University of Alberta

EFL Teachers' Cognition and Usage of TBLT in Beijing

by

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Education

Department of Secondary Education

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Fall 2012
Edmonton, Alberta

Abstract

Task basked language teaching (TBLT) is an innovative second language teaching approach that has gained abundant theoretical support from second language acquisition (SLA) research. However, there is evidence that the conceptions formed by teachers can differ from the descriptions and criteria found in research and published pedagogical materials. Therefore, this study addresses the following research questions: 1) What are the conceptions of TBLT among in-service teachers in Beijing? 2) How are the conceptions formed? 3) What factors will influence their utilization of TBLT? The results indicate that most of them had idiosyncratic conceptions of TBLT that diverge in several ways from "mainstream" versions of TBLT; however, most of them were able to design and implement tasks consistent with the published criteria. It is also found that the effects of peers and mentors, professional development training and school policy are significant in the formation of their conceptions of TBLT.

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Chapter I. Introduction

Task based language teaching (TBLT) is a language teaching approach
that has influenced classroom teaching and educational policy making in
both ESL (English as a second language) and EFL (English as a foreign
language) settings (Nunan, 2004). Pedagogically, TBLT strengthens
learning to communicate through interaction in the target language,
introducing authentic text into the learning situation, linking classroom
language learning with real world language use, and also emphasizes
learners' personal experiences and the learning process (Nunan, 2004).

Despite having broad support from the academic area and praises
from curriculum developers, it was found that in-service teachers'
conceptions of TBLT and tasks and the implementation of it in classroom
might be "out of sync" with the mainstream of the academic area (Xu, Li, &
Jiang, 2008). In China, it is pinpointed in the National English Language
Curriculum Standards in 2001 that TBLT is highly recommended in
English classrooms in order to switch the ways of instruction from
teacher-centered to student-centered. Since then, TBLT has drawn
attention from scholars, teacher training program developers and teachers.
Nevertheless, the "story" of the author with TBLT made her suspect that
many teachers' perceptions of a task and TBLT probably differ from those
in the literature and hope to explore the reasons behind it through

listening to and narrating the stories of other English teachers in Beijing with TBLT.

An English Learner and Teacher from China

I was born in a family with a rich tradition of education; three of my aunts are university professors. From an early age, I was embraced by the deeds and words of my aunts of teachers and inspired by them to the ideal of becoming a teacher and sharing my knowledge with students one day. Although, as a child, becoming a teacher was just one of many career paths I considered, I still believe that it exerted a strong influence on my later decision.

My memory of English learning in high school centers mainly on endless practice in such skills as listening, grammar, reading and writing. Occasional oral practice, including reading dialogues and role-play, was what I enjoyed the most. At that time, English learning was boring, and I was indifferent to it, but it was a subject I needed to gain high scores.

In the third year of senior high school, when facing a choice between Capital Normal University and Beijing Science and Engineering University, I chose the former. Consequently, I became a college student majoring in English education. The four-year college life was perhaps the happiest time in my life, which may be one of the reasons that I wanted to go back to university after working for four years. My interest in learning English was

also increased because of my instructors' various approaches and methods of English pedagogy.

After graduation, I gained a job as an English teacher in a junior high school. In order to gain better learning outcomes, I believed that the key was to motivate students and let students believe that learning English was interesting, rather than boring. Therefore, I designed some warm-up activities or games in my class and provided them opportunities to speak in English. However, my mentor thought that although these activities were good, students could not "learn a lot" in my class and I should pay more attention to drilling and practice procedures. She also told me more about the PPP (presentation, practice and produce) method that I began using soon after. TBLT was another teaching method that we were encouraged to use because it was considered to be "innovative" and "popular". I once asked my supervisor, who was also my mentor, what TBLT was and she answered that as long as there were tasks in your class, you were using TBLT. Afterwards, I paid great attention to the tasks that my mentor used in her classes and the ways she integrated the tasks, and tried to apply them in my teaching practice. I also strived to design tasks by myself in order to fit the needs of my students. The feedback from my mentors and peers helped me improve the design of the tasks and scaffolding that assisted students with completing tasks. Therefore, I used

it frequently in my class at that time.

My Experience in Canada

After I arrived in Canada, I realized three things: Firstly, my English, especially my oral English was not good at all. When I was in China, I was confident in my English. But here, there were many times when I misunderstood or did not understand what others said and people could not understand me, either, because I could not express myself freely and clearly. At that time, I was frustrated because after over ten years of English learning there was still a large gap between native speakers and me. Secondly, I realized that many English learners from China face this problem, and the way I taught my students might not be able to foster their English verbal ability. Therefore, I strongly hoped that my studies in Canada could help me contribute to the improvement of oral English teaching in China. Thirdly, I came to realize that I had never truly used TBLT before. I can still remember that during my first meeting with my supervisor, Dr. Dunn, he mentioned TBLT and I said it was very popular in Beijing and I was very interested in it. However, after my first day of class in a course about TBLT that semester, I realized that what we considered to be "TBLT" when teaching English in China was actually something quite different from what was called TBLT here. I was intrigued to learn that there was an instructional approach named TBLT, but which was

understood in two very different ways. I had previously considered a task to be an advanced and open activity that enhances students' ability to apply certain language knowledge in a real situation. Now I understood that main goal of a task is to facilitate students' focus on meaning and the process of interaction and learning in a way of linking real-world language use, thus leading to a communicative outcome.

My personal experiences made me suspect that there might be many other teachers like me who were using a popular teaching approach recommended by others while not actually being clearly aware of the approach. I believe that having a better understanding of an innovative teaching approach they are using can improve one's teaching ability, promote their self-confidence as a teacher, and further benefit their students. I also hope that through this study, teachers in China can obtain opportunities to learn more about TBLT without having to endure the indirect and challenging process that I went through in coming to better understand TBLT.

Research Questions

Therefore, through my research I intend to investigate different understandings of TBLT. Do other EFL teachers in urban areas of Beijing understand TBLT in the same way that I used to? Why are there different understandings in the first place? My central research questions are: 1)

What are the conceptions of TBLT among in-service teachers in Beijing? 2)

How are the conceptions formed? 3) What factors will influence their

utilization of TBLT?

Chapter II. A Review of Literature

An Introduction to Task Based Language Teaching (TBLT)

Task-based language teaching is an approach that emerged in the 1980s as an alternative to Formal and Functional/Notional syllabus type approaches, in which "the different parts of language are taught separately and step-by-step so that acquisition is a process of gradual accumulation of the parts until the whole structure of the language has been built up"(Wilkins, 1976, p. 2). Both of them have a propositional plan that presents language knowledge, such as grammar, structures and rules. However, second language acquisition (SLA) research related to sequences of acquisition has shown that learners do not acquire a language in this way. Lightbown (1985) indicated that language learning is an organic, non-linear process that cannot be directly affected by external influences. Therefore, more attention was drawn to a process view of language.

TBLT and Communicative Language Teaching

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) aims to foster language learners' ability to use the target language in real communication (Ellis, 2003). Howatt (1984) divides CLT into two versions, a "weak" version and a "strong" version. The former is based on the assumption that "the components of communicative competence can be indentified and

systematically taught" (Ellis, 2003, p. 28), which is representative in Functional/Notional syllabus type approach. In contrast, a strong version of CLT claims that "language is acquired through communication" (Howatt, 1984, p. 279). That is, learners discover language structures in the process of using language and learning how to communicate (Ellis, 2003). Therefore, the strong version of CLT involves providing learners opportunities to use target language to communicate with others. Based on this view, TBLT represents a strong version of CLT.

Definitions of Tasks

In order to understand TBLT more thoroughly, it is important to clarify what a task, the core concept of the approach, is. Different scholars have defined tasks in very different ways. Long (1985) stated that a task is "a piece of work undertaken for oneself or for others, freely or for some reward" (p. 89). Breen (1987) narrows the concept to the area of in language learning and considers that a "task is assumed to refer to a range of workplans which have the overall purpose of facilitating language learning" (p. 23). However, Prabhu (1987) defines task more instructionally; he regarded "task" as "an activity which required learners to arrive at an outcome from given information through some process of thought and which allowed teachers to control and regulate that process" (p. 24). Willis (1996) defines tasks as "activities where the target language

is used by the learners for a communicative purpose in order to achieve an outcome" (p. 23). Skehan (1998) summarized that "a task is an activity in which: meaning is primary; there is some communication problem; there is some sort of relationship to comparable real-world activities; task completion has some priority; the assessment of the tasks is in terms of outcome" (p. 95). Ellis (2003) offers a more detailed description of a task:

A task is a workplan that requires learners to process language pragmatically in order to achieve an outcome that can be evaluated in terms of whether the correct or appropriate propositional content has been conveyed. To this end, it requires them to give primary attention to meaning and to make use of their own linguistic resources, although the design of the task may predispose them to choose particular forms. A task is intended to result in language use that bears a resemblance, direct or indirect, to the way language is used in the real world. Like other language activities, a task can engage productive or receptive, and oral or written skills, and also various cognitive processes. (p. 16)

Nunan (2004) stated that " a pedagogical task 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" (p. 4). One of the most recent definitions of "task" is from Samuda (2005) who states:

A pedagogic task: 1) Poses some kind of challenge, relevant to the learners for whom it is intended, that needs to be met through the use and /or processing of the target language, and that gives a purpose for engaging in that language use/processing. 2) Engages aspects of language use and language processing, with the overall purpose of promoting language development. 3) Has some kind of outcome/goal/objective as an end point. 4) Has some kind of information/ data/content material as a starting point. 5) Requires some kind of action to be taken on the initial data via a process of thought/transformation/manipulation as a means of reaching those outcomes. (p. 234)

In his review of work on TBLT, Ellis (2003) summarized the criteria of a task. 1. A task is a workplan. 2. A task involves a primary focus on meaning. 3. A task involves real-world processes of language use. 4. A task can involve any of the four language skills. 5. A task engages cognitive processes. 6. A task has a clearly defined communicative outcome (p. 9). Among these criteria, meaningfulness, authenticity and outcome are the most important features of a task.

Task-Based Language Teaching and Task-Supported Language

Teaching

According to Ellis (2003), TBLT involves designing whole classes around tasks which are "the basis for an entire language curriculum" (p. 30), and is related to a strong version of CLT. Whilst, Ellis (2003) distinguishes TBLT from 'task-supported language teaching', which simply combines tasks with traditional pedagogy like a methodological procedure consisting of present-practice-produce (PPP), and is consistent with a weak version of CLT. In the case of tasks as support, "tasks are seen not a means by which learners acquire new knowledge or restructure their inter-languages but simply as a means by which learners can activate their existing knowledge of the L2 by developing fluency" (Ellis, 2003, p. 30).

Development of TBLT in Language Pedagogy

One of the earliest proposals for task-based teaching might be related with *humanistic language teaching* (Ellis, 2003). Moskowitz (1977) gives examples of what she calls "humanistic exercises" for language learning, which correspond to the definition of tasks, as described above. In 1979, Prabhu (1987) conducted an innovative curriculum project in Bangalore in southern India. He believed that students would learn more effectively if their minds were focused on a task, rather than on the target language. He devised a series of meaning-focused activities that required students to understand, convey, or extend meaning, and only incidentally to pay

attention to language forms (Prabhu, 1987).

Work on TBLT was further developed in the 1980s and still continues. Candlin (1987) made a significant contribution with respect to the classification and assessment of tasks. He described a series of criteria for choosing tasks and measuring difficulty, including cognitive complexity, communicative stress, code complexity and the like. In order to facilitate utilization of TBLT in classroom, Willis (1996) offers practical guidance for teachers in real classes by describing five principles for applying TBLT: 1. There should be exposure to worthwhile and authentic language; 2. There should be use of language; 3. Tasks should motivate learners to engage in language use; 4. There should be a focus on language at some points in a task cycle; 5. The focus on language should be more and less prominent at different times. Furthermore, she envisages a "task cycle" consisting of three broad phases: 1) pre-task, 2) task, including task, planning and reporting, and 3) language focus, including analysis and practice.

TBLT and Second Language Acquisition (SLA)

As an innovative approach, TBLT gained abundant theoretical support from second language acquisition (SLA) research. Gass (1988) identified that noticing or what she labeled "apperception" is a critical element of the process of acquisition. Apperception is an internal cognitive act that identifies linguistic input as being related to some prior knowledge that is

stored in one's memory and also the first step of input being transformed

into output (Gass, 1988). Besides realizing the significance of noticing,

SLA researchers also began to recognize the importance of output in

language development. Swain and Lapkin (1995) noted that production

using the target language could make learners aware of linguistic problems

and push them to modify their output. This process was important to

language development. Moreover, the characteristic of interaction in a

TBLT class has been demonstrated to promote language acquisition. Ellis,

Tanaka and Yamazaki (1994) found that interactionally modified input

fostered acquisition of vocabulary more than pre-modified input. Tasks

can also be used to manipulate attentional focus on fluency, accuracy and

complexity, and create a balance between accuracy and fluency (Moser,

2005).

Studies on Factors that Influence Teachers' Implementation

Tasked based language teaching (TBLT) is supported by many

language acquisition theories and studies (e.g., Van den Branden, 2006;

Bygate & Norris, 2009); however, it is not currently widely used by second

language teachers despite the fact that it is well known and widely

promoted in the field of second language education (Davies, 2007). Even

when teachers are well informed about TBLT, there are many reasons why

they are not currently implementing this innovative approach. These reasons include: teacher education, teachers' beliefs, the lack of support, students' expectation, classroom management, the lack of resources, time limits, the influence of assessments, and the pervasiveness of the PPP approach.

Teacher Education

Teacher education is usually a crucial link for both student teachers and experienced teachers to implement TBLT, because without proper introduction to an innovative teaching approach, it is nearly impossible to implement it appropriately. One of the significant factors that influence teachers' implementation in their teaching practice is that teachers lack theoretical knowledge of tasks and TBLT (Carless, 2003; Xu et al., 2008; Littlewood, 2004). For example, Zhang (2007) conducted a case study in China's mainland and indicated that some teachers had limited understanding of TBLT, because of insufficient dissemination. Furthermore, not only the assurance of being-informed, but also how teachers are informed in teacher education matters.

In order to promote the implementation of an innovation, teacher education should foster the acceptance of conceptual change and consolidate new ideas and changes in conceptions. However, a widely practiced approach to teacher education is "tell, show, guide" (Myers,

2002). This traditional approach often does not have a major influence on re-structuring individuals' mental schemata, because "meaning is understood to be the result of humans setting up relationships, reflecting on their actions, and modeling and constructing explanations " (Fosnot, 2005, p. 280). Therefore, a constructivist approach was advocated by scholars (Winitzky & Kauchuk, 1997; Richardson, 2003) to promote the reorganization of teachers' mental schemata. This approach shifts the focus of instruction from the presentation of content to the analysis and construction of personal practical knowledge (Winitzky & Kauchuk, 1997). It was found that a constructivist course of pre-service teachers in university increased student teachers' positive disposition towards TBLT; however, other factors also influenced their actual use during the practicum (Ogilvie & Dunn, 2010). Teacher education should also provide teachers opportunities to apply these innovative approaches into their teaching practice in order to help them translate theory into practices.

Teachers' Own Quality, Personal Characteristics, Attitude and Belief

Teachers' target language proficiency, work experience and ability can also influence teachers' implementation of TBLT (Zhang, 2007), because the unpredictable nature of TBLT demands more linguistic knowledge, teaching wisdom and flexibility than the more structured and predictable

PPP method.

Personal characteristics can also influence teacher decision-making. Some teachers who are comfortable to take risks, confident about their teaching ability and open-minded are more likely to implement innovative approaches (Ogilvie, 2008).

Teachers' attitude and beliefs can strongly influence their decisions around implementing TBLT. For example, in one study, some student teachers did not choose to apply TBLT, which they had learned in a teacher education course in university, because they could not "believe" that language could be acquired through tasks instead of teachers' presentation (Ogilvie & Dunn, 2010). However, some teachers who perceive the value of TBLT may also act differently in their teacher practice. Novice teachers might mirror the techniques of mentor teachers to avoid risks (Tochon & Gwyn-Paquette, 2003) or abandon the principles under the pressures of cultural norms (Ogilvie & Dunn, 2010). For experienced teachers, their beliefs regarding second language teaching could lead them to consider that TBLT does not promote accuracy or that it delayed strong students (Jeon & Hahn, 2006). However, other teachers welcome the effectiveness of TBLT for small-group work, interaction, motivation (Jeon & Hahn, 2006), independence, skills and strategies development, and relevance to student needs (McDonough & Chaikitmongkol, 2007).

Support from Others

Support from governments, schools, mentors, peer teachers and scholars is a significant factor that influences teachers' actual use in praxis. Zhang (2007) indicated that lack of support from the government for school projects and English language teaching innovations, along with the lack of school effort to adopt TBLT, constrained teachers' implementation in China's mainland. For novice teachers, the lack of support from their mentors forced them to use traditional teaching approaches that were familiar to their mentors (Ogilvie & Dunn, 2010). Providing teachers with support and guidance over a period of time and supportive partners at different levels of implementation could successfully motivate teachers to implement TBLT (Van den Branden, 2006).

Student Expectations

Students who have been influenced by traditional second language teaching methods for a long time might be resistant to TBLT, because of their expectations that grammar is supposed to be at the centre of language learning (McDonough & Chaikitmongkol, 2007). For example, McDonough and Chaikitmongkol (2007) observed resistance from students when they conducted a study in an institute in Thailand to adopt TBLT. This kind of expectation is not limited to Asia. It was identified in a study of second language students in the USA and Colombia that

grammar-centered instruction and corrective feedback were supported by students from both countries (Schulz, 2001).

Classroom Management

Classroom management was identified as a significant issue when teachers utilize tasks as the focus of instruction. It might be a struggle for teachers to maintain a quiet, orderly classroom as well carry out tasks (Carless, 2004). Since students would most probably make noise and move around during tasks, teachers are worried that they will be interpreted as not competent and authoritative if their classes become such a setting. Moreover, teachers may also find that tackling discipline problems become more complex. For example, Tsui (2003) found that Hong Kong teachers using difficulty distinguishing on-task noise from off-task noise. Teachers have reported classroom management worries with TBLT particularly in the case of large classes (Zhang, 2007) and classes with younger learners (Carless, 2004).

The Feasibility of TBLT Resources

It is indicated by Richards and Rodgers (2001) that the lack of teaching materials designed for task-based language teaching is a significant barrier for teachers to implement TBLT in their teaching praxis, because it requires a lot of time for teachers to search and design teaching materials themselves. Zhang (2007) found that teachers in China lacked

task-based recourses and that the design of TBLT was time consuming.

This was also supported by Carless (2003), who identified that the added

workload associated with the introduction of TBLT restricted the teachers

in his study. Ogilvie and Dunn (2010) also found that the absence of

resources made TBLT implementation difficult.

Time Limits in Class

TBLT has also been described time-consuming in class. Teachers were

challenged by the limited class time available for completing tasks and all

the other activities in the TBLT cycle such as task repetition or focusing on

form (McDonough & Chaikitmongkol, 2007). Therefore, time limits in the

periods of teaching can also influence teachers' implementation of TBLT

(Zhang, 2007).

Influence of Exanimations and Assessment of TBLT

Current testing practices, especially tests that ignore oral language

ability and emphasize grammatical knowledge, reading and written skills,

might make teachers worried about their students' performance on tests

when following a task-based approach (Tinker Sachs, 2007). For example,

Sato (2009) pointed out that a task was demotivating for those Japanese

learners who were focused on preparing for exams.

Assessment of TBLT also raises some practical concerns for teachers.

Some do not know how to assess learners' performance, as opposed to

learners' knowledge of language form (Jeon & Hahn, 2006), whereas

others are bothered by a tendency to mark subjectively (Watson Todd,

2006). Elsewhere, there was a mismatch between tasks and traditional

form-oriented examinations (Carless, 2007).

Influence of PPP

The presentation-practice-production (PPP) sequence of second

language teaching is still appealing and influences teachers in several ways.

First of all, it is apparently logical. PPP has a "logic that is appealing both

to teachers and learners, and it reflects the way that other skills - such as

playing tennis or using a computer – are learned. That is, knowledge

becomes skill through successive stages of practice" (Thornbury, 1999, p.

128). Because sayings like "practice makes perfect" are widespread, PPP is

much easier to be accepted by teachers and learners than TBLT. Secondly,

the PPP sequence is sometimes considered much easier to be handled by

teachers and managed in class than TBLT. It provides teachers a clear

professional role that is relatively easy to maintain (Skehan, 1996). In a

PPP class, the teacher is the controller and the centre of the class. Learning

content and the whole process of learning are all under the control of

teachers. Unexpected questions or scenarios seldom occur and more

teaching resources are available than for TBLT. Thirdly, the outcomes of

the PPP sequence are more obvious and measureable than TBLT. It is

easier for teachers to design standard tests to evaluate students in class. Hence, some teachers may be drawn to insist on a PPP sequence, or when adopting TBLT, they might change some significant stages of TBLT to mirror the PPP sequence more closely.

Research on TBLT in China

Scholars in China began paying more attention to the study of TBLT approximately ten years ago, especially after the publication of the National English Language Curriculum Standards in July of 2001. The new curriculum standard strongly advocates task-based teaching and requires teachers to avoid applying lecture as their only teaching method. It also advises teachers to implement task based teaching approaches in class frequently, in order to develop students' abilities of language, thinking, communication and cooperation in the process of doing tasks.

With the help of Devid Nunan, some text books which are suitable for English teaching in elementary and secondary schools in China, such as New Standard English and New Aim English, were edited and have already been used in public schools. Meanwhile, some Chinese scholars began to study TBLT. Lu (2002), a professor from Huazhong University, systematically introduced TBLT in his article "An Introduction of Task Based English Teaching". Huang (2007) elaborated the theoretical basis

and development of TBLT.

Besides theoretical studies of TBLT, scholars and teachers in China also conducted research about practicing TBLT in class and explored how to achieve a better teaching effect. These scholars and teachers can be categorized into three groups. The first group is teachers from elementary and secondary schools. Li (2011), a teacher from a secondary school in Hebei province, summarized how he used TBLT in his class. Xu (2011), an English teacher from Jiangsu, explained her principles for designing tasks and reflected on what she considered teachers should be aware of when they implement TBLT, such as how to asses students' performance efficiently. Professors who teach English in colleges and universities constitute the second group. Li (2008), an English instructor at the Science and Technology College of Ningbo University, indicated that some college English instructors' lack of cognition of TBLT and lack of English proficiency, along with some students' lack of adaptation to TBLT and some limits of external conditions, were problems in the implementation of TBLT in college and university English teaching. She also suggested that English instructors should further study on the theories and methods of teaching English as a foreign language and try to combine them with their own teaching practice (Li, 2008). Moreover, instructors could also arouse students' motivation on tests and link it with their tasks in English classes

(Li, 2008). An additional recommendation was that encouragement and support should be provided by instructors to help students understand and complete tasks (Li, 2008). Finally, Li (2008) suggested that universities and colleges should limit the numbers of students in classes and provide more proper facilities, such as movable desks and chairs, to promote the implementation of TBLT.

The third group of Chinese researchers who have studied TBLT are scholars of English instruction. Kang (2009) analysed implementations of TBLT in real English classes based on two dimensions: different English proficiency levels among students and regions with different levels of economic development. He indicated that teaching materials and teaching practices that met the criteria of TBLT were quite rare even though the approach was highly recommended in official government documents. Yang and Fang (2010) argued that it was necessary to localize TBLT to fit real conditions in China. They indicated that maladjustment of some teachers and students was due to differences between English teaching in China and in other countries (Yang & Fang, 2010). They implied that the localization of TBLT required integration and creativity (Yang & Fang, 2010).

A review of this literature indicates that although scholars and English instructors in universities and colleges have clearly articulated the concept

and criteria of TBLT, teachers in elementary and secondary schools have described the use of TBLT in teaching practice without always clarifying the definitions of tasks and procedures of TBLT. Therefore, it is difficult to determine the extent to which they were actually using TBLT and which definition or criteria they were guided by. In addition, little is presented in the way of first hand data since there were no interviews or surveys, and detailed observation and description were rarely cited, either. The present study seeks to address some of these limitations by including three cases of English teachers in secondary schools in Beijing, the personal experience of the author, and a clearly specified concept of TBLT in order to benefit both English teachers and scholars in China.

Relevant Research on Teachers' Perceptions of TBLT

Clark, Lo, Hui, Kam, Carless and Wong (1999) conducted a large-scale survey of TBLT in the Hong Kong primary context. Based on data from questionnaire surveys, interviews and classroom observations, they found that teachers had difficulty interpreting and implementing tasks (Clark et al, 1999). Interview data revealed widespread misunderstandings about the nature of tasks; and classroom observations showed that teachers rarely implemented activities that met the definition of task (Clark et al, 1999).

Teachers' understanding of TBLT and whether their perceptions

match the published definitions and criteria were addressed in some studies of TBLT. Yumru et al (2007) conducted a case study in a private primary school to explore the similarities and differences between understandings of the teacher and pupils. Through class observation and follow-up interviews with both teachers and students, the researchers found that the teachers' perceptions of TBLT accorded with relevant literature; however, tasks that were observed were mainly language practice activities in which the students consciously focused on form rather than meaning in their process of fulfilling the tasks (Yumru et al, 2007). Therefore, they considered it as "a weak version of task-based instruction that facilitates the communicative practice of language items that have been introduced in a traditional way" (Yumru et al, 2007, p. 67) and implied that in-service teacher development programs needed to focus on "teachers' experiential understanding" (p. 67) of newly introduced English language teaching methods (Yumru et al, 2007).

Xu, Liu and Jiang (2008) researched secondary school English teachers' perceptions of TBLT and the impacts of their perceptions on their teaching practice. Their data were collected through a survey, interviews and classroom observations. The findings indicated the general understanding and common misconceptions of the teachers concerning their knowledge and perceptions of TBLT. They found that the teachers

had "a scanty knowledge" of TBLT (Xu et al, 2008, p. 1056). They neither knew the goal of tasks nor "how to associate the final goal with the goals of every unit" (Xu et al, 2008, p. 1056). The researchers offered possible causes for this situation, including education policy, the testing system, teaching concepts, teachers' training and the lack of articles that report the current situation of teachers' perception and application of TBLT in China (Xu et al, 2008).

Summary

TBLT is an innovative teaching approach that draws a lot of attention in the area of second language teaching. Though supported by many SLA researchers, it is not used widely in teaching practice in a manner that corresponds with the attention it receives. Although many reasons contribute to this situation, teachers' understanding of TBLT is the foundation of their implementation of it in their teaching practice. Without proper cognition around tasks and TBLT, teachers, even if they are passionate to try this innovative language teaching approach, cannot experience its real effects in their instructions and students. While previous research has investigated teachers' perceptions of TBLT in China, Xu et al (2008) for example, there is a gap of investigation into the details of teachers' understanding, implementations, viewpoints, access to relevant literature on TBLT and their reactions after they receive such

information. In addition, Beijing, as the capital city of China, possesses many educational resources that other provinces do not. However, does it mean that teachers in Beijing, especially those in districts that have good reputations for their education quality, have achieved a better understanding of this innovative language teaching approach? This research will make a contribution toward filling the gaps of this area.

The present study can also benefit researchers of second language who want to have a better understanding of English teachers in Beijing. For second language teachers who are interested in TBLT, the participants' personal experience of cognizing and using TBLT in their teaching practice may offer some insights of knowing and implementing TBLT, such as what the academic concept of TBLT is and difficulties that may affect teachers' implementation of it. For supervisors of teachers, such as principals, the teachers' experiences as described in the findings may provide them with a better understanding of what difficulties teachers may have when they use an innovative approach in practice and how they can support teachers better. For teacher trainers, the findings of the study may offer some implications of how to improve their courses to help teachers learn the way of using an innovative method and gain better outcomes. For professional training developers, the study may contribute toward helping them see the gap between teacher trainings and teachers' actual perceptions and

develop programs that can support teachers more and foster their

utilization of what they have learned.

Chapter III. Methodology

Approach

The intent of this research is to identify the perceptions of TBLT of in-service EFL teachers in Beijing, how these perceptions formed, and factors that influence teachers' implementation of TBLT. To this end, a case study approach was selected to answer these research questions: 1) What are the conceptions of TBLT of in-service teachers in Beijing? 2) How are the conceptions formed? 3) What factors will influence their utilization of TBLT?

A case refers to a single specific phenomenon (Creswell, 2003). Case studies are a strategy of inquiry in which the researcher explores in depth a program, event, activity, process, or one or more individuals (Creswell, 2007). A case study is to study a particular case, which can be particular events or individuals grounded in specific time and space, in depth in order to gain detailed and better understanding of that case, in the hope that this understanding might help others better understand the phenomenon. It allows an "investigation to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events, such as individual life cycles, organizational and managerial processes" (Yin, 1994, p. 4).

In the context of this research project, I used a case study approach to explore the participants' (three veteran EFL teachers in Beijing)

perceptions of TBLT, how the perceptions formed, and how they implemented it in their teaching practice. Therefore, detailed information of their thoughts, cognitions, and experiences needs to be collected to identify the processes of the formation of their thoughts and understandings, which are all bounded by certain periods of time, locations and the like. Therefore, this research is situated within the category of a case study, since it involves investigating the phenomenon of teachers developing various concepts of TBLT and the factors that contribute to their understanding.

Study Participants and Research Site

The study was conducted in Beijing, China. Three in-service EFL teachers in public secondary schools of Beijing participated in this research. They are referred to hear by the pseudonyms Kathy, Daisy, and Yang. All are female and have been working as teachers for a period of time ranging from three years to six years. They all graduated from Capital Normal University in Beijing in 2006 and studied in the same class, which means that they had similar undergraduate education. However, their working and study experiences after their graduation are very different. These differences, along with indications of their personalities and other characteristics, are described in more detail in the case studies presented in Chapter IV.

The teachers were purposefully sampled, and several factors were taken into account to choose these three teachers as the participants of the study. Firstly, all these interviewees have obtained master degrees of Education or TESOL. According to Ogilvie and Dunn (2010) and other studies, the effect of undergraduate education on the implementation of TBLT of pre-service teachers is limited. Moreover, little research has mentioned specifically about the effect of master's programs on the perceptions of TBLT. Therefore, their study experiences in various master's programs may offer insights into the impact of these programs in perceiving and applying an innovative teaching method.

Secondly, Beijing, as the capital of China, possesses more abundant education resources than most areas of China. Teachers in Beijing, especially in the urban districts, may have more opportunities to access innovative approaches, such as TBLT. Consequently, it is likely teachers in Beijing would have some familiarity with TBLT and would have formed understandings and views about this approach to language teaching.

Thirdly, these three teachers are from two urban districts with different reputations of education. This makes it possible to compare the policies and training programs of the two districts and gain more comprehensive data of teachers in Beijing instead of focusing on a specific district. Further, it may bring the audience a more complete approach to

knowing teachers and their teaching lives in Beijing.

Fourthly, all of the participants are former classmates of mine, which allows for greater knowledge of their backgrounds and education training at the undergraduate level. It also allows for an interview climate that is more relaxing, open and less defensive toward the researcher. Hence, their true thoughts and views are easier to be obtained and perceived. Moreover, since personal qualities and characteristics might be factors that influence their processes of cognizing and perceiving TBLT, understanding them as classmates and colleagues may facilitate the analysis of the various factors that impact these processes.

Data Collection

Data were collected from interviews with these three teachers. The interview is one of the most important sources of case study data (Yin, 1994). Qualitative interviews are special kinds of conversations or speech events that help researchers explore the experiences and interpretations of participants (Hatch, 2002). Interviews facilitate qualitative researchers in uncovering the "meaning structures that participants use to organize their experiences and make sense of their worlds" (Hatch, 2002, p. 91). Interviews focus directly on the topic of the study and provide "perceived causal inferences" (Yin, 1994, p. 80). They also provide access that helps researchers gain insights into events and experiences that have not been

observed (Hatch, 2002). Hence, interviews can reveal "the meanings and significance of artifacts collected in the field" (Hatch, 2002, p. 91) when the required data are difficult to observe directly. Since the main data required for this study are experiences and perceptions of teachers related with TBLT, interviews are befitting as the primary source of data, because they can enable the author to understand why and how the teachers cognized and utilized TBLT in certain ways, which is to "make sense of their worlds" (Hatch, 2002, p. 91).

All interviews lasted approximately 40 minutes and were audio recorded. Interviews were conducted in an informal, semi-structured conversational manner and in places that were familiar and comfortable for participants, such as their apartments or cafes. This approach provided a relaxing environment in order to facilitate the participants in revealing how they perceived TBLT, how their perceptions were formed and their tendencies toward using it. Because of the limited time that I was able to spend in Beijing, class observations were not feasible. However, some questions in the interviews that asked teachers to describe their classes and tasks in detail offered an alternative to direct observations.

Questions asked in the interviews are closely tied to the research questions. In the beginning of the interviews, I asked the teachers to talk about their education and teaching experience. Then some general

questions about TBLT were raised to help teachers focus on the theme of the interviews. Teachers were asked to define "task" using their own words and to describe in detail a class using TBLT in order to offer their conceptions of TBLT. After that, I posed questions related to their access to opportunities to learn about TBLT, such as their courses, professional trainings and the like for the sake of exploring how their perceptions had formed. I then shared my "story" of using and learning about TBLT and talked about the criteria and teaching cycle of TBLT as they are presented in the academic literature. After a discussion that encouraged the teachers to make a comparison between their own view of TBLT and the mainstream academic view, the teachers talked more about lessons using TBLT and their future plans, including the benefits and barriers to using TBLT in future.

Participants were interviewed in Chinese. Although they are all English teachers and have comparatively advanced English proficiency, their mother tongue is Chinese. When answering questions related to cognitions, definitions and descriptions of their classroom practices, complex mental processes are required. In order to express their ideas accurately and describe the scenarios adequately, various and abundant expressions including the abstract, detailed and vivid ones are necessary. It would probably have been a challenge for the interviewees if the

interviews were conducted in English, and challenges might arouse anxiety

(Sieber, O'Neil & Tobias, 1977). Both anxiety and challenges in speaking

English could have militated against desirable outcomes of the interviews.

Moreover, expressing complicated ideas in a foreign language would

probably require a secondary processing of the original ideas since foreign

language speakers may not be able to convey their complex thoughts

spontaneously as they do in their first language (Vygotsky, 1978). This

secondary processing of ideas, which means a translation from their first

language into a foreign language, could have reduced the veracity and

richness of the data.

In addition, interviews were conducted in the living environments of

the interviewees, where the English language is rarely used. Therefore,

participants feel much more comfortable and harmonious with the

surrounding environment when speaking in Chinese rather than in

English, and comfort enhances their ability to express themselves fluently

and richly. Since the author's first language is also Mandarin, interviewing

in Chinese helped the interviewer and interviewees communicate in an

effective and efficient way in order to increase the level of mutual

understanding and avoid unnecessary ambiguity. To conclude, according

to the aims and the environments of the interviews and the conditions of

interviewer and interviewees, speaking in Chinese was chosen as a way to

increase the comfort of participants, the efficiency and effect of communication and comprehension, reduce anxiety and negative ambiguity and further enhance the veracity and richness of the expressions with the goal of leading to valuable data and research results.

Since the interviews were audio recorded and conducted in Chinese, they were transcribed in Chinese at first and then summarized in English. Quotations from the participants were translated from the Chinese transcripts.

Data Analysis

The data from interviews were analyzed based on the framework of typological analysis (Hatch, 2002). First of all, I identified what topics to address in the data. Since interviews are the sole data collection tool in this study, there was a set of consistent guiding questions that focused on the research questions and reflected the topics of interest for the research. Secondly, I read through the data and interview transcripts several times, each time with a specific topic in mind to find and mark the sentences related to the topic in order to highlight the relevant information. Thirdly, I read the marked sentences again and wrote summaries with organized topics that reflected the main ideas that I wished to convey and emphasize. Fourthly, I analyzed the summarized data to locate patterns, relationships and themes across the different cases. After that, I read highlighted data

and coded the summaries with identified patterns in order to judge whether the patterns were supported by the data. Then the "survived" patterns were analyzed to find out the connections between them. Finally, ideas were generalized as arguments and findings for the study and specific examples were selected from the data to support them.

During the process of listening to the recordings over and over, transcribing and summarizing, I found that these transcripts or summaries were actually the "stories" of these teachers' encounters with TBLT, and their stories are composed of three sections: past, present and future. Their conceptions of TBLT are their "present" that represents their current conditions of perceiving and applying TBLT. Their "present" was a natural result of their "past" that was composed of their various education and teaching experiences that are like trajectories that depend on the combined actions of various factors. Their "future" with TBLT might be implied in their new perspectives that emerged during the interviews and their expectations and worries of using it in their teaching practice. As a result, the themes that I was looking for in the summaries were their "stories" including their status quo, what happened and what may happen. I describe their experiences of knowing and utilizing TBLT in the form of a "story" in the next chapter of Case Studies.

Chapter IV: Case Studies

In order to explore how these in-service teachers formed their conceptions of TBLT and how they apply it in their teaching practice, it is necessary to reveal and analyze details from the narration of their study and teaching experience. Hence, it is possible to understand these teachers more thoroughly and gain more insights through the description of their experience and opinions during the interviews that are presented in this chapter. Their different stories indicate different trajectories of knowing and implementing an innovative foreign language teaching approach, provide their cognition of TBLT, and offer a chance to compare several different experiences in order to answer the research questions.

The Story of Kathy

Kathy was a diligent and active student during her college time. Although she obtained a high GPA at the university, she did not pass the National Examination of Graduate Enrolment for full time students. However, as a main student leader in her department and a scholarship winner, she entered a good school in the Haidian district that has a good reputation for education in Beijing. In her first year as a teacher, she taught English in Grade One and Six. Then, in her second year, she taught English in Grade Seven. During her second year, she considered obtaining

a master's degree because she believed it was necessary for her teaching career. Therefore, after a consideration lasting several months of whether to study abroad or domestically, she decided to participate in a master's program for in-service teachers, which was organized by both Capital Normal University in Beijing and Flinders University in Australia. "It won't delay my job and I can also obtain a foreign university master degree and have native-speaker instructors", she explained. Kathy took courses during her summer and winter vacations and finished her assignments and a thesis during academic terms. After a study of two and a half years, she was granted a Master's Degree of Education. Now she teaches two Grade Nine classes and is a class teacher of one of them.

She had heard a lot about TBLT and used it for several years, especially in the two most recent years preceding the interview. When she taught Grade 7 and 8, she considered using TBLT in nearly every class except the ones for examination preparation. However, because of the new round of curriculum revolution that is currently carrying through in her school, she seldom uses it now. The new learning pattern in her school emphasizes "group cooperation study", which means teachers give handouts to students and then students work in groups to find out the answers by themselves. When I inquired whether the handout could be a task, she said, "It could not be, because a task must be authentic, for

instance, offering them a real scenario or using authentic materials to finish a task, but not merely practicing and finding answers in textbook, like where the word is in the article and what it means here ". Then she added, "It is not so authentic".

She defined a task as "a practice that imitates a real situation and has a specific aim and enables students to use target language knowledge to do something". Then she offered an example, "Let's say, if you want to teach something about food, you can say that we are going to have a spring trip and we need to prepare something to eat, so what do you want to buy? Then the students will say (something about food)". Then she explained, "The process of talking (about food) is actually a sort of revision of what they have learnt before, but also a way that you can teach them something new about food that they can use (in this context)".

Kathy described one of her classes in which she thought that she mainly used TBLT. It was a revision class about past continuous tense. She showed a video clip about flash mobs, in which some young people suddenly stopped moving for a certain time in a subway train. After watching it, students were asked to report the news to their partners as reporters. In this task, students were supposed to describe the event using past continuous tense in order to let some students who were not familiar with this tense pattern review it. Then students were divided into two

groups to do a flash mob game. Group A did a flash mob first and the students of group B recorded what movements group A were doing; and then group B did the flash mob they designed and group A students recorded. After a group discussion, they wrote it as a report that was also their homework.

Talking about the effect of TBLT in her class, Kathy thinks it depends on different language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) that students practice. She believes that it is quite effective in listening and speaking classes; however, it might not offer students enough opportunities for practicing reading and writing. "They talked too much but wrote a little (in classes)", she described. She also quoted from the teaching researcher in the Haidian Education Professional Development College, "From the results of research in the Haidian district these years, one of the shortages of TBLT in reading and writing class is that students still talk more than write. (The content of) class will be very rich and lively, but it is hard for teachers to ask students to write down what they said in class". She thinks that this phenomenon is due to limited class time.

Kathy was not sure whether TBLT was mentioned in undergraduate courses. She thinks that fundamentally she learned about TBLT after she became a teacher in the Haidian district. In teacher meetings for professional development, the teaching researchers introduced and

analyzed some designs of classes using TBLT, although they did not systematically talk about the definition of a task or what TBLT is. Kathy also thought that many colleagues used TBLT and she learned something about it from their classes, too. Moreover, she obtained some knowledge and ideas about TBLT from some books and English teaching magazines, like *Foreign Language Teaching*, in which there were many articles about how to teach English by using tasks. "There are both theory and practice", she said, "For example, what TBLT is and how I can use it to design a class. When you think that it is a good idea, you will use it automatically".

In her master's courses, she thought that instructors taught them by using concepts of TBLT. For instance, "they threw you a question, you worked in a group and solved it, and then you made a poster and presented it", she said, "It is TBLT, isn't it?" However, because the master's program is about education but not a second or foreign-language-teaching program, she did not have any courses about ESL teaching approaches or methods. Therefore, in the process of the program, TBLT was not directly mentioned or taught. Nevertheless, Kathy was sure that in some books demanded in the courses, TBLT must have appeared somewhere, "or I wouldn't have such a deep impression (of TBLT)". Talking about teaching training at school, she said, "it really depends on the teaching style of your school", then she added, "let's say,

they change style this year and then TBLT is not a topic (to discuss), but before the change, after you gave a public lesson and they (peers and supervisors) would comment like 'well, she used TBLT, that's good' and the like". However, except the training courses for new teachers, she has never had other courses for English teachers in the district.

After I described the criteria of a task as summarized by Ellis (2003), which are meaningfulness, authenticity and outcome, Kathy told me that she considers her design of tasks to correspond with the criteria. She thinks that the most common task she used was survey tasks. Students worked in groups and answered questions of a survey and they summarized different students' opinions, ideas or experiences, in which there was focus on meaning, real world related topic and an outcome. In the lessons given by other teachers that she has heard before, she thought that some of them were well designed and used TBLT well. For instance, a teacher from a very reputable school in Beijing gave a public lesson, which Kathy described. It involved an article about London. The teacher showed some slides of London and then let students do some reading practice. After that, students worked in groups to summarize a frame or template of how to introduce a place. Then the teacher gave students a map of Beihai Park and asked them to design a tour plan. Students designed, drew and presented their tour lines in class. Another class that impressed her was

about the introduction of an international program for students. After reading an article on that topic, students summarized it focusing on what aspects they could use to introduce a study program. Then they worked in groups and assigned different portions of the introduction to different students. When they finished the task individually, they worked in groups again to integrate their paragraphs into an article. Finally, they presented in class and received comments from other classmates and the teacher. Teachers selected new words and sentence structures before students started doing the tasks in both public lessons.

After I shared with Kathy the conceptions of task-based language teaching and task-supported language teaching, Kathy indicated that she usually used task-supported language teaching. However, she questioned the criteria of the two different teaching approaches and noted that in a real class, it is difficult to distinguish these two concepts clearly and distinctly. In our discussion, she mentioned inductive and deductive approaches and argued that even when she presented some new language knowledge, some students have already learned that before and know what she is going to say; therefore, in the stage of lead-in, she always tried to lead and encourage students who had already learned it to "come out" in order to use the "resource of students" to help other students. She thinks that it is a combination of the two kinds of approaches because in her

teaching cycle, she usually lets students discuss first and do a task and then summarize and conduct another discussion.

In her future pedagogy, Kathy intends to keep using TBLT, because "it is authentic", she said. She is confident that her students will like TBLT, particularly group working tasks and they are capable enough to complete the task without a prior language knowledge input. She thinks that TBLT is doable in the class because students are fond of working with and learning new knowledge from peers. She believes that peers are very influential to secondary students. When facing their group members, they are more relaxing without the pressure from the teacher or anxiety in front of the whole class.   She reported that a student once said to her, "I can understand when a classmate explains it to me, but I did not when you explained it". She also stated that it can facilitate their ability to socialize, communicate, cooperate and tolerate others. "These kids (single children who were born after the 90's) really lack these abilities", she commented. The authenticity and interestingness of tasks motivate her to use them in her teaching.

Although Kathy hopes to continue incorporating TBLT into her teaching practice, she also tends to follow her own teaching pattern rather than strictly following a TBLT sequence. Her preferred sequence is as follows: based on what students have obtained, lead students to analyze

and solve problems; offer some hints and supports; then, give students a new task to do. "I just want to teach in my own way", she said. Nevertheless, she worries that students might practice too much on verbal expression, which could lead to a lack of written ability. She also has concerns that under the circumstance of a new revolution of teaching in her school, it would be hard to keep using TBLT because the teaching plan is unified and other teachers will consider you are incongruous, "they will evaluate you in a different way when they listen to your class after they stop popularizing TBLT", she said.

The Story of Daisy

After graduation from the English Education Department in 2006, Daisy was enrolled in the Faculty of Education majoring in comparative education. After a three-year study in this master's program, she became an English teacher in a secondary school in the Chongwen District of Beijing in 2009. Currently, she is teaching two Grade 9 classes of boarding students and is in charge of one of the classes.

Although Daisy had heard of TBLT, she admitted that it was seldom used in her class. In fact, she stated that she rarely considered which teaching approach to use when she designed a class because it was not required in a teaching plan by her school. Based on her understanding of TBLT, she used it for reading lessons occasionally. She defined a task as an

aim that students strive to achieve and the process of achieving it. Then she offered an example of a paragraph in an article which was taught in three steps: (1) Students found answers of questions she raised from the text first in order to understand the meaning or main idea of it. (2) Students were asked to fill in blanks in a paragraph that was paraphrased and simplified by the teacher to reinforce their impression. (3) Based on these practices, students were able to retell the paragraph themselves. She summed up that the whole process is a task, in her view.

When talking about a typical class she taught using TBLT, Daisy stated that the example she described above would be a typical task cycle in her class. She usually helps students to understand the main idea of an article, and then she teaches it paragraph by paragraph. Therefore, one class is usually constructed by several "task cycles" as she described. The differences between these "tasks" might consist of changing the format of questions from multiple choice to true or false statements.

Regarding the effect of the teaching approach, Daisy said, "When I taught them like that, students were quite happy (to learn) and got a deep impression (on the article)". She thinks that since it was basically an intensive reading class, students' understanding of detailed information might be much better than the interpretation of the main idea and the whole article. Moreover, their application of some specific language

knowledge, like a sentence structure, would have been particularly developed, in her view. She emphasizes the language points that she wants students to master as grammar and phrases when students do practice activities like filling in blanks.

Daisy became aware of TBLT through reading a book about English teaching methods. She remembers that an experienced teacher from the school where she just started working recommended it. That teacher said that it was a very helpful book for a new teacher. Daisy also thinks that she might have browsed some other books in her spare time when she was a master's student and in her first year of working. She said that the term "TBLT" appeared in many places, like journals. When browsing the title of articles, she had seen the term TBLT, but felt that she did not have time to actually read the articles thoroughly.

Daisy thought that she might have heard of TBLT in her undergraduate courses but she was not certain. In her master's program, since her major was in comparative education which mainly introduced the history of education, the research method of comparative education and theories of education and the like, she did not participate in any courses related to language teaching methods.

In professional development meetings for teachers in the Chongwen District, Daisy did not recall hearing discussions of TBLT or seeing public

lessons based on TBLT. In these meetings that were held once every other week, the teaching researcher assigned the modules in the textbook to teachers in different schools. These teachers designed and made PowerPoint slides for the modules, uploaded them to the mailing list of English teachers in the district, and presented their slides shows. However, they merely demonstrated the sequences or procedures of the slides and explained why they were conceived this way or indicated what teaching approaches they used. The teaching researcher usually highlighted some strengths of the class from the aspects of whether the students would be interested in the activities, but seldom illustrated teaching approaches.

Sometimes experts were invited to give lectures to the teachers. For example, there had been a PhD student from a university who gave a series of four sessions about how to teach reading. However, as Daisy described, "the sessions were just like reading classes for teachers". The speaker led teachers to read the article, told teachers how to understand the text and do the multiple choice practice.

Similar with the experience of Kathy, the only course Daisy had in the district after becoming a teacher was a training course for new teachers aimed at teachers in all disciplines. Her only training related specifically to language teaching was to write a teaching plan and email it to her teaching researcher without any instruction in advance. Although there is a

five-year-plan that requires in-service teachers to complete a certain number of courses, Daisy was unable to participate in any of them because as a class teacher, she was considered by the school to be too busy and was asked to choose courses in the future. She also revealed that even those teachers who were not class teachers and were able to enroll in courses, typically had to choose ones that were unrelated to English teaching because there were nearly no available relevant courses to choose from. Therefore, she considered that it would be useless and meaningless for her even if she were allowed to take these courses. "One of my colleagues took a course on Dunhuang art because it was the only one she could choose", she said.

When I shared and discussed with Daisy the criteria (meaningfulness, authenticity and outcome) for tasks as discussed in academic literature, she considered that the activities she used in class would not be regarded as tasks because they were not related with students' real life and did not usually have outcomes. In the process of our discussion, Daisy indicated that for listening and speaking lessons, students practiced listening skills through answering questions; however, opportunities for the development of their oral English were lacking. The dialogues in the textbooks were treated like reading material. After students listened paragraph by paragraph and did some practice activities,

they opened the books, read in pairs or chorally and found out language points from the text. Daisy stated that she sometimes chooses students to read a paragraph and asks them the meaning of a sentence that might be not very comprehensible. Students sometimes initiate questions themselves, too.

After I talked with Daisy about the concept of task-supported language teaching and task-based language teaching and the teaching cycle of TBLT, Daisy indicated that in her teaching practice, she tends to use task-supported language teaching. She stated that she had never learned TBLT systematically. "Nobody has taught anything to me about that", she said. Then she added that though she had a mentor, she felt that her mentor taught her nothing about teaching methods and did not even observe her lessons. Daisy did, however, observe her mentor's lessons and felt that her mentor did not pay attention to teaching methods, either. "She just taught that way (like I do)", she said. She thinks that although she had observed other teachers' classes before, she was unable to learn the essence of their teaching, which is the most important or central aspect of their design. In the end, she could not recall any public lessons using TBLT that she had observed.

Still Daisy showed great interest in TBLT and stated that she hopes to use it in her class. She thinks that the choosing of a task might be a

challenge for her. She explained that since the task is the core of the lesson, if it is chosen improperly, the whole lesson would be ruined. Therefore, she felt that the expectation of managing the class holistically was very high. She also worried that although she has confidence in the class that falls under her discipline, she is not confident in the other one. She does not think that the school will intervene in her pedagogy. However, she thinks that because the grade 9 students are already familiar with the current approaches of teaching and learning, it might be hard to change their habits and impractical to try TBLT now. Therefore, she suggested that it might be better for her to use it when she teaches Grade 7 again.

Daisy considers that TBLT can enhance the capacity of students, and she suggested that in the long term, students might find that they are able to help others and motivated to learn actively after class because their peers need their support. She also thinks that since the interaction and communication between fellow students can be smoother than between teachers and students, it is easier for students to receive help and instruction from their peers. She considers that since becoming a teacher, she spends too much time managing the class as a class teacher instead of improving her teaching skills as an English teacher. She indicated that she did not believe she had made much progress in her English teaching, which she believes could be detrimental to her career. Therefore, she is

pleased and eager to learn new teaching methods and practice them in her

class.

The Story of Yang

Compared with Kathy and Daisy, the study and working experience

of Yang is more complicated. Yang always wanted to study abroad.

However, she did not go abroad right after she graduated from the Capital

Normal University. Instead, she worked for one year in a very reputable

elementary school in Beijing. Then, she enrolled in a TESOL (Teaching

English Speakers of Other Languages) program in Sydney University

including courses like social practice, methodology, pronunciation, second

language acquisition, and research methods. After one-year of master's

study in Australia, she went to Shanghai because her boyfriend was

working there, and she found a job in some English training agencies as an

English teacher and study advisor. In her working experience in Shanghai,

Yang found that personality characteristics are very important for the

students in the agencies. She believes that it is easier for the outgoing ones

to improve their verbal English more quickly. In 2009, she received an

interview opportunity in one of the top schools in Beijing and started

teaching two Grade 7 classes beginning in September of that year in the

Haidian district, the same one as Kathy's. In the second semester of Grade

8, the February of 2011, she became a class teacher for one of the two. Now

she is still in charge of the one and teaching the two Grade 9 classes English.

Yang stated that she is familiar with TBLT and that she uses it once or twice a week. She prefers to apply it in listening and reading lessons. Yang considers tasks a means to motivate and help students to achieve a teaching aim. Through backward planning, she suggested, a teacher should be able to infer what tasks students need in order to achieve the goal instead of "designing a task for doing a task".

She offered an example of a reading class on the theme of volunteering. Before the class, she asked students to recall their own experience of being a volunteer or their relevant knowledge on the topic. Many students associated the theme with volunteers at the Beijing Olympic Games in 2008; however, their perceptions of volunteer were greatly confined to this view. Yang's aims in this class were to engage students to talk about volunteering with sentence structures like "I would like to do…", to inspire students that volunteering is a good way to contribute to society and increase their sense of social responsibility and helping others. She divided the lesson into three phases: pre-task, task and post-task. In the phase of pre-task, she designed a warm-up activity like a brainstorming. She wrote the word "volunteer" on the blackboard and asked students to call out the words they could think of. The lesson also

included an article about the volunteer experience of three teenagers. In the task stage, students read the article and then completed some reading practice activities and group discussions. The activities included putting sentences in blanks and answering questions. Yang asked students to share their answers with their classmates, which were added to and corrected by their peers, instead of offering answers by the teacher directly. In the final post-task phase, she showed some pictures and required students to talk about what volunteer jobs they would like to do in the future and explain their reasons. She listed some key words that students' mentioned such as "social responsibility" and "cooperation". Then students presented individually or in pairs. At the end of the class, Yang played a video clip of important international events like earthquakes and wars in order to arouse the students' sense of conscientiousness further. The assignment for this lesson was to write about their intentions of volunteering in the future, which they had already discussed in class.

Yang considers that with plenty of class time, the effects of TBLT are beneficial; however, in order to help students achieve better results in examinations, she thinks that it is improper to devise every lesson like this. Nevertheless, she felt certain that this teaching approach is beneficial to the language ability of students in the long run and strives to assign class time to this kind of lesson as much as possible.

Yang thought that TBLT might have been mentioned in one of her undergraduate courses, but she could not recall the content or any details. Her conception of TBLT was formed in her master's program. In a course on teaching methodology, she gained an impression of TBLT is a teaching cycle of pre-task, task and post-task. She also understood that one task can include several small tasks. She could not remember the criteria for defining tasks or any activities relevant to it. She thinks that there should be some presentations about TBLT-based lessons in professional development meetings; however, she admitted that she did not always pay attention when she participated in these activities. With respect to teacher training courses in her district, she had previously participated in a new teacher training and a computer course. However, she did not remember any information about TBLT, though she believes that it may have been mentioned in the new teacher training course.

Yang stated that she believes many teachers have a very partial impression of innovative teaching methods, especially in the case of popular ones, and that they design lessons by using the method not for facilitating students' learning but for chasing a fashion. She is also averse to what she sees as blind curriculum revolutions; for example, she questioned experts who said that in a 40 minutes class the teacher should not speak over 10 minutes. She emphasized that some teachers used TBLT

improperly. For instance, some teachers designed many tasks for some language points that students have applied skillfully. Although, the class seems very lively and students are very happy, students cannot learn new language knowledge and achieve growth. "Students cannot learn anything new in this kind of class", she said.

When I shared Ellis' (2003) criteria for tasks, Yang indicated that she considers her example of the task on volunteering to be meaningful, authentic and having an outcome. She thinks that there was focus on meaning and it was related to students' real life experience because she learned from the students' presentations that many of them had been volunteers before. She regards their presentations and assignments as outcomes of the task.

In classes that Yang has observed, she thinks that most tasks that teachers designed for the end of the class corresponded with the criteria of a task. She recalled one Grade 7 class on the theme of teachers. The final task was for students to write a paragraph to their teachers or any other people they would like to show their thankfulness to. Before the task, through pictures of other teachers, students learned how to use several sentences to describe a teacher, his or her discipline and what they could learn in the class. The teacher led the students to think about how to talk about that and then asked them to work in groups and write a letter of

thanks to one of their teachers on attractive letter paper that she later sent out.

Following our discussion late in the interview, Yang was very quick to understand the different conceptions of task-supported language teaching and task-based language teaching. She admitted that in her teaching practice, task-supported language teaching is much more frequently used. Moreover, this discussion reminded her of a revision lesson that she thought might correspond with the teaching cycle of TBLT (Willis, 1996). The lesson focused on listening and speaking, and it was designed to review the simple past tense. Firstly, she found a funny video clip from the Internet about an unforgettable experience of two young people one weekend. They had a very unlucky day and many bad things happened to them on that day. Students did a listening comprehension practice by filling in blanks while watching the video clip. Then, they were asked to choose any verbs from the transcript and use them to describe an unforgettable experience of their own. It could be lucky, terrible, exciting or any other kinds of experience. It could also be fictional. Finally, they wrote down their stories and handed them in to the teacher. Yang thinks that the effect of this class was quite good and the stories of students were fascinating. "It was really fun", she said. Then she described a public lesson that had impressed her a lot. The teacher developed a series of

TBLT lessons using many games in class. Teams could choose which kind of game to play. All of these activities were scored to see which group was the winner.

Yang showed great interest in TBLT and hopes to use it more in the future. She considers that more space should be provided to students to develop their English language proficiency. She believes that many of her students have seen or known a lot which means they have received enough input of information including language knowledge; however, because of examinations, they are confined to some extent. She thinks that English lessons should not only enhance students' language ability, but also facilitate their coming to know other cultures. She considers simply teaching grammar "very boring". She also believes that TBLT can increase and maintain students' learning interest and that it is also beneficial for enhancing their oral language. "They speak too little (in English)", she said. This method may also increase their breadth of learning because students may learn things beyond the textbook. She said that her school used to have a program with the Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, in which they provided a series of graded reader books. She thinks that if teachers are able to use these books efficiently, for example, offering students an extensive reading class every week, it will greatly benefit students' literature.

Yang stated that her application of TBLT might be restricted by class time. Giving more TBLT lessons will definitely lead to a decrease of examination preparation lessons; however, in the long term, it is good for the promotion of students' ability. Nevertheless, she thinks that teaching "basic knowledge" is also necessary. "I won't feel my feet are on the ground if I teach too many TBLT classes", she added. Another obstacle she was concerned about is that for completing tasks, some scaffolding is required before students have classes, which usually consists of asking students to obtain some information online in advance; however, Yang believes that many teenagers have web-addiction. Therefore, she worries about how to guarantee that students use the Internet to prepare for tasks instead of using it for other purposes. She added that there is a limit to students' ability of self-control. Nowadays, Yang stated, she seldom gives students assignments online because the current online environment is not good, in her opinion. Furthermore, most Chinese students do not have the habit of gaining information from libraries or enough spare time to go to libraries because of the heavy load of homework; therefore, they are unable to finish more creative activities and teachers can only design tasks that do not need to be prepared before class. She thinks that this condition increases the difficulty for teachers to use TBLT. Yang also thinks that it is better for colleagues to apply an innovative approach all together, because it will be

"troublesome" if one cannot receive support from others and is always different from others although there is no requirement in her school to unify class design. "People will think that you are strange", she said. She expressed concern over whether or not she should tell her peers that she is teaching in a different way. "It is silly to say it in every meeting because people don't care about what methods you are using", she said, "but people will think that you are hiding something if you don't (tell them)". Moreover, she said she would be afraid that parents might inquire about why her lessons are different from other teachers'.

Chapter V: Findings

These three interviews showed that these teachers have different conceptions of a task, and ways to integrate TBLT in their teaching practice. Their perceptions of TBLT are affected by various factors, including pre-teaching education, their master's programs, peers and mentors, professional development training and school policy, personal characteristics and self-study. All of them showed great interest in applying TBLT in future classes; however, they worried about different practical issues related to its implementation. Based on the interviews and resulting case studies, the findings of the research are presented in this chapter and analyzed in relation to five aspects: the teachers' conceptions of a task, implementation of TBLT, trajectories of their "past", factors that

influence their conceptions, and expectations and worries of using TBLT in future.

1. Conceptions of a Task

All of the three teachers indicated that they had heard of TBLT; however, their understandings of a task are different. Kathy regarded a task as "a practice that imitates a real situation with a specific aim and enables students to do something by using target language knowledge". She indicated that an activity that merely requires to achieve a goal, such as finding answers in textbook with a handout, could not be considered as a task and emphasized that "a task must be authentic, for instance, offering them a real scenario or using authentic materials". In the example of a task she designed, Kathy started with a theme (food), then she built a scenario that required students to use words related with food (we are going to have a spring trip and we need to prepare something to eat). After that she asked students to answer a meaningful question with an information gap "what do you want to buy (for the spring trip)". However, in a class using TBLT that she described, the tasks mainly served to help students review a grammar point (past continuous tense) although the class also had a theme (flash mobs). Students completed recording, performing, discussing and reporting in the process of finishing the tasks. According to the criteria of a task that Ellis (2003) summarized based on

different definitions of a task: 1. A task is a workplan. 2. A task involves a primary focus on meaning. 3. A task involves a real-world process of language use. 4. A task can involve any of the four language skills. 5. A task engages cognitive processes. 6. A task has a clearly defined communicative outcome. Kathy's conception of tasks, and the examples she gave, reflect all of these criteria.

Daisy's conception differs from Kathy's. Daisy indicated that a task includes an aim for students to achieve and the process of achieving the aim. According to Daisy's examples, her activities started with answering questions and ended with retelling a paraphrased and simplified paragraph of the text, which formed a teaching cycle heavily dependent on the textbook. Her starting point of designing tasks was a text instead of themes. Most of the activities did not primarily focus on meaning and were not intended to relate to real-world language use. Although there were some outcomes, such as answers of questions or presentations of retelling paragraphs, the outcomes were not always communicative or concrete. The aims of her tasks were to reinforce students' impression of the text and relevant language knowledge in it.

Yang treated TBLT as a means to motivate and help students to achieve a teaching aim. In her sample lesson, the designing of tasks was based on both theme (volunteer) and text. The teaching aims of the lesson

were to facilitate students to talk about volunteering, with sentence structures like "I would like to do…". The lesson also aimed to inspire students that volunteering is a good way to contribute to society and increase their sense of social responsibility and helping others. The aims included talking about a specified topic using certain sentence structures and also some moral goals. Students ended the class by talking about the volunteer jobs they would like to do in the future and presented individually or in pairs. This activity attempted to connect the theme and the text with students' own life, had a focus on meaning and involved a clearly communicative outcome.

All participants regarded "aims" as an important criterion of a task; however, the "aims" they cognized were different. Both Kathy and Yang considered that aims should include both a theme and language knowledge; in contrast, Daisy placed more emphasis on text and language knowledge. Although "aim" is related to one of the criteria summarized by Ellis (2003), namely a "workplan", it is not the most important criterion that distinguishes tasks from other types of activities. Moreover, in their description of classes, the most important aim of a task is still to use or practice certain language knowledge, such as grammar and sentence patterns, albeit within the context of a theme. One of them (Yang) involved emotional aims besides grammar. Only Kathy seemed to be aware of and

emphasized "real situation" and "authenticity" in her statements.

The tasks that teachers described were much more multifaceted than the definitions they offered. Although none of them mentioned the significance of meaningfulness and outcomes in a task, Kathy and Yang both designed meaningful tasks with outcomes, and they also believe that their tasks correspond to the three criteria of a task: meaningfulness, authenticity, and outcome. Daisy's knowledge of TBLT was less extensive in comparison.

The results of this study pertaining to teachers' perceptions of TBLT have both similarities and differences with the findings of previous research conducted by Clark, Lo, Hui, Kam, Carless and Wong (1999) and Xu, Liu and Jiang (2008). In their research, it was found that teachers had some misunderstandings about the nature of tasks (Clark et al, 1999; Xu et al, 2008). In this study teachers thought that "aims" were the essential characteristic of tasks. The teachers also tended to focus on one aspect of TBLT rather than having a well-developed conception of how the various criteria for tasks operate in unison, a finding also reported by Xu et al. (2008). For example, Kathy just emphasized authenticity without mentioning meaningful communication and the final outcome. Nevertheless, this study also led to some findings that differ from those reported in previous research.   Whereas earlier studies reported that

teachers had difficulty interpreting and implementing tasks (Clark et al,

1999), teachers rarely implemented activities that met the definition of a

task (Clark et al, 1999) and teachers neither knew the goal of tasks nor the

ways to connect the final goal with the goals of every unit (Xu et al, 2008),

the current study found that teachers like Kathy and Yang did seem to

understand the main criteria of a task and design and implement tasks

that met the criteria, even though they were not be able to state the

definition completely.

2. Implementation of TBLT

The three teachers utilized TBLT with different frequencies and

methods. Kathy suggested she used it nearly every class, Yang used it once

or twice a week, whereas Daisy seldom used it. Kathy usually conceived of

several tasks, from the simple to the advanced, from listening to speaking

to writing ones. She integrated tasks in her own teaching cycle: task (e.g.

speaking or listening practice)➔ discussion (e.g. a review of a tense)➔task

(e.g. a survey or report) ➔presentation ➔task (e.g. writing an report,

usually leaving as homework). Yang tends to use tasks in listening and

reading classes. Although she is the only teacher in this study who was

aware of Willis' (1996) well-known teaching cycle for TBLT - pre-task, task,

post-task - her way of applying it is different from the approach described

by Willis (1996). Yang's teaching cycle is: warm-up (e.g.

brainstorming)➜reading practice (e.g. answering questions)➜task (free

discussion about the theme). However, I talked about the teaching cycle of

Willis (1996) with her late in the interview, she recalled a revision class

that was more similar to this teaching cycle: listening task (watching a

video and answering questions)➜vocabulary (providing the words

students may need in a task)➜speaking and writing task (e.g. writing

stories and sharing with others). In contrast, the ways that Daisy teaches

are more traditional and less reflective of TBLT. She usually used the

following approach in reading classes: Main idea practice (extensive

reading and answering questions) ➜read paragraph 1➜reading practice

(e.g. answering questions) ➜read paragraph 2➜reading practice (e.g.

filling blanks).... Students had few opportunities to speak English in class.

Although both Kathy's and Yang's teaching cycle are inclined toward

task-supported language teaching rather than a stronger form of TBLT,

their teaching approaches are different from the traditional PPP

(presentation-practice-product) method. In the stage of presenting new

language knowledge, they tend to help students discover new knowledge

by themselves through the use of tasks instead of introducing it directly

through teacher presentation. They were clearly aware that their roles in

task-based instruction were to be behind the curtain and students should

occupy the main roles on the stage. Sequences of their teaching are not in a

typical PPP cycle, either. They may ask students to complete a simple task first and then ask students to review previous language knowledge by themselves in order to become prepared for the more advanced tasks. Kathy and Yang also paid attention to themes and the emotions of students and tried to avoid mechanical practices such as drilling and to offer students more meaningful activities. Nevertheless, in the stories of all three teachers, language knowledge such as grammar and sentence structures still seemed to be the core of the classes instead of tasks or themes.

In addition, Kathy implied that she prefers her own teaching cycle and thinks that she would rather combine task-supported and task-based language teaching than distinguish them clearly and use them separately since she believes that it would be difficult to do that in reality. Moreover, all of the teachers believe that their ways of teaching bring particular strengths, such as spoken English (Kathy), specific language points (Daisy) and the language use ability of students (Yang).

Compared with the results of the research conducted by Yumru et al (2007), which found that the teacher's perceptions of TBLT accorded with relevant literature, teachers in this study did not usually integrate tasks in a pre-task, task and language focus manner, as described by (Willis, 1996), or show the cognitions corresponding with literature. However, in the

current study, the tasks of the three teachers tended to focus on language practice in which teachers intended to reinforce certain grammar knowledge or sentence structures and have the students consciously pay attention to forms rather than meaning in their process of fulfilling the tasks. This result is similar to the conclusion of Yumru et al (2007) and suggests that the TBLT of Kathy and Yang might be considered as "a weak version of task-based instruction that facilitates the communicative practice of language items that have been introduced in a traditional way" (Yumru et al, 2007, p. 67). Nevertheless, there was evidence that teachers in this study, especially Kathy and Yang, were striving to avoid instructing in a traditional, linear and repeating way.

3. The Trajectories of the Three Teachers

These three in-service English teachers in Beijing have very different education and working experiences after their graduation from the same undergraduate preparation. Their different trajectories of education and teaching led to different access to knowing and implementing TBLT. The different master's programs they enrolled in provided disparate methods and resources for learning and knowing TBLT. Besides education, their various working experience and locations of teaching offered them dissimilar ways of receiving information about TBLT in their professional development programs and school trainings.

Different policies, mentors and peers in their schools and districts also influenced their perceptions of the innovative teaching method. Therefore, the trajectories that represent their "past" impacted their cognition of TBLT to a great extent and led to their different perceptions of it. In order to observe and compare the influence of their experiences more clearly, Table 1 indicates and summarizes their trajectories.

From Table 1 it can be seen that among the three teachers, Kathy has the greatest amount of experience. She has been teaching for six years without interruption since she graduated for her master's program; whereas, Daisy spent the longest time, three years, on her master's program of Comparative Education and has been working for three years. Therefore, comparatively speaking, Kathy had much more time and opportunities than Daisy to become acquainted with TBLT, especially with respect to practicing it in her pedagogy. In contrast, Daisy lacked the opportunities to learn and utilize TBLT as a student who majored in Comparative Education, despite having three years of master level study. In these three years, Kathy and Daisy accessed TBLT through different perspectives since they were in disparate environments.

Yang is the only teacher in the three who has abroad study experience and joined a master's program directly related to ESL teaching, or TESOL. However, she was away from the public school system for two

years and had four years of teaching experience at the time of the interview.

Her program at the University of Sydney and her working experience in

Shanghai provided her different perspectives from Kathy and Daisy to see

and experience TBLT. Furthermore, although Yang and Daisy started

teaching in secondary schools in the same year, the schools where they

worked were quite different, which could also impact their cognitions of

TBLT.

Their education and working experiences are the explicit factors

that act on their trajectories; however, there are also implicit ones, such as

their personalities, which influence their past and which will be discussed

in greater detail below.

Table 1. Trajectories of the Three Teachers

Time \ Name	2006.9-2007.7	2007.9-2008.7	2008.9-2009.7	2009.9-2010.7	2010.9-2011.7	2011.9-now
Kathy	An English teacher in an elementary school in Beijing	An English teacher for two Grade 7 classes at the same school	An English teacher for two Grade 8 classes	An English teacher for two Grade 7 classes and a class teacher of one of them	An English teacher for two Grade 8 classes and a class teacher	An English teacher for two Grade 9 classes and a class teacher
		She joined a master's program of education as a part-time student				
Daisy	A master student in Comparative Education Department in the Faculty of Education in Capital Normal University in Beijing.			An English teacher for two Grade 7 classes and a class teacher	An English teacher for two Grade 8 classes and a class teacher	An English teacher for two Grade 9 classes and a class

				of one of them		teacher
Yang	An English teacher in an elementary school in Beijing	A master student in TESOL program in the Faculty of Education in University of Sydney	An English teacher and study advisor in an English training agency in Shanghai	An English teacher for two Grade 7 classes	An English teacher for two Grade 8 classes and a class teacher of one of them	An English teacher for two Grade 9 classes and a class teacher

4. Factors That Affect Teachers' Perceptions

Through the three interviews, it was found that these teachers' conceptions of TBLT are highly related with their learning and teaching experience. Although the undergraduate education, master's programs, teaching experience, peers and mentors, professional development training and school policy, and their characteristics and self-study all affected the formation of their perceptions, they played different roles in the processes.

1) Undergraduate Education

All of these three teachers graduated from the same class in the English Education Department at the same university; therefore, they have similar courses and undergraduate education. Both Kathy and Daisy are not sure whether TBLT was mentioned in their only course on language teaching methodology. Although Yang thinks it was introduced, she was unable to recall more information about it. Thus, the undergraduate

education seems to have contributed little to these teachers' understanding of TBLT.

Several researchers agree that one of the significant factors that influence teachers' implementation of TBLT in their teaching practice is that they lack theoretical knowledge of tasks and task-based approaches to teaching (Carless, 2003; Xu et al., 2008; Littlewood, 2004). Besides the content of teacher preparation courses, the ways of instruction are also important to teachers. Many scholars (Winitzky & Kauchuk, 1997; Richardson, 2003) have advocated a constructivist approach in which the focus of instruction is shifted from the presentation of content to the analysis and construction of personal practical knowledge (Winitzky & Kauchuk, 1997), and in one study, it was found that a constructivist course for pre-service teachers in university increased student teachers' positive disposition towards TBLT (Ogilvie & Dunn, 2010). Unfortunately, the three teachers in the current study neither obtained enough information about TBLT in their undergraduate education, nor learned about teaching in a constructivist or TBLT approach.

2) Master's Programs and Formal Teaching Experience

The three teachers in this research have participated in different master's programs before or after they started working at schools; therefore, their programs influenced their cognition of TBLT in different

ways. It was found that the postgraduate programs of these three teachers affected their perceptions of TBLT to some extent, especially in the case of Yang; however, master level study contributed little to Daisy's perception of TBLT since it was not directly focused on language learning and teaching.

From Table 2, we can see that Kathy and Daisy's master programs were not directly related with second language instruction; whereas, Yang enrolled in a specific ESL program in an English-speaking country; therefore, Yang had the opportunities to learn TBLT more formally and systematically and that is likely why she is the only teacher of the three who was familiar with the teaching cycle of TBLT.

During their study as postgraduate students, Yang and Daisy did not have formal teaching experiences as full-time students. Since Yang did not apply the pre-task, task and post-task teaching cycle as she learned in the course when she worked mainly as a study advisor in English training agencies, she had forgotten the details of TBLT; however, she demonstrated a clear understanding of the differences between task-supported and task-based language teaching during the interview. In contrast, Kathy as a part-time student could relate and associate the content of the courses with her pedagogy immediately although she did not have any ESL instruction courses. For this reason, Kathy believes that

she learned about TBLT through the ways the instructors taught. Furthermore, native English speakers who were trained to teach ESL students instructed Kathy and Yang; hence, their methods may have had a more implicit and unconscious influence than that of the Chinese instructors in the comparative education area that Daisy studied.

To sum up, Yang had gained opportunities to learn TBLT in a formal ESL teaching methodology course in an English-speaking country; Kathy could apply these innovative approaches that were implied by native-speaking instructors into her teaching practice immediately, which might have promoted the reorganization of her mental schemata of TBLT. Whereas, Daisy, from her undergraduate to master's program, received virtually no information about TBLT in courses, was not instructed in a TBLT or constructivist approach, rarely had contact with English-speaking instructors and did not have a chance to translate teaching theory that she learned in university into practices during her master's program. Therefore, she gained the least knowledge of TBLT from her master's program among the three teachers. Thus, in order to maximize the benefit to teachers of becoming familiar with TBLT, an ideal master's program would offer courses that contain abundant information about TBLT and include instructors who teach using a TBLT approach, and provide teachers opportunities to apply TBLT in their teaching practice.

Table 2. Master programs of the Three Teachers

Teachers	Master programs	Related with language teaching	Formal teaching experience during the programs	Native-English-speaking instructors
Kathy	Education	✗	✓	✓
Daisy	Comparative Education	✗	✗	✗
Yang	TESOL	✓	✗	✓

3) Peers and Mentors

It was indicated that peers and mentors played an important role in these three teachers' process of forming conceptions of TBLT. In the cases of Kathy and Yang, the public lessons and presentations of classes using TBLT given by their peers, gave them a clear understanding of what TBLT is. From their detailed descriptions of the classes, we can see that those teachers and their classes were models to Kathy and Yang and strongly suggested how to integrate tasks in a class. We can definitely see the shadow of these public lessons in the TBLT classes that Kathy and Yang described in their interviews. For example, in the case of Kathy, her instruction pattern - including stimulus with media such as video clips, using a simple task to review, and finally an advanced task involving recording and writing - is similar to the public lessons she described with phases like stimulus with pictures, simple task to obtain the way of talking

about a theme, and finally advanced task with presentation and writing. In the case of Yang, the differences between the way she integrates tasks in her lessons and the one (pre-task, task, post-task) she learned in her TESOL program implied that Yang might have been influenced by her peers more than her courses.

In contrast, Daisy's mentor did not offer her any support or guidance to learn teaching methods and improve teaching skills; moreover, her classes gave Daisy an impression that an English lesson was supposed to be like what she presented. As a new teacher at that time, Daisy could only choose from finding her own way or imitating her mentor and it is probably the case that many novice teachers choose the latter since it is much safer. According to Daisy, in the public lessons of her peers, no one had mentioned TBLT or explained teaching methods, either. Similar to this result, previous studies have found that the lack of support from mentors forced novice teachers to use traditional teaching approaches that were familiar to their mentors (Ogilvie & Dunn, 2010). Some research has suggested that providing teachers with support and guidance over a period of time and supportive partners at different levels of implementation could successfully encourage teachers to implement TBLT (Van den Branden, 2006). On the whole, peers and mentors are models for novice teachers, their ways of teaching with a certain approach and guidance in teaching

methods can directly affect a teacher's cognition of an innovative approach.

4) **Professional Development Training**

For these teachers, professional development training seems to have affected their perceptions of TBLT in an important way; however, the impact of the training appears to have varied. Although there is a Five-Year-Plan in Beijing to ensure that teachers gain a certain number of course credits, none of the three teachers had taken any courses directly relevant to language teaching since they became public school teachers. Therefore this plan and the courses provided by the Minister of Education in these two districts did not contribute to building the professional language teaching knowledge and practice of these teachers. Hence, the effect of professional development training was mainly embodied in the teacher meetings hosted by teaching researchers in these two districts.

In the case of Kathy, she identified that she received information about TBLT - and especially the ways to apply it in class - mainly from the meetings of professional development. She obtained the information through the introduction and instruction of TBLT from the teaching researcher in her district, samples of lesson designs and the analysis of these samples. However, Yang did not seem to have obtained as much information as Kathy did in these meetings although she is in the same

district and joined the same meetings. She indicated that this might be because she did not always pay full attention. One explanation might be that she lacked interest in the content of these meetings.

In contrast, the content of relevant information about teaching methods in the meetings in Daisy's district was scarce, especially in relation to innovative practices. The meetings she attended did not provide teachers any lectures, presentations or analysis related to TBLT or any other specific teaching methods. The manner in which the teachers presented their PowerPoint slides - only talking about procedures - and the highlights their teaching researcher emphasized - the points that were appealing to students - built a teaching and researching atmosphere in their district which suggested that teaching methods did not need to be discussed. This atmosphere was identified as one of main reasons for the insufficient support and guidance from Daisy's mentor and peers. As a result, without the study of TBLT in her undergraduate and master's programs, demonstrations and guidance from peers and mentors at school, and related information and support from professional development meetings, Daisy had little to depend on other than herself when it came to exploring and implementing innovative teaching approaches.

Thus, the results indicated that there was a gap between different districts in Beijing with respect to introducing TBLT in professional

development meetings, and the gap played an important role in creating differences in the teachers' perceptions of TBLT and other teaching approaches. In the study by Xu et al (2008), the authors also indicated that a lack of teachers' training may lead to the teachers' scant perception of TBLT and suggested that schools and local education departments should organize long-term and regular training courses and widely spread model lessons at the same time (Xu et al, 2008).

5) School Training and Policy

In this study, it was found that school training and policy, especially the latter, had important effects on these teachers. In Kathy's school, teachers are asked to unify their teaching methods to some extent. When the school encouraged English teachers to use TBLT in last several years, all teachers were supposed to know and use it, and they were evaluated with respect to whether they used the method. Nevertheless, after they changed to a new principal, another method was popularized and then TBLT was rarely mentioned.

In contrast, Daisy's school does not ask teachers to declare what teaching methods they use or provide any relevant training in methods, either. As a result, Daisy lacks the external motivation and support from the school to learn more about teaching methods. Compared with Daisy's school, Yang's is slightly better. The school does not require teachers to

unify their teaching methods, and teachers may talk about their teaching methods in meetings, but the teachers mainly focus on the aims of lessons and to what degree students should achieve the aims, which may be the reason why both Daisy and Yang regarded aims as the essential criterion of a task.

Generally speaking, the influence of schools was divided into two extremes. One extreme involves strongly recommending, even requiring a teaching approach, mostly a currently popular one, and offering support; however, this kind of policy restricts the creativity, autonomy and authority of teachers to some degree. The other extreme is to offer the teachers full authority of what methods to use in class; correspondingly, the school does not provide teachers with training in any teaching methods or require teachers to consider the issue in their teaching plans. This can lead to a negligence of teaching methodology and teachers may mainly focus on the results of lessons, which are what students have learned and to what degree they have mastered it.

Similar to the professional development training, the role of school training and policy with respect to perspectives of TBLT is to create an atmosphere or environment in which teachers can come to know and possibly use TBLT or other teaching methods, while at the same time offering support to teachers. Such an atmosphere was found to be very

influential for those teachers in this study who had access to this type of environment. Schools should also create an atmosphere that allows for experimentation and risk taking. Being against the school culture or atmosphere may arouse risks, which may lead novice teachers to mirror the techniques of practicing teachers to avoid risks (Tochon & Gwyn-Paquette, 2003) or abandon their principles under the pressures of cultural norms (Ogilvie & Dunn, 2010).

6) Characteristics and Self-Study

Personal characteristics and traits were another factor that influenced the teachers' stance toward TBLT. For example, Kathy presented herself as a diligent and ambitious person. She always tried her best in study and acted as a key student leader in her school years. After becoming a teacher, she clearly wanted to transform from a good student to a good teacher and employee. She is one of the assistant teaching researchers in her district. Her personality and position may help to explain why she paid so much attention to the professional development meetings and TBLT when teaching researchers and her school encouraged it.

In contrast, Yang participated in the same meetings, but indicated that she did not pay much attention. Yang is someone who admires freedom and resists any restrictions or "red tape", which is why she chose to study abroad instead of joining the National Examination of Graduate
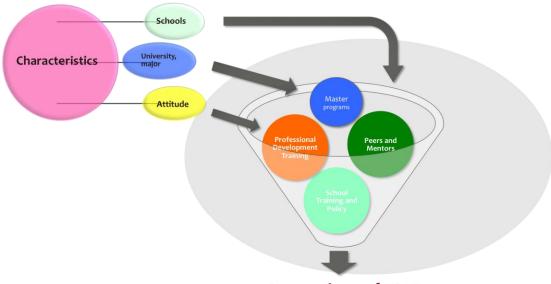
Enrolment. However, with her easygoing manner, her study of theoretical knowledge might be affected in a formal context, such as courses and meetings. That may explain why she said "I have forgotten" when talking about the details of courses and meetings and also why she can design activities that correspond all criteria of a task while being unable to name any of the criteria or discuss them.

Compared with Kathy and Yang, Daisy presented herself as much more conventional. Although she is a very hardworking person, she seemed less ambitious than the other two teachers. These are probably the reasons why she chose the Department of Comparative Education after graduation because she considered it is easier to get enrolled. Both Daisy and Kathy mentioned that they gained some knowledge of TBLT from books and journals; however, Daisy only browsed the titles and remembered the term; whereas, Kathy read the articles and intended to use the insights in her class.

In summary, it is their characteristics that facilitate Kathy to pay more attention to TBLT, Yang to ignore the content of meetings and Daisy to choose a safer option. Furthermore, their decisions about enrolling in which master's programs, working in which schools, choosing what attitudes towards meetings and the like formed their trajectories and further influenced their perceptions of TBLT. Some researchers have also

argued that personal characteristics can influence teachers'

decision-making. For instance, Ogilvie (2008) found that the teachers who

were comfortable taking risks, confident about their teaching ability and

open-minded found it easier to implement innovative approaches.

Chart 1: Factors That Affect Teachers' Perceptions

Although the findings of this study suggest that the master's programs

of these three participants influenced their perceptions of TBLT, the effect

was not very explicit. In contrast, their peers and mentors, professional

development training, and school policy, which are elements from their

working circumstance, played a very important role in their processes of

forming conceptions. Besides the external factors, their personal

characteristics also affected their perceptions in a different way. Through

influencing decisions like which schools to teach, these characteristics

impacted the external factors that were mentioned above and then indirectly affected their conception forming of TBLT.

5. Expectations and Worries

All of these three teachers showed great interest in applying TBLT in the future. They all hold a strong belief that TBLT can enhance the interaction and cooperation between students through collaborative tasks; furthermore, it can facilitate students' learning through the support from their peers, who can be more influential than teachers in some contexts. They also believe that TBLT can benefit the language ability of learners, especially in the long term. Besides the language ability of students, their capacity to socialize, communicate, cooperate and tolerate others can also be promoted. Moreover, they think that students will be fond of and motivated by TBLT in class because it is interesting and provides students more space to use English subjectively and opportunities to contribute.

In addition, Kathy hopes that it can help students link their English class with the real world; Daisy thinks that it will be beneficial for her teaching career by learning and teaching with innovative methods; and Yang expects that TBLT can widen students' knowledge, particularly in the aspect of culture, and increase their chance of practicing verbal English. It was found in previous studies that teachers' attitudes and beliefs can strongly influence their decision about implementing TBLT (Ogilvie &

Dunn, 2010). Teachers who believe in the effectiveness of TBLT for small group work, interaction, motivation (Jeon & Hahn, 2006), independence, skills and strategies development, and relevance to student needs (McDonough & Chaikitmongkol, 2007) are more likely to apply TBLT in future. Therefore, with their faith in TBLT, there is a strong likelihood that these three teachers will use TBLT in their teaching practice.

Although they have similar expectations of TBLT, their worries are various and based on their own particular circumstances. Kathy worries that students might practice too much on verbal expression, which she fears could lead to a lack of written ability. She is also concerned that her peers and supervisor may think that she is incongruous since another method is currently popularized in her school. Her worries indicate that the school policy affects not only the perception of TBLT, but also implementation of it, which corresponds to the argument of Ogilvie and Dunn (2010) that under the pressure of the school environment, it is possible for teachers to abandon the teaching approaches they want to use.

However, Daisy expressed concerns that her teaching and management skills might not be able to satisfy the need of choosing a task properly since it is the core of the lesson and that this might result in a failure of the whole lesson. She also worries that students may not be able to adjust the new method after two years of learning in another way. Her

concerns dovetail with the findings of Zhang (2007). Since the

unpredictable feature of TBLT lessons demands more linguistic knowledge,

teaching wisdom and flexibility than the PPP method, teachers' target

language proficiency, work experience and ability can also be factors that

influence their utilization of TBLT (Zhang, 2007). Daisy's worries also

reflect her diffidence in her teaching ability and her conventional

characteristic.

Yang considers limited class time might be an obstacle for using TBLT

since the guarantee for good examination results and foundational

knowledge is still necessary. It is also not practical for Chinese students to

prepare for their tasks in advance through the Internet or library, a

situation that increases the difficulty for teachers to use TBLT. Similar to

Kathy, Yang also worries that applying a different teaching approach from

other teachers may cause criticism and doubts from peers, students, even

parents. Her worries about class time, examination results and students'

expectations match the previous studies of the factors that influence the

implementation of TBLT. McDonough and Chaikitmongkol (2007) and

Zhang (2007) thought that limited class time for teaching can influence

teachers' implementation because completing tasks and all the other

activities in the TBLT cycle can be time-consuming. Tinker Sachs (2007)

pointed out that tests that ignore oral language ability and emphasize

grammatical knowledge, reading and written skills - which is exactly the kind of test in China - might make teachers worry about their students' performance in tests when following a task-based approach. Studies that were conducted by McDonough and Chaikitmongkol (2007) and Schulz (2001) indicated that students may expect grammar to be the centre of language learning and resist TBLT. Therefore, it is very reasonable for Yang to worry about class time, test performance, and the feedback from students and parents, especially if she intends to use TBLT frequently.

To sum up, although all three of the teachers believe in the positive teaching effects of TBLT and showed interest and the intention to use it further, their worries of school policy, teaching ability, class time, examination performance, and feedback from other teachers, students and parents leads to an uncertainty of their future implementation.

Chapter VI. Discussion

The findings presented above lay a foundation for further discussion in this chapter of the three research questions of this study: 1) What are the conceptions of TBLT of in-service teachers in Beijing? 2) How are these conceptions formed? 3) What factors will influence their utilization of TBLT?

Research Question One:

What are the conceptions of TBLT of in-service teachers in Beijing?

All of the three teachers considered "aim" as an important criterion of a task; only one of them was aware of the significance of "authenticity" for a task. However, two of the teachers are able to design tasks that correspond with all key criteria (meaningfulness, authenticity and outcome) according to Ellis (2003). One of them knew the teaching cycle of TBLT: pre-task, task and post-task; however, all of them tended to use task supported language teaching, rather than task-based teaching, and they tend to treat tasks as a final product rather than the middle phase in a task cycle. They also implied or required students to express their ideas by using certain grammar or sentence structures. Nevertheless, some of the teachers have used TBLT in revision classes or integrated tasks in all

phases of a class instead of merely in the phase of product.

The findings suggest that some teachers in Beijing may not know or completely remember the academic definitions and criteria for tasks; however, many of them were aware of the criteria unconsciously and were able to design tasks according with the literature. Nevertheless, they did not implement TBLT in a pre-task, task and language focus teaching cycle (Willis, 1996). Instead, there was evidence that some teachers are developing their own teaching cycle in order to teach effectively. It seems that some teachers may depend more on their own teaching experience and pedagogical belief and use a teaching approach according to their circumstance than the knowledge they have obtained in university and through professional development. Therefore, the present study supports the conclusion of a study of teachers' perception of TBLT that was conducted in Hebei Province of China by Xu et al (2008); namely, that most teachers cannot clearly state the criteria of TBLT or integrate tasks in lessons in a way that reflects the academic literature on TBLT. However, the current study did not find that teachers' knowledge of TBLT was sparse or that they were not able to design proper TBLT lessons (Xu et al, 2008). Instead, in the present study, the participants identified their ability to design and implement TBLT in their pedagogy and showed their independent and critical thinking toward this approach.

Furthermore, a gap of cognitions of TBLT between the English Curriculum Standard and in-service teachers, and different degrees of perceiving TBLT between different districts in Beijing were also explored in this research. The National English Language Curriculum Standards document publicized in July of 2001 strongly advocates task-based teaching and advises teachers to implement task-based teaching approaches in class in order to develop students' abilities of language completely. However, through this study, there is evidence that the implementation of the English Curriculum Standard (ECS) with respect to TBLT is not satisfactory after 10 years of promotion. The status quo of in-service English teachers of Beijing is far from the ECS requirement for teachers to apply TBLT. It was also found that, even in the same city, the teachers in the two urban districts, Haidian and Chongwen, showed different understandings of TBLT. In this study, it was indicated that the two teachers in Haidian have more thorough perceptions of TBLT than the teacher in Chongwen, which corresponds with the different educational reputations of the districts. The reasons for teachers' idiosyncratic conceptions, the gap between the ECS and teaching practices, and the differences between two districts will be further discussed below.

Research Question Two:

How are the conceptions formed?

It was found that without enough input from undergraduate and master's programs, in-service teachers' perceptions of TBLT are greatly affected by the factors in their working circumstances after they became teachers. These factors include: their peers and mentors, professional development trainings and school policy, all of which are highly related with their teaching practice, career development, evaluation, and sense of belonging.

In the cases presented in this study, the contribution of undergraduate study to teachers' perceptions of TBLT appeared to be very little. Furthermore, only one teacher of the three claimed that she had obtained formal instruction in TBLT during the courses in her master's program, from which she obtained only a very general impression of TBLT. Even the teacher who learned TBLT in a TESOL program in Australia could not explicitly identify the key criteria of a task or describe the integration a task in her lessons with reference to relevant literature. Therefore, the three teachers do not appear to have obtained much specific information about TBLT during their student time.

As a result, after they became teachers, in the process of listening to their mentors', colleagues' classes and public lessons of teachers in other schools, participating in professional development meetings and the school meetings, their conceptions of TBLT were gradually formed. They

have not been directly or clearly told what a task is or how to integrate tasks in a teaching cycle. The conceptions are formed gradually and indirectly through observing others' classes, listening to teaching researchers' analysis and comments, or implementing the requirements of schools. Through their own interpretation, imitation and feedback from others, they gradually formed their own idiosyncratic versions of TBLT. In accordance with their peers, supervisors, teaching researchers and school policies - in a word, their circumstances - they obtained a sense of safety and belonging. They were immersed in an atmosphere created by their circumstances and it is the atmosphere of whether to use and how to use TBLT that fundamentally formed their cognitions of TBLT. The findings of this study suggest that such an initiation into an innovative approach can lead to a gap between the conceptions of teachers and the ideas laid out in academic descriptions and publications.
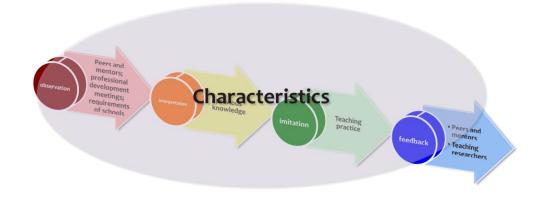
The teachers' personal characteristics also played an important role in the formation of their views. Teachers' personalities affect their degree of accepting the information that is provided by the environment and lead to differences across teachers' conceptions of one single teaching approach. Moreover, personal characteristics are a significant factor that affects their trajectories of the past including whether to work or keep studying, to work in which school and to join which master's program, and these

decisions lead them to their current circumstances.

In summary, teachers firstly received information of TBLT through observing the elements in their working environments and then interpreted the information using their previous knowledge. After imitating others, applying TBLT in their teaching practice, and receiving feedback from others, their idiosyncratic versions of TBLT were gradually formed. Moreover, their characteristics worked behind the whole process by influencing their decision-making. Therefore, the idiosyncratic conceptions of these teachers can be seen as the result of an interaction of internal factors such as personal characteristics and external factors including school policy, professional development training, mentors and peers, and education.

Chart 2: The Process of Forming Conceptions of TBLT

idiosyncratic versions of TBLT.

In addition to the factors that affect teachers' perceptions of TBLT, it

was also found in this study that there was a gap between the requirements of the National English Language Curriculum Standards publicized ten years ago and the reality of in-service teachers' cognitions and implementations of TBLT. Although the English Curriculum Standard (ECS) highly recommends that teachers apply task-based teaching in class, it seems that some secondary English teachers in Beijing are still not clear about what TBLT is. The reason might be that curriculum developers were not aware of the gap between the requirements of the ECS and in-service teachers' reality or that they did not provide any effective measures to fill the gap. The Chinese educational system is highly centralized, and top-down intervention is always the means to implement a curricular plan (Xu et al, 2008). As Xu et al (2008) argued in her article: "The publication of ECS started a new round curriculum reform in the basic education in China. Schools and local education departments immediately answered the call, no matter what their conditions were" (p. 1056). The developers of the ECS were scholars in universities; hence, the ECS is actually a representative of the academic voice of education in China. Therefore, the gap between the ECS and teachers is an embodiment of the gap between the academic domain and teachers. Unlike scholars, in-service teachers' job is not focused on reading academic papers and conducting research. Rather, what they often focus on is "how do I teach the next unit", "how

much homework do I still need to mark" and "who made troubles in class again". With such practical concerns at the forefront of their mind, they may not have time to learn what a task is or how to integrate a task in classes by reading publications on their own. When the ECS appeared, what teachers needed was a clear explanation of what TBLT is, the criteria of a task and how to teach using tasks. However, this study indicates that in the case of at least some teachers, nobody clarified these concepts, which resulted in a gap of understanding and conceptualization. Thus, a bridge should be built between teachers and the academic domain represented by the ECS. In this study, little evidence was found to suggest that measures have been taken to fill the gap.

Teachers from two urban districts in Beijing participated in this study, and it was found that teachers from the district with a better educational reputation had more awareness of TBLT than the teacher from the other district. The differences between their cognitions of TBLT reflect the unevenness of educational resources in Beijing. It is apparent from this research that the perceptions and implementation of TBLT of Kathy and Yang facilitated them in giving more effective communicative lessons than Daisy, which leads the schools in the district to have a better reputation than the ones in Daisy's district. The better reputation attracts better teaching researchers, teachers, students and investments, which provides

teachers in the district with advanced professional development training and more chances to access innovative teaching methods. Thus, a virtuous cycle is formed in Kathy and Yang's district; whereas, Daisy's district has a vicious cycle, which contributes to the phenomenon of uneven development in education.

Research Question Three:

What factors will influence their utilization of TBLT?

All teachers in this study expected TBLT to provide lively, interesting and authentic classes to students, motivate them by cooperating and learning from their peers, and enhance their learning of the English language and their socializing ability. Hopes of promoting their teaching career, enhancing students' verbal English and widening their views also motivated the teachers to use TBLT. With this strong faith in TBLT, they all showed great interest and a high probability of applying it in their class; however, other factors may become obstacles to using it.

First of all, some teachers worry about being in dissonance with respect to their teaching colleagues. It takes courage to be different from others, especially in a school that does not encourage a variety of teaching approaches. It is hard for teachers to neglect comments and doubts from students, parents, colleagues and supervisors. Secondly, some teachers may doubt their own ability of designing tasks and managing classes.

Thirdly, some teachers may consider that too many TBLT classes may lead to a lack of writing skills and basic knowledge like grammar and test skills that are important to students' performance in examinations. Fourthly, the lack of certain resources, such as the Internet, may influence teachers' design of tasks and require more class time. To sum up, the atmosphere of their circumstances, their own capacity for teaching and managing, examinations and class time are key factors that may restrict teachers' utilization of TBLT. These results support the findings of previous research (Ogilvie & Dunn, 2010; Jeon & Hahn, 2006; McDonough & Chaikitmongkol, 2007; Zhang, 2007; Tinker Sachs, 2007) on the topic of factors that influence teachers' implementation of TBLT.

Implications

The curricular scholar Aoki (1986) believed that teachers were "indwelling in a zone between two curriculum worlds: the worlds of curriculum-as-plan and curriculum-as-lived-experiences" (p. 159). This study points to a gap between the National English Curriculum Standard and English teachers' practice. It is hoped that the research will draw attention to the gap from curriculum developers, scholars, education departments, and teaching researchers in order that they might take effective steps to fill the gap and offer teachers more opportunities to experience an innovative teaching approach.

The study makes a contribution to the area of research studying the formation process of teachers' conceptions of TBLT and the factors that influence this formation. It can also benefit the participants and other second language teachers who are interested in TBLT but not very clear of the approach. Through the interviews, the participants obtained more knowledge related to TBLT, such as the criteria of TBLT and the way to integrate it in a teaching cycle. By reading the three stories of the teachers, second language teachers might be able to clarify their conceptions of TBLT and benefit their own teaching practice.

The planners of the ECS should be aware of the problems in promoting the ECS and TBLT. School leaders, teacher training developers and teaching researchers should see the significance of learning innovative teaching methods and the important roles of teacher education and school policy in facilitating teachers' perceptions of these methods. The findings of this study might assist these stakeholders in designing more efficient programs to help teachers perceive innovative teaching methods and create an atmosphere that emphasizes discussing and learning new teaching approaches.

The intent of this study is not to judge whether teachers perceive TBLT correctly. Their idiosyncratic versions of TBLT are an outcome of an interaction of both internal and external elements, as well as a result of

adjusting to their environment and arriving at what fits in their

pedagogical context. The results of the study also indicate that some

teachers are researching and developing their teaching cycles to integrate

TBLT in their own classes and these approaches can be very effective.

Nevertheless, I believe that it is always beneficial to offer teachers more

alternatives of teaching methods. Teachers also have the right to know that

their versions might be different from the one in the academic domain and

that they have the authority to decide which approach to use and how to

use it. However, the findings of this study suggest that some teachers in

Beijing lack access to know more about TBLT and other innovative

teaching methods. This situation can be harmful to their teaching career

and their right of knowing is deprived to some extent. Hence, it is

necessary to build a bridge between teachers and scholars and offer

teachers opportunities to access the academic literature on TBLT.

Although it cannot be guaranteed that teachers will definitely apply this

approach after coming to understand the concept of TBLT as it is

described in academic literature, the seeds of it will at least have been

sowed in the minds of teachers and they may sprout someday in a rich

variety of ways.

Adding more courses on teaching methodology in universities can be a

way to fill the gap; however, it was found both in this study and others

(Ogilvie, 2008) that pre-service teaching courses, even master's level courses, may have a limited effect on the perception of an innovative teaching approach. However, teacher education can definitely provide a theoretical knowledge base of innovative teaching approaches and an unconscious impression of their usage. It was found in this study that the ways that instructors teach may impact teachers more than the content of the courses. Therefore, an effective program should not only provide knowledge of innovative teaching methods, but also be taught through these methods. Moreover, teachers should have opportunities to combine the content of courses with teaching practice, which can reinforce their impression of the methods.

This research indicated that professional development training and school policy have significant influence over cognizing a teaching approach. Teaching researchers can organize more themed lectures about teaching methods. They can invite scholars who have profound knowledge of this topic or they can present the topic themselves based on reading and research; or simply recommend some academic articles. The courses in the Five-year-plan seem far from fully used; therefore, more courses relevant to English education, especially teaching methods should be provided. The content of the courses should be closely related to teaching practice such that it can be readily experimented with by teachers in their classes, which

can encourage teachers to use what they learn immediately and reinforce their learning in turn.

Schools should provide teachers an open, relaxing, and embracing atmosphere of teaching. Principals should encourage teachers to apply and discuss different teaching approaches instead of merely focusing on results. Teachers need to feel safe to be creative and different. Teachers who have worked for three to eight years should, in particular, have opportunities to learn and apply innovative approaches. They are not novice teachers and have already gained a certain teaching experience. At this stage, most of them are forming their own styles of instructing and are seeking a promotion of their teaching career. They are eager to learn new things and are not fully formed yet. Having been at a school for several years, they have gained some trust and acknowledgement from their supervisors and peers and know the policy and culture of the school. Most of them have built a sense of belonging and hope to transcend the stage of imitation. These teachers might be the best ones to implement innovative teaching approaches like TBLT, and schools should provide chances to them.

Teacher education, professional development training and schools should be the bridges between in-service teachers and the academic domain. They should build an environment and lead teachers to pay attention to innovative teaching methods. They can be mediators to help

teachers and scholars understand, communicate and get connected with each other, instead of living in their own worlds in an isolated manner.

Limitations and Future Study

Although this research was carefully prepared and has achieved its aims, I am still aware of its limitations and shortcomings. First, the research was conducted in Beijing within a period of one month, which did not provide enough time for conducting classroom observations. Without directly observing how these teachers applied TBLT in their teaching practice, I could only collect data indirectly through asking participants to describe a class using TBLT. Observational data would have created a useful opportunity for, triangulation in the study. Second, since the research was conducted in Chinese and then translated into English, the translation may not be able to completely present the richness of the participants' original ideas and descriptions. Third, I had prior relationships with the three participants as old classmates and friends. Although this facilitated the analysis of the role that their characteristics played in their perceptions of TBLT, it also created the potential for bias to influence the analysis unconsciously.

In my future study, data could be collected through sources including class observation, document, teaching journals and the like, and more participants that are not familiar to me could be invited to take part.

Future research could address questions such as how perceptions of TBLT reflect problems in implementing the New Curriculum Standard in China, what effort the Department of Education and schools have made to help teachers learn innovative teaching approaches, what roles socio-cultural factors play in the conception forming processes, and how to define and distinguish misconceptions and idiosyncratic conceptions of an innovative approach.

Chapter VII: Conclusion

The intent of this research was to identify whether in-service teachers in different districts of Beijing are familiar with the concept of TBLT as it is discussed in the academic domain, the process of the formation of their conceptions and whether these teachers will choose to use TBLT in their teaching practice in future. The findings of the study suggest that there is a gap between teachers' views and the academic conceptions of TBLT and attempts to identify some of the causes of the gap. The research can also benefit teachers, scholars, school leaders, curriculum and teaching program developers and teaching researchers in helping teachers access innovative teaching approaches.

The study indicates that master's programs may affect teachers' perceptions of TBLT if they involve a second language teaching program and include relevant courses. Teachers' work environment and circumstances including peers and mentors, professional development training and school policy are significant factors of their perceptions. Therefore, it is beneficial for teachers to be aware of various perceptions and the differences between them. The Minister of Education and schools should make more effort to build a bridge between teachers and knowledge of innovative teaching approaches. More qualified trainers, themed lectures, courses related to teaching methods, and an open, safe

and embracing working environment should be provided to EFL teachers

in Beijing.

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Appendices

The interviews were conversational in nature, but the following questions were used as a general guide:

1: Have you heard about Task-based language teaching (TBLT) before?

2: Do/Did you use TBLT in your class? How often do you use TBLT in your class?

3: Can you define a "task" in your own words? Can you give me an example?

4: Can you describe a class that you taught in TBLT as detailed as you can?

5: What do you think about TBLT, for instance, its effect in class?

6: Through what access did you receive the concept of task and TBLT (time, place...)?

7: Have you taken any courses in your undergraduate or master programs that mentioned about TBLT?

8: What did they say or what did you learn about TBLT in these courses?

9. What about teacher trainings? Did they mention TBLT in the courses? What did you learn about TBLT in teacher trainings?

10. Here are some criterions of task: meaningfulness, authenticity, interaction and outcomes. Do you think that the tasks that you designed fit these criterions?   Why or why not? Have you seen tasks that other teachers designed that fit these criterions? What do you think about the tasks?

11. Here are some differences between task-supported and task-based language teaching:
Task-supported language teaching: the tasks are designed to examine students' using of a targeted structure after the targeted structure is presented and practiced.
Task-based language teaching: the basis and core of the teaching process is task. Students learn new language knowledge and/or activate their former

knowledge through the task. A "task cycle" consists of 1) pre-task; 2) task, and 3) language focus.

Which one do you think that accord with your teaching practice? Why or why not? Have you seen other teachers' class that accord with task-based language teaching? What do you think of it?

12. Do you want to try or (keep using) TBLT in your classes in the future? Why or why not?

13. What barriers that you think you might meet (or have met)?

14. What benefits that you think you might receive? What factors motivated you to use TBLT? Why?