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Teacher development for English language teaching in China: Based on English language teachers' beliefs and practices in New Zealand

Unpublished Ph.D thesis, Faculty of Education, University of Waikato

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ABSTRACT

My study inquired into English language teachers' beliefs and practices in China and in New Zealand. It explored the process of using New Zealand English language teachers' beliefs and practices as a stimulus to promoting and developing Chinese English language teachers' understanding of English language teaching and their practices in the classroom.

Interviews and questionnaires were conducted respectively in both China and New Zealand from May 2007 to November 2007. An action research process took place in China, lasting about four months with three cycles from March to July in 2008. Two English language teachers with the students in their class participated in the action research. The goal of my study was to identify the role that New Zealand English language teachers' beliefs and practices played in helping Chinese English language teachers develop their teaching beliefs and practices so as to promote their students' communication competence in the target language.

On investigation, I found that New Zealand English language teachers' beliefs and practices played a positive role in helping Chinese English language teacher participants develop their teaching beliefs and practices. They provided Chinese teacher participants with an alternative view to construct and reconstruct teaching beliefs and meaning of being an English language teacher. Teachers' previous beliefs assimilated other beliefs that were regarded as helpful to solve the self-perceived problems. However, teachers' existing beliefs still played a role in their new teaching practices.

Some values are hard to change and may not need to be changed. Thus, I argued that cultural congruence had to be achieved between New Zealand teachers' beliefs and practices and Chinese social contexts. I also found that once New Zealand teachers' beliefs and practices were transplanted in China, Chinese teachers adapted and tailored pedagogical practices against contexts, which motivated Chinese teachers to develop



culturally appropriated beliefs and practices when they considered Chinese sociocultural contexts in teaching.

Factors which influenced the application of these new approaches were also explored. Firstly, the Chinese educational and learning environment had a large influence because there are large differences between New Zealand and Chinese educational, cultural and learning environments. Beliefs and practices appropriate in New Zealand may not be so in China since different beliefs and practices have different cultural implications. It is thus unrealistic to transfer directly from New Zealand to China and essential to adapt New Zealand beliefs and practices to suit Chinese contexts.

Secondly, teacher expertise was another influencing factor. This expertise linked to teachers' English language proficiency, their subject matter knowledge and their pedagogical content knowledge. For example, English language proficiency influenced teachers' confidence in practising new teaching and their creativity in creating a target language speaking environment in class. In-depth subject matter knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge were the basis upon which teacher participants practised new teaching and closed the gap between their beliefs and practices. Lacking the knowledge about the nature and process of foreign language teaching prevented them from transferring what they believed to practical activities.

Pedagogical reconciliation was found as the key to achieving socio-culturally appropriate pedagogical practices in Chinese contexts. It balanced and integrated what was introduced to teaching with what had influenced teaching before. This study embraced a positive attitude toward using beliefs and practices from other culture(s) in Chinese English language teacher development and proposed it as an effective teacher development mode for China's English language teacher education programme.