

## Teachers as Adult Learners

### Effecting Professional Development and Teacher Change in Primary Chinese Language Teaching and Learning through Variation Theory and Multi-Perspectival Reflective Dialogue

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#### KEY IMPLICATIONS

1. Self-discernment of cognitive dissonance (CD) (Festinger, 1957) is a critical factor for Chinese Language (CL) teachers as adult learners to effect quality teacher change and professional development (PD).
2. The Variation Theory-Multiple Perspectival Reflective Dialogic Professional Development model (VT-MPR dialogic PD model) and Variation Theory-Multiple Perspectival Reflective Dialogue (VT-MPR dialogue) are effective framework and strategy, respectively, for CL teachers to self-discern their own CD.
3. Teacher changes arising from teachers' self-awareness of their own CD can further enhance the quality of CL teaching and learning.

#### BACKGROUND

Teacher cognition (Borg, 2003) is a much researched area in the field of foreign and second language teaching but little has been reported on the effect of teacher CD on CL instruction in Singapore. The present study serves as an intervention study which adopts the VT-MPR dialogic PD Model (developed

by the researcher) as a systematic framework to investigate aspects of CD experienced by primary school CL teachers in Singapore.

#### FOCUS OF STUDY

To use VT-MPR dialogue as a systematic approach for CL teachers to discern and resolve aspects of their own CD that they experienced when implementing the primary CL instructional materials (IM) in the 2015 CL syllabus.

#### KEY FINDINGS

The phenomenographic approach has discerned 207 pairs of cognition. Among them, 88 pairs (42.5%, N=207) were consonant cognitions and 119 pairs (57.5%, N=207) were dissonant cognitions.

A total of 119 pairs of dissonant cognitions were categorised as the following three areas of disparity between (1) CL teachers' original conceptual understanding; (2) perception; and (3) habitual pedagogical behaviours and demand for new teacher cognition on CL teachers with the introduction of the IM in the 2015 CL syllabus.

Specifically, there are three aspects of CD discerned which are in disparity with the proposed teacher cognition required. These three aspects of CD pertain to the disparity in teacher cognition in terms of (1) their mental construct about the traditional dominant teacher role; (2) supporting existing students' language proficiency; and (3) utilising existing curriculum time and learning space.

## SIGNIFICANCE OF FINDINGS

### Theory

The present study is one of the few research studies which investigated factors that causes CD amongst CL teachers in Singapore and highlighted the details of the challenges which CL teachers faced as adult learners.

### NIE programme and practice

The VT-MPR dialogic PD model can be further modified and implemented during the current NIE yearly practicum stint, especially for student teachers who are weaker in pedagogical conceptual understanding and implementation.

### Policy

Identification of the three aspects of CD can inform our policy makers on the future direction of CL curriculum development and implementation as well as areas of teacher training, so as to effect substantial change in teachers' attitudes and beliefs, and to strengthen teacher development.

### Practice

The study has validated the concept of the VT-MPR dialogic model as an effective self-directed learning model for teachers in their pedagogical journey as reflective adult learners.

## PARTICIPANTS

The two-year study involved 229 participants from one neighbourhood primary school in Singapore. A core research team was formed in the collaborating school which comprised 13 teachers and 1 teacher leader (HOD), a group of 9 student representatives (3 students each with high middle and low CL proficiency, respectively) from each of the 12 classes as well as a group of 3 external professionals.

## RESEARCH DESIGN

Based on the phenomenographic approach (Marton, 1986; Marton, 1988), VT-MPR dialogic PD model comprises a four-dimensional reflection tool for teachers to self-reflect on their attitudes, conceptual understanding and pedagogical behaviours during PD dialogues under the guidance of a pedagogy leader. The mixed-method approach with qualitative and quantitative data collected has been adopted in the study.

## REFERENCES

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This brief was based on the project OER 14/16 AGP: Teachers as Adult Learners: Effecting Professional Development and Teacher Change in Primary Chinese Language Teaching and Learning through Variation Theory and Multi-Perspectival Reflective Dialogue

## How to cite this publication

Aw, G. P., Tan, K. C., & Lim, K. H. *Teachers as Adult Learners: Effecting Professional Development and Teacher Change in Primary Chinese Language Teaching and Learning through Variation Theory and Multi-Perspectival Reflective Dialogue* (NIE Research Brief Series No. 20-006). Singapore: National Institute of Education.

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