time, not only formal presentations, but informal discussion also increasingly provided links between the scientific concept, everyday concepts and teachers’ classroom practices. The teachers began to volunteer their ideas and their classroom experiences, particularly in the second term, and to direct their talk to one another, not only to me. As they exchanged ideas, they had opportunity to learn useful instructional methods and to hear peers’ experiences of how activities could shape students’ actions and understandings of literacy. In addition, these interactions provided teachers with new images of teaching which seemed achievable because they were being carried out by their colleagues in similar classes.

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter has provided an overview of the various means that were intended to mediate the teachers’ reconceptualization of literacy. Each two-hour seminar meeting, as well as the teachers’ seminar-related activities outside the meetings, included a number of unique activities, all of which cannot be detailed here. The ways in which some of these activities mediated the focal participants’ conceptual development will be demonstrated in the following chapters.
Chapter 5

Feng: Familiar Scientific Concepts Grow into Classroom Practice

“Literacy involves more than linguistic aspects - that is already realized by me” - Feng

In China, exam orientation, learning for the purpose of demonstrating knowledge in an examination rather than using it in other settings, has existed for centuries (Chen, Warden, & Chang, 2005; Hu & Adamson, 2012; Pong & Chow, 2002). Teachers whose thinking has been shaped by this type of instruction may spend more time providing information to students rather than assisting them to learn to use language for communication. These teachers may also be more likely to engage in verbalism and to “encapsulate” (Engeström, 1991) pedagogical scientific concepts, not connecting them to their instructional practices. The seminar in this study was designed to overcome this tendency and to assist teachers in developing true concepts through connecting their learning of scientific concepts with their on-going teaching activities. This chapter shows how Feng began to create links between Kern’s scientific concept and her instruction, and began to reconceptualize the process of meaning-making in literacy activities despite her tendency to encapsulate theoretical information from practice.

Feng, a teacher with five years of teaching experience, had been recognized by the university as a promising young teacher. Her interest in pedagogical theory was displayed in her regular use of terminology from second language acquisition theories, but observations revealed her approach to instruction as one in which students usually just provided brief answers to her display questions, with the exception of a few activities which required extensive speaking. Her approach to literacy was word-centered, and she spoke rather negatively of her own literacy experiences. In the seminar, Feng quickly learned Kern’s terms but seemed to engage with the
concept *literacy involves communication* in limited ways. For example, there were many references to Kern’s subordinate concepts in her end-of-term project evaluating two textbooks, but they displayed little understanding of literacy involving communication. Her reflections and her instruction showed limited links with Kern’s concepts, but subtle changes in both took place during the year. This chapter describes the signs of conceptual development and the means that mediated her increased understanding of literacy, as well as the contradictions that seemed to limit her conceptual development.

### 5.1 Developing a Concept of Literacy through Subordinate Concepts

Feng developed her understanding of literacy through Kern’s subordinate concepts, particularly those which were familiar from her earlier studies. This section shows how she appropriated the subordinate concepts that specified the meaning of *literacy involves communication*. As she interacted with these more concrete concepts, she expanded her understanding of literacy to include more than knowledge of the meanings of words and acceptable ways of arranging them.

Feng first appropriated those subordinate concepts from Kern that were similar to concepts with which she was already familiar, utilizing them in reflective dialogue and then in structured evaluation of her own instruction. She showed evidence of verbalism with a number of Kern’s subordinate concepts, but the one which appeared to first mediate her understanding of literacy was the three dimensions of literacy. Her reflections on the first term of the seminar expressed her perception that before the seminar she had an everyday concept related to the nature of literacy.

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1 The specific origin of Feng’s scientific terms and concepts is unknown, but they were acquired through intentional effort.
(1) actually I REALLY AGREE with Kern’s idea. even though I thought his way of talking about literacy is new to me. but his idea (1) thinking literacy involves more than linguistic. THAT is already realized by me before. (Int2, 6/24/08)

Feng explicitly distinguished between her knowledge of “literacy,” a term which was “new,” and her understanding that literacy (or language) involved more than linguistic knowledge, that is, it included other dimensions. Her understanding of these multiple dimensions was displayed more specifically in her use of “target reader,” which she introduced into discussions several times (Asgn3 and Deb1), and which reflected aspects of social relationships in literacy. Similarly, her regular use of “schema” (Int1, Asgn2, and Asgn9) and similar terms showed her familiarity with some aspects of the cognitive dimension of literacy. In Feng’s reflection above she seemed to implicitly link these previous understandings of language to Kern’s multiple dimensions of literacy, providing her with a connection between her everyday understandings and Kern’s concept.

Soon after finding commonalities with Kern, Feng also found a tension between the concept of multiple dimensions of literacy and her everyday concept of comprehension. In a seminar discussion, she noted that Kern, in his principles of literacy, understood the relationship between the dimensions differently than she did.

(2) I find that this author [Kern]. DIDN’T emphasize too much on the LINGUISTIC aspects of language like grammar. or words. why didn’t he. talk about THIS more. cuz we CAN’T understand a sentence if we do not know. the meaning of the independent WORDS (Sem3, 3/25/08)

Feng implied that Kern gave too much attention to dimensions of literacy other than the “linguistic aspects,” voicing her concern with his lack of discussion of grammar and words, which she viewed as essential to comprehension (“we can’t understand…”). This excerpt shows

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2 For transcription conventions see Appendix D.
3 Since Feng had indicated she was unfamiliar with the term “literacy” before the seminar, she apparently referred to her earlier understanding of “language.”
4 Feng’s use of these precise terms from scientific concepts did not appear to reference a rich, systematic understanding which she could articulate, and thus did not appear to be robust scientific concepts. However, this study did not elicit sufficient data to determine their exact status.
an instance of Feng expressing her view that meaning is built up from individual words. At the same time she implied that Kern’s linguistic dimension should be more prominent in his explanation of the principles. Thus, while there was commonality between her everyday understanding of the multiple dimensions of literacy and Kern’s scientific concept, there was a contradiction between Kern’s balancing three dimensions of literacy and Feng’s focus on the linguistic dimension as more important. Through the above discussion of the principles, Feng began to externalize a tension involving the relative importance of the different dimensions. In addition, she appropriated Kern’s *three dimensions of literacy* as a structure for articulating her less well-defined concept of the multiple aspects of literacy.

Through connecting her “aspects” of language to Kern’s dimensions, Feng was able to further link other of his subordinate concepts to her understanding of language. This increasing number of links was a sign that a more complex system of meaning was beginning to emerge in her thinking. For example, in the seminar discussion of the various principles of literacy, Feng referenced Kern’s dimensions in her description of the principle of *problem solving*:

(3) we know that in the following explanation (in the reading) the writer. **explains literacy from three dimensions.** linguistic. cognitive and sociocultural. I think this principle (problem solving) is related to COGNITIVE realm of literacy. that is when we try to understand a new WORD. we will RELATE it to our (1) already EXISTED. concept of the similar thing and an example I can give you is that. in the text I’m teaching now there is a new. concept or new word that is DIME STORE and CERTAINLY my students couldn’t understand what a dime store is but I can EXPLAIN to them that DIME means ten cents. and store you know the meaning can you have an IMAGINATION and try to. **figure the meaning out** and I think it’s very EASY for the students to connect this kind of store. to the similar stores we have in China we call 一元点 (dollar store) … they can easily understand it and thus solve this problem 6 (Sem3, 3/25/08)

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5 Her stated concern with vocabulary and syntax was consistent with the bottom-up approach to language learning seen in intensive reading instruction. She explained that much of her instruction consisted of “EXPLAIN the POINTS. paragraph by paragraph (haha) that’s. very typical in our class” (Deb1, 4/18/08).

6 In this example of problem solving, the teacher is central: she anticipates the problem and then provides the information to solve the problem.
Feng suggested an appropriate link between one of the three dimensions and the principle that we were discussing, demonstrating her ability to think about literacy conceptually by forging links between the different subordinate concepts, and then linking it to a specific episode in her instruction. In this comment, Feng displayed more systematic linking of subordinate concepts and practice than was common in participants in the seminar group, which indicated her aim of developing a systematic conceptual structure for understanding instruction.

The assignment to evaluate her instruction using Kern’s seven principles of literacy provided space for Feng to further draw connections between the concept of literacy and her instruction. Her ability to think conceptually and her willingness to consider changing instructional practices allowed her to utilize the mediational space provided by this task. Her evaluations of two principles, problem solving and interpretation, illustrate how her understandings of these principles differed from those of Kern. However, they also show indications of her shifting her understanding to more closely align with his. Specifically, these evaluations show the ways in which Feng was reframing her concepts using Kern’s terms: the first, (interpretation) shows a subtle use of literacy involves communication, while the second shows more overt appropriation of Kern’s definition of literacy involves problem solving.

(4) “Literacy involves interpretation.” I often ask students to think about the implied meaning of the text and try to figure out why the author used a certain word or expression – what the author wanted to convey in the writing.

“Problem solving” should be given more attention to in my class as well. Though I may ask students to think about the embedded meanings of words, the “relationships between words, between larger units of meaning, and between texts and real or

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7 The discussion of the three dimensions followed that of the principles, so in this excerpt Feng brought up the dimensions before the group discussion of them.
8 In this assignment the teachers were invited to reflect on the extent to which they used each of Kern’s seven principles in their classroom instruction and whether they thought they should further utilize any of the principles.
9 Feng also discussed the role of cultural knowledge and language use in her instruction, but only mentioned briefly that she underused collaboration and conventions, and did not understand reflection.
imagined worlds” are more or less overlooked in my class. We may have to stand farther and see a larger picture of the text. (Asgn7, 4/29/2008).10

Feng associated interpretation with both communicative purposes and a close examination of words (“why the author used a certain word or expression”). This understanding of interpretation narrowed the objects of interpretation to merely lexical ones (c.f. excerpt 2), rather than other Available Designs, such as cultural knowledge. A focus on lexical items in her instruction was also displayed in Observations 1-3 where the majority of her questions clarified word meanings, with only a few references to the author or the general message of the text, confirming that she had a much narrower understanding of interpretation than Kern. In addition, early observations of her classes showed that students rarely had opportunity to construct interpretations.11 Nevertheless, utilizing Kern’s concept, she reframed words as means of communication (tools the “author” used to “convey” meaning). In using Kern’s concept to express her understandings, she aligned herself with this goal of understanding the author not simply the text. Though simple, this integration of appropriated knowledge with pre-existing knowledge was an early step in restructuring her knowledge of literacy (Tasker et al. 2010). Though Feng evaluated her teaching as frequently utilizing interpretation, she did not later use the term often. However, the importance of understanding the author’s intentions, apparently a prior concept, was a theme she utilized in her later discourse.

Concerning problem solving, in the excerpt above, Feng used Kern’s definition to evaluate her use of the principle as limited to merely understanding the “embedded meanings of words,” and suggested that problem solving should involve more than that. She engaged in ventriloquation through quoting part of Kern’s definition, and then demonstrated her understanding of the quote by paraphrasing the ideas that seemed most relevant to her: drawing

10 The quoted phrase is from Kern (2000) p. 17.
11 Excerpt 4 may reflect her having an understanding that there is only one interpretation, making it less important who voices it.
students’ attention to meaning at a more global level (“see a larger picture of the text”). Thus, she redefined the scope of problem solving by utilizing Kern’s principle to expand her understanding. She also expressed openness to instituting changes in how she guided the students’ understanding of the text. In discussing both interpretation and problem solving, Feng set up ideals for instruction through her positive appraisal of each principle.

Though Feng was able to use these subordinate concepts in discussion, at the end of the first term she was not confident in her ability to use them to restructure her instruction. When asked whether she perceived changes in her instruction, Feng expressed an understanding that connecting theory and practice was desirable, but was not yet occurring in her instruction.

(5) O: you asked me, if your teaching changed this semester. [F: uh huh] so I want to ask your opinion [F: haha] what do you think, do you feel like your teaching changed? F: I think I KNOW more about Kern’s idea. but put the theories into. my own teaching, I think it still needs time. and I I think I need some TECHNIQUES to really. put them into practice, concerning the change so far I don’t think there are much O: so you feel like your teaching now is PRETTY much the same as it was six months ago or a year ago F: it’s kind of stereotyped ((routine)), though I’ve only taught for five years but I’m quite familiar with how my classes goes. and I would like to do something for a change. like I adopted Teacher G’s practice, but. to to just apply those theories and make a BIG change, I don’t think there’s so far any BIG change (Int2, 6/24/08)

Feng demonstrated her openness to making change in her instruction by pointing to a new activity she had utilized, but made no mention of using scientific concepts in her instruction. Despite the fact that a number of techniques had been introduced in the seminar, Feng stated that she needed specific techniques in order to make changes in her instruction. This description shows how she was focused on the use of particular activities (e.g., one described by Teacher G), rather than

12 Feng did not indicate she saw a connection between her expression “think(ing) about the embedded meaning of words” and Kern’s “relationships between words”, so she may not have grasped Kern’s formulation completely; nevertheless, she understood different levels of problem solving existed.

13 Though her reflection could be seen as expressing reluctance because she employed a passive construction (“should be given”) and a modal expressing slight inclination to take action (“we may have to”), the teachers’ use of English modality did not always convey the subtleties of their meanings exactly.
thinking about instruction in a new way. In fact, as will be shown in the next section, at the time of this second interview, some of Feng’s instructional discourse and several modified instructional activities had already shown new congruities with Kern’s concept of literacy. However, she was not consciously using concepts to think about instruction, and several contradictions constrained her from more fully attempting to use a literacy-based approach to instruction. These contradictions will be discussed in the next section.

5.2 Tensions in Understanding the Concept of Literacy

As shown above, Feng’s narrow understanding of interpreting texts in a bottom-up manner was not aligned with the understanding of literacy introduced in the seminar; however, this was not the only difficulty for her in enacting a new understanding of literacy. Below I will show how her lack of agency in establishing instructional goals and her perceived role of provider of correct information hindered her engaging in goal-oriented activity.14

In China, textbooks are often seen as the focus of instruction (Feng & Byram, 2002), and Feng viewed her textbook as guiding her instructional activity. In a discussion on whether the goals of textbook writers conflicted with or were compatible with the teachers’ goals, Feng mentioned that her only instructional goal was to “finish the text” (notes, 9/25/08), indicating she saw her role as implementing the textbook writers’ plans (c.f. Burton, 2007).15 She did not describe or show other signs of being aware of textbook editors’ goals, so apparently she had not appropriated them. Similarly, she tended not to make connections between her prior scientific concepts and her instruction, but mostly relied on textbook writers’ and experts’ suggestions as to

14 These contradictions may also have been obstacles to her linking her prior scientific concepts to her instruction.
15 Her early explanation of an instructional activity also pointed to a goal of completion: “the first reason why I’m talking about this is because it’s printed here ((in the textbook)) so it is the content I should cover. then I think it’s interesting …” (Deb1).
how to use pedagogical theory in instruction.\textsuperscript{16} For example, she often commented on how helpful the teacher’s book was in providing good activities. Additionally, when discussing why to use a particular warm-up activity, rather than providing a rationale, she merely described it in terms of a rule-of-thumb: “it’s a REQUIREMENT. we must have a WARM-UP or LEAD-IN to the text” (Sem11, 5/20/08). Feng’s only stated pedagogical goal was “I want my students to LIKE English” (Int1, 3/21/08), and maintaining students’ interest was the most commonly mentioned pedagogical rationale in her journals and interviews. Not having learning goals for her students, Feng had no opportunity to use conceptual tools in pedagogical goal-oriented activity, without which she could not internalize them (Johnson & Golombek, 2011b).

Despite her tendency to allow the textbook to lead her instruction, Feng experienced some dissonance in the question of her role in determining class content. In a dialogue between her and me in her journal, responding to an issue she had raised, I suggested adapting her textbook’s questions, and she voiced doubt about taking on that responsibility. She expressed reluctance to adapt the textbook’s contents because of concern with her ability to create effective materials. As she continued her reflections, tensions about her lack of agency were revealed as she seemed to dialogue with unnamed authorities who suggested that teachers’ roles included adapting materials.

(6) However, there arises another problem. Does this mean teachers have to make adjustment to most, if not all, of the questions already provided by the textbook? … the listening textbook we’re using now is well designed…. But now, to meet the students’ need, teachers are responsible for adaptation of the materials. Are all the teachers qualified for doing this? Am I?

Probably it is we teachers that rely too much on textbooks. We are encouraged to use the materials creatively for teaching English rather than teach the materials themselves. Yes, this idea is definitely correct. But then how to guarantee the effectiveness of the teachers’ creative adjustment? Are the questions given by the teachers scientific enough in helping students with their listening? (Asgn3, 3/28/08)

\textsuperscript{16} However, Feng had a few scientific concepts which she used more flexibly, in particular “activate schema.”
Feng’s concern with adapting the material provided in the textbook did not arise from the work it might entail, but apparently from imperfections that might appear and a reluctance to shift responsibility for results from the textbook to the teacher (“how to guarantee the effectiveness of the teachers’ creative adjustment?”). Feng then ventriloquated a converse viewpoint (from unspecified authorities) that teachers should “use the materials creatively.” The dissonance that she felt is shown as she evaluated this understanding of teachers’ work as “definitely correct,” while her final questions implied a lack of confidence in materials she might produce. In terms of instructional goals and activities, Feng was relying on the textbook editor’s “scientific” products, and thus was not self-regulated.

Another contradiction that Feng experienced reflected her focus on activities rather than purposes. She faced conflicting priorities because of her understanding that the chief purpose of instruction was to provide knowledge and her understanding from textbooks and curriculum that students were supposed to speak in class. When Feng described the problem, she provided two reasons for choosing to provide students with information rather than allow them to practice speaking: her own understanding of good instruction and her students’ desires.

(7) I wrote ((in a journal entry)) that I think I spend too much time talking myself in my class, but it’s really a DILEMMA because time is fixed if you ask student to do that ((speak)) you will have little time to speak and then the points you want to explain may not be covered in the class. so it’s hard to choose. some students especially Chinese students they expect teachers to tell them more, they think PEER’S speech on this is kind of a waste of time. and they won’t listen actually… maybe there are some students who think it’s useless for them (Deb1, 4/18/08)

Feng explained the tensions she felt (“it’s a dilemma”): a pressure to reduce her presentation in order to increase students’ spoken participation, an aim which she mentioned multiple times

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17 Feng said she usually spent considerable time reading the teacher’s book suggestions before planning her lessons (Deb1, 4/18/08), and seemed to prepare for class quite carefully.
18 From her journal: “I admit that in my class I dominate the class most of the time.” (Asgn5, 4/15/08)
Most of her explanation argued that this was difficult to accomplish but provided no explanation as to why students’ speaking was important, displaying her focus on activities rather than on purposes. After mentioning her desire to provide information, she described the students’ preference for learning through her explanations, suggesting that an equal difficulty in changing the participation structure in class was that students were reluctant to listen to the non-expert speech of classmates. Feng was navigating this contradiction (between the students’ desire to be silent and her sense that they should speak) by using most of the class to explain the text, but arranging a few activities with extensive student oral performances. Though our discussion concerned speaking, it reflected two barriers to students’ engaging in interpretation in literacy: the concept that instruction consists of providing information and the students’ apparent preference to be provided with authoritative instruction.

Feng also attributed her limited use of writing activities as partly dependent on the students’ understanding of foreign language learning. At the end of the first term, she judged that in the seminar, the topic about which she had learned the most was writing (Int2); however, she noted several reasons it was not feasible to carry out writing activities, especially because of the quantity of grading that would be required (repeated in Sem18). She then explained that an important obstacle to carrying out written literacy activities was students’ understanding that writing was only an exam exercise.

(8) **I don’t know if students could understand you** if you ((ask them to))(write) something irrelevant to the exams (1) just tell them this is the REAL communication. the thing you REALLY need in your own life. **I don’t know if the students could really understand you** (Int2, 6/24/08)

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19 Feng did not say what concept or standard was suggesting increasing students’ speaking, but it may have come from the editors of her teachers’ book and textbook, whom she spoke highly of, or from more general discourse about “good” teaching.
20 She had asked groups to read a dramatic text according to scripted parts (Obs2 and Obs3) and had arranged role play activities as lead-ins for several texts (Obs2, Obs6). Each term every student (as part of the group) also made a presentation before the class.
21 In the seven observations there was only one time when students were asked to write anything, either in or outside of class.
Feng implied in this discussion that students’ understanding was fixed, and that proposing a new purpose for writing would only create a gap in teacher-student understanding. This comment displayed her lack of agency: she tended to avoid presenting viewpoints that differed from her students’ and infrequently attempted to influence their understandings. Her discourse that implied students’ views were fixed (seen in excerpt 7 and 8) and her general lack of effort to guide students’ understandings of learning indicated she was regulated by students’ opinions. Feng knew experts’ opinion concerning effective instruction (e.g., students need to speak more or write more), but her own conceptualization of instruction and her students’ confirming viewpoints took priority over her knowledge of scientific concepts.

The above excerpts demonstrate Feng’s tendency to encapsulate theoretical knowledge from her practice, except in a few links created by others. Though in academic (that is, seminar) discourse she employed theoretical terms from her previous learning, such as “input,” “schema” and “target reader,” she was not using concepts as tools for planning her instruction; rather, her instructional activity appeared to be regulated by the textbook and her students. This regulation was not uncontested, so Feng felt tensions concerning her approach to instruction. Through reflection, several contradictions were re-examined as she articulated that the students and teaching experts differed in preferred participation structures, and that the experts and she differed in their views of how teachers should use textbooks.

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22 In a seminar meeting, Ao stated that one interpretation of “student-centered teaching” in China is “the teacher has to teach what the STUDENTS want to learn” (Sem12, 5/27/08), which suggests that being regulated by students could be viewed as positive.
23 It appeared that Feng had been aware of these contradictions before the seminar, and through reflection externalized them again.
5.3 Use of Subordinate Concepts in Instruction

Feng seemed to understand and make connections between scientific concepts, both those she learned before and new ones, but she was not experienced in linking these to her instruction. In addition, though she was aware of concepts that she was not using in her instruction, she seemed content with the way she structured her classes. Thus, it is not surprising that in Observations 4-7, her class structure and activities were largely the same as those seen in the earlier observations. However, as she attempted to use a few new instructional activities and to think about instruction using the subordinate concepts of literacy, her ability to create her own links between scientific concepts and instruction increased. Feng’s increasing self-regulation was displayed in the latter half of the study through her explanations of how she chose her instructional activities. She also increasingly used several subordinate concepts as tools to meet specific goals for student learning. This section shows this conceptual development as displayed in her instruction and reflection on it.

5.3.1 Developing Use of Goals through Reflection on a Mimicked Activity

An early example of Feng’s use of modified activities demonstrated how she was beginning to use subordinate concepts to form pedagogical goals, which partially regulated her instruction. In a sentence jumble activity, an adaptation of a colleague’s technique (mentioned in excerpt 5 above), Feng appeared to use the subordinate concept of literacy involves problem solving, though she did not articulate this clearly. When I asked her purpose in the activity Feng described an explicit purpose that she had not provided to the students, saying she wanted students “to know that when people say something, they say it logically. to give a general idea and specific examples. the result and then. the cause.” (Deb2, 6/21/08). However, as in other
instances, this goal had to do with what the students would “know,” not what they would learn to do. Feng also displayed a mix of personal and social goals for using the activity when she commented to me “well, I thought maybe you want to see some CHANGE ((in teacher instruction)). here’s some change from the seminar. and actually I told you. I LIKED this exercise” (Deb2).24 This demonstrates the multiple goals a teacher may have in one instructional activity: she carried it out in part because of her understanding of what I hoped to see, but also because she thought it was a good activity and would help her students understand about logic in language.25

In this activity, students were to arrange the jumbled sentences taken from a paragraph in their text, using logic to work out the correct order. Feng invited students to order the five sentences and present their answers. When the students supplied an unexpected order, she attempted to mediate their understanding of how cohesive devices like pronouns indicate the relationships between ideas.

(9) F: it takes a couple of special qualities. what does IT mean? (2) IF we put these sentences in SUCH an order. now we come to the second sentence. IT takes. so IT must refer to something. if in THIS order what does it refer to? (1) S1 what do you think?
S1: (4) I think the second ((sentence)) change with the third...
F: you want to change the order? what is the new order to be?
S1: change xxx
F: ok. do you have any other versions? (2) any other ideas (4) S2? do you agree? ((S2 agrees)) okay. such an order. let’s look at it again. the first sentence ((I suspect not everyone who loves the country would be happy living the way we do)). then IT takes a couple of special qualities (1) so what does IT mean THIS TIME? (3) ((students speak quietly)) living in the country. okay. living in the country. takes a couple of special qualities …
((similar dialogue in checking answers and explaining two paragraphs))
F: you can check ((in the book)) that’s paragraph 12 and 13 – have a look at it and why the author put the sentences in such an order and what’s the logic of it (Obs5, 6/16/2008)

24 This was one of several comments Feng made about how her activities were connected with the my research goals.
25 Teacher G’s activity (see Appendix C) was not one of the ones which seemed to be closely linked to Kern’s concept, but Feng’s adaptation of it enhanced the potential for literacy development because she focused on cohesion.
Feng’s explanation of the cohesive function of pronouns, along with the conclusion activity (“have a look at it and why the author put… what’s the logic”) emphasized the problem solving aspect of the activity, which was also confirmed in her explanation of how she had selected paragraphs from the text which “were easier to be made in order according to the logic” (Deb2, 6/21/2008). Thus, one of her goals, though not clearly stated, seemed to be to allow students to practice problem solving in seeing how a text fit together. However, there was no evidence that she was mediating students in terms of ordering sentences according to specificity or cause and effect sequences.

Feng’s spontaneous reflections in the following excerpt revealed another goal that began to lead the activity, that of completing the exercise smoothly. When she compared how her two class sections differed in carrying out the exercise, it emerged that the second group’s faultless completion may have been supported more by their recall of the text than by their understanding of logic or cohesive relations. Feng’s reflection focused on the product rather than the learning process, revealing her goal that students would quickly produce correct answers, rather than solve a problem using logic.

(10) F: I DIDN’T expect them ((the first section)) to give me such order. I thought they would give me the right answer. so I wasn’t well prepared to explain how it ((their answer)) doesn’t work. I was a bit (1) not very clear in mind… it’s interesting because in the other class … they give me the right answer the first time. it’s so easy for me to do this exercise with them… I don’t think ((the first group of)) students did well
O: ohhh. well it’s possible that they hadn’t prepared well. or that they weren’t paying attention?
F: or maybe they. forgot what they have learned last time
O: how did you expect them to figure out the answer? what were they supposed to use?
F: definitely I do not want them to refer to the BOOK to find the answer. still according to some idea they got. last class [O: so some memory] yeah MEMORY but not the textbook. and also the. INNER LOGIC between sentences… maybe for the second class they had some time to … they have half an hour to review what they learned ((in the break before class)) but for this class … I don’t think they had time to review. they SIMPLY put them in order according to the logic. no memory at all. maybe they couldn’t even remember that they had read it before (Deb2, 6/21/2008)
Though Feng indicated her lack of preparation for her students’ incorrect answers ("I was … not very clear in mind"), she demonstrated her knowledge of cohesion by identifying the crucial cohesion markers. Her evaluation of the activity afterwards focused on a superficial awkwardness, i.e., the students not providing expected answers, rather than on their difficulties in understanding the relationships between ideas. Nor did she mention how her explanation may have developed their understanding of cohesion devices. She attributed the second group’s success in the exercise to their review of the text, rather than their ability to make logical connections. Although Feng’s aim included students’ practicing problem solving, this explanation did not reflect use of that goal to evaluate her students’ performance. She had adapted this literacy-oriented activity from a rather different one, but she had essentially mimicked the discourse of using logic, rather than imitating an activity with a goal of developing students’ literacy. Nevertheless, in this activity Feng spontaneously created original links between linguistic and metalinguistic features (that is, cohesive devices and using logic) and an instructional activity. Through her reflection in the debriefing, she also articulated how the activity was related to problem solving. In terms of conceptual development, she took initial steps to connect one of the subordinate concepts to her instruction, through using the concept to set up a vaguely defined learning goal. Though she did not use the goal to fully regulate her instruction, our discussion enabled her to reconsider the goal and other previously unarticulated goals, such as remembering the text.

5.3.2 Using Discourse to Guide Students’ Interpretation

In the first term, Feng’s discourse displayed ways in which she was increasingly linking Kern’s subordinate concepts with her prior concepts (both scientific and everyday) and with pedagogical problems. For example, in the fifth observation, she utilized her prior knowledge of
In this excerpt, Feng attempted to mediate the students’ understanding of how the pronoun “you” could create a particular type of relationship between the writer and the reader. She directed students’ attention to the subject pronoun, identified an alternative phrasing (“he could very objectively say…”), and finally asked the author’s intention. Although the students’ answers could not be clearly heard, Feng’s positive response to their answer with “yes,” likely indicates that some of them had given an answer similar to hers. In this explanation Feng oriented her students to the idea that texts are purposeful communications (“why does he use” and “target readers”). This was one of the first observed instances of Feng using her prior scientific understanding of authors’ intentions in literacy to show her students the communicative aspects.

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26 This was not a term introduced by me in the seminar, but one which Feng knew and used before the seminar.
of a text through emphasizing the participants (i.e., the writer and the readers) and the writer’s purpose.

In the debriefing, Feng’s explanation of this instructional discourse in the above excerpt displayed her intentionality in using Kern’s principle of literacy involves collaboration. She began to explain her purpose with her much repeated goal of helping students “to understand the writer’s idea,” but as I encouraged her to be more specific, she included an example of students’ practical need to appropriately use “you” in the future.

(12) F: this is the fruit from our seminar… let the students be aware about the author’s choice of words. and the author’s intention. one principle ((of literacy)) involves collaboration. so I learned Kern’s ideas (haha)
O: … what was your goal?
F: to let them know why did the author use this kind of tone. YOU…. O: why would that be good for them. to be more aware of it
F: mmm. to be better readers. to understand the author’s ideas better. and in their future writing they can use it – if they really NEED to. like a speech. … they can use it
O: or NOT use it. in the wrong place [F: yeah maybe] I mean to understand if you use it-
F: oh I I don’t know if I mentioned it in THIS class. but in one of the classes I tell my students that. when you write. compositions in the exams. you’d better avoid use YOU … like in the exam you always said. YOU SHOULD - students like to use this kind of word… but the teachers who’s marking this they feel very (un)comfortable reading this (Deb2, 6/21/2008)

Feng attributed her instructional explanation of “you” to the seminar (“fruit from our seminar”), linking it to the principle of collaboration, though she did not explain how readers collaborate with an author by understanding his purpose.27 She linked her understanding of interpretation and intentions (see excerpt 4) to collaboration, a principle of literacy that she had not discussed previously. Then she described a practical application of the use of pronouns in a high stakes issue for students, i.e., exam essays, showing how word choice could engender emotional responses and carry real consequence. When she explained exam essays as a situation in which

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27 The use of pronouns as an indicator of relations between readers and writers did not arise in the seminar, so Feng’s discussion of this was not an imitation of a seminar activity nor based on a seminar discussion of pronouns.
meaning would be created and interpreted, she demonstrated an understanding of how meaning is jointly formed by writers and readers. In this example Feng also began to refer to language as a tool that can be used by students to accomplish their purposes (such as not offending test graders) rather than an item to merely be evaluated as correct or incorrect. This discourse displayed Feng’s emerging ability to use Kern’s concept to solve a pedagogical problem, an actual situation that her students encounter, demonstrating that she was beginning to internalize a new understanding of literacy.

In the second part of excerpt 11 (“but when he is writing, his target readers …”), Feng employed in her instructional discourse the term “target readers,” which she had previously used in her academic discourse. In class, she utilized this term to orient the students’ engagement with the text, enabling the students to collaborate with the writer by identifying the intended readers, thus situating the context of the text as distinct from the students’ context.28 While clarifying that the students were not the target readers, Feng also provided them with a role in the literacy activity, stating that they could still interact with the text through reflecting on its relationship with their lives. Though she did not label it as such, Feng also appeared to be utilizing another of Kern’s principles, *literacy involves reflection.*29

In the debriefing, Feng also demonstrated her understanding of the importance of developing students’ ability to collaborate with the author. When I asked about her goal in providing students with the explanation above (excerpt 11), she explained how the concept of collaboration solved a pedagogical problem. This problem, which she had repeated several times (Deb1, Obs4, and Int2), was that students found the text difficult to understand because they lacked necessary cultural knowledge.

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28 Feng’s explained this several weeks after Bi’s presentation in which she described students losing perspective in a text (see chap. 7, excerpt 16).
29 There was no further discussion relating this text to students’ understandings of families in China. This was typical of Feng’s apparent desire to avoid having students voice their opinions on social topics, so as not to expose them to either criticism or pressure to provide an acceptable opinion.
most all of texts in this book are written by foreigners and maybe their target readers are not Chinese. actually a couple of articles, they are trying to make Americans aware of something … then as Chinese readers. sometimes maybe you feel it’s difficult for you to understand, don’t have that background knowledge, because it’s not written for YOU… and then for my students I want them to understand it in the right way. maybe you feel it’s hard to understand because you do not have that background knowledge it’s not written for YOU. now we are LEARNING this. by standing OUTSIDE. to look at this issue. and how you feel (Deb2, 6/21/2008)

Feng first generalized the nature of the texts in her textbook and her students’ affective response to them. Then she described her use of the target reader explanation (excerpt 11) as emerging from her goal to mediate students’ understanding of the relationship with the text (“I want them to understand it in the right way”). Through linking “target reader” to this problem, she was beginning to utilize an aspect of the concept literacy involves collaboration to solve her pedagogical problem. This explanation indicates that she was using the concept for the purpose of mediating the students’ affective response to the text (“maybe you feel …”). In addition, guiding them to reflect on this relationship was a step in achieving her ideal (expressed in excerpt 4) of helping the students to “see a larger picture of the text” through better understanding their relationship to it. Although Feng’s articulation of Kern’s concept of collaboration and its connection with her instruction were quite general, these examples show how she started to use her prior scientific concept target readers in her instruction.

5.3.3 Adapting Instructional Activities to Meet Purposes

In the second term, Feng more clearly expressed her goals of mediating students’ interpretation of the text, evidencing increased self-regulation. Two episodes from her sixth and seventh observations show her changing approach, in which she made space for students to create their own interpretations and supplied hints about new ways to interpret a text.
The first example below shows how she selected a technique, Readers Theater,\textsuperscript{30} that was similar to instructional techniques that she had previously used, in that it included a text-based performance.\textsuperscript{31} Though the form of this activity was somewhat similar to some of her earlier activities, the purpose was expanded in that she began to provide her students with an opportunity to interpret the text, rather than to simply practice speaking or find discrete answers to comprehension questions.

To utilize Readers Theater, Feng selected a section of the text that included a surface ambiguity regarding four lines of dialogue.\textsuperscript{32} In giving instructions for the task, she was purposely vague concerning the number of speakers in the section, thus allowing students to examine textual cues to determine who would speak each sentence.\textsuperscript{33} Unlike many of Feng’s activities, there was no emphasis on presenting a particular answer, and students were invited to make interpretations.

(14) F: I’d like you to READ this part. **READ part 3 ((of the text)). according to different roles because I think there are several roles involved.** like … the narrator … this might be one role and of course there should be a role as Porter… and also customers…. I think there are several ((customers)) in this part…. of course he went to different houses… **decide how could you read this part together… I think you better work in larger groups… about 5 to 8 people** ((she walks around as students divide into groups and practice))
F: ok everyone. how many voices are there? ((the number 5 is mentioned by some students, so she selects a group of 5 and they read their version))
F: ok thank you, very good. did you read the same as them? (2) [some replies] yes? **maybe some of you have DIFFERENT opinions. I hope that AFTER doing the reading THIS way. you will have a clearer idea about what might happen that day to Porter.** so let’s look at it in detail … (Obs7, 11/3/2008)

\textsuperscript{30}See 4.4.1 for an explanation of the technique.
\textsuperscript{31}See note 20 above.
\textsuperscript{32}Feng’s approach differed from Kern’s description of this technique in two ways. He suggested that readers divide the text according to voices, or themes, based on meanings, not just surface structures (i.e., assigning one person all the narration), and that multiple groups perform, whereas Feng only had one group present.
\textsuperscript{33}There was also some interpretation of roles involved in a part of the text where the protagonist’s thoughts were not marked with quotation marks, and Feng approvingly mentioned that some students assigned these sentences to the protagonist rather than the narrator (Deb3, 11/8/08).
Feng’s discourse left the problem solving aspect somewhat implicit (“decide how you could read this”), so that the goal of the activity was to stimulate thinking (“have a clearer idea”), rather than to find a particular answer. As she explained below, she wanted them to understand the theme of the text (the difficulty of being a salesman) in order to promote thinking rather than to teach a specific interpretation of the text. Similarly, when she explained her reasoning for the number of people involved, she prefaced the explanation with “it depends how you understand it,” again not emphasizing a particular “correct” answer. In our debriefing, Feng’s description of her goal for the activity was congruent with her classroom discourse and linked the activity to one of the subordinate concepts we had discussed.

(15) O: what were you hoping they would get from the role play? maybe several things  
F: that is (1) what I’m. inspired by our some discussion in seminar. because this is a situated. uh what practice? [O: practice mm hm] the students could find the roles by THEMSELVES. and read it according to the ROLES. I think it is INTERESTING. and it will help them. understand the text better  
O: how can it help them understand the text better in your view?  
F: uhh. first. they have to distinguish. that there are SEVERAL roles involved. rather than one salesman and one customer (1) so if they figure THAT out. then they will know well it’s really hard to be a salesman because… (Deb3, 11/8/08)

Feng identified this activity with the specific term situated practice, and though her explanation did not reveal her understanding of that term in detail, she emphasized her intention for the students to carry out the interpretation themselves through using a number of expressions related to problem solving (i.e., “find... by themselves”, “distinguish”, “figure out”). This goal of having students construct meaning was consistent with the seminar discussions of situated practice. Thus, Feng’s explanation displayed a new goal of allowing students to interpret the text and appeared to realign her practice to meet her ideal of helping students “see a larger picture of the text.” Feng imitated a number of elements from the seminar and Kern’s Readers Theater, and

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34 Feng discussed in another part of the debriefing that the author’s purpose was to give a sense of a salesman’s life rather than merely to relate facts (see excerpt 18, below).  
35 The fact that Readers Theater was a kind of situated practice was mentioned several times in the seminar.
employed a term from the scientific concept to categorize the activity. Most importantly, her overall intention of allowing students to interpret an aspect of the text showed a new understanding of literacy. Furthermore, she used the concept to regulate her instruction as she selected the part of the text to use in the activity, connected the activity to a specific goal for student understanding, used the goal to regulate the activity (in contrast with the jumbled paragraph task), and explained her purpose in the debriefing.

In teaching this same text, Feng also expanded her students’ understanding of ways to interpret texts. She aimed to develop their meaning-making ability through drawing attention to how they should be synthesizing information. After explaining a section of text, Feng encouraged her students to synthesize the various parts of the text into a mental image.

(16) so when YOU READ this. did you have a PICTURE. of a man preparing to. go out of the door. in your mind? I think it is. 我觉得这个作者的描述非常详细. 你在读到这儿的时候，脑子里应该有这么个形象. 一个残疾的老人，颤颤巍巍的，冒着这个风雨，准备出门了. (I think the author has described this in great detail. when you read this part, you may have such an image in your mind that a handicapped old man, shivering, despite the rain and wind, was ready to go out.) …

(Obs6, 10/27/08)

Mentioning the “author” and a mental “picture” in the same sentence, Feng implied that the author had put the details together for the purpose of creating a mental image for readers. Thus, she brought the author’s purpose to students’ attention and through her rhetorical question, suggested that students imagine a mental “picture.” Further developing this approach a week later, Feng encouraged the students to see a larger picture of the text through noticing the affective response the text evoked as they synthesized the parts of the description.

(17) F: when we do some READING. usually we have a kind of FEELING. we will have our own IDEAS. AFTER reading it. for example. after reading part three we may have a feeling it’s very hard for Porter to. make a sale. it’s very hard and here AFTER you read part FOUR what kind of feeling do you have? (6) ((repeats explanation and question in Chinese)) (2) sympathy some of you say sympathy ah. 很同情他为什么？ 为什么同情他？ (why deeply sympathize with him? why sympathize with him?) is it because he’s a disabled man? (1)
a few Ss: no
F:好像不是. 我们在读第一段第二段的时候好像有那种对他是残疾人的一种同情, 对不对? 我们读完第四段, 我们又有一个同情. 这个同情是不是因为他是残疾人, 所以感到xxx (no, probably not. when we read the first and second sections we had a kind of sympathy for him because he was handicapped, didn’t we? when we finish reading the fourth section, we had another kind of sympathy. Isn’t this sympathy that because of his handicap he feels xxx?)

Ss: ((several brief answers))

F: because his life HARD. he leads a very simple solitary life? maybe我觉得我有一个词，来描述我的心理感受. 不会拿英语说，就是感觉很凄凉. … 大家有这种感觉吗? (I have a word to describe my feeling. I’m not sure how to say it in English. that is the feeling of dreariness … do you have that feeling?) (Obs7, 11/3/2008)

Feng attempted to guide students into greater awareness of the affective responses they as readers could have to the text. She first generalized that readers usually have a “feeling” when they read, and then provided an example from the previous section before asking the students to notice the feeling that the next section evoked. This approach displayed her aim for students to interact with the text, rather than simply recall the correct interpretation. Despite their initial lack of response, Feng stimulated them to think more specifically about the unique features of the section through repeating her question and asking “why.” These questions about feelings invited students to expand the activity of reading beyond decoding meanings to constructing meaning using words and other knowledge, as well as beginning to allow for multiple interpretations and explanations.

In the debriefing, Feng indicated that her pedagogical reasoning in the previous episode was mediated by her own experience with the text. She also explained that she was leading her students to fulfill the author’s purpose in this part of the article, demonstrating her orientation to collaboration.

(18) O: ((after watching a videotape segment including excerpt 17)) so why did you talk about this?

F: because after I READ the last part. I got the feeling it’s SAD. in class I used the word 凄凉 (?dreary) because I really couldn’t find an equivalent word. in English and I want my students to, just read and FEEL. the text. and the author’s

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Feng described this group of students as unusually quiet. In this somewhat typical example, her question did not produce discussion, but a few student responses of “sympathetic.” Seemingly, Feng resigned herself to asking a yes/no question and providing her own opinion.
meaning, so I raised that question… and for this part I don’t think the author is trying to tell us his ((the protagonist’s)) ACTIVITIES … just want to create a kind of atmosphere and let the reader to think about his life (Deb3, 11/8/2008)

Because of her affective response to the text and her reflection on the author’s purpose, Feng aimed to guide the students to experience the text as the author intended (“I want my students to just read and feel the text and the author’s meaning”). Though she utilized her typical means of teacher-fronted discussion, Feng signaled that the students should have a personal response (i.e., excerpt 14 “we will have our own ideas”), and in this excerpt she showed that she was intentionally encouraging the students to notice the emotions the text raised. Feng’s explanation in the debriefing did not use specific terms such as collaboration or communication, so it is not clear whether she was consciously mediating her activity through the concept literacy involves communication. However, her earlier thinking about collaboration and this new type of classroom discourse suggest that she was linking literacy involves collaboration to her classroom instruction.

5.4 Means Mediating an Emerging Concept of Literacy

Feng’s new understandings of literacy and a literacy-based approach to instruction emerged through linking Kern’s subordinate concepts to concepts she had before the study began, i.e., problem-solving and interpretation. She then linked these familiar concepts to her instruction. In Kern’s subordinate concepts, Feng found more specific definitions for concepts with which she was familiar. She used these definitions to enlarge her understanding of literacy and more systematically organize her prior scientific concepts and connect them with her practice. This process deepened her understanding of the concept of literacy, as well as enabling her to create activities which could mediate students’ ability to make meaning. Later she linked novel concepts such as collaboration and reflection to her instruction and pedagogical reasoning,
though she did not use the term “reflection.”

During the study, Feng did not describe texts in terms of communication.

Feng’s preference for a theoretical approach to learning about literacy was consistent with her information transfer approach to instruction, and meant that she tended not to create connections between pedagogical concepts and instruction. In the reflection she carried out in her journal entries, she began to link scientific concepts to instruction. The most useful entry guided her to make systematic comparisons between the subordinate concepts and her own instruction. The questions I asked in debriefings also were important in stimulating her thinking about how literacy could be connected to instruction. The focus on goals in the seminar provided another means of linking theory with instructional practice. Though Feng had little experience with setting learning goals, the seminar activities made her aware of how teachers could create goals, and she began to establish simple ones.

One example of the process of developing a new understanding of literacy is the manner in which Feng linked her concept of “target readers” to the subordinate concept *literacy involves collaboration* and began to use it in her instruction. “Target reader” was a prior concept that she initially used in the academic discourse of the seminar. Frequent group discussions of authors and their intentions provided opportunities to consider writers’ intentions, and she linked “target readers” to experiences of reflecting on writers and their purposes in order to more fully interpret the text. Then Feng used the term “target reader” and more generally the concept *literacy involves collaboration* in her instructional discourse to direct the students to consider the author’s intention. Eventually she used it to expand the range of ways students could respond to the text, through comparing the text with their own experiences or noticing the feelings it evoked. She also demonstrated that collaboration was a tool for thinking when she used it to frame her

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37 Among the subordinate concepts, Feng also began to develop some understanding of Kern’s pedagogical components, especially *transformed practice* and *situated practice*, which were novel to her.
understanding of a pedagogical problem (i.e., that of students feeling disconnected from the text) and a concrete situation (i.e., the use of “you” in exam essays). In similar ways, Feng also began to increase the opportunities for her students to engage in problem solving and showed indications of expanding her understanding of the scope of interpretation, allowing for more than one interpretation of a text.

Feng’s emerging use of pedagogical goals based on subordinate concepts signaled her first moves from the position of a curriculum implementer (Freeman, 2002), to that of a teacher with agency. As shown in the previous sections, she increasingly demonstrated the ability to plan instructional explanations and activities with particular learning goals. Creating her own links between theory (such as collaboration) and practice was a new activity for Feng. She also sensed that her teaching was more regulated by pedagogical purposes, and described her growing confidence at the end of our last debriefing:

(19) ALWAYS. after you ask me some questions I feel more CONFIDENT in my teaching. because I can always - oh yeah this is the PURPOSE I did that- because you know. unless someone asks you why did you do this some of the purposes are IMPLIED. maybe I didn’t think too much on it … and (now)) I have a strong feeling yes I am doing my teaching with strong purposes (Deb3, 11/8/08)

Feng described her instruction as having been based on unarticulated purposes. She appropriated the seminar theme of goals (“purposes”) and our discussions of concepts about instructional purposes based on scientific concepts, so that she expanded her goals and could articulate them more easily. Though her comment indicated that she did not reflect on purposes in the absence of someone asking her (“unless someone asks…”), the data suggests that as she linked some of Kern’s subordinate concepts to her instruction, she also began to form pedagogical purposes utilizing them, which she could increasingly articulate. Being able to articulate her purposes increased Feng’s confidence and supported her growing sense of agency. Learning to shape her instruction with pedagogical goals connected with literacy involves communication was an essential step towards internalizing that concept.
In addition to her appropriating some subordinate concepts from Kern, Feng’s instruction also showed indications that she was being socialized into new approaches to instruction. She suitably adapted intentionally organized aspects of the seminar, such as ways of discussing author’s intentions and reflecting on one’s personal response to a text (excerpt 17). Because she articulated little conceptual reasoning when she explained her use of these techniques, there was no evidence that the scientific concept was mediating her pedagogical reasoning (i.e., in excerpt 18). Rather, it seems that she was imitating those forms of activity she had experienced in the seminar, confirming that teachers often use those methods that they have experienced. Another kind of social influence was more explicit, seen when Feng mentioned my expectations and implicitly indicated her desire to help fulfill the goals of the research project.

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter has shown that a key means of mediation for Feng was the introduction of the subordinate concepts related to literacy involves communication. Understanding literacy as a communicative activity stands in sharp contrast to Feng’s understanding of learning as originating in teachers transmitting their interpretation of texts. The difference between these two epistemologies was a barrier to Feng understanding Kern’s concept, and so the subordinate concepts provided a way she could understand Kern.

This chapter has shown some of the subtle indications that Feng was beginning to develop a new concept of literacy. She showed signs of first expanding her understanding of everyday concepts (e.g., multiple dimensions of literacy) to align with Kern’s scientific concept, and then developing understandings of other novel aspects of the core concept. She displayed understanding of the scientific concept through making systematic links between subordinate concepts in academic discussion. Her reflections comparing these concepts with her own
instruction created ideals that mediated new forms of instructional discourse and instruction half a year later. Though some of her instructional activities were mimicking literacy activities from the seminar (e.g., her colleague’s presentation), her later activities were imitative, shaped by intentional goals related to literacy (e.g., readers collaborating with the text author) that offered students increased opportunities to make sense of texts in new ways.

Though Feng seemed to increase her self-regulation through her linking several subordinate concepts to her goals and activities, these links were not extensive. In addition, the nature of her conceptualization of literacy was not clear because her new understandings were not yet closely integrated with one another or with her beliefs about instruction. Her attempts to link her scientific concepts with her instruction appeared to be limited by unresolved pedagogical tensions concerning her role as a teacher and her understanding of how students learn. Specifically, lacking a sense of agency, Feng had little reason to create pedagogical goals which would be a means of linking the scientific concept to her instruction. At the end of the study, there was no indication that these contradictions had been resolved, and thus the ways that literacy involves communication could be used in her instruction were limited. Similarly, there were limited opportunities for her instruction to inform her understanding of the scientific concept.

Feng’s case demonstrates how an effort to understand the scientific concept of literacy in itself did not transform instruction. Rather, her understandings of the processes of instruction and learning, and the roles of teachers and students, filtered the ways in which she was able to link the scientific concept to her teaching practice. Nevertheless, through her participation in activities of the seminar, Feng began setting goals for her instruction and using conceptual tools to mediate new understandings of literacy for her students, taking initial steps towards reconceptualizing literacy instruction.
Chapter 6

Ao: New Understandings of Teaching and Learning Expand an Everyday Concept of Literacy

“I kind of believed that those [Designs] could be acquired unconsciously as long as students read a lot.” - Ao

Teachers in China, as in other settings, vary in the learning histories they bring to their English instruction. Not all teachers have developed an understanding of literacy based on intensive reading, and some have instead experienced approaches to instruction that are more communicative. One of this study’s focal participants, Ao, is a teacher who through earlier classroom learning had developed an everyday concept of literacy similar to Kern’s concept. As such, it might be expected that utilizing that everyday concept she would readily develop a true concept of literacy through the seminar. However, this case shows that there are many facets to linking scientific and everyday concepts and that the development of true concepts is not always a straightforward process. Ao had positive English literacy experiences before the study, and aimed to prioritize text meaning in her classroom, but had difficulty comprehending the scientific concept literacy involves communication. Through her participation in the seminar and exposure to the scientific concept she developed only a general understanding of Kern’s concept. However, she expanded her understanding of literacy instruction, which allowed her to utilize a number of new instructional activities. This case demonstrates an everyday concept expanding and growing up towards the scientific concept of literacy.

This chapter shows how Ao appropriated Kern’s subordinate concept literacy involves interpretation using it to link her everyday concept of literacy to her instruction. As she developed an understanding of the roles of instructional goals, she began to utilize goals related to
literacy to organize her instruction, which further deepened her understanding of her students’ literacy and ways to develop it. Through a discussion concerning conscious and unconscious learning, she reassessed the value of explicit instruction, and began changing her approach to instruction. Finally, the path of the development of another subordinate concept, literacy involves cultural knowledge, further displayed Ao’s pattern of expanding instructional models she observed, which showed that her thinking about instruction tended to be empirical, rather than conceptual in nature.

6.1 Making Links between Literacy and Instruction

Ao’s everyday concept of reading and writing enabled her to understand literacy involves communication. Her initial conceptualization of literacy included the understanding that texts express ideas and feelings. For example, before Kern’s ideas were mentioned, she suggested that reading involves gaining new ideas through communicating with the writer, stating “reading is to communicate with the writer and learn something new, some new information, new culture” (Sem1, 3/11/08). In describing her own attitude towards writing, she described it as a means of expression: “I like writing WHATEVER I’m thinking you know sometimes I feel I HAVE to write it down to express my feelings” (Int1, 3/19/08). Ao’s discourse reflected a robust awareness of the existence of the writers of texts and of communication between readers and writers, though this was not reflected in her instruction. Her usual approach to instruction was close examination of texts through questions and answers, organized around the textbook’s comprehension questions. However, before the seminar she had assigned several situated practice activities as homework, such as keeping a journal and writing book reports.1

1 She only carried out these activities a few times before the seminar because she perceived that students felt it was not useful (Deb1, 5/5/2008).
Ao first linked her everyday understanding of *communicating through texts* to the scientific concept of literacy in a journal entry in which she imitated Kern’s use of “interpret” pointed to the role of intentions in writing. In this entry, she utilized her difficulties with the journal assignment to describe her experiences of English reading and writing, and thus not only completed the assignment, but communicated those difficulties to me.

(1) I have read the two questions for several times and I have talked to four of my colleagues and we all agreed it was hard to know what to write. It is not like that your questions are not clear. It is more like that we don't get the real intentions. I know each of the words here ((in the written assignment)) perfectly but I feel uncertain about the answers because I am not sure if my answers are what you expect from us…. I am not sure if I interpret the questions correctly (Asgn1, 3/18/08)

Though several other teachers were unsure about how to approach the assignment, Ao was the only one to communicate her uncertainty in the entry, as she reflected on that puzzle as part of the answer to the assigned question. In this entry, she clearly displayed her understanding that meaning did not just reside in words. She used “interpret,” rather than a more generic word such as “understand,” which showed that she was aware that various readings of texts were possible (though she wanted to find my understanding in this situation). Ao’s linking this term to her lived experiences was the beginning of her engaging with the scientific concept.

Ao’s use of the subordinate concept of *interpretation* in her discourse increased, and she linked it to her instruction. For example, in the third observation she used “interpretation,” seemingly spontaneously, to describe her students’ interaction with the text. Her comment was made when she was using a series of questions to guide students to understand a value-laden word (superwoman). In the midst of her concrete example, she seemed to remind herself that students’ views could differ from that of the author.

(2) A: who can be called a superwoman? … X is successful in POLITICS but her FAMILY life seems not SO desirable. so maybe (2) so she’s just successful in

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2 In meeting 1 Kern’s definition was discussed, and the idea of “interpreting” texts was brought up several times, though not explored.
ONE ASPECT in one field. 那么 in your opinion 你如果称为她为 superwoman. 可以吗? (then in your opinion is it reasonable to call her a superwoman?)
Ss: ((some)) no
A: 那也没有什么未尝不可. 只不过有自己的 interpretation. eh ((spoken quickly and quietly)) 当然了文章所讲的 (well there’s no bad idea, you can have your own interpretation. eh. of course what the article says is) if a woman can manage her home successfully and also if she makes great achievements in her job. she can be the superwoman. but anyway this is. probably this is just the author’s understanding. so maybe we should ((flipping textbook pages)) (1) try to see. how the AUTHOR sees what is a superwoman. (Obs.3, 4/23/08)

In this excerpt, Ao began to guide her students into the author’s view of superwoman, but then appeared to remind herself that the students could understand the word in various ways (“you can have your own interpretation”), while suggesting that in this case they should find the author’s meaning. She implicitly began to distinguish between her students’ understandings and that of the author and implied that words’ meanings are complex, and possibly contested. In acknowledging that there was not one authorized meaning of superwoman (“this is just the author’s understanding”), Ao was creating a space for communication between readers and writers, which involved sharing not only new information, but also potentially new perspectives. These comments, which had some characteristics of private speech (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006), seemed to reflect Ao’s spontaneous expression of her understanding of literacy. She used the subordinate concept literacy involves interpretation in her later classroom discourse and used it extensively in her end-of-term project. Ao seemed to use this subordinate concept in her instruction more than others because it allowed her to link her everyday concept as an English user to her English instruction.

Ao linked the concept of literacy with her instruction in two ways. As shown above, she began to use the concept of interpretation to think about her own and her students’ activities. In addition, she began to use simple literacy-oriented techniques in her instruction, in imitation of techniques I had used in the seminar. For example, Ao employed scanning to find the topic of a text one week after we did this in the seminar, and in the same class (Obs3, 4/23/08) she used pair
work before whole class discussions, as we had in the seminar several times. These appeared to be new in her instruction, but were not discussed in the debriefing.

6.2 Developing Instruction Based on Instructional Goals

The effect of Ao’s linking her everyday concept of literacy to her instruction became more significant as she began to think about structuring her teaching through the use of instructional goals. Ao began setting goals because she felt it was a way to improve her instruction, and in fact, creating goals provided concrete ways to link her understanding of literacy to her classroom practice.

6.2.1 Reflecting on Instruction Motivates Change

Ao regularly expressed concern with improving her teaching, attempting to evaluate it throughout the year. One indication of her concern was her raising the question of whether she was a “traditional” teacher (Asgn1 and Asgn4). Her journal entries regularly included careful observations of her students’ activity and critical reflections about her instruction. In one entry, observing student responses to reviewing exercise answers, she expressed her lack of a sense of achievement in her instruction.

3 For example, though Ao was nervous about having an observer visit, she felt it was useful to her, and mentioned asking others to observe her classes (Int1 and Deb1).

(3) I think it is very useful for them, so I asked them to finish it ... we checked the answers. But they seemed bored and didn’t respond actively... they really didn’t listen to me patiently when I explained why we chose this [answer] but not that one I guess not all of them have the same problem. I may waste a lot of time to some students. Now I wonder if we can cancel the (checking of answers) ((several sentence description of alternative approach to exercise)) Maybe. Then they showed interest in watching pictures… They still prefer visual aids. I felt there was an impasse in my teaching. I mean the classes are merely the repetitive circles and the classes are always alike (Asgn4, 4/7/08)
Through her observation of her students, Ao noted a pedagogical problem, specifically, a contradiction between her and the students’ perceptions of the value of checking answers (“I think it is very useful”, “but they seem bored”). Articulation of the problem stimulated her to consider reorganizing her instruction, and she proposed a possible alternative method of completing the exercise, which she then evaluated with uncertainty using a simple “maybe.” Noting her students’ learning styles did not seem to be changing, she evaluated her instruction as not contributing to student progress (“repetitive circles”). She externalized her feelings of not knowing the way forward as being at an “impasse.” Despite the fact that Ao typically used writing to clarify her thinking, in this excerpt, she did not mention having a means to explain the importance of the exercise to the students or evaluating the alternative plan she had outlined. Apparently she lacked conceptual resources that she could consciously employ to solve these problems. She expressed her feelings concerning two issues: she and her students lacked a common motive for the task, and the students’ abilities were not developing. This externalization of her dissatisfaction was a kind of pedagogical problem to solve that motivated her to institute change in her instruction.

After the reflection above, Ao began to develop a concept of goal-oriented instruction through three means of mediation: a simple introduction of the concept learning is mastering tools in the seminar, the seminar theme of goals, and comparing her instructional approach with an article the group read. In the seminar, I used Kern (p. 34) and several practical examples to demonstrate the concept of English as a collection of resources that can be used for one’s own purposes as they are mastered (Sem6, 4/15/08). Thus, teaching the Available Designs as tools-to-master formed an implicit contrast with teaching as a repetitive routine, the view of her

4 Ao seemed to use journals and emails to organize her thinking: in one email she articulated that her purpose was not merely communicating with me, “Anyway, writing to you makes me think clearly. So don't worry if you feel you have nothing to comment” (6/1/08).
5 See 4.3 for how this was part of the discussion of Engeström’s (1987) activity triangle.
instruction that Ao had externalized (see excerpt 3 above). In addition, one of the seminar themes, planning instructional activities according to instructional goals (see 4.4.3), was reinforced through my regularly asking teachers about possible goals in utilizing particular instructional activities. Finally, after reading Paine (1990), Ao concluded “now I am VERY sure I am using the traditional way of teaching, when I read [Paine] … I think what she described is EXACTLY the same as I did” (Deb1, 5/5/2008). She found in Paine’s description elements from her own instruction, and made generalizations about her teaching practice. The article, together with the alternative view of instruction as structured through goals, provided her with an objective view of her own instruction as aimlessly following an instructional routine. In the first term, she began to resolve this tension by establishing instructional goals.

6.2.2 Creating Literacy-Related Pedagogical Goals

At the beginning of the study, Ao’s only stated goal was keeping students involved in learning, without any mention of pedagogical goals for students.

(4) O: ... what is your GOAL. and. how do you try to teach your students (6)
   A: my GOAL (3) haha (2) mm [O: a hard question, huh] yeah. I mean a lot of goals
   O: what are some of the important ones-
   A: just the important one is just to try (2) 领着他们怎么说 (lead them – how do you say?) try to. just like a person who is LEADING you to some direction. my my.
   purp- my goal is to HELP them. not to give up English. if there’s no teacher at all... but with ME they will. really LEARN it. of course one of the purpose is to. pass the Band exam. but that’s not the important one to ME. I really WANT them to have INTEREST. to have the motivation to study (Int1, 3/19/08)

Ao was not able to list other goals she had in instruction in our initial discussion, but described her chief role as providing motivation in students’ study. She mentioned and then disassociated herself from the motive of preparing students to pass the national CET4 ("Band") exam. In the

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6 This was not unusual and was also seen in Feng’s description.
first debriefing, Ao also mentioned another goal she held more implicitly: focusing on comprehension “I INTEND to put reading questions - the comprehension. as the big part.”

Ao seemed to engage with my repeated questions regarding instructional purposes in the seminar since she began to answer these questions relatively quickly. In her presentation of a literacy activity from her class, she described the pre-reading questions that she created for Text A, the core text in the textbook unit. She had not prepared to explain the purpose of her activity, but was able to spontaneously provide it when I asked.

(5) O: my question - the clarifying question. is what’s the PURPOSE ((of your activity))? A: ah purpose. ((sigh)) [all: haha] I don’t know, I just think this can arouse their INTEREST in learning Text A so that the class can be. YES can be very ACTIVE the students’ ENTHUSIASM will be. [several: aroused] yes F: it’s a REQUIREMENT. we must have a WARM-UP or LEAD-IN to the text. A: yeah. can. but that’s not. why do it and also I think this can make them SPEAK for a while. in COMPREHENSION class they can have time to SPEAK. (Sem11, 5/20/2008)

Ao’s first reply (including a sigh) indicated that having to describe her instructional purpose was both expected and challenging, but she quickly answered that the activity would meet her overarching goal of engaging students and motivating them (see excerpt 4), as well as providing them with a chance to speak. She rejected Feng’s suggestion that she utilized this type of task as a required element or rule-of-thumb (“that’s not why I do it”), but positioned herself as a person who had pedagogical goals for activities. In later discussions, Ao repeated this newly articulated goal of allowing students to speak.

Ao began to internalize the need for pedagogical purposes, displaying her purposes in various literacy activities in multiple reflections and discussions. In the end-of-term project, she systematically identified the goals of each of eight literacy activities that she carried out. She also reflected on the changes in her thinking about instruction, by linking theory, goals, and teaching methods to one another:

(6) During the seminar ... I felt shocked and ashamed at the same time because I realized my teaching was never based on any theory and I didn’t have correct
understanding about English and my teaching goal. I was like a blind man who was leading people to try to find the right direction in the dark cave. I used to think English was just a tool to help people know other knowledge and learning English meant to get meanings through learning new words and knowledge about grammar and structure and translation... and I believed passion in teaching and love for students made one a good teacher. I never really thought about my teaching aim and the way I taught. It seemed I taught because we had to finish six, seven, or eight units in sixty four hours in one school term. I taught because I was supposed to help them to pass CET4 and CET6 so they could graduate and get good jobs with better English. (Proj p. 1, 6/17/08)

Ao described two foundations for instruction that she had lacked: theory (perhaps also “understanding about English”) and goals (“teaching goals”, “aims”). She implied that her previous understanding of how learning takes place (through the teacher’s character), what language learning consists of (knowledge of words, grammar, structure and translation) and her instructional goals (complete the syllabus, help students pass the exam) were undergoing change. In this excerpt, as in other reflections, Ao tended to describe her former ideas negatively but in more detail than new ones, demonstrating a desire to change without describing a clear vision for an alternative direction.

6.3 Deepening an Understanding of Literacy Instruction through Classroom Practice

Ao’s journal reflections and her imitative use of new instructional techniques were expanded in the end-of-term project. Through the project she expanded her understanding of the practical aspects of carrying out literacy instruction and added to her understanding of the scientific concept. The paper, entitled “Thoughts started from Kern’s theory – a different way to teach a text,” explored how the concept of literacy could be linked to her instruction. She

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7 I provided a list of possible topics, and Ao adapted this one, “A plan for a different way to teach a unit or text from your textbook.... include explanations of goals and anticipations of outcomes.” In deciding to carry out the plan, Ao took initiative in implementing the plan.
engaged in narrative inquiry modeled on Herndon (2002),\(^8\) describing how she planned, carried out, and then evaluated a new approach in teaching one textbook unit. The project involved a series of activities that differed significantly from her usual instructional routine, carried out over three classes. Ao’s typical instruction of Text A largely consisted of utilizing comprehension questions as a departure point for additional questions and explanations concerning vocabulary and sentence meaning. In this unit, Ao utilized new instructional activities to teach Text A (see Table 6-1 below, activities a - f and k), and in two activities she made use of a section of her textbook (Language Enhancement) for the first time (activities g and h). Table 6-1 summarizes the activities that I observed and that she wrote about or discussed (the bold items are those which Ao indicated she used for the first time).

Table 6-1. Instructional Activities in Ao’s End-of-term Project.

- **a.** Anticipation of text: Examination of title and pictures for Text A (5 min)
- **b.** **Explanation of background/culture information (45 min)**\(^9\)
- **c.** Reading text A: Students read, small groups answer questions, and groups write questions on “language points” which they cannot solve (50 min)
- **d.** Solving language points: Teacher models how to work out answers through answering a number of groups’ questions (75 min)
- **e.** Examine organization of Text A (textbook exercise)(25 min)
- **f.** Exercises: Review of text content and vocabulary (25 min)
- **g.** Reading and writing activity with poem (20 min)
- **h.** Discussion of quotation and anecdote (including assignment to write an essay on one of quotations after class) (6 min)
- **i.** Textbook exercise on vocabulary (20 min)\(^10\)
- **j.** Reading Text B and answering comprehension questions (25 min)
- **k.** **Pairs discuss selected student generated discussion questions on Text A (10 min)**

(derived from Obs4, Obs5, Deb2 and Proj)

Through designing and carrying out the project, Ao began to connect *literacy involves* interpretation with her instruction, and through writing about it, she more clearly articulated her

\(^8\) Ao and I carried out an extensive email correspondence during her planning, in which she explicitly stated she was using Herndon as a model.

\(^9\) Ao had taught background information for texts before, but here dedicated considerably more time to it, linking it to culture because she understood this to carry out Kern’s principle of linking culture to literacy (Deb2, 6/16/08).

\(^10\) There was some innovation in how Ao dealt with these vocabulary exercises in that she asked students to raise questions on those items which they felt they needed help with, rather than reviewing all the answers.
understanding of literacy. This section will show new ways that she used goals, situated practice, and interpretation in this project.

6.3.1 Linking the Scientific Concept to Instructional Activities through Goals

Earlier in the first term, Ao expressed frustration in trying to synthesize Kern’s subordinate concepts and had difficulty linking literacy to instructional activities in seminar discussion. For example, her summary of Kern mostly consisted of verbalism, relying on Kern’s terms, with little explanation to demonstrate her understanding of them. In addition, when describing how Kern’s approach to instruction would differ from current practices, she perceived the need for a change in orientation, discarding “the traditional way which focuses on vocabulary-to-remember notion and sentence-to-translate class form” (Insem3, 5/20/08). The only new aspect of instruction that she envisioned was related to the participation structure of classes: “students will write more and discuss more in class,” which focused on students’ actions, without mentioning the purposes of their actions, that is, communication.

However, in her written end-of-term project Ao began to articulate her understanding of literacy and intentionally drew links between literacy and English instruction.

(7) Kern’s understanding of English literacy made me see literacy is more than just being the ability to read and write. English literacy learning is a complicated process which involves lots of knowledge. But mostly, ‘Literacy involves communication.’ Also literacy can’t be separated from those goals including critical thinking, problem solving, and cross-cultural awareness developing and cognitive and metalinguistic consciousness. Then I decided it was time to really think about what my teaching goal was and how I was going to meet it and to make some change on teaching. (Proj p. 2, 6/17/08)

Ao first mentioned the complexity of literacy (“complicated process”) and then simplified it by quoting and giving prominence to the central concept literacy involves communication. Then she gave a generalized explanation of literacy, largely using her own terms and focusing on points
that were relevant to her (e.g., “critical thinking”). In the next section of her paper she connected literacy with the items mentioned in excerpt 7, creating goals for student learning for each of eight instructional tasks (“steps”), some of which are shown below.

(8) Step 1 … Look at the title … [students] ask themselves questions … [they] may see reading as a process to communicate with the author to figure out the writer’s intention.

Step 2 Talk about background information … The goal is to help students to see some social and cultural differences … so they can understand Text A better and also increase their consciousness of their own culture.

Step 3 … [in groups] discuss reading questions [in the textbook] and at the same time write down the difficult language points [from the text]…. The goal is to let the students become active participants in reading comprehension so that they will show great initiative to become active thinkers. I expect they will solve most of the language-points-problems….

Step 4. [I will] Help them solve the questions they write down after discussion. The goal is to make them see how the teacher works out the problems so that they can compare that with the way they did and eventually they can enhance their metalinguistic and cognitive ability in problems-solving. (Proj p. 3-4, 6/17/08)

To create these goals, Ao appropriated aspects of literacy we had discussed, such as knowing the author’s intentions, understanding one’s own culture through contrast with another culture, and developing students’ metalinguistic knowledge. Some of Ao’s understandings and techniques used to accomplish these goals, such as spending 40 minutes telling students about cultural facts, were not aligned with the seminar discussion of literacy. Nevertheless, in writing this project, Ao articulated specific links between her instruction and her understandings of literacy through establishing literacy-related goals for her instructional activities.

6.3.2 Teaching Interpretation through Situated Practice

Before the seminar, Ao had utilized some situated practice activities for homework (cf. 6.1), but in the end-of-term project she created in-class situated practice when she asked students to respond to a poem in their textbook (activity g in Table 6-1). The poem interpreting activity
was simple to design, and utilized a previously unused textbook section. However, in the midst of this activity, Ao discovered that in order to complete it, students needed to read in a new manner. In discussing earlier observations, Ao had noted that her students sometimes repeatedly read the text aloud, a technique she said could be useful, “sometimes if you keep reading aloud. if you turn it into HABIT it can ENHANCE your.... yugan (language sense)” (Deb1, 5/5/2008). 11 In contrast, in this activity Ao framed the poem task as a communicative event between the author and the students, with the students interpreting the poem and expressing their understandings in writing.

(9) The poems ((in our text)) we didn’t look at before but. the poem in this unit is a really nice one. and also I think it’s not very difficult for you. so I want you to READ the poem. and try to see what the author wants to convey. I mean maybe maybe DIFFERENT people have DIFFERENT interpretation. about the poem. because different people have different life experience. and also have different IDEAS about life. but you can have your OWN ideas. when you read the poem try to see what the author wants to tell us … MAYBE the author… was not only talking about road. I want you to read the poem and write a small paragraph about what you think of the poem. (Obs5, 6/11/08)

Ao invited students to make their own interpretations, explaining that these might be based on their “life experiences” or their worldview (“ideas about life”). The students then read aloud for more than two minutes, and Ao interrupted them, seemingly unsure that they were going to interpret the poem. She then emphasized the need for them to write their impressions, imitating the rationale given in the seminar, that writing was useful in formulating thoughts.

(10) I don’t want you to just keep reading... if you just keep reading and reading. I don’t know how it will help you to think. just (1) see what the AUTHOR is trying to say in this poem. just write down a paragraph (60) I think that writing down will help you organize what you’re thinking ... just find a piece of paper to write down a paragraph see what do you THINK of the poem … because after a while I’m going to ask you to READ what you write (Obs5, 6/11/08)

In order to shift the students’ activity from gaining “language sense” to using conscious cognitive activity (“think”) to interpret the poem, Ao repeated the goal (“see what the author is trying to

11 This comment may reflect the influence of the audiolingual approach to instruction (see Celce-Murcia, 1991).
say”), demonstrated the informality of the writing (“just find a piece of paper”) and provided a rationale. This situated practice was more closely connected to Ao’s core instruction than her previous attempts because it was linked to the textbook and designed as an in-class activity, which allowed students’ to share their reflections with one another. However, Ao encountered difficulties in guiding her students to interact with the text in a new way.

Examining Ao’s explanation of the poem activity shows how she was striving to connect instructional practice with theory. In her description of the project to the seminar group, Ao evaluated this poem activity as being very closely related to “Kern’s theory” (Sem14, 6/10/2008). This comment indicated that she saw this as an activity consistent with his concept of literacy, but she provided no further explanation of the connection. In discussing her purposes in the debriefing, she only briefly mentioned communication, and explained how she was linking the scientific concept of literacy to her instruction through using a writing activity.

(11) O: what did you want them to learn from doing [the poem activity]. or what did you want them to GET from doing it? why do it?
A: first (for) comp- understanding, uh just to see what is the. MEANING of the author I mean what does the author try to CONVEY. and also I want them to. uh. to practice WRITING a little bit, I don’t know how they ((comprehension and writing)) can be connected CLOSER but according to what we have learned in Kern’s theory. those parts are INTEGRATED ones. and writing actually is a BIG - not a big part but. yeah it’s a big part. in LITERACY. so I think. maybe I should add some writing part in the reading CLASS and also I believe that writing can make them think clearly... (Deb2, 6/16/08)

Though Ao framed her explanation in terms of theory (“what we have learned in Kern’s theory”), she appeared unsure about the relationship between reading and writing, initially appealing to an authority (Kern) to support the idea that writing was a part of literacy. She did not use either

literacy involves communication as a theory or interpretation as part of her purpose.12 This explanation showed that Ao was attempting to articulate links between theory and her instruction, but her understanding of the scientific concept was still weak at the end of the first term.

12 In the written project, she used both communication and interpretation in her explanation of this activity, without mentioning literacy.
6.3.3 Tensions in Linking Interpretation to the Core of the Curriculum

In the Chinese context, a teacher linking literacy involves communication to instruction of Text A shows that she has integrated it into the core curriculum. As shown in excerpt 8 (step 3), Ao planned for students to become “active thinkers” by working out the meaning of Text A in groups, and identifying the problems they could not solve (activity c in Table 6-1). In the written project, she reflected on that instructional activity and her modeling of problem solving (activity d), expressing dissatisfaction as she contrasted the anticipated and actual outcomes of her instructional goals. Then she reflected on the importance of this particular activity in relation to larger issues of instruction.

(12) It is supposed the emphasis on words and language points and translation part should be shifted to the interpretation of the writer’s intention and communication between students and the writer. Also, my role of feeding them much information is supposed to become weakened and students’ role of participation and self-learning ability become strengthened. However, during the practice, things have gone differently from my anticipation sometimes. For example, as for the questions raised by different groups, most of them still were related closely to grammar, structure and meaning and translation. I still spent a lot of time explaining that part… Too much attention on language points might have made us miss the general understanding of Text A. [The students] didn’t ask any comprehension question designed in the book made me wonder if they really discussed those questions… I think my students have not been used to this change yet. They still hold the idea what I do in class with them is supposed to be very important. … I am still struggling in looking for bigger changes while turning around to look at the schedule made by the office. But I have realized there must be changes done in the current teaching situation, or else, all that my students will remember one day after graduation may be just several words or even nothing. I don’t want that. I want them to have the idea what language learning is and the ability to acquire language for different purpose at different times in their life after they stop having education in school. (Proj, p. 6/7, 6/17/08)

Generalizing about the content of the discussion (“too much attention on language points”), Ao externalized her evaluation of how the activity met her goals. The participation structure had not changed (i.e., she spent a lot of time explaining) and the students had not increased their role in interpreting the text. In her reflections she articulated the possible negative impact this approach
would have on students’ comprehension of the text (“miss the general understanding”). In carrying out this activity, Ao seemed to have been regulated by an implicit goal of making every word clear, rather than her written goal of providing students with opportunities to make their own interpretations. She did not clearly articulate this tension between her explicit and implicit goals. However, reflecting on the possible outcomes of utilizing her implicit goals, she indicated a new commitment (“But I have realized”) to the aim of helping her students gain more from her class than just knowledge of words.

Ao suggested that part of the reason that these tasks did not fulfill her goals lay in the students’ participation, summarizing the students’ orientation towards the tasks as “students have not been used to this change.” The students’ decoding-oriented questions, focused on “grammar, structure and meaning and translation,” displayed their understanding of English learning as largely involving bottom-up decoding of sentences. Their lack of interest in the meaning-oriented comprehension questions reflected their understanding that their activity, that is, their interpreting the text, was unimportant compared with the teachers’ explanation (“what I do in class with them is supposed to be very important”). Using this externalized tension and seminar discussions of learning as a social activity, Ao stated it was necessary for students’ understandings of tasks to more closely resemble hers. Thus, she constructed a new goal of meditating students’ understanding of language learning (“I want them to have the idea what language learning is”).

Through the end-of-term project, Ao fully engaged in reflecting on her past instruction (excerpt 6), enacted her understanding of literacy, largely through literacy involves interpretation, and began to attend to the importance of students’ motive in instructional tasks. Some instructional tasks did not accomplish her purposes because she did not take into account the students’ motive and mediate their understanding of literacy, but the project was important in furthering her understanding of students’ orientation to the task. She used her earlier practice of

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13 Ao also explicitly used problem-solving and implicitly used collaboration and situated practice.
reflecting on instruction in her journal and utilized Herndon’s (2002) article as a model to make extensive, objective evaluations of the activities in her project. In her second term description of semester goals, Ao’s understanding of literacy involves communication and of her students’ orientation to literacy was clarified, as shown in two of the goals below.

(13) (1) Help students understand more deeply about the idea that English is to communicate by expressing your own thoughts but [sic] not only a tool to pass exams.

(4) Shift the focus on remembering vocabularies to the understanding of the relationship between the writer and the reader so that students consciously think about what they can learn from the writer about the world and people or something.

(Asgn10, @10/5/2008)

In these goals, Ao aimed to realign her students’ learning purposes to a communication orientation (“help students understand … that English is to communicate”) and to shift her instructional approach from vocabulary-oriented to literacy-oriented (“understanding relationships between the writer and reader”). These goals appear to point back to her reflections in the end-of-term project (four months earlier) that revealed the differences between her (and Kern’s) understanding of literacy and that of her students. As she reflected on those differences, she further developed her understanding of literacy involves communication, by contrasting this concept with the current state of her students’ understanding of literacy.

By the end of the first term, Ao’s instructional discourse and practices showed increasing consistency with literacy involves communication. However, her explanations of her instruction (spoken and written) contained limited reference to the scientific concept of literacy, mostly literacy involves interpretation. She did not reference Kern’s concepts, but linked her own experiences of literacy to her instruction and reflected on her instruction, signaling that her understanding of literacy was developing empirically through practice. This apparent path of development was confirmed in her comment that the seminar helped her connect her everyday concepts with instruction: “what we learned from those papers made me think of. some. some
IDEAS which already EXISTED in my mind. but now I just take those ideas out. and really put
MORE emphasis on those ideas.” (Deb2, 6/16/2008).14

6.4 A New Understanding of Instruction Restructures Teaching Practice

Ao increased the number of links between Kern’s concept of literacy and classroom
practice as her understanding of instruction came into alignment with the subordinate concept of
overt instruction. Kern described overt instruction as including “scaffolded learning activities”
that assist learners in gaining “conscious control” of language (Kern, 2000, p. 133). With this
understanding, Ao began to further transform how she mediated students’ practices of interacting
with texts, as seen in the last two observations.

6.4.1 Examining the Role of Conscious Learning and Instruction

In the second term, though Ao was formulating a new understanding of the importance of
goals, her goals were not easily linked to instruction because of her everyday concept that most
learning takes place unconsciously.15 Apart from explaining basic units of language (vocabulary
and grammar), she used little overt instruction, expecting students to gain a language sense as
they practiced reading and she modeled comprehension practices.16 Near the end of the year, a
written reflection, preceded and followed by discussions indirectly dealing with the topic of overt
instruction, assisted her in re-evaluating her understanding of learning.

Towards the end of the second term, the seminar group discussed student difficulties in
the speed reading task for the CET4, along with methods of assisting students. During the

14 Unlike Feng, the ideas that “existed” in Ao’s mind did not seem to include specific terms from theory.
15 Her understanding of unconscious learning was also reflected in her quote on “yugan” in 6.3.2.
16 Ao’s use of modeling in the end-of-term project was more extensive than in earlier classes, but early
observations she also demonstrated strategies she used to construct meaning from texts.
discussion Ao reflected on a previous interaction in her classroom and evaluated whether she had mediated her student’s reading ability.  

(14) O: … reading quickly isn’t just a matter of knowing different skills. it’s a matter of using skills. so if the student doesn’t have those skills when he reads SLOWLY. of COURSE. he’s going to be unsuccessful when he has to read quickly. so if we want to find out what’s their true ability. let them read it slowly. and see. can they make meaning. do they have that ability to make meaning. that’s what I wonder. you know if. as Teacher D SAYS. This (student’s reading) method is WRONG. and he can’t make meaning out of it. then. maybe if you let him read it longer and he says. I STILL can’t find it. then we realize. the problem is not the speed. the problem is. the basic comprehension skill (2) because. it’s an interesting question. what that ((the problem)) is.  

D: haha we usually measure their reading comprehension. by the TEST. the test you know has a requirement for speed so  

O: but we can be more flexible [D: yeah] right  

D: you remind us that we have this ability too  

O: because if you want to. if the student can’t do THIS thing successfully. then we have to think what can we do. to help them do it successfully and I WANT to know. WHAT’S the problem. and (is) the problem the speed. maybe NOT maybe the problem is no matter how much time. he can’t do it well. OR. maybe. my guess is. that the student. doesn’t have CONFIDENCE. in their ability to put together the meaning quickly ((several nod)) …  

A: … one of my students came to me. and she said. for the fast reading... if I have ENOUGH time... I can do it VERY well. she said I can find ALL the answers. but in 15 minutes I just. CAN’T find it. she means sometimes when she missed the answer. for example for question TWO. ((then)) she had difficulty looking for answers for number THREE. but you know what did I tell her? I said oh you just need more PRACTICE. just take 15 minutes you HAVE to limit it in 15 minutes. PRACTICE more. now I think this is not good. (Sem20, 12/4/08)  

Ao only articulated that her answer to the student was inadequate (“this is not good”), but her emphasis on “practice” may indicate that she felt she had shifted the problem to her student (“practice more”), rather than offering concrete support in developing this skill. My suggestions of how to assist students provided Ao with not only alternative actions, such as allowing students more time to read or building up their confidence, but also with an alternative conception of instruction (“we have to think what we can do to help them”). The discussion appeared to lead Ao to question the effectiveness of her assistance to her student.

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17 Just a part of the long discussion is included here: before this excerpt several other speakers described the characteristics of low level readers.
In the following weeks, Ao began to externalize her previous understanding of how students learn and to examine an alternative conceptualization of teaching and learning. In a written assignment, the teachers were asked to examine a list of specific Available Designs, determine whether their textbook taught any of them, and write about their findings.\(^{18}\) Ao used this assignment to more clearly articulate an idea which she had mentioned earlier: the existence of two approaches to learning, conscious and unconscious.

\[\text{(15) The first impression after I read the items and went through the units is that all the items from the paper you gave us can be taught by using the book if I do that consciously when I teach reading. However, it surprises me that students need to know so much when they read. What I mean is that I neglected some of the items mentioned here even though they could be pointed out when I taught. It is too much to consider all the aspects of reading but I must admit it may worth trying.}^{19}\) I stressed little on cohesion/coherence, schemata stuff and genres and styles. I kind of believed that those could be acquired unconsciously as long as students read a lot. But now I am thinking it might facilitate the understanding of this knowledge if I teach them on purpose in reading.\\(\text{Asgn15, 12/16/08)}\]

In this reflection, she stated her previous understanding that unconscious learning was sufficient (“I kind of believed…”) and an indication that she was reevaluating it (“But now I am thinking”). In addition to reconsidering the students’ learning process (“it might facilitate the understanding”), it appears that her reevaluation of how to approach instruction emerged from her understanding that literacy is a complex activity, as reflected in the Available Designs (“all the aspects of reading”). This realization of the complexity of literacy was seen in her earlier comments, including excerpt 7 above, where she stated that literacy “involves lots of knowledge.” This complexity may have added to her sense that students would not learn all these designs unconsciously. This excerpt seems to indicate that our group discussion and her articulation of

\(^{18}\) I supplied the teachers with a list of specific designs (such as “word order gives emphasis in writing”) as more concrete instantiations of Kern’s general designs (e.g., grammar, genres) and asked them to evaluate which designs were explicitly introduced in their textbooks and which they would have to plan to teach themselves.

\(^{19}\) “It is too much” appears to be a typical Chinese usage of “too” to indicate a large amount, without an implication of the amount being problematic.
her dissatisfaction with merely telling the student to “practice more” motivated her to explore her beliefs about learning.

In the meeting following her written reflection above, the seminar group discussed the assignment, and Ao again voiced her understanding that literacy involved using processes unconsciously, creating an opportunity to clarify how instruction could assist students’ practice of literacy.

(16) A: just for example, the schemata content. no matter they REALIZE. [O: mm] or not. when they try to understand. something. they will use the knowledge they already have
… (discussion on a point by Feng))
O: ok. let’s take the example with content schemata. you ((pointing to A)) say all your students use that unconsciously. but I’m not sure that they do. if some students are still thinking. all of the meaning is in the words here. then they FORGET. to take the information. that they know already and connect it together. [K: mm] now when your students get GOOD enough. you’re RIGHT. they SHOULD do it automatically. but at the BEGINNING. maybe they don’t. [A: ohh] so you don’t need to teach this every chapter
A: but I understand. you mean we can use one passage or one text. [O: right] just to DELIBERATELY tell them how to connect those ideas
O: (4:19) EXACTLY. you show them how to do that. and then you ask them to do that in another chapter WITHOUT your help. but to report to you. what they did. and then after that you don’t have to discuss it maybe. because as you say. they should know how to do it. (Sem21, 12/18/08)

In this discussion, Ao’s assumption that her students were subconsciously using the Available Designs was externalized,20 and then I questioned her understanding (“I’m not sure…”), utilizing the previously discussed problem of students reading word by word (from Sem20, 12/4/08).

When the example of students continuing to read in ineffective ways was brought up, Ao saw the contradiction with her assumption that students would unconsciously use effective strategies. Although the Available Designs were discussed in earlier meetings (extensively in Sem4 and Sem5), Ao seemed to come to a new understanding that they include abilities that could be taught intentionally (“ohh”, “but I understand”). In addition, I explicitly described what guided (or

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20 Ao’s understanding that students could read in the way that she, an advanced reader, read is typical of novice teachers.
scaffolded) instruction entailed in the context of a specific example that Ao had introduced by materializing and subtly amending (“show … ask them to do … report”) her suggestion to “tell them how to ….” Ao’s appropriation of this mediation was seen in her instruction in the following observations.

6.4.2 Utilizing Overt Instruction to Enhance Students’ Abilities to Use Language

In the last observations, Ao began to more intentionally guide students’ understanding, and in particular enhance their awareness of tools they could use for English literacy. Her use of these approaches fit with Kern’s subordinate concept of overt instruction, which the group discussed. However, she only articulated her changing approach in terms of making students conscious of various aspects of literacy.21

One of Ao’s goals in her students’ fourth term was to mediate their abilities in translation, which the seminar group had discussed as a kind of transformed practice.22 Ao developed a sequence of three activities that aimed to make her students conscious of specific techniques and principles of translation and allow them to practice utilizing these techniques. These activities were structured to develop students’ metacognition and skills in translation, as well as their understanding of how English is used.23 Below I describe two of the sequence of three translation activities, all of which showed Ao’s intentional scaffolding of student learning.

In the first activity in the sequence, Ao’s routine manner of evaluating student answers to translation exercises was transformed into a means of developing their translation skills. Ao’s earlier method of reviewing this homework was “just I read a sentence. and say. someone ((how

21 There is not sufficient data to specify the extent of overlap between Ao’s everyday concept of conscious learning and Kern’s overt instruction.
22 As will be seen in the next chapter, translation was an important aspect of Bi’s two presentations. Ao commented that Bi’s presentation had provided the idea for her third translation activity (Deb3b, 3/19/09), which is not described here, but shown in Appendix E.
23 See Appendix E for an overview of the sequence of Ao’s instructional activities related to translation.
do you translate it?)… and then I read the correct one” (Deb3b, 3/19/09). In that approach, students’ answers were merely compared to the answer in the teacher’s book to ascertain how closely they matched the authorized answer. In Observation 7, Ao explicitly taught skills and guided the students in practicing them, while reminding them of the concept *literacy involves communication*. The instructional sequence began with orienting students to the activity (including the affective aspects of translation), and then providing them with a general technique for translation.

(17) A: 那你觉得做*translation* 的一个基本的原则是什么... (what do you think is the basic principle of *translation*...) 一般很多同学看到长的 long sentences complex structures 就会感到很难. 但事实给你一段话... 你怎么样做手呢你怎么样究竟翻译呢 (3) 你要注意点什么呢 (1) (many students feel lost when they see long sentences and complex structures, but *if you are actually faced with a piece... how will you start? how exactly will you translate?* (3) *what should you pay attention to?* (1))

Ss: ((many respond))

A: 对. 你事实上就猜(xxx)好了. 我就要把他的 main structure 找出来之后其他的都是一些修饰性的 modifier 之类. 的就需要加上定语... (yes. you got it exactly. *first I would find the main structure, then the modifying parts can be added in, objects...*) 而且呢xxx 觉得没什么 standard answer. 需要你只要能够用一些语言表去来. 你说我没有比较准确的或优美的词. 那我可不可以用一些比较 simple 比较不美的词? 都可以. 翻译千万不要惧怕. 把人家想说的意思能成功地表去来就可以 (also, there aren’t standard answers. all that’s necessary is that you find some words. you might ask if I don’t know the exact word or some beautiful words, then can I use some relatively simple or awkward words? anything is okay. *don’t be afraid of translation, if you just express the idea of the other person that’s enough*) (Obs7, 3/4/09)

By first asking the students to think about what they might do in a real life task (“if you are actually faced with a piece”), Ao framed the task as related to a possible future activity rather than simply completing an assignment, thus linking the academic topic of how to translate (“principles of translation”) to a real world activity. This orienting discourse showed her knowledge of students’ usual views of exercises (as disconnected from other activity) and a strategy for mediating it. Then she provided a simple strategy for the translation of sentences,

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24 This was the routine I observed in Observation 2.
and briefly discussed the affective aspects of translation, aiming to reduce students’ anxiety about finding the “standard answer.” In addition, she reminded them of the communicative aspect, mentioning the existence of the original writer (“the other person”) and a focus on the writer’s ideas rather than words. After this introduction, Ao involved the students in constructing answers as a class, utilizing the strategy she had provided (“find the main structure”). She then asked them to use that strategy in their homework.

In the following class, Ao reviewed the assigned homework, attempting to deepen students’ sensitivity to language use through comparing different students’ versions of the assigned paragraph. She first introduced metalanguage (“source” and “target language”) and standards for translation (“faithful, accurate and graceful”). Then the class compared two student translations sentence by sentence, deciding in each case which version was better, discussing reasons for their preferences, and offering alternatives. In the debriefing, Ao explained that she decided to use the technique of comparing student translations because it would involve the students in selecting better expressions.

(18) O: why did you want the students to do that comparison. what was your purpose?
A:  we were talking about- try to be more FAITHFUL. more ACCURATE. so I thought. the students – I told them. the most important thing is. you just translate – you try to make the ORIGINAL meaning. UNDERSTOOD. then I thought HEY if they compare the different. translations. they may REALIZE. this one might be. BETTER. they use the more ACCURATE words. or better 句式 (sentence structures)…
… ((several more exchanges))
O: in this way, this way ((of arranging the exercise)) had some advantages because
(2)
A: they made COMPARISONS. this MOTIVATED them. and also this was DIFFERENT from what they usually did. I think this will be more helpful
O: I think one of the things from MY point of view. when you just read the model out of the text. it seems there’s only one right way to do it (1) [A: mm]- but in this case they can hear two of their classmates did differently. some part is better. some part is
A: yes. yeah. yes that’s what I’m thinking. I’m TELLING them. there is no STANDARD translation. you can just see maybe YOURS. is even BETTER than the STANDARD one (Deb3b, 3/19/09)
Ao’s understanding of her goals in this activity was still developing, so the connections between
her ideas were not well articulated. She implied that comparison would be a cognitive activity
which could engage students in the task of evaluating translations to find the more accurate ones
(“they made comparisons. this motivated them”). This task provided students with an
opportunity for participation, one of Ao’s goals, which they took up by contributing a number of
suggestions and evaluations. She also implied that students would understand that translation
involves making choices (“there is no standard translation”), an important aspect of using
Available Designs and deciding on interpretations.

In the entire sequence of instructional activities related to translation, Ao used a number
of techniques to provide overt instruction concerning translation: she oriented students to the
activity; she linked in-class and homework activities closely; she provided techniques and utilized
guided practice in using them both in class and out of class; and she developed students’
metacognition through providing metalanguage and drawing their attention to available resources
and principles for evaluation. She also brought students into a collaborative relationship with
authors as they translated these texts. Finally, she appropriated Kern’s suggestion of providing
students with opportunities to practice translation during class, when help from her and their
classmates was available.25 The overall arrangement of closely linked activities demonstrates that
Ao had appropriated a number of ideas from the seminar, combining them to involve students in
meaningful practice through a more overt approach to instruction. For example, comparison was
frequently discussed as a tool for understanding language in the seminar: specifically, Bi
described comparing translations in her presentation (Sem11) and I mentioned comparing
students’ answers (Sem12). Ao’s use of comparing answers in the translation exercise was not an
exact imitation of either of those instances, but combined them. At the same time, neither Ao’s

25 In meeting 6 (4/15/08), the group discussed Kern’s suggestion that more literacy activities be carried out
in class.
instructional discourse, nor her debriefing reflections made explicit mention of Kern’s concepts, for example, the term “transformed practice” had been linked with translation in the seminar multiple times, but she did not mention it.\(^{26}\) In terms of overt instruction, Ao appeared to be responding to a superordinate concept from Kern not explicitly discussed in the seminar, learning involves both conscious and unconscious learning, which underlay his inclusion of both overt instruction and situated practice in the pedagogical components. Ao’s understanding was stated as a difference between conscious and unconscious learning, which she did not connect to Kern’s overt instruction. In the last two observations, Ao appeared to be creating her own understanding of how literacy involves communication could be linked to her instruction, based on examples she had seen modeled and discussed in the seminar, but without any indication that she was consciously using Kern’s concepts as mental tools.

### 6.5 An Expanding Understanding of the Cultural Aspect of Literacy

In the second term Ao was not observed to articulate the scientific concept literacy involves interpretation, which she had appropriated in the first term. She continued to focus students’ attention on communicating through texts, so that interpretation appears to have been internalized and no longer in the process of forming.\(^ {27}\) In the second term, I observed the genesis of a new subordinate concept of culture, demonstrating more clearly how Ao’s learning of the new concept was empirical, rather than conceptual. Ao’s initial interpretation of Kern’s concept of literacy involving cultural knowledge had been that teachers provide “background” information to enable students to understand the text,\(^ {28}\) as displayed in her end-of-term project

\(^{26}\) I did not label Ao’s distinction between conscious and unconscious learning as relating to overt instruction, so it is not surprising that she did not reference that concept.

\(^{27}\) Her not using the term interpretation in her later discourse could suggest that she did not find it useful for students or that in her understanding of unconscious learning, it was unnecessary to use the term.

\(^{28}\) For discussion of this common concept, see Lantolf & Johnson (2007).
(activity b in Table 6-1). However, Kern’s subordinate concept entails an understanding of the importance of context on interpretation of texts, which involves more than knowing facts about culture.

In the second term of the seminar, Ao began to appropriate the importance of context on interpretation through several incidents in the seminar. For example, in one seminar meeting, Ao ventriloquated my comment on the role of context in interpretation, giving it priority in a list of nearly 20 curricular goals. When I asked for first term goals, she suggested: “context is essential for understanding, I think this is very BASIC. maybe we should just. I mean at the FIRST just let the students have the CONSCIOUSNESS to understand that” (Sem15, 9/18/08). 29 Though Ao did not initially propose this goal, she identified it as important, showing that she was developing an awareness of this idea. Afterwards, she was engaged in a discussion of Widdowson’s (1994) speech given at a TESOL conference, in which understanding the context facilitated creating a coherent interpretation of a text with multiple voices.

(19) O: notice which English is the real English? (2)
D: English. British
O: yes
B: British English
O: BRITISH English. the QUEEN’S English. the ROYAL English. OXFORD English. so you see he is a British person and who is he speaking to? (2)
B: Americans
O: AH HA. and he’s telling them. [A: haha] there’s only one. real English. it’s the British English. do you think this is his real voice?
all: no
O: .... he says to them. this is the property of the ENGLISH. THE English. right. he talks about British English is THE standard (1) will his audience agree with him? (3) will a group of Americans [several: haha] and people from other countries agree with him (2) ((J and A shake their heads))
B: (52:30) that’s one of the the response is more likely to be outrageous. [O: right exactly] haha
O: outrage. paragraph 6. exactly. you will feel outraged. so he begins with an example. which NOBODY. [A: oh] can agree with. because he wants to show. this idea. oh this idea is impossible (Sem16, 10/9/08)

29 In this excerpt, Ao also signaled her growing concern with students’ metacognition (being “conscious”).
Though Ao did not articulate her understanding, she was an engaged participant in this discussion of the importance of context on interpretation. I demonstrated that it was through understanding the identities of the speaker and listeners and the setting (among other features) that the meaning of Widdowson’s speech could be interpreted.

In her fourth term, Ao combined her growing awareness of texts having cultural contexts with ideas that she drew from the third debriefing to further expand her students’ abilities to interpret. In the first part of the third debriefing, she and I discussed the ways in which questions both reflect and frame how students think about the text. When Ao characterized her students’ questions as concerning language usage (cf. excerpt 12), I modeled other ways to think about texts by raising my own sense-making questions concerning a text I had observed her teaching (notes, 3/16/09). In her next class, Ao explicitly guided her students to consider the author’s culture when they raised questions about the text. She then reported in the second part of the debriefing that she had told her students to remember that the author’s values might not be the same as theirs.

(20) before I encouraged them to ask questions I told them. you may see the CULTURAL difference. I mean the text DOESN’T have to be TELLING about a cultural difference obviously. but this guy is not CHINESE. when he is writing that maybe his target. readers are not YOU guys. maybe what he VALUED is. DIFFERENT from what we value. I give them a hint (Deb3b, 3/19/09)

In specifying that the writer’s values might be different than those of the students and explaining that these differences were cultural, Ao demonstrated a deepening understanding of how culture is part of texts. Her description of the students’ responses expressed her sense of success in mediating students’ reflection on the text, since they asked meaning-oriented questions, not just form-oriented ones.

(21) A: I told them to. just look at the text in a BROADER way. I said (1) I told them. what you told ME haha last time. and one student asked me questions (1)

30 The students were asking questions in response to a text that they had read for homework using guided reflection.
REALLY interesting questions…. he said. I HAVE a question WHY do you think BURTON would tell this story to the AUTHOR since he is a smart merchant. ((and it puts him in a bad light)) ... I thought ah you know. he is REALLY thinking, then we were discussing about this question. some of the students gave VERY good answers. very UNEXPECTED answers…

O: what do you think you told them about. looking at the text broadly. do you remember
A: haha. yeah. I told them in CHINESE because I couldn’t explain that in English well. I told them. vocabulary and meaning ARE important. just like what you said. I said, but sometimes we can look at it in a BROADER way. for example the QUESTIONS that you may think are NOT related to MEANING or the TEXT can be. the questions that make you think about. you can think about the the (1) something about human being or something about human nature. not only focus on the meaning and also I gave them example … (Deb3b, 3/19/09)31

Ao indicated her students viewed the text more globally (“broadly”) and thus began to ask more diverse questions and propose original (“unexpected”) answers to them. Ao’s reported discourse reflected an understanding similar to Kern’s subordinate concepts of literacy involves interpretation, cultural knowledge and reflection. She reminded the students of the cultural context of the writer (excerpt 20), and encouraged them to think of the text as reflecting social realities (i.e., showing human nature). Her enthusiasm about the students’ responses (“very good answers”) indicated that this kind of thinking was achieving the goal that she had set in her project of helping students become active readers (see excerpt 7).32 Ao indicated that she had imitated my explanations from our previous discussion (“just like what you said”) expressing them in Chinese. She did not indicate in our discussion how her activity was linked to any aspect of Kern’s concept. Her imitative explanation was an indication of her expanding understanding of literacy involves communication as she linked together ideas related to cultural knowledge and problem solving. She appropriated examples she had seen, transforming them to meet her goals with a new text. Her explanation seemed to mediate her students’ understanding; however, it

31 From these comments it appears that Ao’s use of “meaning” indicates understanding the individual words rather than the message of the writer.
32 Ao made several positive other comments, including: “there were some students who were thinking more than what I was thinking. they did a VERY good job yesterday” (Deb3b, 3/19/09)
reflected thinking at the level of everyday practice rather than thinking conceptually about her instruction.

6.6 The Path of an Expanding Everyday Concept

The expansion of Ao’s everyday concept of literacy was displayed in how she utilized Kern’s *literacy involves interpretation* and pedagogical goals in instruction, and how she began to explicitly teach literacy abilities. Ao’s new forms of instruction emerged from her experiences of communicating through texts, displayed in her descriptions of her literacy experiences and the effective ways in which she interacted with and through texts during the seminar. Before the study, she had linked this concept to her instruction mostly through giving priority to comprehension questions, and through a few attempts at situated practice activities. In the study, Ao first linked her everyday concept of communicating through texts to Kern’s subordinate concept *literacy involves interpretation*. Her development followed Vygotsky’s (1986/1934) observation of how children learn new scientific concepts, as she shifted from spontaneous to conscious use of *interpretation*, initially linking the term “interpret” to her experiences as a reader, then using it spontaneously in classroom discourse, and eventually designing instructional activities to allow students to interpret texts for themselves. Through structuring instructional tasks with the concept of interpretation, she became aware that her students were not oriented to interpreting the texts for themselves. Her reflection on instruction, in her journal and project, provided space for her to deepen her understanding of English literacy as communication and of how this understanding could shape her instruction. Discussions about instruction and literacy activities in the seminar supported her connecting the literacy-based approach to specific situations and techniques.
During the first term, Ao began producing instructional goals in order to resolve the emotional dissonance of being a “traditional” teacher and to make student learning visible as a means to enhance her own sense of success. She intentionally utilized goals to develop her planning for and reflection on instruction, particularly in the end-of-term project where she redesigned instruction of one unit. She used these goals to link her understanding of literacy to each of her instructional activities. Ao’s reflections on this project strengthened her ability to link her instructional practices to her expanding understanding of literacy as communication, though she made little use of terms from the scientific concept. She shaped the project in such a way as to begin to use goals to regulate her literacy instruction, rather than be regulated by students’ expectations regarding exams (cf. excerpt 13). Ao appropriated ideas from discussions on student goals, so that her reflections on the project mediated both her adapting instructional activities and her externalizing the need to reorient students’ thinking about literacy.

Ao’s initial activities for enhancing student ability to interpret texts largely involved situated practice. The focus on meaning in situated practice activities was congruent with her everyday concept that students mostly learn through unconscious activity. During the second term, discussions on specific means of developing student literacy and her understanding of the complexity of literacy led Ao to consider the potential of making students conscious of aspects of literacy. In some activities in later observations, she explicitly mediated student learning of translation through presenting strategies, metalanguage, and standards for evaluation, as well as providing guided opportunities to practice using these metacognitive tools. Ao also more explicitly made students aware of cultural values reflected in texts, and encouraged them to link the text to their knowledge of the world. The outcome of these activities involving overt instruction was to fulfill her earlier goal that students would think about “the relationship between the writer and the reader so that students consciously think about what they can learn from the writer about the world” (excerpt 10).
By the end of the study, Ao’s concept of literacy still had minimal direct links to Kern’s scientific concept, in spite of her mention of the importance of theory in her end-of-term project. Ao compared her instruction with descriptions of Paine’s (1990) and Herndon’s (2002) classroom activities, gaining insights on instruction from them, but she struggled with comparing her instruction to scientific concepts. In her summary of Kern’s ideas, she largely repeated his phrases and concluded with a personal note, describing her struggle to understand, “I can’t organize my thoughts… there are some odd ideas in my mind but I can’t organize them in a logical system … I don’t know how they are related” (Asgn5, 4/14/08). In meeting 11, when partners were to describe their understanding of literacy, Ao struggled to explain what she and her partner (Teacher Z) had discussed.

(22) our group we basically have the same opinion [some: haha] with. we think literacy is the ability to read and write including the skills but it is more than that. we are repeating Kern’s description of literacy you know. [O: ok] something situated [O: ok] (to Z) socially situated? [Z: yes] [all: haha] [Z: and culturally situated] we have learned literacy for a lot of weeks but we don’t have a clear picture about it. that is really upsetting. (Sem.11, 5/20/08)

Ao’s self-evaluation of her understanding of literacy indicated that she was not comfortable with these abstract ideas.33 It is not surprising then, that in her reflections on her activities, she did not explicitly reference literacy involves cultural knowledge, literacy involves reflection, situated practice, transformed practice or overt instruction, though her activities seemed to reflect these concepts. She used literacy involves interpretation and literacy involves communication frequently in her explanations in the first term. Her lack of use of them in the second term is likely because they became internalized, following Vygotsky’s pattern that “every psychological function appears twice,” first socially and then within the individual (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006, p. 153). The other subordinate concepts were not seen on the interpersonal level in her reflections,

33 Ao missed seminar meeting seven and did not complete the assignment to compare Kern’s concepts with her own instruction.
and barely in simpler seminar discussions, and thus could not be internalized.\textsuperscript{34} Ao’s use of literacy-based goals and activities appeared to expand considerably during the year. However, this expansion was largely based on her general understanding of literacy involves communication and significant reflection (at an empirical level) on techniques, both those discussed in the seminar and those she attempted in her instruction.\textsuperscript{35}

6.7 Conclusion

Ao’s instruction displayed significant changes, but she did not display a similar development in her conceptual understanding of literacy. While some of her instructional activities appeared to be consistent with Kern’s principles of literacy, there was only evidence of her using a few of those subordinate concepts as tools to think about instruction. In fact, Ao displayed minimal understanding of scientific terms and the relationships between subordinate concepts, never displaying confidence in using the word “literacy,” so literacy involves communication was only a vaguely understood concept. However, she had other affordances, such as her ability to critically reflect on her instruction, which enabled her to develop her understanding of literacy. In particular, her everyday understanding of literacy as a type of communication was an important foundation for instituting changes in her teaching practice. Her willingness to appropriate new techniques and approaches to instruction allowed her to link her everyday concept and the models and techniques discussed in the seminar to her instruction, expanding the ways in which she enacted literacy instruction. Thus, Ao’s developing concept of literacy...

\textsuperscript{34} In the 11\textsuperscript{th} and 12\textsuperscript{th} meetings she successfully identified these principles related to activities: collaboration, conventions and critical framing, as well as interpretation. There is a possibility that Ao used scientific concepts at other times with her colleagues, but it is unlikely that this happened more than once or twice.

\textsuperscript{35} It is possible that asking Ao more precise questions would have provided more data concerning the degree to which she was able to use Kern’s concept to think about instruction.
literacy appears to be a case of an everyday concept displaying the increased complexity characteristic of a scientific concept.

Ao’s everyday concept developed through her participation in the seminar, and in particular her reflecting on instruction through journal entries and discussions, her reading of articles, in particular, Herndon (2002) and Paine (1990), and her appropriating two concepts that assisted her in linking her understanding of literacy to her instruction. First, Ao used the concept of goal-oriented instruction as a tool for questioning, planning and evaluating her practice. She explicitly utilized this understanding to create new literacy-related goals and instructional approaches based on her everyday concept of texts as communication and Kern’s subordinate concept of literacy involves interpretation. Second, Ao utilized her emerging and still unarticulated concept of overt instruction to shift her instruction from simply modeling thinking to providing students with clear instruction in metacognition. These two subordinate concepts have the potential to further deepen Ao’s instruction in the future. Her previous understanding of instruction only required her to experience texts and model comprehension. However, her concepts of goal-oriented and overt instruction could generate a series of questions concerning how to mediate student learning of the complex aspects of literacy that she was beginning to appreciate.
Chapter 7

Bi: The Concept of Literacy Utilized to Achieve the Teacher’s Goals

“Kern’s idea is just the part I’m looking for” - Bi

Vygotsky claimed that the emergence of true concepts would signal cognitive development, or new ways of thinking and engaging in activity. The case of Bi, the third focal participant, demonstrates the ways that prior conceptual development paved the way for new development. Bi utilized an already emerging true concept to form a true concept of literacy. Before the seminar, she was attempting to use the concept of language as a tool for communication in her language instruction. Thus, Bi’s initial goals and concept of instruction were not only well-defined but also aligned with those of Kern in several important ways. Her clearly stated conceptualization of communication in foreign language instruction allowed her to compare this understanding with Kern’s concept of literacy. She then began to integrate the two systems within a relatively short time. As she developed an understanding of a literacy-based approach to instruction, she expanded her goals from teaching language to additionally assisting students to reconceptualize foreign language learning.

This chapter describes how Bi’s emerging true concept of literacy developed. I first examine her initial literacy-related concepts and instructional goals that she linked to Kern’s concept, and how she almost immediately began to use that concept in her instruction. Then I introduce the way that Bi used one specific key subordinate concept, Available Designs, to reconceptualize how she planned her instruction. This chapter also shows the ways in which she focused her students’ attention on communicative purposes to guide their use of designs. Finally, I describe Bi’s goal of reconceptualizing students’ understanding of foreign language literacy and new instructional methods she utilized to mediate their understanding.
7.1 Linking Literacy with Previously Learned Scientific Concepts

Bi began the seminar utilizing the concept that *foreign language is a means of communication* in her instruction. This seemed to be an emerging true concept, that is, she had a fairly complex scientific concept, apparently gained during her M.A. studies in English for Specific Purposes (ESP), which she was seeking to link to her instruction.\(^1\) When introduced to Kern’s concept of literacy, she immediately began to create links between this theoretical concept and Kern’s. In particular, she linked the subordinate concepts introduced in the seminar to two other concepts, those of language as a social phenomenon, and of the situated nature of language use.

7.1.1 Setting Goals with a Scientific Concept of Language as a Social Phenomenon

Bi had systematically learned *foreign language is a means of communication* in her M.A. course, and it provided her with concepts and tools, such as genre and discourse analysis, for understanding language as a social phenomenon. At the beginning of the study, this scientific concept of language was displayed in Bi’s clear articulation of her instructional goals, which focused on communication and defined its role in her classroom. In one description of her goals, she linked student activity to the textbook, but communication was only indirectly linked to texts through reflection.

(1) [I want] to encourage my students to use English to describe personal feeling... I HOPE. my students love to. **SHARE with his or her, peers about feelings.** about. and also I think that’s a way to encourage them. **to THINK. to think about what they are learning in the textbook. and CONNECT. the content in the textbook with their personal life** so that’s a main purpose in my mind when I design or organize activities in my class (Int1, 3/24/2008)

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\(^1\) I did not collect data to fully investigate the extent to which this was a true concept, but rather I am using Bi’s own evaluation that she had not linked it to her instruction to her satisfaction. See excerpt 5 below.
Bi anticipated that English would fulfill a social role in her class, as a means of interpersonal communication (“share … about feelings”). Her other goals, that students would think about ideas in their texts and connect them to their lives, were similar to Kern’s subordinate principle, *literacy involves reflection*. In observations of her classes, these stated goals appeared to shape Bi’s instruction: she guided students to give opinions and to link ideas in the text to their experiences. Texts, however, were positioned as a source material for communication between students, rather than as a means of communication between readers and writers, relegating texts to objects of learning, rather than means of communication.

Because her M.A. studies had emphasized the importance of social context, Bi understood communication to be situated in particular contexts. One pedagogical difficulty which she faced was situating her students’ English study, because the main context that she envisioned for her students’ use of English was their future workplace. In a seminar discussion of Kern’s comment on classroom activities being “real literacy events,” rather than rehearsals (Kern, 2000, p. 17), Bi displayed her doubt that this could take place. Generalizing about Chinese classes, she indicated it was not possible to authentically situate students’ communication: “what the teachers and the students are doing in the classroom, it IS a kind of rehearsing” (Sem2, 3/18/08). This statement was an externalization of the gap she found between her ideal of creating a social context for English use in the classroom and her limited ability to expose her students to “workplace” English. A week later she further articulated her understanding using more precise language:

(2) this ((MA)) study taught me that. language is a kind of social product… **you must USE the language in a social CONTEXT** (1) as a teacher you must establish ANOTHER relationship between the CLASSROOM and the SOCIETY. I know in THEORY I know we should do that. but in REALITY it's a little bit difficult. because students always study in the classroom … they have no chance to GET INTO a workplace to. FEEL how English is used. so that’s. my. I think one of the purposes in my mind NOW… in MY classroom I try to. create a kind of CONTEXT. I know it’s ARTIFICIAL. but at least we can. we can. give them a chance to EXPERIENCE… a kind of social context (Int1, 3/24/2008)
Bi was able to articulate the scientific concept (“in theory”) that “language is a social product,” used in specific contexts, and felt that she needed to link the classroom with another social context. The difficulty she saw in situating her students’ learning came in part because she did not regard classroom communication as being genuine (“I know it’s artificial”). This expression reflected an idea voiced by other teachers that English interactions involving only Chinese native speakers are “inauthentic” and therefore are not considered to be real communication. Thus, Bi’s understanding of language being situated provided her with the overarching instructional goal of preparing students for workplace communication in the future. However, this future orientation, in combination with her everyday concept of the inauthenticity of English use between Chinese, seemed to preclude authentic communication in the classroom.

7.1.2 Expanding a Scientific Concept of Literacy

Before the seminar, Bi had formed a scientific concept that reading and writing were communicative activities, but through the seminar she expanded it. In the first assignment, Bi explained her understanding of reading and writing in terms of two roles that students should take up.

(3) While reading, English learners must respond by learning the background information, by using their own knowledge of the world, and by thinking critically about what the writers want to say. While writing, English learners must hold certain communicative purposes in mind. (Asgn1, 3/18/08)

Bi’s initial concept reflected in this excerpt has the characteristics of a scientific concept because it is somewhat abstract, i.e., generalizing about activity; complex, that is, describing three activities for learners; and formal, in particular her use of “communicative purpose.” This

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2 It is possible that Bi felt that all classroom activities (regardless of language) were just rehearsals, but her later development, discussed below, suggests the issue was more related to the language employed.
description implied social activity, in the reader responding and the writer purposefully communicating, but did not directly address the interaction between readers and writers.

Early in the study, Bi began to link Kern’s subordinate concepts to her own experiences. For example, she utilized the term “collaborate” in a written reflection describing why she preferred her students to answer with paraphrases: “because I can see that they ((students)) were collaborate with the author to understand. They were doing a kind of reflection on the text” (Asgn4, 4/15/08). She appropriated two of Kern’s terms, “collaborate,” which expresses a link between readers and writers, as well as “reflect,” to specify that students were to interact with the ideas of the text. Bi’s use of Kern’s discourse to describe her on-going instructional activities created a link between the subordinate concepts and concrete activity, with an apparent increased emphasis on interaction between readers and writers.

As conceptual development is uneven, Bi’s discourse did not consistently display this understanding initially. In the first debriefing, when she and I reviewed her class discussion on a text about courtesy, I mentioned her discourse displaying interaction between reader and writer, but she did not choose to discuss the interactive aspect of literacy.

(4) O: before that you said “let’s see what the author. has to say”
B: I think when I said that. I have. because I have learned something from Kern haha [O: really?] you must know. why we have such a long discussion ((in class)). I hoped my students will get themselves INVOLVED. in this topic. think the courtesy has something to do with ME … reflect on their own life. (Deb1, 4/25/2008)

Bi demonstrated the congruity she found with Kern’s concept when she attributed her own goal of students reflecting on the text (seen in excerpt 1) to Kern. Thus, in describing her purpose she did not mention interaction, but instead discussed connecting students to the text (“this topic”). Her classroom discourse implying interaction between readers and writer (“let’s see what the author has to say”) may have been formulaic. Though she did not mention collaboration, and her
earlier conceptualization of student relations with the text appeared to be guiding this response, the concept of collaboration reappeared later.

7.1.3 Linking Old and New Scientific Concepts to Instruction

Early in the study, Bi began to intentionally link different scientific concepts to one another and to her instruction, in order to solve a central problem in her teaching practice. At the end of the first term, as she reflected on how she learned about literacy, she said that before the seminar, she had appropriated instructional goals from her M.A. study, but was uncertain how to achieve them. She sensed that Kern’s concept could provide a solution for the gap she felt between theory and practice.

(5) O: so when we started talking in the seminar ((about Kern’s ideas)) ... did you feel like it’s sort of ALREADY what you had in mind? did you have that feeling?
B: no. totally not. it’s just the opposite. it’s what I’m THINKING about. what I’m LOOKING for. because when I studied ((the M.A. course)), I did get some ideas about genre and communication. use English for communicative purposes. something like this. but it seems there’s something I don’t KNOW … how to ACHIEVE that kind of goal how to help my students to. get the kind of ability to understand genres or communicative purposes. I think Kern’s idea’s just the PART I’m looking for. now I feel it’s like a kind of foundation. … I found many ideas ((from the M.A. course)) that before I didn’t quite. UNDERSTAND. now they become. more and more clear. or more and more PRACTICAL …because at that time ((in M.A. studies)) we learned about how to analyze discourse. but it seems. it had NOTHING to do with my class. my TEACHING. now the concept of literacy. it just. help my mind. EXTEND my mind. this is my teaching purpose. and also I can combine them both ((ESP and Kern)). I can put them into my teaching. that’s really. a very exciting thing. (Int2, 6/24/08)

Bi’s studies had helped her establish an overarching instructional goal (“use English for communicative purposes”), but she felt she was still working out how to achieve that in “practical” instructional activity. She explained how Kern’s concept mediated her linking what she studied in the M.A. to her classroom instruction (making it more “practical” and part of “my
teaching”). She described the new concept as both expanding her conceptualization (“extend my mind”) and relevant to her teaching (“put them into my teaching”).

A specific example of how Bi was connecting her prior scientific concepts with Kern’s can be seen in her explanation of how she used Kern’s elaborate definition of literacy (see p. 42) to more fully understand her previously underdeveloped concept, ability.

(6) when I got through Kern’s concept of literacy. that long that long definition. I think we tried maybe 3 weeks? to work on that. definition. I think it’s after the three weeks I get some BRIEF ideas and understanding about the definition. then I COMBINED it with what I learned BEFORE. ooh that’s what we. always. that’s what we referred to as ability ability. ooh THIS is the ability. the ability SHOULD be like this. it’s so COMPLEX. that’s why we. just. get a very. unclear idea BEFORE we read HIS definition. that’s SUDDENLY. BROADENED my mind. so that’s a TURN (haha)... from the dictionary you can only read a brief explanation ... then you see literacy in HIS book with such a LONG definition. and EVERY word means a lot. so. after I TRIED to UNDERSTAND this definition I. became. very excited or. inspired. (Int2, 6/24/08)

Bi explained that considering Kern’s definition alone provided her some minimal (“brief”) ideas about literacy, but when she linked (“combined”) the definition with her prior knowledge, it expanded her understanding of the concept ability. She had been looking for ways to link her M.A. knowledge to her instruction, and understood Kern’s definition as being compatible and providing new resources for accomplishing that. This linking of the two concepts also deepened her understanding of literacy (“every word means a lot”). The ease with which she was able to draw connections between these two concepts is another indication that she already had a systematic scientific concept of language. She then integrated this concept of language with the new concept of literacy, creating a more complex conceptualization.

Bi’s previous conceptualization of instruction supported her ongoing development of a new concept of literacy in two ways. Her emerging true concept of language as a means of communication provided her with experience in linking scientific concepts with practice. In

3 Bi’s response of being “inspired” by Kern’s definition, rather than overwhelmed, was somewhat unique in the group.
addition, the overlap between that emerging concept related to communication and Kern’s concept provided a foundation for more quickly understanding *literacy involves communication*.

### 7.2 Organizing Instruction with a New Concept

Early in the study, Bi’s instruction appeared to be structured using a rule-of-thumb concept that *four macro-skills need to be taught separately*, a concept largely disconnected from her goals related to communication. This concept was common in the group and was supported by many aspects of the English education system, including national curriculum, textbooks, and classroom arrangement. Kern’s subordinate concept of the Available Designs (AD) provided her with an alternative way to conceptualize how she organized instructional activities.

Bi’s discourse revealed her understanding of the four macro-skills as distinct. For example, in our first interview, she displayed how she was using the macro-skills to arrange her instructional activities.

(7) **B:** another WAY now I’m USING in my classroom. I’m TRYING to combine. SPEAKING. with reading. because. I think one thing is reading is (1) by speaking it seems I can TEST my students understanding very IMMEDIATELY. if by WRITING I have to wait. but I would. use writing maybe one or two months later (1) to test their reading something. like write comments. but NOW I’m using. speaking. and that’s what I’m going to write. in this week’s teaching journal. I just tried. on Friday. last Friday … ((several turns))

B: since the beginning of this seminar. I’m thinking about. one thing (1) about. reading and speaking because. you’re now talking about. we WOULD talk about reading and WRITING. so I think reading and SPEAKING. that means may I. USE some of the theories. uh from the SEMINAR or from what we talk or from the papers and you are doing reading and WRITING. [O: uh] I’m trying to do reading and SPEAKING haha (Int1, 3/24/2008)

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4 Though the four macro-skills were not a discussion focus in the seminar, they were mentioned when I introduced reading and writing as “two sides of one coin” (Sem1) and when Kern questioned the isolated instruction of the macro-skills (pp. 39, 131).

5 A number of scholars have confirmed that the concept that teaching English consists of teaching four macro-skills is a central aspect of the Chinese version of CLT (G.W. Hu, 2002; Y. Jin & Yang, 2006; Liao, 2004; Hong Wang & Han, 1999).
Bi emphasized she was “now… trying to combine” several skills, displaying that linking of the macro-skills to one another was a new practice for her. She had organized discussions of texts before (see excerpt 1), but here she displayed intentionality in linking (“combining”) macro-skills through instructional activities. Bi also displayed her understanding that reading and writing were not naturally connected, and would only be linked through her efforts. She acknowledged the seminar focus on reading and writing and justified her plan to use writing later (“I would use writing one or two months later… but now…”). These statements indicated how her understanding of the four macro-skills shaped her instructional planning around the mode of student activity (which macro-skill was being practiced), rather than using multiple modalities simultaneously to learn content, specific skills or concepts.

Over time, Bi began to utilize Kern’s AD as an alternative means of organizing instruction, and she also made fewer references to the four macro-skills in planning. Her understanding of the subordinate concept of AD was relatively rapid, possibly because of her interest in defining “ability” (excerpt 6) and because the goals that she set for student learning before the seminar included two of Kern’s designs.

(8) “the focus of MY teaching. of THIS term is on expanding their vocabulary and introducing more KINDS of English to them [O: more genres?] yeah genres (haha) and also help them. to prepare for CET6” 7 (Int1, 3/24/08)

Bi explained that before the seminar began, her goals included teaching genres, indicating she was aware that students needed to learn aspects of language in addition to vocabulary. The fact that one of the AD was genre helped her to link her understanding of students’ need for genre knowledge to Kern’s concept of AD as resources for readers and writers. She then began to relate the designs to other topics we discussed in the seminar. For example, she identified AD as

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6 Kern intended his pedagogical components to be used to organize instruction, and though Bi made a reference to using them (see excerpt 23 below), there was little evidence of their influence on her planning instruction.
7 Bi’s stated goal related to the CET6 examination was not discussed again. She may have set it as a compromise with students eager to prepare for tests, and it may also relate to her perception that she learned much through preparing for language exams (Int1, 3/24/08).
“tools” for reading in our discussion of mediation (Sem6, 4/15/08) and volunteered that reading strategies were one kind of AD (Sem9, 5/6/08).

Bi used the assignment of writing a summary of Kern’s ideas to systematically connect Available Designs with other aspects of literacy and with prior concepts. Her summary reflected how she understood the importance of linking scientific concepts to practice: she described Kern as being relevant in both broadly conceptualizing language learning (part a), and in the particulars of guiding instructional decision making (part c). In part b, Bi described two kinds of resources (“sources”) which students should learn to use, and in part c she more specifically described AD.

(9) (a) … Language learning is no more considered as an activity limited to classroom or a business between an individual and a group of words, which is separated from real society, but a mediate that bridges a person’s inner world and outside world….
(b) There are many sources [or resources] learners must learn to make conscious use of in order to communicate effectively. The internal sources consist of the various kinds of knowledge a learner possesses, the schemata the learner forms since he was born, purposes and goals the learner holds in a certain context, which Kern refers as “the linguistic dimensions of literacy” and “cognitive dimensions of literacy”. The external sources refer to “immediate and eventual communicative contexts” and “Sociocultural context”. Literacy is to make full use of the sources that are available both inside a learner and outside a learner to achieve a communicative goal through a language ….
(c) The Available Designs and contextual layers in literacy illustrate clearly the elements that are included in terms of communication. According to Kern, language learning is to learn how to design to mean effectively in social communication. In other words, how to manipulate what you have and absorb what is new but generally accepted in order to create your own ways of communication. Having recognized the Available Designs and contextual layers in literacy, teachers are able to design their teaching syllabus and class activities so as to help students develop their literacy. (Asgn5, @4/23/08)

Bi’s summary largely explained Kern’s diagram of AD and contextual layers (see p. 47), connecting AD with the scientific concept of language as a social activity used for communication, and also with her own concepts (i.e., internal and external sources). She ignored

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8 Bi’s summary, unlike that of most teachers, contained almost entirely unique phrasing, which was consistent with her goal of teaching paraphrasing to show understanding (see 7.1.2).
9 These excerpts from her summary are provided in the order in which they appeared, but I created the divisions (parts a, b, c) for convenience of discussion.
10 The second to last sentence in the excerpt paraphrases the complex relationship between the dynamic and conventional aspects of literacy.
her previously stated gap between activity inside and outside the classroom, and focused instead on how language learning bridges the gap between an individual and others (“outside world”). At the end of the summary, as she focused on linking theory to instruction, Bi pointed to the AD as assisting teachers in designing instructional activities, demonstrating their practical use. This summary shows how, just halfway through the first term, Bi was beginning to use AD as a framework for thinking about instruction. Below I will show how AD became a foundation for further developing her conceptualization of what literacy consists of.

7.3 Linking Literacy to Instructional Activities

In the first term, Bi linked subordinate concepts of literacy to her instruction in a number of ways. She imitated some techniques used in the seminar, and also adapted some techniques she had previously used. From reflecting on her students’ performance, she designed an end-of-term project that aimed to foster students’ literacy, utilizing discourse analysis and translation. The six week project, parts of which she described in two seminar presentations, included drawing connections between reading and writing activities, analyzing the use of words, and teaching genres through translation. In her preliminary plan for the project, she had a well-articulated goal to develop students’ literacy: “To further foster students’ literacy by exposing them to various discourses, and getting them involved in discourse practices.” (Asgn9, 6/3/08). The project deepened Bi’s understanding of literacy as it related to her instruction, and appeared to begin mediating some students’ understandings. I will describe two aspects of Bi’s project: how she reconceptualized vocabulary instruction as she utilized new techniques in translation instruction, and how she helped students to understand reading and writing as activities which

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11 Bi’s end-of-term project was so multi-faceted that it was difficult for her to summarize, and she did not produce a full length paper. Her two presentations relating aspects of the project (15-20 minutes each in Sem11 and Sem14) were a valuable opportunity for her to reflect on it. See Appendix F for Bi’s simple outline of the project as she was implementing it.
communicate emotions. The third subsection will show indications of students’ beginning to reconceptualize literacy.

7.3.1 Adapting and Reflecting on Previous Techniques

In instructional activities before she began the project, as well as in the project itself, Bi began to adapt two of her instructional activities: working with translation exercises and teaching vocabulary. A week after translation was briefly mentioned in the seminar as a type of transformed practice (Sem5, 4/8/08), Bi began to adapt her use of this common instructional technique. Translation has an ill-defined role in contemporary English instruction in China: translation exercises have long been part of textbooks and exams, but it has an undefined relationship with CLT and is associated with the now unpopular Grammar-Translation approach. Bi noted that giving extensive attention to translation was a kind of “risk” (Sem11, 5/20/08), but she quickly linked translation to the role that Kern had described for it, as a kind of transformed practice.

Bi had previously checked the answers to the translation exercises orally, but in her journal she described and justified two adaptations she made: asking students to translate more extended discourse and to write their translations. In this journal entry, she linked her understanding of writing\(^\text{12}\) and the specific designs of coherence and cohesion to this instructional activity.

(10) Students were asked to translate the 6 and 7 paragraphs. I didn’t ask them to do separate sentence translation, which we did very often before. There are more to notice when we translate paragraphs in terms of coherence and cohesion. At first they just sit there, again thinking. When we do translation, thinking about translation in mind is rather different [from] writing it down …. By writing it down we are likely to use more formal words and structure. Moreover we can

\(^{12}\) Bi had mentioned the value of writing at the start of the seminar, explaining that ideas tended to be better organized when one writes them: “when we write them down we have to organize [ideas] (to) make it logical” (Sem1).
modify it again and again. … So I asked them more specifically and explicitly to write the translation down on a piece of paper and then exchange it with a partner. (Asgn4/5, 4/22/08)13

Bi noted that her adaptation allowed students to attend more to cohesion and coherence, and though she did not explain it, it also allowed each sentence to be situated in a context, meeting her general concern with situated language (see 7.1.1). She also explained the benefits of having students write because they would “use more formal” language and be able to “modify it again.” Thus, Bi was transforming the basic “quick” translation activity whose purpose was to check comprehension into one that allowed students to consider how discourse was connected and to find the best expressions to convey meaning. At the end of the first term, Bi reflected on her use of translation, and explicitly contrasted her earlier use of it before the seminar with her later understanding of how it could develop students’ abilities with discourse.

(11) Instead of asking students to do English-Chinese translation while we conduct intensive study on texts, I often ask((ed)) them to paraphrase sentences, which few of them can accomplish. Occasionally, I ask((ed)) them to do oral English-Chinese translation in order to do a quick check on their comprehension… ((or)) as a final explanation of some difficult sentences or paragraphs. As for the Chinese-English translation, students get used to it as a way of testing…

The traditional way I used to deal with translation in my class is ((was)) superficial and form-oriented.14 Avoiding to making use of translation in English teaching is also unwise. In a literacy-based curriculum, translation can be adopted to develop effectively learners’ ability to analyze, interpret, and transform discourse. (Proj, 6/23/08)

In this later explanation, Bi also linked translation to abilities to interpret and transform language, utilizing Kern’s subordinate concepts as well as her own emphasis of analyzing language.

During the first term, as Bi examined her students’ written translations, along with her growing understanding of literacy, she recognized the students’ needs and set new instructional goals. When she read her students’ translations, she evaluated them in terms of what they showed

13 Bi’s assignment continued to describe how she had pairs work on their translations, share them with the class, and compare those translations.
14 Bi may be using “form-oriented” to indicate that it was “task-oriented”, used to complete exercises and prepare for this exercise type on the exam.
about the students’ abilities and found that in places, students were translating the text literally and not interpreting words according to context.

(12) I collected the translations today. I’ve read several pieces. I found the problems … they’re not conscious of Chinese pattern. we’ve talked about English structure. they are already used to it… but when they translate. they couldn’t. how to say? [O: transform] yeah transform it into a. REASONABLE Chinese order… the DIFFICULT part ((of the text)) is word by word. from the word by word part you can see they actually. they. they. don’t understand the WORD in that context. because they KNOW the word’s meaning but something like … students’ work, ((i.e., assignment)) translate work into 工作 (job) not find out the MEANING in that CONTEXT (Deb1, 4/25/08)

Bi first noted that her students were using unusual Chinese word order in their translations. She did not express the relationship between that problem and their translating each word individually; however, she recognized that they were using that strategy in the difficult parts of the text. She realized that though the students had memorized word definitions (“they know the words’ meaning”), they were not able to select an appropriate meaning according to context. At this point, Bi’s externalizing these observations of her students’ abilities mediated her understanding of the design of vocabulary. Extensive vocabulary memorization had been a regular task for Bi’s students, and for years she had frequently utilized dictation exercises to stimulate their vocabulary study.15 Her goal had been for students to be able to use English and she was aware of the importance of context. Through her observation of the students’ difficulties in translation, she deepened her experiential understanding that knowing the denotations of words did not provide her students with the ability to use them to interpret texts.

After these observations, Bi used several means to expand her students’ understandings of words and meaning-making. In one example, she recounted in a debriefing how she illustrated the importance of words’ culturally specific connotations in her class.

15 Bi used a variety of methods to draw students’ attention to different features of words: “I use different. WAYS of dictation. to PUSH them to make some change or pay more attention to the ENGLISH explanation and pronunciation” (Deb1, 4/25/08).
today we also talked about the. the WORD. the EMOTIONS. or the CULTURE (1) behind the word. we had some examples like DOG. the dog in English and dog in Chinese. then we finally work out together when English people see dog, because I talked them about schema in your schema ((Americans’)) maybe the dog can make you think of a kind of. FAITHFULNESS and LOYALTY. and something, but CHINESE people they will sometimes... MOST of us will have a kind of very negative. FEELING on that. in Chinese we have IDIOMS. with dog but they all have bad meanings. so then we think that the word ITSELF has no power. but the cultural connotation or the emotional connotation. in the word really has power because the word can make American people cry, the word with the same. the literal meaning can make Chinese people LAUGH. this is the POWER of language (Deb2, 6/13/08)

In this excerpt, Bi summarized the point she conveyed to her students about how cultures assign meanings to words apart from the literal ones, and provided a simple example showing one way in which culture is manifested in language. She used everyday terms, “emotional” and “cultural,” to illustrate the dynamic nature of word meanings. In her explanation, she linked these terms with “connotation,” connecting an everyday concept with a scientific one as she linked her knowledge of linguistics and discourse to classroom instruction. She was attempting to mediate students’ understanding of word meanings, showing they are more complex than simple translated equivalents.

7.3.2 Developing Student Understanding of Literacy

In her project, Bi carried out a number of activities to enhance students’ understanding that English literacy is a type of communication between readers and writers. In the fourth and fifth observations, she emphasized the communicative purposes of texts by alternately positioning the students as readers and writers. She used this series of activities to develop their understanding of the relationship between readers and writers through: discussion of indirect ways to express feelings, group work examining how the author of the text conveyed her feelings,

16 In another class, as part of her project, she discussed and had students find examples of how the author selected words to create images and physical sensations: part of this exercise is shown in excerpt 14.
comments on students’ summaries, whole class analysis of an appeal letter to find the author’s purposes and the techniques he used to persuade readers, an assignment to write a letter, discussion of how an author creates mental images, analysis of the stages in the appeal letter, and in-class writing of a closing for a complaint letter.

Bi’s focus on communicative purposes can be seen in the following example where she asked the students to identify the writer’s purpose in using a certain technique (i.e., anecdotes).

(14) this is a narrative. and the writer write about some stories. in her childhood. the purpose. what is the PURPOSE? (1) WHY she wrote about. so many. small stories. that happened in her childhood? (1) what what IS her purpose? ((several students speak quietly)) yes. ok. maybe you have noticed that. right? xxx (or maybe you have) that kind of feeling. first of all after you READ the text. you can feel. you can feel HER love for reading. and by TELLING us or by WRITING about the small stories. she tries to tell how. she. developed. her love. for reading. is that right? this is her purpose. (Obs5, 6/6/08)

Bi asked the question of the writer’s purpose, and then used the students’ ideas to form an answer, emphasizing “purpose” throughout the question and answer. She had used the term “communicative purpose” in the first seminar assignment (excerpt 5) and other discussions of scientific concepts. In this observation, she linked it to her instruction by explicitly drawing students’ attention to the writer’s purpose. She also provided students with a more prominent role as they read the text by pointing out how they should make a response to the text (i.e., “after you read the text, you can feel…”).17

One of the ways that Bi mediated her students’ understanding of authorial purposes was by positioning them as authors with a particular aim, both in the discussion and the writing of persuasive letters. Her class first analyzed an appeal letter,18 and then she guided students in reflecting on how the author achieved his ends by asking them to imagine the approach they would take to the task:

17 This excerpt also shows how Bi framed the writer as a person with feelings, helping to mediate students’ view of the text as a social communication.
18 The letter they analyzed was one which Bi had received, and represented a real communicative artifact for her, perhaps in part because she had a clear context for it.
Bi used simple terms with her students, asking them to “change” their readers, but clearly was portraying that the intent of letters is to produce a response. After the students finished a homework assignment to write an appeal letter, she asked them to compose the closing sentences of a complaint letter in class. Then the class analyzed several of the student closings to evaluate the effectiveness of their language and content in achieving their communicative purpose. Bi stated that she intentionally intertwined the study of narratives and letter writing to show “emotions in words” (Deb2, 6/13/2008), and her discourse demonstrates that she was making communicative purposes more concrete for her students.

These activities and Bi’s instructional discourse show that she had not only understood literacy to involve collaboration, but she was intentionally mediating her students’ understanding of the importance of collaborating with readers and writers. She was also trying to expand her students’ understandings of the ways that words could convey meaning in a particular context, broadening the designs available to them. These actions show how in the first term, she was linking scientific concepts with instructional practice, beginning to form a true concept of literacy.

7.3.3 Student Response to a New Concept

Bi intended her project to foster students’ literacy, using activities and discourse to guide students in: collaborating with writers and readers, interpreting texts, understanding cultural aspects of texts, learning about language use, and reflecting on their abilities. In her presentation, she stated her purpose was “to train students’ comprehension, to introduce some translation skills,
to strengthen context awareness, and to arouse genre awareness of my students.” (Sem11, 5/20/08). In her presentation to the seminar group, she provided evidence of how several of these goals were met in her students’ reflections on their translation errors, which showed how their understandings of language were being transformed.19

Bi used students’ reflections to evaluate progress in her goals of raising their awareness of context and their ability to analyze discourse in simple ways. This excerpt demonstrates how her intentional use of translation, in connection with the metacognitive technique of reflection, was mediating students’ understanding of how languages differ (i.e., different languages have different sentence patterns). Specifically, this student seemed to understand that meaning is found in context rather than residing in individual words.20

As Bi emphasized the social nature of texts and her instructional activities guided students to think more deeply about the author, her students began to appropriate her discourse reflecting literacy involves communication. In one instance, a student responded to the question of how he understood a sentence, saying “when I read this sentence. xxx the author. draw a PICTURE for the readers” (Obs4, 5/30/08). This student’s discourse framed the text as a communicative event between the author and readers, specifically including him (“when I read”).

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19 This is Bi’s English explanation of the student’s reflections, which were projected in Chinese for the seminar group to examine.
20 Bi’s presentation also demonstrated that she was using new conceptual tools (particularly transformed practice) to mediate her students’ thinking about language, and specifically, its situated nature, rather than simply attempting to use new instructional activities.
In another example, when Bi asked a student to explain why he included a particular sentence in his complaint letter, the student responded by mentioning his goal to influence the reader: “I think this kind of (words) will touch the person I will write to” (Obs5, 6/6/08). Bi’s students’ responses seemed to imitate her discourse reflecting texts functioning as means of communication between readers and writers.21 This discourse was one indication that they were beginning to reconceptualize foreign language literacy (cf. Chaiklin, 2003).22 In addition to the students’ written reflections, their general collaborative responses to Bi’s instructional activities indicated that they were able to think about and interact with literacy in the ways she was framing for them.

7.4 Reorienting Students’ Approach to Learning

Based on her instructional activities in the previous term, in the second term Bi further developed and more clearly articulated her goals for developing students’ literacy. For example, in the first term she had organized activities focusing on understanding communicative purposes (see 7.3.2). In the second, she began to articulate her students’ lack of understanding of communication in more abstract terms, displaying that she was using scientific concepts to think about a pedagogical problem. She also showed the flexibility of her emerging true concept as she expanded her activities for developing students’ understanding of literacy and modified them for her lower level (i.e., first term freshmen) students.

In the beginning of the second term, I asked the group to identify and sequence goals for four terms of instruction. This activity provided an implicit opportunity for the teachers to consider how the concept of literacy involves communication could be used to organize

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21 Because students’ reflections or other data were not collected, only their classroom discourse can be evaluated.
22 In the fall, Bi’s new (freshmen) students were observed to make similar remarks, suggesting that after just two months of instruction she had already begun to mediate their discourse and reconceptualization of the relationship between readers and the text.
instruction. After most teachers had contributed ideas and I had suggested a goal directly related to literacy, Bi extensively described her understanding of her overall instructional purpose. Using my simple goal as a starting point, she described her more specific goal of mediating her students’ orientation to learning foreign language. Then she linked this goal to the concrete situation of her students, externalizing her understanding of the challenges in meeting it.

(17) O: … I’m going to add my own which you may or may not agree to. ((writing while speaking)) learning English. is learning. how. to. communicate. so. learning English. means. learning to communicate in English. right (3) so- go ahead

B: I think my purpose … a general purpose is to help my students understand. what I think language is. or so far. the ideas I’ve got about language and English I mean the culture. I mean. in other words. I think now using English. is a kind language. language. EMBODIES a kind of relationship between. between people. so I hope my students can be FREE from a kind of limitation. by. the language itself. because most time my students will JUST focus themselves on the LANGUAGE use. and at the same time they forget about the. OTHER side. language is a kind of INTERACTION between people. if you focus TOO much on the language you would. pay no attention to your reader. or even probably. to know about the writer. so I hope they can get free from that kind of idea. and. to get a better CONTROL of their own language resources … because I think that the students. they sometimes they get BORED. or they get a kind of afraid of (1) learning English or just ENGLISH because they cannot feel a kind of control they cannot CONTROL the language. on the CONTRARY they feel they are the SLAVES of the language. because they (just say) I don’t know the rule. that means probably I CANNOT use it well so. I think it’s not true. so.

… ((several turns later))

B: I ((a language user)) can CHANGE the way ((of using language)) according to my situation according to my PURPOSE. you know. I have my way of using the language. so the general rules ARE important but they are just - they are not EVERYTHING. (Sem15, 9/18/08)

Developing my comment on the role of communication in learning, Bi articulated how students’ conceptualization of foreign language might interfere with their understanding it as a means of communication. In explaining her overarching instructional goal, she used specific terms referencing a scientific concept to describe the relationship between students and language (e.g., “embodies a relationship”, “interaction”), and literacy (“reader” and “writer”). Bi showed her understanding of her students when she described their difficulties in terms of their attention (“focus on themselves”) and affect (being “bored” or “afraid”). She attributed these problems to
their not understanding the goal of communication in foreign language. Her new goals were to assist them to understand that language involves relationship and to enhance their agency through providing skills in using language resources (“get a better control of their own language resources”). As students gained these skills, they could use language in contextually appropriate ways (“change the way according to my situation”), and understand that following grammar rules was not the final goal of language use (“rules… are not everything”). Bi externalized these ideas she had been reflecting on, in that she used scientific terms and mentioned a variety of aspects of the issue, though had not organized it concisely. She framed her goals in terms of the concept of literacy: she wanted to enable her students to understand that foreign language consists of resources to be mastered in order to communicate with others. These newly articulated pedagogical goals (that students gain new understanding of language and control of resources) were congruent with her previously stated ones (causing students to think, communicate, and link the text with their lives).

In the same discussion of goals, Bi displayed her scientific concept of vocabulary when I asked the group to specify what they wanted their students to know about vocabulary.

(18) ... knowledge about the levels of the words that means TWO levels or two aspects of the word. denotative and connotative [O: uh huh] that’s a terms but I know the LITERAL meaning of the word and the SOCIAL meaning of the word. [O: mm hm] or maybe PRACTICAL meaning of the word. because MY students mainly focus on the literal meaning of the word or even just the CHINESE translation of the word. I really hope them to. LEARN the word. firstly. by reading the English explanation ... (Sem15, 9/18/08)

In this excerpt, Bi articulated the problem she had noted in the previous term, that her students’ approach to learning vocabulary was incomplete, focusing only on the word denotation, that is, the literal meanings or Chinese equivalents. The solution that Bi presented, the technique of having students learn English explanations so as to more fully understand the word meaning, was repeated from a previously stated goal (Deb1, 4/25/08). She did not explain the ways she had been introducing students to word connotations in the spring, perhaps because she was not yet
able to articulate it. Nevertheless, in this comment she utilized different scientific terms and concepts from her prior learning (denotative and connotative) to evaluate her students’ difficulties. She could then use this understanding as a foundation for specifying goals and selecting instructional activities.

Bi’s instructional activities and discourse increasingly reflected her understanding of literacy as she linked her knowledge of language and instruction more explicitly with communication. Teaching a group of freshmen students, Bi oriented them to learning to use vocabulary through creating situations for them to convey their experiences and opinions. For example, after examining the ways in which a narrative in their textbook used specific verbs to describe action, pairs of students wrote and then read a description of a daily activity for the class. The class listened to one student reading her description of the activity and tried to picture it, and then during a repeat reading, her partner mimed the actions, demonstrating what the words described. In concluding the activity, Bi summarized for the students her goal that they learn the importance of selecting verbs which would convey actions precisely.

(19) sometimes when you describe the action, you must pay attention to, some very SPECIFIC word. right?具体的 (specific). very specific word (1) instead of some general word (1) in that way. your AUDIENCE or your LISTENER, or your READER. can understand what kind of movement you actually are describing for example the dribble, dribble, dribble right? ((making a dribble motion)) and swing the hip, and scan. okay … these are the specific words that we can USE in our WRITING and in our speaking to describe a very VIVID picture for your reader. and your reader can UNDERSTAND (Obs6, 11/19/2008)

Bi’s summary explained the importance of using specific words to convey a specific understanding to the audience. This activity focused on the resource of words, framing students’ use of words in terms of communication with the audience by setting up a situation in which the class was listening carefully and trying to create a picture of the sequence. In addition, it was linked to students’ lives because the topics were familiar activities. Furthermore, the students’ writing of a sequence of actions was based on their having studied how another author
accomplished this. Thus, in this activity, their text was converted from an item to be decoded into an example or resource for their own descriptions. The structure of this activity reflected Bi’s goal of leading students to focus on the audience, mediating their understanding that the purpose of writing and speaking is to make ideas clear to others. It also provided students the opportunity to feel that they could control the language, using it to describe their experiences, rather than just be evaluated on their knowledge of it (cf. excerpt 17).

In this activity, Bi utilized a situated practice activity that focused on communication while developing the students’ use of one of the designs, that is, vocabulary. This represented a contrast from her previous method of developing vocabulary through dictation. She had always intended her students to focus on understanding the meaning of words. However, when the dictation activity was the principal means of vocabulary instruction, it had focused their attention on memorizing isolated meanings rather than on using words to convey their meanings. In creating a performance-based activity and asking the audience to picture their classmate’s description, Bi’s activity addressed the problem she had mentioned earlier (excerpt 17) of students not taking their audience into account.

In the same class, Bi also aimed to mediate her students’ understandings of how meaning is created by the reader, and not merely conveyed by words. She used a series of activities on making inferences, which included: an activity she created, her simple explanation of meaning making, the textbook’s explanation of “reading between the lines,” and finally her adaptation of the textbook’s activity to practice making inferences.23 The first activity began with a simple explanation of an example sentence containing implications, and then she asked pairs to find other such sentences in their text. The whole class reviewed their findings, with some students

23 The final activity in the sequence included a DRTA type activity from the textbook, which Bi adapted to help her students interact more with the author.
drawing sophisticated implications, such as the student below who pointed out the meaning the
author conveyed by using quotation marks.

(20) FS: in ((paragraph)) 28 ... they took a report and in it “the important thing” was
nobody was hurt. the important thing was xxx
B: … ok she’s ((the student)) very careful. the important thing is actually with a
QUOTATION. it’s a quotation 有一个标点符号 (it has punctuation marks)
this expression. has been QUOTED (1) right? so what does this mean?
FS: (it means) the writer is NOT satisfied with this policeman.
B: ok the writer is not satisfied with him (1) mm hm in what way, why?
FS: he didn’t think the important thing was nobody was hurt. 就是 (that is) he was-
he DISAGREED with the statement
B: ok then WHAT was really important. according to the writer
FS: the situation of the SOCIETY. the young people’s situation….
B: … the young generation. their problem. THAT’S really 哇 (wow). important. ok.
very good (1) are you following. her class? do you understand what she’s talking
((quite a few “yeahs,” teacher reviews the idea)) (Obs6, 11/19/2008)

In the activity, Bi had generally framed reading as understanding the writer’s meaning, not just
decoding the words. In this excerpt, the student showed that viewpoint as she mentioned “the
writer’s” opinion without any prompting. Furthermore, she was able to interpret the divergence
of opinion conveyed by the quotation marks. This answer, along with others, demonstrated that
some students had the ability to interpret the text and were interacting with it as the product of an
author. The data does not show if these freshmen had this ability before entering Bi’s class or
whether she had assisted their development of it; however, at the very least, the organization of
the activity allowed them to further enhance their ability to construct meaning in sophisticated
ways.24

Concluding the above activity, Bi prepared the class for another activity on making
implications by explaining how to use context to construct meanings. Her explanation implicitly
contrasted how some of the students were constructing meaning and how she hoped they would.

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24 Bi also reused these student answers as examples of the specific strategies listed in the textbook
explanation of “reading between the lines.”
(21) I know some of you actually are TRANSLATING in your mind. when you read an English text. you’re trying to translate something to CHINESE. is that right? (some students agree). that’s only. one layer of the meaning. one level. just one level of the meaning. you translate it into CHINESE. right? that’s the LITERAL meaning. literal means. of the WORD related to WORD of the WORD related to WORD 词面有关的。对吧? (related to words, right?) actually there’s ANOTHER layer. the meaning BENEATH. or we call it the meaning BETWEEN the lines. that means you cannot get that directly from the WORDS. you have to use. YOUR KNOWLEDGE to understand that. is that right? for example. you must imagine the situation. right? and also. one thing is very important. you must DRAW the conclusion based on your UNDERSTANDING of the context (1) I mean from the beginning to the end of the text. I mean this kind of CONTEXT. then you can understand the sentences better. (Obs6, 11/19/2008)

By summarizing the processes that some students had demonstrated, Bi provided detailed directions for those who were not yet proficient in drawing implications. She utilized her knowledge of her students as she attempted to mediate their problem of relying only on words’ denotations (“literal meaning”). She used a simple illustration of “layers” to describe the different ways that meanings are constructed and encouraged students to use their knowledge and the resources of the whole text (“from the beginning to the end of the text”) to interpret sentences (“draw the conclusion”). In this explanation, she did not employ the language of the scientific concept, but she used “layers” to help students see beyond the individual words. Her explanation utilized the conceptual tool of literacy as being collaborative, situated, and involving interpretation.

Bi’s instruction in early observations tended to focus on examining individual words or the overall meaning of the text, with little connection between these two aspects. Her activities in the sixth observation, related to drawing implications, provided her students with means of connecting words with global meaning. When asked if she had taught this skill to her students before, Bi replied that she had not and that this group of instructional activities were based on her textbook’s exercise on drawing implications, “I found this action when I prepared the

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25 Bi had not carried out extensive activities concerning translation with these students and seemed to be referring to a word by word approach to translation which she assumed they used.
((textbook’s)) lesson about the reading skills” (Deb3a, 11/27/2008). Thus, to plan her lesson, Bi linked her scientific concept that meaning is formed by readers using context, her everyday knowledge of her students’ typical ways of reading, and her reflections on her textbook’s explanation and exercise on drawing implications. Her ability to effectively adapt and create activities to support the textbook’s explanation and exercise for “reading between the lines” is evidence of her emerging true concept of literacy.

Bi’s understanding of texts as communicative artifacts seemed to develop over time and was seen in how she expanded her discussion of the writer. This understanding was particularly revealed in her analysis of her students’ difficulty in seeing past the material artifact of the texts to the other person(s) involved in communication. After the first few weeks of the seminar, Bi did not mention the problem of genuine communication in class again. Though she did not articulate this, it seems that she came to perceive the (native speaking) author as making the classroom discussion authentic.

7.5 Key Factors in Bi’s Development of a True Concept of Literacy

Through the seminar, Bi further developed her ability to reflect on instruction both conceptually and practically, as well as to link various concepts and experiences together. The ideas she expressed in spoken and written reflections were carefully articulated, indicating that Bi also engaged in much reflection outside the seminar activities as well. She noted the importance of reflection, saying that it was one of the important notions she gained in the first term.

(22) writing on your own classes. teachers’ journal. I forgot to mention that. it’s really helpful. [O: why?] because. for ME. I found that. when you REFLECT or when you WRITE about your own classes even the class you have already done. you YOURSELF can find some PROBLEMS… reflecting about the STUDENTS’ reaction. I think that’s very very important. because. it’s a kind of. INDIRECT feedback from students. when I wrote on my own classes I think I started to notice this. before I never wrote about. the classes I already taught. I MISSED many
things, because you can learn from books. but **you can learn from your own classes.** I mean the past experiences (Int2, 6/24/08)

Bi previously knew the importance of learning from theory (“learn from books”), but she stated that learning from her own reflections on her instruction was new. In the seminar, she learned to examine her students’ responses and find aspects of instruction to improve. She also described how she used reflection to link the scientific concept with her practice: she improved her ability to evaluate her class through using Kern’s subordinate concepts as frames for comparison: “the first writing. when I wrote about my classes. I just wrote down the things I’ve done. later on I learned to evaluate it using Kern’s principles” (Int2, 6/24/08). Her intention to integrate theories and practice also allowed her to make multiple connections between concepts and experiences. As a result, her understanding of both the theories from her M.A. studies and Kern deepened.

Three activities designed to mediate the teachers’ understanding of literacy particularly supported Bi’s conceptual development: examining Kern’s definition of literacy, writing a summary of Kern’s ideas, and carrying out a project at the end of the first term. Through linking scientific concepts in Kern’s definition to other scientific concepts, Bi expanded her understanding of old and new concepts. When writing a summary she made these links more explicit, and in particular, linked the term AD to other pedagogical concepts. It was this linking of AD to prior concepts that allowed the rapid development of AD as a scientific concept. The end-of-term project allowed Bi to connect both prior and new scientific concepts to her instruction in numerous ways. Specifically, she utilized her understanding of discourse analysis to analyze students’ translations and to mediate students’ broadening the means they used to interpret texts. Though the written reflections Bi produced assisted her conceptual development, English writing created challenges for her, resulting in her completing fewer assignments and only two pages of her final project. Instead, Bi gave two long seminar presentations, which

26 Bi identified several other aspects of the seminar as important in developing her understanding of literacy, including instances where her colleagues’ comments mediated her thinking.
allowed her to articulate her understanding of how her instructional activities were linked to Kern’s concept.  

Bi’s goal of learning, that is finding better ways to teach, was a powerful force in her development. In particular, she had intentionally used the end-of-term project to “put what I learned in the seminar into practice” (Sem14, 6/10/08), so like Ao, she did not merely design a plan for teaching, but implemented it as well. Bi explained to the seminar group her goal of developing her understanding of instructional practices, as well as her students’ understanding of language, through the project.

(23) the number TWO. **that’s my personal goal. to practice literacy based approaches** by integrating four curriculum components, I think THIS part. the four components takes a lot - takes time and energy for us. to really. really UNDERSTAND them. so I think **by DESIGNING some kind of activities. I try to. get more ideas about HOW to put them. into real classroom or real activities in the classroom... I think I would choose very CAREFULLY. from his. ((Kern’s)) THEORIES (to) support my view in this project. and also **in addition I would use some theories from discourse and genre...** (Sem14, 6/10/08)  

This excerpt also displays Bi’s strong sense of agency as she explained how she designed activities by selecting ideas (“choose very carefully”) from Kern and synthesizing them with concepts she had learned earlier (e.g., “discourse and genre”). While appropriating Kern’s theories, she maintained her autonomy by framing herself as a person selecting useful ideas rather than merely implementing someone’s program. She also demonstrated her strategy of learning **through activity** (“to practice literacy based approaches”), which was evident in her instruction as well as in her own learning. This understanding of teacher learning was a theme in the seminar, though only stated generally in the syllabus in this way: “The means of accomplishing this is through looking at “experts” ideas which have been published, observing our own situations more closely, and discussing how to apply new ideas in practical ways.” (Sm1ho1, 3/11/08). Bi

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27 Bi did not dominate discussion in the seminar, but in addition to the two presentations, she also extensively externalized her understandings orally in meeting 15, as shown above in excerpts 17 and 18.

28 Despite Bi’s prominent mention of the four curricular components in this excerpt, she did not discuss them further in her presentation.
had been striving to improve her teaching practice before she participated in the seminar, but my comments about teacher learning and the structure of assignments supported her intentional approach to learning about theory through her own instructional activity.

The most important subordinate concept for Bi was that of Available Designs which allowed her to reconceptualize aspects of language as “resources.” This understanding was useful in orienting her teaching to developing multiple designs (as she first pointed out in Asgn5, 4/23/08) and framing instruction in terms other than mode of language, i.e., the four macro-skills. She further developed her understanding of the design of vocabulary through linking her scientific concepts concerning words, such as the idea of denotations and connotations, to her knowledge of her students’ abilities, derived from analyzing their translations. She also expanded the ways in which she taught the design of vocabulary, using discourse analysis and situated practice. There was some indication of Bi consciously using new designs when she effectively utilized her textbook’s activities to teach reading skills, a kind of procedural knowledge, which she had not taught previously.

7.6 Conclusion

This chapter has shown how Bi was developing a true concept of literacy through connecting Kern’s subordinate concepts to one another, to her other conceptual understandings, and to her practice. Though Bi was fairly adept at using scientific concepts, her instructional activities sometimes reflected understandings of literacy that she was not able to immediately articulate. However, after reflection, mediated by the seminar activities or independently undertaken, she was able to better articulate her understanding. As she began to understand texts as communicative, she understood teaching texts as a way to meet her goal of teaching
communication skills. This view made the classroom a site of more authentic communication and resolved her difficulty concerning inauthentic language use.

In terms of change in her instruction, Bi began to make significant changes in her teaching activity relatively early in the seminar, creating a variety of activities which were directed at mediating students’ understanding of literacy. She reconceptualized instruction as helping students develop resources (or Available Designs) rather than just engaging in activities using four macro-skills. Specifically, she expanded an instructional focus on memorization of words to include developing students’ conceptual understanding of the multiple ways that meaning is made, such as, through connotations and implications. She then used this understanding to meet her macro-goal of mediating students’ reconceptualization of foreign language learning. Through her understanding of Kern’s pedagogical components, Bi specifically reconceptualized translation, such that she understood it as a tool for developing her students’ abilities to use language rather than for merely checking their comprehension.

Bi’s case illustrates how true concepts restructure cognition and thus facilitate further conceptual development. Before the seminar, Bi had been endeavoring to link the scientific concept *language is a social product* to her instruction, that is, to develop a true concept. Though she apparently had not realized this goal very fully, her way of understanding her own professional development had been restructured, and she was able to exploit many forms of mediation offered in the seminar. This understanding enabled her to link concepts and practices to *literacy involves communication*, thus developing a fuller conceptualization of literacy. Specific examples of items she linked to literacy included: other scientific concepts and terms, such as *language is social practice* and *denotation/connotation*; everyday concepts, such as students should get “involved” in the text; and practices, such as helping students reflect on their work.
This case also shows how the congruency between a teacher’s understanding of language learning and a new concept can provide multiple conceptual and practical resources that the teacher can easily link to the new concept. Though Bi’s M.A. studies seemed to provide her with many resources, they did not seem to mediate her developing a true concept. In contrast, the seminar activities provided space for repeated reflection on her instruction as well as on the scientific concept, which enabled her to link them in ways that she had not done in her M.A. course.
Chapter 8

Discussion, Implications and Conclusion

This study has traced the development of the concept *literacy involves communication* in three teachers who participated in a seminar on a literacy-based approach to English instruction. The findings increase our understanding of the value of true concepts and provide more understanding of how teachers develop true concepts through participating in in-service professional development activities. In particular, it has shown the variety of paths by which teachers may begin to form a new concept, and how different activities can support their developing it. It also shows ways that teachers’ instruction is impacted through the process of developing a new conceptualization of literacy. In this chapter I will discuss the findings of the earlier chapters and their implications, concluding with my reflections on this study, on the limitations of the study, and the spaces for further investigation that it has opened.

8.1 Discussion

The aim of this study was to examine teachers’ discourse and instruction for changes in their conceptualizations of literacy and to discover ways that their participation in the seminar mediated that development. Changes in the teachers’ conceptualizations were found through a genetic examination of their discourse and activity. The following sections will discuss the findings of the study in terms of how conceptual development was mediated and the changes in the teachers’ conceptualizations and instruction that were observed.
8.1.1 Effective Means of Mediation

This study has added to our understanding of how the use of three types of mediation suggested by SCT mediated the focal participants’ understanding of literacy. This section will review the findings concerning mediation by concepts, reflection (a type of interaction), and activity.

The scientific concept was useful in mediating the participants’ understandings of literacy to varying extents. An important finding was that each focal teacher’s experience in linking scientific concepts to their instruction was different. Feng and Bi’s prior familiarity with other scientific concepts, such as target reader and language is a social phenomenon, facilitated their using the new concept as a mental tool. Their prior experiences prepared them to make comparisons between scientific concepts, and to some extent to compare the scientific concepts with their instruction. However, because Bi had a goal of linking theory to practice, she engaged in this type of comparison more frequently and independently of seminar activities. Her ability to describe her instruction as a system in terms of scientific concepts allowed her to more quickly compare her conceptualization with Kern’s concept. Thus, for Bi, the scientific concept itself was a key means of mediation. In contrast, the scientific concept did not have a strong mediational role for Ao, despite the fact that it resembled her everyday concept of English literacy. Ao’s everyday concept was not systematically articulated and had few links to her instruction. Thus, her unfamiliarity with using scientific concepts to think about instruction limited her use of Kern’s concept as a mental tool.

For the most part, making the concept literacy involves communication more concrete through subordinate concepts mediated the teachers’ understanding of it. The participants tended to create their first links with literacy through subordinate concepts that were similar to other concepts that were salient to them. Presenting a variety of subordinate concepts in the seminar
allowed each teacher to find at least one to which she could link her prior understanding. Ao’s everyday understanding of literacy resembled *literacy involves interpretation*; Feng linked *problem solving, interpretation, and collaboration* to her prior understandings of literacy; and Bi, utilized the *Available Designs* to support her developing understanding of literacy. At the same time, the number of unfamiliar subordinate concepts, combined with Ao’s inexperience in using scientific concepts, appeared to hinder her engaging with Kern’s concept. Overall, this study shows that using subordinate concepts can be a useful way to materialize abstract concepts (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). This approach provides a useful alternative to merely providing teachers with instructional techniques.

The study showed how pedagogical concepts develop in relation to other concepts, and specifically how superordinate concepts also played an important role in the teachers’ understanding of literacy. In particular, the three teachers all engaged with the concept of *learning is a social activity*, especially as seen in their planning instruction using pedagogical goals. Bi, who was already using goals in her instruction, was supported by the seminar discourse that emphasized teacher learning, leading her to articulate her aim of learning through her own instruction. Feng showed signs of increased agency in her teaching practice by expressing goals for students to collaborate with the text’s author. Ao began to consciously create goals, which became a means of linking her understanding of Kern’s concept to her instruction, providing a way to evaluate it. In Ao’s case, the superordinate concept *learning involves both conscious and unconscious learning* also played a key role in how she understood a literacy-based approach to instruction. This concept was identified late in the study and she minimally articulated its connection with her instruction. Nevertheless, her becoming aware of the contradiction between this superordinate concept and her everyday understanding that learning occurs unconsciously enabled her to utilize new approaches to instruction.
This study expanded findings of earlier studies of teacher development concerning the essential role that reflection plays in conceptual development (Au, 1990; Golombek & Johnson, 2004; Tasker et al., 2010). However, the ways in which it was used differed among the participants. The two participants who displayed more understanding of scientific concepts, Feng and Bi, utilized written reflection to systematically link Kern’s concept to other concepts and to practice. Intertwining Kern’s concept with other concepts enabled them to develop a fuller understanding of literacy. Ao’s initial reflections linked practice and everyday concepts, and it was only at the end of the first term that she began to utilize scientific concepts in her written reflections. The challenges for teachers to engage in effective reflection has been noted by many (Borg, 2011; Calderhead, 1989; El-Dib, 2007; Kubanyiova, 2006; Luk, 2008), but the important role of theory, or scientific concepts, in reflection has been given less attention (cf. Golombek & Johnson, 2004; Johnson & Arshavskaya, 2011). This study has shown that reflection is profitable when linking scientific concepts to one another and to practice. Reflection without scientific concepts can also be useful: Ao’s early reflections were expressive rather than systematic, and focused on everyday understandings. These reflections also played an important role as they enabled her to articulate emotional dissonance related to her instruction. This externalization enabled her to identify problems and purposefully make plans to change her instruction.

Among the specific seminar activities utilizing written reflection, different ones mediated each teacher’s understanding of literacy. For example, for Bi, writing a summary of Kern was an important means of integrating her literacy-related concepts with Kern’s. For Feng, comparing her understanding of Kern’s principles with her instructional activities was more useful. The latter activity was more structured, and the principles were relatively specific, so this easier task was useful to Feng who had less experience in linking scientific concepts to instruction. In contrast, writing a summary required more abstract thinking and integration of multiple ideas, which Bi was able to undertake successfully. For Ao, because she was not experienced in
conceptual thinking, planning and using new instructional activities in her classroom and then reflecting on links between her activities and Kern’s general concept expanded her understanding of literacy. Thus, the type of reflective activities which could be used by each teacher was related to her skill in using scientific concepts.

Another important aspect of written reflection was the way in which the teachers’ sense of efficacy in using English literacy shaped the amount of written reflection they produced. For example, Ao was fairly comfortable using English writing for thinking and so she used writing for externalizing and refining her ideas more than other teachers. In contrast, Bi commented on the difficulties of expressing herself well in written English, and produced less written reflection than other participants, while utilizing oral reflection more extensively. Bi’s notable conceptual development suggests that the quantity of written reflection is not important if a teacher uses other types of reflection, and if reflection utilizes scientific concepts.

Oral reflection in the seminar allowed for immediate feedback, from both myself and peers, which allowed further articulation of ideas and for the communal development of understanding (Hoffman-Kipp et al., 2003). Oral reflection carried out in the form of discussions was especially useful for the group, as one person externalized her understanding, others could link other concepts and practice to it. Structured discussions, such as the teachers’ presentations and follow up discussions allowed presenters and audience to more intentionally seek to make connections between conceptual understandings of literacy and instructional practice. The activity of orally reflecting on articles we read, in which I guided the group in considering the author and his or her purposes in discussions, also mediated the teachers’ understanding of literacy involves communication. This implicit mediation seemed to be appropriated by the three focal participants and was reproduced in their instruction. In addition, individual guided reflection through discussion (i.e., debriefings) was clearly an important means of mediation for
all three focal participants, as has been shown in a number of studies (Au, 1990; Golombek, 2011; Harvey, 2011; M.E. Poehner, 2007).

This study has also shown how for each teacher, carrying out new (or adapted) instructional activities allowed her to intertwine the new concept with knowledge of her instructional context, such as students’ perspectives, students’ abilities, and textbook affordances, as well as with her knowledge of various aspects of English.1 Even when teachers carried out new instructional activities for which their goals were not clearly articulated beforehand, they deepened their understanding of the concept through evaluating both the ways in which the activity proceeded, and the students’ responses. As the teachers observed their students’ performance in novel activities, they enhanced their knowledge of the students’ abilities and needs, knowledge which they could then link to Kern’s concept. As they linked these insights to Kern’s concept (or subordinate concepts), their understanding of that concept deepened, and laid a foundation for a true concept to emerge.

The extent to which carrying out instructional activities mediated a teacher’s conceptual development depended on how learning-oriented instructional goals shaped those activities. When teachers had other motives for completing assignments or carrying out instructional activities that were not related to learning, these activities appeared to have less impact on the teacher’s conceptualization. For example, when Feng carried out a new literacy-related activity her class, i.e., ordering sentences according to logic, she had only minimally reflected on its connection with literacy. Her understanding of her role as lacking agency (i.e., she was other regulated by students’ expectations and the textbook) made the creation of her own learning goals, or even appropriation of the textbook editors’ goals less relevant to her. It was largely though my mediating questions afterwards that she began to reflect on her pedagogical goals. In

1 The teachers began to attempt this at different points in the study, with Bi beginning before the midpoint in the first term and Feng utilizing literacy-related activities late in the second term.
contrast, Ao carried out effective and independent reflection on her end of term project because she had set learning goals for the activities, showing that she had internalized the role of instructional goals as a means of self-regulation. Bi utilized well-formed goals for both her students’ and her own learning, and demonstrated multiple instances of learning from her classroom instruction. Considering all three participants, we see that carrying out new activities was not sufficient to mediate a teacher’s development. It was the teacher’s reflection on the activity and the degree to which an instructional activity was related to a teacher’s learning goals that determined the extent to which novel instructional activities mediated development.

8.1.2 Changes in Teachers’ Conceptualizations of Literacy

Teachers’ conceptual development shaped their discourse concerning literacy involves communication and other concepts, their ways of referencing literacy in their instructional discourse, and their linking of literacy to pedagogical problems and goals.

The different ways that the three focal participants articulated their understanding of the scientific concept, particularly its definition, displayed their different ways of interacting with the concept. Ao did not find Kern’s formal definition of literacy to be useful, presumably because it included so many unfamiliar abstract concepts, but she effectively used the simple formulation literacy involves communication in her discourse about instruction and in her practice. In her discourse and instruction Feng used Kern’s dimensions of literacy, as well as the principles of literacy, rather than his definition. In this way, she seemed to appropriate aspects of literacy, but did not display a more general understanding of literacy involves communication. Through my mediation in the discussions, Bi was able to appropriate ideas from Kern’s complex definition. She found the definition to be useful and linked it to her prior scientific concepts, expanding her understandings of both. Though she infrequently used the terms communication or collaboration,
much of her discourse and instructional activities highlighted the interaction between writers and readers.

Similarly, in their instructional discourse, the three participants also used different ways to link the scientific concept with instruction as they explained aspects of learning literacy to students. In some cases, teachers used the exact language of the scientific concept (such as Ao using “interpretation”), and in other cases, everyday language was employed (such as Bi saying “change your reader”). Using a specific term from the concept could develop students’ understanding if it is explained. However, the teacher’s use of everyday language may indicate her fuller understanding of the concept and a stronger ability to mediate it to students. Similarly, the complexity of teacher discourse about literacy varied, reflecting less and more complex understandings of literacy involves communication. An example of a simple expression of this concept was pointing out the author and his intentions, while a more complex understanding was exemplified in Bi’s description of how meaning is created in texts. The simple uses of Kern’s concepts in instructional discourse tended to precede using it in instructional activities, possibly reflecting the ease of imitating discourse from the seminar. More complex explanations displayed the depth of teachers’ developing concepts. A deeper understanding was particularly displayed when discourse involved guiding students into new goals for instructional activities and other ways of mediating students’ understanding of literacy.

As teachers developed a more complex conceptualization, they were able to use literacy as a mental tool for thinking about instruction in several different ways. Describing instruction using terms from the subordinate concept was one of the simplest ways of using a concept to think. These descriptions showed teachers reorganizing their understandings through renaming her experiences (El-Fiki, 2012; Johnson, 2009; Reis, 2010). This study also illuminated more complex ways of linking the scientific concept to classroom activities, particularly through using the concept to evaluate their instruction, articulate pedagogical problems and explain learning
goals. The teachers evaluating their instruction using the concept was one type of comparison. They also reflected on how the concept could help to solve prior and newly discovered pedagogical problems. From these problems, they formed learning goals that connected Kern’s concept to their instruction. Forming a learning goal based on the scientific concept linked that concept to practice and was foundational for goal-oriented activity, which is necessary to internalize a concept (Ball, 2000a; Dunn, 2011; Johnson & Golombek, 2011b). In some cases, goal construction took the form of adapting prior goals, which was particularly important because it signaled a link between teachers’ previous conceptualizations of literacy and the scientific concept, allowing for a more integrated understanding of literacy with more links between concepts and practices. For example, Bi adapted her goal for vocabulary instruction, from one of helping students learn more words, to one of helping students learn how to use more words in communication. In fact, the more specific nature of Bi’s goals allowed her to make multiple links between her instruction, her prior scientific concepts and the new concept. In terms of general goals, Bi and Ao recognized that literacy-based instruction involved more than using new instructional techniques when they formed macro-goals of enhancing their students’ understanding of literacy.

8.1.3 Changes in Teachers’ Literacy Instruction

All three teachers in the study utilized new instructional activities, although the number of activities and how they were utilized to mediate student literacy differed among the teachers, depending on their conceptual development. The acts of creating or adapting activities in themselves did not indicate development, but had to be understood in relation to the teachers’ other activities and articulation of their purposes in the activity. When an understanding of a new concept was emerging, teachers’ explanations of the links between instructional activities and
concepts were often initially vague. This difficulty in articulating their purposes illustrates the conflict that Wertsch described as the teacher attempted to make connections between the more abstract concept and her “unique, spatiotemporally located intention” (2007, p. 185). It was after the recursive process of using instructional activities and reflecting on them that some teachers were able to more clearly articulate links between activities and scientific concepts. This process demonstrated the importance of ongoing action and reflection-on-action in conceptual development (Schon, 1983). A teacher’s more fully developed concept was evidenced by her prompt explanation of how an activity was linked to the concept of literacy.

This study found indications of development in all three of the focal participants, even when it was not clearly articulated. Specifically, novel activities and discourse were contrasted with the teachers’ typical activities, which often provided students with information or evaluated their comprehension. Though Feng did not clearly articulate goals linking Kern’s concept with her activities, she began to design instructional activities that appeared to expand students’ understandings of literacy. In particular, an early sign of the development of the concept literacy involves communication was creating purposes for students’ reading that allowed them to interact with the text in ways other than answering comprehension questions.

8.1.4 Differing Paths of Conceptual Development

All three teachers displayed new conceptualizations of literacy and literacy instruction. Each teacher showed an increased understanding of how texts are co-constructed by readers and writers, and each provided expanded opportunities for students to learn how to construct reasonable interpretations. In addition, each of them began to emphasize that texts not only inform, but reflect writers’ affect and relations with their readers. Their developing conceptualizations were displayed in their carrying out novel instructional activities, and in the
ways that they reframed typical activities, such as checking homework answers. Through the mediation provided in the seminar, all three of the teachers began to find new ways to realize their ideals of instruction in their practice, achieving increased congruity between their beliefs and their teaching activity.

This study also showed clearly differing paths of development for each teacher: Bi transformed her approach to literacy instruction, Ao imitated a number of new instructional activities, and Feng’s use of new approaches and understandings seemed to be largely influenced by socialization. The teachers’ different histories, particularly their prior concepts, shaped their different paths of development.

As would be expected from both Vygotsky’s view of development (1986/1934) and numerous studies (Ahn, 2009; Dunn, 2011; Pajares, 1992; Woods, 1996), the teachers’ initial understandings of literacy contributed to their differing responses to the core concept. Of the three teachers, Ao had been most aware of utilizing English literacy as a means of communication before the study. Through the mediation of the seminar, she linked her prior understanding of literacy to her instruction in multiple ways. Bi aimed for her instruction to focus on communication, but did not regard texts themselves as means of communicating, while Feng tended to emphasize English literacy activities as means of evaluation rather than communication. Both Bi and Feng increased their understanding of literacy as a communicative activity and reflected this understanding in their teaching practice. However, the teachers’ prior conceptualizations of literacy were not the most important factor in their developing a true concept: despite Ao’s greater familiarity with literacy before the study began, at the end of the study she had not developed the most robust conceptualization of literacy.

Of greater importance, each of the teachers had different approaches to thinking about instruction: Ao focused on everyday concepts derived from experience, Feng was familiar with both everyday and scientific concepts, but made weak links between them, and Bi endeavored to
link scientific concepts to her teaching practice. Feng and Ao both displayed development that precedes the development of true concepts, but in different ways. Ao’s instructional activities displayed a number of changes in guiding her students to understand literacy as communicative. Her development of a more complex concept was displayed in the increased links between her everyday understandings and other concepts (e.g., culture and problem solving), illustrating Vygotsky’s description of an everyday concept growing up to a scientific concept. However, her articulation of her conceptualization remained fairly simple, and did not allow her to make clear or extensive connections between concepts or between concepts and instructional practices. Feng displayed fewer changes in instruction, but changes in her conceptualization of literacy and literacy instruction indicated potentially important steps towards her taking up greater agency as a teacher. Her development was supported by her ability to relate scientific concepts to one another and to her practice. Her path of development illustrated scientific concepts growing down into practice as she began to create her own links between concepts and instructional activities. For both of them, conceptual development was supported in a large part through the practice of creating instructional goals.

Like Ao, Bi used a number of instructional activities which were new to her, but in contrast, Bi also appeared to reorganize her understanding of literacy instruction as she integrated other concepts and instructional practices with it. This new conceptualization was displayed in her ability to make novel connections independently, rather than only adapting (or imitating) others’ instructional activities. The multiple links she built between concepts and activity marked her as an “expert” teacher (Tsui, 2009), and her ability to use the concept of literacy involves communication as a mental tool indicated that she was becoming a transformative intellectual (Johnson, 2006). Bi made extensive use of the means of mediation in the seminar, but her conceptual development was shaped by her conviction that theory could be utilized in her
instruction and would strengthen it. Also important were her abilities to create links between scientific concepts, and the specific content of her prior concepts.

In terms of the process of development, the discussion of five levels of appropriation of a concept in Grossman et al. (1999) does not provide an adequate explanation for the development process of true concepts observed in this study. All four of their indications of conceptual development were found: knowing the label of the concept, knowing its surface features (i.e., pedagogical activities), knowing its underpinnings (i.e., purposes for which it is used) and using it as an evaluative tool. However, appropriating the label was not necessarily the first stage of appropriation: in this study, teachers’ activities sometimes appeared to be shaped by concepts before the teachers were using the label to explain that connection. Surface features and underpinnings appeared to be used without the direct mediation of the concept’s label and sometimes teachers used the concept to evaluate their own instruction before they had fully grasped the underpinnings. For example, Feng began to better understand the subordinate concepts through the evaluation process of comparing Kern’s principles with her instruction. In addition, complex concepts (including those studied by Grossman et al) are multi-faceted, and the teachers showed appropriation of different facets at different points. Thus, it may be more helpful to assess the extent to which various facets of a concept are appropriated rather than only generalizing about the concept as a whole.

This study shows how conceptual development is subtly displayed in a number of ways, and does not have a particular endpoint. The process of creating learning goals in instruction, carrying out instruction, and finally, reflecting on the outcomes combined to deepen teachers’ understanding of how the concept could be connected to instruction. The various ways in which teachers engaged with the scientific concept in this process created a multiplicity of paths for conceptual development. This study has revealed the complexities of internalization and the variety of ways in which it is manifested.
8.2 Implications

The implications from this study will necessarily be tentative for other teachers and other contexts because of the variation in teachers’ understanding of literacy and instruction, and even more the variation in their experiences of learning literacy and teaching it. This section will first present those implications which seem most useful across cultural contexts, then those more relevant for professional development in China, and finally some related to the specific issue of utilizing the concept literacy involves communication as a means of instruction.

8.2.1 Implications for Mediating Teacher Development

This study shows that the claim by Vygotsky (1986/1934) concerning conceptual development in children, applies to adults as well in that teachers’ cognition is changed through developing new concepts. Teacher education activities are likely to include teachers with varying experience in linking scientific concepts with instruction, who differ in how they engage with the forms of mediation which are offered. Specifically, this study suggests that teachers will respond to different types of mediation depending on their prior experience using concepts to think about instruction. Those with less experience in using concepts as tools to think about pedagogy may need help in systematically thinking about instruction and require help in building up a network of relevant scientific concepts. If teachers think practical applications are more valuable than learning scientific concepts, it may help to provide explanations concerning the usefulness of true concepts.

This study exposes some reasons teachers see themselves as implementers of someone else’s program and suggests solutions for this situation. These teachers lack a sense of agency, so that they do not create learning-oriented goals, without which it is difficult to internalize a
concept. In this study, teachers who could not initially provide specific goals began to articulate them when they examined scientific concepts and transformed them into goals. Helping teachers to articulate pedagogical problems may lead them to externalize goals. Then it may be useful to guide them to explore links between these problems and scientific concepts. Additionally, in this professional development group, teachers increasingly articulated pedagogical goals through the mediation of my regular requests to identify goals and link them with scientific concepts. This study suggests that when teachers externalize instructional goals that are relevant to them, their taking up agency in instruction increases. Developing alternative goals and activities as a group may also encourage teachers with less agency to realize that they have choices in how they link scientific concepts to their instructional plans.

This study revealed another reason that teachers may not utilize scientific concepts in instruction: teachers may have learned scientific concepts, but evaluated them as incompatible with their instruction. Other teachers may appear to use scientific concepts, but have only mimicked others’ instructional techniques related to those concepts, without having used concepts for pedagogical thinking. Teachers in these situations may benefit from analytical activities which promote linking abstract scientific concepts to concrete instructional practice, as well as from discussions in which the implications of a scientific concept are explored. Finally for those teachers who have developed or are developing true concepts in some aspects of their instruction, the experience of linking scientific concepts to practice should be familiar, though the content of a particular concept may be new. This study suggests it will be easier for them to apprehend relatively abstract concepts, so the important aspects of developing a new conceptualization will be clearly defining the new concept and helping them to identify the relationship between prior and new concepts.

This study also suggests that the complex nature of true concepts is their strength, so explicit mediation should attempt to utilize the various aspects of a true concept, including the
definition of the scientific concept, links between related scientific concepts, related everyday concepts, and materialization in instructional activity and rationale for techniques. Because of the complexity of teacher conceptualizations, teachers’ prior understandings are not objects to be replaced with new concepts (e.g., Crandall, 2000), but collections of concepts that teachers can evaluate and reorganize. Vygotsky stated that the starting point for scientific concepts are their definitions, but the challenges for learners in grasping a new definition should not be underestimated, and revisiting it after the initial introduction will probably be helpful. While the definition will only be a small part of the understanding the scientific concept, the lack of a clear definition may cause significant trouble in appropriating a concept (as also demonstrated in Smagorinsky et al., 2003).

Learning a scientific concept should also include examining the superordinate and other concepts related to it in order to discover how this new concept contradicts and/or complements other known scientific concepts. Examining superordinate concepts may reveal foundational concepts that contradict a new concept. Similarly, a teacher educator should be aware of teachers’ everyday (or rule-of-thumb) concepts, articulated or reflected in typical instructional activities. This knowledge can be enhanced by inviting teachers to externalize their everyday concepts, which can then be compared to scientific concepts. Discussing congruencies and incongruencies between concepts can deepen understanding of the scientific concept and help to link it to instructional activity. When comparing teachers’ concepts with the scientific concept, apparent similarities between the two should be questioned as much as differences: for example, Feng’s concept of interpretation had the same label as Kern’s concept, but significantly differed in content.

This study has confirmed the utility of professional development activities that allow teachers to experience the pedagogical concepts that teacher educators hope teachers will use (Singh & Richards, 2006). Since teachers draw on their own experiences of learning when they
teach, it is important for them to experience learning through the use of a particular concept, such as literacy involves communication. These models also provide an alternative image of instruction (Dunn, 2011; Johnson, 1994), enabling teachers to envision new ways of teaching. This experience of using techniques in their own learning will enhance their practical knowledge so they have more extensive links between instruction and the scientific concept. It seems that modeling will be most valuable if teachers’ attention is explicitly drawn to the link between the activity they are participating in and the concept. Debriefing how the concept has been utilized in techniques could encourage teachers to forge links between everyday concepts, scientific concepts and instructional techniques though teachers sometimes appropriated goal-directed activities without explicit discussion of the model. Modeling is a helpful way of providing instructional techniques that materialize a concept, but it is also important for teachers to create their own links between new concepts, prior concepts, and instructional activities. For example, teachers can also be asked to adapt a technique to meet their articulated goals.

This study suggests that development of true concepts will be mediated through the use of multiple types of reflection to support development. Both more formal and less formal writing may support learning and development, but generally those assignments which were more structured led to more useful reflections for these focal participants. It should not be assumed that teachers know how to carry out effective reflection, but rather explicit guidance should be provided about ways to more effectively use reflection to compare and create links between concepts, and between concepts and instruction. In a group, each teacher will be ready to respond to different mediation, so having various activities promoting reflection is important. Considering Bi’s case, though written reflection is useful, it may be that some teachers will find writing their reflections to be a formidable task, and oral reflection may also be very profitable.

This study was an example of onsite teacher development for in-service teachers which involved cross-cultural elements, and thus has implications for activities with one or more of
these features. In this intervention, a new concept, first developed outside of China was brought to the teachers’ context by me, an agent who had links with both the source context and the teachers’ context. Though the pedagogical concept was not created locally, I intended the means of utilizing it to be worked out through the interaction between the teachers and myself. As a result, the teachers gave few indications that they found incongruities between Kern’s concept and their context, in contrast to other programs which have brought pedagogical approaches from outside the local context (Q. Gu, 2005; Ouyang, 2000; Yan, 2008). Because the activity was an in-service activity at the teachers’ actual worksite, teachers brought their daily teaching experiences with them into seminar discussions. There were more opportunities in discussions for the teachers to integrate the scientific concept with their actual teaching situations. In addition, they could use their classrooms as sites for learning, for example observing student activity, during the time between seminar meetings (Johnson, 2006). In contrast, teachers in offsite in-service programs have had difficulties linking new ideas to their instruction (Martin, 1993; Ouyang, 2000; Yan, 2008) perhaps because they lose sight of their context through their extended time away from it.

8.2.2 Implications for Teacher Development in China

Since many English teachers in China have had little pedagogical instruction or opportunity to link pedagogical theory to instruction, Chinese teachers may need more help in creating these links, utilizing some of the recommendations noted in the previous section. One important step is helping teachers to externalize their understandings and become aware that all instruction is based on conceptualizations of language and instruction, even that which is mimicked. Articulating their everyday concepts, such as teaching means providing information (i.e., knowledge transmission), will allow them to compare these concepts with other concepts.
In particular, the rules-of-thumb related to CLT, such as students need to speak more and four macro-skills need to be taught separately, should be externalized and examined for how they relate to other concepts and are being carried out in instruction. Tensions between concepts should be explored since dissonance can be a motive for change (Golombek & Johnson, 2004), and comparison helps promote deeper understanding of concepts. In addition, for two of the focal participants, learning to structure their teaching by means of goals appeared to be relatively new. Therefore, repeated examination of various goals, including previously unarticulated ones, and practice creating their own detailed goals should help teachers to become more aware of how to regulate their instruction through goals.

This study suggests that the use of first language (L1) or second language (L2) in carrying out reflection should be carefully assessed, as there are advantages to each. For L2 teachers, the use of the L2 can be beneficial, especially as teachers simultaneously learn and experience a learner’s role in the use of various instructional approaches; in addition, activities in the L2 can help support teachers’ proficiency and confidence in using it. Thus, the opportunity to use L2 may be a feature that attracts teachers to professional development activities. However, constructing a system of interrelated concepts in an L2 may be a challenge for some teachers. Utilizing bilingual explanations of concepts could help teachers to link new concepts to their existing conceptualizations. In this study, because Kern’s ideas had not been translated into Chinese, some teachers lacked confidence that they understood his ideas. It could have been useful to ask the group to create their own equivalent terms in Chinese as a way to link Kern’s concept to their everyday concepts and experiences.

In order for professional development to be effective in China, it is important to take textbooks into consideration because they have a central place in instruction (Feng & Byram, 2002; G.W. Hu, 2002). This study found that the discussions and activity based on the contents of the teachers’ textbooks (Sem20 and Sem21) were important opportunities for at least one of
the focal participants (Ao) to link the scientific concept to practice. More such activities, such as discussing texts, explanations, or activities from the textbook, should be developed to enable teachers to create more links between the concept and their instruction. At the same time, this study suggests that textbooks did not guide teachers’ instruction as much as might have been expected, such as Ao’s previous inattention to the more communicative section of her textbook (“Language Enhancement”). Thus, teacher educators should not assume that because teachers do not use certain approaches that the textbook does not support them or that teachers will notice the ways that their textbook’s activities align with a new concept. Creating opportunities for structured comparison of the textbook and the new concept has the potential to deepen teachers’ understandings of the concept and how it can be used in instruction.

This study confirmed the historical gatekeeping function of examinations in China (A. Cheng & Wang, 2012; L. Cheng, 2008; L. Jin & Cortazzi, 2006; Li, 2012), even when the teachers and students were not facing strong pressure concerning the CET4 exam. Though the teachers anticipated that all the students in these classes would pass the examination, teachers and students were accustomed to measuring success in teaching and learning through examination scores. The students’ orientation to learning through exam preparation exerted subtle influence on their teachers to select activities which were more directly related to exam preparation. Ao was most vocal in describing the influence of exams, but all three focal participants mentioned the expectations of students regarding exam preparation as one of the factors they considered in planning instruction. When students expect teachers to prepare them for examinations, teachers have to be ready to explain the use of activities that are not obviously oriented towards that end.

This study suggested that teachers could influence their class’s orientation: in the latter half of

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2 Bi and another teacher commented on how they noticed few difference among the various textbooks they had used, suggesting that they used different textbooks in the same manner.

3 Pressure was minimal for these focal teachers and their students, who were in the top half of their grade in terms of English achievement. This would not necessarily be the case for all students in the university.
this study it was observed that Ao’s and Bi’s students appeared to respond positively to their discourse and activities that focused on developing English ability while framing texts as means of communication. Thus, teachers should be helped to find ways to orient their students to learning goals other than examination preparation.

This study also showed ways in which the current English education system in which these teachers worked did not support their taking agency in their instruction. Some teachers lacked confidence in taking responsibility for student learning and were focused on carrying out activities smoothly rather than on evaluating the effect of their instruction (G.W. Hu, 2002). There are various possible reasons for this, such as the lack of pedagogical education teachers had or the long-standing sense that textbook writers are responsible for setting the curriculum of the course (Burnaby & Sun, 1989; Yoshida, 2011). In addition, since many Chinese teachers do not write exams, they do not have responsibility for evaluating their students’ learning, nor the opportunity to learn from assessing teaching and learning (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995). Thus, the move to help Chinese teachers learn how to carry out formative assessment (A. Cheng & Wang, 2012; Y. Jin & Yang, 2006; Peng, 2011) may be important in developing teacher agency.

The influence of examinations and students’ expectations reflect how teaching is a social activity, which suggests that professional development should also provide local support in teachers’ particular teaching context. The existence of structures which may support informal teacher collaboration has been noted in China (Ouyang, 2012; W. F. Wang, 2008). However, comments made by participants in this study indicated that in their context this structure was not a powerful support, and that more intentional and intensive experiences of professional development were useful. This study showed the benefits of structuring professional development as a longer-term activity carried out at teachers’ places of work. This arrangement enhanced the process of teachers’ linking concepts to instruction immediately and then reflecting
on that use. This study also suggested that teachers sharing with and learning from one another was an important form of support, as was shown by Ao’s and Feng’s use of colleagues’ teaching techniques, as well as the more general feedback that some teachers learned from colleagues’ contributions.\footnote{Bi also commented on how helpful her colleague’s comments were, and specifically seemed to have regularly exchanged ideas with Teacher J outside the seminar meetings.} In addition, having a supportive community also appeared to encourage some teachers to take risks in attempting new instructional approaches. These findings suggest that onsite teacher development may have greater effect than that carried out in another location.

### 8.2.3 The Potential for a Literacy-Based Approach to Instruction in China

This study suggests that a literacy-based approach to English instruction is appropriate for tertiary English instruction in China, where a communicative approach to instruction has been unevenly implemented. Though speaking and listening have been widely regarded as the macro-skills involving communication (L. J. Jin et al., 2005; W. Wu, 2008), *literacy involves communication* shows potential for developing a broader understanding of “communication.” Ao and Bi adapted and created a number of activities in which students used English literacy to communicate. They accomplished this while largely relying on their textbooks and fulfilling general expectations for instruction. In addition, all three teachers used Kern’s concept to clarify students’ roles in relation to texts, such as interpreting a text as someone outside the target audience. Bi’s case suggests that *literacy involves communication* may help to resolve tensions regarding English use in homogenous Chinese groups through discussions of writers and their purposes. This technique allows teachers to bring English “speakers” into the classroom through means of texts written in English. In addition, the subordinate concept of Available Designs expands the resources for communication beyond vocabulary and grammar, suggesting attention
should be given to a variety of designs. Similarly, the four pedagogical components suggest balance between and linking of teacher instruction (*overt instruction*) with student practice (*situated practice* and *transformed practice*).

This study confirmed that in China there are a number of material supports and goals which align well with a literacy-based approach to instruction. Textbooks, as noted above, provide some support for a literacy-based approach.\(^5\) In addition, a literacy-based approach utilizes the abilities of those Chinese teachers who tend to have relatively sophisticated abilities in text analysis, unlike CLT which tends to emphasize knowledge of informal oral language which teachers are less likely to possess. In particular, this study suggests that translation, a familiar activity in Chinese English learning, can have an important role in helping develop students’ literacy. Ao and Bi demonstrated that they had a number of resources to bring to translation activities. Crucially, they understood that translation in itself did not mark a literacy-based approach, but found ways to use it to develop students’ literacy abilities. In terms of goals in Chinese English education, in this study teachers used activities that met the general calls for Chinese students to be able to think creatively and critically. Similarly, Kern’s emphasis on understanding learning to use designs corresponds with the growing understanding in China that it is the ability to *use* language that is the final goal of foreign language instruction (Ministry Of Education, 2001, in Hu & Adamson, 2012).

This study also demonstrated the importance of teachers’ own experiences of literacy in mediating their students’ literacy development. Many Chinese teachers may have developed their English literacy in classes focused on intensive reading, so they need to have everyday experiences of literacy as communication in order to develop a true concept of it. This suggests that an important part of professional development is intentionally mediating teachers’

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\(^5\) In addition to the focal participants, Teacher D “found a useful activity” in her textbook which prepared students to read and write a new English genre (reports).
experiences with interpreting and designing texts. Kern’s Available Designs suggests a rubric to enlarge the resources which teachers have to interpret and create texts, but the introduction of specific designs, which was minimally carried out in this study, will probably be helpful.

In terms of Kern’s version of literacy-based instruction, there were many aspects which were useful, but the language of his materials was difficult for this group of teachers to comprehend. The number of novel terms and concepts was challenging for the teachers to manage in a second language, and they seemed to require extensive support and time to understand Kern’s text and his underlying concepts. Most of Kern’s subordinate concepts were helpful, but the four pedagogical components were particularly difficult for teachers to grasp because they do not overlap with familiar ways of categorizing instructional activities in China.6 This most practical aspect of the literacy-based approach to instruction was important to the teachers, but the study suggests that additional thought be given to how it is introduced.

8.3 Researcher Reflections

In the planning stage of this study I endeavored to “take into account the social, political, economic, and cultural histories that are located in the contexts where L2 teachers learn and teach” (Johnson, 2006). I utilized my understanding of instruction in China and my prior work with Chinese teachers to determine a scientific concept which would be of use to them, and anticipated several benefits to utilizing Kern’s approach to foreign language literacy in this intervention. I recognized the problems that can occur when transferring methods across cultures (Canagarajah, 2006), so when I began this study I did not aim to lead teachers to implement a particular model of instruction, as a top-down imported package (Liu & Xu, 2011). Instead, I

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6 In addition, the four categories are neither comprehensive (including all possible activities) nor are their defining characteristics clear in Kern’s introduction.
anticipated that the teachers would find unique ways that Kern’s approach could help to solve problems that they faced in their instruction. I hoped that we could work together to construct ways that Kern’s concept could be realized in their instruction. This was difficult to accomplish for a number of reasons including my own need to more deeply understand the concepts I was working with and my not anticipating the difficulties that teachers would have in interacting with a scientific concept and with Kern’s text.

I did not anticipate how much more grasp of Kern’s concept the teachers would need before they were ready to use it as a tool to develop new instructional techniques. For example, I was surprised at how Ao, in spite of her seemingly strong ability to engage with English texts, her everyday concept which resembled Kern’s core concept, and her desire to improve her instruction, struggled to understand his ideas. Other teachers also faced this struggle, and I frequently reflected on this difficulty during the course of the seminar, but only through the analysis of the data, did I develop a useful understanding of the situation. I had not understood the extent to which adults’ cognition was restructured by the development of true concepts or even through extensive experiences in using relevant (i.e., pedagogical) scientific concepts. This study increased my appreciation for the challenges of thinking about everyday experiences in abstract terms even as I was faced with doing this myself in analyzing the data. Vygotsky (1986/1934) referred to the conceptual change in cognition (i.e., developing true concepts) as “revolutionary,” which no longer appears overstated to me: as with any revolution, this development of true concepts is difficult to achieve.

Despite my familiarity with the teachers and their context, I was influenced by the context in which I resided when I constructed the plans, unexpectedly regulated by my “specific, concrete circumstances” (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006, p. 159). Immersed in the culture of a US university, it was difficult for me to fully imagine the difficulties that these teachers would face in interacting with a new scientific concept, particularly one communicated in a foreign language.
Though I had expected that the texts themselves and the new terms would offer linguistic challenges, I had failed to anticipate the extent to which they were barriers. I also came from a situation in which students were expected to extensively and independently link abstract concepts to other concepts and to practice. It was easy to forget how this is not a natural activity for most people, and that teachers would need much more assistance in making these connections. Though I had planned a number of activities to help teachers develop links, the intervention would have benefitted from a larger number of more structured activities. In particular, the group would have benefitted from my giving more explicit thought to ways to link prior understandings with the new concept.

Through the study and the analysis of the data I also came to a greater appreciation for the role of teachers experimentally utilizing and then reflecting on new instructional activities. Probably because of my own ways of approaching instruction, I initially felt that the planning aspect of new activities would be more important in linking activities to scientific concepts. However, teachers clearly deepened their understanding of the concept when they tried activities without a strong understanding of why they were carrying them out and then reflected on them. This seemed to confirm Korthagen’s (2001) observation that reflection begins with action and thought on action.

My understanding of Kern’s literacy-based approach to instruction had developed in my context as a teacher of English composition. It was expanded greatly as I saw more ways that his ideas applied to general foreign language instruction. In retrospect, I recognize that during the seminar, I could have provided fuller explanations of his ideas; in addition, it was sometimes a challenge for me to see how teachers’ activities were linked to his concept. Discussions, both with the whole group and with individuals, enlarged my understanding. For example, my initial explanations of the four pedagogical components were quite simple, and it was through the teachers’ questions that I began to understand their purpose and core differences. Through our
discussions and my own analysis I also came to see the strengths and weakness of this set of categories as a tool for these teachers. The components offered a way to balance various approaches that are not always balanced in instruction: focus on meaning with focus on form and concern with utilizing conventions through both following and reshaping them. However, these components could not be used to describe many of the teachers’ routine instructional activities and thus did not appear to be very relevant to them. Using Kern with the group, I also came to appreciate the power of understanding language as a social, and therefore dynamic and flexible, tool. My understanding developed as I watched Bi use this understanding of literacy to reframe her understanding of literacy and shape her instruction of English literacy as a tool which students could use for their own purposes.

During the course of the discussions with teachers, I also thought more deeply about their biggest concern as they continually brought the group’s attention to the issue of student motivation. As mentioned above, I understood more deeply how the historical role of exams in every students’ experience as a means of evaluation and promotion shaped their activity in the classroom. My appreciation of the issue of identity increased as the group discussed the relationship between identity and language learning in their own experiences. When the teachers’ reflected their views of how English learning challenged their identity as Chinese, I suspected this would probably be even more likely for students. The issue of identity was not a focus of the seminar, but it influenced my selecting Widdowson’s article and some of my comments to teachers. The question of how to minimize the threat students may experience to their sense of national identity when they study a foreign language now appears to me to be an important issue in motivation in EFL classes.
8.4 Limitations

This study cannot be considered typical of professional development activities for several reasons and its findings must be understood in context. For example, the seminar was carried out with volunteers, and as such may not reflect the kinds of learning and development that take place in situations where such activities are required. Furthermore, due to my relationships with the administration and the teachers, as well as my knowledge of the setting, teachers may have had more positive anticipation of learning than sometimes accompanies professional development activities that are organized by outsiders. In addition, my previously established relationships provided me with a number of means of receiving feedback, which was important to making useful adjustments to my plans during the seminar. The fact that this was a case study further limits the findings to illustrating possible paths of and obstacles to conceptual development.

Another limitation to the study is that the development of “typical” participants was not examined. Rather, the conceptual development of the focal participants, for whom richer data was collected, was mediated not only by their activity in the seminar but by their activities as focal participants. These teachers commented that my presence in classes sometimes influenced factors such as their choice of language and use of explanations, and one teacher commented that she and her students carried out an unusual activity largely because they had prepared it for an outside observer. As would be expected, the analysis also showed that the debriefing interviews (and possibly less formal after-class chats) were important opportunities for mediation for those teachers. These facts point to how teachers develop through having someone with whom to discuss classroom instruction, that is, someone who sees their instructional context, reflects with them over the events, and brings alternative perspectives to their instruction. It is likely that a teaching peer could be helpful in some of these ways.
8.5 Future Research

This study suggests several areas for further research. In particular, two of the focal teachers were still in early stages of conceptual development, which indicates that a longer study would be necessary to obtain a larger view of the process of developing a true concept. It appears that a study might require two to three years to uncover the process of development in a teacher. In addition, in this study, I asked questions to ascertain teachers’ instructional goals, understandings of reading and writing, and personal experiences of literacy, but more explicit questions and more time could be given to systematically exploring teachers’ concepts at the beginning of a study. A more detailed understanding of teachers’ initial understandings could provide additional insight into how old and new concepts are linked or contrasted through later mediational activities. In particular, I did not focus attention on asking about teachers’ initial understandings of how learning and teaching take place or the relationship between theory and practice, which the study suggested were equally important with their understanding of literacy.

In this study, I also found the challenge of carrying out learning activities that focused teachers’ attention on both the process of the instructional activity (i.e., the approach to instruction) and the content (i.e., Kern’s concept of literacy). In many instances I focused on mediating the conceptual content, and hoped teachers would independently notice the means I had used; however, because the content was difficult, teachers may have been distracted from noticing the processes I modeled. Thus, it would be worthwhile to explore various means of helping teachers to attend to both aspects.

In terms of the relevance of utilizing a foreign language literacy-based approach in China, this study was a first attempt to utilize Kern’s approach in China. In another introduction of Kern to Chinese teachers, terminology could be simplified, everyday concepts and contradictions more explicitly be addressed, and additional relevant ways of linking literacy to instruction in Chinese
classrooms using local textbooks be modeled. Thus, the insights described in the previous sections provide a strong foundation for ways to more effectively mediate this new concept to Chinese teachers. Further study would be needed to reveal whether this could be usefully employed in other Chinese universities, or whether some aspects of this approach could be utilized in the more examination-centered English instruction in secondary schools.

This study provided limited data reflecting how teachers’ instruction was mediating students’ literacy practices through observing general student participation and easily observed student discourse. Bi’s students were active in interpreting meaning in a number of activities and were observed to imitate her use of literacy-related expressions, suggesting they were taking up her concept of literacy to some extent. In Feng’s class, there was no evidence that students had an interest or confidence in interpreting texts themselves. Further investigations analyzing students’ responses over time could deepen our understanding of the effect of changing teacher conceptualizations on student learning. It would also be valuable to examine the concepts of those students of teachers using a literacy-based approach to instruction. In this study only the responses of some of the students were noticeable, so it would be useful to know if these activities mediate the understanding of a majority of students, or only a part of the group. If utilizing Kern’s approach in China, it would be worthwhile to further examine textbooks and examinations. A closer investigation could reveal the extent to which existing instructional materials could support a literacy-based approach to English instruction. It would also be useful to investigate whether students who are taught through a literacy-based approach would gain skills that would allow them to be successful on the Chinese CET4 examination.

Because learning is a social activity, the outcome of teacher development is impacted by the interactions between participants in professional development activities. Though teacher interactions with one another were not the focus of this study, there were indications that reflections with peers had some role in teachers’ conceptual development. Closer investigation of
pair work in the seminar, general meeting discourse and informal discussions outside of meetings could reveal some additional ways in which peer interactions mediate teachers’ understanding of a new concept.

8.6 Conclusion

This study has shown the ways in which Chinese teachers participating in a literacy-based seminar developed new conceptualizations of literacy, and how that impacted their classroom instruction. Through their participation in the seminar, each of the focal participants was observed to develop a new understanding of literacy by utilizing and refining their previous scientific and everyday concepts of literacy and instruction. Each of the three focal participants displayed a different response to the scientific concept presented in the seminar, a response based on their understandings not only of literacy, but also of the role of scientific concepts in instruction. At the end of the study, a true concept of literacy was emerging in only one of the participants, but each teacher was in the process of developing new understandings of literacy instruction. Learning Kern’s scientific concept, structured reflecting on practice, and carrying out instructional activities were all essential means of mediation. This study provides insights concerning the paths of teacher development and means of mediation for teachers in general, and specific insights related to mediating the concept of foreign language literacy in China.

This study has shown how Vygotsky’s theory of conceptual development can be effectively linked to teacher professional development. Vygotsky’s description of various kinds of concepts allows for teacher educators to recognize the strengths and importance of both scientific and everyday concepts, and to identify and then aim to replace rule-of-thumb concepts with true concepts. The development of true concepts in the context of teacher education is a time consuming process, but this study shows that once true pedagogical concepts are developed
they enable teachers to adapt their approach to instruction in changing circumstances and facilitate future learning considerably.
Appendix A

Interview Guides for Interviews 1 and 2

Interview One - Questions for Participants

For all participants

1. (Confirm basic facts – see notes on individuals)

2. First, I am just asking this to understand people’s previous experiences a little: Do you enjoy reading or writing in Chinese?

3. Tell me about one (or two) of your most memorable memories of English reading or writing. What do you enjoy most about English reading or writing? What gives you the most trouble?

4. What things did your teachers do with you related to English literacy which you think were useful and you would like to do with your students?

5. How would you describe yourself as a teacher? What do you think is the most effective thing you have done with your students?

6. What do you think of your students’ reading abilities? What can they do and what do they need to learn?

7. (If they indicated willingness to be observed) How do you feel about me coming to your class to observe you? I would visit 3 different periods, for 2-3 times each period. One would begin next week (for 3 weeks), then one would be late in the term (mid-May or June), then one would be next term. I’d like you to not prepare anything special for my observation, but to teach in a natural way.

8. If you are willing to be observed, are your reading classes and listening classes completely separate? If so, what times do you teach reading class?

(Plus possible questions specific to comments made by a particular participant during seminar meetings.)

Interview Two with Teachers

General questions

1. How did you feel your teaching went this term?

2. Did anything go differently in your teaching? Did you do anything differently in your classes this term?
3. Do you have any ideas for things you may do differently in your teaching in the future?
4. Were there any ideas we talked about in the seminar this term that you are still thinking about or thinking over?
5. Do you think you will be able to put any ideas from the seminar into your teaching? What might make it hard for you to do that?
6. Looking over this sheet – what was the most impressive part of the seminar for you?
7. Did you feel the seminar presented you with some challenges? If so, what were they?
8. Did the seminar make you think about your own abilities in reading and writing English?

Specific questions (examples)

Teacher D

- You said you got a lot from the seminar, what ways do you think it helped you?
- Could you tell me more about why you mentioned Kern’s article was most helpful to you?

Teacher J

- We missed you the last several meetings – were you finding your work very busy?
- Project: What did you hope to find out from the project? What did you find?

Teacher A

- Are there new goals that you have for teaching your students now?

Teacher F

- Do you think your teaching has changed this semester?

Teacher B

- (Question posed in advance) What has helped you to take Kern’s ideas and use them in your classes?
Appendix B

Example Interview Guide for Debriefing Interview

(Excerpted from Interview with Bi)

Class 1 (11/20/08)

1. review of processes in text
2. students read and act their processes
3. discussion of how author uses indirect methods to show ideas
   a. students find sentences in Text A which imply various things
   b. explanation of reading between lines (text)
   c. begin looking at first two paragraphs of Text B to read between lines
4. read Text B
   a. students read quickly on own
   b. students check answers in groups

General questions
- How does having me in the class observing seem to affect you and/or the students?
- Did you feel you went slower than expected in these two classes?
- Could you estimate how many of the same students volunteered in both classes?

Class 1  (times in parentheses indicate segments of video we watched)
- Do you remember what you did in the previous class?
- From 6:00 – what was it you said to the students at the beginning?
- How did you decide to focus on the processes in the text? (Was this a teacher’s book suggestion?)
- (from 7:20-8:00) What had you done with the processes before?
- Did you have criteria for what things would be mentioned in this review?
- (from 11:25-12:30) What are you trying to do here? (Did you plan this in advance?) Do you think a lot of the students are following you?
- (18:10-19:10) For second time – why did you change the way to do this? How much do you think class was understanding?
- (53:20-54:40) How do you think the student came to this answer?
- (1:06:11-1:07:40) Is this the first discussion of this in your class?
- (Stop in middle of explanation – how much are they following?) – Do you usually do the reading skills section of the text?
- (1:14:00-1:14:50) Did the students say they are mostly concerned with words? Why did you add this explanation?
- Do you think your students had previewed text B?
(1:16:15-1:17:30) Do you think students are guessing new info here? Have you tried this before?

- Why did you put these sentences on overhead?

- (1:29:00-1:31:00) – where did you get the idea of this technique of dropping out the negative?

- What does “get ready for unit 8” mean?
Appendix C

Teacher Presentations of Teaching Activities with Links to Literacy

Each teacher’s presentation is described. My analysis follows in italics, showing the literacy-related concepts from the seminar displayed implicitly as well as explicitly.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Excerpts from presentations (implicitly or explicitly linked items from seminar)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Teaching writing genre (from textbook)</td>
<td>“some theories here… back me up to reevaluate some material in our textbook”, “with a better understanding of literacy I found out some very good material in our textbook about writing”, “I expect that students learn to transfer information into (English) language from a graph or chart… learners will learn some writing strategies of this genre, at last they will learn how to evaluate their writing” (literacy/writing, transformed practice, procedural schemata or strategies, genre, reflection)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Theme-related questions (before intensive study)</td>
<td>“before we start a new text I will design some questions, theme-related question, ask them to discuss… express their opinions”, “the last question usually is directly related to the story”, “this can arouse their interest in learning text A”, “it is linked to collaboration… because usually there will be one or two (questions) related to the text” (situated practice, collaboration)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>Cloze version of text and jumbled sentences (after intensive study)</td>
<td>“the purpose or goal of this activity is [review] … some key words or language points... and maybe this is one way for them to (step) back and look at this article as a whole because not just - they not only have to fill in the blanks but also to rearrange the order of all the paragraphs”, “they are using other abilities not just language. for example the logic… when you talk about something else besides linguistics they pay more attention to it” (interpretation, problem solving)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Teaching English-Chinese translation</td>
<td>“I picked [translation] up this time and I’m taking risks to teach this again based on my understanding of literacy from Kern”, “my purpose is to train students’ comprehension, to introduce some translation skills, to strengthen context awareness, and to arouse genre awareness of my students”, “find out what are the words that are used differently, or what kind of choice his or her peer have made”, “my student’s self-evaluation … she noticed that the sentence pattern in English really different from the pattern of the Chinese sentence… translate word by word. … and she found out she lost her view about the whole context. just focus on ... words” (transformed practice, language use, cultural knowledge, conventions, interpretation)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Topic</td>
<td>Excerpts from presentations (implicitly or explicitly linked items from seminar)</td>
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<td>---------</td>
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<tr>
<td>K</td>
<td>Lead in question</td>
<td>“by lead-in questions I just want to develop their ability of thinking and meanwhile. I try to - (raise) some questions that (are) beyond the text questions”, “I want them to use their knowledge to associate themselves with the theme of text” (situated practice, reflection)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Text related role play</td>
<td>“the purpose for this activity is first to help students have a better and more vivid understanding of the text, and then also I would like to make the class more interesting and lively”, “I have appointed a certain group of students to do the role play in class … the other students will first, try to figure out whether their performance is the same as what is stated in the text”, “[this] can’t be applied to all the texts, it depends on the genre of the text … they have many creative ideas and they also add some scenes to their skit” (interpretation, situated practice, problem solving)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Noting textual coherence, encouraging critical thinking, and finding the main idea</td>
<td>“my purpose is to encourage the students to master skills of coherence in writing... and the second is develop their ability of critical thinking”, “write down the main ideas of each part … before this seminar I always ask them to think of the idea and speak out the ideas... but now... I asked them to write down the main ideas”, “I always think that writing is from reading, so you have to first read then you know ah this is coherence so when you write you know how to” (conventions, reflection, problem solving, interpretation, reading/writing linked)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Z</td>
<td>Student led teaching of a unit from text</td>
<td>“I will divide my students into groups and assign them every task about the text and I will not do it I will just be a stander by” tasks include: introducing the text, presenting meaning of the text, generalizing the rules of grammar, dividing text into sections, and analyzing the (rhetorical) pattern of the text, “listen to their classmates’ explanation to see if they could fully understand the text, and be (clear) about those language points”, “I would give them this task and make them feel and experience how hard it is to learn English and how hard it is for a teacher to give a lesson so that we can understand each other better” (conventions, interpretation, problem solving)</td>
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</table>
Appendix D

Transcription Conventions

[ X: words] short phrase given by another person in the midst of a speaker’s discourse
O: Organizer of the seminar (researcher) spoke
A: Teacher (Ao) spoke
FS, SS: unidentified student speaker (female), multiple students speak
, topic change (demonstrated through intonation or other phonological means, not notable pause)
? rising intonation indicating question
. short pause
(( )) additional information, such as gestures, summary of talk and implied ideas
(3) pauses in seconds
(English) translations from Chinese or words not heard clearly
xxx indiscernible words
… deleted phrases (unimportant)
- restart
CAPS word stressed by speaker
bold emphasis by author
italics read aloud from a written text
Deb debriefing interview
Sem seminar meeting
Obs classroom observation
Asgn written seminar assignment
Int interview with teacher
Proj end of first term project
Port end of second term portfolio
Sm(1)ho(1) handout (1) from meeting (1)
Appendix E

Ao’s Classroom Activities Related to Translation (Observations 7 and 8)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Instructional Activity</th>
<th>Teacher’s Key Discourse and Actions of Group</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Obs 7</td>
<td>introduction</td>
<td>Orientation: What would you do when faced with translation task?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Strategy: Find the main structure of the sentence, then modifiers</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Strategy: Just try to get the idea across – don’t be afraid</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Textbook ex 1 (p. 93)</td>
<td>Orientation: Practice finding main elements</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Draws on class’ ideas to construct answers to first few sentences</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Alternative expressions suggested (some by students) and evaluated</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Asks everyone to create an answer (silently) for final sentences, then share and compare</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Conclusion: translation is flexible</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Homework assigned</td>
<td>Assigns exercise on p. 54</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Orientation: though long, if use these techniques, won’t be hard</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Strategy: more practice will make them less afraid</td>
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<tr>
<td>Obs 8</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>Introduces metalanguage: “source language” “target language”</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Presents principles of translation: faithful, accurate, and graceful</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Discusses which is easier: English to Chinese, or Chinese to English?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Check homework (p. 54)</td>
<td>Reads two students’ answers sentence by sentence, asking class what parts are better, which not as good</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Chinese → English)</td>
<td>Asks for alternatives from class</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Summarizes: though it looks hard, they are getting the basic ideas across</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>Task introduction: now try translating something beautiful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Introduces poem and poet briefly</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Asks what resources they have for translation (encourages them to get help from classmates)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Translate poem (English → Chinese)</td>
<td>Task: translate poem; first read to understand, then try to translate in “beautiful” way (emphasizing “graceful” aspect)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Reminds throughout: they still need to find the subject, they should use resources (including herself), a poem should sound beautiful</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Advises: an idea in poem may not be finished at end of line</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Comments: new genre, she doesn’t have high expectations</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Three volunteers read their translations</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Leads comparison of the lines in 3 versions, focus on difficult parts</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>Presents three published translations of the poem and asks students which they like</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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1 Ao attributed the idea of using a poem to Bi’s presentation in the seminar, which included teaching genres.
| Comments: different genres have different requirements |
| Comments: translating can be interesting |
Appendix F

Bi’s Progress Report Midway through End-of-term Project (Assignment 9)

A Progressive Report of the Final Project
Literacy-based Approach to Teaching Reading in English
06/03/2008

1. Goals
   To further foster students’ literacy by exposing them to various discourses, and getting them involved in discourse practices.

2. Subjects
   Sophomores who have passed CET-4
   A-level classes, mixed majors in Electrical Engineering, Biological Medicine, and Machinery Measuring and Controlling

3. Time
   The last 6 weeks of the fourth term of two-year English curriculum

4. The progress
   Reading & translation (6 hours) --- finished
   Reading & summary writing (6hrs) --- 2 hours to go
   Reading & letter writing (6 hrs) --- just started
   Newspaper reading & writing in response (4 hrs)

5. The rationale
   Literacy-based approaches
   (Combinations of reading, writing & talking, four curricular components)
   Discourses & genres
   Communication-oriented activities
   Student-centered


Li, M. (2012). English curriculum in higher education in China for non-English majors. In J. Ruan & C.B. Leung (Eds.), *Perspectives on Teaching and Learning English Literacy in China* (pp. 105-114): Springer.


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Education

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Teaching Assistant, Research Assistant: The Pennsylvania State University, College Park, PA 2004-2008
Assistant Director Chinese Language Program: Northeast University, Changchun, China. 1995-1998
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Selected Presentations and Publications


