

# Exploring Teachers' Beliefs and the Processes of Change

*Jack C. Richards, Patrick B. Gallo, Willy A. Renandya  
SEAMEO Regional Language Centre, Singapore*

## Introduction

The nature of teacher change is crucial to the field of second language teacher education. Since most of what we do in teacher education seeks to initiate change of one sort or another it is important to try to better understand the nature of change and how it comes about.

The nature of what is meant by change is complex and multifaceted. As many others including Bailey (1992) and Jackson (1992) have pointed out, change can refer to many things including knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, understanding, self-awareness, and teaching practices. Several assumptions about the nature of teacher change underlie current approaches to teacher professional development:

- teachers' beliefs play a central role in the process of teacher development;
- changes in teachers' practices are the result of changes in teachers' beliefs
- the notion of teacher change is multidimensional and is triggered both by personal factors as well as by the professional contexts in which teachers work.

These assumptions reflect a bottom up view of teacher change rather than the top down model of change often seen in traditional models of innovation, where change is viewed as the transmission of information from educators or policy makers to teachers (Darling-Hammond 1990). The present study was prompted by an interest in the kinds of beliefs teachers describe in relation to their practice and how they conceptualized their own process of teacher development. It therefore sought to clarify the following questions:

- What core beliefs do language teachers hold about the processes of teaching and learning?
- How do teachers see their teaching as having changed over time?
- What were the sources of change?

## Investigating teachers beliefs and changes

In order to investigate the questions above we administered a questionnaire to 112 second language teachers, the majority of whom were from Southeast Asian countries. 14 teachers from Australia also took part in the survey (See Appendix 1, 2). Information was collected in relation to each of the questions above, namely the teachers' beliefs, the changes teachers reported in their approach to teaching, and the sources teachers reported for those changes.

### 1. The teachers' beliefs

The study of teachers' beliefs forms part of the process of understanding how teachers conceptualize their work. In order to understand how teachers approach their work it is necessary to understand the beliefs and principles they operate from. Constructivist theories of teacher development see the construction of personal theories of teaching as a central task for teachers. Such theories are often resistant to change and serve as a core reference point for teachers as they process new information and theories (Golombek 1998, Roberts 1998). Clark and Peterson (1986) (summarized and discussed in Breen, ms., pp. 47-48) proposed that:

- The most resilient or “core” teachers’ beliefs are formed on the basis of teachers own schooling as young students while observing teachers who taught them. Subsequent teacher education appears not to disturb these early beliefs, not least, perhaps, because it rarely addresses them.
- If teachers actually try out a particular innovation which does not initially conform to their prior beliefs or principles and the innovation proves helpful or successful, then accommodation of an alternative belief or principle is more possible than in any other circumstance.
- For the novice teacher, classroom experience and day to day interaction with colleagues has the potential to influence particular relationships among beliefs and principles, and, over time, consolidate the individual’s permutation of them. Nevertheless, it seems that greater experience does not lead to greater adaptability in our beliefs and, thereby, the abandonment of strongly held pedagogic principles. Quite the contrary in fact. The more experience we have, the more reliant on our “core” principles we have become and the less conscious we are of doing so.
- Professional development which engages teachers in a direct exploration of their beliefs and principles may provide the opportunity for greater self-awareness through reflection and critical questioning as starting points for later adaptation.
- The teacher’s conceptualizations of, for example, language, learning, and teaching are situated within that person’s wider belief system concerning such issues as human nature, culture, society, education and so on.

Other researchers (e.g., Bailey, 1992; Golombek, 1998) affirm the notion that changes in teachers’ beliefs precede changes in their teaching practices. Similarly, Hampton (1994) notes that teachers’ beliefs or “personal constructs” determine how they approach their teaching. These beliefs may be quite general or very specific. For example Harste, Woodward, and Burke (1984) identified nineteen separate beliefs about teaching and learning that were built into a simple primary-one level activity. Teachers’ beliefs strongly affect the materials and activities they choose for the classroom. Hampton suggests that some of these core beliefs are changeable, but others are “impermeable and difficult or impossible to change” (p. 129). Breen (ms) describes the core beliefs of a group of 167 teachers who participated in a language learning experience and who reported on the practices they thought facilitated the learning of the language. These are summarized in terms of nine principles.

1. Selectively focus on the form of the language
2. Selectively focus on vocabulary or meaning
3. Enable learners to use the language/Be appropriate
4. Address learners’ mental processing capabilities
5. Take account of learners’ affective involvement
6. Directly address learners’ needs or interests
7. Monitor learner progress and provide feedback
8. Facilitate learner responsibility or autonomy
9. Manage the lesson and the group

Examining language teachers’ beliefs, then, should therefore help clarify how teachers change their approaches to teaching and learning over time.

In the present study the respondents were asked to provide a written response to the following statement:

***Briefly describe one or two of your most important beliefs about language teaching and learning that guide(s) you in your day-to-day teaching (e.g. grammar plays an important/trivial role in language learning).***

From the responses given, a total of 207 summary statements were recorded in the data base. Thirteen categories of beliefs emerged from the responses; nine main categories summarize the majority of the responses, while four smaller categories contain less than 5% of the total number of comments; hence, these final four categories were put together under *other*. Table 1 lists the categories and the numbers of responses that fit in that category.

## Results

The most commonly reported core belief centered on the role of grammar in language teaching and the related issue of how grammar should be taught. Out of 38 responses, 25 discussed the importance of grammar for communication, comprehension and clear expression. Others described grammar as the foundation of English language learning or referred to the need for grammar at the early stages of language learning.

**Table 1**  
**Teachers' Most important Beliefs about Language Teaching and Learning**

Category	Frequency	Percent
The role of grammar and grammar teaching	38	18
Beliefs about learners	30	14
The language skills	25	12
Teacher characteristics	24	11.5
Class atmosphere/conditions for language learning	21	10
Purpose of language teaching and learning	16	8
Teaching procedures	16	8
Methods	11	5
Role of practice in language learning	10	5
Other: Personal philosophies	6	3
Learner errors	4	2
The status of English	3	1
Teaching/learning processes	2	<1

At first, this result was surprising, considering that other research evidence has suggested teachers in Southeast Asia prefer the more communicative, meaning-focused approach to teaching (Renandya, Lim, Leong & Jacobs, ms). On one hand, this response may have been triggered by the design of the questionnaire, since the example provided of a belief was a belief about grammar. In addition at least one group of teachers who filled out the survey were engaged in an in-service course on Communicative Grammar Teaching at the time they answered the questionnaire. Hence for some respondents the role of grammar in language teaching and how grammar should be taught were topics fresh on their minds. On the other hand, informal interviews with some of the survey respondents confirmed that the role of grammar is an issue of special interest to teachers in the Asian region, especially those who have been using a communicative approach. Such teachers often feel frustrated because some of their students continue to speak and write with relatively poor accuracy.

The second largest category of beliefs was that of beliefs about learners. Many of the respondents commented on the need for learners to be independent, self-directed and responsible for their own learning (n=11). Several (n=4) mentioned learner training and learner strategies as important to autonomous language learning. Several others (n=11) suggested that learning should be learner-centered and relevant to student needs and interests, and that learner goals should shape language courses. A few (n=3) mentioned

the differences between different groups of learners and the need to adjust one's teaching to fit the learning styles and special needs of different groups.

The third most common key belief was the importance of the language skills. 10 mentioned the importance of reading instruction, especially extensive reading. As with the results for 'grammar,' part of the reason so many teachers mentioned this skill may have been because one cohort of teachers was taking a course in Developing Reading and Writing Skills (during which extensive reading is studied) at the time they answered the questionnaire. Five others identified speaking as the most important language skill and related it to good writing. The comments on writing (n=5) indicate that teachers believe a lot of practice with writing will help students learn to write well. Several teachers mentioned the integration of the skills and the importance of vocabulary learning.

The next most common focus for responses centered around beliefs about the characteristics of a good teacher. Comments ranged greatly here, but included exhortations about a) teacher-student relationships (to believe in, respect, support and encourage students, learn more about students, find the positive qualities in each student, not to judge students, and develop good relationships/rapport with students); b) the teacher's role (as a facilitator, leader, guide, skill trainer, model of values and desirable habits, and socializer of the young); c) teacher attitudes (teachers should be open, flexible, motivated, and willing to experiment); d) teacher training and development (language teachers need intensive training, teachers should keep up to date, teachers learn to teach by teaching, a good teacher is a well-prepared teacher, more education encourages me to work harder); and e) other assorted comments (the teacher is the focus of language teaching and learning, teachers should self-evaluate lessons, teachers must adapt to student needs, and teaching is fun and not a stressful as other jobs).

There were many comments about class atmosphere and the conditions necessary for language learning. These included the need to create a fun, motivating, non-threatening and secure learning environment and to create a language rich environment in which learners could be constantly exposed to and use the language (N=11). Motivation, interest and readiness for learning were mentioned as essential ingredients for the language classroom by another group of respondents (n=6). Moreover, there were individual comments about language learning as a two way process—involving both a teacher and a learner, the need to offer lessons suited to the students' background and capacities, and finally that class atmosphere is as important as content and pedagogy.

Concerning the purposes of language teaching and learning, many respondents agreed that language learning is for communication and should be practical, relevant to out of class needs and instrumental for attaining other goals (n=13). Teachers, then, should focus on students' purposes for learning and must not overlook the socio-linguistic and cultural aspects of the target language.

Several teachers (n=16) described a variety of specific teaching procedures that they believed were important. They mentioned a) getting students to participate in lessons by making the learning activities varied, interesting, creative, relevant, enjoyable and not too difficult; b) setting clear objectives and developing good lesson plans in order to help teachers determine instructional priorities; and c) that revision and reteaching were essential. Other comments ranged from the benefits of cooperative learning to the use of music to motivate students.

Although a small group of teachers suggested that there was no agreement on the one best method for language teaching or learning—and consequently, that teachers should constantly find new methods of teaching—the majority (n=7) of those who commented on teaching methods agreed that an approach which focuses on authentic language used

in meaningful contexts for real communicative tasks was more practical, successful and natural for language learning. Other comments mentioned methods for teaching writing, recommending a process approach and a genre approach respectively.

The final category of beliefs focused on the role of practice in language learning. A number of teachers (N=8) recommended providing a lot of practice for language learners since "practice is essential for learning the skills" and "we learn languages by using them." A few others commented on how and when practice should occur: in class with communicative groups and out of class as well.

In describing beliefs about language teaching and learning many of the beliefs reported demonstrate an awareness of the learner as central in the educational context. Even when describing the characteristics of a good teacher, which one might expect to be the most "teacher-focused," the respondents gave more emphasis to teacher-student relationships than they did teacher training and development. When discussing teaching procedures, student participation, cooperative learning and relevant activities were mentioned along side planning objectives and developing lesson plans. Within every category explored above, there is a clear thread of belief in the centrality of the learner. This finding is consistent with the growing body of research which describes and supports the move away from a teacher-centered to a more learner-centered teaching methodology (e.g., Bailey, 1992; Larsen-Freeman, 1998; Nunan, 1988; Renandya *et al.*, ms., and Tudor, 1996).

The question now is are these beliefs, especially that of a learner-focused classroom, reflected in the data collected about the changes teachers have made in their approach to language teaching during their careers?

## **2. Teachers' changes in their approach to teaching**

Change is regarded as a major dimension of teachers' professional lives. Both pre-service and in-service teacher education is normally predicated around the need to provide opportunities for thoughtful, positive change. Pennington (1990) describes positive change as central to the professional life of a teacher. She comments that "a distinguishing characteristic of the notion of teaching as a profession is the centrality of career growth as an ongoing goal" (p. 132). In addition, Freeman (1989, pp. 29-30) highlights a number of aspects of the notion of change:

- Change does not necessarily mean doing something differently; it can mean a change in awareness. Change can be an affirmation of current practice...
- Change is not necessarily immediate or complete. Indeed some changes occur over time, with the collaborator serving only to initiate the process.
- Some changes are directly accessible by the collaborator and thereafter quantifiable, whereas others are not.
- Some types of change can come to closure and others are open-ended.

In a survey-based study, similar to the present study, Bailey (1992) examines sixteen separate changes reported by sixty-one teachers. Those which represent at least 5% of the respondents are listed here:

- Teacher-centered classes were made more student-centered
- Use of more varied, authentic materials
- Earlier focus on accuracy changed to communicative competence
- Decrease the explicit teaching of rules in grammar instruction
- Change in attitude
- Use of groupwork begun or improved
- Increased use of tasks and student-generated projects
- Changes in procedures for teaching children

In order to identify how teachers' approaches to teaching change over time, the respondents were asked to reply to the following question:

***Think about your first year(s) of teaching and compare what you did then with what you do now. What are some of the important ways your approach to teaching has changed (e.g. my teaching is not as teacher-centered as before)?***

## Results

The one aspect of teaching about which teachers reported the most change over their careers was their focus on the student. Although a few teachers reported a change away from student centeredness—due to time constraints and the heavy demands made on teachers—the vast majority of respondents (n=60) described their teaching as more learner centered, more focused on students' purposes for learning, more closely related to students' interests and daily lives, and more individualized. As they explained what they meant by 'more student centered,' several of the teachers mentioned eliciting student contributions, opinions and views during lessons, showing more respect for students' ideas, using students' names, treating students as individuals who learn differently, and providing more activities such as pair and group work. Two teachers mentioned that now their students take more responsibility for their own learning, while three others honestly commented that they mix teacher- and student-centered techniques, using more student-centered lessons for non-exam classes.

**Table 2**  
**Changes in Approach to Language Teaching**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Frequenc y</b>	<b>Percen t</b>
Learner centeredness	62	22
Basic teaching philosophy	60	21
Materials and resources	43	15
Language learning activities	33	12
Teaching grammar	28	10
Teacher confidence	25	9
Other: Learner errors	9	3
Teaching the language skills	9	3
Teacher effort	7	2
Teaching procedures	4	1.4

This move toward student-centered teaching parallels Bailey's (1992) findings. It also matches well with the underlying beliefs reported in the first section of this study and agrees with the results of other studies of Southeast Asian teachers (Renandya *et al.*, ms). One doubt remains, however, since the sample answer to this question included the opposite concept of teacher-centeredness. Perhaps some of these responses were triggered by the sample response rather than true reflection on real changes.

The second most common area in which teachers reported changes was basic teaching philosophy. This category includes several key concepts, including changes in a) methodology, b) activity and task based learning, c) the linguistic and pragmatic focus of lessons, and d) assessment. Many (n=18) indicated that they now use a mix of methods and strategies when teaching. Some have shifted from a structural to a communicative approach, while others have moved from a communicative approach to an analytic approach. Some mentioned an emphasis on strategies, processes, thinking, and creativity. Several respondents (n=15) mentioned using a more interactive teaching

style, with task-based, activity-based and project-based lessons. Comments on the focus of lessons include concentrating on specific rather than general purposes for language learning, focusing on sociolinguistic and discourse competence, and targeting the quality not just quantity of output. As for assessment, one respondent mentioned being more exam focused for final year students. The others (n=5) mentioned using fewer exams and tests but more continuous assessment, trying to predict learner difficulties and highlighting these, and using assessments as a basis for changing teaching and helping students.

Aside from these main areas, there were a few other notable changes in basic teaching philosophy: increased use of cooperative learning and attempting to appeal to all multiple intelligences during lessons, the change in the role of the teacher to guides, facilitators, motivators, counselors, resource persons and consultants for learning, as well as having clear objectives but flexible lesson plans.

As for materials and resources there were many comments about a change in the availability of a much greater range of resources for teaching. Instead of relying on the prescribed textbooks and covering everything in them, teachers are using more authentic texts, teacher created materials, and other creative materials chosen for their relevance to students' current and future activities (n=26). Another main change in the area of resources is the introduction of information technology. Many of the respondents (n=14) wrote that they now use (or are expected to use) IT for teaching and lesson preparation.

A fourth category of changes that teachers reported was the types of learning activities used in the language classroom. Now, the teachers reported, they use communicative activities, group work, role play and games during their English language lessons. Although one teacher lamented that she had less time for music, drama or other activities, others reported that they encourage their students to participate in class discussions, answer open-ended questions, take longer and more difficult tests, and produce more writing assignments and homework. To make time for the increase in the variety of activities, the teachers reported less lecturing.

Grammar teaching was another area of definite change. Generally, the teachers reported spending less time on grammar rules or drilling, because of a shift in focus from accuracy and grammar to fluency and communication. Others mentioned using an inductive approach such as a focus on consciousness raising, and teaching and testing grammar in context.

A final category of change related to teacher confidence. Some mentioned general feelings of confidence and enthusiasm for their work while others described being more friendly, approachable and open with students, having better rapport with colleagues and supervisors, and being able to relax in class and interject comments and incidental ideas while teaching. Other respondents discussed specific competencies that have developed with their growing experience: confidence with test writing, integrating the skills, linking lessons, and language analysis. Several others mentioned how experience bred new flexibility in their teaching. They felt able to be more flexible about lesson plans, teaching methods, and materials. Two more general attitude changes were reported as well: from idealist to realist, and from dislike to love of teaching.

### **3. Sources of change**

Vonk (1991, p. 64) observes:

*At certain moments a coherent set of changes occurs in teachers' thinking about the profession and in their conduct. These changes are both qualitative and quantitative in nature. Such a development, however, is not a simple,*

*spontaneous process; it is rather the outcome of a complex interaction between the individuals and the various environments in which they are participating.*

These “complex interactions” often involve a mix of supervisors, colleagues, teacher trainers and quite often groups of students. Through discussions, formal and informal feedback and interaction with these collaborators, changes begin to take shape. Jackson (1992, pp. 64-67) identifies four ways that collaborators help teachers to change. Collaborators can:

- tell teachers how to teach;
- improve the conditions under which they work;
- relieve them of psychological discomfort and help them come to terms with the demands of their work;
- help teachers come to a broader and richer understanding of what they do.

Batten (1991, p. 295) adds the idea that reflecting on and verbalizing what one does well helps to bring about positive change:

*If teachers can be encouraged and helped to identify and reflect on the positive aspects of their teaching — to articulate their professional craft knowledge — they may provide us with a clearer insight into the nature of effective teaching, enhance their own teaching, and establish a basis for sharing their knowledge with other teachers through school-based professional development.*

In addition to collaborators, Bailey (1992, p. 271) identifies six other catalysts for teacher change, including

- dissatisfaction with the current situation
- the connection of a new idea with the teacher’s own situation
- a change in the teaching context
- life changes and personal growth which led to professional development
- a realization of something based on his or her experiences as a learner
- a conflict between the teachers’ new beliefs and their practices

In order to identify the specific sources of the changes the teachers had reported, the respondents were asked to reply to the following question:

***What are the sources of the changes you identified above? Number the three most important of the following options (#1, 2, 3) and explain your responses in the space provided.***

<input type="checkbox"/> feedback from supervisor	<input type="checkbox"/> use of (new) textbooks/new curriculum
<input type="checkbox"/> student feedback	<input type="checkbox"/> classroom investigation/research I conducted
<input type="checkbox"/> keeping a teaching journal	<input type="checkbox"/> contact with others who triggered a change in me
<input type="checkbox"/> through trial and error	<input type="checkbox"/> attending seminar/conference/workshop
<input type="checkbox"/> collaboration with colleagues	<input type="checkbox"/> other (please specify)
<input type="checkbox"/> self-discovery	
<input type="checkbox"/> attending in-service courses	
<input type="checkbox"/> tired of doing the same thing	



## Results

A total of 341 responses were recorded for this question. This chart ranks the frequency of the responses.

**Table 3**  
**Sources of Change**

Item	Frequency	Percent
In-service courses	55	49.1
Seminars/conferences	47	42
Student feedback	46	41.1
Self-discovery	39	34.8
Trial and error	37	33
Collaboration	36	32.1
New texts/curriculum	23	20.5
Contact with others	20	17.9
Research	10	8.9
Tired of doing the same thing	9	8
Other	8	7.1
Teaching journal	6	5.4
Feedback from supervisor	5	4.5

The responses indicate that in-service courses, seminars/conferences, and student feedback are the top three sources for the changes the teachers reported. It is not hard to understand how teachers learn and then change based on student feedback. Since they are with them most of the time, teachers often view their students as their best source of feedback. As the respondents explained, they use student feedback "to find out if lessons actually help students learn," "to find out if lessons are effective," "to help me understand how people at the receiving end feel about my teaching," and "to find out what students' problems are and change my teaching methods accordingly."

What was surprising; however, were the two highest responses. While we may have to discount some of the evidence for the first response, since all the respondents were attending in-service courses at the time they answered the survey and may have wanted to please the researchers, the respondents themselves gave interesting explanations of their first two choices. They reported that in-service courses and seminars/conferences

- give us a lot of ideas to put into practice. I choose those ideas that are suitable for my class.
- help us to upgrade our skills and to keep up with latest teaching methods and materials.
- provide lots of good, well-tested strategies.
- shed new light on ELT as well as help to reinforce old ideas.
- are an opportunity to access new resources and read widely.
- have helped to change my attitude towards English teaching.

Perhaps the most interesting comment came during informal interviews with some of the respondents during which they indicated that what makes in-service courses and conferences/seminars so useful is that teachers meet their counterparts in other schools and have a chance to share ideas, find out what else is being done to handle similar materials and how others are overcoming similar problems. As a result, they have the courage to implement some of the new ideas they have learned.

Of the next three sources of change — self-discovery, trial and error, and collaboration — the first two involve teachers reflecting on their own performance. As one of the respondents explained, “self-reflection and self-evaluation help as they make you ponder whether you’ve achieved your objectives.” Another source that spurred reflection was reading. As for collaboration, the explanations were telling:

- Conversations and sharing sessions with colleagues trigger off new ideas.
- When talking with colleagues, we find new ways to handle a task.
- Discussions with colleagues lead to the discovery and adoption of better teaching methods.
- I exchange ideas/methods/worksheets/teaching materials with more experienced colleagues.
- Encouraging words from colleagues help a lot.

The next two categories — new texts/curriculum and contact with others — also proved to be catalysts for change. Clearly, new curricula including student texts, workbooks, and teacher’s guides would directly influence what is done in the classroom, especially if the book writers have incorporated new task or activity types or left out other types of tasks, grammar drills, for instance. One respondent commented on the process of developing a syllabus and textbooks and how this process “encouraged a lot of sharing, brainstorming and collaboration.” Similarly, contact with others, especially those who share the same beliefs about teaching would certainly help to bring about positive change. This type of contact could come during workshops, seminars, in-service courses or in other informal contexts.

Of the other sources of change — research, tired of doing the same thing, other, teaching journals, and feedback from supervisor — the only one with less than 5% response was feedback from supervisor. The reasons that this was identified as the least important for the teacher change is not clear. Perhaps the respondents did not receive regular professional supervision and thus did not consider their supervisors as helpful collaborators in the process of change. On the other hand, this could be a revealing comment on the usefulness of the supervision that is being done.

## **Conclusions**

Teacher development is a vast and complex field of study. What is already known informs what is being done, and yet, it seems as if we see only through a glass, darkly. This study was designed to provide some insight into teacher’s current beliefs about language teaching and learning, the changes teachers have made in their approach to language teaching and the sources of those changes. But, clearly, there are limitations to the applicability of our findings.

First, the respondents were not a random sample of teachers from the region; consequently, the results may differ in some significant way from what would have been gathered from a purely random sample. The fact that our respondents were all attending in-service courses at the time of the study also may have biased the responses, especially in the area of sources of change. Secondly, the data for this study came from a single source (i.e., a self-report questionnaire), and although a few interviews were conducted to clarify some of the responses, the data were not verified through other sources such as classroom observations, lesson plans, reports from students, colleagues or administrators. Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, the responses may have been influenced by our survey questions, which included sample answers for the first two open-ended questions. Our highest number of responses for both those questions fell into categories that matched the sample responses we had provided. For further examination of these questions, removing the sample responses would be recommended.

With these limitations in mind, this study does shed some light on the three questions and the three assumptions about teacher development with which we began this study:

- i) teachers' beliefs play a central role in the process of teacher development;
- ii) changes in teachers' practices are the result of changes in teachers' beliefs;
- iii) the notion of teacher change is multidimensional and is triggered both by personal factors as well as by the professional contexts in which teachers work.

As for teachers' beliefs, we found a high number of responses about the role of grammar and grammar teaching, and beliefs about learners. Although many of these teachers also reported that they are following a communicative methodology and have texts and materials that were designed with this approach in mind, many of the respondents still hold firmly to the belief that grammar is central to language learning and direct grammar teaching is needed by their EFL/ESL students. While there was also evidence that this belief is changing, more responses indicated that the view of grammar as foundational has not changed, even though many have moved away from direct grammar teaching or are at least doing less of it. Perhaps beliefs about grammar and grammar teaching are two of what Clark and Peterson (1986, in Breen, ms) described as "resilient or 'core' teachers' beliefs."

On the other hand, our study confirms what other researchers (for example Bailey, 1992 and Breen, ms) have said with regard to teachers' beliefs about learners. Teachers believe learners should take responsibility for their learning, teachers should equip learners for the task of learning, and teaching should meet learner needs. In other words, teaching should be learner-centered. Additional support for this finding comes in the form of parallel beliefs in other categories of our data. When describing the characteristics of a good teacher, the respondents mentioned learner-centered ideas: positive relationships with students, new teaching roles (facilitator, motivator, guide), and a focus on student needs. As for class atmosphere and conditions for language learning, again student-centered concepts came through: classes should be motivating, interesting, relevant, secure, and fun. A third area in which student-centeredness is evident is the purposes for language teaching and learning. Respondents focused on both teaching and learning being practical, relevant and instrumental for current and future goals.

Our second survey question attempted to shed light on the second assumption, that changes in teachers' practices are the result of changes in teachers' beliefs. The responses on learner-centeredness offer clear evidence in support of this view. There was a clear correspondence between the respondents' belief in the centrality of the learner and the number of teachers who described their teaching as learner-centered as opposed to teacher-centered. Additional support for this assumption can be seen in the responses on basic teaching philosophy. The respondents reported changes in teaching methods (more communicative), style (more interactive and activity based) and teacher roles that seem to correspond to the central belief in the learner. Moreover, with this belief in learner-centeredness and the change towards a communicative approach, teachers reported using more communicative activities, group work, discussion, role-play and games in their language lessons. Again a change in belief seems to be behind these changes in practice.

Yet, we did not find the same support for this assumption in the category of materials and resources, or grammar teaching. Although the finding that teachers have changed in these areas parallels Bailey's (1992) findings, there is little evidence that the respondents use additional materials and more variety of resources because of a change in their beliefs about language teaching materials or how materials are chosen. Perhaps our survey prompt did not surface a belief in this area, or perhaps the respondents'

views on this subject were too sensitive to report, or perhaps the underlying beliefs for this change come from many sources. Nevertheless, our data do not demonstrate a clear link between belief and change in this case.

Similarly, with regard to the role of grammar and how grammar should be taught, our data do not suggest a clear relationship between belief and resulting behavioral change. The respondents reported that they believed grammar was central to language learning and many, but not all, suggested that direct grammar teaching would result in more accurate language use. At the same time, the data concerning changes in approach indicate that the current trend is towards less direct grammar teaching. While there may not be any conflict in a high view of the role of grammar and a more communicative approach to language teaching, there are mixed signals regarding how we should approach the teaching of grammar. What we do see in the data, then, is that some teachers are trying to adopt a communicative approach, which they interpret to mean using less direct grammar teaching, whether they believe it is the best way or not. Perhaps this is one area in which a change in belief and a change in practice are in such flux that clear and definitive development is difficult to describe.

Moreover, it is not within the scope of this study to comment on the order in which these changes occurred: whether the beliefs formed and then resulted in changes, or whether, as Bailey (1992, p. 272) suggests "small changes preceded a developing feeling of confidence." What we can note is that there is a correlation between the two. Further study on the relationship between beliefs and positive change is needed. Perhaps the best we can say, then, is that changes in teachers' practices are *often* the result of changes in teachers' beliefs.

Certainly, though, we can support the third assumption that teacher change is multi-dimensional and triggered by many factors. Our question about the sources of change reveals that many avenues bring about significant changes in teachers' practice. The clear thread running through many of the responses we received is that collaboration with colleagues, students, trainers, presenters and other collaborators offers the support, ideas, and the encouragement necessary to implement positive change. Additionally, reflection and self-appraisal are clearly beneficial for inducing change.

### **Implications for teacher development courses**

1. Since teachers' beliefs about successful language teaching and learning form the core of their teaching behavior and changes in behavior often follow changes in beliefs, teacher development courses which give participants the opportunity to reflect on their beliefs and make those beliefs explicit will be more likely to encourage professional development. This type of reflection is possible through many means including narratives, discussion, review of student feedback, viewing videotapes of their teaching as well as other modes of reflection.
2. A focus on how change comes about is also a select focus of teacher development activities. Teachers can monitor how their own beliefs and practices change through such activities as journal writing, case studies and other methods for reflective analysis. Opportunities to share experiences of positive change can provide a valuable source of input for in-service courses and teacher education activities.

## Appendix 1

### Participants

One hundred and twelve teachers participated in the study. The majority of these teachers (87.4%) were from Southeast Asian countries: 48.2% from Singapore, 19.6% from Thailand and 19.6% from other Southeast Asian countries (Malaysia, Indonesia, Laos, Cambodia, and the Philippines). A total of 14 teachers (12.5%) from Australia also took part in the survey. Table A.1 presents the breakdown of the participants by country.

**Table A.1**  
**Participants by Country**

Country	Frequency	Percent
Singapore	54	48.2
Thailand	22	19.6
Other SE Asian Countries	22	19.6
Australia	14	12.5
Total	112	100

Seventy-nine percent of the participants were female and 21% were male. More than two thirds of the participants (73.2%) worked at publicly funded institutions, while the rest (26.8%) worked at privately-run institutions. These teachers taught at primary (27.7%), secondary (29.5%), and tertiary (39.3%) levels of education; a small percentage of them (3.6%) taught at non-formal institutions (e.g., language training centers). The majority (51.8%) had a BA as their highest degree, with the rest holding certificates (17%), diplomas (8.9%), MA degree (16.1%), and doctorates (2.7%). The teachers varied greatly in terms of the length of their teaching experience, with a range of 1 to 39 years. The mean and median years of teaching experience were 11.6 and 9, respectively, with a standard deviation of 9.5 for the mean.

This group of respondents is not a random sample of teachers from the region, but rather represents teachers with whom RELC faculty members had some contact. Most of the Singapore respondents were practicing teachers attending short MOE sponsored in-service courses offered by RELC, either a course in Communicative Grammar Teaching or Developing Reading and Writing Skills. The majority of the Thai respondents were English Department faculty members of Dhurakijpundit University, Bangkok, who were enrolled in RELC's distance education Advanced Certificate in TEFL. The remaining Southeast Asian respondents were students enrolled in RELC's in-house courses: either the Diploma in Applied Linguistics or the Advanced Certificate in Language Testing. The Australian respondents were M.A. TESOL students at Macquarie University.

### Analyzing the data

In analyzing the responses on beliefs, after receiving the responses, we created a data base into which we entered the information, assigning an identification number to each respondent. For the first two questions, which were open-ended questions, summary statements were extracted from each response and then up to three beliefs and up to three changes reported by the teachers were entered into the data base. For the question about sources of change, which involved choosing three sources from a given list then explaining the answers, the responses were tabulated and representative explanations selected.

In order to group the responses into more general categories, we read through the summary statements to find areas of commonality. With several general categories in mind, we went through each teacher's responses and sorted them by category. Informal interviews were also conducted with a few of the respondents in order to clarify their responses.

In analyzing the responses on changes, again up to three changes were recorded for each teacher, yielding a total of 280 responses for this question. Ten categories emerged from the responses; six main categories summarize the majority of the responses, while four smaller categories contain less than 5% of the total number of comments; hence, these final four categories were put together under *other*.

## Appendix 2

### TEACHER DEVELOPMENT SURVEY

Dear colleagues,

We are interested in how teachers develop professionally and how this development is reflected in their teaching practices in the classroom. Your participation in this survey will help us understand this important topic better. Please kindly spare a few minutes of your time to fill out this questionnaire. Your responses to this questionnaire will be treated with utmost confidence. Thank you for your cooperation.

Jack C Richards, Willy A Renandya & Patrick B Gallo

#### ***I. Background Information***

1. Sex:     male  female
  
  2. Highest academic qualifications. Please tick one box only.
    - A teacher's certificate in \_\_\_\_\_
    - A diploma in \_\_\_\_\_
    - A bachelor's degree in \_\_\_\_\_
    - A master's degree in \_\_\_\_\_
    - A doctorate in \_\_\_\_\_
    - Other; please specify: \_\_\_\_\_
  
  5. Number of years of teaching experience \_\_\_\_\_
  
  6. Type of school you are teaching in
    - government     government-aided     independent
    - other \_\_\_\_\_
  
  7. Level at which you are teaching
    - primary     secondary     other \_\_\_\_\_
  
  8. Are you willing to participate in a 15-minute oral interview? If so, please write down your name, telephone number and email address:
- 

#### ***II. Teacher Development***

1. Briefly describe one or two of your most important beliefs about language teaching and learning that guide(s) you in your day-to-day teaching (e.g., grammar plays an important/trivial role in language learning). Please explain your response in the space provided.
- 
2. Think about your first year(s) of teaching and compare what you did then with what you do now. What are some of the important ways your approach to teaching has changed (e.g., my teaching is not as teacher-centered as before). Please explain your response in the space provided.

Then	Now

3. What are the sources of the changes you identified above? Number the three most important of the following options (#1, 2, 3) and explain your responses in the space provided.

<input type="checkbox"/> feedback from supervisor	<input type="checkbox"/> use of (new) textbooks/new curriculum
<input type="checkbox"/> student feedback	<input type="checkbox"/> classroom investigation/research I conducted
<input type="checkbox"/> keeping a teaching journal	<input type="checkbox"/> contact with others who triggered a change in me
<input type="checkbox"/> through trial and error	<input type="checkbox"/> attending seminar/conference/workshop
<input type="checkbox"/> collaboration with colleagues	<input type="checkbox"/> other (please specify)
<input type="checkbox"/> self-discovery	
<input type="checkbox"/> attending in-service courses	
<input type="checkbox"/> tired of doing the same thing	

1. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for your cooperation.



## References

- Bailey, K.M. 1992. The processes of innovation in language teacher development: What, why and how teachers change. In J. Flowerdew, M. Brock & S. Hsia (eds.), *Perspectives on Second Language Teacher Education*. Hong Kong: City Polytechnic of Hong Kong, pp. 253-282.
- Batten, M. 1991. Identification and development of teachers' professional craft knowledge. In Ho Wah Kam & Ruth Wong Y.L. (eds.), *Improving the quality of the teaching profession: An international perspective*. Singapore: Institute of Education, pp. 295-305.
- Breen, M.P. (ms). A pragmatics of language teaching: From practice to principles. Manuscript.
- Darling-Hammond, L. 1990. Instructional policy into practice: the power of the bottom over the top. *Education Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 12,3 233-241.
- Freeman, D. 1989. Teacher training, development, and decision making: A model of teaching and related strategies for language teacher education. *TESOL Quarterly*, 23(1), 27-45.
- Golombek, P.R. 1998. A study of language teachers' personal practical knowledge. *TESOL Quarterly*, 32(3), pp. 447-464.
- Hampton, S. 1994. Teacher change: Overthrowing the myth of one teacher, one classroom. In T. Shanahan (ed.), *Teachers thinking, teachers knowing*. Illinois: NCRE, pp. 122-140.
- Harste, J.C., Woodward, V.A., and Burke, C.L. 1984. Language stories and literacy lessons. Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann.
- Jackson, P.W. 1992. Helping teachers develop. In A. Hargreaves and M.G. Fullan (eds.), *Understanding teacher development*. New York: Teachers College Press, pp. 62-74.
- Larsen-Freeman, D. 1998. Expanding roles of learners and teachers in learner-centered instruction. In W.A. Renandya & G.M. Jacobs (eds.), *Learners and Language Learning*, pp. 207-226. Anthology series 39. Singapore: SEAMEO-Regional Language Centre.
- Nunan, D. 1988. *The learner-Centred Curriculum*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Nunan, D. 1989. Teacher-research and professional development. Chapter 6 of *Understanding language classrooms: A guide for teacher-initiated action*. New York: Prentice Hall International, pp. 97-113.
- Pennington, M.C. 1990. A professional development focus for the language teaching practicum. In J.C. Richards and D. Nunan (eds.), *Second language teacher education*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 132-151.
- Pennington, M.C. and Richards, J.C. 1997. Reorienting the teaching universe: the experience of five first-year English teachers in Hong Kong. *Language Teaching Research*, 1(2), 149-178.
- Renandya, W.A., Lim W.L., Leong K.W., & Jacobs, G.M. (ms). A survey of English language teaching trends and practices in Asia. Manuscript.
- Richards, J.C. 1998. *Beyond Training*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Roberts, Jon 1998. *Language teacher Education*. London: Arnold.
- Tudor, I. 1996. *Learner-centredness as language education*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Vonk, J.H.C. 1991. Becoming a teacher, brace yourself. In Ho Wah Kam and Ruth Y.L. Wong (eds.), *Improving the quality of the teaching profession*. Singapore: The Institute of Education. pp 63-81.