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English Reading Instruction in China: Chinese Teachers' Perspectives and Comments

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to describe teachers' perspectives and comments about their reading curriculum and instruction at different school levels. A brief historical examination of the English instruction and the contemporary education policies in China was provided. Twelve Chinese teachers of English at different schools levels participated in the study and were interviewed twice. The results revealed these teachers' perspectives and comments on the 2001 revised curriculum (MOE, 2001a) and the focus of their reading instruction, which included alphabet, common phrases, fluency, vocabulary, grammar, and comprehension.

INTRODUCTION

China has a history of more than 100 years of English instruction (Bao, 2004), but China's emergence as an international economic power and the growing visibility and impact of Chinese culture and society—as demonstrated by the 2008 Beijing Olympics—has elevated the importance of developing English in its citizenry. Anticipating the necessity of English proficiency to compete globally, in 2001 the Chinese Ministry of Education (MOE) required that English be taught in Chinese public schools beginning in Grade 3, with the option of initiating English instruction as early as Grade 1 (MOE, 2001b).

The impact of these policy changes on Chinese education has been staggering. The MOE reported in 2006 that over 300 million Chinese were already learning English. Furthermore, they estimated that shortly the number of English learners in China would surpass the total number of native English speakers in the entire world (MOE, 2006). Thus, the “sleeping giant” has not only awakened politically and economically, but also educationally with respect to English instruction.

Given the proliferation of teaching of English as a foreign language in the world's most populous country, one might wonder what the curriculum and instruction involves. Although there have been descriptions of the Chinese educational system and some reports on the status of reading instruction in English (e.g., Adamson & Morris, 1997; Adamson, 2004; Cortazzi & Jin, 1996; Feng

& Wang, 2005; Tang, 2002; Zhang, L. J., 2008), the voices of insiders—that is, Chinese teachers—have been absent. In this article, we describe the status of reading instruction in English in Chinese kindergarten, elementary, secondary, and postsecondary classrooms through the descriptions and comments offered by Chinese English teachers themselves.

We begin with a historical examination of teaching English in China, and then we describe contemporary education policies. Next, we present the comments and perspectives of kindergarten through college English teachers on the curriculum and instruction they provide in their classrooms. We conclude with a discussion of the problems and issues remaining that teachers and students are facing under this revised curriculum, and what it suggests for future research.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Education in China can be traced to Confucian times (Chan, 1999; Fu, 1986), and according to the available historical evidence, the earliest foreign language teaching (of Persian and Mongolian) occurred during the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1386) (Fu, 1986). Systematic instruction in English as a foreign language did not begin, however, until the late Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) (Yang, 2000). Specifically, in the early 19th century, British missionaries established English-speaking schools, and following the defeat by the British in the Opium Wars, Qing Dynasty reformers established Chinese-government-run schools that taught English, a tradition that continues to the present (see Yang, 2000, p. 2).

During what Yang (2000) referred to as the Republican Period (1919-1949), Western education and culture had a significant influence in China, and English emerged as a prominent foreign language taught in Chinese schools (Fu, 1986). During the Socialist Revolutionary Period (1949-1978), however, English instruction came in and out of favor, and the instruction that did occur was “characterized by the inculcation of political expressions” (Yang, 2000, p. 13) through the use of state-developed English-language textbooks.

After the end of the Cultural Revolution in the late 1970s, as the movement toward the “open-door” policy with the West accelerated, teaching English literacy was again elevated to a high status and importance in China (Boyle, 2000). Kang (1999) noted that “English [is] everywhere in China” (p. 46) and predicted that “English as an international language will play an important role in China’s modernization in the next century” (p. 48). Indeed, this has been proven to be the case (Adamson, 2002).

CONTEMPORARY ENGLISH EDUCATION

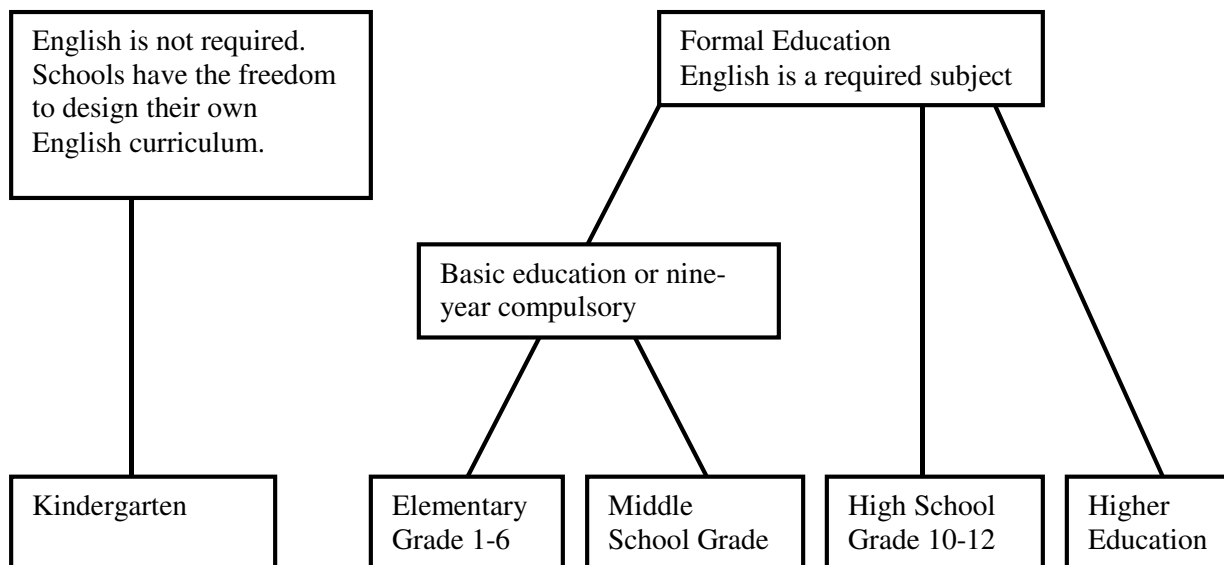
School Organization

The modern national school system in China was influenced by the American 6-3-3 model (Clopton & Ou, 1973). Thus, schools are organized into elementary (Grades 1-6), secondary including middle (Grades 7-9), and high (Grades 10-12) schools. Kindergarten in China is similar to day care and preschool programs in the United States, where children as young as one or two years old may attend until they enter Grade 1 at age six. In 1985, a compulsory education law was passed with the purpose of improving mass education. The law required all children in China to attend the first nine years of school.

Curriculum and Standards

At the turn of the millennium, the Chinese MOE (2001b) established a new English education curriculum (see Figure 1). This policy required that English be taught in Chinese schools beginning in third grade, although many schools chose to initiate English instruction as early as kindergarten or first grade if they had the resources. Thus, English became part of the compulsory education curriculum, which went through Grade 9. For those students who went on to high school and higher education, English was also a required subject.

Figure 1. English Education in China



In 2011 English became a required subject in Grades 3-9, and schools could begin English instruction as early as Grade 1 if they had the resources (MOE, 2001b).

At this same time, a National English Curriculum Standard (NECS) was adopted that designated nine objectives for students in Grades 1 to 12 (MOE, 2001a). At the elementary school level, the new standards were designed to develop students' basic reading abilities and to cultivate their interest in the English language. For schools that initiated English instruction at Grade 3, the NECS required students in Grades 3 and 4 to meet the first objective. For schools that initiated English instruction at Grade 1, the NECS recommended that schools raise their requirements but avoid putting undue pressure on the children. At secondary school levels, the objectives were intended to equip students with the ability to understand and learn from English texts.

Reading has been regarded as the most important aspect of English teaching and learning in China (Bao, 2004, 2006). This importance has been reflected in the reading objectives in the revised curriculum (MOE, 2001a), which are shown in translated form in Table 1. The importance of reading is also demonstrated through national examinations (He, 2006), which we address next.

Table 1. National English Curriculum Standards for Reading (MOE, 2001a, pp. 10-18)

Level (Grades Covered)	Reading Objectives
Level 1 (to be achieved by the end of Grade 4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identify words based on pictures • identify objects and read words and phrases • read simple stories with the help of illustrations
Level 2 (to be achieved by the end of Grade 6)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identify words • read words based on phonics rules • read and understand simple directions in textbooks • understand simple messages on greeting cards • understand simple stories and short passages with the help of illustrations, and form a habit of reading based on semantic groups • accurately read aloud stories and short passages from the textbooks
Level 3 (to be achieved by the end of Grade 7)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • read aloud texts with accuracy • understand and follow simple written directions • understand simple stories and short passages and grasp the main ideas • know how to use simple reference books • the amount of extracurricular reading (i.e., beyond textbook reading) should cover more than 40,000 words by the end of the school year
Level 4 (to be achieved by the end of Grade 8)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • read aloud texts fluently and accurately • read and understand informational texts • look for information from a passage and understand its meaning • infer the meanings of words based on context clues • understand and explain information based on graphs and charts • understand sequence and character motives in short passages • understand simple personal letters • use an English-Chinese dictionary or other reference books to promote reading comprehension • the amount of extracurricular reading (i.e., beyond textbook reading) should cover more than 100,000 words by the end of the school year
Level 5 (to be achieved by the end of Grade 9)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • infer the meaning of unknown vocabulary based on context clues and word-formation rules • understand the logic among sentences in a paragraph • understand the theme and plot of a reading passage and predict the possible endings • understand general reading materials • use different reading strategies to get information from texts based on different purposes of reading • use reference books such as dictionary to study • the amount of extracurricular reading (i.e., beyond textbook reading) should cover more than 150,000 words by the end of the school year
Level 6 (to be achieved by the end of Grade 10)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • obtain important information and opinions from reading texts • infer the meaning of unknown vocabulary based on context clues and sentence structures • make prediction about the story based on context clues • use different reading strategies for different reading purposes • obtain necessary information through different media

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the amount of extracurricular reading (i.e., beyond textbook reading) should cover more than 200,000 words by the end of the school year
Level 7 (to be achieved by the end of Grade 11)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> obtain important information and extract key points from the reading understand the theme of the reading and the purposes of the author extract, select, and paraphrase information from the reading use context clues to facilitate comprehension understand and appreciate simple English poems the amount of extracurricular reading (i.e., beyond textbook reading) should cover more than 300,000 words by the end of the school year
Level 8 (to be achieved by the end of Grade 12)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> understand opinions and attitudes expressed by the author recognize the characteristics of different genres understand long and difficult sentences through sentence-structure analysis understand and appreciate simple English classics obtain information from electronic books and the Internet and put it into application the amount of extracurricular reading (i.e., beyond textbook reading) should cover more than 360,000 words by the end of the school year
Level 9 (to be achieved by students in English-emphasized vocational schools)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> be able to read English newspapers and magazines and obtain important information read English classics and understand their plots and characters read and understand manuals and general reading materials comprehend reading materials through the use of context clues use different materials and reference books to understand difficult language develop an interest in extensive reading and form a good reading habit use media such as the Internet to obtain and process information

Note. The information in this chart was translated from Chinese by the first author.

Assessment and Accountability

As in the United States and other Western countries, China implemented high-stakes testing is linked to standards. For example, students are administered a series of standardized tests, one of which assesses students' English proficiency, at the end of elementary school in Grade 6, at the end of middle school in Grade 9, and at the end of high school in Grade 12. Students' performance on these tests determines which schools students will attend. Students who perform at high levels on these tests are assigned to prestigious middle schools and high schools; ultimately, many of these higher-track students will attend colleges and universities. Alternately, students who perform at lower levels on these tests attend middle and high schools with more of a vocational emphasis, and most of these students did not pursue higher education.

In 2002 the MOE changed the examinations administered at the end of Grades 9 and 12 and recommended that the scores should not be the sole factor that determined which schools students attended; rather, it was determined that students should be evaluated comprehensively. For example, the examination scores at the end of Grade 6 were no longer used to assign students to middle schools. Although students were still tested in Chinese, mathematics, and English proficiency at the end of sixth grade, students were randomly assigned to middle schools based on region (MOE, 2002).

According to official policy, this change should have been nationwide. However, Dr. Qingsi Liu at the National Examination Authorities (Q. Liu, personal communication, September 23, 2009) indicated that the assessment system changes have been implemented primarily in large cities like Beijing and Shanghai. In most other provinces in China, exam scores are still used to determine the type of schools that students attend.

Pedagogy

Various approaches to English instruction in China have been in and out of fashion over the years (Adamson, 1998, 2004; Anderson, 1993; Cortazzi & Jin, 1996; Dzau, 1990; Ford, 1988; Liu, 2002; Liu & Adamson, 1998; Nunan, 2004; Rao, 1996; Wang, 1999; Yu, 2001). Traditionally, English teaching involved *grammar-translation*, which had students translate texts word-for-word and learn grammar rules. Later, the *audiolingual method* flourished, in which students memorized language forms without explicit grammar instruction. Still later, *communicative language teaching* (CLT) came into vogue, which emphasized students' ability to construct meaning and develop communicative competence.

Currently, Chinese education officials are promoting *task-based language teaching* (TBLT), which refers to "an approach to the design of language courses in which the point of departure is not an ordered list of linguistic items, but a collection of tasks" (Nunan, 1999, p. 24). TBLT is a more open framework, in which learners assume an active role, and teachers select instructional tasks and guide the students' completion of them (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Although TBLT has been promoted strongly by education officials, there have been critiques of the approach Bao (2006), and TBLT has not been widely adopted by Chinese teachers of English.

Instructional Materials

The 2001 curriculum also brought new textbooks for teaching English. Foreign publishers, mostly from the U.S. and England, developed and marketed textbooks. Current English textbooks include everyday interactions and scientific, educational, moral, and cultural selections (Wang & Methold, 2005). In addition, much like Western reading and language arts textbooks, there are other resources that accompany the textbook, including teacher's manuals, workbooks, reading practice books, cassettes, wall pictures, videos, CD-ROMs, and so forth (Adamson, 2004). Appendix A, B, and C are examples of a unit in elementary, middle, and high school textbooks.

Textbooks designed for elementary schools contain simple daily topics that allow students to talk, learn, play, exercise and sing together. At the end of each unit, a short story based on cartoon characters is also provided in tapes for students to practice listening and comprehension skills. Through the series of exercising and learning activities based on the topic, students learn pronunciation, spelling, vocabulary, reading aloud, writing, speaking, and listening. Middle school textbooks emphasize more on reading and grammar. Listening and speaking exercises are provided as pre-reading activities to facilitate reading comprehension. Reading passages have clear grammar foci—passages and dialogues are written to demonstrate the characteristics of the targeting grammatical point. High school textbooks emphasize students' overall English skills. Each unit includes several parts: warming up activities (key words and general questions in relation to the topic), pre-reading activities (pre-reading questions), reading passage and comprehension exercises, learning about language (grammatical points and exercises), and language application (listening, speaking, reading and writing exercises).

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Related literature suggests that there have been studies examining the match between assessment methods and new standards (Bao, 2004; Deng, 2005), implementation of CLT (Hu, 2003; Rao, 1996; Yu, 2001), and strategies for vocabulary and comprehension learning (Chan, 2003; Gu, 1994, 2003; Li & Munby, 1996). Both Bao (2004) and Deng (2005) pointed out problems under the 2001 curriculum, such as lack of qualified teachers, lack of smooth connection between elementary and secondary schools, and lack of proper assessment methods to match the objectives. Among all these problems, the most critical one was the insufficient development of different types of assessments to match the new objectives (Deng, 2005). The current instructional objectives in the 2001 NECS have practical implications that emphasized everyday use of the language. However, the current assessments still have the same old foci on vocabulary, comprehension, and grammar.

In terms of CLT, research revealed that it is not the best approach in English classrooms because of the contextual limitations and the needs of Chinese students. What has been suggested is to combine the CLT approach with the traditional approach in teaching English (Hu, 2003; Rao, 1996; Yu, 2001). Finally, many studies also explored students' use of strategies in learning vocabulary and comprehension and found that competent English learners were aware of and able to apply a variety of learning strategies in their learning process. Poor learners, on the contrary, showed no control of using strategies in learning English vocabulary and comprehension. In addition, there is not a study investigating how different strategies were taught in classrooms (Chan, 2003; Gu, 1994, 2003; Li & Munby, 1996).

In spite of the significant changes the 2001 English standards had on curriculum, assessment, and pedagogy, empirical research on English instruction in China under the new curriculum across grade levels is not widely available (Hu, 2009; Zhang, 2008). Hu (2009) studied the aspects of English reading instruction covered in classrooms at three elementary schools in China. Zhang (2008) studied the pedagogy of one English teacher at a secondary school in China. These studies focused on English instruction at a particular school level; hence, they did not provide a holistic picture of English reading instruction across school levels in China under the most current curriculum.

It was the purpose of this study to ask Chinese teachers of English at various levels of schooling to determine what their perspectives and comments were about their reading curriculum and instruction. To achieve this, we conducted interviews with English teachers at kindergarten, elementary, middle school, high school, and college levels, inquiring about the substance of their English reading instruction. This study is significant in that it provides insiders' perspectives on the nature of English reading instruction that is provided to tens of the millions of students in Chinese schools.

METHOD

Knowledge is constructed when human beings interact with each other and their world (Schwandt, 2000). A qualitative interview research design was chosen for this study because qualitative research allows for interaction between and among the investigator and the investigated, and makes it possible to study experience as it is lived, felt, and undergone (Sherman & Webb, 1988).

Design and Participants

This is a qualitative interview study (Merriam, 1998; Silverman, 2001) that involves semi-structured interviews (Seidman, 1998) of 12 English teachers from kindergarten through the university level in Beijing, China. Snowball sampling (Patton, 2001) is employed such that the first author, who is from Beijing and previously taught English there, contacted four teachers she knew and who agreed to participate. These teachers then assisted her in identifying the remaining eight participants.

The 12 participants included: (a) two kindergarten teachers, (b) two elementary teachers, (c) two middle school teachers, (d) two high school teachers, and (e) four teachers from the English Department of a university. All high school and university teachers and one of each the kindergarten, elementary, middle school teachers had Bachelor of Arts degrees in English. The remaining three teachers had either an Associate's degree in English (middle school) or a diploma from a professional high school (kindergarten and elementary). It is not uncommon for English teachers in China to possess an array of training and educational experiences.

The years of experience teaching English ranged from 1 year to 18 years across the sample (except the university professor, who has been teaching English for 25 years), with an average of 5 years. The amount of time dedicated to English instruction varied by educational levels which, on a weekly basis, were kindergarten and elementary about 100 minutes, middle and high school about 225 minutes (with optional after-school classes for high school students), and university 400 minutes (distributed across extensive and intensive reading classes and oral language classes).

Interview Protocol and Procedures

The interview protocol was a 16-item, semi-structured questionnaire broken into two parts. Participants responded to Part I, the first 13 questions, during individual, face-to-face interviews conducted by the first author when she visited Beijing. Participants responded to Part II, questions 14-16, over the telephone during data analysis, so that the researchers could seek clarification and elaboration regarding the participants' original responses. The interviews were conducted in Chinese (the language that all the participants decided to use), audio-recorded and later transcribed in Chinese and then translated to English by author 1. The interview protocol is reproduced in Appendix D.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was guided by the thematic analysis method, which is inductive in nature and aims to identify themes within the data (Ezzy, 2002). Several coding procedures were conducted: open coding using IN VIVO codes, axial coding to examine the relationships among codes to identify core categories, and theoretical coding to summarize the themes.

Data were first analyzed using IN VIVO codes, which were then grouped into core categories. For example, the IN VIVO codes—*practical learning, better communication skills, support for teaching from administrative, early introduction of English*—were grouped into the category called *Teachers' preference toward the 2001 curriculum*. The IN VIVO codes—*teaching alphabet recognition, letter sound, letter writing*—were grouped into a category called *Alphabet*. Other IN VIVO codes—*using pictures and real objects, Chinese translation, repeated reading, questions, comprehension importance, comprehension difficulty*—were grouped into another

category called *Comprehension*.

Three categories—*curriculum change, teacher's preferences, weakness of the curriculum*—were generated and grouped into the theme *Teachers' perspectives and comments about the curriculum*. Seven categories—*alphabet, common phrases, fluency, vocabulary, grammar, comprehension*—were generated and grouped into the theme *Focus of Reading Instruction*. It should be noted that the teachers also reported instruction on teaching English listening skills, oral communication, writing and translation (at college level). However, due to the focus of this paper, we only take the reading instruction into consideration.

RESULTS

Results are organized by the two emphases that were induced from the data: (a) teachers' perspectives and comments about the curriculum, and (b) teachers' focus in their reading instruction.

Teachers' Perspectives and Comments about the Curriculum

Curriculum Changes

Teachers reported that the English curriculum changed in several ways as a result of the new English policy. First, English was taught in earlier grades. For example, one elementary teacher mentioned that prior to the revised curriculum, compulsory English instruction began in fourth grade, but this was lowered to third grade in her school in 2001. Then, in 2003, students in first and second grades were provided English classes every week.

Second, teachers reported providing students more practical English skills, particularly at the elementary level. For instance, daily oral English became an important aspect of instruction. Students were taught how to greet each other, how to introduce themselves and their families, and how to count in English. In addition, listening and speaking skills were emphasized more. One high school teacher mentioned that a new language lab was built in her school exclusively for students to practice listening skills.

Third, instruction became more student-centered, with a greater emphasis on motivation. One veteran teacher stated that, compared to the old way of teaching that involved "standing in the platform and explaining the book", teachers now thought about activities that placed students at the center, such as using role-play activities to practice speaking fluency, using discussion and debate to enhance reading comprehension.

Finally, the new curriculum brought a variety of materials and technologies to classrooms. Teachers had access to materials like vocabulary cards, posters, tapes, and CDs. Teachers also more commonly went beyond textbooks, using tools like PowerPoint and the Internet during classroom teaching. The elementary teachers reported that the CDs accompanied with the teacher's manuals have made the reading texts into short cartoon movies, so they let students watch the cartoon movies as the initial introduction of the reading passages. Secondary school teachers also mentioned that the Internet has become a great tool for them to make lesson plans and look for pictures to include into the PowerPoint class presentations.

Teachers' Preferences

Most of the teachers except one favored the new curriculum. They reported that the new curriculum provided more practical English instruction, making students more competent at communicating globally. The two high school teachers believed that the new objectives were more difficult to achieve for both teachers and students, but they agreed that the more taxing curriculum promoted students' English facility. One high school teacher said:

They [the objectives] require our students to do more, such as extra reading, more oral practice, and group work. It makes our job harder as well. We have to think about how to make our classes fun and think about how to do extra activities in our current tight schedule. But we are happy to do that since it will benefit our students in the long run.

The high school teachers also indicated that school administrators took English instruction more seriously and provided support for teaching. For instance, the school has updated their teaching equipment and purchased more English literature books in the school library. Even though the university teachers admitted that the new curriculum did not influence or change their own teaching very much, they supported it because they believed that the earlier start resulted in greater English skill as students advanced through the school years.

Not all teachers favored the new curriculum, however. One middle school teacher neither agreed that starting English early in elementary school was a good thing nor favored the new objectives. She said:

I think it is a pain to let students learn English in elementary school. [Because] they come to me all at very different levels and it is too hard to teach. In the past, English was introduced at middle school. I started teaching them from A, B, C, D... and I felt that they were at the same level and it was a lot easier to teach.

With regard to the new objectives, she stated:

The objectives are hard to achieve, very hard, especially when the students varied in their English level. And this is why so many of my students cannot do well during tests. For those struggling students, they were so behind. They have not even reached the elementary school objectives. What could we do to help them to achieve those objectives?

Weakness of the New Curriculum

Despite the fact that most teachers favored the new curriculum, several mentioned drawbacks. One major limitation teachers noted was assessment. One teacher stated that the end-of-grade test and the graduation examination failed to reflect the new emphasis of the instruction: "They want us to put more emphasis on communication to make English learning practical; however, the practical aspect of English was definitely not part of the exam." Another teacher commented that the evaluation system was not updated and too much emphasis has been given to the final summative testing:

There are many changes, indeed. Curriculum has changed, materials have changed, teaching approaches have also changed, but the only thing that remains the same is testing. Why no one ever thought about not putting too much emphasis on testing?

The university professor who had been teaching English for 25 years pointed out that the

changes on the curriculum reflected good intentions to improve English instruction in China, but some of the changes did not match the reality of the Chinese education system. He indicated that the limited number of English teachers whose oral expression was similar to native English speakers made it impossible to implement task-based language teaching: “There are no real-life tasks that would require Chinese students to use English to compete in China.” He also pointed out that with the pressure teachers and students experienced to perform on mandated texts, the student-centered approach to learning English was neither realistic nor beneficial, especially considering that all other school subjects were taught the traditional way.

Focus of Reading Instruction

Data analysis revealed that the teachers identified seven different foci related to reading instruction.

Alphabet

Kindergarten and elementary school teachers reported that learning the alphabet was one of the most important parts of reading instruction. When teaching letter recognition, they emphasized letter-sound relationships. Teachers presented the letter in capital and lower case format, repeatedly read the letter name out loud, asked students to echo read, and then told students the sound of the letter. For example, in teaching letter A, one teacher wrote *A a* on the chalkboard, read it *A - /a/ - apple*, and asked students to echo read it multiple times. Elementary school teachers also taught letter writing. After each letter was introduced, students were asked to copy the letter in their notebooks for five to seven times as homework.

It is worth mentioning that alphabet instruction provided in elementary school overlapped with instruction in kindergarten. Kindergarten is not compulsory in China, so many students go to first grade without attending kindergarten. Thus, many students start to learn English in first grade.

Common Phrases

Kindergarten teachers reported that instructing students in commonly-used English phrases and sentences was a dominant area of instruction. Being able to speak a few simple English phrases and sentences, such as *How are you? Thank you very much*, and *Good morning*, is viewed as an indicator of knowing how to speak English. The teacher said: “We teach kids one phrase every week and by the end of the semester, they can speak more than 10 sentences. This is our goal.”

One kindergarten teacher mentioned that reading was used to enhance students’ oral fluency. Teachers usually wrote the phrases on the blackboard or sentence strips and asked students to echo and choral read the expressions. Both kindergarten teachers indicated that repeated oral reading helped students memorize the phrases and sentences, which enabled them to develop oral expression in English. Thus, reading was sometimes a vehicle for promoting oral expression rather than for developing reading ability directly.

Fluency

Fluency was addressed at multiple levels. In kindergarten oral fluency was taught more than reading fluency, and the goal was to enable students to speak rather than to read in English. In contrast, at the elementary level, many reading activities were provided to enhance reading fluency, including repeated reading, reading aloud, echo reading, and choral reading. Teachers either read aloud texts themselves or played an audio recording to model fluent reading. Students were provided many opportunities to read aloud to one another or to the whole class. One teacher mentioned that even though class time was limited, she still tried to let students read aloud in class to build fluency. And because students all had cassette tapes that provided oral readings of the textbook selections, oral reading of texts along with the tape was a very common assignment.

Middle and high schools teachers reported that students were neither given opportunities to read orally in class nor participated in any partner or group work on fluency. Instead, students were directed to practice reading fluency outside of class, such as at home or during their free periods at school. Middle and high school teachers indicated that the ability to read the texts fluently was not very important due to the limited time they had in class and the pressure of high-stake testing. One high school teacher said:

Being able to read fluently could be important to English learners in a long run, but fluency is not something that is tested in the college entrance examination, so it is not an important part of instruction in my class.

Interestingly, all four university teachers reported that they emphasized the importance of being able to read fluently in English, so they required their students to read aloud every day. During intensive reading class (a grammar-based language course in which instructors provided explicit instruction in English skills), the three instructors who taught freshmen and sophomores reported that they read aloud the text to students and provided students opportunities to read aloud in class. They believed that reading aloud was very important because “it demonstrates what fluent reading should sound like—with accurate pronunciation and proper expression”. They also suggested repeated reading aloud because “repeated practice brings automaticity in reading.”

Vocabulary

Vocabulary instruction was present at every school level; however, the emphasis was different. Five to ten words were introduced to kindergarteners every week and the learning objective was to make those words students’ oral vocabulary, which referred to vocabulary words that students understood and were able to speak. Hence, vocabulary instruction was provided orally rather than by print. Teachers in kindergartens told students directly how to say a word in English.

Vocabulary instruction was one of the instructional foci at elementary school level. Instruction included teaching pronunciation, spelling, and meaning. The traditional *look and say* method dominated vocabulary instruction. Repeated reading out loud and writing on the notebooks were used to ensure students memorize the pronunciation and spelling. Teaching vocabulary meaning was straight forward: in addition to reading the glossary which provided word definition in Chinese, teachers also used pictures and real objects to demonstrate vocabulary meaning. For upper grade students, another dimension of vocabulary instruction was learning how to use the vocabulary word. In order to reach this goal, teachers explained key sentences from the texts as examples in great detail and students were asked to make sentences following those examples. For

examples, when learning the days of the week (*Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday*) teachers asked students to make up sentences about what they do in each day following the examples on the textbook.

Vocabulary instruction at middle and high schools covered similar dimension as those at elementary schools; however, because students were exposed to more texts at middle and high schools, learning strategies were also introduced. One strategy mentioned by a middle school teacher was what she called “summary verb learning”. When teaching a verb, she would provide a summary of the verb under different tenses. For examples, the verb *do* as its base form, *did* as its past tense form, *does* as its present tense singular pronoun form, *done* as its past perfect tense form. She said that verbs are usually the most important and confusing part when teaching grammar; however, by providing a summary of the verb in different forms, she not only taught the word and increased students’ vocabulary, but also helped students build grammar knowledge simultaneously. One high school teacher suggested the use of dictionary in vocabulary learning. High school students were asked to preview key vocabulary words before teachers started to teach a unit. They were required to look up each vocabulary word in a dictionary and wrote down: (a) definition(s), (b) parts of speech, and (c) sentence examples to demonstrate how to use the word in different contexts. The other teacher explained using the word study activity as a way to enlarge students’ vocabulary. Four elements were included in her word study: definition(s), sentence examples, synonyms, and antonyms. When teaching a key vocabulary word, she always made sure students know the meaning, usage, synonyms, and antonyms of the word.

University English majors had much more exposure to English texts than school students and they had many more vocabulary words to learn. However, all the instructors indicated that vocabulary learning was something students should pursue by themselves instead of depending on explicit instruction in class. Such that one instructor said, “It is their responsibility to know every word before they come to me. They are no longer school kids who always need their teacher to teach the basics”. Another instructor also indicated that reading extensively was the best way for students to learn vocabulary. The textbooks used at the university level no longer provide a glossary list because each student might know different vocabulary and have different unknown vocabulary words to learn.

Grammar

Based on what these teachers reported, it can be concluded that the higher grade level students went, the more explicit grammar instruction was provided. At the elementary school level, the goal of grammar instruction was to build students’ grammar awareness. One teacher indicated that at the elementary level, it was more important for students to understand the texts that were built upon different grammar knowledge and structures than to know what those rules were. An example that she provided was *I am – you are – she is*, and she indicated that her goal was to make sure that students understood what these sentences meant rather than to know that different pronouns should be followed with different forms of verbs.

Grammar became the heart of reading instruction in middle and high school classrooms because grammar knowledge facilitated reading comprehension and was a key area to be tested. High school teachers stressed the importance of grammar by saying “everything serves the grammar purpose” and “it is all that is tested”. In both middle and high schools, a large amount of the class time was spent on teaching grammar knowledge. Grammatical rules, tenses, and sentence structures were explicitly explained without context first and then addressed within the reading

context. And finally written exercises, such as filling in the blanks using correct grammar or multiple choice questions, were provided for students to apply the knowledge learned. Grammar instruction at the high school level differed from the middle school level by including an extensive amount of exercise for students. One teacher said that 11th and 12th graders at her school were tested on a weekly base and the content was all about grammar.

The goal of grammar instruction at university level was to facilitate comprehension and writing. The teachers explained that because all grammatical points and rules have been taught in high school, students should come to university with a good command of English grammar. University English classes provided students with an opportunity to enhance and apply this knowledge. English majors were expected to be able to communicate in fluent and accurate English, and comprehend Classics written in English. In addition, English writing classes were offered to juniors and seniors and one goal was to ensure students know how to use correct grammar in writing.

Comprehension

The focus of comprehension instruction differed at different school levels. As these teachers reported, students in third grade and below were not exposed to a large amount of English texts; hence, comprehension instruction was limited to understanding the meaning of words. The goal of comprehension was to “know all the words in order to understand what the sentence means in English”. Pictures were used to demonstrate word meaning, but the most commonly-used way was Chinese explanation. Students in upper elementary school started to read short reading passages that consisted of only a few sentences. Illustrations were accompanied with the texts, so it provided meaning clues to assist comprehension.

At middle and high school level, reading strategies were explicitly introduced, including looking for context clues, repeated reading, using key vocabulary words or key sentences to locate meaning, reading questions before reading texts, guessing, using common sense, and skim-read-check (skim reading first, then read it carefully and finish comprehension questions, and finally re-reading and check if the answers were correct). Teachers indicated that Chinese students at middle and high school level had limited resources, so students rarely read other English books other than their textbooks. The only way to check if students understood the texts was by doing the multiple choice questions listed after each passage. One middle school teacher indicated the importance of comprehension by saying “without correct understanding, students cannot do well in the exams”. Further, one high school teacher also said “only when they can use those strategies well, can they get a better score in exams”.

Extensive reading was a language course offered at the university with the purpose of encouraging students to read extensively in order to learn English from the reading experience. The textbooks used in this class consisted of different reading passages and comprehension questions. Students were asked to read the assigned texts as homework, answered those comprehension questions, and then they were called out to answer teachers’ questions in class. Three instructors incorporated this traditional approach of teaching. One instructor, however, was unsatisfied with the current approach of teaching reading for comprehension and suggested an approach which was similar to the book club in the U.S. context:

Extensive reading should not be taught like that. First, we should not require a textbook for extensive reading. The goal is to let students read extensively, then why not letting them read what they want to read? Second, extensive reading is taught based on questioning-answering now – teacher asks a question and students answer the question. This is not teaching. Why students need a teacher when all the teachers' job is to ask questions? The textbook has questions listed and students can refer to those questions there. I think that the teacher's role in extensive reading should be the facilitator, to facilitate students' discussion based on what they read. During the discussion, teachers could assess comprehension, and students also practiced listening and speaking skills. Extensive reading should be taught in that way.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The results of the study revealed that the changes made to the curriculum have been positive. Most teachers responded favorably toward the curriculum and were positive about the introduction of English to elementary school. This popular opinion from these teachers enhanced the well-accepted assumption that in terms of language learning, younger is better. Compared with some other countries in Asia where English is taught as a foreign language, China is one of those countries which require an early implementation of English in the elementary school curriculum. Japan, for example, does not require English to be a compulsory subject until secondary school; students in South Korea are not required to learn English until third grade in elementary schools (Nunan, 2003).

In addition, the curriculum has set higher standards and objectives toward English teaching and learning, and most teachers perceived that as a necessary step in order to meet the need of the fast developing country. However, several issues remain unclear. First of all, there is a question of whether the new standards and objectives are practical. On one hand, most students, especially middle and high school students, have heavy workload. Eight major content areas (Chinese, Mathematics, English, Politics, History, Geography, Physics, and Chemistry) are tested at high schools and all the content area teachers require students to spend more time studying these subjects. Under these circumstances, it is questionable whether students would have time and energy to complete extensive extracurricular readings in English, as suggested by the standards (see Table 1, Level 4 to Level 9). On the other hand, teacher education and teacher English language skills are inadequate in current China (Liu, 2010; Zhou, 2009). There is doubt about whether they will be capable to provide task-based language instruction to students, as described in the NECS in 2001 (MOE, 2001a).

Second, there is an issue of student achievements. We failed to locate any literature or reports comparing students' overall achievement on English across years in both the U.S. and Chinese educational database. Hence, the first author talked with a Research Associate working in Beijing Academy of Educational Sciences on the phone and requested information on students' achievement in English. The reply she obtained was: "Those information is confidential and we cannot expose those information without permission" (X. Chen, personal communication, July 18, 2010). It would be interesting to know whether Chinese students' overall achievement in English is improving across years and what was the Chinese students' achievement scores compared with other Asian countries.

The issue on student achievement contributed a third concern, which is assessment. Norm-based end-of-grade testing still dominates the evaluation and assessment system in China and it fails to reflect some of the new objectives. Take read-aloud exercises for example, because the

ability of reading out loud with fluency and accuracy was not tested in the formal examinations, some secondary school teachers neglected the importance of read aloud in language learning in a long run (Farrell, 2009; Zhang, 2006).

The findings also suggest that alphabet, common phrases, fluency, grammar, vocabulary and comprehension are the content of reading instruction. Even though teachers at different school levels have different foci of reading instruction, it is evident that vocabulary instruction is the focus at every school level. While the traditional look and say method is still prevalent, learning strategies are also introduced at secondary school level, which proves to be effective vocabulary instruction (Decarrico, 2001; Farrell, 2009). We wonder why elementary school teachers still choose to use the traditional look-and-say method, and one possible explanation was that Chinese learners at beginning stage have only limited oral and reading vocabulary, which make teachers incapable of associating vocabulary words semantically.

The results seem to reveal that fluency instruction was the most disputable aspect of instruction at different school levels. Oral or speaking fluency is practiced in kindergarten, and reading fluency is emphasized in elementary school. Fluency instruction is neglected in secondary schools, but regain its importance at the university level. The contrast between secondary school and university is most striking in terms of the number of opportunities students have in class to practice reading fluency. One possible explanation is the fact that university teachers do not feel constrained by the mandated tests; hence they could provide instruction based on what they feel to be beneficial to students.

Meanwhile, it is also important to note that Farrell (2009) believed that EFL students should develop oral/speaking fluency before reading fluency. This seems to be true with the pattern of instruction reported in this study in kindergarten and elementary schools that oral fluency is first emphasized and then comes reading fluency. However, Hu (2009) reported a different finding that some elementary school teachers believed the importance of using reading fluency to facilitate the development of oral fluency.

Achieving comprehension is the ultimate goal of reading. Teachers in this study reported different instructional approaches at different school levels. At upper elementary school, students depend on illustrations and pictures to comprehend texts, and at secondary school level teachers only reported the teaching of certain strategies to facilitate comprehension. When these reported aspects of instruction were compared with the leveled curriculum standard (Table 1), it is not difficult to understand the impracticability of some of the standards. For examples, one of the standards requires students to form a habit of reading based on semantic groups at the end of elementary school. However, elementary teachers made no implication of teaching semantic groups in reading. Secondary school standards makes explicit that the amount of extracurricular reading is important, but all the teachers indicated the impossibility of requiring extra reading for students.

University teachers referred to the extensive reading course as a way for students to practice comprehension. The four instructors interviewed held different opinions toward what approach is appropriate in teaching this course. Three instructors indicated the traditional way of teaching: students read the required textbooks and are called in class to answer questions. Another instructor challenged this traditional way of teaching by suggesting an approach that gives students more power in selecting and discussing the readings. There had been a lot of discussions about how college extensive reading courses should be taught (Ge, 1993; Cortazzi & Jin, 1996; Zhu, 2004), and one common suggestion shared by all was to encourage more self-selected reading of extracurricular materials. However, as Bao (2004) indicated that when English is taught in a

foreign context, self-selected reading of English materials becomes difficult because of the shortage of authentic resources and students' lack of interest in reading a foreign language. How to effectively use the extensive reading course as a way to help students improve comprehension was still an unsolved problem and could be an area of focus for future studies.

The results illustrate several pictures of English reading instruction at different school levels. At kindergarten and elementary schools, teachers provide students many opportunities to get involved in speaking and reading out loud in class. Beginning English instruction focuses on cultivating students' interest in learning the language, and the learning environment is relatively free from the testing pressure. Teachers teach necessary skills in order to help students learn the language better. Compared with beginning English instruction, instruction at secondary schools is relatively structured and intense, which gives the impression that learning English is for the sake of making a good score in different kinds of examinations. The heart of their instruction is anything that was important in testing. Then when students move to university, they start to enjoy more freedom in learning English. Teachers cover basic language skills and emphasize the importance of reading; students are given many opportunities to pursue learning by themselves.

Some researchers suggest that the different foci of instruction at different school levels, especially between elementary and secondary schools, had caused a disconnection on English instruction at different school levels (Cui, 2002; Xiahou, 2003). As a matter of fact, it has not only caused a disconnection, but when we compared the instruction with the 2001 NECS objectives (MOE, 2001a), we see little connection between the instructional objectives and the actual classroom instruction. For instance, the objectives level 3 to 8 specified that students should be encouraged to read extracurricular materials; however, none of these four teachers reported encouraging students to read beyond textbooks. Level 3 and 4 objectives pointed out that students should be able to read aloud with accuracy and fluency; however, the middle school teachers indicated the ability to read out aloud with fluency is not an important part of their instruction. Based on the voice from the teachers in this study, it is clear to see that their opinion and perspectives were neglected in the creation of standards. Hence, a suggestion to offer is to involve teachers into the policy and standard making process in order to ensure the standards and objectives were created to guide instruction. As Au (2010) claimed, "Standards can and should be interpreted both in light of teachers' knowledge about their students' needs as literacy learners, and in light of their professional knowledge of literacy and literacy instruction" (p. 14).

This study produces rich findings about English reading instruction across school levels in Beijing China and added valuable information to the field of EFL instruction in China; however, it also has some limitations. First of all, the findings are general, and more specific studies should be conducted within each school level to explore the topic more in depth. Secondly, the study only includes a small sample size. Like many qualitative studies, the findings cannot be generalized. The teachers in this study do not represent all English teachers in China, so larger scale studies should be conducted to reveal a more comprehensive picture about English reading instruction at different levels in China. Thirdly, in this qualitative interview study, interview is the major data source used. Even though teaching materials, such as textbooks, provided additional data support, the study would be strengthened if more data sources, such as observations for example, could be included to provide triangulation. Finally, because both middle and high school teachers highly addressed the pressure and the importance of the testing, it is of great significance to research the assessment and testing requirements under the 2001 curriculum.

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Appendix A: Textbook Example

C  **Story time** 



Panel 1: Hello!

Panel 2: Hi! Who's there?

Panel 3: Guess!

Panel 4: Are you Tutu?


Panel 5: No!

Panel 6: Ha! Ha! I'm Zip.

Panel 7: Let's play! OK?

Panel 8: Great!

Panel 9: Hi, Zip! My name's Zoom.

10 

C



Story time



Appendix B: Textbook Example

UNIT 9

SECTION
A

Language Goal:
• Talk about future intentions

I'm going to be a basketball player.



- 1a** Do you think these jobs are interesting? Rank them [1-6] (1 is most interesting, 6 is least interesting).

___ computer programmer ___ basketball player ___ pilot
___ engineer ___ cook ___ scientist



- 1b** Listen and match the items below.

1. computer programmer	a. take acting lessons
2. professional basketball player	b. study computer science
3. engineer	c. practice basketball every day
4. actor	d. study math really hard

1c PAIRWORK

Practice the conversation in the picture. Then make conversations about the other jobs.

A: What are you going to be when you grow up?
B: I'm going to be a basketball player.
A: How are you going to do that?
B: I'm going to practice basketball every day.



2a Listen. What is Cheng Han going to do? Check (✓) the correct boxes in the picture.



2b Listen again. What are Cheng Han's plans for the future? Fill in the chart.

What	Cheng Han is going to be an actor.
Where	
How	
When	

2c PAIRWORK

Ask and answer questions about Cheng Han's plans.

A: Where is Cheng Han going to move?
B: He's going to move to New York.



2d Listen and repeat.

hat help here history home hold heat



2e Listen and compare the words with the /h/ sound and the words without the /h/ sound. Then listen again and repeat.

whole whom who hour honost wheel when what
 Who waited the whole hour?



2f Which words in the sentences are stressed? Write the sentences in the correct place in the chart. The listen, check and repeat.

What's the time?	She knows him.
I think so.	What's your name?
O o O	o O o
Can't you see?	I took it.



3a Read the sentences.

**Grammar
Focus**

What are you going to be when you grow up?	I'm going to be an engineer.
How are you going to do that?	I'm going to study at university.
Where are you going to study?	I'm going to study in Hong Kong.
When are you going to start?	I'm going to start when I finish high school.

3b Match the questions and answers.

What are you going to be when you grow up?	Next year.
How are you going to do that?	In Shanghai.
Where are you going to study?	A teacher.
When are you going to start?	I'm going to go to college.

3c Fill in the blanks. Then practice the conversation.

A: Kelly, what _____ you going to be _____ you grow up?
 B: I'm _____ to be a doctor.
 A: Wow! _____ are you going to do that?
 B: I'm _____ to study medicine at a university.
 A: Hmm...sounds difficult. _____ are you _____ to study?
 B: I'm going to _____ in London.
 A: _____ are you going to start?
 B: I'm _____ to _____ next September.

3d Match what these people want to do with what they are going to do.

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1. My friend wants to be an engineer. | A. They're going to practice every day. |
| 2. My brother wants to be an actor. | B. I'm going to buy a fast car. |
| 3. I want to be a doctor. | C. We're going to take singing lessons. |
| 4. My sister wants to be a school teacher. | D. She's going to study education. |
| 5. Those boys want to be Olympic athletes. | E. She's going to study math. |
| 6. My friend and I want to be pop stars. | F. I'm going to study science. |
| 7. My cousin wants to be a cook. | G. He's going to go to cooking school. |
| 8. I want to be a race car driver. | H. He's going to take acting lessons. |

SECTION B

1a Match the pictures with the New Year's resolutions. Number the pictures [1-5].



New Year's Resolutions
Next year, I'm going to:

1. learn to play an instrument
2. make the soccer team
3. get good grades
4. eat healthier food
5. get lots of exercise



1b PAIRWORK
What things are you going to do next year? Discuss with your partner.

A: What are you going to do next year?
B: Well, I'm going to take guitar lessons. I really love music.
A: Sounds interesting. I'm going to learn a foreign language.



1c Listen and circle the resolutions in 1a that you hear.



1d Listen again. How are they going to make their resolutions work? Write what they are going to do.



How are they going to do it?

Kim	
Lucy	going to take piano lessons
Manuel	

1e GROUPWORK
Make a list of other resolutions you want to make. Then discuss with your group.

A: Well, I want to be a teacher. I'm going to get good grades.
B: Sounds interesting. I want to get a lot of exercise.

2a Are you going to do these things next year? Put a ✓ for yes and an X for no. When and/or how are you going to do them?

Are you going to ...?	Yes / No	When?	How?
learn a new subject			
take up a new hobby			
do more exercise			
eat more			
eat less			
improve your life			
organize your studies			

2b What is the main purpose of each paragraph in the article below? Read the article and match the paragraphs with the statements. Underline the words and phrases that helped you decide.

1. Do you know what a resolution is? It's a kind of promise. Most promises are made to other people ("Mom, I promise I'm going to tidy my room when I get back from the beach."). However, resolutions are promises that you make to yourself, and the most common kind are New Year's resolutions. When we make these resolutions at the beginning of the year, we hope that we are going to improve our lives. Some people write down the things they are going to do in the coming year. This helps them to remember their resolutions. But if the resolution is important enough, you shouldn't have to write it down to remember it.
2. There are different kinds of resolutions. Some are about physical health. For example, some people promise they are going to start a workout program or eat less fast food. Many resolutions have to do with self-improvement. Some people might say they are going to take up a hobby like painting or photography, or learn a musical instrument. Then there are resolutions that have to do with being better organized. Examples include making a weekly plan or organizing your school notes.
3. Although there are differences, most resolutions have one thing in common. People hardly ever keep them! Sometimes the resolutions may be too difficult to keep. Sometimes people just forget what they are going to do. For this reason, some people say the best resolution is simply not to make any resolutions!

- _____ To criticize the idea of making resolutions
- _____ To give the meaning of the word *resolution*
- _____ To discuss the different kinds of resolutions

2c Answer the questions with short sentences.

1. What is a resolution?
2. Do you ever make resolutions? When?
3. When do people often make resolutions?
4. Why do people usually make these resolutions?
5. How many different kinds of resolution are mentioned in the article?
6. What kind of resolutions do you make?
7. Why do you think resolutions may be difficult to keep?
8. Why does the writer say it is best not to make resolutions?
9. Do you agree with the writer? Why or why not?



3a Read the first two paragraphs about resolutions and fill in the gaps with a suitable verb.

Resolutions _____ promises to yourself. They _____ meant to make you a better person and to make your life easier. I am going to _____ about four resolutions. They are resolutions for my own personal improvement, for my physical health, for improving my relationships with my family and friends, and for being better organized at school.

The first resolution has to do with my own personal improvement. Next year, or maybe sooner, I am going to _____ a new hobby. I think singing _____ an interesting activity so I am going to _____ to sing. This will also _____ my family happy because they love to _____ to music and songs.

3b Write ideas for a resolution under the following headings. Also note why you have chosen these resolutions.

- A. Ideas for improving my physical health

- B. Ideas for improving relationships with family and friends

- C. Ideas for being better organized at school

3c Use your notes to write three more paragraphs about your resolutions. In each paragraph, write what you will do and why.

The second resolution is about improving my physical health. _____

The third resolution is about improving my relationships with my family and friends. _____

The final resolution is about how to be better organized at school. _____

3d **GROUPWORK** Clean and Green
Imagine you work for your city. It's your job to make it cleaner. What are you going to do? Think of a six-point plan.

1. We're going to build a bigger subway.
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____



Appendix C: Textbook Example

Unit 3 Travel journal

Warming Up

- 1 Which kind of **transport** do you **prefer** to use: bus or train? Think about the **advantages** and **disadvantages** of each form of transport and fill in the following chart.

Transport	Advantages	Disadvantages
bus		
train		
ship		
airplane		
- 2 Imagine that you plan to spend a holiday. Choose a place you want to visit. Think about the **fare** for different kinds of transport and decide how to get there. Then, **get into pairs**. Use these questions to make a dialogue about your holidays.

When are you leaving?

How are you going to ...?

When are you arriving in/at ...?


Where are you staying?

How long are you staying in ...?

When are you coming back?

Pre-reading

- 1 Many people live beside a river. How do they make use of it in their daily life?
- 2 The world has many great rivers. If you could follow the route of only one of them, which one would you choose? Why?
- 3 Look at the map on page 18 and list the countries that the Mekong River **flows** through.



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Unit 3 Travel journal

Reading

JOURNEY DOWN THE MEKONG

PART I THE DREAM AND THE PLAN

1 My name is Wang Kun. **Ever since** middle school, my sister Wang Wei and I have dreamed about taking a great bike trip. Two years ago she bought an expensive mountain bike and then she **persuaded** me to buy one. Last year, she visited our cousins, Dao Wei and Yu Hang at their college in Kunming. They are Dai and grew up in western Yunnan Province near the Lancang River, the Chinese part of the river that is called the Mekong River in other countries.

10 Wang Wei soon got them interested in **cycling** too. After **graduating** from college, we **finally** got the chance to take a bike trip. I asked my sister, "Where are we going?" It was my sister who first had the idea to cycle along the entire Mekong River from where it

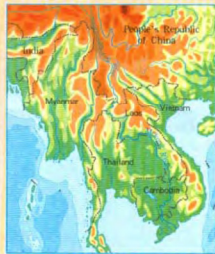
15 begins to where it ends. Now she is planning our **schedule** for the trip.

I **am fond of** my sister but she has one serious **shortcoming**. She can be really **stubborn**. Although she didn't know the best way of getting to places, she insisted that she **organize** the trip properly. Now I know that the proper way is always **her way**. I kept asking her, "When are we leaving and when are we coming back?" I asked her whether she had looked at a map yet. Of course she hadn't; my sister doesn't **care about** details. So I told her that the source of the Mekong is in Qinghai Province. She gave me a **determined** look – the kind that said she would not **change her mind**. When I told her that our **journey** would begin at an **altitude** of more than 5,000 metres, she seemed to be excited about it. When I told her the air would be hard to breathe and it would be very cold, she said it would be an interesting experience. I know my sister well.

25 Once she has **made up her mind**, nothing can change it. Finally, I had to **give in**.

Several months before our trip, Wang Wei and I went to the library. We found a large atlas with good maps that showed details of world geography. From the atlas we could see that the Mekong River begins in a glacier on a Tibetan mountain. At first the river is small and the water is clear and cold. Then it begins to move quickly. It becomes rapids as it passes through deep

30 **valleys**, travelling across western Yunnan Province. Sometimes the river becomes a waterfall and enters wide valleys. We were both surprised to learn that half of the river is in China. After it leaves China and high altitude, the Mekong becomes wide, brown and warm. As it enters Southeast Asia, its **pace** slows. It makes wide **bends** or meanders through low valleys to the plains where rice grows. At last, the river delta enters the South China Sea.



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Comprehending

1 Read the passage carefully and answer the following questions.

1 What was Wang Kun and Wang Wei's idea of a good trip?

2 Who planned the trip to the Mekong?

3 Where is the source of the Mekong and which sea does it enter?

4 What can you see when you travel along the Mekong?

5 What difficulties did Wang Kun and Wang Wei find about their journey?

6 What do you think about Wang Kun and Wang Wei?

2 Look at the following sentences from the text and explain them in your own words.

- 1 She gave me a determined look – the kind that said that she would not change her mind.
- 2 ... my sister does not care about details.
- 3 It makes wide bends or meanders through low valleys to the plains where rice grows.

3 An attitude is what a person thinks about something. Write down Wang Wei's and Wang Kun's attitude to the trip. Then add your own opinion.

Wang Wei's attitude
Wang Kun's attitude
My attitude

4 Work in pairs. Imagine that you are Wang Kun and Wang Wei. Choose a paragraph from the passage and use the information to help you make up a dialogue.

WANG WEI: *You know, we've always wanted to do a long bike trip. Why don't we go on one after we graduate from college?*

WANG KUN: *That's a good idea. ...*

5 Compare the following sentences with different stresses and explain the meaning.

EXAMPLE: We were **both** surprised to learn that half the river is in China.
→ Not only my sister, but also I was surprised to learn that.

We were both **surprised** to learn that half the river is in China.

We were both surprised to learn that **half** the river is in China.

We were both surprised to learn that half the river is in **China**.

Learning about Language

Discovering useful words and expressions

1 Find the correct words or expressions from the text for each sentence.

- 1 He is so stubborn that no one can _____ him to do anything.
- 2 A _____ person always tries to finish the job, no matter how hard it is.
- 3 My grandpa _____ fishing and sometimes he fishes all day in the river.
- 4 Liu Xiaoding is a good teacher and _____ his students very much.
- 5 I _____ the red dress to the green one because it fits me better.
- 6 The concert went like clockwork because Li Pei had _____ it so well.
- 7 I wanted to pay the train _____, but my friend insisted. Finally I _____.
- 8 She persuaded all of us to _____ to work instead of taking the bus.

2 Choose the correct words or phrases to complete the sentences.

- 1 As neither of them would _____, no decision was taken that day. (give in / give up)
- 2 I _____ the first flat we saw _____ because it was larger. (like ... better / prefer ... to)
- 3 The task was difficult, but Helen's _____ expression let me know that she would not give up. (stubborn / determined)
- 4 The list of gifts was very long, and we don't know why, but the most important _____, the golden cup, was forgotten. (detail / item)
- 5 "How I wish I could make a _____ into space and see the stars up close!" cried Sarah. (journey / voyage)
- 6 When he returned from his successful climb of Mount Qomolangma, Andrew finished his travel _____ (journal / diary) and gave it to the newspaper.
- 7 She had only one _____: she was very stubborn. (disadvantage / shortcoming)
- 8 The very first time that Joe saw the film "ET" directed by Steven Spielberg, he _____ to become a director too. (make up one's mind / change one's mind)

3 Complete this passage with some of the following words.

rapids glacier mountain delta plain valley waterfall bank

I really enjoyed my school field trip in geography two months ago. We saw so many beautiful things: a _____ that flowed like a river of ice through a _____ that cut the mountains into two parts. We also discovered a river that was falling off the mountain and became a wonderful _____. This was even more exciting to see than the _____ where the water seemed to **boil**. Later we followed the river to a quieter _____ and finally into a _____ and the sea.

Discovering useful structures

- 1 Look at the questions in the *Warming Up* again. They are in the present continuous tense but they express future actions. Can you find similar sentences from the reading passage?

- 2 In the following dialogue, a newspaper reporter is interviewing Wang Wei about her plans for the trip along the Mekong River. However, they are not sure about some of the verb tenses. Please complete their conversation.

R: Miss Wang, I hear that you _____ (travel) along the Mekong River. Have you got everything ready?

W: Almost.

R: So when _____ you _____ (leave)?

W: Next Monday.

R: How far _____ you _____ (cycle) each day?

W: It's hard to say. If the weather is fine, I think we'll be able to ride 75 km a day.

R: What about the weather in Qinghai Province?

W: The weather **forecast** is not good so we _____ (take) a large **parcel** of warm clothes with us.

R: Where _____ you _____ (stay) at night?

W: Usually in our tent, but sometimes in the villages along the river bank.

R: What happens if you have an accident?

W: Don't worry. I had some medical training at my college. Besides, we _____ (take) out **insurance** to cover any problems.

R: Well, it sounds fun. I hope you'll have a pleasant journey. Thank you for your time.

- 3 You have got some plans for the future. Use the present continuous tense to express your future actions. Give as much information as you can.

EXAMPLE: (this evening) *I'm going out this evening. / I'm not doing anything this evening. / I don't know what I'm doing this evening.*

1 (tomorrow morning) _____

2 (the day after tomorrow) _____

3 (next Saturday evening) _____

4 (next month) _____

Using Language

Reading and discussing

JOURNEY DOWN THE MEKONG

PART 2 A NIGHT IN THE MOUNTAINS



Although it was autumn, the snow was already beginning to fall in Tibet. Our legs were so heavy and cold that they felt like blocks of ice. Have you ever seen snowmen ride bicycles? That's what we looked like! Along the way children dressed in long **wool** coats stopped to look at us. In the late afternoon we found it was so cold that our water bottles froze. However, the lakes shone like glass in the setting sun and looked wonderful. Wang Wei rode in front of me **as usual**. She is very **reliable** and I knew I didn't need to encourage her. To climb the mountains was hard work but as we looked around us, we were surprised by the **view**. We seemed to be able to see for miles. At one point we were so high that we found ourselves cycling through clouds. Then we began going down the hills. It was great fun especially as it gradually became much warmer. In the valleys colourful butterflies flew around us and we saw many yaks and sheep eating green grass. At this point we had to change our caps, coats, gloves and trousers for T-shirts and shorts.

In the early evening we always stop to make camp. We put up our tent and then we eat. After supper Wang Wei put her head down on her **pillow** and went to sleep but I stayed awake. At **midnight** the sky became clearer and the stars grew brighter. It was so quiet. There was almost no wind – only the **flames** of our fire for company. As I lay **beneath** the stars I thought about how far we had already travelled.

We will reach Dali in Yunnan Province soon, where our cousins Dao Wei and Yu Hang will join us. We can hardly wait to see them!

- 1 Read the passage above and discuss these questions in pairs.

- What items are Wang Kun and Wang Wei carrying with them? What do you think they will have to leave behind in Dali? What should they take instead?
- How does Wang Kun feel about the trip now? What do you think changed his mind?

- 2 Imagine that in the morning there is a dialogue between Wang Kun and Wang Wei. What do you think they would say before they leave camp?

- 3 Listen to the tape and mark the rising and falling tone of each sense group and sentences from "To climb the mountains ..." to "... T-shirts and shorts". Then practise reading it aloud.

Listening and speaking 

- Before you listen, read the exercises below and try to predict what the listening is about.
- Listen to the tape and tick the statement which tells the main idea of the dialogue.
 - A A girl from Laos told Wang Kun about how Laotians use the Mekong River.
 - B A girl told Wang Kun about what they would see along the Mekong River.
 - C A girl from Laos told Wang Kun about how important and beautiful the Mekong is.

3 Listen again and complete the passage below.
 The Mekong is the most important river in Laos. It even _____ on the national _____ of the country. Laotian people use the river for _____, _____ and _____ goods and people around the country. They call the Mekong "the _____ of Laos", but in Tibet people call it "the water of the _____". If you follow the river in Laos, you can visit **temples, caves** and a _____. At night, you can sleep in some small _____ by the river.

4 What else would you expect Wang Kun and the girl to talk about? Get into pairs and continue the dialogue between them. Use the following expressions to end your conversation.

- | | | |
|------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------|
| Have a nice/good time. | Have a nice/good trip. | Take care. |
| Have fun. | Good luck on your journey. | Write to me. |
| Say hello to ... | Give my love / best wishes to ... | Best wishes. |

Writing

Imagine that you are a friend of Wang Kun. Write a short email asking about Laos.

- In pairs brainstorm some questions.
- EXAMPLE:
What is the food like in Laos? What do you think of the country?
- Choose two or three questions and use each as a new paragraph.

- How was your trip?
- What did you do when ...?
- Have you met ...?
- When did you get back?
- What kind of things did you see?
- Could you give me more details about ...?
- Could you tell me about ...?



You can start your email like this.

Mail | Addresses | Calendar | Notepad

Send Save as a Draft Spell Check Cancel

To: Wang Kun
 Cc:
 Subject: About Laos

My dear brave Wang Kun,
 How are you these days? I keep wondering how you feel about
 Your friend forever,

SLIMMING UP

Write down what you have learned about travelling.

- From this unit you have also learned
- useful verbs: _____
 - useful nouns: _____
 - other expressions: _____
 - a new grammar item: _____

LEARNING TIP

When you go on a journey, why not keep a travel journal? There are always so many new people to meet and interesting things to see. Describe them and the scenery in your travel journal as if you are writing to a friend who has never seen them. You may be teaching yourself a whole new job, as many people enjoy reading about journeys and seeing the world through somebody else's eyes.

READING FOR FUN

TO WANG LUN

by Li Bai

I was about to sail away in a junk,
 When suddenly I heard
 The sound of stamping and singing on the bank -
 It was you and your friends come to bid me farewell.
 The Peach Flower Lake is a thousand fathoms deep,
 But it cannot compare, O Wang Lun,
 with the depth of your love for me.

Appendix D: Interview Protocol

Part I: Face-to-Face Protocol

Participants' Background

1. What is the highest degree you have obtained? What was your major? How long have you been a teacher? How long have you been teaching English?
2. What are the grade levels you are teaching?
3. Have you ever been to English-speaking countries to study teaching English as a second/foreign language?
4. What are the types of English classes offered at your school? For examples, English Listening, English Oral Communication, Reading, and Writing.

Curriculum

5. Based on your years of teaching experience, have you seen changes in the English curriculum?
6. What are the changes and how do you like them?
7. What are some strengths of the current curriculum?
8. What are some of the weakness of the current curriculum, if there is any?

Instruction

9. How do you teach the types of English classes you mentioned earlier? For example, how do you teaching English Listening? How do you teach Oral Communication? How do you teach Reading and Writing?
10. Please describe some examples of teaching those classes you mentioned.
11. What do you think is the most difficult aspect in teaching English to Chinese students?
12. In your opinion, what are some barriers for Chinese students learning English?
13. What should be done to improve the teaching of English to Chinese students?

Part II: Telephone Interview Protocol

14. I want to know more specifically about the English Reading Instruction you provided to students. What aspects are included in your reading instruction?

For example, are you teaching vocabulary, comprehension, fluency? What are some other aspects?

15. How do you teach each of these areas you mentioned?

16. Do you think these three aspects of Reading are important: Reading Comprehension, Read Aloud, Repeated Reading. How much emphasis you give to these three aspects? How do you teach them?