

TEACHING ENGLISH THE LINGUA FRANCA OF ASIA:  
AN INTERVIEW AND OBSERVATION STUDY OF ENGLISH READING INSTRUCTION  
IN THREE BEIJING PUBLIC ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

by

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(Under the Direction of Michelle Commeyras)

ABSTRACT

This qualitative study investigated the English reading instruction and teachers' pedagogical approaches in three elementary schools in Beijing, China. Eleven English teachers in these three elementary schools participated in the study and data were collected through semi-structured interviews, field observations, and documents.

The findings of the study indicated that these teachers of English had covered eight aspects of knowledge when they taught Chinese students how to read in English, and these eight aspects included phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, writing, grammar, and cultural knowledge. Among these eight aspects, the teachers varied mostly with regard to phonemic awareness and phonics instruction. Furthermore, the participating teachers had different concerns in developing their teaching pedagogies. They all had concerns focusing upon the learner, the subject, and the teacher, but it differed on the subcategories within. Some teachers emphasized more of an affective involvement of the learner whereas some were concerned more with the background knowledge of the learner; some focused on the practical aspect of the language whereas some focused more on the target language being a testing

subject; some were concerned with how to facilitate students' learning process and some concerned more with how to lead the class or the learning. These pedagogical differences were the reason for the different approaches these teachers adopted in their classrooms and also determined where they were placed on the locus of control continuum.

**INDEX WORDS:** English Reading in China, Teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL), Beijing Elementary School English Reading Instruction, Teaching Pedagogy, Qualitative Study

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## DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to all the participants in the study and others who are interested in the issue of English teaching in China.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### Introduction and Background of the Study

2005年9月9日，上海市福州路英孚教育二楼教室，一位英国老师和30名中国学生卷入了一场名为“‘持续时间最长英语课’的吉尼斯世界纪录大挑战”风暴。在长达72个小时的课程里，师生们只有每隔八小时15分钟的休息时间，坚决不允许睡觉。医务人员随时待命。他们要在三天三夜无眠的状态下，学完原本长达三个月的英文课程---这是一场彻底的疯狂。

*September 9th, 2005, in an English classroom in Shanghai, a British English teacher and 30 Chinese students were attempting to have the longest English class in order to challenge the Guinness World Records. In 72 hours, they could only take 15 minutes' break for every eight hours and no one was allowed to sleep. Doctors and nurses were prepared at any time. The students and the teacher were going to use only these three days to finish all the English courses that had been designed for three months – this is completely crazy.*

This was a piece of news that was published in the China Education and Research Network (author unknown) in December 15<sup>th</sup>, 2005. In that article, the author used real examples like the one above to show that learning English has become a national campaign in China, and Chinese students spent more than 6,000 hours on learning English in their elementary and middle school years. Furthermore, the author also mentioned that English teaching has become a lucrative industry and has applied all the different methods and strategies used in the world. English has become a must-learn language in China for anyone who wants to receive better education, study abroad, obtain a better job or get promoted.

I have been learning English both in China and in the United States. My life and education in the United States is different, interesting, and challenging compared with my life in Beijing, China. In Beijing, I learned English from textbooks then taught English oral communication and extensive reading in a vocational high school. In the US, my English language skills continue to improve from managing everyday life, being a graduate student of reading education, becoming a certified elementary school teacher and teaching preservice reading methods and assessment courses to undergraduate college students. I have become knowledgeable about teaching reading in US elementary schools. These experiences along with my assistantship as an evaluator of Georgia's implementation of the Reading First Federal program in grades K-3 have led me to wonder: What is beginning English reading instruction like in China's elementary school classrooms?

No one can deny the fact that English has become the language of globalization because of its use in social, economics, and political fields in many countries. Accompanied by the development of the economy, international trades, and intercultural communication, English has become the most popular foreign language in China. The Ministry of Education (2006) has reported that more than 300 million Chinese people are learning English, and the total number of English learners in China will surpass the total number of native English speakers in the world in the next few years.

China has a history of more than 100 years of English teaching and learning. Since 1978, economic development has been the major goal of China, and the teaching of English has developed most significantly in the past 30 years (Bao, 2004). In 2001, English became a required subject starting at third grade (Ministry of Education, 2001a). The Ministry also

suggested that some elementary schools could choose to start English instruction as early as first grade if they had the capacity.

A great deal of effort has been made, and progress has occurred; however, there are problems associated with the implementation of English education in elementary schools (Bao, 2004; Cui, 2002). First of all, the nine-year basic education system in China (six years in elementary school and three years in middle school) is not sufficiently developed for teaching English in the elementary curriculum. Why? Because there is a lack of resources, such as teacher preparation, professional development programs, qualified and experienced English teachers, and quality textbooks for the basic education system. Second, there is a need to develop assessments and evaluations that could inform English instruction in the primary grades. Finally, there is no research and insufficient knowledge about how to teach English reading to China's elementary school children. Cui (2002) pointed out that even though there are more than 400 universities in China that are qualified to offer English as a major, less than 20 universities are qualified to offer PhD programs on English education. Hence, there is a great need for expert teachers, researchers, and scholars in the field of English education.

Given the current situation in Chinese elementary schools regarding English education and my experience of learning and teaching English reading in the United States, it is essential to investigate how English is taught to students in elementary schools. Therefore, this interview and observation study will focus on how Chinese students in elementary schools are taught to read in English.

### Research Rationale and Research Questions

My review of related literature has shown that little is known about teaching students how to read in English at school levels in China. Research studies on teaching English reading

have focused on the tertiary level rather than the school level, and more studies have investigated the teaching and learning of vocabulary and comprehension in English rather than other aspects of learning how to read in English; hence, there is a huge need for empirical study to investigate English reading instruction in elementary and secondary schools in China. For this reason, I conducted this interview and observation study to understand the teaching of English reading in three Beijing elementary schools. My first research question is – *What aspects of English reading are taught in elementary schools in Beijing China and how they are taught?*

Furthermore, the literature review for this study also indicated that little is known about Chinese teachers' pedagogical concerns, so my second research question is - *How do teachers in Chongwen and Xuanwu districts shape their pedagogical approaches of teaching students reading in English?*

#### Significance of the Research

This is a critical moment for English education in China. With China's entry into the World Trade Organization in 2001 and its hosting of the Olympics in 2008, English has been closely associated with Chinese people's daily life. It has become a key to success and to the world outside China. The hunger for learning English has made it a required subject in elementary school.

This study is significant for the following reasons. First, the study targeted the investigation of a rather new phenomenon. It was in the year of 2001 that the Ministry of Education in China required elementary schools to teach English as a compulsory subject (Ministry of Education, 2001a). Seven years have passed, but the teaching of English in elementary school is still in the experimental stage, and there are problems associated with this implementation (Bao, 2004; Cui, 2002). Hence, the purpose of this study is to provide research

evidence on the English teaching instruction in elementary schools in Beijing to inform policy making and the development of pre-service and in-service teacher preparation programs.

Furthermore, while the objectives of English education in elementary school in China have been developed and published (Ministry of Education, 2001b), they have not been explicitly or thoroughly explained. For example, the objectives state that English should first be introduced in third grade although if elementary schools have the capacity they could begin instruction in first grade (Ministry of Education, 2001a). What is unclear, though, is what is meant by capacity.

Second, based on my extensive search of studies in the past 16 years on English teaching in China from different databases, no empirical study investigated the teaching and learning of how to read in English in primary and secondary schools levels. Most of the journal articles, book chapters, and all the conference proceedings that I could retrieve, identified tertiary level university students, either English majors or non-English majors, as their research participants. Hence, this study offers useful information about how basic learning and teaching happens, which will also provide more clues to better help tertiary level teaching and learning.

Third, the disconnect that exists between English education in elementary school and English in secondary school in China provides another rationale for the purpose of this study (Bao, 2006; Liu, 2001). Because elementary schools start English instruction in different grades, some in first grade and some in third, students who finished elementary schools are in different levels in terms of their English ability, which makes it hard for middle school English teachers to teach in order to meet students' different needs (Bao, 2006). Furthermore, the middle school English teachers that I interviewed in the pilot study also reported that the English instruction in elementary schools did not sufficiently prepare students to study English in order to reach the middle school objectives. Some of these teachers mentioned that what students had been taught

in elementary schools was too easy, and many elementary English teachers only paid attention to how to motivate students to learn rather than strategies for learning well. Therefore, when students moved to middle school, they did not have the basic English knowledge and they lost interest in learning English immediately, which caused them to fail in the required national examinations

Fourth, the review of related literature has shown that English reading instruction to Chinese students should cover the five domains of reading including phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension. However, the available research on learning English reading focused on the teaching of vocabulary and comprehension, and little is known about how phonemic awareness, phonics, pronunciation, reading aloud, and fluency are taught in classrooms in China. This study, in contrast, is broad in investigating all the components of reading that are taught in elementary classrooms and it places an equal emphasis on how each of them are taught by teachers.

Fifth, the use of data triangulation has strengthened the quality of the qualitative research (Patton, 2002). Semi-structured interview, observation, and document analysis were ways of data collection. Data from observations and documents such as textbooks, teacher's manuals, students' work samples, and test papers compensated for what could not be obtained from interviews. These different data sources are used to validate the findings of the study.

Finally, although this study focuses on Chinese students in elementary schools, it makes recommendations for teaching English in other countries where there is no strong presence of English outside of the EFL classroom.

## Organization of the Dissertation

This dissertation is organized in the following manner. The first chapter provides an introduction to the background of the study, research purposes and questions, and the significance of the study. The second chapter provides the theoretical framework of the research and reviews relevant literature. The third chapter presents the methodology and research design, the findings of the pilot study, the context of the research site, the introduction of research participants, subjective statements, data collection and analysis, and research trustworthiness and ethnical issues. The fourth chapter presents the findings of the study based on data analysis. The findings include two big sections: the first section provides findings toward the subject of teaching reading and the second section provides findings toward teachers' pedagogical concerns. The fifth chapter is the concluding chapter and discusses the findings and implications for further research.

## CHAPTER 2

### THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES AND RELATED LITERATURE REVIEW

A researcher's theoretical perspective influences what is studied, the methods used, and the reporting of findings (Crotty, 1998). In this chapter, I present the epistemological and theoretical perspectives that influenced the conduct of this research followed by a review of literature related to teaching students how to read in English in China.

#### Epistemology and Theoretical Framework

Ruth Hayhoe and Julia Pan (2001) in their introduction to the edited book "Knowledge Across Cultures" write that it is "crucial that Chinese people know themselves, and build upon their own rich cultural heritage while embracing all that is positive from the international community" (p. 17). Contrary to Occidental philosophies, there is an absence of logic in Chinese philosophy (Weber, 1958). Knowledge was a matter of interpretation rather than scientific evidence (Li, 2006; Zhou, 2006), and was expressed "in the form of parables...rather than of rational argumentation" (p. 433, Weber, 1958). Being a Chinese national, I am deeply influenced by Chinese philosophy. In deciding on the epistemology and theoretical framework of this proposed study, I acknowledge the interpretive nature of Chinese philosophy, and also embrace what I have learned about Western philosophies. My readings of social constructionism (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Crotty, 1998; Schwandt, 2000; Shotter, 1995) provide me the epistemological stances in designing the study, and the readings of symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969) provide the theoretical framework for the study.

Epistemology refers to the “ways of knowing reality” (Dillon, O’Brien, & Heilman, 2000, p. 14). The term social constructionism and social constructivism often appeared in educational research, and these theories share a number of things in common. According to Shotter (1995), studies informed by social constructionism or constructivism both focus on human activities rather than on things or substances; hence, the process of creating knowledge is more important than the process of discovering knowledge. Furthermore, coming from the social constructionism or constructivism perspectives, we do not see knowledge or society being independent from us; rather, it is created by us, and we, in turn, become the product of our creation (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Finally, instead of addressing the causal relationship, social constructionism and constructivism are both concerned with meanings and significances.

In addition to these similarities, Hruba (2001) has made a distinction between the two. Constructivism refers to “knowledge formation in the head” (pp. 51), whereas constructionism deals with “knowledge formation outside the head between participants in social relationship” (pp. 51). In this research, I use the term social constructionism, which argues that “the view that all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practice, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context” (p. 42, Crotty, 1998). The emphasis in social constructionism is that human beings’ generation of meaning does not occur in a vacuum, but instead meanings are constructed by individuals interacting with their social world, and the understanding of this meaning can only be achieved through the interaction between and among the investigator and the investigated (Crotty, 1998; Hruba, 2001; Schwandt, 2000).

Epistemology also has methodological implications (Dillon, O'Brian, & Heilman, 2000). I believe that my participants have constructed their own meaning of teaching through their experience within the social and educational context in China. These meanings affect the teaching practice in their classrooms. In order to capture and understand the complexity of teaching English reading in these three elementary schools in Beijing, I offered my participants opportunities to talk about their experiences, perspectives, and understandings about teaching English reading through interviewing (see appendix A for teacher interview protocol). Through observation, I experienced the classroom context that my participants were in and tried to understand what the teachers told me during interviews and, especially, what they have not said or done (Glesne, 2006). Meanwhile, I am also aware that each interview and observation affects my understanding and interpretation of teaching English reading in these schools, so I am constantly involved in the process of modification in order to have a thorough and fair interpretation.

A social constructionism epistemology demands that the point of view of the social individuals, their understanding, and their meanings should be of primary consideration. Symbolic interactionism, a theoretical perspective that shares the same premise, provides the framework for my study. Symbolic interaction maintains that human beings develop their conception of the world through a process of interaction by acting on things based on the meanings things have for them (Blumer, 1969). The three basic premises laid out by Blumer (1969) are: first, "human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them"; then "the meanings of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interactions that one has with one's fellows"; finally, "these meanings are handled in and modified through an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with the things he or she

encounters” (p. 2). Symbolic interactionism comes in multiple varieties, and the perspective that I hold that influences my study is interpretive interactionism (Denzin, 1992; 2001), which emphasized studying the subjective perspectives that human beings bring to their activities and environment. In addition, I also find that interpretive interactionism is somehow in line with the characteristic of Chinese philosophy, which also emphasized the subjective interpretation made by social individuals.

In this research, it is essential to study what meanings these Chinese teachers of English give to the required textbooks, teachers’ manuals, the national elementary English objectives and syllabi. And it is also necessary to examine how the teachers act upon these symbols in the school contexts while their prior educational, social, and cultural experiences in China have impact on them. The participants became interpreters of these symbols and prior experiences, and their interpretations were derived not only from themselves, but also from the social interactions including people they met in the past or in the setting and important persons that had influences on their lives. A researcher coming from an interpretive interactionist perspective tries to understand the participants’ interpretation through interview, observation, and document analysis. In answering the research questions of this study – 1) what aspects of English reading are taught in elementary schools in Beijing China and how they are taught, 2) what shapes their teaching pedagogies and perspectives of teaching reading, I do not simply report the dimensions of reading that are taught in Beijing, but I investigate in depth how participants in different school settings respond to the same documents similarly or differently, and how they made the decision of adopting certain teaching pedagogies and approaches of teaching students reading in English.

## Related Literature Review

I reviewed literature to answer a few questions that are related to this study of English reading instruction in China. First of all, I reviewed literature to answer a very broad question - what is known about English reading instruction in Chinese classrooms? Reviewing what has or has not been researched in China on English reading instruction was needed in order to place my study in a larger context. The results directed me to what and why I should investigate in order to contribute to the field of teaching Chinese EFL students how to read in English.

Second, I reviewed the literature to answer the question – are Chinese students learning how to read their mother tongue Chinese similarly or differently from learning how to read English? It is known to all that Chinese is a logographic language and has a nonalphabetic writing system. There are no grapheme-to-phoneme correspondences in the pronunciation of Chinese characters. English scripts, however, are different in that phonological knowledge is a crucial step in the process of learning to read. This is a necessary part of literature review because it might influence how Chinese teachers teach students reading in English, which is another focus of this study.

Third, I reviewed literature to answer the question - what does scientifically based reading research say about teaching reading in the US? This question is relevant because I want to use what I have learned as a member of a team evaluating the implementation of Reading First in Georgia in conducting my study in China. In evaluating Reading First my primary responsibility was to observe and code instruction in more than 60 elementary schools in the southeastern state of Georgia in the US. The Reading First program is part of President Bush's No Child Left Behind legislation of 2001 (NCLB, 2001), and is designed to ensure that all children learn to read well by the end of third grade. Based on scientifically based reading

research, the program requires classroom teachers from kindergarten to third grade to systematically and explicitly teach in five domains of reading: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension (U.S. Department of Education, 2004).

Finally, the last question that directed my literature review is - if scientific based reading research has concluded that phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension are domains of reading that should be included when teaching children reading in the US; then should English reading instruction for Chinese children also cover the same five domains of reading? The result of literature review on how Chinese students learn to read their first language indicated both differences and similarities from learning to read English as a foreign language. Therefore, I reviewed research about what kind of teaching is needed and how it might differ. This allowed me to consider if the best practices in teaching English reading in US schools are relevant when teaching Chinese children for whom English is a foreign language. To seek answers I reviewed research on teaching phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension to students learning English as a foreign language. The related literatures on all four questions will provide rich information and solid background knowledge to undergird my study.

*What is known about English reading instruction in Chinese classrooms?*

I have searched in both the English database and the Chinese database. The English database includes ERIC (Education Resource Information Center) and 13 peer reviewed journals tracking back to 1990. First of all, I searched the ERIC database using these terms: *English second language; English foreign language; TESOL; TEFL; second language instruction; second language learning; English curriculum; English teaching and learning; Bilingual education; Reading instruction, English*, and I used *Chin\** as my key word identifier. Secondly, I

used the Bibliography of Asian Studies database by country/subject, China, and by two specific limiters *Secondary Education* and *Teachers & Teaching*. Finally, I searched a list of 13 journals from 1990 to present including *Reading Research Quarterly*; *World Englishes*; *Language, Cultural and Curriculum*; *TESOL Quarterly*; *Research in the Teaching of English*; *Journal of Literacy Research*; *Journal of Education for Teaching*; *Reading Psychology*; *ELT Journal*; *Comparative Education Review*; *Second Language Research*; *Journal of Curriculum Studies*; *Journal of Asian Pacific Communication*. The Chinese database includes the five most authoritative and comprehensive databases: Journal and Magazine Full Text Database (中国期刊全文数据库), Doctoral Dissertation Full Text Database (中国博士学位论文全文数据库), Excellent Master's Thesis Full Text Database (中国优秀硕士学位论文全文数据库), Major Conference Paper Full Text Database (中国重要会议论文全文数据库), and Major Newspaper Full Text Database (中国重要报纸全文数据库).

From the reading the literature I was able to identify three themes that teachers and researchers have been writing about related to the teaching of English reading: 1) research on the teaching of intensive and extensive reading, 2) research on the methods of English language teaching in China, 3) research on the education of Chinese teachers of English.

*Intensive and Extensive Reading in China.* The teaching of English reading is an important part of English teaching in the Chinese context. In primary and secondary school levels, English classes last for 40 to 45 minutes every day, and all the four skills, listening, speaking, reading, and writing are covered, but the emphasis is on reading. In tertiary colleges and universities, students of all majors learn English through intensive and extensive reading classes, and only English majors will have further listening and speaking classes. Although the English teaching practice at the school level helps students to build a base for further English

learning, little is known about teaching and learning English in classrooms at different school levels. Most studies related to teaching English reading focus on tertiary level colleges and universities (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996; Ge, 1993; Ji, 1993; Qian & Xu, 1993; Shen, 1993; Tang, 2002; Wang, 1993; Wang & Xing, 1993; Wu, Z. Y., 1990; Wu, Y. A., 2001; Yang, 2004; Yin & Chen, 2002; Yue, 1990; Zhang & Han, 1993; Zhen & Zou, 1993; Zou, 1993).

Intensive reading is the core foundation course for students at tertiary level universities. However, the name “intensive reading” is disputable. Gu (2003) argued that intensive reading is a reading-based intensive language training course aimed at reading to comprehend text and to learn English; others disagreed, suggesting that intensive reading is neither an intensive English course, nor a reading focused course (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996; Wu, 1990). Rather, it is a text based and teacher centered course, which “integrates all skills and emphasizes the meaning and use of words and knowledge of grammar with some translation” (p. 66, Cortazzi & Jin, 1996). In this course, teachers teach everything including vocabulary, grammar, sentence structure, reading aloud, and fluency based on written texts. Those in favor of this course argue that it permits students to develop a good command of the language and language skills, and it cultivates good learning habits. The opposite view states that the focus of intensive reading courses is hardly on reading skills, the grammar translation and teacher lecturing methods are rather ineffective, students’ motivation and interest are not fully stimulated, authentic contexts in using the language are not provided, and the differences between spoken and written forms of the language are not taught (Wu, 1990; Yue, 1990).

Teachers teach intensive reading following several steps. They first teach new vocabulary and phrases, including the pronunciation, meaning, and usage; then they read aloud and explain the text sentence by sentence, teaching grammar rules and analyzing sentence structure; lastly,

they lead students to do exercises which emphasize grammar points (Wang, 1993). Intensive reading classes enable students to achieve a number of goals. They allow students to read with good pronunciation, expand students' vocabulary and grammar knowledge, and offer a chance for students to improve their speaking and writing skills (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996; Wu, 1990).

Extensive reading, as the name suggests, is a course that requires students to read extensively so they can be exposed to a larger amount of authentic language in order to improve their reading speed and reading comprehension ability. Before an extensive reading class, teachers assign reading tasks; in class, teachers raise comprehension questions and ask students to do summaries or retelling activities; after class, teachers sometimes assign homework, such as writing a report of what students read in class (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996; Wu, 1990).

However, the way extensive reading has been taught has been much criticized (Ge, 1993; Cortazzi & Jin, 1996; Wu, 1990). Ge (1993) declared that teachers' dominant roles in extensive reading classes hold students back from realizing their full potential as language users. Students receive a great deal of language input from teachers, such as vocabulary and comprehension knowledge, but they do not have enough opportunities to practice what they have learned. Other researchers also comment that the Chinese way of teaching extensive reading is not so different from the teaching of intensive reading, which provides few opportunities for students to read extensively and fails to meet the goals of this course (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996; Wu, 1990).

Traditional intensive and extensive reading classes have shown weaknesses and disadvantages, and many Chinese English teachers and researchers requested a change in teaching practices. Most of these studies suggested a student-centered approach (Wang, 1993; Wu, 1990; Zhen & Zou, 1993) and an integration of all the skills in teaching English reading (Ge, 1993; Yue, 1993; Zhen & Zou, 1993). One study (Wang & Xing, 1993) recommended the

application of a discourse approach to the teaching of advanced reading. The student-centered approach to teach reading recommended using reading centers, paired work, group discussions, and student involvement in all kinds of teaching tasks, including text explanation and analysis. Creating a favorable English atmosphere in the classroom to help enhance students' confidence in communicating in English is the greatest strength of this teaching approach.

Traditional intensive reading classes emphasized the teaching of grammar and language structure analysis, but failed to teach the target language as a whole. Yue (1993) compared three freshman English classes and found that when teachers integrated all the listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills into the teaching of reading, students' English proficiency level improved greatly. Ge (1993) and Zhen and Zou (1993) also suggested that integrating listening, speaking, and writing activities in the reading class will further enhance students' reading comprehension. Furthermore, Wang and Xing (1993) proposed the discourse approach, which identified the differences in language and culture between English and Chinese, and suggested that the teaching of advanced English reading should include English linguistic discourse and cultural discourse.

In the Chinese context, reading in English is an activity that happens mostly in English classrooms, so teachers need to find ways to encourage students to read outside the classroom. Qian and Xu (1993) surveyed the amount of reading students in English programs in a university expose themselves to outside the classroom and reported that these students read only .27 English books a week. They asserted that these students spent too little time on reading due to lack of interest and insufficient vocabulary, and suggested that teachers should emphasize reading by creating more elective English courses to increase students' exposure to English reading.

Another reason that inhibits Chinese students from reading extensively is their slow speed in reading in English. Shen (1993) stated that fast reading is an important skill in teaching English reading. Chinese students' slowness in reading in English is caused by their poor reading habits including word by word reading, repeated reading of unfamiliar words or phrases before finishing a complete sentence, vocalization, or mouthing every word while reading, constant dictionary use, and mental translation. Teachers should set up purposeful training sessions to help students overcome these poor habits of reading in English.

Yin and Chen (2002) and Zou (1993) suggested incorporating English literature into the reading class as a way to provide more opportunities for students to read. Yin and Chen (2002) argued that traditional English reading classes tended to be like training centers where students were provided with narrow, exclusive, and fragmented knowledge rather than taught how to actively involve themselves in the pursuit of knowledge to meet the educational purpose. Appropriate use of authentic English literature in reading classes, on the other hand, not only provided an authentic context for the learning of necessary language skills, but also, and most importantly, engaged students in the learning process and taught them to read for pleasure and appreciation. In addition, students could also gain information and knowledge on social, cultural, and historical aspects about English speaking countries from the reading of authentic English literature (Zou, 1993).

Whether English should be the only language used in reading classes in the Chinese context is a matter of debate. Krashen (1981) has argued that second language learning follows the same route as first language acquisition, so teachers should minimize the use of the mother tongue in a second language learning atmosphere. However, the results of a study based on questionnaires and classroom observations in a tertiary level college (Tang, 2002) revealed that

both teachers and students acknowledged the benefit of using Chinese in English classrooms. Appropriate use of the mother tongue in foreign language classrooms tends to be more efficient in teaching difficult and abstract words and concepts; less time consuming in terms of teachers' explanation process, which leaves more time for students to practice; and beneficial as it allows students to compare the differences and similarities of Chinese and English.

*Methods of English Language Teaching in China.* Adamson (2004) examined the history of English teaching in China, and scrutinized the English curricula, syllabus, textbooks, and teaching approaches. According to him, China has undergone some major historical periods: English under the Soviet influence from 1949 to 1960, seeking quality in English education from 1961 to 1966, English in the Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1976, English for modernization under Deng Xiaoping from 1977 to 1993, and English for globalization from 1993 to present. The literature has also pointed out that four methods had been prevalent in the history of English language teaching in China, and they are the grammar-translation method, the audiolingual method, the communicative language teaching method, and the task-based language teaching method (Adamson, 1998, 2004; Anderson, 1993; Cortazzi & Jin, 1996; Dzau, 1990; Ford, 1988; Liu, 2002; Liu & Adamson, 1998; Nunan, 2004; Rao, 1996; Wang, Q. 1999; Yu, 2001).

The history of using a grammar-translation method to teach a second or foreign language can be traced back to more than three centuries ago when Latin and Greek were taught, and the purpose of teaching was for the acquisition of necessary skills to read and understand the classical languages (Chastain, 1988). The grammar-translation method is characterized by its emphasis on reading and writing with little attention given to speaking or listening. Grammar knowledge is important in learning a foreign language and is taught deductively, from rules to examples (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Under the grammar-translation method, the teacher is the

authority, being at the center of the teaching and learning process, and directing all the classroom activities; the learner is considered as a passive receiver, learning what is presented by memorization (Omaggio, 1986).

The grammar-translation method was adopted in English language teaching in China for many years and was the dominant teaching approach in the period under the Soviet influence from 1949 to 1960 (Dzau, 1990; Ford, 1988, Adamson, 2004; Liu & Adamson, 1998). In the textbooks published at that time, the linguistic components focused on pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary, and a typical lesson consisted of 1) a reading passage or a dialogue that included grammar items, 2) all new vocabulary in a box, and 3) grammatical rules and structures in tabulated form. Some of the learning and teaching activities were reading aloud the passage or dialogue, writing and copying new vocabulary, explaining and mechanical translating the English texts or grammar points into Chinese, etc. (Adamson, 2004).

Because the grammar-translation method was not effective in preparing students to speak the language fluently, the US government developed the Army Specialized Training Program (ASTP) with the purpose of providing military personnel who could speak a foreign language fluently in World War II (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). The ASTP adopted the informant method – using a native speaker of the language and a linguist to facilitate the language learning process. Later after the War, language teaching researchers and educators developed the audiolingual language teaching method based on the informant method, structural linguistic theory and behavioral psychology (Richards & Rodgers, 2001; Steinberg, 1993; Stern, 1983).

According to Celce-Murcia (2001), the development of the audiolingual method is based on the assumption that language is a habit of formation, so imitation, memorization, and pattern drills are used to promote the learning of basic language patterns. The audiolingual method

stresses pronunciation from the beginning of language learning, and gives priority to listening and speaking skills, so reading and writing are not suggested to be presented before or simultaneously with listening and speaking skills. Dialogues are used predominantly and grammar structures are presented inductively. Teachers take the active role and are encouraged to correct every error learners make.

The audiolingual method started to emerge in foreign language textbooks in China in the 1960s and was widely promoted in secondary schools in the mid 1970s (Adamson, 2004). The 1961 version textbooks aimed to react to politicization and to improve pedagogical quality in English education, and it also advocated the inclusion of original English language materials. In addition to the dominant grammar-translation method, students were encouraged to memorize the English expressions and sentences, so they would be able to speak English when necessary. The 1963 version textbooks were the first sets of textbooks that included cassette tapes, which reflected the emphasis on oral practices including read-aloud, phonics, and pronunciation, and indicated the starting influence of the audiolingual method (Adamson, 2004).

The audiolingual method was demanding of language teachers and the techniques of memorization and drilling exercises also became tedious and boring for the learners (Rivers, 1968). In addition, Chomsky's theory (1959) of transformational grammar also challenged the assumption of the audiolingual method that language learning was a process of habit formation. All these dissatisfactions led to the emergence of the communicative language teaching method (CLT).

CLT is an indirect language teaching approach introduced in the late 1970s and the 1980s, which encourages learners to achieve language competence based on extensive communicative task engagement instead of teaching language rules, principles, and strategies directly (Celce-

Murcia, Dörnyei, & Thurrell, 1997). It calls for student-centered learning activities rather than teacher lecturing, it concentrates on use and appropriateness rather than on language form, and it favors fluency-focused rather than accuracy-focused activities; it also takes learners' differences and the variations in language into consideration (Maley, 1984).

Even though the idea of applying CLT to language teaching was first introduced to China around the late 1970s, no substantial progress was made until the early 1990s (Yu, 2001). In 1979, Li Xiaojun and her Canadian colleagues published the first series of English textbooks in China based on the communicative approach to language teaching. These textbooks focused on putting students in the central role in classroom learning and providing students with opportunities to master all four skills rather than just intensive and extensive reading (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996). Later Li (1984) published her article "In Defense of the Communicative Approach" claiming that the focus of learning a language is learning to communicate and called for the adoption of CLT to replace the traditional grammar-translation method. CLT targets training students to be able to listen, speak, read, and write English, in order to solve Chinese students' problem of not being able to understand and speak English (also known as the deaf and dumb English). Thus, the State Education Commission (1992) published a new national English syllabus emphasizing the ability to be able to communicate in English to replace the old syllabus, which solely emphasized reading and writing skills.

Though the advantages of CLT were obvious, there was still resistance toward the implementation of CLT from both teachers and students (Anderson, 1993; Hu, 2003; Rao, 1996; Wang, 1999; Yu, 2001). This resistance toward CLT centered on the following aspects. First of all, there were many factors that limited teachers' adoption of CLT. Most of the teachers were not qualified enough to teach English communicatively. Most of the English language teachers in

China are Chinese nationals, who learned English based on the traditional grammar-translation method, and most of them have never been to any native English speaking countries or talked with foreigners. They were not able to speak English competently enough to teach their students. Furthermore, the syllabus called for the adoption of CLT, but in-service teachers had never been trained in how to teach English communicatively. Even though there were professional development activities, the training emphasized more on content areas rather than on teaching methods (Anderson, 1993; Cortazzi & Jin, 1996). In addition, economically speaking, the low salary of English teachers caused a lack of motivation in pursuing better ways to teach English. Many of the teachers held a second or third teaching job, so they did not spend much time in researching how to better apply CLT to classrooms (Yu, 2001).

Secondly, the contextual factors (Hu, 2003) limited the use of CLT. The Chinese context is different from many other countries where English is taught as a foreign language. And these contextual factors, such as scarcity of authentic language atmosphere and materials, oversized classrooms, lack of financial resources, and shortages of teachers in rural regions, made it inappropriate to adopt CLT in many classrooms in the underdeveloped regions of China.

Thirdly, CLT did not meet the needs of teachers and students in China (Anderson, 1993). CLT is aimed at training learners with communicative competence so they could be able to use the language to communicate effectively and efficiently. This approach may be a good method in the United States or in other countries; however, it did not serve the English learning and teaching situation in China. In English classrooms in secondary schools, the teachers' primary responsibility was to prepare students for the English section in national examinations and communicative skills were not the focus of those tests. In addition, there were also many

students who did not think that they would use English in their future jobs and had no hope of visiting English speaking countries.

Students did not respond favorably to CLT as well (Anderson, 1993; Rao, 1996). Under the influence of Chinese traditional culture, learning is considered a serious pursuit that students should seek from respected others (usually their teachers); memorization is viewed as one of the most effective strategies in learning. CLT countered this traditional belief in a way that made students the center of the classroom and suggested using games and role-playing as learning activities. Students felt confused about taking the center roles and viewed games and role-plays as playful activities that were inappropriate for classroom settings.

The situation in China has been changing. With the development of science and technology, English today is considered a skill one has to have in many fields, and more and more jobs require their employees to have the ability to communicate in English. Science and technology have also allowed native English speaking teachers and authentic English materials to be more and more accessible, and teacher quality has also improved greatly so that many teachers are able to speak fluent English now. However, there are still problems of unbalanced development between urban and rural schools and the heavy pressure of national examinations. In addition, Chinese traditional beliefs of learning still prevail among teachers and students. Hence, an effective way of teaching English probably is to combine the traditional Chinese methods of teaching with CLT (Rao, 1996; Wang, 1999), as Wang's study (1999) indicated that both traditional analytic methods and communicative methods should be practiced in language classrooms in China.

Nunan (2004) suggested that CLT is a broad philosophical approach and task-based language teaching method (TBLT) represents “a realization of this philosophy at the levels of

syllabus design and methodology” (p. 10). There are a number of definitions describing what the task is. Long (1985) defines a target task as:

A piece of work undertaken for oneself or for others, freely or for some reward. Thus examples of tasks include painting a fence, dressing a child, filling out a form, buying a pair of shoes...In other words, by ‘task’ is meant the hundred and one things people do in everyday life, at work, at play and in between (p. 89).

When those tasks are transformed from the real world to the classroom, they become pedagogical in nature, and Breen (1987) defines a pedagogical task as

...any structured language learning endeavour which has a particular objective, appropriate content, a specified working procedure, and a range of outcomes for those who undertake the task. ‘Task’ is therefore assumed to refer to a range of workplans which have the overall purposes of facilitating language learning – from the simple and brief exercise type, to more complex and lengthy activities such as group problem-solving or simulations and decision-making (p. 23).

Nunan (2004) also offered a definition for a pedagogical task that

...[it] is a piece of classroom work that involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language while their attention is focused on mobilizing their grammatical knowledge in order to express meaning, and in which the intention is to convey meaning rather than to manipulate form. The task should also have a sense of completeness, being able to stand alone as a communicative act in its own right with a beginning, a middle and an end (p. 4).

Even though the definitions are different, they all emphasized the communicative language use in which learners’ attention should be given to meaning instead of grammatical

form. Learners should be active participants in pair-work or group work, and teachers should be selectors, choosing or creating tasks that suit the learners' need. In addition, teachers should also be prepared to provide demonstration of task procedures to facilitate the learning process (Nunan, 2004; Richards & Rodgers, 2001).

The current series of textbooks (the 2001 version) used in China promote the TBLT method, and the 2001 National English Curriculum Standard (NECS) emphasizes students' comprehensive language ability which includes five big components: language knowledge (语言知识), language skills (语言技能), learning strategies (学习策略), emotional attitude (情感态度), and cultural awareness (文化意识). The NECS (2001) requires teachers to cultivate students' learning interest and to encourage students' learning from real tasks by practicing, thinking, participating, communicating and cooperating.

*Education of Chinese Teachers of English.* Two themes are present in the literature on English teachers: one called for bringing cultural perspectives of the English language into the teaching practice (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996; Gu, 2005; Lessard-Clouston, 1996; Tang, 1993; Zhang, 2003a), and the other suggested that pedagogical knowledge should be emphasized more in the training of Chinese EFL teachers (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996; Hu, 2005; Zheng & Adamson, 2003; Zuo, 1990).

The cultural perspectives of the English language involve both linguistic and sociocultural elements that language teaching should take into consideration. Linguistically speaking, what makes teaching most challenging is the use of slang and the *so-called pitfalls* defined by Tang (1993). The so-called pitfalls are culturally-loaded words and phrases that are not comprehensible when translated into Chinese literally. Tang used the *guinea pig* as an example to show that the lack of cultural knowledge would lead to inappropriate comprehension.

In a context introducing how German athletes were treated like guinea pigs, some Chinese people understood it as pigs from Guinea. Likewise, understanding that a restroom is not a room for people to take a rest and a teashop is not a shop to sell tea also requires learners to be familiar with the cultural context. English is full of words and phrases like those examples, and Chinese EFL teachers should be aware of them in order to better help their students.

In addition, even though English is a world language, British English and American English differ in many aspects such as pronunciation, spelling, punctuation, and the use of words. One characteristic of the English taught in China is that there is no standard to require which English, British or American, should be taught in schools (Zhang, 2003a). Some EFL teachers learned British English from their teachers, so they continue to teach their students British English; some teachers have a preference for American English, so they teach their students what they prefer. Furthermore, the worst situation is that some teachers are not aware of the differences between British English and American English. It is possible that students who learned British English in middle school and got used to the British pronunciation and spelling, are judged wrong for using British pronunciation and spelling by their high school English teacher only because this teacher learned American English (Zhang, 2003a). Training should be provided to Chinese EFL teachers to make them aware of the differences, and a national unified standard should also be determined in order to minimize these types of confusion.

Sociocultural elements provide a context for language use and should be part of language teaching. Lessard-Clouston (1996) interviewed 16 Chinese EFL teachers on their views of culture in language learning and teaching. Among more than 300 definitions of *culture*, he emphasized looking at the aesthetic, sociological, semantic and pragmatic perspectives of culture in language learning and teaching. The results indicated that even though most of the teachers

recognized the necessity to include teaching of culture in their classrooms, not many did so in their own classrooms. Furthermore, several teachers (19%) admitted that they did not include any cultural aspects of the language into their teaching because they think that students learned English mainly for examinations, not for future use. The sample of 16 teachers was rather small; however, it still represents many Chinese EFL teachers' beliefs toward embracing culture in the teaching of language. The fact that Chinese EFL teachers lack of intercultural experience with the West could be one factor that explains this situation. As Gu (2005) suggested, more intercultural experience will familiarize Chinese EFL teachers with the sociocultural aspects of the English language, change their inappropriate beliefs, and allow them to adopt more a critical and comprehensive perspective in language teaching.

The roles teachers play in classrooms influence the approaches teachers apply in their teaching. Traditionally in the Chinese context, teachers were viewed as gardeners, role models, and the fount of knowledge (Adamson, 1998; Gu, 2005; Rao, 1996). Since the job of teaching was to pass knowledge to students, teachers only needed to know the subject well, and little attention was given to pedagogical skills. Therefore, in teacher education and in-service training programs, the emphasis was to improve EFL teachers' proficiency in English rather than to teach and strengthen teachers' pedagogical knowledge (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996; Hu, 2005; Zuo, 1990). Hu (2005) scrutinized the 1984 and 1993 versions of the unified curriculum for EFL teacher education programs at teacher colleges, and found that neither version devoted much course time to pedagogical knowledge and skills. Cortazzi and Jin (1996) also pointed out that many Chinese EFL teachers' expectation for in-service training courses was to improve their English language skills rather than to learn teaching pedagogy and methodology.

Furthermore, the lack of practical experience was another problem in the English teacher preparation program (Hu, 2005). The 1993 curriculum, compared with the 1984 curriculum, gave teachers more freedom in the teaching practice; for example, it allowed teachers to offer elective courses and the choice of standard use, it incorporated communicative language teaching, and it doubled educational related courses. However, the practicum course remained the same: it was six weeks in length and was offered at the very end of the program. The six weeks student teaching was the first and only time that pre-service English teachers would go out to classrooms to observe and practice teaching under supervising teachers. Two problems existed in this practicum: firstly, the student teaching experience came too late at the very end of the program, which left pre-service teachers little time to reflect in order to improve their teaching; and secondly, supervising teachers were not well trained professionals, which provided poor quality supervision.

In general, the problems that existed in the teacher education programs have a direct influence on the teaching practice in classrooms. The earlier section mentioned that students depend heavily on the flexible use of strategies in learning English reading, accordingly, a considerable amount of teaching should be devoted to the teaching of strategies, but it is evident from reading teacher education literature that strategies and methodologies are not focal points in teacher training programs. In addition, except for some summer intensive training programs, the educational system provides few opportunities for in-service teachers to go back to school to receive formal graduate education. Teachers are not aware that they could be researchers exploring English teaching and learning in their classrooms, and this could be one explanation of the lack of research about English teaching and learning at the school level.

These findings also provided some implications: 1) research and studies on teaching English reading focused on the tertiary level rather than the school level, and there is a huge need to investigate English reading teaching in elementary and secondary schools in China; 2) since phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension are important domains that should be included in teaching reading in an EFL context, more studies and research should be conducted emphasizing how they are taught; 3) more empirical research should be conducted in school classrooms in China so that empirical evidence could be used to inform future teaching and research.

*Is learning how to read in Chinese similar or different from learning how to read in English?*

Since some readers of this dissertation may not be familiar with Chinese, I will briefly introduce how reading Chinese is taught in elementary schools in Mainland China. Beginning literacy instruction in China starts with the teaching of *Pinyin*. Pinyin is formally called *Hanyu Pinyin*: *Hanyu* means the Chinese language, *pin* means spell, and *yin* means sound (“Pinyin” 2008). It is the official Mandarin romanization system, and some people also translated *Pinyin* into *phonetic transcription* in English (Pinyin- the official Chinese System of Romanizing Chinese, n. d.). Each new Chinese character is paired with the Pinyin representation of it when teaching character recognition. For example, in learning the character 上 (meaning above or up), the Pinyin *shàng* is provided to facilitate students’ acquisition of the pronunciation of the character and promotes students’ phonological awareness. The mark above the letter a ` shows the tone of the Pinyin, since Chinese have five different tones that differentiate the meaning of syllables (It is worth of mentioning that the Chinese here refers to Mandarin).

The current Pinyin system was approved and issued by the National People’s Congress on February 11<sup>th</sup>, 1958 and became the international standard (ISO7098) of “Latinized Spelling

Method of Chinese” in 1982 (Pinyin list, n. d.). Chinese Pinyin consists of 21 initial consonants and 6 finals or compound vowels (Please see Appendix C for the Pinyin List). There are four tones<sup>1</sup> in Chinese: 1) smooth tone, marked “ˉ” on the top of the vowel or “1” at the end of the syllable, 2) rising tone, marked “ˊ” on the top of the vowel or “2” at the end of the syllable, 3) upper tone, marked “ˇ” on the top of the vowel or “3” at the end of the syllable, and 4) falling tone, marked “ˋ” on the top of the vowel or “4” at the end of the syllable.

Chinese and English are different in many ways. In terms of phonology, the basic unit of speech in Chinese is the syllable. A typical Chinese syllable consists of only an onset and a rime, and has four different tones that differentiate the meaning of syllables (Li, Anderson, & Zhu, 2007). For example, the syllabus *fu* has an onset *f* and a rime *u*, and has four different tones representing different meanings: *fu(1)*, *fu(2)*, *fu(3)*, and *fu(4)*. In terms of orthography, Chinese is a logographic language and has a nonalphabetic writing system. Each Chinese character represents a morpheme as well as a syllable. For example, the character 富 has the syllable of *fu* and pronounces *fu(4)*. Chinese also has more homophones than most languages. Compared with the large number of Chinese characters, there are only about 400 possible syllables or about 1200 when tones are considered (Shu & Anderson, 1997). One syllable could have many representing characters meaning completely different things. For example, the characters 富 (*meaning rich*), 副 (*meaning vice- or auxiliary*), 赴 (*meaning go to or attend*), 负 (*meaning negative or lose*), 傅 (*meaning tutor or the surname of a person*), 妇 (*meaning woman*), 复 (*meaning again or duplicate*), 父 (*meaning father*), 覆 (*meaning overflow or cover*) all have the same syllable *fu(4)*, which means that their pronunciations are the same, but their meanings are different. In addition, most Chinese characters also consist of both a phonetic component and a semantic component, in

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<sup>1</sup> It is debatable concerning how many tones there are in Mandarin Chinese. Most of the researchers say 4 tones and some say 5 – and the fifth one is light tone, not marked or with “5” at the end of the syllable (Pinyin list, n. d.).

which the phonetic component reflects a syllable or the pronunciation and the semantic component is associated with meaning or a morpheme (McBride-Chang & Ho, 2002). For example, the character 妈 [pronounced *ma(1)*, meaning *mother*] consist of a phonetic component of 马 [pronounced *ma(3)*, meaning *horse*] and a semantic component of 女 [pronounced *nü (3)*, meaning *woman*].

Morphemes are the smallest unit of meaning in words and morphological awareness is children's awareness of "morphemic structure of words and their ability to reflect on and manipulate that structure" (Carlisle, 1995, p. 94). Both English and Chinese have morphemes. In English, for example, all the words *superman*, *superior*, and *superpower* share the same morpheme *super*. In Chinese, the term 杯子 (*cup*), 孩子 (*child*), and 儿子 (*son*) also share the same morpheme 子 (has a lot of meanings, but it means the small thing in this context) pronounced *zi (3)*. Research has indicated that morphological awareness is important for children learning to read both alphabetic languages, such as English, (Carlisle, 1995; Carlisle & Nomanbhoy, 1993) and Chinese orthographies (McBride-Chang, C. & Ho, 2000; Shu & Anderson, 1997; Shu, Anderson, & Wu, 2000; Shu, Anderson, & Zhang, 1995). McBride-Chang et al. (2005) conducted an experimental study investigating the relations among phonological awareness, morphological awareness, vocabulary and word recognition among approximately 100 second graders each from Beijing, HongKong, Korean and the United States, and found that morphological awareness is more important in reading Chinese, whereas phonological awareness is more important in reading English. Wang, Cheng, and Chen (2006)'s study supported their findings by saying that "learning to read an alphabetic system entails acquiring the grapheme-phoneme correspondences...[and] learning to read Chinese, a morphographic system, entails learning the grapheme-morpheme correspondences" (p. 543).

Studies of Chinese have suggested that phonological awareness is important (McBride-Chang & Ho, 2002; Shu, Anderson, & Wu, 2000; Yin, Anderson, & Zhu, 2007). McBride-Chang and Ho (2002) tested 106 three and four years old Chinese children in Hong Kong on Chinese syllable deletion, vocabulary, short-term verbal memory, speech perception, speeded naming, English letter naming and Chinese character recognition, and found that 1) speech perception is associated with phonological awareness across languages, 2) phonological awareness emerges as the primary phonological processing skill in normally developing Chinese readers, and 3) letter naming knowledge predicts unique variance in Chinese character recognition.

Shu, Anderson, and Wu (2000) investigated the role of phonological awareness in learning to read Chinese among 113 second, fourth and sixth graders in Beijing. They believed that the role of phonetic awareness, meaning “insight into the structure and function of the phonetic component of semantic phonetic compound characters (Shu, Anderson, & Wu, 2000, p. 57)”, in reading Chinese is parallel with the role of phonemic awareness in reading English; the only difference is that phonemic awareness “has to do with paying attention to units of speech, whereas phonetic awareness is inextricably tied to orthographic units” (p. 57). They concluded that phonetic awareness continues to develop over the elementary school years, which was reflected by the increasing influence of phonetic regularity on the performance of children in higher grade and the increasing percentage of phonetic-related errors among older children. Their findings supported the early research conclusion that factors influencing the pronunciation of Chinese have proved to be similar to the factors influencing pronunciation in English, so Chinese readers also used phonological information, or Chinese orthography-phonology correspondence rules to decode some Chinese characters (Ho & Bryant, 1997).

Yin, Anderson, and Zhu (2007) studied the developmental stages in reading English words among 118 Chinese students in second, fourth, and sixth grades in Tianjin, China, and the results revealed several points. First of all, both Chinese children and English speaking children acquire basic literacy skills in a similar manner. Chinese children follow stages in alphabetic reading development similar to those of native English-speaking children: the pre-alphabetic stage, the partial alphabetic stage, and the full alphabetic stage. Second, Chinese first graders learn Pinyin in the first three months of school. Because the sound values of letters in Pinyin overlap with the sound values of letters in English, Chinese children's may benefit to some extent of using Pinyin to decode English words; even though it is rather limited and it will not change the overall patterns of learning to read English words. Finally, the current "look and say" method of teaching how to read in Chinese is not a helpful way to help Chinese students learning reading in English.

In conclusion, even though English and Chinese have a lot of differences, the studies I reviewed indicated that they are similarities across the languages and Chinese students also followed similar developmental stages in learning the two languages. Therefore, it is necessary for me to review more research to see what is suggested about teaching students in the United States how to read in English.

*What does scientifically based reading research say about teaching reading in the US?*

Teaching is both an art and a science (Walpole & McKenna, 2004). The art of teaching is intangible and takes many complex factors into consideration, such as teachers' emotion and students' individuality and background; the science of teaching looks for experimental research evidence to improve our teaching methods and results. The National Reading Panel (2000) reviewed a large number of experimental and quasi-experimental studies and reported that

scientifically based reading instruction should include the teaching of phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension.

Phonemic awareness is the awareness that spoken language consists of a sequence of phonemes (Yopp & Yopp, 2000). The NRP report (2000) concluded that explicit phonemic awareness instruction is highly effective in improving children's phonemic awareness, reading, and spelling skills under a variety of teaching conditions. Teachers need to remember that phonemic awareness training is an important part of beginning reading instruction, and, because there are many ways to teach phonemic awareness, teachers should carefully evaluate each method and use the most appropriate one to their own students.

Phonics refers to the various approaches designed to teach children about the orthographic code of the language and the relationships of spelling patterns to sound patterns (Stahl, 1992). The NRP examined five different approaches to phonics instruction: analogy-based phonics, analytic phonics, embedded phonics, phonics through spelling, and synthetic phonics. It reached the following four conclusions: 1) systematic phonics instruction produced significant benefits for students across all grade levels from kindergarten to 6<sup>th</sup> grade, 2) systematic synthetic phonics instruction was significantly effective for disabled, low-achieving, and low socioeconomic status students' reading skills, 3) systematic phonics instruction helps to improve the spelling ability of good readers more than that of poor readers, and 4) systematic early phonics instruction produced the biggest impact in kindergarten and 1<sup>st</sup> grade even though conventional belief suggested that phonics instruction was not appropriate for younger students. Teachers should keep in mind that effective phonics instruction should be integrated with other reading instruction such as phonemic awareness, fluency, and comprehension in order to provide the best reading instruction.

Fluency is reading with speed, accuracy and proper expression without conscious attention (IRA, 2002), and guided repeated oral reading and independent silent reading are the two most commonly used approaches for fluency instruction (NRP, 2000). The NRP reported that guided repeated oral reading procedures had a significant and positive impact on word recognition, fluency, and comprehension for all students, good readers as well as struggling readers, across all the grade levels. In addition, even though it is widely recognized that engaging students in wide, independent, silent reading increases reading achievement, there is no sufficient research evidence to suggest the amount of independent silent reading students should do in order to improve their reading skills.

Vocabulary development is a critical aspect of successful reading. Vocabulary is stored information about the meanings and pronunciations of words necessary for communication, and the five different types of vocabulary are listening vocabulary, speaking vocabulary, reading vocabulary, writing vocabulary, and sight vocabulary (IRA, 2002). The NRP report (2000) suggested that vocabulary development leads to gains in comprehension, so teachers should provide both direct and indirect quality vocabulary instruction. Some effective ways of vocabulary instruction include keyword method, incidental learning, repeated exposure, preteaching of vocabulary, restructuring reading materials, and context method.

Comprehension is defined as the construction of the meaning of a written text through a reciprocal interchange of ideas between the reader and the message in a particular text (IRA, 2002). The findings from the NRP report (2000) revealed that teaching a combination of reading comprehension strategies is most effective in helping students to improve reading comprehension. Teaching comprehension strategies in natural settings and content areas can be most effective. Strategies such as comprehension monitoring, cooperative learning, graphic

organizers, story structure, question answering, questioning generating, and summarization have proven to be the most scientific based comprehension instruction strategies, and should be used as part of a multiple-strategy method.

What has been reviewed so far is a summary of what is contemporarily termed scientifically based reading research (SBRR). SBRR is having an impact on reading instruction in classrooms in the United States. It is important for us to give credit to these scientifically based research and studies; however, in the meantime, we should keep in mind that teaching is more than a science, and we should go beyond this evidence to include the research evidence that is not based on experiments and quasi-experiments (Pressley, Duck, & Boling, 2004).

*Should English reading instruction to Chinese students also cover the five domains of reading including phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension?*

Before answering this question, I want to first review differences between teaching English as a second language (ESL) and teaching English as a foreign language (EFL). When I searched for literature related with EFL teaching, I found that many articles treat ESL and EFL as two terms for one thing. Being an English language learner and an English teacher, I think that there are more differences than similarities between the two.

The most predominant difference is that in the EFL situation, English is not the language of instruction (Bao, 2006). In the ESL situation, the teachers are usually native English speakers or at least someone who can speak English fluently and accurately, and English is the instructional language for all subjects. In the EFL situation, however, the instructional language is the native language, and English is considered a subject just like Math or Social Studies. Furthermore, most of the classroom English teachers in the foreign context, such as China, are themselves language learners who cannot speak completely fluent and error-free oral English

(Bao, 2006). Secondly, the language atmosphere is seldom rich in the target language in the EFL situation. Students cannot expect to be immersed in an English atmosphere both orally and in print, which limits students' opportunities to learn the language through real life experience and practice. Finally, in countries where English is taught as a foreign language, such as China, English materials and books are not widely available. Students mainly rely on textbooks to learn the language (Bao, 2006).

Taking all these factors into consideration, will phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension be necessary domains of reading to be taught in China where English is a foreign language? The literature I reviewed in the earlier sections have already indicated that Chinese students follow the similar developmental stages leaning to read English as learning to read Chinese, so I looked for more research to see if phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension should be taught to Chinese students learning to read in English.

The search results show that most studies and research conducted about how Chinese students learn to read in English focused on vocabulary and comprehension, which suggested that these are important components that English reading instruction should include. However, are phonemic awareness, phonics, and fluency important components in learning to read English in China? I could not find much related literature about the teaching of phonemic awareness, phonics, and fluency to Mainland Chinese students, so I broadened the search and included the teaching of these domains of reading to students in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and other countries where English is a foreign language.

*Literature related to the teaching of phonemic awareness and phonics.* In the field of beginning reading instruction for native English speaking children, there has been a debate

between explicit phonic instruction and the whole language approach (Baumann et al., 1998). In the late 1990s, however, the pendulum was replaced by a balanced approach to reading instruction, in which phonics teaching should be combined with the whole language approach (Smith, 2003). Many foreign language researchers and teachers have advocated embracing the whole language approach in EFL teaching (De Godev, 1994; Lems, 1995; Louton & Louton, 1992; Redmond, 1994), but little has been written on how phonics should be taught in the EFL classroom (Liaw, 2003), even though it has been recognized as an important skill for EFL students to improve their spelling and comprehension (Birch, 2002). Some Chinese researchers and teachers also realized the importance of teaching phonemic awareness and phonics to Chinese students and argued that it is useful and beneficial for children to have these skills in learning how to read English (Chien & Chen, 2002; Chen, 2006; Ding & Peng, 1998; Kong & Wang, 2005; Leou & Huang, 2006; Liaw, 2003; Liu, 1995; Qiao, 2003; Wang, L., 2003; Wang, M. T., 2006; Wang, P. G., 1999; Xu, 2002; Zhang, 1998). Among all these articles, six are empirical studies, and these studies will be discussed below (Chien & Chen, 2002; Leou & Huang, 2006; Liaw, 2003; Wang, L., 2003; Wang, M. T., 2006; Xu, 2002).

Chien and Chen (2002), Leou and Huang (2006), and Liaw (2003) studied elementary school students in Taiwan, and one finding they shared in common is that when explicit instruction on phonemic awareness and phonics is provided in classrooms, students made great improvement on their vocabulary and reading comprehension. Both Wang Lu (2003) and Wang Mintao (2006) studied elementary school children in Mainland China, and reported that teaching English through the International Phonetic Alphabet is not the best method; instead, providing children with phonemic awareness and phonics instruction leads to positive gains on students' spelling and comprehension ability. Xu (2002) explored the development of Chinese and English

phonological awareness for Chinese Mandarin-speaking children and found that there is a strong correlation between children's development of Chinese and English phonological awareness. Teaching English phonemic awareness and phonics can not only facilitate students' English learning but also their learning of Chinese.

*Literature related to the teaching of fluency.* Fluency has been a neglected area in reading instruction in US classrooms (Allington, 1983). The same is true in the English classrooms in China. No empirical study on reading fluency was found during my extensive search, but a few articles investigated Chinese students' oral speaking fluency development (DeVeto, 2003; He & He, 1999; Sorest, 2005; Zhang, 1999; Zhou, 2001). Is English reading fluency important in the foreign context? The answer is Yes! Fluency is an important reading skill even in the foreign language setting (Taguchi, Takayasu-Maass, & Gorsuch, 2004). Many foreign language researchers have investigated using extensive reading to help EFL students achieve reading fluency and reported that extensive reading is effective in increasing EFL students' reading speed and comprehension (Bell, 2001; Elley & Mangubhai, 1983; Robb & Susser, 1989). Taguchi, Takayasu-Maass, and Gorsuch (2004) explored if assisted repeated reading would work as effectively as extensive reading among Japanese college students, and found that assisted repeated reading provided a distinct form of scaffolding for EFL/ESL students to improve their fluency and comprehension.

Furthermore, I conducted a pilot study in 2004 to investigate what does teaching students to read in English mean to teachers in Beijing at different school levels. In that study, I interviewed some elementary and secondary school teachers in Beijing asking their opinion on teaching fluency using reading aloud (Hoffman, Roser, & Battle, 1993), silent reading (Anderson, 2000), and repeated reading (Samuels, 1979). I got various responses: the elementary teachers

supported teaching fluency and agreed that it was an important reading skill, while some secondary school teachers mentioned that fluency was not directly related to students' final objective – passing the English examination.

Based on the research evidence presented above, I think it is important to teach reading fluency in the EFL context. Therefore, it is important to conduct empirical research to investigate if and how reading fluency is taught in English classrooms in China.

*Literature related to the teaching of vocabulary and comprehension.* As stated earlier, my search of research literature on teaching English in China resulted mostly in studies of vocabulary and comprehension instruction. This makes it obvious that these two dimensions of SBBR are already important in teaching how to read in English. In my extensive search, I found a total of 11 studies investigating vocabulary and comprehension. Nine of them are empirical studies that examined students' use of strategies in learning vocabulary and reading comprehension (Chan, 2003; Feng & Mokhtari, 1998; Gu, 1994, 2003; Gu & Johnson, 1996; Ji, 1993; Li & Munby, 1996; Parry, 1996; Tang, 1997); the remaining two are teaching reflections delivered by language teachers in Chinese tertiary level universities based on their experience in teaching English (Gu & Qian, 1990; Xu & Zhang, 1993).

Vocabulary is an important component of learning how to read. Knowing the vocabulary is a necessity for Chinese students in order to be able to read English. Knowing a word implies more than just knowing the form, the spelling and its pronunciation, but also includes knowing how to use it in different contexts. Gu and Qian (1990) identified the features of English vocabulary as 1) a huge quantity of vocabularies and specialized terms and lingoes in each field; 2) vocabulary is subjected to change constantly with the development of technology and the expansion of knowledge; 3) a word could have multiple meanings and the meaning changes in

different contexts; 4) the meanings of idioms are not always self-evident and many of the idioms are bound to the history and culture of English speaking countries. Xu and Zhang (1993) argued that Chinese students traditionally used two strategies to learn vocabulary, through extensive and intensive reading, and through word by word translation. Empirical studies concerned with vocabulary learning strategies suggested that Chinese students apply a variety of learning strategies rather than solely depend on repetition (Gu, 1994, 2003; Gu & Johnson, 1996).

Gu (2003) studies two successful non-English-majors' use of strategies in vocabulary learning and found out that even though these two learners used very different strategies, they both achieved success in the learning experience. One learner depended on the deeply rooted strategies used for the acquisition of Chinese to learn English vocabulary, such as the meticulous study of selected texts, list learning, and repetition; the other relied on reading extensively to increase the possibility of the natural recurrence of words. The success achieved by the two learners indicated 1) successful learners were aware of intentional and incidental learning and emphasized intentional learning more; 2) repetition and memorization were meaningful strategies that meet the needs of Chinese learners; 3) successful Chinese learners were pragmatic learners who achieve success with or without intrinsic motivation; and 4) effort, perseverance, and joy of reading were factors that lead to success. These strategies account for the discrepancy between what is considered a poor learning strategy such as depending on memorization and the success achieved by Chinese learners.

Poor learners, on the contrary, showed no control of using strategies in vocabulary learning. Gu (1994) compared a good and a poor Chinese non-English-majors' vocabulary learning experience by looking at how these two students responded to the unknown vocabulary during the initial encounter, how the unknown vocabulary was consulted in the dictionary, and

how it was reinforced afterwards. The results showed that the good learner was well aware of learning opportunities in these three stages and was able to selectively apply different strategies toward different learning circumstances. Learning an unknown vocabulary was more than just learning the form and meaning of this word. In contrast, the poor learner showed no ability to control time and strategy use, relied on word for word translation and the mechanical rehearsal of repetitive writing, and learned only the form and literal meaning of an unknown vocabulary.

Gu's studies (1994, 2003) targeted only four students; a larger scale study investigating the relationship between learning strategies and learning outcomes is Gu and Johnson's (2001) study of 850 non-English-majors in a university in Beijing. In this investigation, students predominantly believed that vocabulary should be memorized rather than acquired in context or learned to put to use. The study found self-initiation strategies and selective attention strategies are two best predictors toward students' overall proficiency in English learning. Self-initiation strategies include reading more than textbooks, using multiple methods to learn vocabulary, and focusing learning on what teachers told to learn and on what was directly related to examinations; selective attention strategies refer to knowing which words are important to learn, which words could be guessed and were worthy of taking notes. The study also revealed that poor vocabulary learners not only lacked effort in learning but also needed more flexibility in using strategies.

All these studies revealed one commonality: successful Chinese vocabulary learners were able to apply a variety of learning strategies and all these strategies, no matter good strategies or poor strategies, could all lead to success. In addition, these examples of successful Chinese vocabulary learners prove that it is erroneous to believe Chinese learners depended solely on memorization and rote learning. Repetitive learning (Biggs, 1996) is the more appropriate name for the strategy Chinese students used in learning vocabulary.

Six studies explored Chinese students' learning strategies used in reading comprehension (Chan, 2003; Feng & Mokhtari, 1998; Ji, 1993; Li & Munby, 1996; Parry, 1996; Tang, 1997). Almost all of them reported that competent readers with good comprehension could use different strategies flexibly. Li and Munby (1996) analyzed two Chinese graduate students' use of metacognitive strategies in academic reading in a Canadian university. Through interviews, thinking aloud sessions, and analyzing journals, they found that the students were very aware of their cognitive processes in reading. In addition, students not only used common reading strategies such as translation, background knowledge, self-questioning, prediction and contextual clues, and looking for topic sentences, they also invented strategies such as picking out key words and comparing and contrasting them to their first language knowledge to meet their own needs.

Other research that has been done in English speaking countries is Feng and Mokhtari's (1998) study and Tang's (1997) study. These two studies were done in America and Canada separately, and the participants were all competent readers in both English and Chinese. The studies presented similar findings. Feng and Mokhtari (1998) compared twenty Chinese students' use of strategies in reading difficult and easy texts in both English and Chinese. The research findings revealed that all the students used a variety of strategies in their reading of Chinese and English texts, but students used more strategies in reading the English text and in reading the difficult text. In addition, this research also showed that students demonstrated similarity in their strategy use in reading easy texts in English and Chinese. Tang (1997)'s study investigated eight Chinese scholars' reading comprehension processes in English and Chinese. Through thinking aloud protocol and comprehension strategy checklists, the study presented 24 different strategies used by these participants in reading English and Chinese texts. It showed

that even though these participants tended to use more strategies in reading English texts, the overall process between reading English and Chinese texts was similar.

Parry (1996) called for the need to understand learners' use of reading strategies within a cultural context. She compared the strategies Chinese graduate students used in reading English texts with Nigerian students and concluded that Chinese students had a stronger tendency to use bottom-up strategies than Nigerian students. She explained that the reason Chinese students look for precision at the lexical level and use English syntax to work out how the words fit together was due to their experience of reading Chinese, which requires students to know all the parts before they could be expected to appreciate the whole. Parry concluded that the readers' application of reading strategies could be seen "at least partly as a function of culture and the differences in these strategies can often be explained in terms of how different cultural communities represent, use, and teach both language and literacy" (p. 687).

The results from Chan (2003) and Ji (1993)'s studies have shown that the overall language competence in the second language affects reading comprehension to a great extent. Chen (2003) looked closely at the relation between background knowledge and English language proficiency in English reading performance in two groups of university students, one from Mainland China and one from Hong Kong. Based on the English proficiency test results, students were divided into intermediate and post-intermediate groups, and the results showed that post-intermediate groups of students (high proficiency learners) were more flexible in using strategies. When reading culturally familiar texts, a top-down strategy, such as using background knowledge, helped them with comprehension. When reading culturally unfamiliar texts, bottom-up strategies, such as using lexical, syntactic, and discourse clues, were used to facilitate comprehension. Intermediate groups (low proficiency learners), on the contrary, were able to use

background knowledge when reading culturally familiar texts but failed to use reading strategies when reading culturally unfamiliar texts. Ji (1993) further examined the relationship between reading comprehension and vocabulary, background knowledge, and learners' strategy application, and found that the proper use of strategy is the key to reading comprehension.

Comprehension is the ultimate goal of reading. One theme that has been revealed from all these six studies is that good readers were aware of and capable of using a variety of strategies in reading texts written in their second language. When these readers read easy or culturally familiar English texts, their reading processes and their application of strategies were similar to reading in their first language; while reading difficult and culturally unfamiliar English texts, these readers were able to use different strategies to compensate for the lack of comprehension. This finding is important in understanding Chinese students' reading behavior, and it seems that the flexible use of strategy is what students depend on most to achieve reading comprehension.

Finally, the review of these studies related to students' use of strategies for learning English reading has three implications. First, all these studies investigated Chinese students use a variety of strategies in learning English vocabulary and comprehension, but no study researched the instruction of vocabulary and comprehension. And this fact made us to wonder where did Chinese students learn all the different strategies and how did they know when to use them?

Secondly, all these studies were done at the tertiary level, in colleges and universities, in either an English-speaking country or in China, using undergraduate or graduate students, English majors or non-English majors, as their participants. None of the researchers whose work I reviewed here used elementary, middle and high school students as their research subjects even though English has been a required subject at all these school levels. How school students learn English vocabulary and comprehension from the very beginning remains a myth. Furthermore,

since all these participants are college students, they have studied English for at least six years before they were recruited in the research. Even though not all of them were competent English learners, the fact that they were admitted by colleges or universities or have achieved college degrees from China through the highly selective college entrance examination showed that they were good learners in all subject areas. Hence, those studies (Chan, 2003; Gu, 1994; Gu & Johnson, 1996) that involved poor or low proficiency English learners were not very indicative of the learning strategies used by poor language learners.

Last but not least, these studies reflect the importance of the application of strategies in learning English among Chinese students. Since China is unique in that it does not have a rich English language atmosphere, and it holds contradictory beliefs about teaching compared with most of the English-speaking countries in the West (Rao, 1996), the well-balanced and systematic teaching of different strategies would benefit language learners in China.

In conclusion, the answer to the question “Should English reading instruction to Chinese students also cover the five domains of reading including phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension?” is a definite Yes. What is needed now is to explore if and how phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension are taught in English classrooms in China.

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHDOLOGY

This chapter details the methodology used for this investigation of how English reading is taught to students in elementary schools in Beijing China. The chapter is organized into seven sections: 1) rationale for a qualitative design, 2) pilot study, 3) research site and participants, 4) subjectivity statement, 5) data sources and data collection, 6) data analysis, and 7) research trustworthiness and ethical issues.

#### Rationale for a Qualitative Design

There are a couple of reasons why a qualitative research design is appropriate for this study of the teaching of English reading in Beijing. First of all, in my view knowledge gets constructed when human beings interact with each other and their worlds. As a social constructionist (Schwandt, 1994), I value qualitative research that allows for interaction between and among the investigator (me) and the investigated (teachers). Secondly, qualitative research makes possible studying experience as it is lived, felt and undergone (Sherman & Webb, 1988). This is important because I want explore in depth the phenomenon of teaching English reading to Chinese elementary school children.

I primarily collected my data through interview and observation. I believe that my participants have constructed their own meaning of teaching through their experience within the social and educational context in China. These meanings affect the teaching practice in their classrooms. In order to capture and understand the complexity of teaching English reading in these three elementary schools in Beijing, I gave my participants opportunities to talk about their

experiences, perspectives, and understandings about teaching English reading through interviewing. Interviewing has been an important method of data collection in various types of qualitative research. As suggested by Charmaz (2006), “intensive interviewing permits an in-depth exploration of a particular topic or experience and, thus, is a useful method of interpretive inquiry” (p. 25). Interview allows the researcher to enter into other person’s perspective to respond to the situation flexibility, to explore the phenomenon profoundly, and to grasp the multiple views, perspectives, and meanings of some activity. (Johnson, 2002; Kvale, 1996; Merriam, 1988; Silverman, 2001).

Despite of the great advantage of using interview, there are limitations to how much the researcher can learn from participants self reporting during interviews, so in order to understand more about the complexities of a situation, observation is another good research method (Patton, 2002, p. 21). Through observation, the researcher can experience the researched context that the participants are in and try to understand what the participants said during interviews and, especially, what they have not said or done (Glesne, 2006). There are five advantages of direct observation: 1) the researcher can better understand and capture the researched context, which will allow the research to develop a holistic perspective; 2) the researcher can get firsthand experience about the setting and the people in the setting, which lead the researcher to be open-minded and inductive; 3) the researcher can see things that people in the setting may routinely take for granted and escape to mention; 4) the researcher can learn things that the participants are unwilling to talk about; and 5) the researcher can draw on personal knowledge when interpreting the data based on firsthand experience (Patton, 2002).

## Pilot Study

Pilot studies refer to “mini versions of a full-scale study (also called ‘feasibility studies’)... [and] are a crucial element of a good study design” (van Teijlingen & Hundley, 2001). Pilot studies can provide valuable insights for the research. I conducted a pilot study in the winter of 2004 and the study served as the preliminary investigation of English reading instruction in kindergarten, elementary, secondary, and post-secondary classrooms in Beijing China. The study aimed to answer one broad research question – “What does teaching students to read in English mean to teachers in Beijing at different school levels”?

Semi-structured interviews (Seidman, 1998) and the examination of teaching artifacts were used as the major methods of data collection. Snowball sampling (Patton, 2002) were used and 13 teachers from different school levels were selected and interviewed. These 13 teachers included two teachers from the kindergarten level, two teachers from the elementary school level, two teachers from the middle school level, two teachers from the high school level, and five teachers from the university level.

My qualitative analysis revealed a couple of theme issues. First of all, the Chinese national English curriculum has different standards and expectations for the different school levels. The English curricula in elementary and secondary schools have very different foci, which caused inconsistencies and great difficulties in teaching. Secondly, the data showed that teachers at different school levels understand teaching reading differently. There were differences in foci and teaching methods and strategies. To summarize their opinions, I briefly divided them into two categories here. Most of the teachers of elementary students used repeated readings and read alouds because they said students could not read on their own. Teachers of upper grade students thought their students did not have a solid foundation of English in younger

grades. The pressure of testing, led these teachers to devote most of their class time training skills to prepare students for testing. This meant there were few opportunities to read in class.

The pilot study provided me with rationales and directions about what to further pursue in my dissertation research. Instead of studying English teaching at all school levels, I knew that I should focus on the elementary level. And this was because many teachers in the secondary and post-secondary schools blamed elementary teachers for not doing a good job teaching English. Based on this pilot study, I designed my dissertation research to explore two research questions – 1) What aspects of English reading are taught in elementary schools in Beijing China and how they are taught? 2) How teachers in Chongwen and Xuanwu districts shape their pedagogical approaches of teaching students reading in English?

## Research Site and Participants

### *Selection of the Research Site and the Participants*

Conducting educational research in China is different from doing research in the US. There are no Institutional Review Boards who grant permission to researchers to conduct their studies, nor clear rules and guidelines for researchers to follow. Where and how you do research is largely based on “guanxi” (relationships or who you know). I called two elementary schools where I might have “guanxi,” one is the school that I attended and another is the school that my cousin attended, but I was not successful because there are new principals who did not know me. Therefore, they were not open to my interest in doing research. The principals also indicated that they are not used to having someone doing research in their schools. Hence, I continued my hunt of “guanxi” to do research in Beijing, and was fortunate to meet a Chinese scholar, Dr. Li, at the 2006 National Reading Conference who was willing to help.

Dr. Li called his first English teacher, Ms. Ding Jie, a famous English teacher, researcher, and educator in China who was retired but remained active working with English teachers from different elementary schools to improve English instruction. Ms. Ding has been teaching and researching Chinese students' learning of English for more than 40 years and has authored more than 40 books about learning English. Two of her most famous series of books are *Open Your Mind to Learn English* («开窍学英语») and *My little English books – series 1 to 12* («我的英语小丛书 1-12»). In the recent ten years, Ms. Ding traveled to North America and more than 20 provinces in China to give lectures and presentations about teaching Chinese children learning English (Information about Ms. Ding Jie was retrieved Dec. 19, 2007, from <http://www.sdchild.com/Article/news/renwu/200512/1499.shtml> ).

After Dr. Li told Ms. Ding about my research interest, I called Ms. Ding to introduce myself. After several telephone conversations, Ms. Ding told me that my interest in researching English reading instruction in elementary school was significant, and she was willing to help me to make any necessary contact in order for me to conduct the research. At the same time, she also mentioned that she was not satisfied with the vocabularies that were included in the English textbooks required for Chinese students in elementary schools to learn. She believed that the current vocabulary list failed to include the most frequently used English words, so she asked me to bring word lists that are used a lot in US elementary schools (which I did). Before coming back to Beijing, I sent Ms. Ding some information about my research, methods of data collection, and some letters asking permission from the school principals. After Ms. Ding received all my information, she found four schools in Chongwen and Xuanwu districts which agreed to let me do research. The principals signed the permission letters and Ms. Ding faxed those letters to me. Because of Ms. Ding's great help, I was able to get Institutional Review Board approval within

the US. I went to Beijing in May 2007 and visited Ms. Ding in her home. I brought her the Fry/Dolch combined word list that I used in my master's thesis and a little gift to show my thanks and appreciation.

I chose to conduct this research in Beijing because this is my home city, where I am most familiar with and can search for “guanxi.” As I have indicated, the development of “guanxi” with Ms. Ding provided my entry to the school sites. Ms. Ding chose the schools in Chongwen and Xuanwu districts because first of all, the overall education in these two districts are considered average in Beijing, and secondly, these are also the districts that she has a strong “guanxi”, which enabled her to get permissions from school principals.

#### *Education in Chongwen and Xuanwu Districts in Beijing*

Chongwen and Xuanwu districts are located in the downtown area of Beijing and are two of the oldest districts in Beijing. According to the statistics from Chongwen Education Commission (CWEDU, 2007), the district has 19 kindergartens, 23 elementary schools, and 15 middles and high schools with a total student population of 39,698 students. Among this number, 16,097 students are in elementary schools. In Xuanwu district, there are 33 kindergartens, 42 elementary schools, and 31 middle and high schools (XWEDU, 2007). The total student population is 56,555 students with 21,055 of them in elementary schools. These districts are two of the most populated districts in Beijing. I have searched on the Internet to look for detailed information comparing the education in Chongwen and Xuanwu districts with other districts and counties; however, the search was in vain. I could not find any published records comparing Beijing's education in each district and county. So I am writing based on the information Ms. Ding provided and my experience of growing up and schooling in Beijing for 24 years.

As mentioned earlier, Ms. Ding suggested that schools in Chongwen and Xuanwu districts are representative of the average education level in Beijing. Even though Beijing is one of the most developed cities in China, not every part of Beijing is industrialized. Among the ten districts and eight counties in Beijing, four downtown districts include Xicheng, Dongcheng, Chongwen and Xuanwu. They are the oldest districts and retain cultural heritages from Ming and Qing dynasties. In Qing dynasty, most of the government officials and the relatives of the imperial family lived in the Xicheng and Dongcheng districts because these places were right next to the Imperial Palace. Common Beijing citizens lived in Chongwen and Xuanwu districts or even further away from the Imperial Palace. After the Chinese Communist Party took power, even though people were treated equal, the educational facilities and resources in Xicheng and Dongcheng districts are still the better than other places.

The other six districts are located in the outer town, but with the development of business, science, and technology, some of these districts have become the center of foreign business, technology, and higher education. For example, Chaoyang district has become an international place with all the foreign embassies, international markets, and technology centers. Haidian district has long been the center of higher education with most of the prestigious universities and research centers. Basic education in these two districts is also regarded as the best in Beijing. As for the eight counties, such as Huairou, Pinggu, Shunyi, they are located in a relatively rural area with less educational facilities and resources, and some citizens depend on farming for living. Hence, economics and education are relatively behind in these eight counties.

Ms. Ding found four schools which agreed to the research and I was able to use three of them, XJ Elementary School in Chongwen District, BBQ Elementary School and XSYFX Elementary School in Xuanwu district to be the research sites.

### *XJ Elementary School in Chongwen District*

XJ elementary school is located in one of the downtown neighborhoods in the southeast Beijing. The neighborhood is rather modern with newly-built skyscraper condominiums, parking lots, a supermarket, and security guards at the entrance. The school is right in the middle of this well-structured neighborhood, so it is far away from the noisy and busy morning traffic. The school has only one building, a five-floor brick building with about 1,000 students and more than 80 teachers. The school building looks very new and each classroom is well equipped. In each classroom, there is an air conditioner, a computer, a projection screen, a TV, and an overhead projector. In the hallway, there are a few boards for teachers or school personnel to post announcements and news. I did not see any students' work presented on the walls of the hallway.

I talked with the principal on the phone and she told me to that all her English teachers were aware of my research and agreed to be interviewed and observed. She also indicated that when I arrived at the school, I could go directly to meet the head of the English group and then this person would introduce me to all the English teachers. I came to the school the next day and met four English teachers. I was told that there were a total of five English teachers in the school. One teacher was on maternity leave at the time of my data collection, so only the remaining four teachers could participate in the study. I named the four participant teachers 1, 2, 3, and 4.

Both teacher 1 and 3 were new teachers. They both graduated from the Capital Normal University with their Bachelor degrees. Teacher 3 majored in Physics Education, but he became an English teacher because it was easier to find a teaching position in English and other school teachers and the principal thought that he was qualified after a teaching demonstration. Teacher 2 was the oldest among the four and had the most teaching experience, but she had only been at

this school for a semester. Teacher 4 was the head of the English group and been at this school the longest. The table below presented more detailed information about them.

Table 3.1 XJ Elementary School English Teachers Overview

	Highest Degree	Major	Years of Experience	Grade levels taught	No. of lessons taught per week
Teacher 1	B.A.	English Education	Less than a year	3 <sup>rd</sup> and 4 <sup>th</sup>	18
Teacher 2	Professional High School	English Education	15 years	2 <sup>nd</sup> and 5 <sup>th</sup>	18
Teacher 3	B.A.	Physics Education	Less than a year	1 <sup>st</sup> and 4 <sup>th</sup>	18
Teacher 4 (head)	A.A.	English	5 years	6 <sup>th</sup>	16

I met these four teachers in the office they shared with more than 15 teachers. All the teachers there taught different subjects, such as math, English, Chinese, and science. Each teacher has a desktop computer with Internet connections, but the office had no printer or copier. I was told by one of the English teachers that they need to go to a special office staff, who is the only one having the key to a room, to print or copy. It is rather inconvenient, so most of the teachers rarely print or copy anything for students.

*BBQ Elementary School in Xuanwu District*

BBQ elementary school is located on a busy street. The area outside the school is busy almost all day. Six to seven major city buses go through that street and the buses were crowded almost all day. In the early morning, I saw many old people doing morning exercises on the street, and street vendors setting up to sell breakfast. Then the street got even busier after seven because people who lived nearby started to leave for work. There were pedestrians, bicycles and bus riders, and parents or grandparents who were busy bringing their children to school. There was usually a big traffic jam in front of the school because of the number of people and the

narrow street. When school finished in the afternoon, parents or grandparents again came to the school, waited outside the school gate to meet their children, which usually was the cause of another traffic jam in the street.

The school has only one building, a big four-floor building with east and west wings. The building looks new from the outside, but I could still hear the noise of the busy traffic inside the building. The school has a total of 850 students and 75 teachers. Compared with XJ elementary school, BBQ classrooms are not that well equipped. Each classroom only has a TV, an overhead projector, and three fans hanging on the wall. Because of the heat in the classroom, some teachers prefer to leave the window open during class time, which cooled the classroom a bit but made the noise from the street more intrusive.

After talking to one of the principals on the phone, I went to the school to meet him in his office. I explained my research purpose and data collection methods thoroughly and showed him the IRB approval from the University of Georgia. He then called all the four English teachers to his office and very formally introduced me and my research. After his official speech, I added some information about my background, the schools I attended when I was in Beijing, and some of my relatives who also attended schools in Xuanwu district. I was hoping that they could see me as a common person from Beijing rather than some kind of foreigner. Even though none of the teachers asked me any questions, I knew that they were not aware of me and my research before this meeting. Finally after all the talking, the principal asked one teacher, who was the head of the English group, to arrange time for interviews and observations.

I visited the teachers' office when I was called later to interview the first teacher. There are four English teachers in the school and they shared their office with another four teachers, who teach science and history. One teacher told me that the reason that they share one office

together is that they are all subject teachers (科任老师), which means that they come to different classrooms to teach the subject, instead of being responsible for only one class. The office has no computers, printers, and copiers. The teacher told me that if they need to use the Internet, they need to go to the computer lab located in a different floor, and if they need to print or copy, they should inform a special teacher, who will do it for them.

I will refer to these four teachers as Teacher, 5, 6, 7, and 8. Teacher 5 is the head of the English group and has taught English in this school for 11 years. When she first got hired, she only held a high school degree. While teaching, she went to night schools to get her Bachelor of Arts degree in English Education. Teacher 6 taught Chinese for eight years before she became an English teacher. She told me that her Associate Degree was in Chinese, but when the school asked her to teach English due to the shortage of English teachers in 1995, they supported her to attend a night school to study English. She took a few courses in English, but never got a degree in English. Teacher 7 is the youngest among the four and she graduated from a university in Southern part of the China majoring in Biology. She always wanted to be a teacher, so she got certified in teaching before graduation. She came to Beijing to look for a job and one of her friends introduced her to this school. Teacher 8 has been teaching for 14 years in this school. She was the home room Chinese teacher for 10 years and started to teach English four years ago. She mentioned that the school needed more English teachers, so the principal gave her an English book and asked if she could teach English. She read the text book and thought the content was not hard to teach, so she agreed. However, she had never taken any English courses or studied in a night school.

Table 3.2 BBQ Elementary School English Teachers Overview

	Highest Degree	Major	Years of Experience	Grade levels taught	No. of lessons taught per
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					week
Teacher 5 (head)	B.A.	English Education	11 years	5 <sup>th</sup>	18
Teacher 6	A. A	Chinese	8 years teach Chinese 12 years teach English	2 <sup>nd</sup> and 4 <sup>th</sup>	20
Teacher 7	B.S.	Biology	Almost 2 years	1 <sup>st</sup> and 3 <sup>rd</sup>	20
Teacher 8	Professional High School	Education	10 years teach Chinese 4 years teach English	1 <sup>st</sup> and 6 <sup>th</sup>	18

*XSYFX Elementary School in Xuanwu District*

XSYFX elementary school is only two streets away from BBQ Elementary school and the school is located in the similar neighborhood as BBQ. XSYFX has about 100 years in history and is regarded as a key elementary school in Xuanwu district with more than 1,700 students and 130 teachers. The school has two four-floor main buildings with 39 classes. Because of the school's fame, many parents send their children to this school. So compared the class size with the other two schools, XSYFX has the largest class size with more than 40 students in one class. The classrooms look very crowded with these many students. In addition, the equipment in the classrooms is similar with those in BBQ, with a TV, an overhead projector and three fans on the wall.

I called the principal on the phone but then made three trips to the school without an opportunity to meet her in person. She either forgot the appointments or changed the time without informing me. In my third phone call, she told me that she had already informed the head of the English group, so I could contact her instead. I called the head English teacher immediately and then came to their office to meet them.

XSYFX has a total of six English teachers and they share one spacious office. The office has one public computer with a printer, but each teacher has her/his own desktop. The teachers would bring their own laptops to the classroom if they want to show students to video or if they have prepared a PowerPoint presentation. I meet all the six English teachers and told them about my research. It was an informal meeting because they were busy preparing their afternoon classes while listening to me talking. After four teachers left for classes, the head English teacher told me that three teachers could not participate in the study for a variety of reasons. The fifth grade teacher had a death in her family and the other two teachers who teach sixth grade chose not to participate due to the pressure of final graduation testing in sixth grade. Therefore, only three teachers participated in my study.

Teacher 9 is the head of the English group and she has been teaching English in the school for 17 years. She started her teaching job with a high school degree but then she attended night schools to get her Bachelor of Arts degree in English. Teacher 10 was a Physical Education teacher for 5 years, and then due to the shortage of English teachers, the school asked her to teach English and sent her to a university to study English for two years to get her Bachelor degree. She had graduated four months prior to this research to resume teaching. Teacher 11 just graduated from a prestigious normal university in Beijing, but her major, environmental engineering, has nothing to do with teaching. She wanted to be a teacher, so when she graduated, she took an extra four courses to get a teacher certification. Since she was still in her first year of teaching, the school only gave her half of the teaching load. But she would have a full load the next semester.

Table 3.3 XSYFX Elementary School English Teachers Overview

	Highest Degree	Major	Years of Experience	Grade levels taught	No. of lessons taught per
--	----------------	-------	---------------------	---------------------	---------------------------

					week
Teacher 9 (head)	B.A.	English	17 years	1 <sup>st</sup> and 2 <sup>nd</sup>	18
Teacher 10	B.A.	English	P.E. teacher for 5 years. English teacher 4 months	4 <sup>th</sup>	18
Teacher 11	B.A.	Environmental Engineering	Less than a year	3 <sup>rd</sup>	9

### Subjectivity Statement

The researcher serves as the research instrument in qualitative research, which makes qualitative research inevitably subjective (Patton, 2002). Peshkin (1988) also argued that acknowledging one's subjectivity and making assertions about it is no longer enough; what qualitative researchers should do is to seek out their subjectivity. Hence it is necessary for me to examine my bias in order to ensure the credibility, transferability, and research trustworthiness. In this section, I described my own research biases and how they might have influenced the study.

I grew up in Beijing and have received all the K-12 education in schools in Beijing. This great familiarity with the research setting has been both an advantage and disadvantage. On one hand, the familiarity made it easy for me to be an insider, to develop an emic perspective, and to not only see what was happening but also feel what it was like to be a part of the setting. As Patton (2002) suggested experiencing the setting as an insider accentuates the participant's part in conducting observations. On the other hand, my familiarity could unconsciously lead me to take some routine things for granted and therefore leave them out of my observation notes. For example, there is the phenomenon of teaching from the required textbooks. In China, all the teachers across all school levels have a standard textbook to use in class. It is rarely the case for

teachers to use non-standard books to teach. The fact that this is part of my school experience means that I was not surprised or critical when seeing this fidelity to the textbook. However, this might become an important topic in the field notes of a researcher who has no experience with schools in China.

My experiences in visiting many different elementary public schools in Georgia helped me to minimize this disadvantage of being familiar with the research setting. By volunteering, observing, and teaching in different classrooms, I know school teachers in the US used a variety of resources in their teaching. And after learning and conducting qualitative studies, I am also aware that a good researcher should be able to understand the setting as an insider while describing it to and for outsiders. During my observations, I kept a record of the teaching materials each teacher used in my notebook.

In addition, I am also aware that I relate to my participants in many ways. I am a middle class female Chinese national who attended elementary school to college in Beijing. I studied English and also taught English in Beijing. I grew up in a neighborhood and attended an elementary school similar to the ones in this study. When I entered the schools, the classrooms, and the teachers' offices, I immediately recalled my elementary school days. Many of the school routines they do today are the same as when I was an elementary student. Because all these similarities, I followed Peshkin (1988)'s suggestion – take notes. I wrote in my notepad every time when I felt that my subjectivity was aroused and I took these notes into consideration when analyzing the data.

In addition, coming from the social constructionist perspective, I am also well aware that the meanings I report in this study depend on how I interpreted my participants. I know that each interview and observation contributed to my understanding and interpretation of teaching

English reading in these schools. I am committed to the process of modification in order to seek a thorough and fair interpretation. For instances, during interviews if I did not feel sure of my understanding then I would ask for a restatement or I would paraphrase what I think was said and ask for confirmation. I interviewed each teacher twice, once before the first observation and once after. After the first interview, I listened to the recording and wrote down points that I needed clarification and questions that I still needed to ask. I then conducted my first observation and wrote down points that I needed clarification. After the first observation, I did the second interview with the purpose of adding more needed information and clarifying unclear points. I believe that by doing this, I could have a thorough and fair understanding and interpreted my participants more accurately.

#### Data Sources and Data Collection

Qualitative research is concerned with understanding the phenomenon of interest from the participants' perspectives; therefore, qualitative inquiry requires data collection methods that are sensitive to underlying meanings when gathering and interpreting data (Merriam, 1988). The researcher serves as the research instrument in qualitative research and qualitative data coming from multiple sources are encouraged to bring together a comprehensive perspective (Patton, 2002, p. 306).

This study aims to investigate not only teaching students how to read in English but also teachers' pedagogical perspectives. I collected data from the following three sources: 1) transcriptions of what the participants said during the semi-structured interviews; 2) descriptive field notes of classroom observations and of other incidents in the schools or in teacher's offices; 3) teaching and learning related documents such as the 2001 National English Curriculum Standard (NECS) (Ministry of Education, 2001c), textbooks and workbooks, test samples, and

students' work samples. The data collection occurred from May 30, 2007 to July 31, 2007 in Beijing, China. I spent a few days calling and making trips to the schools to meet the principals and the teachers to introduce myself, my research, and to set up time for interviews and observations.

### *Interviews*

Interviewing has been an important method of data collection in various types of qualitative research. As suggested by Charmaz (2006), “intensive interviewing permits an in-depth exploration of a particular topic or experience and, thus, is a useful method of interpretive inquiry” (p. 25). I used semi-structured interviews (Seidman, 1998) to talk with each teacher twice, one time before the observation and one time after. In my first meeting with the teachers, I explained my research goals clearly. I wanted each teacher to understand that I am not there evaluating their teaching; rather I am trying to understand their pedagogy and perspectives about teaching reading well enough to describe it fully. I then discussed the time for interviews and observations with the head of the English teacher group.

I provided the consent form for the teachers' signatures at the beginning of my first interview. The purpose of the first interview was to get background information that would inform my observation of teaching English reading. At the beginning of the interview, I asked the teacher which language they preferred to use and then the interview was conducted in the language they preferred. The first interview was guided by a semi-structured interview protocol (see Appendix A).

Each interview was digitally recorded. I also had a copy of the textbook and teacher's manual ready for reference purposes, so when the teacher mentioned something in the textbook, I could ask her/him to show me examples. The first interviews lasted about 45 to 60 minutes.

After the first interview, I always asked the teacher if he/she was willing to let me copy any pertinent documents or to email me the PowerPoint lesson they made that will help me gain further understanding.

My intention was to transcribe the first interview before conducting the second one, but due to the short amount of time between interviews, I was not successful. Even if I could not provide all my participants the transcriptions of the first interviews before the second one, I tried to listen to them carefully and wrote down questions to ask for purposes of clarification.

I believed that having an opportunity to talk to these teachers for the second time would be beneficial, and the purposes of the second interview were 1) to get the teacher's perspective on what I have recorded about her instruction; 2) to address any questions that arose during my observations; and 3) to ask for further explanation and clarification about any questions and concerns I may have after the first interview. I was able to interview eight teachers for the second time. Three teachers (Teacher 2, 4, and 8) were unable to meet again due to personal reasons. I conducted most of the second interviews before the second observations, but for teacher 10 and 11, their two observations were scheduled with only a 5 minute break, so I talked to them after the second observation. The content of the second interview varied among teachers because I had different questions to ask for clarification and different things that I needed more information based on the first interview. The second interview was also conducted in the language they preferred, digitally recorded, transcribed and translated when I came back to US. Once I finished transcribing all the interviews, I emailed the transcriptions to each teacher for review, elaboration, and clarification. Two teachers who emailed me back saying that they read the transcripts and everything looked good, I did not hear back from the others.

## *Observations*

As mentioned earlier, there are limitations to how much the researcher can learn from participants self reporting during interviews, so in order to understand more about the complexities of a situation, observation is another good research method (Patton, 2002, p. 21). Observation differs in the extent to which the observer will participate in the setting. Whether the researcher will be mostly observing or mostly participating depends on the questions the researcher investigates and the context (Glesne, 2006). In elementary schools in China, each class lasts about 40 minutes. The students sit in rows and columns, and the teacher typically stands on the platform in the front of the classroom teaching mostly with chalks and a blackboard. Teachers rarely have observers in their classrooms with the exception being administrators who come in to observe for evaluative purposes. Considering this status quo, my presence in the classroom was an unusual event for both teacher and students. As such it would likely create curiosity and possibly some discomfort. To try and minimize this I sat at the back of the classroom with pencil and paper as a silent observer. I placed the digital recorder on the front table in the classroom to record the whole observation. That placement was to ensure that I could catch the teacher-student talk completely.

I observed most of the teachers twice except the two teachers (Teacher 4 and 8) who taught sixth grade. Six graders ended their classes earlier than other grades to prepare for the final graduation examination, so I was not able to observe any of the sixth grade classes. My decision to do two observations per teacher was to get richer data. I have observed many classrooms in the US and the observation always lasted at least one hour. The English lessons in the three Beijing elementary schools were 40 minutes long. With two observations I was able to see different teaching and content for eighty minutes. Also, two observations gave me more

reliable data. Hu (2005) identified three major types of lessons: ordinary lessons, demonstration lessons, and competition lessons. Ordinary lessons are not prepared in advance, and can be conducted by either a novice teacher or an experienced teacher with the purposes of improving instructional effectiveness. Demonstration lessons are prepared for observation to support reform initiatives. And competition lessons are conducted to select the most effective teachers for rewards. What Hu (2005) forgot to mention, however, is another different type of demonstration lesson. My own experience as a teacher in China meant I was aware that teachers sometimes prepare demonstrative lessons for outsiders or foreigners with the purpose of showing the effectiveness of their teaching and their students. Some teachers even teach the lesson ahead as a rehearsal or organize a group of above-grade-level students to be in the class, so the observer would see something better than an ordinary unrehearsed lesson. Even though I repeatedly emphasized that I wanted to see ordinary lessons, I was still aware that some of these teachers might prepare a lesson just for my observation. So I planned to observe them twice just in case the first one was a demonstration lesson.

My concerns were founded because Teacher 6, 7, 8 in BBQ elementary school prepared demonstration lessons in a special classroom. That room was better equipped with a computer, a project screen, a projector, and a better chalk board. These three teachers moved their students to this special room in an afternoon and taught three lessons (a first grade lesson by Teacher 8, a second grade lesson by Teacher 6, and a third grade lesson by Teacher 7). After the observation, I talked to the teachers and asked them the difference between the lesson I observed and their ordinary lessons. Their answers were similar that they used more media support and prepared PowerPoint presentations for their students. I thanked them for preparing nice lessons just for me, and reminded them that I was not evaluating their teaching, so I still wanted to observe an

ordinary lesson from them. They were supportive and agreed to let me observe an ordinary lesson from them. Teacher 9 in XSYFX elementary school was the one teacher whom presented two demonstration lessons for me to observe. She also used a special room, which is not only better equipped but also allow students to sit in groups instead of the traditional Chinese rows and columns sitting style. I asked her if I could just observe an ordinary lesson in a regular classroom, but she emphasized that there were not any differences in her teaching and because of her rich experience in teaching, she has been observed a lot in that room, so she felt most comfortable being observed there.

Even though I did not observe all ordinary lessons, the observations still provided me with first hand information on how the teachers I interviewed implement what they have told me about their teaching, and I was able to further develop more meaningful interview questions to ask my participants. After each observation, I read my field notes carefully, jotted down reflective and analytic thoughts (Glesne, 2006), and formulated interview questions to inform the second observation and second interview.

### *Documents*

Documents constitute another rich source of information for research, and they prove valuable “not only because of what can be learned directly from them but also as stimulus for paths of inquiry that can be pursued only through direct observation and interview” (Patton, 2002, p. 294). Documents in this study came from two major sources. The first major source of document data is public documents including textbooks, students’ workbooks, and teacher’s manuals used in Chongwen and Xuanwu districts, and the 2001 NECS. These documents provided me considerable information about the general objectives and standards of English teaching in Beijing, and the content of English teaching in these schools. The second major

source of document data are those that were provided by the teachers including their PowerPoint presentations, the teacher or district and students work samples. These documents have provided me additional information to supplement the interview and observational data and helped me to develop further understanding of the participants and the research questions.

### Data Analysis

Analysis transforms data into findings and qualitative data analysis is a process of making sense of data, sifting, organizing, cataloging, and determining themes (Holliday, 2002). The data analysis in this study consisted of several steps. First, analyzing interview data: after each interview was transcribed, I did incident to incident coding using in vivo codes (Charmaz, 2006). For example, a teacher's talk about teaching fluency was counted as one incident and the code for that was *fluency*. A teacher's talk about her role as facilitator in classrooms was coded as *teacher as facilitator*. Then I looked for incidents that were related and conducted axial coding (Charmaz, 2006), and the purpose of that was to relate categories to subcategories. This gives coherence to the emerging analysis. For example, when a teacher talked about the textbooks, my in vivo codes were *likes of the textbook*, *dislikes of the textbooks*, and *suggestions of the textbook*. My axial code for this part was *opinion about the textbook*. I carefully examined all my codes, categorized all the related incidents, and made charts to facilitate data analysis, so I did not need to read the 11 transcripts again and again. For each school I made a chart which included all the interview information from the teachers. For example, the chart for BBQ elementary school had five columns and 31 rows. The title of the first column was *codes*, the titles for the second to fifth columns were *teachers 5, 6, 7, and 8*. And I had a total of 30 incident codes. Examples of some codes I used were: *major/degree*, *teaching experience*, *opinion of the textbook*, *teach phonemic awareness*, *homework and exercise*, *classroom activities*, *instruments/materials...*

Second, analyzing observation data: I used field notes from each observation, and the digital recording to fill in details such as how did the teacher give direction, what was the content of the listening exercises in class, and how did the teacher respond to students' questions. I open coded the field notes for each observation and then I did the axial coding (Charmaz, 2006) again to categorize the open codes, and I ended up with 23 categories. It is worth mentioning that many of the codes in the observation were similar with those in interview, such as *instrument/materials*, *teach phonemic awareness*, *teach phonics*, *teach fluency*, *teach vocabulary*, and *teach comprehension*. Since there are limitations to how much the researcher can learn from participants self reporting during interviews, I used field observation to understand what the teachers told me during interviews and, especially, what they have not said or done (Glesne, 2006). Finally I applied the theoretical coding procedure, which is targeted to find themes from the data (Charmaz, 2006). Based on the open codes and axial codes, I identified core categories, which moved the analysis into a theoretical direction to answer the major research questions.

#### Research Trustworthiness and Ethical Issues

Researchers with a social constructionist perspective have used terms like credibility (internal validity), transferability (external validity), dependability (reliability), and confirmability (objectivity) to address the trustworthiness (rigor) of the qualitative research. In particular, dependability and authenticity are used to judge the quality of the research (p. 546, Patton, 2002). Dependability refers to “a systematic process systematically followed” (p. 546, Patton, 2002). In carrying out this research, I followed my detailed research plan but was also flexible about changes that occurred during data collection. I kept a detailed record about what changes happened and reported according in great detail. Authenticity is the “reflexive consciousness about one’s own perspective, appreciation for the perspectives of others, and

fairness in depicting constructions in the values that undergird them” (p. 546, Patton, 2002). The goal of this study was to understand English reading instruction in three elementary schools and teachers’ pedagogies and perspectives of teaching; therefore, it is especially important for me to acknowledge and appreciate the different perspectives from my participants. In addition, informed by the social constructionist theories, I understand that on one hand I unavoidably brought my perspective and bias into the research, and on the other hand the field experience also influenced me on how I analyze the data. Hence, in conducting this research, I have paid great attention to examining my research bias in order to depict the teachers and the classroom instruction accurately and fairly.

Credibility (internal validity) deals with the issue of how one’s research findings match the reality and is a definite strength of qualitative research (Merriam, 1988). Merriam (1988) suggested six basic strategies a researcher can use to ensure credibility: 1) triangulation, 2) member check, 3) long-term observation or repeated observation, 4) peer examination, 5) participatory modes of research, and 6) examination of researcher’s biases (p. 169-170).

In this research, I have used most of these strategies mentioned to ensure the credibility of my study. The research data comes from multiple sources including interviews, observations, and different teaching and learning related documents. I tried to do member check after I transcribed all the interviews; however, only two teachers responded back to me. Even though I did not hear back from the rest of the teachers, I do believe that my second interviews with the teachers served the member check purpose in some sense because I had asked them to clarify any concerns or questions I had when hearing the first interview recording at home. I also used repeated observations to ensure the richness and the realness of the data. In addition, I have shared some tentative findings at the 2007 National Reading Conference to get some feedback

and suggestions from my peers. And finally I was aware of my researcher's bias and was constantly involved in examining my bias. It is worth mentioning that I stopped to continue with the member check process once I began the data analysis, because Riessman (1993) indicated that it is questionable that the validity of an investigator's interpretations can be affirmed by the individual narrators.

Transferability (external validity) deals with the extent of which the findings of one study can be applied to other situations or groups (Merriam, 1988). Qualitative researchers argued that because human behavior is forever changing and unpredictable, it is problematic to only be concerned about data generalizability rather than data consistency (Guba & Lincoln, 1981; Merriam, 1988; Patton, 2002), which indicates that it is more important for qualitative findings to be consistent with the data collected rather than to be able to find the same findings again. Erickson (1986) also suggested that generalizable knowledge can only be found in particular, which means "what one learns from a particular situation is indeed transferable to situations subsequently encountered" (Merriam, 1988, p. 176). Hence, in this study, I did the following two things to ensure consistency and transferability.

First of all, strategies that I used to ensure the credibility of the study also help to increase the consistency of the research. I have collected data from multiple sources to ensure data triangulation, I used member checks to give my participants opportunities to clarify and verify my interpretations of what they said and what I observed, and I was aware of my researcher's bias and was constantly reflected upon. All these strategies not only help to ensure the credibility of the research but also increase the consistency (Merriam, 1988; Stake, 1994; Yin, 1994).

Secondly, to ensure the transferability of the research, I have provided a rich, thick, and detailed description of the research context, the participants, and the researcher's role (LeCompte

& Preissle, 1993; Merriam, 1988). I have provided details about the research setting, the participants, and my researchers' bias in this chapter, so readers can make comparisons with their own situation to determine the appropriate application of the study results. In chapter 4 and 5, I not only described the research findings in great detail, but also provided many direct quotes from the participants' interviews, which would also help readers to determine the applicability of these findings to other situations.

Ethical decisions should be given a lot of thoughts throughout the process of doing qualitative research. Patton (2002) has suggested ten things to be considered for ethical purposes: 1) explaining purpose, 2) promises and reciprocity, 3) risk assessment, 4) confidentiality, 5) informed consent, 6) data access and ownership, 7) interviewer mental health, 8) advice, 9) data collection boundaries, 10) ethical versus legal.

In this study, I have made special effort to ensure that my research was conducted in an ethical manner. In the planning stage, I have contacted the Educational Bureau in Beijing trying to find out if conducting educational research in Beijing China would also need approval from some agencies such as the IRB in the US. After many phones to different educational offices, I knew for sure that no approval from the administrative offices was needed except for the permission from school principals. In obtaining permission from school principals, I have clearly stated both in writing and orally the purposes of the research, the main features of the research design as well as possible risks or benefits from participation in the research. In addition, I also made it clear that the names of the school and participants would be replaced by pseudonyms, data would be kept in confidential and destroyed after five years, and as the only researcher in the study I am the only one to have access to these data.

Throughout the data collection process, I made special effort to go over all the details mentioned above with each participant. All my participants have agreed to sign the consent forms and to share with me their teaching artifacts. In addition, I also respect my participants' right and willingness during data collection. For example, I respected their decision of not letting me conduct any observations in sixth grade due to the pressure of final testing. And even though a regular lesson was what I really wanted to observe, I went ahead to observe two demonstration lessons from teacher 9 when she informed me that those demonstration lessons were what she felt most comfortable to be observed.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

This study investigated the English reading instruction in three elementary schools in Beijing. This chapter is organized into two sections. The first section presents findings of research question one - what aspects of English reading are taught in elementary schools in Beijing China and how they are taught. The second section presents findings from research question two - how teachers shape their pedagogical approaches of teaching students reading in English

#### Aspects of English Reading and How They Are Taught

The literature review has suggested that phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension are aspects of reading that should be taught to students who learn English as a foreign language (EFL). In the semi-structured interviews, I not only asked my participants if and how they teach these five aspects of reading, but also about other aspects of reading they have included in their teaching. In this section, I reported the eight aspects of knowledge that the participating teachers mentioned in their teaching of reading: phonemic awareness instruction, phonics instruction, fluency instruction, vocabulary instruction, comprehension instruction, grammar instruction, writing instruction, and cultural knowledge teaching.

#### *Phonemic awareness instruction*

During interviews with teachers I asked about phonemic awareness. I wanted to know if the teachers thought it was important to teach phonemic awareness and if so, how much and in

what way would they provide instruction. All 11 teachers indicated that they did not understand what phonemic awareness was when I said the English term. So I used Chinese to explain the term (音位/音素意识), and then offered some examples of phonemic awareness instruction. Some of the examples I provided were 1) teachers ask students to identify or produce rhyming words orally, 2) teachers ask students to orally identify and/or match words that begin or end with the same consonant sound (e.g. baby and banana; man and run), 3) teachers ask students to orally segment spoken sentences into spoken words, 4) teacher asks students to orally blend syllables to form words (e.g. ta...ble=table). After my explanation and the examples, I got responses that I were then able to classify into the following four categories: (1) no knowledge with no teaching, (2) no importance with no teaching, (3) important with occasional teaching, (4) very important with lots of teaching.

#### *No knowledge with no teaching*

After my explanation of phonemic awareness three teachers (7, 10, and 11) reported that they had never learned that English could be taught in this way. Teacher 7 and 11 wondered the usefulness of phonemic awareness instruction to Chinese students. They mentioned that their uncertainty came from the fact that they have never learned or taught English in that way, but they would like to learn more about it or probably try it in their classrooms in the future to see if it would work. After I introduced some activities about phonemic awareness instruction, Teacher 7 said: “No, I don’t do that in my class. I did not know that you can do things like that. I don’t know if it would work for my students, but I could try later.” Teacher 11 also replied:

These are some interesting activities. As a new teacher, I have never heard of them. I don’t know if it would work on my students, either. But I really think the activities you just said are interesting and I would like to do those in the future.

Teacher 10, however, was quite the opposite. She admitted that she did not know much about phonemic awareness, and she was certain that phonemic awareness instruction would not be of any help. She concluded that Chinese students depend on their memory to remember the sound of letters and words. For example, in the interview she said:

I really don't know much about it [phonemic awareness]. And honestly, I don't even think it helps. Even teaching students letter-sound relationship, students still have to memorize them, then again memorize the spelling of the vocabulary. I just teach them how to say the word and ask them to remember the pronunciation and the spelling.

*No importance with no teaching*

Three teachers (1, 4, and 8) seemed to understand what phonemic awareness was after my explanation and examples, but they all reported that they did not have phonemic awareness instruction in their classes. Teacher 4 and 8 both taught sixth grade students in their schools, and they mentioned that sixth graders usually have already mastered the sound-letter relationship of the English alphabet, so their teaching did not include phonemic awareness instruction, and they also admitted that for sixth graders phonemic awareness instruction had little importance. For example, Teacher 4 said:

Oh, ok, I know it [phonemic awareness]. It is to train students to have awareness about the English phonemes/sound, isn't it? I think it should be taught to younger students. I don't know if other teachers do that or not, but I don't teach my sixth graders. For them, they should focus more on vocabulary and grammar knowledge to pass the test.

Phonemic awareness is not something important for them to learn. I don't spend time on non-test-related stuff.

Teacher 1 taught third and fourth grades in her school, and her opinion toward phonemic awareness instruction was that:

I think the ability to gain the awareness of letters is not that important for our Chinese students. I really don't know how they learn that but I don't have that instruction in my classes. Many of my students go to after-school English classes, and they just learn and practice it there. You know, now in China there are many kinds of after-school English programs and many parents take their child to those places. When they come back to me, they all get it [sound-letter correspondence].

*Important with occasional teaching*

Four teachers (2, 3, 5, and 6) thought that it was important and necessary to include phonemic awareness instruction for Chinese students and they admitted that they only provided students with phonemic awareness exercises occasionally. Teacher 2 asked students to orally identify or match words that have the same sound such as *tea*, *team* and *read*. She mentioned that she sometimes did this activity with her students in reviewing vocabulary they have learned. Teacher 3 taught first grade and he occasionally asked his students to orally blend individual sounds into a word or segment a word into individual sounds. For example, he said the word *dog* and then he asked his students to tell him the phonemes in the word /d/ /o/ /g/. He mentioned that he did this activity occasionally only because this was beyond the objective of first grade. He did not expect every student to be able to do that in first grade but he believed that it was important to include this instruction in his teaching so those students who went to after-school English classes would get extra benefit.

Teacher 5 taught in fifth grade and her phonemic awareness instruction included segmenting and/or blending syllables. For example, she presented students with a picture of a

basketball, led students to read aloud the word a few times, and then asked students to segment the syllables. She said that she only did this activity with longer English words because it helped students remember the pronunciation of those words. Teacher 6 talked about using picture cards to provide phonemic awareness instruction, such as blend or segment sounds or words, to her second graders. She showed students the picture of a cat, led the reading-aloud of not only the word *cat* but also the letter and each phoneme it represents /k/ /a/ /t/. She believed that this was a beneficial way of teaching letters and sounds but the only reason that kept her from providing students enough phonemic awareness instruction was the limited time they had in second grade. The table below provides a summary of the activities different teachers reported in teaching phonemic awareness.

Table 4.1 Summary of Phonemic Awareness Instructional Activities

	Grades	Activities	Reasons for occasional teaching
Teacher 2	2 <sup>nd</sup> & 5 <sup>th</sup>	Orally identify or match words that have the same sound such as <i>tea</i> , <i>team</i> and <i>read</i> .	Review learned vocabulary
Teacher 3	1 <sup>st</sup> & 3 <sup>rd</sup>	Blend individual sounds into a word or segment a word into individual sounds.	Beyond the first grade objective
Teacher 5	5 <sup>th</sup>	Segmenting and/or blending syllables using picture cards	Help students remember longer English words.
Teacher 6	2 <sup>nd</sup> & 4 <sup>th</sup>	Segmenting and/or blending sounds or words using picture cards	Lack of time

*Very important with lots of teaching*

Only one teacher (teacher 9) believed that phonemic awareness was one of the most important abilities for younger Chinese students to have, and teachers of younger grade should spend relatively more time on it in order to help students build a foundation for future English learning. She said:

I know what you meant. I do think this ability [phonemic awareness] is very important for students. Once they master this, learning words becomes easy for them. They would know the sound and spelling naturally. I often do activities with them [her students] to make sure they learn this and in the presentations I gave to other teachers either in the school or in some other schools in the district, I also suggest other teachers to do this.

Activities that she used to teach phonemic awareness included 1) using self-created songs and chants to teach letter-sound relationship (e.g. apple, apple, /a/, /a/, A; baby, baby, /b/, /b/, B;), 2) orally identify rhyming words, and 3) orally identify and/or match words that begin or end with the same consonant sound (e.g. boy and banana; cat and car).

During my classroom observations I only saw teacher 9 providing phonemic awareness instruction to her students. Even though some of the other teachers also said that they provided phonemic awareness instruction occasionally in class, I did not see any of phonemic awareness instruction in my observations of their teaching. In my second observation of teacher 9 I saw a lesson for second graders on the letters J j, K k, L l, M m, N n. In this lesson, she had offered students many opportunities to practice letter-sound relationship. She conducted four different activities for phonemic awareness instruction:

- Single letter and sound practice. In this activity, Teacher 9 orally said a sound or a letter and asked students, as a whole class and individually, to say the matching letter or sound. For example, Teacher 9 said /m/ and students should say *letter m*.
- Using picture cards to practice the beginning sound of a word. For example, Teacher 9 provided students four picture cards of a jacket, a kite, a moon, and a monkey. Then she asked students, individually, to pick up the card that starts with the sound of /j/.

- Single letter-sound read-aloud. In this activity, Teacher 9 led students to read aloud the letters and the sound they make as a whole class. For example, /j/ /j/ - J, /k/ /k/ - K, /l/ /l/ - L, /m/ /m/ - M, and /n/ /n/ - N.
- Using picture cards to review previously learned words focusing on the beginning sound. For example, Teacher 9 showed students the picture card of a flower and asked students *what's this?* Students answered *flower*. Teacher then asked students to read *flower, flower, /f/, /f/, F*. They did this activity both as a whole class and individually.

#### *Phonics/pronunciation instruction*

During interviews with teachers I asked about phonics/pronunciation instruction. I wanted to know if the teachers thought it was important to teach phonics/pronunciation and if so, how much and in what way would they provide instruction. I used the term phonics/pronunciation instead of phonics alone because pronunciation is an emphasis when teaching English speaking and oral reading to Chinese children.

I obtained three types of answers from the 11 teachers. Nine teachers could be categorized as the first group: they thought phonics/pronunciation is a very important part of teaching reading, and they had some types of phonics instruction but they admitted that they also taught students pronunciation based on rote learning. I named this group as *important with some phonics instruction*. The second category had one teacher. She also believed phonics/pronunciation was a very necessary part of teaching reading, and she had applied many phonics teaching methods in her classroom. In addition, she also mentioned that her students never needed to use rote practice to learn English pronunciation. I named this category as *important with lots of phonics instruction*. The third group also had one teacher who reported negatively about any kinds of phonics instruction or practice. She believed that the only

reasonable way to teach her students pronunciation of words was rote practice. She represents the *not important with no phonics instruction* type.

*Important with some phonics instruction*

Even though all the nine teachers (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 11) reported that phonics/pronunciation instruction was important for Chinese students learn to read in English, they provided three different reasons. Teacher 1, 3, 7, and 11 indicated that it was important because being able to speak English fluently with accurate pronunciation was one of the important standards used to judge a person's English speaking ability in today's world, and it affected what kinds of jobs a person could compete for in the future. For example, teacher 3 said:

Very important, in my opinion. You know, in today's standard, speaking well is even more important than getting a good score on paper. A child who could speak English well will probably have a better chance to get a good job than another child who could do well in exams. So we just need to teach students how to read each word correctly.

Teacher 11 also mentioned:

I actually have a lot of struggle with it [teaching phonics/pronunciations] since I am so new. But I know that I need to emphasize this in class because it is very important for my students to speak and read English with correct pronunciation. I don't want my students to come out of school speaking or reading English with poor pronunciations. In addition, you know the world has been changing. Today being able to speak English well is a big thing.

Teacher 2 and 6 believed phonics/pronunciation instruction was important because that was one of the objectives of the national syllabus. They both mentioned that the new syllabus

required students to be able to read and speak fluent English, so as teachers it was their job to make sure that students could meet this objective.

Teacher 4, 5, and 8 indicated test-related reasons to explain why they emphasized phonics/pronunciation instruction in their teaching. They said that students were tested on phonics/pronunciation skills in all kinds of important examinations. Two types of questions were usually presented. First, cross out the word that does not belong: *jeep, girl, jam, jacket* (p. 23, Third Grade Workbook II). Second, circle the same sound: ***cent*** *cap cat circle camera* (p. 36, Third Grade Workbook II). In these examples, there are certain rules that help students get the right answer. For instance, in the second example, as long as students know that when c is followed by e, i, or y, it makes the soft sound, they could get the correct answer. However, these teachers told me that they should not tell students the rules when teaching those words, the objective was to let students master the pronunciation and use correct pronunciation to answer the question. Teacher 5 said:

I teach them some rules, such as letter combination *oa* pronounces the /o/ sound, but we are not advised to present many rules to students, definitely not something complicated as what sound a consonant letter makes following different vowels. That is the old way to teach English. Now we just want our students to have the correct pronunciation and they can use the correct pronunciation to do exercises.

In answering my question – how do they teach phonics/pronunciation, the nine teachers provided me with some activities as examples. And there were altogether five types of activities mentioned. First, teacher taught or asked students to practice single letter-sound correspondences. The two teachers who taught second grade (Teacher 2 and 6) reported that they asked students to tell them what sound the letter makes by using either letter cards or writing single letters on the

board. For example, they would show students letter *A* and ask students what sound letter *A* makes.

Second, teachers taught or have students practiced blending and segmenting activities while looking at the words. Teacher 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8 told me that one activity they often used in teaching vocabulary was to write the word on the board or use vocabulary cards to have students practice oral blending and/or segmenting syllables activities. For example, the teacher showed students the word *basketball* and asked students to segment the syllables in this word.

Third, teachers taught or had students practiced common letter combinations. All the nine teachers reported having students practice letter combinations based on the textbook exercises. The textbooks used in all grade levels except the first grade have a section called *sounds and letters*, where words with the same letter combination are presented. For example in the fourth grade textbook unit 8 in page 20 (Wang & Methold, 2005), six words are presented: *toys*, *boy*, *oyster*, *oil*, *coins*, and *boil*. The nine teachers mentioned similar ways to teach this section, which were 1) teachers read aloud these words or have the tape played aloud, 2) teachers then emphasized the /oy/ and /oi/ letter combinations and the sound they make, 3) students either repeated the taped voice or the teacher to read aloud these words, 4) teachers asked students to do some exercises based on the textbook. The next two sections in the textbook after *Sounds and Letters* are *Listen for Sounds* and *Read with Uncle Booky* (Please see Appendix B for an example of a unit in the textbook). These two sections provided students with exercises to reinforce the *oy* and *oi* letter combinations. In *Listen for Sounds* section, ten pictures are presented: toy, boy, tie, soup, oil, oyster, kite, and coin. Students listen to the tape and cross out the words that do not belong to the *oy* or *oi* letter combination. Then in *Read with Uncle Booky's* section, more *oy* and

*oi* words are provided for students to read, such as *joy, soy, enjoy, annoy, noise, voice, soil, spoil, point*, to experience the sounds these letter combinations make.

Fourth, teachers use the Pinyin approach to teach English pronunciation. Teachers 2, 5, and 8 mentioned that many of the letters of the Chinese Pinyin have the same pronunciation with many of the letters in English, especially the consonant letters. So these teachers often taught students to use the Pinyin system to figure out the sounds and the spelling of the English words.

Finally, teachers used repeated reading to help students memorize the pronunciation of words. All nine teachers also indicated that even though they had some phonics activities in their teaching, they still believed that the most commonly used and reasonable approach to teach their students how to read English words was to ask students to read repeatedly following either the example of the teacher or a professionally produced audiotope to memorize the pronunciation. Some teachers indicated that for irregular words that do not follow any rules of pronunciation, students needed to use repeated reading to make those words part of their sight vocabulary. Others also complained that they did not have enough time to teach or explain the pronunciation rules, so the best way was to have students imitate the teacher or an audiotope's pronunciation to memorize words.

#### *Important with lots of phonics instruction*

Teacher 9 was the only teacher who reported that phonics instruction was important for her students and she provided students with lots of phonics activities. She had applied all the above-mentioned activities in her teaching over the years, and she mentioned that her students and herself enjoyed using the current textbook (*Primary English* jointly published by Beijing Normal University Press and McGraw-Hill Education Asia Co.) to learn phonics/pronunciations. In the interview she said:

I love how the book is designed to teach students phonics/pronunciation. It provides many activities and interesting exercises for students to acquire English phonics/pronunciation naturally. It allows students to listen, speak, and sing through songs, rhymes, and chants. It makes learning really fun. Students' fear to read aloud or to speak out is just gone and they have lots of interest in reading and speaking.

When I asked her if she had enough time to spend lots of time on teaching phonics/pronunciation, she replied:

Time is always not enough, since students only have 2 to 3 English lessons every week. But I do spend quite some time on teaching it because it is very important and it is the key to determine if later they can understand or speak English well. In addition, if they really have acquired a solid foundation on letter-sound correspondence, pronunciation and spelling will just come really naturally.

*Not important with no phonics instruction*

I have asked teacher 10, questions related with teaching phonics/pronunciation in both my interviews with her, once before the first observation and once after. She responded negatively both times about teaching phonics. Based on talking and observing her class, I concluded her way of teaching phonics/pronunciation could be explained with two words – memorize it, which is also called the whole word or look-say method (Beck & Juel, 1995).

In the first interview, when I asked her if phonics/pronunciation was important in teaching students how to read in English, she replied: "I don't really know, probably not. Pronunciation is not something that can be reflected in their paper exams. You know, we have a lot of pressure about how they make sure they pass the tests." In responding to my following

questions – how much phonics/pronunciation instruction she teaches and how she teaches, she said:

I don't spend a lot of time on it. I have tried in the past. For example in teaching the word *amusement*, I asked my students to separate syllables. But they could not understand and they could not do it at all. They are not capable of doing activities like this, I think. So I just told them to use their memory to remember the pronunciation and the spelling.

Later in a fourth grade classroom, I observed her reviewing vocabulary such as Wednesday, Thursday, and Saturday. She spoke the words out loud and picked individual student to spell them on the board. One student spelled *Saturday* as *Tauesdy*. Once the student returned to her seat, the teacher asked another one to come up to spell. The second student spelled it as *Starday*. Without analyzing the misspellings these two students made, the teacher blamed these two students for not studying hard enough. Then she put the correct spelling on board and told these two students that they each needed to copy the correct spelling for ten times. Because of this incident, I asked her in my second interview if she believed that it was necessary to teach letter-sound correspondence to these two students or probably to the whole class. She replied:

No time for that. I have too many students in one class and I cannot waste too much time on only a few students. Even though I repeatedly teach letter-sound relationship, they won't remember. Rote learning is just the easiest way.

I also ask if she taught students to use Chinese Pinyin to help with English pronunciation and her answer was: "No, because there are some Pinyin letters that sound differently in English, so I told them not to confuse Pinyin with English alphabet."

My observations of phonics/pronunciation instruction were consistent with what they reported during interviews. Eight out of the nine teachers in the first group - important with some phonics instruction, all had applied some of the activities they mentioned in their teaching, although the most regularly used activity was using repeated reading to memorize the pronunciation of the words. The teacher in the second group - important with lots of phonics instruction, has applied different activities to teach phonics/pronunciation, just like what she said during interviews. The teacher in the third group - not important with no phonics instruction, had no teaching of phonics/pronunciation besides telling students to use their memory to remember.

#### *Fluency instruction*

During interviews with teachers I asked about fluency instruction. I wanted to know if the teachers thought it was important to teach fluency and if so, how much and in what way would they provide fluency instruction. All the teachers reported some level of teaching and practicing of fluency in their classes, but with regard to importance, the responses fell into two categories: very important versus somewhat important.

#### *Very important*

Nine of the eleven teachers (except Teacher 1 and 4) thought fluency was very important to teach and they mentioned using different activities to have students practice reading fluency. Oral repeated readings were an activity that was used by all the teachers for fluency. Choral reading, echo reading, group reading aloud, and partner reading aloud were other activities these teachers applied in their classrooms. Furthermore, many teachers talked about the lack of time in classroom for students to practice repeated readings, so one of the homework assignments was to read repeatedly at home following the tape. These were oral homework reading assignments depended on students' initiative, but teachers had ways to check if students actually finished the

homework. Some teachers would pick individual students to read aloud in class to check reading fluency, while others asked group leaders to help check if students had successfully finished the homework. In addition, one teacher (teacher 2) also indicated that she encouraged students to read as many times as possible until they could memorize the text. Then she picked students to perform a role-play activity in class as a way to check their fluency. The role play activity was similar to the reader's theatre activity in the US. Three or four students worked in one group and they had the text scripts with different roles to play. Students practiced reading the text scripts many times until they were memorized. When performing, these students were called to the front of the classroom and performed the show with actions.

*Somewhat important*

Two teachers (1 and 4) considered the ability to read fluently would be a plus for students, but it was not something that every student needed to achieve. Teacher 1 indicated that for her above-grade-level and on-grade-level students, she was willing to assign homework to have students practice fluency at home; but for her struggling students, she would love to see them spend more time on vocabulary.

Even though these two teachers did not think fluency as important as the other teachers they did agree that fluency would help comprehension and the overall language sense. They also reported some level of fluency instruction and practice in their classrooms, which was providing students with repeated reading opportunities in class to reinforce reading fluency.

During classroom observations, I noticed fluency instruction at different levels with all but one teacher. Some teachers worked on fluency at word level, some at sentence level, and some at text level. The word level refers to the teacher having students read the words repeatedly with the focus on pronunciation and reading rate. Teacher 3, 4, 8, and 9 used word cards and lists

to have students read aloud the key words. They asked students to read as a whole class, in groups, or individually by themselves or by following the teacher, audiotape, or compact disc. It was worth mentioning that all four teachers used word level fluency instruction when teaching lower graders such as first and second grade students.

Teacher 3, 8, and 9 had fluency instruction at sentence level. Each unit in the textbooks has a section called *Uncle Booky's Storyboard*, where the key sentences in the unit were listed. For example in first grade, the key words in unit 12 are *walk, run, jump, swim, and dance* and the key sentences are *I can ... (walk, run, jump...); Can you...; Yes, I can; and No, I can't*. When asking students to practice fluency at sentence level, these teachers provided students repeated opportunities to read or speak the key sentences. Teachers either asked students to read after them, read by themselves, or read to each other.

Eight teachers (1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 9, and 11) also had students practice fluency at text level. The texts included the main story in the unit, lyrics, chants, and dialogues. All these teachers had provided students with many repeated reading aloud opportunities in class either following the CD/tape or the teacher. Echo reading, choral reading, partner reading, group reading were also present. However, one more reading activity that these teachers did not mention in the interview but that was present in their teaching was reader's theatre. Four teachers assigned their students to different roles based on the text, gave them time to practice reading in class, and then asked them to present to the whole class.

Teacher 10 stood out from others. She indicated that fluency instruction was very important and she provided students with repeated reading opportunities to practice their reading fluency. However, I did not notice any fluency instruction or practice during my two observations. Her focus of the two lessons I observed was on spelling and grammar.

### *Vocabulary instruction*

As for vocabulary instruction, I wanted to know if the teachers thought it was important to teach vocabulary and if so, how much and in what way would they provide vocabulary instruction. Teachers' opinion about whether vocabulary is important was consistent. All these teachers believed vocabulary was the most important and basic aspect of learning how to read in English in elementary schools; however, one teacher (teacher 11) did mention that she disliked the current objective on vocabulary and she believed that it would be better for elementary students if the focus of teaching were to make sure students could understand the meaning of the words and be able to use them when talking in English rather than to master the correct spelling. The responses from these teachers revealed three aspects of vocabulary instruction they valued: teaching pronunciation, teaching meaning, and teaching spelling.

#### *Teaching vocabulary pronunciation*

Only one teacher who taught sixth grade (teacher 8) mentioned that she would assign preview homework for her students, so students should have listened to the tape and used the vocabulary list at the back of the textbook to find out the pronunciation and the meaning of the key vocabulary before learning a new unit. In the preview homework, she asked students to listen to the tape reading aloud the text, copy the key vocabulary to their vocabulary notebooks, try to remember the pronunciation of each new word, and read the wordlist on the back of the book to know the meaning of each word. The other ten teachers had no preview homework for their students, and they taught vocabulary pronunciation by presenting students some phonics rules, allowing students to read repeatedly, and solely depending on memorization (as I have already mentioned in the phonics/pronunciation section).

#### *Teaching vocabulary meaning*

All the teachers thought that when teaching a new word, it was better to tell students the Chinese meaning of it instead of offering an English definition. Teacher 10 offered an example to show that using Chinese was the most time-saving and beneficial way to teach the meaning of vocabulary. She once observed a foreign teacher who spoken no Chinese teaching the word *very* to Chinese students. Even though this foreign teacher used a long time and offered many examples to explain the meaning of *very*, she did not think every student in that class understand the exact meaning of *very*. However, if the teacher could tell students that *very* means 非常 in Chinese, then very quickly students could get the meaning and even know how to use it in a sentence, because this word is used in the same way in both English and Chinese.

Besides using Chinese to facilitate the instruction, other ways to teach the meaning of vocabulary mentioned by these teachers included action, sentence-making, pictures, and context clues. Teachers who taught the younger grades performed the action in order to demonstrate the meaning of verbs. Teachers also presented students a vocabulary card with a picture on the other side, so students could get the meaning by looking at pictures. Some teachers (Teacher 2, 3, 5, and 6) did not always teach vocabulary separately; instead, they explained the vocabulary in the context of the story. They attended more to comprehension of the story rather than on the individual words. They indicated that students could already understand the text after watching the Compact Disk (CD) accompanied with the teacher's manual about the story, so the meaning of individual vocabulary was not a big problem. Furthermore, the textbook had illustrations that also helped with comprehension. As for the homework, teacher 2 mentioned that she asked students to write the sentences they make using the key vocabulary they learned in class as a way to check comprehension.

### *Teaching vocabulary spelling*

Being able to spell the vocabulary words correctly was an important part in all the grade levels except in first grade. Eight of the eleven teachers applied the rote learning method in teaching spelling, and only three (Teacher 5, 6, and 9) mentioned that knowing some phonics/pronunciation rules would assist students to remember the spelling. For instances, teacher 1 said:

I really don't know a better way to teach spelling than asking students to memorize it. I think that is just the way to learn a language. Even in Chinese, students still have to use their memory to remember how to write characters.

Teacher 3 said: "I don't know a better way to let them remember spelling of the words we learned than to memorize them. I ask them to copy the words and I do dictation too in class."

Teacher 7 mentioned: "It [teaching vocabulary spelling] is a boring thing for sure, but they [students] have to remember the spelling. Through repeated practice of spelling words in class and writing in their notebooks, they could remember if they want to." Teacher 10 also mentioned: "Rote learning. I just ask them to write it (vocabulary) for more times, so they can remember the spelling. It is really the easiest way. They just need to work hard."

All these teachers in the three schools had the same type of homework for spelling, which was to write the English words four to five times with one time in Chinese. Dictation was a common exercise for the new vocabulary in each unit. Teachers had two ways to do it. First, teachers would speak Chinese and ask students to write the corresponding English word. For example, the teacher said 高兴 and students should write *happy* on their dictation notebook. Second, teachers would read in English and ask students to write the word in Chinese. For example, the teacher said *restaurant* and students should write *restaurant* - 餐厅.

All the six grade levels in these three schools have a similar examination every semester called 100 words test. The purpose of this test was to check how many vocabulary students could spell correctly at the end of the semester. Chinese was given and students should write the corresponding English word next to the Chinese character(s). First graders also needed to take this test; however, their test was given in a different way. Instead of giving Chinese character(s) and asking them to write English, pictures and English words were all given but in a wrong order. All students needed to do were to draw a line to match the picture with the English word.

Through classroom observations, I was able to notice more vocabulary instruction activities or practice than what I was told during interviews. In addition to what these teachers mentioned in their interviews, I also noted the use of games, puzzles, and exercises from textbooks and workbooks to provide vocabulary exercises. I provided a few examples here to make my point clear.

### *Games*

Teacher 11 invented the FREEZE and TOUCH games when teaching vocabulary on body parts. When playing the FREEZE game, she first had all the students stood up and done whatever they wanted. Next she said “FREEZE” and students should stop moving. Then she wrote her direction on board such as “move your head (hand, foot, feet, arms...)” and students should do accordingly. The TOUCH game is almost the same as the FREEZE game. Students stood up, and she gave directions either writing on the board or speaking it out loud to touch their body parts.

### *Riddles*

I observed teacher 7 using a word puzzle as a way to review vocabulary she taught to students. After learning vocabulary *deer*, *frog*, and *bird*, she said to students in English: “I am

going to say something and you tell me what it is, OK? It is an animal. It is green. And it can jump. So what is it?” Students shouted with the answer – frog.

#### *Exercises from textbook and workbook*

The textbook and workbook have many different activities to reinforce vocabulary learning. I have observed teachers 1, 2, 4, 7 spending time in class to help students finish these exercises. Some examples are provided here.

In the second grade textbook II (Cheng, Wang, & Methold, 2005) page 64 and 67, three sections, *listen for words*, *listen to this*, and *write the letter*, are vocabulary exercises. In *listen for words*, pictures are provided in the book, students should point to the picture and say the word following the tape. If the tape said *banana*, student should point to the picture of banana and speak the word following the tape. The next section is *listen to this*, and in this section a word is provide below each picture. Students listened to the tape and used their fingers to point to the word read by the tape. It is worth mentioning that besides providing students vocabulary practice, these sections also provided students with listening exercises. In *write the letter* section, an incomplete word with a missing letter is provided below each picture and students should fill the blank to make the word complete. For example, the first picture is a pear and *\_ear* is written below the picture. Students’ job is to fill the line with the letter *p*.

#### *Comprehension instruction*

I asked the teachers about three aspects of comprehension instruction: 1) is comprehension important for Chinese students in learning how to read in English, 2) how much comprehension instruction should occur, and 3) how should comprehension be taught? Most of the teachers agreed that comprehension was also very important and they used different methods to make sure students comprehended. It was interesting that several teachers of younger grades

first responded negatively and told me that comprehension was not important. For example, teacher 3 who taught first grade and third grade first told me: “Oh, there is no reading comprehension teaching to first graders. They cannot read. We never give them any passages to read.” Teacher 6 who taught 2<sup>nd</sup> grade and 4<sup>th</sup> grade also said: “Reading comprehension is too hard for my younger students. For 4<sup>th</sup> graders, we have reading passages but not for 2<sup>nd</sup> graders.” Based on their answers, I knew that they assumed I was asking them about how to teach their younger students to answer comprehension questions after reading a passage. Hence, I explained to them what I meant for comprehension instruction – how to make sure students understand what they read or learned. After my clarification, these teachers changed their opinion and agreed with other teachers that comprehension is the ultimate goal of learning how to read. These teachers have mentioned many ways and methods to teach comprehension and I used the following sections to explain them.

#### *Chinese translation*

All the 11 teachers indicated that they would translate the text into Chinese for students if they did not understand it. Those teachers who taught fifth and sixth grade reported using more Chinese translation than teachers of other grades. And one reason for this was that in fifth and sixth grade textbooks, there was a narration passage without any pictures for students to read. Even though this passage was a summary of the story presented in the unit, it was still hard for students to understand. Therefore, teachers spent extra time explaining and translating this passage to ascertain students’ comprehension.

#### *Picture walk/illustrations*

Seven teachers (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 9, and 11) suggested an activity similar to what is called picture walk in the US as an efficient way for students to achieve comprehension. It is interesting

to know that a couple of teachers did not even realize that they were using this method to teach comprehension. For example, teacher 3 said:

Honestly, sometimes I don't even know how they just understand. I guess after they remember the key vocabulary, reading the easy text in the book is not hard at all. I told them to look at the illustrations before they read the text and they just get it. Later when I asked them some comprehension questions, they understand it and they get it. I think the colorful illustrations are really good.

### *Movies*

The movies here refer to the animated version of the textbook story. One of the components of the current core teaching material used in these three schools is a compact disk. The disk presents the story just like a cartoon movie. Students watch all the cartoon characters talking and acting exactly like what is presented in the text. Four teachers (2, 7, 9, and 11) liked to show students the movie before they talked about the text. They mentioned that it was very interesting to watch the story from the CD, which was like a movie and a read-aloud of the text. After watching the movie, they reported that students usually have already achieved 80% to 90% of the comprehension. They used the rest of the time to talk about important vocabulary and key sentences. Teacher 3 provided me with an example to show why sometimes key sentences and Chinese translations still needed to be explained for students to understand the text completely. She used the sentence *It's time for dinner* as an example and suggested that for sentences like this, even though students have watched the CD and knew every single word in that sentence, they still could not understand the meaning of that sentence because of the difference in word orders in English and Chinese. Hence, she would need to translate the sentence and explain the sentence structure to her students.

### *Pre-reading comprehension questions*

Teacher 5 reported using pre-reading comprehension questions as a way to help students with comprehension. She said that she always asked students some questions before letting them to read the text and she told them to bring these questions when they read and try to find the answers from the text. She admitted that students would have a purpose in reading by doing so, which facilitated their comprehension.

### *During and after reading comprehension questions*

Five teachers (2, 3, 4, 7, and 8) told me that they always asked comprehension questions during or after reading the text to check students' comprehension. If students could not answer a certain question, they would know what and where exactly more explanation or Chinese translation was needed. Two teachers (2 and 4) also mentioned using the different types of comprehension questions as a way to make the lesson suitable for students in different levels. According to them, explicit questions were usually asked to struggling readers and implicit or infer questions were asked to advanced readers. Teacher 2 used the text in unit 12 in the fifth grade textbook as an example. Here is the text: *School vacation started on July 15. Ann and Ken were very happy. There were no classes for seven weeks! The family decided to eat out. Mocky wanted to go to his favorite restaurant. The restaurant was the cheapest in town. The family decided to try it out...* Teacher 2 said that based on this part, she could ask students two questions. She would ask her struggling readers to answer the first explicit question - Why Ann and Ken were happy? And she would call her advanced readers to answer the question – Do you think the family will like the food in Mocky's favorite restaurant? Why?

### *Silent reading*

Two teachers (1 and 2) mentioned that they sometimes preferred to use a few minutes to have students read independently before they read aloud or explained the text. They believed that it would give students a chance to read something in English by their own, which was important for them to be good readers. For example, teacher 1 said: “let them read by themselves independently give them a chance to read some English text. I don’t think they read anything in English outside the classroom and also we don’t have a lot of stuff in English for them to read. So I just like to use a few minutes for them to read in my class.” Teacher 2 said similar things about teaching her fifth graders: “This would be good for them too because in the test, they have to read by themselves independently. It just gives them an opportunity to practice their reading comprehension.”

### *Repeated reading*

Teacher 2 also mentioned using repeated reading as a way for students to comprehend the story text. She said that she provided a lot of opportunities to read in her class. She used 6 to 7 lessons to finish teaching a unit, so her students had a lot of opportunities to read the text repeatedly which enhanced comprehension.

### *Group reading/reader-theatre*

Teacher 1 believed that asking students to read in groups or use the reader’s theatre approach was a good way to achieve comprehension. By reading together with group members, reading became a fun activity and students could support each other in many different ways. They could correct each other’s pronunciation, compete on reading fluency, and talk about the content of the text, which would enhance reading comprehension. She said,

It is really fun to ask students to work in groups reading together. They are excited.

Except that I cannot always do it because of the time issue, but once in a while I ask them to do it and it is nice to see them working together. You know, compete with each other or with other groups, who read better, more fluent, better pronunciation. They also have conversations about the content of the text with each other. It helps them to understand. Even though they don't always talk in English, as I required, but it is still nice to know they get it.

### *Explicit teaching of comprehension strategies*

When I used the term *strategy* in my interview questions, some teachers did not quite understand what the word means. So I used the terms *method* and *skill* to explain it as 方法, 策略 in Chinese. Four teachers (2, 4, 8, and 10) stated that they explicitly taught students some methods to better aid comprehension. Except teacher 10 who taught third grade, all the other three teachers taught fifth and sixth grade, and they believed the teaching of comprehension strategy allowed their students do better during exams. The methods/strategies they all mentioned included using key words or sentences to locate answers, ignoring individual unknown vocabulary and try to get comprehension of the passage as a whole, reading the questions before reading the passage, and applying comprehension strategies they learned when reading Chinese to English passages.

During classroom observation, I have noticed all the teachers used the above-mentioned approaches to teach comprehension. First graders' comprehension teaching was limited to the level of understanding vocabulary and sentences rather than texts. One strategy that the teachers did not mention in the interview was using prior and background knowledge to help with comprehension. Before asking students to read the passage, which was a section of the story *The*

*Emperor's New Clothes*, teacher 5 asked students if they still remember where the story ended last time and what happened last time. After making sure that all students had a background, teacher 5 continued the reading.

So far, I have talked about if these teachers have phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension instruction in their teaching. Besides these basic five components, I also asked them what other aspects of knowledge that they think the teaching of English should include and how they teach them. I concluded their answers into three categories: writing, grammar, and culture knowledge.

#### *Writing instruction*

Five teachers (2, 5, 8, 9, and 11) mentioned that it was necessary to teach students writing in English while teaching them how to read. And the reasons for that were: 1) reading and writing were connected, the learning of one reinforced the learning of the other, 2) writing was a way to reflect how much a student had learned, and 3) writing was an important part that was tested. The other six teachers did not mention that writing was a necessary part of teaching students how to read in English at first, but when I asked them if they had writing instruction in their teaching and what did they think of using writing to help or assess how much students had learned, they all gave me a positive answer that learning how to read in English could not be separated from learning how to write. And they indicated similar reasons as the above-mentioned ones.

The interview results indicated that there was no free writing activity in these three elementary schools in Beijing. Instead of learning writing processes, such as prewriting, drafting, revising, and all the forms of writing, such as narrative, expository, students' writing focused on

words and sentences levels with an exception that in sixth grade students learned how to write a letter. I talked about the writing tasks based on grade in the following sections.

### *First grade*

Four teachers (3, 7, 8, and 9) taught first grades and they shared a similar opinion about writing instruction. Because the major objective for first graders was to build up some basic vocabulary to be able to speak a few sentences, teachers did not teach writing letters, words, or sentences. The only writing activities for first graders were drawing and coloring. For example, some drawing activities could be 1) the tape said: “This is a green apple.” If students understood the sentences, they should draw a green apple. 2) Draw a line to link the word with the picture: a cat --- a picture of a cat. Coloring activity was similar to the drawing activity. Students listened to the tape for directions and color the picture. It is interesting to note that the directions were always given by the tape instead of written directions in their textbook, and this was because first graders were not expected to be able to read and understand the directions.

### *Second grade*

The four teachers (2, 4, 6, and 9) who taught second grade indicated that the majority of the writing in second grade was writing individual words. Exercises were devoted to having students practice vocabulary spelling, and homework was also used for the spelling purpose. For example, a picture of a cat is provided and an incomplete sentence is listed below a picture: *This is a \_\_\_\_*. Students should be able to write the word *cat* on the blank. The typical homework for students was to copy new words to their notebooks a few times with Chinese included, such as *dog dog dog dog dog 狗*.

### *Third grade*

Writing in third grade has reached sentence level, according to the four teachers who taught third grade (1, 3, 7, and 11). Copying the key sentences in the unit into their notebooks with Chinese translation and using key vocabulary to make sentences were the most common writing activities. In the workbook, exercises included 1) completing sentences by identifying missing letters in words, such as *Do you have a n\_w w\_ \_c\_ ?* (a picture of a new watch is provided); 2) drawing and writing, such as draw a face and write the parts *nose, mouth, hair, eyes*; 3) completing the conversation, for example, based on the pictures provided, students complete the sentence: *I want an umbrella. Do you have one? \_\_\_\_\_* Students should fill in the blank with either *Yes, I do* or *No, I don't*.

### *Fourth, fifth, and sixth grade*

Starting from fourth grade, students are asked to write a short composition of about five to six sentences. Writing topics were all pre-determined in relationship to the theme of the unit. For instances, when students studied the unit about time, writing practice could be something about writing one's day: *On Monday, I get up at 6 o'clock. I go to school at 7 o'clock. I go home at 4 o'clock in the afternoon. I do my homework and I eat dinner at 7:30. I go to bed at 9:30 in the evening.* Other writing topics teachers mentioned included one's favorite subject, one's family, and one's best friend.

Teacher 4 introduced four different types of writing activities for sixth graders in her school. First, write a short passage of around 5 sentences based on a given topic such as the one I mentioned above. Second, write a short passage based on the information provided. For example, students would use the information from a table to write a short passage.

Table 4.2 Writing Topics

My age	12
My hobby	Go to movie
My best friend	Tom
My family	Mom, Dad, and a sister.

Third, write a letter. In letter writing, the teacher taught the form of an English letter because English and Chinese have different forms. A topic was also pre-determined such as tell one of your English speaking friends how you celebrated your last birthday. Finally, write a short story based on the illustrations given. Usually four to five illustrations were provided and students wrote about them. For example, a student could look at the illustration and write *I go home at 4 o'clock. I walk my dog and go swimming.*

#### *Grammar instruction*

Teaching grammar was involved in every aspect of English education in every grade. All the teachers reported that grammar instruction was an inseparable part in teaching Chinese students how to read in English because 1) grammar (syntactical) knowledge helped foreign language learners to achieve correct comprehension, and 2) grammar knowledge was a big portion in all the required examinations. For examples, teacher 7 said: “Grammar instruction is another aspect that my teaching includes. Without this knowledge, students won’t understand what they read. They won’t know something happened today or tomorrow or yesterday. Or they won’t understand some sentences which have the fixed structures.” And teacher 8 said: “Definitely I need to teach grammar knowledge. If you look at their (her 6<sup>th</sup> graders) final examination paper, you will understand. It is a very heavy part in the test.”

Very necessary as these teachers reported; however, based on the interviews and observations I found that most of these teachers did not spend a lot of time explaining grammatical rules because grammar teaching was implicit, with the goal of students naturally acquiring English grammar (syntactical knowledge). And this was different from the way English was taught when I was in school. The following section provides three illustrative examples of the implicit approach to teaching grammar.

#### *Examples of Grammar Instruction*

*Teaching articles a, an.* The vocabulary card provided with the textbook makes the teaching of articles *a* and *an* natural and easy. The presentation of nouns is accompanied by appropriate articles. For example, an eye, an apple, a banana. Teacher 7 said that when she introduces these vocabulary cards she does not explicitly talk about the difference between using *a* versus *an*. She expected students to begin developing the concept that *a* and *an* were different and used in front of different words. After students had some practice with nouns with articles, she would tell students the rule in brief as a summary.

During an observation, I noticed that teacher 11 had articles *a, an, the*, and some nouns on board. She asked volunteer students to come to the board to match the appropriate articles with the appropriate nouns. She did not use any Chinese during her teaching, but students were able to finish the task successfully. I asked her after the observation how she taught students this aspect of grammar so that they could do it so well. She replied that she never used a lot of time on it and she only explicitly mentioned the rule one or two times. By practicing repeatedly, students finally got it.

*Teaching singular or plural nouns.* Second graders begin learning singular and plural forms through the use of pictures/illustrations. By repeatedly showing students pictures of

animals such as *one duck* and *four ducks*, students gradually learned when there was more than one, you needed to add the morpheme *s* to nouns. I also asked these teachers how they explained irregular forms of changing singular nouns to plural nouns (potato – potatoes, fish – fish, baby – babies) and the answer was through rote learning. For irregular forms, you had to tell them the rules until they were memorized..

*Teaching tenses.* Upper grade students started to learn different tenses and these teachers had different ways to teach them. Most of the teachers still preferred implicit teaching first, which was to let students experience the tense first in the context of the story. After students understood the story, teachers explained the key sentences, and finally, if necessary, they would explicitly tell students the rules. Two teachers (Teacher 8 and 10) were different, however. They both preferred explicit explaining of grammar rules first and then providing students with exercises or context to reinforce their memory.

### *Cultural Knowledge*

The 2001 National English Curriculum Standard (NECS) (Ministry of Education, 2001c) requires elementary students to develop an cultural awareness, and it has seven objectives: 1) to know the simple English terms including addressing, greeting, and farewell (知道英语中最简单的称谓语，问候语和告别语); 2) to be able to respond appropriately to compliment and requirement (对一般的赞扬，请求等做出适当的反应); 3) to know the important amusement and sport events internationally (知道国际上最重要的文娱和体育活动); 4) to know the most common drinks and food in English speaking countries (知道英语国家中最常见的饮料和食品的名称); 5) to know the capital cities and the national flags of some major English speaking countries (知道主要英语国家的首都和国旗); 6) to understand the symbols of some major English speaking countries, such as the Big Ben in the Great Britain (了解世界上主要国家的重

要标志，如英国的大本钟等); 7) to be awareness the important holidays in English speaking countries (了解英语国家中重要节假日)。

In exploring whether or not the cultural knowledge was part of teaching Chinese students how to read in English, I asked the teachers if they believed it was important to include the cultural aspects of the language into teaching, what aspects of the culture in English speaking countries were included into the teaching, and what they thought of the current textbooks that have westernized illustrations.

All the teachers admitted that it was important to include the cultural aspects of the language into teaching and to help students develop the cultural awareness. All the teachers except one (Teacher 10) indicated that they would spend some time in class to talk about cultural-related knowledge, while teacher 10 reported that she had no time for teaching non-test-related stuff. The teachers mentioned specific examples of what cultural knowledge would appear in their teaching, and it includes: 1) holidays, Chinese spring festival vs. Christmas, Halloween; 2) food, such as the names of Western food (French fries, hamburger, pizza...) and the habit of eating (have sweets after meal, drink coffee instead of tea); 3) social customs, such as age (inappropriate to ask age), privacy (greeting by saying *how are you* or *how are you doing* instead of saying *where did you go* or *have you eaten your lunch/dinner*), personal space (should not be too close to someone), pets (dog is a beloved animal and it is not a bad word), numbers (13 is an unlucky number in Western culture), days of the week (Sunday is the first day of the week in the western culture, not Monday); 4) sports, such as the difference between football and soccer.

Even though all the teachers reported that they would cover cultural knowledge in their teaching, I only observed attention to culture in one lesson done by teachers 6. I observed her

teaching a review lesson. In this lesson, no new content was presented; the teacher reviewed the learned vocabulary and the key sentence structures. When talking about football, she said: “Remember we talked about this before, right? The football we said here means 足球, which is soccer. Football means a different game in the US, right?” I opened the textbook page 41 (Wang & Methold, 2005) and found the illustration of a soccer game, but the English word above the game is *football* instead of soccer.

I also indicated to these teachers that when I looked at the current series of the textbooks, I felt the book was westernized. The illustrations were westernized, such as using English names and non-Asian appearance for all the main characters or western style kitchen and eating utensils (ovens, forks, knives). So I wanted to know their opinions about the westernized English textbooks for our Chinese students. Two teachers (4 and 10) admitted that they had never thought about it, so they did not really know how to answer the question. Other teachers all agreed that it was a good thing for the English textbooks to be designed in this way, so Chinese students could have a more native and idiomatic language atmosphere and develop a better sense of cultural awareness. Some of these teachers said:

Before you mention this, I have never thought about it. But now I think this is a good thing and it is because we want our children to not just learn English, but also to understand their culture. If all the figures are Chinese children, then the names should also be Chinese. But now we use English names, Tommy, Peter... and students like that. Also in 6<sup>th</sup> grade textbook, the first class is about children's club. You know in our country, children go home directly after school and they don't have clubs to go. But in the US, children go to different clubs after school, so it is a way for our children to know

this culture. Language cannot be separated from culture: we learn their language, so we should also learn their culture in the mean time.

Teacher 7 said:

I think it is a good thing because in this way, our students can know more about the Western culture and tradition. And it will give our students a more native atmosphere. We are learning English, so I think it is best for our students to see the authentic Western figures such as this boy with yellow hair.

Teacher 9 also said:

I think this is interesting, since you mentioned it. Personally I think it is more idiomatic if everything is from the western country, since we are learning their language.

#### Teachers' Pedagogies and Perspectives on Teaching English Reading

Breen (1991)'s study and Commeyras' (2007) continuum have informed my data analysis toward the second research question - How teachers in Chongwen and Xuanwu districts shape their pedagogical approaches of teaching students reading in English? Breen (1991) investigated how thinking and decision making influenced language teachers' pedagogical approaches. He divided the 106 participant teachers into language learning groups where some of the teachers acted as teachers, some acted as learners, and some acted as observers. After each language lesson, the teachers, learners, and observers would write down teaching techniques teachers used and why they believed each technique was adopted. The results of this study indicated that there teachers had seven pedagogic concerns, which could be grouped into three categories. Teachers in the first category focused on the learners and were concerned with the learners' affective involvement, background knowledge, and cognitive processes. Teachers in the second category focused on the subject matters and were concerned with the language they taught as usage and as

use. Teachers in the third category focused on themselves and were concerned with guidance and management. Commeyras (2007) proposed a continuum to examine the locus of control for teachers of reading. The left end of the continuum represents control outside the classroom (scripted reading instruction), whereas, the right end of the continuum represents control within the classroom (teachers designing the reading program).

In reporting the results of my study, I categorized my participant teachers' pedagogical concerns using Breen's (1991) framework and I also added my own category. Then I placed my participant teachers on the Commeyras continuum (2007) to show where they were in their locus of decision making.

#### *Focus on the Learners*

##### *Concern with the learner's affective involvement*

Teachers' concern with the learner's affective involvement was related to the emotional climate of lessons, which addressed teachers' choice of teaching techniques focusing on the motivation and confidence in learners. A teacher belongs in this category if she/he adopted a teaching method for fun and to stimulate students' interest in learning the target language.

Two teachers (9 and 11) belonged to this category. They both reported using intrinsic motivational strategies to make English learning a fun thing to do. Teacher 9 mentioned using computer, CD movies, and music to teach English and teacher 11 reported using games and actions to motivate students in learning. In my observations and interviews with the other teachers there was no evidence of a concern about the emotional climate of lesson and they did not seem concerned about motivating students' learning. Instead, they relied on extrinsic motivators such as parents, testing, and the standardized reward system used currently in all the elementary

schools in Beijing. They used the stickers accompanied with the teacher's manual to reward students' learning efforts in English.

*Concern with the learner's background knowledge*

None of the teachers mentioned that they would pay attention to knowledge other than English of students to inform their teaching. What they (1, 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, and 11) did acknowledge was differences in the students' English levels, which led them to different expectations and try to provide stratified (differentiated) instruction to meet the differing needs of students. For instances, teacher 3 indicated how he provided stratified instruction in this way:

I usually have a very general plan because it is impossible to make different plans for all the different students. But I do take their differences into consideration and I design different activities for students at different levels. For example, for average students, I ask them to make a sentence using the word we just learned. And for struggling students, I ask them to replace a word using, maybe a new word learned, in a sentence that I provided.

Teacher 4 understood stratified instruction as this:

Stratified instruction (分层教学) is really what is highly suggested today. So as for me, I prepare questions in different levels...I will ask good students more difficult questions and give struggling students easier questions. Take this unit for example: it talks about the mountain bike race. To competent students, I will ask them to tell me what the rules are. They really need to think about it and find the answers from different parts of the text because they are listed everywhere. But for struggling students, I simply just ask them – when will the mountain bike race happen? The answer to this question is right here in the first sentence – there is a mountain bike race next Saturday.

Four teachers (2, 6, 7, and 10) admitted that it was impossible for them to take all the individual needs into consideration during planning and teaching, and the best some of them could do was to assign different homework to students at different levels.

*Concern with the learner's cognitive processes*

Breen (1991) found that some teachers' instruction was concerned with the cognitive processes of the learners in comprehension and understanding. Teaching techniques in this category focused on retention in memory and recall of new materials, such as using repetition to facilitate discrimination, encouraging memorization, eliminating error, and reinforcing correct structure or pronunciation etc. All the participant teachers in my study had provided repeated opportunities for students to practice what they learned in class to enhance memorization. Students repeatedly practiced phonics skills, read aloud for fluency, completed vocabulary activities, practiced spelling and sentence-making activities to enhance grammar. Teachers also assigned homework of repeated reading, copying, and writing to encourage memorization.

*Concern with the learner's native language*

All the teachers indicated the use of students' native language, Chinese, in classrooms to facilitate English teaching and learning. So I add to Breen's (1991) category here. Even though teachers were encouraged to speak more English in classrooms to immerse students into the English atmosphere, these teachers felt that speaking Chinese in classroom allowed them to teach more efficiently and allowed students to achieve better understanding. They reported using Chinese under the following circumstances: 1) giving direction such as assigning tasks to students and directing them how to finish the tasks, 2) transition from one activity to another, 3) managing classrooms, 4) assigning homework, 5) explaining new words, 6) teaching grammar points, and 7) translating difficult sentences.

### *Focus on the Subject Matter*

#### *Concern with language as usage and as use*

Widdowson (1979) suggested a distinction between language as usage and language as use. According to Widdowson, usage refers to “the citation of words and sentences as manifestations of the language system” and use refers to “the way the system is realized for normal communicative purposes” (p. 18, Widdowson, 1979). My understanding of these definitions is that language usage is concerned more with syntax such as the order of nouns, verbs, and objects in a sentence; whereas language use is concerned more with how to use the language in practical situations. Breen (1991) noted in his study that some of the teachers attended more to the system or the form of the target language. For example, teaching emphasized the syntactic features of the language so that students could learn to make sentences by themselves. Or, explicit sound and sound segments were taught so students could learn to acquire standard pronunciation. On the other hand, those teachers who were concerned with language as use encouraged students to use the target language in meaningful communication activities.

In my study, I found it hard to distinguish between teachers concern with language as usage versus language use. Many of my participant teachers were concerned with both in teaching all the other aspects of reading except grammar. In teaching grammar, it seemed some of the teachers were concerned more with language as usage and some concerned with language as use. Two teachers (8 and 10) applied the explicit teaching approach. They explained the rules to students first and then asked students to think of those rules during speaking and writing. Teacher 10 gave me an example of how she would teach past tense. She would tell students that past tense means something happened in the past. The structure of the sentence should have past

tense verbs, which is usually to add *ed* at the end of the verb. She would also tell students that people express past tense differently in English and in Chinese. In Chinese, there is no need to change the form of the verb, such as *我昨天打篮球了* means *I played basketball yesterday*. But in English, the correct form of the verb *play* should be *played*, which indicated it happened in the past. This explicit syntactic rule teaching approach concerned more with language as usage. The other nine teachers all reported using the implicit approach when teaching grammar – letting students experience how to use different tenses in the language context, which concerns more with language as use.

#### *Concern with language as the testing subject*

Breen (1991) found that her participant teachers concerned with language as usage and as use, but the results in this study indicated a third category – concern with language as the testing subject. Seven teachers (1, 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, and 11) mentioned that they needed to consider about the test related reasons when teaching the language. For instances, teachers 2, 4, 8, and 10 mentioned that they explicitly taught comprehension strategies for the purpose of helping students do well in test. Teachers 8 and 10 said that repeatedly explained the grammatical rules in order to make sure students could pass the required examinations. Teachers 4 and 8 both taught sixth grade and they told me that students would do a lot of writing exercises and the school-created paper tests in class time because they needed to be prepared for the final graduation examinations. And finally teacher 11 indicated that learning English would be a much more pleasant thing for both teachers and students if students were only required to understand the meaning of the words and be able to use them in practice instead of to master the correct spelling to pass the tests.

### *Focus on the Teacher*

The data in Breen (1991)'s study revealed two groups when the focus was on the teacher: concern with guidance and concern with management of the lesson or the group. Teachers have assumed two instructional roles in his study: One is as the guide and the other as the manager of the lesson or the group. Those who served as the guide assumed a responsive role in classroom, providing learners with feedback and formative evaluations. Teachers as managers assumed a supervisory role when implementing the lesson plans or maintaining the group work procedures. Teachers in this group were more concerned with the pace of the lesson or group involvement during a task.

The eleven teachers in my study played more than these two roles. They reported in the interviews that they were facilitators, leaders, lecturers, presenters, students' partners, guides, need-providers, organizers, and evaluators. Based on their report, I had three categories: concern with facilitating students' learning; concern with directing the class and the learning, and concern with meeting the needs of students.

#### *Concern with facilitating students' learning*

Two teachers (1 and 8) named themselves as facilitators. According to them, teachers as facilitators placed students to be the center, provided opportunities for students to be active learners, and helped students in the learning process. For examples, teacher 1 said:

I hope and I am trying to be, you know, I think when learning English, students should be the focus. I do not want to be a leader. I hope I can be the facilitator to help my students during their learning process. I want them to be active learners. I am not the one who stands in the front and do all the lecturing.

Teacher 8 also said: “I think I am the facilitator in the classroom. I help them to learn. To be more specific, I help them to learn how to learn – the methods, not just what to learn.”

*Concern with directing the class and the learning*

Some teachers (2, 3, 4, and 10) stated that they still considered themselves as the traditional teachers, which were presenters, lectures, and leaders. They were the directors, who gave order to students and students’ job was to finish their required tasks. They also indicated that they knew it was encouraged to place students into the center of teaching and ask students be active learners; however, due to many limitations, they were not able to do that. Teacher 2 indicated:

I think I have to be the lecturer or the leader of the class. I need to tell my students what to do and ask them to do what I said. But I do hope the situation will change, I really want to be their learning partners. But I can’t because of the pressure of the test. We have too many students and too limited time, so I need to be there to make sure they get it.

Teacher 3 said:

I think teachers should be the person to facilitate the learning. Being a leader probably is not right, just told them what to do and then check it. But sometimes being an English teacher, you know, as the subject teacher, students do not give you enough attention and respect, it is not like how they treat their homeroom teacher. So I have to be stricter with them, I just lead the class.

Teacher 10 also stated:

I know that teachers are equal to students, so it is great if we could build the partner relationship. But in practice, it is not possible. I am still considering myself a traditional

teacher; I lectured and presented the content to them. So I am a lecturer, a presenter, or even a leader. This is especially true among those struggling students.

*Concern with meeting the need of students*

Four teachers (5, 7, 9, and 11) reported that they had multiple roles in classroom in order to meet the need of students. They lectured on important language points, organized classroom activities, facilitated and guided students' learning, and evaluated students' learning process.

Teacher 5 stated:

I am facilitator. I helped and supported my students when they need me. But I have to admit that I am also a lecture and a leader: I need to lecture when it comes to the important language points and I lead my class to go toward our goal.

Teacher 9 said:

I play multiple roles. I am first a helper. I help them to learn English. I teach them the methods to learn and I help them to be better. I also provide them guidance too. I guide them and make sure they are in the right direction.

And Teacher 11 also said:

I think I am an organizer. I give the class time to my students mostly and I organize different activities for them to practice what they learned. I am also an evaluator. I tell them what is right and wrong and I evaluate their learning progress. I am also an answer-provider. I am the one they turn to for any questions they have.

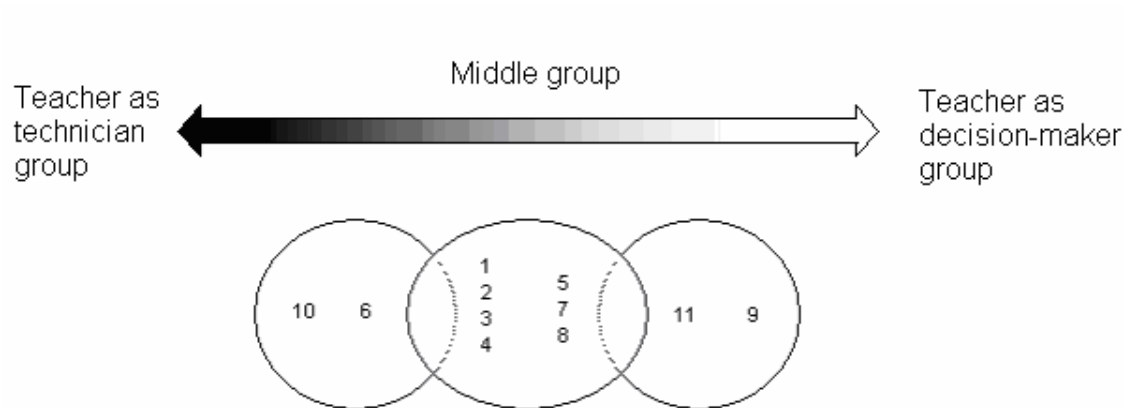
In addition to what these teachers reported their classroom roles were, I also noticed that some of them chose to have some freedom in their teaching: even though guided by the teacher's manual, they still planned their own instruction using other resources and adopted activities or games. They were the decision makers in their teaching. Some of other teachers followed the

manual strictly and conducted the list of suggested activities in the manual. They worked like technicians, who followed the “correct” procedures described in the manual. And finally there were also teachers that could be placed in the middle of these two groups. I found that the Commeyras continuum could be applied here to explain further.

### *Locus of Control in Decision Making Continuum*

Commeyras (2007) reflected during her teaching of preservice teachers that she could use a continuum that represents “differences in the locus of decision making with regard to who develops reading lessons and an overall plan for reading instruction” (p. 407). Using this framework, I divided my 11 teachers into three groups: the left end group, the middle group, and the right end group.

Figure 4.1 Teachers’ Decision Making Continuum



#### *The left end of the continuum*

The left end of the continuum represents the teacher-as-technician group. In addition to teaching with great fidelity to the manual and textbook, they also carry some characteristics of a behaviorist approach in teaching. Behaviorists believe that the outcome of learning is an observable change in behavior and teachers should play an active role in classroom as a dispenser of knowledge (Skinner, 1974). Direct instruction is often associated with the

behavioral theoretical perspective and it is based on the teaching of six steps: 1) specifying objectives, 2) devising instructional strategies, 3) developing teaching procedures, 4) selecting examples, 5) sequencing skills, and 6) providing practice and review (Carnine, Silbert, Kame'enui & Tarver, 2004).

I place two of the teachers on the far left of the continuum (Teacher 10 and 6) with teacher 10 being at the very end. They represented the technician stance in which they followed the textbook order and taught with great fidelity to the manual. During interviews, teacher 10 stated that she was confused about teaching grammar because there was not much guidance from the manual. She admitted that she had no time to plan individualized lesson to meet the needs of different students, no time to search for extra resources when planning her lessons, and no time to add extra activities or games besides what were listed on the textbook in her teaching. In addition, it seemed that she did not like to offer any opinions about non-teaching-related things. When I asked her about if she believed it was good to start English teaching early in elementary grades, she replied: "I really don't know. I am a teacher. I don't decide when students should start to learn English. In addition, I have never taught English from the beginning, I don't know if it is good or bad." And later when I asked her again about having westernized illustrations in the textbooks, she answered: "I never really thought about this, but if this is the book we should use now, probably this is the way English learning should be in China."

I observed a behaviorist approach (Carnine, Silbert, Kame'enui & Tarver, 2004) in her teaching. Her first lesson focused on reviewing grammar points they have learned (how to use *what* and *when* to ask questions in future tense) and spelling (days of the week). She provided direct instruction following the manual. She explicitly explained grammar rules in Chinese, asked students to recall strategies she taught before, called students to stand up to answer her

questions, and finally asked more students to do exercises to reinforce what they have learned. I provided one teaching scenario below:

Teacher (T): Write the word *What* on the chalkboard and asked: “我们学过的什麼句型用 *what* 提问?” [What sentence we have learned using *what* to ask a question?]

Students (Ss): What are you going to do?

T: 这是什麼时态? [What tense is it?]

Ss: 将来时。 [future tense]

T: 非常好。将来时表示将要发生的事，我们说过将来时的动词形式为 *be going to* 或者 *will*。我们要记住出现 *be going to* 和 *will* 的句子就表示将来时。现在我找同学回答我的问题 – What are you going to do tonight? [Very good. We use future tense to express something that will be happened in the future. I said in the last class that the verbs we use for future tense are *be going to* or *will*. We need to remember that once we see *be going to* or *will*, it means future tense. Ok. Now I will have one student to answer my question. Remember to use future tense – What are you going to do tonight?]

S 1: Student 1 stood up and answered: “I watch TV.”

T: 我刚讲什麼来着? 你听讲了吗? 大家说他说得对吗? [“What did I just say? Did you listen to me carefully?”] Then she asked the whole class “Tell me is his answer right?”]

S1: He kept standing up and kept in silence.

Ss: Other students said “不对” [“No, he was wrong”, shouted by other students.]

T: 我刚才说了，将来时一定要用 *be going to* 或 *will* 表示。这点很重要，大家要记住。X  
X，你来重新回答 – What are you going to do tonight? [As I said earlier, we need to use *be going to* or *will* to express future tense. This is an important point and you need to

remember. XX (Teacher called the name of another student), now you answer my question for him – What are you going to do tonight?]

S 2: Student 2 stood up and answered “I am going to write my homework.”

T: “Good. Sit down.” The teacher then called two more students to answer two more questions.

After that, she said “你懂了吗 [Do you understand it now]” to student 1. Student 1 nodded and then the teacher asked him to sit down. Teacher then asked the whole class do exercises on the textbook.

I also placed teacher 6 to this left end group because she has also been very loyal to the manual and the textbook. She told me that she followed the textbook order exactly and she also made sure that she strictly followed the objectives and the teacher’s manual. She believed that as a teacher, her most important task was to make sure students could reach the required objectives. In addition, she also expressed her willingness to follow the authorities. She said that she changed from a Chinese teacher to an English teacher because her principal asked her to do it. She questioned if the current methods of teaching phonics and vocabulary were the best approach, but she used them anyway in her lessons because those methods were suggested by the manual and by the experienced teachers in the district. When I asked her if she thought the objectives were reasonable, she replied: “I have never thought about it. Those are given from above, so I think they must be reasonable.” But later when we talked about the weak point of English instruction in Beijing, she said:

...I want to say that different people have different goals in life. Students learn English also for different purposes. Some students want to go abroad, some wants to use it in their work, but some may never need it after graduation. I think we should not ask students all reach the same objectives.

She thought that it was impossible to individualize a lesson due to the large number of students, but she assigned different homework to students in different levels. Teacher 6 also indicated that time was limited in class and it was hard to include other activities besides what were listed on the manual; however, she tried to incorporate some cultural issues into teaching such as Eastern and Western perspectives on some numbers and pets.

Teacher 6 demonstrated similar teaching approach with teacher 10. One of her lessons was a review lesson in fourth grade. She reviewed the language points students learned in Unit 7, 8, 9, and 10 (Fourth grade textbook II). The language points included in these units were days of the week (Monday, Tuesday...Sunday), time (how to express time and how to talk about doing different things at different time), and *let's...* sentence. Teacher 6 followed the manual exactly in reviewing these points. For example, the fourth grade teacher manual II gave directions “have the children open their books at page 9. Model the structures on Uncle Booky’s Blackboard by reading them aloud to the class. Have the children repeat the structures in a class drill. Use all possible combinations” (Wang & Methold, 2005, p. 18). Teacher 6 did the following steps:

- Step 1: She copied the question sentences on page 9 to the blackboard, which are

What	do	you	do on	Monday?
	does	they		Tuesday?
does		he		Wednesday?
	does	she		Thursday?
does		she		Friday?
	does	she		Saturday?
does		she		Sunday?

- Step 2: She asked students to read aloud those sentences with her together.
- Step 3: She picked some individual students to read these sentences.

- Step 4: She asked students how to answer those questions and picked 3 individual students to say the answers. Students answered: “I go to the park. They go to the museum. She goes to the shop.”
- Step 5: She copied the answer sentences on page 9 to the blackboard, which are

I	go to	school.
We		the bank.
They		the library.
He	goes to	the park.
She		

- Step 6: She leaded students to read all the possible combinations of the sentences.
- Step 7: She picked individual students to read the possible combinations of the sentences.

Based on my interviews and observations to teacher 10 and 6, I placed them on the left end of the continuum. They obliged to the authority and did not spend effort to think about ways to improve. They adhered to the manual, provided scripted teaching, and regarded finishing teaching what was required as the major task of their teaching. They represented the teacher-as-technician group.

#### *The right end of the continuum*

The right end of the continuum represents the teacher-as-decision maker group. Teachers in this group designed teaching activities by themselves and encouraged students to actively participate in their teaching. In addition, they also demonstrated some characteristics of constructivist approaches in teaching. Many theories of reading reflect a constructivist approach in teaching, such as the Dewey’s inquiry learning theory, Bartlett’s schema theory, Rosenblatt’s reader response theory, Goodman’s psycholinguistic theory, Smith’s whole language theory, Guthrie’s engagement theory (Tracey & Morrow, 2005). The teachers in this group did not frame

their teaching within a specific theory, but their teaching behaviors reflected some characteristics of those theories, such as stimulating students' curiosity and providing problem-based learning (Dewey, 1916), immersing students into meaningful literacy environments and using student-centered approaches (Smith, 1971), and motivating students intrinsically and using metacognitive strategies to enhance understanding (Guthrie, 2004).

I placed teachers 9 and 11 to this group, with teacher 9 being at the very end. These were teachers who assumed control of decisions that affected English reading instruction. Even though they did not develop the lessons by s themselves, which was different from what Commeyras (2007) described at the very right of her continuum, these two teachers used the manual selectively, incorporated teaching sources they found from the Internet, and designed activities and games in their teaching.

Different from most teachers' responses that they were confused about how to teach phonemic awareness and phonics, teacher 9 reported that teaching phonemic awareness and phonics were one of her most favorite teaching subjects because she could use songs, rhymes, and chants that she developed by herself to teach. She said:

Yes, I know. This book [the manual] does not tell how to teach those [phonemic awareness and phonics] exactly and it only has the general goals such as students need to master the sound of *ou* combination. But this is where I use those activities I created myself to teach.

She introduced the different activities she applied in teaching and I also observed her using those activities during teaching. I have reported those activities in the early sections under *phonemic awareness instruction* and *phonics/pronunciation instruction*.

Teacher 9 also freely expressed her concerns and hoped that those who have more authority in designing the English curriculum could consider teachers' voice in the future. She indicated that the designers or authors of the textbooks did not seem to be aware of the tests teachers needed to prepare students for, so it made it hard for teachers to make a decision about teaching for the test or teaching to make sure students really learned what they should learn. She said: "...I wish they [textbook designers] could come to the school to talk to us or ask us to participate in making the plans." She also expressed that one of the challenges she found in teaching was to meet the needs of students in different levels. She said:

...If I spend too much time emphasizing the basics, then those average or above grade level students really cannot get much out of it. But if I keep on teaching new stuff, then the below-grade level students could not follow... I really hope the school could do something different, such as to divide students by levels and allow students in the same level to go to one class. In this way, it makes easy for teachers as well as students, because when students see they are together with those in the same level with them, they could feel more comfortable and be more willing to participate in class activities.

I observed teacher 9 one lesson teaching phonics and one lesson working on reading fluency. The classroom that she conducted her teaching was a special room with better equipments, and students were also sitting in small groups instead of rows and columns. She had many teaching materials in both her lessons including a computer, a CD, a tape, some hand puppets, a stuffed animal, letter cards, picture-vocabulary cards, the textbook (second grade), and the blackboard. She had provided students many opportunities to participate in activities. For instances, she asked groups of students to practice reading the different parts of the story and called two groups to present their fluent reading to the whole class (a readers' theatre activity);

she asked students to pass out the stuffed animal and whoever got the animal should speak a sentence - *What a lovely deer!* loud with intonation; she created a game “Fining Danny Deer” to play with students using picture-vocabulary cards. In this game, students needed to solve the problem - looking for a deer named Danny from the woods. She placed the picture-vocabulary cards everywhere in the classroom with the picture and word facing inside. Students would go to pick up these cards. If the card one student found was a tiger, then this student should say “This isn’t Danny deer. This is a tiger.” to the class and he/she would pick another student to look for Danny deer. Those sentences were the key sentences in the text, so teacher 9 used this game for students to repeatedly practice speaking them.

Teacher 11 worked in the same school as teacher 9, who seemed to be her mentor in the school. She indicated that she learned a lot from teacher 9 twice in the interview - when I asked her how to prepare her lesson, and when I asked her how she learned to be an English teacher since her major was environmental engineering in college. In both times, she mentioned that teacher 9 had given her a lot of support and guidance. Teacher 9 also observed her teaching when she first started and offered a lot of suggestions.

I could see how teacher 9 influenced her teaching. Just like teacher 9, teacher 11 also used the manual as a general guide and then searched on the Internet for teaching ideas and games. In addition, she also brought real things to the classroom and she believed that the real things were better than picture cards for students to experience learning in the real context. For example, she told me that she brought fruits such as bananas, apples, oranges, and different candies to students if they were learning food and taste related knowledge. And she felt that students could have a deeper impression about what they learned in this way rather than looking at the picture cards. Teacher 11 also indicated that she believed that as a teacher she had multiple

roles in the classroom. She felt that sometimes she was an organizer because she “[needed to] organize different activities for students to participate in the learning process”, sometimes she was an evaluator because she “[needed to] tell students right or wrong and evaluate their progress”, and sometimes she had to be a lecturer because she “[needed to] make sure to cover all the testing points”.

Both teacher 11’s lessons were review lessons. At the beginning of her lessons, she spent around 5 minutes to have students practiced oral language, and she told me that it was her tradition that the first few minutes of every lesson was devoted to have students practicing what they have learned earlier. She asked students to greet each other first, and then talked about how they felt the previous night (This was what they learned in this unit). Then she called 2 pairs of the students to come to the front of the classroom to present their short conversations to the class. In reviewing the vocabulary, she distributed the vocabulary cards to students in different groups, picked a group leader, and asked the leader to be the teacher to help the rest of the group members to study vocabulary. Some group leader presented the card to the group and asked group members to read it and say Chinese, some group leader hid the cards and spoke in Chinese and then ask the members to say the English word corresponding to the Chinese, and some group leader and the members read the words aloud together. Teacher 11 also used games in her teaching. Once she ended the group work, she played a vocabulary game to assess if students had mastered the vocabulary. The two games she invented were called *freeze* and *touch*. I have described the games in detail in early sections under *vocabulary instruction*.

In both teacher 9 and 11’s classrooms, I also saw students actively participated in the learning process. The teacher made the effort to teach new things in relation to students’ prior knowledge and offered many opportunities for students to work by themselves. Teacher 9

presented students with a problem and asked students to take the initiative to solve the problem. Teacher 11 adopted small group teaching strategy and each of the group had their own ways to learning. They were also the only two teachers who reported using intrinsic motivational strategies to promote students' interest in learning.

For these reasons, I placed teacher 11 and teacher 9 to the right end of the continuum to represent teacher-as-decision maker. However, it is worth mentioning that even though there were some constructivist characteristics in her teaching, when it came to assessment, they still had to stick to the standard tests which were required by the district and the school.

#### *Those in the middle of the continuum*

Seven teachers belong (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, and 8) in the middle group, between the technician and decision-maker ends. I found it hard to line these seven teachers up to tell exactly which one was closer to the technician group or the decision-maker group because I noticed similar teaching styles within the same school. Teachers 1, 2, 3, and 4 were from XJ elementary and they were all more like traditional teachers who followed the manual and textbook compared with other three teachers. They could be placed closer to the left with teacher 10 and 6. Teachers 5, 7, and 8 were from BBQ elementary. They reported that they used the manual to guide their lesson planning and they taught following what the manual suggested. However, in my observation of their lessons, I noticed that they had activities that were not listed on the manual and they encouraged students working with their partners. So I placed them closer to the right end group with teacher 9 and 11.

In sum, Breen (1991)'s framework and Commeyras (2007)'s continuum informed my data analysis. I followed Breen (1991)'s categories and also added to them based on the data I

obtained from my participant teachers. The differences of pedagogical concerns provided me useful information to decide how to place the teachers on the continuum.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSIONS

The purposes of this study were to investigate what aspects of reading are taught in elementary schools in Beijing, how they are taught, and how teachers shape their pedagogical approaches in teaching. Chapter 4 presents the results to these questions. In this chapter, I present a summary of the research findings, discuss how I interpret them from my perspectives, and suggest areas that deserve more research.

#### Summary of Findings

##### *Teachers' Subject Knowledge of Teaching Students How to Read in English*

The results of the study showed that these 11 teachers of English had covered eight aspects of knowledge when they taught Chinese students how to read in English, and these eight aspects included phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, writing, grammar, and cultural knowledge. Among these eight aspects, the teachers varied mostly with regard to phonemic awareness and phonics instruction. Three teachers reported that they had no knowledge about phonemic awareness, another three teachers thought phonemic awareness was not important for Chinese students learning to read in English, four teachers taught phonemic awareness knowledge occasionally, and one teacher differed with others suggesting phonemic awareness was very important. For phonics, nine teachers agreed that it was important in some sense, and another two teachers differed significantly with one strongly believing in its importance for Chinese students learning to read English. Conversely one teacher thought phonics unimportant. Teacher 9 and 10 stood out among all the teachers, with teacher 9 reporting

very positively about phonemic awareness and phonics instruction and teacher 10 reporting negatively about them. I think that there might be several reasons explaining why teachers think differently about phonemic awareness and phonics instruction.

In the first place, I think the way Chinese is taught and learned influenced these teachers' opinions about phonemic awareness and phonics. Phonological awareness is more important in learning English than Chinese, and phonemic awareness is associated more with learning English whereas phonetic awareness is associated more with learning Chinese (McBride-Chang et al., 2005; Shu, Anderson, & Wu, 2000). Even though the sound values of letters in Pinyin overlap with the sound values of letters in English to a limited extent, the dominant method of teaching reading in Chinese is still whole-word/character teaching, also known as the "look and say method" (Yin, Anderson, & Zhu, 2007). These facts indicated that it is possible that some teachers of English were not aware of the relationship between phonemic awareness and English reading, and may just use what works for teaching Chinese to teach English. Biggs (1996) used the term repetitive learning to emphasize that Chinese students remember English words through repeated practice. Parry's study (1996) confirmed my speculation that both Chinese teachers and students believed that the repeated whole-word strategy was effective because this was how they learned to read Chinese.

Secondly, the ways these teachers learned English influenced their perspectives about teaching. As I indicated in the literature review, four major approaches were prevalent in the history of foreign language teaching in China: the grammar-translation method, the audiolingual method, the communicative language teaching method (CLT), and the task-based language teaching method (TBLT). Even though CLT was introduced to China in the late 1970s, no substantial progress was made until 1990s (Yu, 2001). And because of the contextual factors,

there were limitations toward the adoption of using CLT in many English classrooms in China (Hu, 2003), so the grammar-translation method and the audiolingual method still dominated foreign language teaching and learning. TBLT was also a foreign language teaching approach that was recently suggested in 2001 National English Curriculum Standard (NECS) (Ministry of Education, 2001c) in China. Under the grammar-translation method and the audiolingual method, word study was taught using the whole-word or look-and-say method, and pronunciation was taught by pure memorization or using International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) symbols. Therefore, these teachers did not have enough phonemic awareness or phonics knowledge from their educational experience.

Thirdly, some of these teachers' education background indicated that they were not prepared in their trainings to be English teachers. They majored in different subjects and gained degrees from schools at different levels. Some had normal university or professional teaching school training, but some only took a few English classes or the classes required for certification. This difference in the professional development might contribute to the different opinions and approaches about teaching phonemic awareness and phonics. It is interesting to note that teachers who received more formal training and gained English education degree (teacher 1 and 5) were not the ones who favored phonemic awareness and phonics instruction; instead, teacher 9, who has been teaching the longest, was the one who really favored providing instruction on phonemic awareness and phonics.

Finally, the lack of direction from the curriculum standard and the teacher's manual might result in instructional differences among teachers. According to Dr. Qiang Wang (personal communication, May 26, 2008), the co-author of the current series of English textbooks and teachers' manuals used in these schools, phonics was never officially included in the curriculum;

however, some phonics activities were included in the textbooks (see Appendix B sections: *Sounds and Letters, Listen for Sounds, Read with Uncle Booky*), so teachers were encouraged to use these activities to help students develop their reading ability, especially how to pronounce English words. In addition, the 2001 NECS has 5 objectives related to students' pronunciation, which are 1) to know that wrong pronunciation will influence effective communication (知道错误的发音会影响交际), 2) to know English letter names and their pronunciation (知道字母名称的读音), 3) to understand simple pronunciation rules (了解简单的拼读规律), 4) to understand that English words have stressed syllables (了解单词有重音), and 5) to have clear and accurate pronunciation and natural intonation (语音清楚, 语调自然). There is no information about how to teach to these objectives. For the teachers who depended on the manual a lot, they not only had different opinions about how to teach phonemic awareness and phonics to reach these objectives, but also differed in their methods of teaching.

Another point that deserves attention is that these teachers made no distinction with regard to which years of English instruction need phonemic awareness and phonics instruction. Research on phonemic awareness and phonics instruction recommended that instructions on these two aspects should be provided to young students including kindergarteners, first and second graders (CIERA, 2003; Cunningham, et al, 1998; NRP, 2000). The Reading First rubrics (GADOE, 2003) also suggested that phonemic awareness and phonics instruction should be provided to students from kindergarten to third grade. However, this was not the case with English instruction in China. The Ministry of Education does not specify the grade levels when aspects of English should be taught. The teacher's manual and the textbook do not have this specification either, instead, they present sound and letter relationship knowledge under a few sections called *Sounds and Letters, Listen for Sounds, and Reading with Uncle Booky* (see

Appendix B for details). This leaves it to teachers to provide the instruction whenever they felt they needed to and in whatever ways they wanted. Teachers who taught fourth and fifth grades (3, 5, and 6) reported occasional instruction on phonemic awareness, and teachers of all grade levels mentioned providing some types of phonics instruction in their classrooms.

Fluency is considered a neglected aspect in teaching reading in the US (Allington, 1983), and studies on how to teach fluency in elementary classrooms in China are also limited, as indicated in the literature review section of this study. However, responses gained from these teachers revealed that fluency teaching was important and it happened at the word level, sentence level, and text level. It is also important to acknowledge that the goal of reading fluency in these English classrooms in China was to promote oral/speaking fluency. And this was the reason why these teachers encouraged their students to repeatedly practice reading fluency in school and at home until they could recite the dialogue and the text. This fact also revealed the gradual popularity of teaching English under the CLT framework in these elementary schools. More and more teachers realized the importance of being able to communicate in English, and they offered opportunities in class to have students practice reading and oral fluency. Available studies suggested that extensive reading was used at tertiary level to improve EFL students' reading fluency (Bell, 2001; Elley & Mangubhai, 1983; Robb & Susser, 1989), this study adds to the current literature indicating that elementary school teachers used many of the same methods that are used in the native English classrooms, such as repeated reading, choral reading, echo reading, group reading and partner reading to promote reading fluency.

The literature review for this study also indicated that even though there are, comparatively speaking, more studies exploring how Chinese English students learned vocabulary and comprehension at tertiary levels, no study was available on how teachers taught

English vocabulary and comprehension to students in elementary schools. The findings of this study add to the literature in two ways. First of all, it shows that vocabulary and comprehension are two major aspects of knowledge for students learning English reading in China at elementary school level. Second, it demonstrates that teachers have applied a variety of methods to teach vocabulary and reading comprehension. Under the standard curriculum and the unified textbooks, many of these teachers still used different methods to provide different instruction.

It is also significant that these teachers did not ignore the importance of writing when they talked about how to teach students to read in English. They indicated different reasons for how writing helped reading acquisition; however they did not report various activities that were used to promote writing nor did they indicate how to help students to improve writing. The content and the style of writing were limited and I think this had a lot to do with the objectives in the NECS, in the first place. The objectives listed are 1) to be able to imitate to write sentences according to the examples (能模仿范例写句子), 2) to be able to write simple greetings (能写出简单的问候语), 3) to be able to write short titles or descriptions based on the illustrations or the objects provided (能根据要求为图片, 实物等写出简短的标题或描述), and 4) to be able to use capital letters and lower case letters correctly and to write with correct punctuation (能基本正确地使用大小写字母和标点符号).

Furthermore, I believe that the reason of limited writing activities and content had a lot to do with that fact that English is a foreign language for Chinese students. According to (Raimes, 1985), writing in the ESL/EFL context needs to be dealt with at the particular level of linguistic and discourse proficiency that students have reached. Olshtain (2001) also suggested that writing in a foreign or second language context should start with teaching writing mechanics, which refer to letter recognition, letter discrimination, word recognition, and the basic rules of spelling.

The writing instruction in these Beijing classrooms was in line with what was suggested by these studies: it started with matching and coloring, then went from letter recognition to word spelling, and moved from writing complete sentences to writing a short paragraph. However, Tierney (1983) suggested that reading and writing are multidimensional and involve concurrent and complex transactions, so students develop their reading and writing skills with the teaching of both. Hsu (2004) also indicated that reading and writing mutually reinforce each other in a foreign language context and writing helps to build proficiency in reading, so EFL students should be involved in more writing activities rather than simply writing mechanics. Therefore, I would recommend that students in elementary schools in China should be given more freedom in deciding what to write, and teachers should spend some time to make reading and writing connection.

I witnessed changes in grammar instruction in today's classroom compared with my time in elementary school. More teachers (9) reported teaching grammar implicitly, which was to encourage students naturally acquire English grammar in the learning context or during completing a task instead of providing explicit instruction on grammatical rules. This approach of teaching is consistent with the CLT framework, as reflected in the objectives of the grammar instruction in the 2001 NECS. Five objectives are listed for students in elementary schools: 1) to know that English nouns have singular and plural forms (知道名词的单复数形式), 2) to know the differences among personal pronouns (知道主要人称代词的区别), 3) to know that English verbs change their forms under different situations (知道动词在不同情况下会有形式上的变化), 4) to be aware of prepositions for expressing time, place, and location (了解表示时间, 地点和位置的介词), and 5) to be aware of the forms of simple English sentences and their meanings (了解英语简单句的基本形式和表意功能). These objectives are general and aim to

help students build the concept of English grammar. They ask students to *know* or *to be aware* instead of *to master* or *to apply* into a real situation.

At last, language learning cannot be separated from its socio-cultural background (Gu, 2005; Parry, 1996). To include the cultural aspects of the language into the curriculum and into the teaching is a significant curriculum development in China, and it shows that the English educators in China have given increased attention to cultivating students' cultural awareness. However, three things deserve attention.

First, these teachers had different degrees of cultural knowledge: some had more cultural knowledge and some had less. These teachers taught based on how much they knew, so it was possible that students also learned cultural knowledge to different degrees.

Second, these teachers viewed English culture as one homogeneous culture and the United States as the representative of Western culture. They either did not know or ignored the fact that there are many different English speaking countries and there is a variety of English cultures. However, we should know that this is not the specific of the English teachers; instead, it is an accepted concept for most Chinese people. Most of the Chinese people regard the United States as the superpower country in the world and the representative of Western culture. That is why American English is far more popular than British English and is the dominant English taught in China.

Finally, these teachers did not think that the westernized textbooks used in the English classrooms in Beijing China were a cultural violation toward the traditional Chinese culture. Most of the teachers agreed that having westernized textbooks was a good thing that would benefit Chinese students learning English, developing stronger interest, and understanding Western cultural. They believed that since Chinese are learning English, a Western language,

Chinese should accept the Western expressions, culture, and values. Take the example mentioned by one teacher that “dog” is man’s best friend in Western culture and is not a bad word. She explained to the students that they should not get offended when hearing English speaking people using the word “dog” to relate to them even though they have enough reasons to be mad under the Chinese culture. This willingness to accept the conflict between Eastern and Western culture revealed one important characteristic of the Chinese philosophy that there is an absence of logic (Weber, 1958), so conflicts between Eastern and Western could exist in Chinese people’s way of thinking and doing things.

#### *Teachers’ Pedagogy of Teaching Students How to Read in English*

The results of the study indicated that the participating teachers had different concerns in developing their teaching pedagogies. They all had concerns focusing upon the learner, the subject, and the teacher, but it differed on the subcategories within. Some teachers emphasized more of an affective involvement of the learner whereas some were concerned more with the background knowledge of the learner; some focused on the practical aspect of the language whereas some focused more on the target language being a testing subject; some were concerned with how to facilitate students’ learning process and some concerned more with how to lead the class or the learning. These pedagogical differences were the reason for the different approaches these teachers adopted in their classrooms and also determined where they were placed on the locus of control continuum in chapter four.

The results indicated that high-stake tests were highly influential on teachers’ pedagogical approach. It was reflected in many aspects. In the first place, there were not many teachers who were concerned with using developing students’ intrinsic motivation to learn English. Instead, they believed that the pressure from parents and from the required examinations

were the motivators to encourage students learning English. In other words, they did not think that teachers had the responsibility to cultivate students' interest in learning English using motivation strategies. Students needed to learn English simply because it was required and would be tested. Secondly, some teachers reported that they were concerned with students' English knowledge when providing stratified/differentiated instruction. Four teachers (2, 6, 7, and 10) also indicated that it was impossible for them to do that due to the large number of students in a class, the limited class time they had, and the large amount of content they needed to cover in order to prepare students to pass the standard tests.

Thirdly, more than half of the teachers stated that they taught the language in a way that could lead to passing tests. Four teachers (2, 4, 8, and 10) taught comprehension strategies explicitly, but they said the reason of that was to allow students to do better in the tests. Two teachers (8 and 10) also explained the grammatical rules explicitly, which was not the suggested way to teach grammar, but they did it in order to allow students to pass the tests. The two sixth grade teachers (4 and 8) used their limited class time to let students finish writing exercises also due to the testing demand. And finally teacher 11 taught vocabulary spelling, which she believed did not have much usefulness compared with the more practical goal of using vocabulary in real situations. Last by not least, the four teachers (2, 3, 4, and 10) who reported they being the lecturer, the presenter, and the leader in classroom knew that they should not take those roles, but in order to help struggling students to catch up, to have a better classroom discipline, and to finish the testing content efficiently, they took on those roles in their classrooms.

This testing centered theme is contradictory to what is recommended in the curriculum. According to NECS (2001), students' English achievement in the elementary level should be evaluated by the on-going assessments over the semester and teachers are not encouraged to

teach to the test. Then why are many of these teachers putting so much emphasis on testing? And what has student achievement been in high-stake testing? This information is not available through English and Chinese database, so I contacted two experts in China, Dr. Qiang Wang and Dr. Yongmei Zhang, asking them about English testing in elementary schools in China. Dr. Wang is a professor in Beijing Normal University and she is also the co-author of the English textbook used in these elementary schools. Dr. Wang told me that even though testing is not encouraged by the curriculum, every district still designs its own tests and depends on scores to evaluate their students' overall English ability at the end of the semester, and those scores are not open to public (Dr. Qiang Wang, personal communication, May 30, 2008). Dr. Zhang works in the research center of Basic Education in Beijing Academy of Educational Science. She also indicated that in the elementary school level, the nation does test every child rather subsets of students are tested in English (similar to National Assessment of Educational Progress in the US) are given to Beijing fifth graders every two years to evaluate students' English progress (Dr. Yongmei Zhang, personal communication, May 30, 2008). In 2007, Dr. Zhang and her team randomly selected 3,264 Beijing fifth graders from 93 elementary schools among nine districts in Beijing (which is 3.96% of the total fifth graders in Beijing), 22.7 percent of the students failed and 20.6 percent reached the excellent level (Beijing Academy of Educational Science, in press).

Another theme that I found was that teachers' pedagogical approaches were influenced by the social surroundings they were in and the social interactions in the setting. In this study, the social surroundings refer to the schools these teachers were in, and the social interactions refer to the interaction among the teachers in each school setting. It was clear to see from the continuum in chapter four that most of the teachers in the same school had demonstrated similar teaching concerns and behaviors so they were placed closer together, even though there was an exception

of the three teachers in XSYFX elementary school. The four teachers (1, 2, 3, and 4) in XJ elementary school and three teachers (5, 7, and 8) in BBQ elementary school were categorized into the middle group, where teachers in XJ were closer to the left. They demonstrated somewhat similar teaching behaviors and concerns, so it was hard to place them one by one exactly on the continuum. For examples, the four teachers stated similar strategies they used to provide students with stratified instruction, talked about lesson planning almost consulting the same resources, and reported using teacher-centered approaches more than student-centered. Same is true for the three teachers in BBQ elementary.

Teachers 11 and 9 were from XSYFX elementary and they also presented very similar teaching approaches. In addition, teacher 9 explicitly mentioned that teacher 11, being the more experienced teacher in her school and also the English group lead teacher, had offered her suggestions and advice about teaching. Teacher 9 had learned how to teach from teacher 11 to some extent.

It was also interesting to note that teacher 10, who was at the same school with teachers 9 and 11, had completely different teaching approaches. Her place on the continuum was at the end that represented teaching to the manual with no decision making of her own. Teacher 6, who was placed next to teacher 10, also presented different teaching concerns and approaches compared with other teachers in her school. This fact indicated that difference in teaching could exist even among the same group of people in the same school. Other factors such as their educational background, professional development sessions they attended, and their teaching philosophy might be the contributors to the differences.

## Discussions and Implications

In the theoretical framework for this research I used the quote that “Chinese people [should] know themselves, and build upon their own rich cultural heritage while embracing all that is positive from the international community” (Hayhoe & Pan, 2001, p. 17). I received 16 years of education in Beijing China, from elementary school to college and also taught English in a high school for a year. Then, I came to the United States in 2002 to start my graduate education, and also worked and observed in many elementary school classrooms. The experience of learning and teaching in both countries helped me better understand the similarities and differences between the two countries, especially in the field of education.

When analyzing the data, I see a thread of Confucian influence on the educational, social, cultural, and political systems in China. Smith and Smith (1989) said this about Confucianism: “more than merely a philosophy, yet not a religion in the usual sense, it has traditionally been the substance of learning, the source of values, and the social code of many people other than Chinese” (pp.1). In fact, even today the “Chineseness” that Chinese people presented to the world is still inseparable from the influence of Confucianism.

Confucius’ ideas and thoughts were centered on harmony and hierarchy (Schnucker, 1974), which were presented within these three schools. In the designing stage of this study, I was not successful in recruiting participants because I was outside the circle. When I was given a referral to Ms. Ding, my key “guanxi” person, I was able to implement this study finally. Later, when Ms. Ding informed some principals about my research projects, they either agreed or disagreed to participate in this study without talking to the English teachers, who were the real participants of the study. In my initial visit to two of the schools, I also noticed that the teachers were not aware of my research before, but they participated in the study because their principals

had asked them to. Furthermore, based on what the teachers reported, the principals also seemed to have the right to determine who could be English teachers. Four of my participants (3, 6, 8, 10) became English teachers due to different reasons related to their principals: some were asked to change their teaching subject because of the shortage of English teachers in the school and some was believed to be qualified in teaching English after a teaching demonstration even though this particular teacher had no English education degree.

The hierarchy in education in China is easy to observe. Even though I have also heard and seen the hierarchy within the field of education in the US, I think that the Chinese hierarchy is stricter and the people who are in the higher ranks are more empowered. With people in the lower social ranks doing what they are supposed to do and not challenging those that are above them, this perpetuates social harmony. Just like Confucius said: “let the ruler be a ruler, the minister minister, the father father, and the son son” (Analects, 12:11), both harmony and hierarchy are valued greatly in China.

The hierarchy in education was reflected in the curriculum, in the different aspects of teaching reading, and in teachers’ pedagogical choice. In China, the Ministry of Education, the highest educational office in the country, designs the curriculum, syllabus, and objectives. Textbooks are then designed by another group of scholars and professors from key normal universities (Adamson, 1998). All these people who are responsible for designing have more advanced degrees and are considered as the experts; however, very few of them had experience teaching at school levels. Experienced teachers, on the other hand, are not given many opportunities to participate in the designing process (Ms. Ding Jie, personal communication, June 21, 2007).

Many of these teachers also chose what to teach and how to teach based on what would be tested on. Compared with what I have seen in many classrooms in the US, the theme of teaching for testing is more obvious and stronger in these Chinese classrooms. The so-called experts in the educational offices create the objectives, and teachers need to make sure students meet those objectives in order to pass all the required examinations. Many of these teachers did not favor teaching for testing, but they admitted that they had no other choice. Three of the teachers (3, 6, and 8) even mentioned that they believed it was a great thing that many of the parents took their children to other English classes outside the school because the students could learn more practical English.

Confucianism also values the six concepts: 仁 [pronounced *ren(2)*], 礼 [pronounced *li(3)*], 孝 [pronounced *xiao(4)*], 义 [pronounced *yi(4)*], 忠 [pronounced *zhong(1)*], and 信 [pronounced *xin(4)*] (Smith & Smith, 1989; Ames & Rosemont, 1998). Among these six values, *li(3)* tells us what is valued in education. *Li(3)* refers to ritual norms, customs, and etiquette, and it determines the roles of different human beings in society. Proper ritual should be followed in order to facilitate the social communication and to keep the harmonious social order. Educating the young to have *li(3)* means to educate them to follow ritual traditions and not to challenge the authority, which usually refers to the elders, teachers, and the rulers.

When I was in these Beijing elementary schools, I deeply experienced how the Chinese students have *li(3)* at school. When students saw me in the hallway, they stopped walking and saluted me by raising their right hands above their heads (a typical way for Chinese Young Pioneers to greet their teachers) saying “Hello, Teacher (老师好)”. When I entered the room for observation, the class president would rise and bring a chair for me to sit and say “please sit down, Teacher (老师请坐).” Before the start of each class, students stood up to greet the teacher,

and when asked to answer a question, students also stood up in order to show respect. In the teaching scenario I provided in chapter four about teacher 10, when student 1 failed to answer the question, he kept on standing besides his seat watching the teacher asking student 2 to answer the question. He knew not to sit down without the teacher's permission and only did so after receiving it. In addition, during observations I noticed that some of the students were not willing to share their different opinions because they did not want to give wrong answers. There were a few times that I was able to have a short conversation with the students sitting next to me during independent work time in class, and I asked them what they thought of an opinion offered by either the teacher or other students about a comprehension passage. They told me their different ideas but they were reluctant to speak up because their teachers did not ask them and they were afraid their ideas were not correct.

These students indeed respected teachers and regarded them as an authority. Teachers, on the other hand, expected the student to do so, because as the sanctioned authority they demanded this type of respect from students. However, the respect for authority led to an unwillingness to offer different opinions, which results from too much *li(3)* among Chinese students. I think that this type of Confucian influence is in conflict with what is suggested as the best approach to teaching English. For instance, the 2001 NECS suggested the student-centered teaching and learning. However, students could not be the real center if teachers maintained their traditional authority roles while teaching. In addition, under the traditional Chinese culture, learning is considered a serious pursuit of knowledge that students should seek from the experts, who usually are their teachers. All subjects, such as Chinese, math, sciences, etc. are all delivered in the traditional way, in which lectures dominate the classrooms teaching and learning activities (Bao, 2006a). English, however, is encouraged to be taught in a different way by the curriculum

standard, in which all kinds of activities, including games, songs, and role-plays, should be used to make students active learners. On one hand, it intends learning to be fun; but on the other hand, these methods breakdown the traditional Chinese classroom culture, and may cause discomfort among students and teachers. It also makes discipline a problem in English classrooms. Many of the teachers I observed spent time in class on discipline issues. Some of them believed that it was because they were not homeroom teachers so students did not give them enough attention or respect, and some of them indicated that they preferred not to have too many student-centered activities to avoid discipline problems. In addition to the reasons they offered, I speculate that it also has a lot to do with the different methods used in teaching English.

How can Chinese know themselves better, and build upon their own rich cultural heritage while embracing all that is positive from the international community, just like what Hayhoe and Pan (2001) suggested in their book? This is a complicated question and there is no easy answer to this question. When social harmony and certain hierarchies are greatly valued in the whole political and social systems in China, it would be extremely difficult to change it just in the field of education. Furthermore, educating students to have *li*(3) to certain extent is also good, as Chinese students are known for their diligence and good manner toward the elders and their teachers. Based on my personal experience, I suggest the following things to address the hierarchy issue, and the conflict between teaching English and the traditional Chinese classroom culture.

First of all, there should be a standard that specifies the qualifications for being an English teacher in elementary schools in Beijing. A certain degree, such as college degree, or certain English level should be required in order to teach English. A standardized system of

English teacher selection should be created, so the qualifications of being an English teacher could be determined by the system, instead of an empowered individual.

Second, teachers should be encouraged and given the opportunity to go back to school to gain advanced degrees. In this way, teachers could keep on improving themselves and have the opportunities to work in higher education. When there are more experienced teachers with advanced degrees working in higher education, they could take part in the curriculum, objective, textbook, and examination designing tasks to represent the voices from teachers.

Third, elementary schools and universities should start partnership programs, in which school classrooms could be more open to college professors and students to do research projects and to have more field experience. If this could be done, professors would have an easy access to classrooms and be informed on issues and problems that they could provide assistance with. And college students, in the mean time, could have more opportunities to do field work, which would benefit their future teaching.

I hope the above three actions could bring a promising future to the English education in China. With more qualified English teachers in classrooms, with more experienced teachers in higher education involving themselves into policy making and examination designing, and with a stronger connection between universities and schools, more and more teachers could realize what indeed they need to teach and how they could use the most efficient approach to teach. They could, hopefully, also start to embrace the westernized teaching approaches and philosophies while still appreciate the good influence of Confucianism to the traditional Chinese classroom culture. In addition, these actions would also weaken the hierarchies between the above (policy makers) and the below (teachers) to the extent that would not call for a complete change of what is greatly valued in the political and social system.

## Recommendations

This is a descriptive qualitative study investigating what aspects of English reading are taught in three elementary schools in Beijing, how they are taught, and how teachers shape their pedagogical approaches. The findings of the study indicated that the teachers either had no knowledge or insufficient knowledge about certain aspect of teaching reading in English. For examples, some teachers indicated that they had no knowledge about phonemic awareness, some indicated that they were not sure about how to teach phonics because of the lack of direction from the manual, and some also mentioned that they did not have time to do many activities which would benefit students' learning English just because they needed to prepare students to the tests. Based on these statements, I think it is very necessary to look at what subject knowledge on English these teachers learned from the teacher preparation classes or programs.

These teachers reported that they paid no attention to students' background knowledge other than their English levels in providing students with differentiated instruction. Two things deserved to be discussed here. First, what is students' background knowledge? And second, what is differentiated instruction? Research has shown that every student brings to school some funds of knowledge (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992) and this knowledge is broad and diverse, which can include knowledge about economics, medicine, religion, culture, or certain types of profession. Even though students from Beijing come from a similar macro cultural background, they still come out from different families and can bring different funds of knowledge to school. And these different funds of knowledge will influence their learning to read in English. For example, a student whose parents are English teachers might have more opportunity to practice English at home than a student whose parents are bus drivers. So the student who has bus driver parents might need more individual help from the teacher. Another example could be that a

student might know more about bicycle racing because his dad participated in racing games. If the teacher was aware of this situation, he/she could depend on this student leading some classroom activities when they were reading something about bicycle racing. These differences in background knowledge will cause learning differences and teachers should take into consideration when planning their lessons. However, none of the teachers in the study mentioned these background knowledge differences. Is it because these teachers just did not pay attention to it or their education did not prepare them to think about those differences? It would be interesting to study Chinese teachers' perspective about funds of knowledge.

Next, what is differentiated instruction? Some of the teachers mentioned that they provided differentiated instruction to their students such as offering students questions in the different difficulty levels and assign different homework. But is differentiated instruction all about this? Tomlinson (2000) stated that differentiated instruction consisted of four elements: differentiated content, differentiated process, differentiated products, and differentiated learning environment. Teachers should present differentiated content such as using materials at different level, using reading buddies, and meeting small group of struggling readers to do some pre-teaching activities. Differentiated process of teaching could include using tiered activities through which learners work with the same content but receiving different support, using centers to encourage students with different interest, and varying the length of time each student gets in completing a task. Differentiated products means letting students demonstrate what they have learned by using different final products. Examples could include having different rubrics, allowing students to work independently or receiving help from group members, giving students options to demonstrate their work. Finally, teachers should also work to differentiate the learning

environment for students. Some examples are using materials that reflect a variety of cultures, allowing students to move around in classroom, and offering a place for student collaboration.

This model is based on US education and some of the suggestions Tomlinson stated may not be possible in the Chinese classroom setting. However, there are definitely ideas that Chinese educators could learn about how to provide differentiated instruction, such as teachers providing some pre-teaching activity to a small group of struggling readers, using reading buddies, giving students freedom in choosing if they like to work independently or with a group, etc. If this study could be extended including more English teachers from elementary schools across all the different districts in Beijing, I believe that the researcher would be able to get a more thorough understanding about if and how Chinese elementary school English teachers provide differentiated instruction to their students.

Some research indicated that the teacher education and in-service professional development programs in China only emphasized improving teachers' English proficiency instead of providing trainings on teaching pedagogy and methodology (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996; Hu, 2005; Zuo, 1990). Hu (2005) also examined the 1984 and 1993 versions of the unified curriculum for EFL teacher education programs at teacher colleges, and found that neither version devoted much course time to pedagogical knowledge and skills. The results from this study indicated that this is far from enough. Educational programs and in service teacher professional development programs should work to improve teachers' English proficiency, because our teachers need to be capable to speak fluent oral English. But more importantly, they need to have more pedagogical knowledge and skills. They should know the differences and similarities of teaching Chinese and English, they should know what aspects of knowledge they

should include in order to teach students reading in English, and they should know how to teach them effectively.

My participant teachers also reported the roles they played in classrooms. Even though they reported that they played different roles such as facilitator, leader, lecturer, presenter, or even multiple roles, my observation of them teaching did not result in the same conclusion. Two teachers (1 and 8) said that they were the facilitators. And they defined teacher-as-facilitator as someone who placed students to be the center, provided opportunities for students to be active learners, and helped students in the learning process. However, I did not see that in my observations.

I observed teacher 1 twice, the first time she taught the review unit with her fourth graders and the second time she asked her fourth graders to complete some exercises on the textbook and on the workbook. She followed the teacher's manual to teach the unit: reading the text story, asking comprehension questions, doing listening, reading, and writing exercises on the textbook, and finally checking answers. Students were involved in doing the required exercises and voluntarily offered the answers. However, the two classes were definitely teacher centered. She assigned different tasks to students and students did what they were told to do. Teacher 8 basically did the same: giving directions and asking students to finish the task accordingly. I asked the teachers after my observation if what they had done was typical and their answers were definite. They said that what they had done was how they usually teach a unit. Based on their responses, I wondered if they really knew what exactly a teacher-as-facilitator should do in classrooms or if facilitator means something different in the Chinese English classrooms.

Tylee (1999) indicated that there were four necessary components that teachers needed to do in order to take the facilitator's role: 1) assess the students, 2) plan the learning, 3) implement

the plan, and 4) evaluate the process. The purpose of assessing students is getting to know students: finding out their interest in learning, the level they are at, and their concerns and confident levels. Based on the assessment results, teachers should plan the lesson accordingly, designing different activities to meet the learning needs of different students. When implementing the lesson, teachers should also take the emotional climate of the classroom and the quality of interaction between students and the teacher into consideration. And finally teachers should reassess students to evaluate if they have reached the objectives.

Because of the limited amount of time that I could spend in the field, I could not observe everything. It was possible that some teachers might do what Tylee (1999) suggested, but in real classrooms in Beijing where one teacher had more than 100 students to teach, it was very unlikely that the teachers could afford to be facilitators in classrooms. Based on my participants' statements, I think it was their hope that they could take the facilitator's role to provide students more learning opportunities. It would be interesting to compare the roles teachers play in English classrooms in China with the roles they wanted to play. The results of those studies could inform educational policy making and curriculum design.

Finally I also suggest that more research could be done in another two areas. First of all, the findings revealed that teachers would cover eight areas of knowledge - phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, writing, grammar, and cultural knowledge, in teaching elementary Chinese students how to read in English. The results also included their opinions about each aspect of the knowledge and how they taught each. Even though the results presented a lot of information, I still think that how teachers teach each area of this knowledge deserves more in-depth study. Large scale or small scale studies could be done to compare and

contrast how teachers in different schools, districts, or even cities in China deliver each aspect of this knowledge, and the differences it makes to the overall students' achievement.

Secondly, my participant teachers had quite different opinions about the NECS objectives. Only two teachers believed that the objectives were reasonable, whereas the majority of teachers did not like the objectives. Four teachers thought the objectives were too general to follow, another four teachers thought that the assessments did not match the objectives, and one teacher believed that the objectives were just big words with no specific use at all. The Ministry of Education in China should take this information into consideration and look for ways to improve the current objectives.

In conclusion, being a global language, English has played a very important role in students' life in China. Including English into the elementary curriculum is also a necessary step in order to spread English learning among Chinese people. It is not surprising to have questions, concerns, or even problems in curriculum planning, instruction delivery, and teacher preparation. However, the most important thing is that Chinese English educators and researchers should recognize those questions, concerns, and problems, study them, and find solutions to them.

## POSTSCRIPT

### When I teach English in China...

Upon finishing this research, I have wondered what kind of teacher of English I would be if I was teaching in an elementary school in China. How would I negotiate the tension between Eastern and Western cultures? I have been deeply influenced by both the Chinese and American culture. I grew up in China and received many years of education there. I believe in Confucianism and truly value some of the Confucian concepts, such as younger generations should have *li* toward their parents and their teachers. I have also been in the US for six years now and I have had many opportunities to work with students in cooperation with teachers. I have volunteered in and observed many Georgia classrooms; I had been a student teacher in a fourth grade classroom; I also have taught preservice university students how to teach reading, supervised and evaluated their teaching. I have noticed many positive attributes in American education, such as, the emphasis on creativity, self-confidence and independence as learners.

There are positives from both the cultures and I believe that having an open mind is the key in order to embrace all the positives during teaching. I truly think that I am lucky to have the opportunity to study and teach in the United States. I have learned many things about teaching, but most importantly, is to have an open mind to accept differences. One day when I go back to China, I will bring my open mind to my classroom and I hope that I could have a good influence on my students and colleagues. I would be the teacher who teaches not only English, but also all the positives in the Western culture. I would also value my traditional Chinese culture greatly and teach my students to appreciate their Chinese heritage.

I will tell the students my definition of “respect” and “authority”. Respect is something that everyone in the classroom deserves to have. I, as their teacher, will respect my students by preparing the lesson carefully, paying attention to their individuality, and teaching them what they should want to learn. I would require my students to respect me in ways such as being prepared, taking learning English seriously, and working hard. Authority does not mean that they cannot challenge me or should be afraid of offering a different opinion; instead, it means to respect the teacher and follow the rules of the school and the class.

I want to have a classroom that is full of variety and creativity. I know as an English teacher in China, I will have to teach using the predetermined textbooks, but my learning in the US has prepared me well with a collection of classic children literature books. These books are going to be my read-alouds in class. They will not only add to my students’ book collection but also be the good resources to introduce Western culture. I hope that my students will realize the fun of reading English through those classic literatures.

Finally, I do not favor teaching following the manual. I believe that there are many ways to ensure students to reach those objectives. Just like teacher 9 and 11, I will also be the one to stand near the left end of the continuum – be the decision makers of my own class.

I know that I would not be able to do that without my experience in the US. And I truly wish that there could be more English teachers in China who could have an opportunity to study and teach in a Western country. Only in this way, can teachers truly understand a different culture, build an open mind, start to appreciate those that are different from the traditional Chinese culture.

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APPENDIX A  
TEACHER INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

## Teacher Interview Protocol

In the first part of the interview, I will try to get some information about the educational background of the teacher, about the English classes, about the school, and about teachers' perspectives of the syllabus, objectives and textbooks.

- Your major, highest degree, years of teaching experience, how many English classes you teach in a day and a week.
- How long have you been working in this school?
- What is the textbook used and how do you think about this current textbook?
- Teachers' opinion about starting English teaching in elementary school in 3<sup>rd</sup> or 1<sup>st</sup> grade.
- What do you think about the current national syllabus or objectives toward elementary English?
- Do you plan your class based on the syllabus or the teacher's manual? If yes, why? If not, what else you will add to your teaching? Why?
- Will you take students' response about the teaching into consideration when you plan? How will that influence your teaching?

Secondly I will ask teachers their opinion about teaching reading, phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension and how they teach them.

- How do you teach reading in your classroom? Do you primarily rely on using Chinese or English during teaching?
- What kinds of skills students need to have in order for them to learn to read English?
- Do you think phonemic awareness is important for Chinese students learn to read English? How much phonemic awareness instruction do you have in your teaching? How do you teach it?
- Do you think phonics is important for Chinese students learn to read English? How much phonics instruction do you have in your teaching? How do you teach it?
- Do you think fluency is important for Chinese students learn to read English? How much fluency instruction do you have in your teaching? How do you teach it?
- Do you think vocabulary is important for Chinese students learn to read English? How much vocabulary instruction do you have in your teaching? How do you teach it?
- Do you think comprehension is important for Chinese students learn to read English? How much comprehension instruction do you have in your teaching? How do you teach it?

Finally I will ask teachers the teaching pedagogy they preferred to use and their teaching philosophy.

- How do you see yourself in the classroom – a lecturer, a facilitator, a leader or else? Do you prepare activities for students to do during instruction or you just want your students to answer your questions?

- Is your teaching teacher-centered or student-centered? Why or why not you think [teacher centered instruction or student centered instruction] is the most appropriate in China?
- Do you have a standard to judge your students? What make you think if for example, student A is really a good student?
- What is your opinion about whole classroom instruction and small group work?
- Do you teach Western or English language culture in your class? If so, what aspects, such as education, customs, family, society, everyday life, values, geography, history...?

APPENDIX B

TEXTBOOK UNIT EXAMPLE – FOURTH GRADE BOOK II UNIT 8

Unit  
8

# Mocky is late



Lulu and Mocky go to Uncle Booky's house on Saturday.

1

Hurry, Mocky. It's four o'clock. It's time to visit Uncle Booky.

No, it isn't, Lulu. It's three o'clock. We're early.

2

We're not early. We're late.

3

Hello, Lulu. Where's Mocky?

I don't know, Uncle Booky.

4

What time is it, Lulu?

It's five o'clock.

5

Excuse me, Mocky. What time is it?

It's four o'clock.





6 No, it isn't.  
It's five o'clock.



7 Oh, no! My watch is slow. I'm very late.



8 You're very late, Mocky! It's time for dinner.



9 I'm sorry. My watch is broken.

Don't worry, Mocky. I can fix it.



10 Here you are, Mocky. It's fixed.

Now you can't be late!

# Words to Learn



one o'clock



two o'clock



three o'clock



four o'clock



five o'clock



six o'clock



seven o'clock



eight o'clock



nine o'clock



ten o'clock



eleven fifteen



twelve thirty



one forty-five

time  
hurry  
early  
late

# Listen to This



Write the number.



a.



b.



c.



d.



e.



f.



g.



h.





# Talk Together

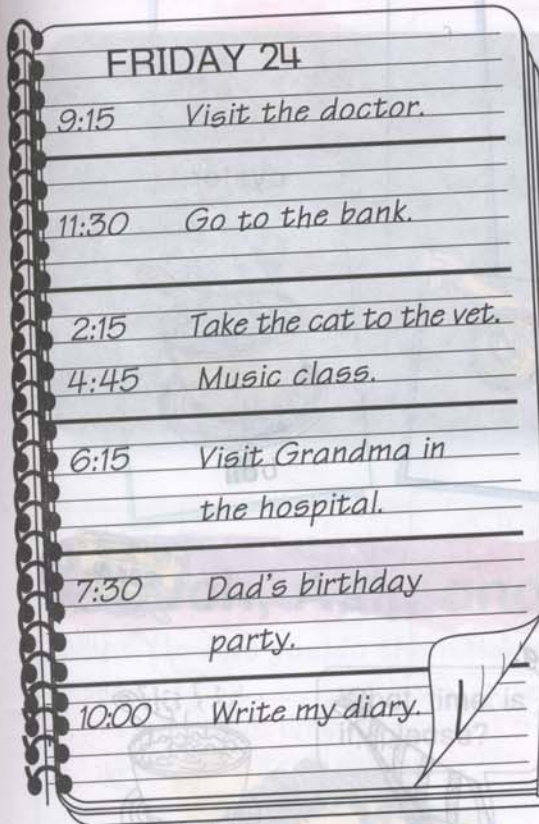


- 8:00 go to school
- 10:00 English class
- 12:30 visit grandma
- 3:00 play with friends
- 5:15 go home
- 6:30 watch TV
- 7:00 dinner

# Listen and Match



# Read and Check



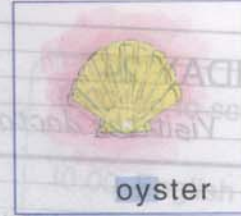
1. Lucy visits the doctor at nine thirty. True  False
2. At eleven thirty Lucy goes to the bank. True  False
3. Lucy has dance class at four forty-five. True  False
4. At six fifteen she visits her brother in the hospital. True  False
5. Lucy goes to her Dad's birthday party at seven thirty. True  False
6. Lucy eats dinner at ten. True  False



# Sounds and Letters



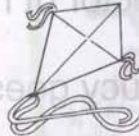
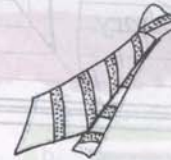
Listen and repeat.



# Listen for Sounds



Cross (X) the word that doesn't belong.



# Read with Uncle Booky



Read and observe.



joy    soy    toy    enjoy    annoy

noise    voice    soil    spoil    point

# Uncle Booky's Blackboard

What time is it?

one	
two	
three	o'clock.
four	fifteen.
five	thirty.
six	forty-five.

It's time for school.  
It's time to visit Uncle Booky.



# Touch, Ask, and Answer


What time do you do the following things?

What time is it, please?

It's four fifteen.

It's time for English corner.

Let's go.



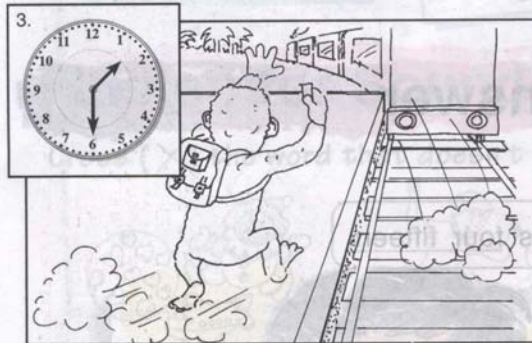
# Write the Time



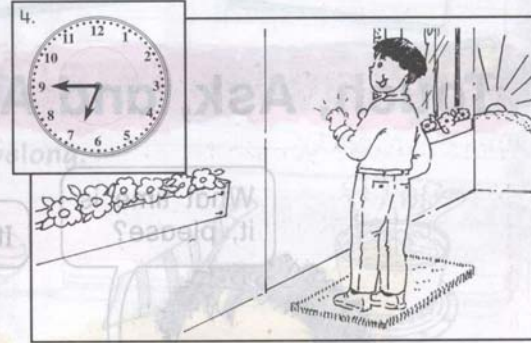
Ann and Ken are early for school. It's seven fifteen.



Ann and Ken are late for dinner. It's



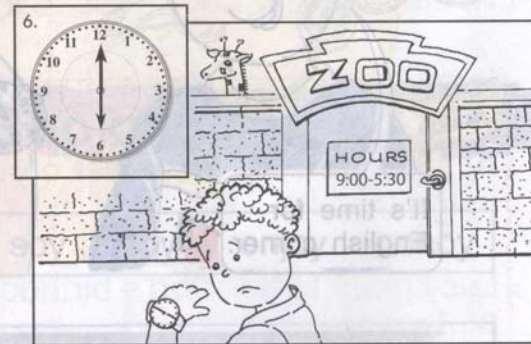
Mocky is late for the train.



David is early.



Cathy is early.



Tommy is late.



# Let's Chant!



What time is it?  
 What time is it?  
 Sorry, sorry, I don't know.  
 My watch is slow.

What time is it?  
 What time is it?  
 It's eight. It's eight.  
 Hurry up. Don't be late.

What time is it?  
 What time is it?  
 It's nine. It's nine.  
 Don't worry. We're fine.

# Ask and Find Out

What time do you do the following things? Ask three friends and take notes.

What time do you go to school every day?

I go to school at 7:30.



	Friend 1	Friend 2	Friend 3
go to school	_____	_____	_____
have English class	_____	_____	_____
play with friends	_____	_____	_____
go home	_____	_____	_____
help Mom	_____	_____	_____
eat dinner	_____	_____	_____
watch TV	_____	_____	_____





# Uncle Booky's Storytime



It's seven o'clock, Allen.  
It's time to get up.



Don't worry, Mom.

1

It's Monday morning.

I'm sorry.

Allen, you are late.  
It's nine o'clock.



2

Allen is late for school.

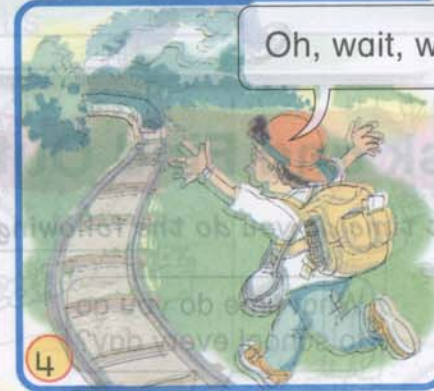
I'm sorry.  
I'm late.



3

Allen is late for dinner.

Oh, wait, wait!



4

Allen is late for the train.

What time is it now?  
Am I late?

No, Allen. You  
are on time.



I can't be late again.

5



6

He is a good boy now.

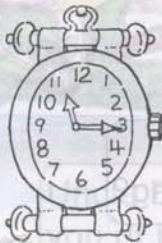


# Self-assessment

1. I can write the time.



It's six forty-five.



2. I can read and write.

Tom's school day.

On Monday, I go to school at 7:30.  
I have English at 8:00.  
I play with my friends between  
5:00 and 6:00.  
I eat dinner at 7:00.

Tom

My school day

On \_\_\_\_\_, I go to school at \_\_\_\_\_

I have \_\_\_\_\_

I \_\_\_\_\_

I \_\_\_\_\_

## Reflection

- 我能用英语表述时间: 是  否
- 我觉得用英语表述时间: 很简单  比较简单  有点难  非常难
- 我觉得这一单元还没有学会的内容有: \_\_\_\_\_
- 我觉得用英语描述自己一天的活动: 非常容易  不太容易  还需多练习
- 今后我要在以下几个方面努力提高: \_\_\_\_\_
- 我认为我学习 很努力  努力  需要更加努力



APPENDIX C

PINYIN LIST

汉语拼音字母表  
PinYin List

声母表 Initials

b	p	m	f	d
t	n	l	g	k
h	j	q	x	zh
ch	sh	r	z	c
s	y	w		

韵母表 Finals

a	o	e	i	u
ü	ai	ei	ui	ao
ou	iu	ie	üe	er
an	en	in	un	ang
eng	ing	ong		

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[http://www.learningmandarin.cn/phpcms/Classroom/2007/0105/content\\_5.shtml](http://www.learningmandarin.cn/phpcms/Classroom/2007/0105/content_5.shtml)