The Effectiveness of Student-Centred Learning in the Development of A New Communication Curriculum in China

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Dedication

To my family, my students and my homeland

Acknowledgement

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Abstract

This study examines the introduction of a new communications key skills course in Chinese vocational education colleges, using a student-centred learning approach. This was established in response to the changing demands of employers in China's new environment of economic growth and competition. The research explores teachers' and students' understanding of key skills and their attitudes to student centred learning, an approach very different to China's traditional didactic methods. The effects of the new course are examined and barriers to effective implementation are analysed.

The research was based on five higher education institutions. Both quantitative and qualitative techniques were used. Three questionnaires were employed, and three of the institutions were singled out for more detailed qualitative analysis. Through a series of case studies, focus groups, interviews and class observations data was gathered to reveal underlying attitudes towards the experiences of the new course.

Both teachers and students welcomed the new approach. It was found to facilitate the development of complex communication 'key skills', as students were actively involved, working in groups and learning from each other. The role of the teacher changed significantly, from 'provider of information' to facilitator of learning. Designing activities and resources to motivate students and meet their learning needs was a new experience for Chinese teachers, as curriculum development and course textbooks had always been provided centrally.

Teachers encountered a number of barriers to successful course implementation; these included difficulties in adjusting to the new methods; lack of suitable resources; poor staff development and lack of support from college management

However, both teachers and students noted an increase in students' confidence and self-awareness resulting from the new course. Students particularly appreciated the benefits that this might bring in terms of their employability as well as their social capabilities.

Recommendations are made for the further development of a student-centred learning model for communication course in Chinese vocational colleges.

Content

Chapter One

Introduction and background to the study

1.1 Introduction

This Chapter is divided into eight sections. It begins with an introduction to the study and then Section 1.2 introduces the background to the research. The information relevant to the context of the research includes the establishment of a 'key skills' criteria framework by the Chinese National Occupational Skills Test Authority (OSTA), and the implementation of the national 'key skills' research programme, which was proposed by the Chinese Employment Technical Training and Direction Centre (CETTDC). These agencies are introduced here because their activities are central to this research. Section 1.3 focuses on a brief rationale for the research and identifies the research questions. The research aims will be presented in Section 1.4 and the implications of the research will be described in Section 1.5. Section 1.6 gives a synopsis of the research methodology used, and 1.7 Section explains the structure of the thesis.

As in most cultures, the ability to communicate has been seen as an extremely important factor affecting personal success and career development in contemporary society in China (Tong & Zhong, 2008). In 1999, communication skills were highlighted by the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party (CCOCCP) and National State Council (NSC) as a set of 'key skills' (CCOCCP&NSC, 1999). Since 2002, the 'key skills' criteria has been developed by China's National Vocational Qualification Appraisal Experts' Committee for 'key skills' Development

(NVQAECKS), and the communication skills curriculum is now emphasised as one of the most important components of vocational education (Ye & Li, 2008).

There are two interconnected questions which have emerged in the field of 'communication key skills' development in China. The first is how to recognise the nature of 'communication key skills'? People use the word 'skill' variously and without exact definition. Are social skills and diplomatic skills the same as the skills of plumbing or using a knife, or tying a shoelace? The term 'key skills' has been widely used, especially pronounced in the UK since the publication of the Report of the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education, chaired by Sir Ron Dearing (1997), and this term is now used in further and higher education around the world (Washer, 2007). However, the issue of 'key skills' is controversial and disputed (McAleavey & McAleer, 1991; Hyland, 1994; Wylie, 2005), and Chapter Two (Section 2.3) will explore different perspectives on this. As the concept of 'key skills' has now been transmitted into the Chinese context, it is necessary to explore and hopefully clarify their nature in order to have a clear consideration of the purpose, development and implementation of the 'key skills' curriculum in China.

The term 'key skills' in many western countries and in China has been identified as covering a broad range of skills such as communication, numeracy, information technology, teamwork, self-improvement and problem-solving (Whitston, 1998; Cundell *et al* 2004; Tong & Zhong, 2008). The Chinese government prefers to use the term 'communication key skills', which is the translation of the term used in the Chinese context, as a specific reference to those multi-skills that are involved in

communication activities (Ye & Li, 2008). Thus, within the context of this thesis, I will use this given term 'communication key skills' as a starting point, a term which will be questioned, despite being so widely used. However, at the end, this research will argue whether the use of 'skills' even 'key skills' is really appropriate to the concept of communication.

Secondly, a substantial body of literature has identified the notion of student-centred learning as an important approach to the development of learning. It has been associated with the competence-based model for key skills teaching and learning (Candy & Harris, 1990; Hyland, 1994; Whiston, 1998; Bates, 1999; Chapple & Tolley, 2000; Tong & Zhong, 2008). Student-centred learning has also been emphasised by a number of researchers as an important approach for promoting individual communication skills (Price, 1996; Harkin *et al*, 2000; Gillies, 2007). The questions raised here are many: Why is student-centred learning deemed so important for communication skills teaching and learning? What is the link between student-centred learning and the competence-based learning model? What are the most important factors which will enable Chinese students to develop their communication abilities?

Back in the 1950s in China, the notion of student-centred learning and its advocator, Tao, and his educational thoughts were criticised as an 'anti-Marxist education thought' (Li, 2005, p7). Therefore, even the idea was, and continues to be, questioned. Because of this positioning of student-centred learning as 'politically deviant', its implementation has been held in abeyance for many years. One might

question whether, given this circumstance, the concept could be fully understood when put into practice in the Chinese context. What impact might student-centred learning have on Chinese teachers and students? What could be the significance of student-centred learning for the communication abilities development of individuals in China? Given these questions, it is not only 'key skills' but also student-centred learning and the model for 'key skills' development that remain largely unexplored in the context of Chinese vocational education.

This research aims to explore the role that pedagogical reform can play in the development of students' communication abilities. The main idea is whether the development of communication abilities or 'communication key skills' can be achieved through didactic or skills training approaches. To improve personal communication abilities, individuals need to have lots of experiences of self-reflection and recognition of self development through social interactive processes (Price, 1996; Saarni, 2001; Palmerton, 2005). As many researchers have identified, social interaction is the most important factor in the complex human communication process (Gerbner, 1993; Hargie & Dickson 1994; Price, 1996). The process, as Hargie & Dickson (1994) and Price (1996) point out, does not only involve the exchange of 'symbolic content' (Price, 1996, p75) between human agents but also involves personal cognitive, affective and social interactive processes (Hargie *et al* 1994; Price, 1996). An individual's assertiveness and responsiveness play an important role in communication activities (Aylor & Oppliger, 2003; McCroskey *et al,* 2006). The issues associated with this point of view relate specifically to personal self-awareness

and a personal value system. According to Watson (1988), individual learning experiences do have certain strengths in the 'process of exploration' of social meaning and value through communication activities (Watson, 1988, cited by Price, 1996, p60). Therefore, I would argue that student-centred learning could provide a fundamental approach to the promotion of individual communication abilities. This is because student-centred learning, as identified, could motivate students to participate in learning activities fully, and take responsibility for their own learning experiences (Brandes & Ginnis, 1996; Allan, 1999; Crick *et al,* 2007). The basic idea of this approach is that each student is valued and trusted to do so, and this point of view is believed to 'move the student towards self-fulfilment by enhancing self-concept and at same time facilitating the release of potential' (Brandes & Ginnis, 1996, p3). According to Crick *et al* (2007), student-centred learning focuses on the personal domain, which emphasises personal and interpersonal relationships, beliefs and perceptions that are 'affected by and /or supported by the organisation and educational system as a whole' (p270). More importantly, effective student-centred learning is expected to create a cooperative learning community (Gillies, 2007). In student-centred learning, communication is the dominant activity, and the student can perceive how others understand and relate to him or her, and how his or her opinions impact on others. There is also the opportunity to present challenges to the students' perspectives and 'develop new or alternative positions or arguments that are logical and that others will accept as valid' (Gillies, 2007, p7). The point is that this approach itself, if delivered well, could provide a basic foundation for communication abilities

development, rather than simply to advocate skills or 'key skills' training. It is suggested that 'communication' cannot be delivered as another skill. This is of concern, as the introduction of the new programme that will be evaluated in this study has been based on the notion of 'key skills' - as if they could be applied and measured.

The fact that ambiguity exists about the terms used should not be surprising. Many researchers have disputed what 'skills' comprise. The starting point of the thesis is, however, the given term 'communication key skills'. The question is, what is the real relationship between the concept of 'skills' and the human concept of communication? The cultural shift from didactic teaching to student-centred learning, particularly in the context of China, is a profound one. Can it be conveyed by the application of skills training?

This study will seek evidence from both qualitative and quantitative research methodologies to explore these issues in the context of 'communication key skills' teaching and learning in China. An in-depth literature review of student-centred learning and its implication for 'communication key skills' will be presented as part of the study.

The research is based on a 'key skills' educational initiative set in the Chinese higher vocational education sector, and it attempts to examine the notion of 'communication key skills' and its implication for Chinese vocational education. It focuses on the effectiveness of student-centred learning in the practical delivery of a

communication programme. The research was carried out in five vocational education colleges in China, with more detailed case studies undertaken in three of the colleges.

1.2 Context

Along with international global economic development and the proliferation of information technology, there is an increasing demand for a more highly-skilled workforce. This has led, in a number of countries, to certain communication abilities becoming formally embedded into education policies relevant to vocational education and being categorized in specific terms as 'key skills' (Kelly, 2001; Hodgson & Spours, 2002; DfES, 2007; Tong & Zhong, 2008).

This trend is also impacting on China's current policy on vocational education since China has been experiencing a profound social and economic change parallel with global economic development and the advance of information technology. Consequently, there has been a new, increased demand for competence-based education in China's higher vocational education (Wu, 2005). As Liu (2008) points out, changes in China's economy and society have caused Chinese education policy-makers to emphasise the importance of core competence ('key skills') development and skills training in the vocational education sector. Development of the key competences (a list which includes communication skills) is 'seen as crucial, not only for the cultivation of a more highly-skilled workforce but also for the intrinsic needs of personal career development' (Liu, 2008, p5). The Chinese context and the implications of individual communication abilities development in China, as

well as the many different perspectives about how to define 'competence', 'skills', 'key skills' and 'communication' will be explored in more detail in Chapter Two.

1.2.1 The establishment of 'key skills' Criteria in China

As mentioned above, this research is directly linked to the Chinese national 'key skills' development programme. I am a member of China's National Vocational Qualification Appraisal Experts' Committee for 'Key Skills' Development (NVQAECKS) and have been actively involved from the very beginning in the research and subsequent development of 'key skills' criteria. Therefore, it is necessary at this point to introduce some basic information relevant to my research background.

The initial proposal for 'key skills' development in China came from the Occupational Skills Test Authority (OSTA), through the national vocational qualification validating system, under the auspices of China's Ministry of Labour and Social Security. A basic literature review was started in early 2000. Then, in 2001, a seminal book was published, entitled 'Towards Global Vocational Competence Leadership' (Chen, 2001). Chen was the first authority who attempted to define 'key skills' in a manner exclusively relevant to China. As the director of OSTA, Chen highlighted the need for the establishment of national 'key skills' qualifications, sets of assessment criteria, and 'key skills' training for employees in the workplace. He identified this as a crucial issue for national human resource development in China, and especially in a country entering the World Trade Organization (WTO). A practical plan was proposed for 'key skills' development in which the first goal was

'to establish a set of 'key skills' criteria and a test scheme' and secondly, 'to implement the 'key skills' training in vocational schools, higher vocational institutes, employee training centres and all enterprises' (Chen; 2001, p520).

Subsequently, a National Vocational Qualification Appraisal Experts' Committee for 'key skills' (NVQAECKS) was established by OSTA in 2002, which was officially documented in 2004 (OSTA, 2004). Its stated purpose was to 'develop China's National 'key skills' criteria' … 'develop 'key skills' teaching material and teaching strategies' [and to] 'develop the teachers' training program' (2004, p1). At the end of 2004, eight skills were identified by NVQAECKS as China's national 'key skills' categories which included:

- skills of communication

- information technology

- teamwork

- problem solving

- invention

- self-improvement

- numeracy

- competency in the English language.

Following this, the national 'key skills' assessment criteria were formulated. These 'key skills', as developed by NVQAECKS, became advisory supplements to the national curriculum for vocational education at the end of 2007.

1.2.2 The CETTDC research programme and this research

Following the establishment of the 'key skills' criteria, the China Employment Technical Training & Direction Centre (CETTDC), part of OSTA, proposed a research programme which was entitled 'the Research of Theory and Implementing 'key skills' Training for Employment' in May 2005. Meanwhile, a new model of course design named Objective - Tasks - Preparation - Action - Evaluation (OTPAE) was established by the researcher and other members of NVQAECKS and introduced into Chinese vocational education institutes to develop the 'key skills' curriculum (Tong & Zhong, 2008). The purpose of the model was to encourage vocational education teachers to create learning programmes or projects by using the model to develop students' 'key skills' and meet the needs of local employers and students' specific career development.

Besides being involved in the whole process of the development of China's Vocational 'key skills' Criteria, I was appointed as one of the editors to develop the students' textbook for a 'communication key skills' programme. Subsequently, I was also asked to lead the research focus on the implementation of 'communication key skills' training and appraisal (CETT/SRP, 2004). The government's concern centred on three issues:

- Whether or not 'communication key skills' could be established in the curriculum framework of Chinese higher vocational education institutes.

- The attitudes of teachers and students towards 'communication key skills'.

- Whether 'communication key skills' teaching and learning could be

delivered effectively through a student-centred learning approach.

As a result, these research questions were embedded into my research aims. Although my research is recognised as one of themes of the CETTDC national research programme, the research for this study will retain its independent nature.

1.2.3 China's national 'key skills' framework and criteria for 'key skills' communication

China's 'key skills' qualification is designed to be available for all students in schools, colleges and universities and all individuals who wish to obtain this qualification. The qualification was planned to be delivered nationwide after the end of the CETTDC research programme in 2008 and the qualifications were divided into three levels: elementary, intermediate and advanced. As such, the conduct of this particular research was carried out before the nationwide implementation of the national key skills qualification; however, a number of colleges implemented early or pilot programmes, and these are the subjects of this study.

OSTA and NVQAECKS define 'key skills' as 'generic, transferable competence[s]' (OSTA, 2007, p3). 'Communication key skills' in this framework are identified as the:

> vital social and methodological competence[s] for daily life and
> professional development, and the abilities to express ideas,
> share and obtain the information by discussion, presentation,
> reading, and writing
>
> (OSTA, 2007, p3)

'Key skills', described as 'generic, transferable' competences or skills are broadly used in many other countries (Whitston, 1998; Kelly, 2001; Cundell *et al,* 2004).

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Others argue that there is lack of empirical and philosophical evidence to support skills transfer (Halsall, 1996; Bolton & Hyland, 2003). As Bolton and Hyland point out, transferability requires skills to be applicable across knowledge domains. People's abilities in communication or problem-solving vary, depending on different particular contexts. Could a politician solve an electronic problem very effectively? Or could a skilled carpenter solve an interpersonal conflict? The problem is that these individual's abilities, which have been labelled as 'key skills', are deemed to have much more depth of meaning than skills, because they are situation-specific and they are embedded in an individual's values and attitudes. As such, it appears doubtful to accept that these individual abilities can be defined as kinds of 'skills'. Chapter Two will continue this discussion in more depth.

1.2.4 The OTPAE model

My model (OPTAE) was influenced by the notion of student-centred learning, and it embraces the competence-based approach. The features of the competence-based approach and its relationship with student-centred learning will be explored further in Chapters Two and Three.

Underlying the OTPAE model, four concepts were identified to guide the curriculum design in China. Firstly, is the belief that the acquisition of 'communication key skills' depends on students' own learning experiences. The model requires that learning outcomes should clarify what kind of tasks students should achieve and the requirements they have to meet. This emphasis on outcomes is

worthy of exploration, as 'key skills' are notoriously difficult to measure and assess (Eynon & Wall, 2002; Biemans *et al,* 2004). But the concern with outcomes which can be measured is the driving force behind the concept of 'key skills'. The second concept is that the students needed to acquire their ability to communicate with others through social, interactive activities in which the communicative events take place (Price, 1996). This necessitates teachers organising and providing resources to create an appropriate environment for student learning. The third concept is that students' practice should dominate the whole teaching and learning process. Fourthly, there is the assumption that students will learn more after they demonstrate and assess their achievements. The process of the assessment of learning outcomes is an important learning process in 'communication key skills' teaching and learning, where students' communication behaviours can be mediated by others' social perspectives. This necessitates teachers having to identify suitable forms of learning outcomes for assessments, and being capable of recognising when they have been achieved.

The OTPAE model is provided for teachers, instructors and trainers in order to enable them to develop 'key skills' courses. The aim of this model is to help teachers design courses with clear objectives, well-specified learning outcomes, interesting learning activities, integrative training courses and multidimensional assessment strategies for 'communication key skills' acquisition. It was also proposed that teachers should be able to develop learning programmes to meet the local demands for 'key skills' and establish clear learning goals for individual learners and employees in different organisations. Although the outcome model seems to highlight

students' own learning experiences and their achievements, it cannot always sit comfortably with student-centred learning. This is because, in a student-centred learning environment, it is 'quite common to find 'process' learning outcomes alongside others that express propositional knowledge' (James, 2005, p86). Therefore, what has been learnt will vary according to the nature of the content and process of learning (*ibid*). This discussion will be continued in Chapter Three.

In the OTPAE model, the five letters OTPAE refer to different stages in the proposed process of 'key skills' development:

'O' refers to Objective. Normally, an objective refers to 'what the students should be able to do having successful completed the course of study' (Light & Cox, 2001, p86). The teacher at this stage has to consider how the course requirements relate to the 'key skills' criteria and determine the level of each learning unit's specified objective. The learner's entrance standard and learning needs should be pre-assessed, fully understood, and prepared for appropriately by the teacher.

'T' refers to targeted 'tasks'. In this stage, the teacher selects targeted tasks which could motivate or trigger students' interest in the learning process. The tasks selected are expected to be designed in a manner relevant to the learner's career development or to the real work tasks he or she expects to undertake in later life. This stage requires a clear statement of the course's learning outcomes.

'P' is for Preparation. The teacher has to think about how best to organise available learning resources so as to provide a structured learning experience. In order to do this the teacher must consider what kind of knowledge and understanding the

learner requires to underpin skills development and how they foster individual student involvement.

'A' refers to Action. It emphasises the significant role that experiential learning (Kolb, 1984) plays in the 'key skills' teaching and learning process. The tasks in 'key skills' programmes should provide adequate opportunities for practice (Otter, 1992) in which students are able to 'integrate their experience with other information and knowledge they have acquired, develop a greater understanding of why things happened in the way they did, and [establish] key learning points for their future tasks' (Prichard *et al*, 2006, p123).

'E' refers to 'evaluation' - the method of assessment designed to measure whether learning outcomes have been achieved. This stage stresses the shift of examination from 'paper and pen' to a performance assessment in which candidates have to show what they really can do. Teachers are asked to consider how best to organise the assessment both in student team and individual performance situations and how this should be linked with the designed tasks.

Since the main teaching strategy underpinning the OTPAE model is student-centred learning which emphasises the learner's experiential learning (Li, 2008), it presents a huge challenge to both Chinese teachers and students, who have to adapt to new teaching and learning methods that are very different from the traditional, didactic ones to which they are used. Discussion of this issue continues in the next section.

1.3 Rationale of the study

In many countries, 'key skills' development has emerged along with an increasing concern for a well qualified workforce, leading to a 'competence-based qualification policy' (Williams & Raggatt, 1998; Stevenson, 1999; Eynon & Wall, 2002). Normally, 'key skills' include: communication, numeric application, information technology, teamwork, improving one's own learning, and problem solving. They are regarded as 'general, transferable' skills (Whitston, 1998; Kelly, 2001). They are also deemed 'a range of personal skills, the interpersonal skills involved in working with others' (Whitston, 1998, p312). This perspective suggests that in the new market with its modern occupations, these competences, or so-called 'key skills', are utilised frequently in a variety of contexts. Yet, others claim that they are 'isolated from the wider world of living' and have a fundamental value because they are related to 'providing customer service' (Stevenson, 1999, p345). This positioning of 'key skills' places emphasis particularly on the requirements of business employers, which characterises contemporary economic life. These requirements are rendered necessary by the proliferation of advanced information technology and the more general march of globalisation.

These perspectives suggest that the notion of 'key skills' is essentially a political concept, associated with what might be seen as economic and political necessities within a given national context. Governments aim to develop and adapt their workforce to meet the changing demands of economic conditions; education is perceived as a means by which this can be achieved. Increasingly with globalisation, there is a similarity in some aspects of the skills' base which different governments

seek to develop, especially those that might be deemed as 'key skills'. 'Key skills' are more likely to be mentioned within the realm of core competences, since they are often demonstrated in interpersonal interactions, problem solving and many other such crucial contexts. 'Communication key skills', in particular, are seen as important as the 'first precondition of individual successful career development' (Li, 2008, p13). The drive for the concept of 'key skills' development is therefore pragmatic, concerned with the employability of the workforce. It does not question whether 'communication key skills' development can be treated in isolation, separated from a consideration of the motivations, value and attitudes of the individual, or whether traditional rote learning methods are appropriate.

There are many issues that surround the term 'communication key skills' and there are also a lot of links between 'communication key skills' and the notion of 'skills', 'competence' and 'key skills'. The concepts underpin 'communication key skills' will be analysed in Chapter Two. However, as Price (1996) points out:

> The uses and purposes of communication include socialization, where human subjects acquire values, roles and norms through a variety of influences.
>
> (p15)

One of the most important points Price suggests here is that the social nature of communication abilities and the acquisition of social skills require individuals to be involved in social interactive processes. Therefore, communication teaching and learning, as Harkin *et al* (2000) point out, 'cannot be developed through didactic pedagogy', and they are improved only 'through a process in which individuals practise the skills in their everyday learning and work' (p6). The substantial body of research literature suggests that student-centred learning which emphasises the

students' own learning experiences and their learning responsibility is literally the best strategy for promoting effective student learning (Ekpenyong, 1999; Fazey, & Parker, 2000; Prosser *et al*, 2000; Reece & Walker, 2000). The key points of this strategy are identified for integration into competence–based vocational qualifications and 'key skills' teaching and learning (Williams & Raggatt, 1998). A review of the relevant literature suggests that this competence-based education model has been widely used in different countries to help the student create his or her own meaningful learning experience (Hager & Gonczi, 1996; Bates, 1999; Eynon & Wall, 2002; Gao & Bao, 2004; Hager, 2004; Tong & Zhong, 2008). These perspectives suggest that 'key skills' learning involves the acquisition of 'personal abilities', by active engagement with others. A more detailed literature review and various perspectives will continue this discussion in Chapter Three.

One of the most significant aspects of student-centred learning is that the teacher's role changes radically. As Candy and Harris (1990) point out, these changes are part of the teacher's transition from an approach focused on direct instruction to one facilitating student learning more generally. This shift, however, presents a great challenge to Chinese teachers.

Chinese traditional higher education was usually described as a 'knowledge acquisition' education (Wang, 2002; Gu, 2003). According to Wang, this education style is 'classroom, teacher and textbook centred' and the focus is on memorising existing knowledge in the textbook (Wang, 2002, p73). Influenced by this education style, students in educational institutes in China are not encouraged to develop their

own thinking and creativity. The result is that students tend to learn only what is written in their textbooks or explained by their teachers in a way that is rather rigid (Gu, 2008). The typical, dominant feature of the 'three centred' approach used in China could be described by using Freire's (2002) words. He points out that the traditional didactic education model is supported by a concept of 'banking education', which places students as 'containers' and 'receptacles' to be filled by the teachers (p72). As time passes, the students become passive learners. As Wang (2002) describes:

> Students dare not think anything the teacher has not said, and dare not do anything that the teacher has not taught.
>
> (p73)

Gu's and Wang's arguments suggest that a traditional Chinese education limits students' creative thinking and hinders the emergence of a pro-active attitude towards their educational development. They also imply that it would be an impediment for the development of students' communication abilities.

Additionally, there have been growing controversies in western countries, both within the field of 'key skills' development and the competence-based education model. Some literature criticises 'key skills' development and competence-based educational approaches as being fundamentally flawed philosophically (Hyland, 1997; Lum, 1999; Mulder *et al*, 2007). According to Hyland (1997), the arguments put forward suggest that the efficacy of an approach linking 'key skills' with an emphasis on competence has no 'rationally justifiable philosophical foundation,'(p491) nor can it 'incorporate any intellectual process' (p494). In the opinion of Hyland, the competence-based model cannot promote students' learning and development since it

seems only to be concerned with the assessment of performance. He goes on to suggest that the model is underpinned by 'technicist and managerialist assumptions' (p492). This perspective suggests that the model cannot promote students' ethical and epistemological development because it is rooted in behaviouristic models which are traditionally employed for 'skills' training (Stenhouse, 1976). Reece and Walker (2000) point out that the learning outcomes (which focus on the assessment of performance) model is in direct opposition to a student-centred learning approach, since the behaviouristic model is concerned with 'the careful sequencing of learning activities to shape behaviour' (p123).

The question arising here is that if the philosophy behind the competence –based education model is flawed, or at least questioned by many eminent researchers, should this controversial model be employed in China? Given the Chinese educational background, how feasible or likely is the successful introduction of student-centred learning aimed at promoting 'communication key skills'? As 'communication key skills' are linked with individual cognitive abilities which perceive and interpret social meaning and respond to others in appropriate manner, could this model be used effectively for communication abilities teaching and learning? Will Chinese teachers be able to adopt this model in conjunction with the notion of student-centred learning? What will the impact of student-centred learning be on Chinese teachers and their colleges and can this approach serve as the basis for progressive curriculum design? These questions lead to a consideration of the importance of investigating any issues that may arise in real teaching and learning environments when implementing a

communication programme, particularly one using a student-centred learning approach. The findings of this research might facilitate decision makers in their support for teachers and for educational institutes who are implementing such programmes. This is one of the objectives of my research. The next section discusses the research aims in full.

1.4. Research questions and research aims

As discussed above, there are a number of interconnected questions which have emerged in the field of 'key skills' development in China, on which this research will focus. The first is how to recognise the nature of 'key skills' and the 'key skills' of communication. What, for example, is the difference between 'key skills', especially 'communication key skills'and 'skills' and how do Chinese teachers and students interpret these? The need to explore these issues is not only necessary for the clarification of the terms 'key skills' and 'communication key skills' but will also have an impact on the choice of pedagogical approaches.

The other important aspect is about the notion of student-centred learning and its potential for implementation in the Chinese educational context. What attitudes are Chinese teachers and students likely to have to a student-centred learning approach? What might be the significance of this approach in promoting Chinese students' 'communication key skills'? In addition, how does the notion of student-centred learning relate to the competence-based model of teaching and learning? It is necessary to examine these questions because they are closely linked to the

implementation of 'key skills' and 'communication key skills' in the Chinese curriculum.

The main goal of this research is to assess the effectiveness of student-centred learning in the development of a 'communication key skills' curriculum and pedagogy in China. In order to achieve this, five interconnected research aims are as follows:

1. To explore teachers' and students' understanding of 'key skills'.

2. To explore teachers' and students' attitudes to the new teaching method of student-centred learning in a Chinese context.

3. To evaluate the impact of student-centred learning on teachers and colleges where such an approach has been tried, and investigate any barriers that might stand in the way of teacher adaptation to a student-centred strategy.

4. To investigate the effectiveness of student-centred learning in promoting Chinese students' communication abilities.

5. To make recommendations for evaluating the development and implementation of a new type of curriculum model to promote student-centred learning of communication abilities in the Chinese context.

1.5 The implications of the research

Since competence education and 'key skills' development have been regarded as one of the core issues in the development of China's higher vocational education sector (Zhang, 2008; Zhou, 2008), the priority, when discussing vocational education reform, is to explore the nature of competence and examine notions of teaching and

learning which support the development of competence education. This will explore whether education reform is heading in the right direction in China.

It is my opinion that this specific study will make an original contribution to the development and implementation of a 'communication key skills' curriculum in China through its examination of the notions of 'key skills' and student-centred learning, together with its investigation of the whole process of implementing a programme based on these concepts in three colleges in China. This involves investigating the understanding and attitudes of both Chinese teachers and Chinese students to 'key skills' and student-centred learning approaches. It will also explore teachers' perceptions about their experiences of new course implementation and the barriers they faced. It is anticipated that the research could inform the revision of the current OTPAE model as its effectiveness is revealed and examined. The teachers' and students' views regarding the definition of 'key skills' and their perceptions of the necessity of 'communication key skills' development will also be analysed and examined.

The most significant aspects of the research can be identified as the following: first, the research includes a broad view of the notion of contemporary competence and 'key skills' development in western countries, though there is a particular focus on the UK. Different perspectives of these concepts are explored in the research. As China only initiated 'key skills' teaching and learning in vocational education in 2005, it is necessary to have a discussion that clarifies the notions of 'communication key skills', 'competence', 'skills' and 'key skills'. I believe that the discussion that

arises from this research will be of benefit to the Chinese 'key skills' development programme and to vocational education in China generally.

Secondly, this research provides first-hand information about the reality of implementing a communication programme, from course design to course delivery. Both qualitative and quantitative data analysis will explore the evidence for the effectiveness of student-centred learning and the OTPAE model in teaching and learning practices. It will provide the decision-makers in Chinese vocational education institutes with a detailed picture as to the success or otherwise of existing 'key skills' development in order to ensure more effective curriculum development and course design in the future.

Thirdly, the promotion of national 'key skills' criteria in China needs the involvement of thousands of institutions, together with their teachers, in the process of reform. The awareness of supplying adequate and appropriate resources to support teaching and learning have to be recognised by the leadership of these vocational colleges and local governments. It is hoped that this research will provide some positive suggestions through its findings which might benefit the vocational colleges to overcome or avoid some barriers due to inadequate preparation and resource.

Finally, this study is the first to examine the experience of developing the communication programme by the teachers in colleges using the OTPAE model. It should, therefore, prove useful in helping teachers to adapt to the new teaching approaches and explore the possibilities for college-based staff and curriculum development in response to specific marketing demands and student learning needs.

As an educator in China, I have had more than 37 years experience in teaching and educational management. This included fourteen years as a classroom teacher and eight years as a Dean at a normal school, where Chinese students study child-care courses to become pre-school teachers, three years as Director of a district teaching and research centre and twelve years as a Principal in a college. After experiencing both success and failures in the area of Chinese educational management, I was motivated to identify what might be the most appropriate methodologies for helping vocational education students to develop their occupational competence and communication abilities, and also, how vocational education teachers could be involved in the new teaching and learning strategies in order to make a real difference. The OSTA has initiated 'key skills' development in China, and as a member of NVQAECKS, I have the responsibility to investigate the effectiveness of student-centred learning in 'key skills' teaching and learning practices and to share the analysis and advice to the decision makers. All of these factors encouraged me to start this study with the expectation of also gaining more understanding of the wider issues involved in communication teaching and learning.

1.6 Methodology used in the study

Under the framework of a qualitative research approach, this study explores the introduction of new teaching and learning approaches and the implications of a new curriculum. The focus is on the effectiveness of student-centred learning in a communication curriculum in China, by examination of actual teaching and learning programmes. Influenced by phenomenology and the notion of 'illuminative

evaluation' (Parlett & Hamilton, 1972), case study methodology will be one of the main methods used to investigate and explore different contexts and perspectives of teachers and students in depth. Triangulation is employed in the research, using quantitative methods to collect statistical data as supplementary evidence supporting the findings of the case studies.

After the initial investigation of the attitudes of Chinese teachers and students towards 'key skills' and student-centred learning in five vocational education colleges in Beijing, three colleges were chosen as case studies for further research. The crucial precondition for these case studies was that the new communication curriculum was well established in each college and that there had been no 'communication key skills' courses delivered previously. The principals of the three colleges agreed to take part in the innovation of the new communication programme by implementing it in their colleges. With the support of CETTDC, a collaborative research relationship was formed and the independence of this research established, despite it being part of the 2006 CETTDC programme. I helped to develop a new communication textbook for the three colleges, assisted in the implementation of the teaching and learning programmes and managed focus groups of teachers in their own research initiative as well as conducting my own. My role was not only to facilitate changes by using reflective discussion with focus group teachers based upon their practice, but also to act as an evaluator to investigate the effectiveness of student-centred learning as perceived by the teachers in line with my research aims.

Nine teachers were approved by the three colleges as members of a focus group in the research. Most of them were part of the new communication programme development and actively participating in its implementation process. Qualitative data was collected from focus teacher groups and student participants through interviews, focus group meetings and class observations. At same time, two other questionnaires were used; one for students' self–assessment of their communication abilities (before and after the programme), the other for course evaluation. The course rating questionnaires were administered both to the teachers who delivered the course and to the cohort of 446 students who were involved in the new communication programme taught by the focus group teachers in three colleges. The detailed case studies will help to identify any differences with the results from the quantitative data and will illustrate and support findings. The details of the methodology utilised in this research will given in Chapter Four.

1.7 The structure of the thesis

As mentioned at the beginning, this thesis comprises nine chapters. Chapter One establishes the context of the study and indicates the problems and controversies in the field. It states the purpose of the research and provides an overview of relevant literature and the research methodologies used.

Chapter Two reviews literature concerning 'key skills' development with a view to exploring the nature of 'communication key skills'. This includes an analysis of concepts that underpin 'communication key skills' and which are relevant to competence, skills, 'key skills' and communication. The complex nature of the

communication process is explored and examined. The particular context of China is explored.

The notions of student-centred learning and the competence –based model which were largely used for 'key skills' development in the UK will be explored in Chapter Three. This includes an examination of the essential points of student-centred learning for 'communication key skills' teaching and learning and also an exploration of the barriers that have already been identified in adapting to change. Some classical works such as Dewey (1966), Knowles (1973), Kolb (1984) and Rogers (1994) are also reviewed since their perspectives still influence pedagogical development in competence and 'communication key skills' teaching and learning. The topics covered in this chapter will support the research objectives aimed at understanding 'key skills' and typical approaches of 'communication key skills' teaching and learning.

Chapter Four provides a detailed explanation of the research methodology. The process of research decisions will be introduced and explained. This includes a mapping of the research questions and consideration of the research paradigm, and how triangulation was developed to secure the research's validity and reliability. The research procedures and my position in the research will also be explained. Both the qualitative and quantitative investigation process will be revealed.

Chapter Five presents the analysis of the quantitative data. Three different questionnaires were designed to obtain quantitative data which was particularly relevant to research aims. In the first survey, the questions asked were mainly about

the understanding and attitude toward 'key skills' and student-centred learning from both teachers' and students' perspectives. Five colleges in Beijing completed the questionnaires before the end of January 2006, involving 3233 students and 291 teachers. During the implementation of the new programme, another two investigations were undertaken with the targeted groups of students and teachers from the three case study colleges, which involved 446 students and 8 teachers. Chapter Five presents the findings drawn from these three surveys and presents preliminary interpretations.

Chapter Six presents the findings drawn from the case study based on the implementation of the new programme in College B. It discusses the impact of student-centred learning on teachers, students and their college during the introduction of the new communication programme. Background information about the college context is also provided. This includes teachers' understanding about student-centred learning and their perception of their new roles and the kind of problems they encountered when they began to lead their students into experiential learning. Some specific activities such as the embedding of a teacher training programme during the implementation of the course are documented and analysed. The teachers' and students' perspectives of the effectiveness of the course and the new pedagogies are also explored.

Chapter Seven presents the case study based on teaching and learning in the new communication course in College R. Evidence which related those critical factors which hindered the teachers' capacities to deliver the course effectively are explored

and analysed. Practical problems encountered during the student-centred learning and OTPAE model's implementation are presented and discussed. Different understandings about communication key skills, from the students' points of view, are reviewed and discussed.

The case study of College S is presented in Chapter Eight. In this college, two teachers who developed team-based learning pedagogies during their practice were used for close analysis. This enabled the examination of team-based learning for promoting students' communication key skills. The teachers' perspectives about learning outcome design and their understanding of student-centred learning are explored. The barriers they encountered during the implementation of the new course are revealed and analysed.

The final chapter, Chapter Nine, analyses the findings drawn from the qualitative and quantitative data. The extent of the data collected enables a detailed evaluation of the effectiveness of student-centred learning in the particular context of 'communication key skills' teaching and learning in the Chinese case study colleges. The conclusion and recommendation are also presented in this Chapter.

1.8 Summary

This chapter introduces the background to the research programme. It reviews the progress of Chinese 'key skills' criteria development and the key issues which relevant to this research. As the Chinese government has initiated 'key skills' development through a student-centred learning approach, it is necessary to evaluate whether or not the new teaching and learning methodology is appropriate for use in

China and identify what kind of problems might arise or need to be avoided. The next chapter will provide a review of relevant literature on 'competence', 'skills', and 'key skills 'and 'communication 'in order to begin this process.

Chapter Two

Communication key skills development in China

2.1 Introduction

The main aim of this research is to examine the effectiveness of student-centred learning in the development of 'communication key skills'. It is necessary, therefore, that the literature review should explore student-centred learning as a teaching and learning pedagogy, especially in relation to key skills development. Chapter one traced the initiation of a key skills curriculum in China back to its inception by the Chinese government. The literature review concentrates on the five main themes which will provide the theoretical underpinning to this study:

1) the increasing requirements of 'communication key skills' in China;

2) the conceptual underpinning of 'communication key skills';

3) student-centred learning and competence-based models;

4) the teacher's role in effective teaching and learning, especially student-centred learning;

5) the potential barriers to pedagogical change.

This chapter covers the first two themes. The other three will be explored in Chapter Three.

It is important to explore the concept of 'communication key skills' and its development as a teaching and learning pedagogy. Not only is it relevant to communication theory, but it is also an important component of the competence-based

education movement, promoted in the 'key skills' curricula (Jessup, 1991; Reece & Walker, 2000; Gray *et al*, 2004; Cornford, 2005).

This chapter reviews the nature of communication. It will not only examine the nature of such notions as 'competence', 'skills' and 'key skills' but will also explore the complex nature of the communication process. This will lead to a discussion of the issues related to key skills development in China, including the necessity of encouraging individual development, the need for educational reform and the requirement for social change.

2.2 The increasing requirement for 'communication key skills' in China

The ability to communicate effectively has been seen as an important educational purpose from 'very ancient beginnings' (Morreale & Backlund, 2002, p4). However, to appreciate the current challenge of 'communication key skills' development in modern China, it is helpful to think about how social and economic development can bring about educational reform. The transformative market reforms and economic development have not only improved the living standards of people in China, but also have raised new demands on education. The requirement for more general educational reform is itself an important factor when examining the value of competence-based education as a pedagogical methodology. There is no doubt that, when the learning needs of Chinese students are analysed and explored, 'communication key skills' will play an increasingly significant role in China.

2.2.1 Social change and new demand

As a result of its successful economic reform and 'opening door' policy, China has witnessed dramatic economic change. China's economy has been in a state of rapid development for more than 28 years. As Premier Wen (2008) states, China's Gross National Product in 2007 reached RBM 24.66 trillion, an increase of 65.5% over the 2002 figure, whilst the average annual rate of growth was 10.6%. China's Gross National Product is now fourth in the world. Its national financial revenue approached 5.13 trillion RMB, with foreign exchange reserves of more than 1.52 trillion US dollars (Wen, 2008).

This phenomenal economic growth has been the catalyst propelling the expansion of the education sector in China and the need for high quality education. Two factors, in particular those of global economic growth and the advances of information technology, have had a strong impact on the Chinese vocational education sector. According to Wen (2008), China is ranked third in the world for its imports and exports, which have reached 2.17 trillion as of 2007 (Wen, 2008). Foreign investment has also grown very rapidly. Wang (2005) noticed that over 80 percent of the world's 500 largest companies have a presence somewhere in China today. This integration into world markets has forced China's higher education sector to shift the direction of its development, since these economic trends have critical implications for students' competences and the education development strategy necessary to realise them. The shift was made more urgent given China's 2001 entry the World Trade Organisation (Du, 2006, p6).

Yu (2000) identifies a number of global economic development issues which require educational development for their most efficient fulfilment. Firstly, the current world market, characterised as it is by multiple ownership and the fact that its development is not solely within the power of any one state, requires each country to have a more skilled workforce. Secondly, occupational structures have changed rapidly. Employment generally has shifted from manufacturing industries to the service sector. This trend brings about varying impacts on the Chinese economic structure and this requires the development of a new vocational education curriculum. Thirdly, the ubiquitous use of information technology and computing resources requires well-trained and better-qualified workers. Fourthly, vocational education institutes are required to provide the learning context in which the workplace can be linked more closely with education (Yu, 2000). China's Ministry of Labour and Social Security has chronicled the consequences of the increasing use of information technology. In a recent report, You (2005) reveals that the extensive application of information technology has led to structural unemployment problems in China (You, 2005). When it comes to the influence of information technology on the nature of employment skills, he points out that it has tended to blur the boundaries between blue and white collar work, replacing the traditional division between desk and manual work with something between 'innovation work and new skills' (2005, p317).

As a result of economic development, Chinese vocational education students are deemed to need higher skills and more effective competence training to remain employable. In realising this, both government and educators have placed great

emphasis on competence-based education, not least because of its inclusion of key skills for employment (Du, 2006; Ye & Li, 2007; Zhou, 2008). Globalisation and advanced information technology enables the Chinese population to face international communications and competition which they have never met directly before. The changes, as in western countries, have forced the communication field to shift emphasis from the notion of an individual's relation with others to the need to acquire sets of basic and advanced communication skills in a range of media (Morreale & Backlund, 2002). However, although social economic changes might have injected new demands and new techniques into the communication field (such as the internet), they do not change the social interactive nature of the communication process. Nowadays, Chinese young people need to be more confident to be able to participate effectively in global cooperation and competition than at any other time in history and this needs to be achieved by a self-awareness established through social interactive processes. Otherwise, the advocacy of key skills development from the government will be unable to make a real change. According to Fullan (2007), the change imposed may be 'explicitly defined in detail in advance or developed and adapted incrementally through use' (2007, p84). Both processes are likely to be necessary, but it would be helpful to be able to define and clarify, in advance, the nature of key skills and the connection between 'communication key skills' teaching and learning and student-centred learning.

2.2.2 The need for education reform

Given the fierce competition in the global economic and marketing environments, China's vocational higher education is required to equip individuals with all the necessary skills and competences that will enable them to compete at a level equal to workers in the most economically developed parts of the world. Many Chinese educators have also argued that strengthening competence development is a crucial part of the longer term goal of breaking the traditional educational model (Wang, 1989; Wang & He, 1989; Lu *et al*, 2008).

As mentioned in Chapter One, traditional Chinese education is best described as 'teacher-centred', 'classroom-centred' and 'textbook-centred' (Wang, 2002). The emphasis of all three is on knowledge transfer based on textbooks and teacher transmission. The learning activities are carried out inside classrooms and dominated by the teacher's instruction. This has resulted in an excessively examination-focused education. In China, this approach has lasted for thousands of years and is at the root; it is suggested, of a host of current problems. According to Zhao (2003), the method of selecting officials through exams was inaugurated in the Sui (隋 AD 581-618) Dynasty and was systemised in the Tang (唐 AD 618-709) Dynasty. As different subjects (科 ke) were set to select the talents to be the different officials, such a system was named as Keju (科举). Along with continuous improvement and development in the following Song (宋),Yuan (元), Ming (明) and Qing (清) Dynasties, the Keju system lasted for more than 1300 years and became a system to select officials (p105). Zhao further points out that while the value of education was

always been manifested through the achievement of Keju for more than a thousand years, school education systems have established their curricula according to the content of the examinations, and this remains an important factor in contemporary Chinese education. Nothing could contrast more clearly with the theory behind the development of key skills and competences, especially communication, which must be a complex, dynamic and, at least, two way process.

An education consisting of 'mouth + chalk + blackboard' (Gao, 1998, p129), followed by rote learning, if closely linked to assessment, may raise final examination scores. Given that they are usually the only criterion of teaching quality in China, it is not surprising that student results then become crucial in determining a teacher's prospects of promotion (Gao, 1989). The effects on students too, should not be ignored. Whilst many of Gao's examples are extreme (he presents cases where, for example, students have committed suicide due to the pressures of the exam-oriented system), he is not alone in pointing out the severe effects on students of such a system. Cheng (1989) says that those students who fail to achieve high scores are distained not only by their teachers but also by their parents, relatives and wider society. Such treatment can serve to undermine the foundations of personal dignity as well as confidence, and, as Gao points out, there are strong arguments against continuing with such a system (Gao, 1989). Such perspectives illuminate the weaknesses of China's traditional examination-oriented education, and strongly suggest that education should not be focused only on those students who are following an academic route, but on the needs of all students as individuals. China's

development depends upon a new generation of young people that will be growing in confidence, who are aware of their identities, and have commitment and responsiveness. To achieve this, students need to be provided with the opportunities to express themselves, an aspect which should be promoted, especially, in the curriculum of 'communication key skills'.

There is a substantial literature advocating the necessity of higher education reform in China and of establishing a new education model for comprehensive individual development (Xu and Gong, 2001; Zhang, 2001; Wang, 2002; Li & Li, 2008). Research by Zhang (2008) asserts that skills and the development of competence should be seen as the ultimate aims of higher vocational education. He suggests that these are the essential characteristics of vocational education, the characteristics which distinguish it from academic higher education (Zhang, 2008). He argues that education institutes, ideally, should be the sites of student growth and learning, where students learn to love the educational process and see their progress improve accordingly. Zhang further argues that this should apply equally to students who wish to follow a vocational pathway – such students should also be equipped with the key competences and employment skills necessary for a variety of jobs. A natural consequence of Zhang's position is that education should provide opportunities for successful career development, not only for those already well-served by an academic approach, but also for those who might do well in various vocational occupations. Nor does it follow that this vocational education should

simply copy the academic style of teaching and learning which, in any event, is unlikely to match what the vocational student is looking for or would benefit from.

As representatives of China's national vocation education principals, Gao & Bao (2004) declared that the leadership of China's various vocational education institutes had reached a consensus, namely, that the primary purpose of Chinese vocational education must be to cultivate graduates with high level skills and competences (2004). This, they claimed, was required by the very nature of vocational education and its historical mission (Gao & Bao, 2004). Such policies and strategies of competence and skills development were seen as a pathway to education reform in China.

A recurring criticism of competence-based education in China concerns its alleged utilitarian tendencies (Qing, 2008). Qing thinks that, if the pressures of both general social change and China's market-oriented reform process act as an influence on education, it will push people to follow market trends. His concern is that, led by this market-orientated principle, higher education institutes will reform their curricula according to vocational criteria, which will mean more resources and greater teaching time for competence and skills training to the detriment of general knowledge (or liberal arts) education. This perspective suggests that universities urgently need to put subjects such as civic and ethical education back as part of the core curriculum. This would include enabling students to understand the obligations of citizenship, to appreciate the variety of world cultures and promote students' all–round development. Questions that need to be asked, however, are how to achieve this educational

purpose. How might a student's 'all-round' ethical and moral development occur through a didactic approach? Another question is whether or not competence education and liberal or general education is as diametrically opposed as this criticism implicitly assumes. Can competence or key skills development be implemented separately from general knowledge? Since early 2000, Chinese education researchers, such as Zhang (2008), have discussed the relationship between general knowledge education and competence-based education. From another perspective, many articles have pointed out that higher vocational education should enhance not only basic theoretical study but also applied skills and competence training (Wang & Cheng, 2000; Zhao *et al*, 2001). This suggests that, far from being in opposition, the two forms of education are perhaps better seen as complementary approaches to quality personal and vocational development, in effect as two sides of the same coin. Competence or 'key skills' (for example, 'communication key skills') development could be seen as one of many important educational goals. However, it is essential to find the right approach to bridge the gap between the student's existing level of achievement and his or her ultimate goal or purpose. Both didactic and skills training approaches might not be the only way for the purposes of quality personal and vocational development. This notion requires further consideration, which will continue in Chapter Three. It is important, as my research will explore how the educators involved in the new courses perceive their necessity, and the ways that various factors, such as assessment and student motivation impinge on each other.

2.2.3 The new demands on learning

As an important part of competence in any vocational area, communication abilities have become a significant issue for an individual's social and professional life. For example, Adler and Elmhorst (1996) quote a subscriber to the Harvard Business Review who states that communication abilities are 'the most important factor in making an executive promotable', more important even than 'ambition, education and the capacity for hard work' (1996, p4). This demonstrates clearly that effective 'communication key skills' are crucial even in higher level employment, because most business depends upon successful communicative transactions. Emanuel (2007) points out that individual communication abilities are not the sole preserve of managers but enable any individual to 'exert more control over their life' (2007, p.1). His argument is that communication plays a fundamental role in an individual's career path in contemporary society. Why do communication abilities play such important role in people' life? The question is related to the cognition of communication and communication abilities which will be discussed in Section 2.3.

As discussed in sub-section 2.2.1, China is undergoing a profound economic transition characterised by globalisation and the information technology revolution. As in many western countries, the economic transition is not only altering economic structures but also influencing social culture, affecting people's beliefs and values (Brian, 2001; Kitchen & Schultz, 2001). Under the influence of this trend, the level of 'communication key skills' of its employees has increasingly been concerned many Chinese corporations and various other employers (Chen, 2001; Tong & Zhong,

2008). This increased concern is not only from those international conglomerates and companies which have set up subsidiary concerns in China, employing Chinese staff in the field that is labelled by Kitchen & Schultz (2001) as 'corporate communication', but also from the requirements of expanded Chinese service industry organisations.

Originally, higher education not only provided graduates with academic qualifications but also with a significant symbol of social status (Ainley, 1993). Students who graduated from some of China's best-known universities were deemed to have more promising career prospects. With the growth and wide-scale employment of information technology, things are beginning to look more favourable for those graduates who, although they did not study for degrees at one of the famous universities, still demonstrate that they are adaptable, flexible and, crucially, have the transferable, professional skills – the relevant 'competences' – that serve as the basis for future professional development. As Lai & Lo (2008) have noted, strengthening the transition from vocational school to work is a major education issue on the Chinese mainland.

The dramatic growth of information technology has brought fresh opportunities for the current generation of China's youth. People communicate in a different way from before since many have easy access to the internet. These world-wide links have shifted the nature of modern social life and such ties bring about the unpredictable 'intrusion of distant events into everyday consciousness' (Giddens, 1993, p186). These tendencies not only bring about a new understanding of the world but also give

more possibilities for personal choices. For instance, the key decisions affecting people's lives and professional development are today no longer made in a purely local context but rather on a worldwide scale. Thus the possibilities for self-development motivate people to develop their 'communication key skills'. By doing so, they can obtain and share all the necessary information and integrate into a particular environment. Social changes lead people to believe that many things are possible through the cultivation of effective communication.

Given all these rapid developments, and the need for the Chinese education system to respond to them, it is important that an understanding of the development and function of communication abilities is explored from the perspectives of both teachers and students. It is necessary to pursue the more subtle aspects of 'communication key skills' development on vocational and skills education as well as the way in which the promotion of the ability to communicate has the potential to change the pedagogies of teaching and learning in the Chinese educational system.

The emergence of, and increasing emphasis on, key skills is not an accidental phenomenon. It is an inevitable consequence of economic development. As Cameron (2000) has pointed out, 'the ability of an education system to respond to economic change is seen as crucial for the future competitiveness, not just of individual companies but of whole nations' (2000, p128). If vocational education aims to empower individuals by giving them skills for employment, then vocational educators have to realise that effective communication abilities are in demand across the full spectrum of 21st century occupations. Therefore, they have to be emphasised in the

vocational education curriculum. However, the problem is what the best approach for implementation might be.

2.3 Conceptual underpinning of 'communication key skills'

There are various concepts related to an individual's abilities of communication. While much literature defines communication as a kind of competence (Parks, 1985; Chen, 2001; Allen, 2002; Morreale & Backlund, 2002; Tong & Zhong, 2008), others reduce communication abilities to 'communication skills' (Ruiter, 2000; Gruba & Mahmood, 2004; Littleford, 2004; Silver, 2005). Much literature has emerged, especially from the competence movement that arose in the 1980s, that defines communication as a 'Key skill' (Jessup, 1991; Reece & Walker, 2000; Gray *et al*, 2004; Cornford, 2005). This simply raises more questions: what are competences, skills, and key skills in general, and how do we define them? What is the connection between these concepts and the broad abilities of communication? How do these concepts relate to the choice of pedagogical methods in teaching and learning? In exploring these issues, this section attempts to analyse the conceptual underpinnings of 'communication key skills'.

2.3.1 Communication as a competence

The concept of 'competence' has been a controversial issue in the field of education (McAlcavcy & McAleer, 1991; Wylie, 2005). The perspective that defines 'communication', 'teamwork', 'problem solving' and 'working with others' as key skill competencies is criticised as creating a 'terminological confusion' (Winterton *et*

al, 2005, p.12). Hyland (1994), for example, considers such concepts which define the abilities of communication, problem-solving and so on as 'competence' and 'key skills' are 'conceptually imprecise, logically equivocal and systematically ambiguous' (1994, p.31). It is clear then that there is no agreement about what competence either is or should be. However, to explore possible sources of this conceptual ambiguity might help to clarify the complexity of competence and communication as a competence. The first question, then, is what is competence in general?

2.3.1.1 Competence as outcomes

In the 1980s in the UK, the Further Education Unit (FEU) defined competence in as the 'possession and development of sufficient skills… [for] successful performance in life roles' (FEU, 1984, p3). The emphasis on performance is important for this model and is highlighted by many scholarly articles subsequently. According to Jessup (1991), competence is 'the ability to perform in a range of work-related activities and the underpinning skills, knowledge and understanding required for performance in employment' (1991, p15). Eynon and Wall (2002) term it a 'task based/behaviourist' approach (2002, p320). Mulder *et al* (2007) point out that this model typically is based on research 'observing successful and effective job performers' (p69). Obviously, this definition of competence stresses performance and outcomes relevant to work, and therefore has its limitations. It is identified in the literature as the 'competence outcomes model' or 'competence performance model' (Hyland, 1997; Williams & Raggatt, 1998; Canning, 2000; Kelly & Horder, 2001;

Eynon & Wall, 2002; Grzeda, 2005; Mulder *et al*, 2007). Importantly, Grzeda (2005) points out that this perspective 'understands competence to be a dependent-outcome equivalent to a performance standard' (p533). The key point of this interpretation of competence is the assessment of individual achievements or performance in completing specific (usually vocational) tasks. The significance of this model is that it has been identified as creating a new way of assessing an individual's competence according to their performance. It focuses attention on the outcome, the tangible and practical nature of competences rather than the accumulation of knowledge. However, critics point out that the performance might provide evidence to show what people can do, but it might not provide enough evidence to show what people are capable of doing. This can be found typically in a human communication process. An individual's communication involves complex factors; therefore, outcome assessment might better be recognised as a kind of learning process rather than, as it is used, as an outcome, a summative assessment.

The 'outcomes model' has a number of critics. Hyland (1997) dismisses it as unoriginal, claiming that it is simply a variation on 'existing behaviouristic models' (1997, p.494). More substantially, he claims it cannot carry the 'weight of wide-ranging knowledge, understanding and value… [and] cannot accommodate the ethical and epistemological bases of professional practice' (Hyland, 1997, p492). This will be especially true when referring to higher vocational and technical skills which may require a substantial body of underpinning knowledge as well as ethical and attitudinal components. Lum (1999) develops and extends this line of critique in a

way that is particularly relevant to 'communication key skills'. He claims the outcome competence model suffers from a fundamental problem in its 'methodological strategy' which, he claims, makes 'profoundly naive assumptions about language,' and further is guilty of containing within it a 'disregard for the metaphysical complexity of human action' (Lum, 1999, pp416-7).

These writers strongly suggest that the outcome model simplifies matters in a misleading way. This is likely to be especially true when outcome assessment is linked with performance in communication abilities. As mentioned in Chapter One, an individual's communication abilities cannot be simply defined as a set of behaviours or a repertoire; it is about social interactive processes. In actuality, personal communication abilities are related to, for example, the cognition of the meaning of others' discourse, or of the material that individuals read, or of the ability to present to others an interpretation of the world. These are all examples of complex communication processes which are potentially intangible, evident only when individuals are involved in communication with each other. Any communication activity is dependent on an individual's personal thinking, feeling and doing (Thompson, 1996), so that only when students are involved in the communication process, can they get to understand more about themselves and the meaning of their relationship to the social environment. This kind of recognition might vary depending on each individual's personal experiences and their family, social and cultural background; it is extremely difficult to measure and assess.

Despite the many criticisms of the outcomes based model, there remain aspects of it that may be of value in the Chinese education system. For example, rather than an emphasis on the assessment of outcomes, and the inevitable link with a competence qualification, it may be possible to focus on the process of learning that needs to take place before the outcomes can be achieved by the student. In this way, it may be possible to link learning to students' own practice, and encourage each student to identify what he or she needs to learn for a successful outcome. Thus the tasks the individuals are aiming to achieve might trigger their own active learning. This could be an important use of this model, if it can be effectively linked to the perspective of student-centred learning. From an administrative point of view, 'outcomes', clearly stated and assessed, are attractive. They seem to be an assurance of competence. The research evidence reveals something less clear cut. Further discussion about this will be presented in Chapter Three.

2.3.1.2 Competence as an integrative process

In contrast, an American competence model, which defines competence as a 'composite of skills, knowledge, attitudes or traits… [and] a set of inputs that influence behaviour' has been identified (Grzeda, 2005, p533). Grzeda highlights how this model, which refers to 'independent variables', emphasises the inner qualities of competence rather than the UK model which emphasises 'dependent outcomes' (Grzeda, 2005). This preference for a broader approach to competence education is supported by many studies in both the US and elsewhere. Winterton *et al* (2005),

offering an approach typical of the more recent British perspective, think that competence is a broader, more integrated concept than previous researchers may have realised. Competence in this view is an amalgamation of skills (including key skills), together with relevant knowledge and attitudes. Other researchers have reached much the same conclusion independently. The Chinese writers Wen & Ma (2007) see competence as an ability which combines skills, knowledge and cognition. Gerbe & Velde (1996) also stress the holistic nature of competence, interpreting it as being multi-faceted, holistic and integrated. Similarly, Reece & Walker (2000) claim that competence is a wide concept which embodies the 'ability to transfer skills and knowledge to new situations within the occupational areas and includes aspects of key skills' (p286).

Although the examples and detailed explanations vary, all the more recent research places great emphasis on the complex and comprehensive nature of holistic competence. From this standpoint, the 'communication key skills' can be seen as a competence which cannot be analysed simply as another kind of skill, because it has a 'deeper underlying structure that is reflected in but is different from more readily visible performance' (IIes, 1993, cited by Grzeda, 2005, p533). For instance, a communication process has many dimensions: cognitive, affective and social, and makes use of both verbal and non verbal language (Gerbner, 1993; Hargie *et al* 1994; Price, 1996). Given these many dimensions, competence in communication skills cannot be obtained through one narrow educational model, one course, or one subject in education.

2.3.1.3 Competence and tacit knowledge

Hager (2004) argued that 'the constituents of competence are the diversity of human attributes that underpin performance' but he considers that there is no precise way to define and delimit what they are, saying, for example, that they 'cannot be precisely specified' (p420). Farrar and Trorey (2008) suggest they may be an 'application of previous learning' which has become 'automatic, intuitive or instinctive' (2008, p36). Chen (2007), a Chinese author, describes core competence as the 'base of an iceberg' which is hidden under the surface of water. This analogy, which describes core competence as a kind of tacit but substantive competence, emphasises how basic and important a role it has in shaping personal career development (2007, p3).

Polanyi (1969) created the term 'tacit knowledge' to explain the competence demonstrated by experts. He identifies tacit knowledge as a kind of activity, what he called 'a process of knowing' (Polanyi, 1969a, p132). According to him, experts can direct themselves more deliberately in this process; they can 'indicate their clues and formulate their maxims'. In addition, tacit knowledge is, by definition, present in a way of which the holder is not consciously aware. Since experts not only 'know much more than they can tell', the fair-minded observer must conclude that 'the knowledge of such particulars is therefore ineffable' (Polanyi, 1969a, p87). Polanyi then generalised this conclusion, claiming that this ineffable knowledge comes from three sources:

> The art of doing and knowing the valuation and their understanding
> of meaning are thus seen to be only different aspects of the act of

> extending our person into the subsidiary awareness of particulars which compose a whole.
>
> (Polanyi, 1969a, p65)

This is further explained by Stevenson (2001), who suggests that 'knowing and doing', the understanding of the meaning of why it is done and the values that underpin the performance are stored in the subconscious and 'become tacitly known when we use them, deriving their meaning from the whole to which we apply them' (p653). These complex and often intangible aspects of a competent performance can only lead us to the same conclusion as Lum (1999, p410) who, using Polanyi's perspective, concludes that competence is not at all 'clear cut' and cannot be described in terms of educational outcomes. These conclusions have some resonance for the development of 'communication key skills'.

Indeed, it seems futile to attempt to assess a person's competence according to their beliefs, cognitions and value systems, given that they exist in the inaccessible realms of people's thoughts and consciousness. However, these perspectives explore the process of competence acquisition as a kind of process of socialisation. This process of socialisation is a method by which the individual draws out his or her value system and belief from the interaction between the self and the social environment. This process of socialisation could, therefore, be seen as the core of the teaching and learning process in 'communication key skill' development, because it sets a foundation for an individual's motivation. From this standpoint, competence acquisition, for example, or competence in 'communication key skills', requires an

understanding of the individual's own learning processes, in which these concepts and cognition systems grow.

2.3.2 Communication as a skill

As mentioned above, much of the literature on competence-based education reduces communication abilities to 'communication skills' (Ruiter, 2000; Gruba & Mahmood, 2004; Littleford, 2004; Silver *et al*, 2005). Such a reduction shifts the emphasis from the integration of communication competence with subject knowledge towards the assessment of explicit, measurable skills. Defining communication as a 'skill' rather than as a 'competence' might make it easier to evaluate and assess communication abilities directly and practically since skills have specific behavioural, performance or psychomotor aspects. However, as has been argued above, the 'performance' of communication should be considered to be not only a 'complex output of a variety of psychological processes' but also as 'a cooperative endeavour' and 'socially-situated' (Fussell & Kreuz, 1998, pp3-7). Thus, defining communication abilities as a set of 'key skills' will necessarily narrow the focus of what can be assessed and therefore developed. This will be discussed further in sub-section 2.3.4.

2.3.2.1 The concept of skills

Much of the literature indicates that skills are important components of competence (Grzeda, 2005; Winterton, 2005; Wen & Ma, 2007). According to the Skills Base Labour Market Information Database, skills are 'pre-determined standards of competence' (cited by Cundell, 2004 p62). Though 'skills' is a term frequently

used in the literature, there is little consensus as to what it exactly means. It is necessary to explore the different understandings of this term as it is interlinked with the concept of 'communication key skills'.

Some writers describe 'skills' in purely behavioural terms or else place great emphasis on its psychomotor aspects. For instance, Proctor & Dutta (1995) define a skill as an example of 'goal–directed, well organized behaviour that is acquired through practice and performance with economy of effort' (cited by Winterton *et al*, 2005, p12). This conception of skills stresses not only the important role played by goals (they serve as motivation) but also highlights the importance of structure and practice in skill acquisition and behaviour formulation. Usually, this conception links with craft work as well as the combination of individual mental activities and manual actions in specific work situations. In contrast, Van Loo & Toolsema (2005) define skills as 'personal cognition or physical fitness for task completion' (p208). Though this definition still focuses on task performance, it highlights the requirement of a certain level of cognitive involvement in skilled action. However, skills cannot be simply examined by the frequency and quality of the action output.

Farrar and Trorey (2008) developed a more sophisticated account of skills. They consider that skill involves a 'complex engagement with action, applying knowledge and previous experience in both a conscious and subconscious manner' (p36). Besides emphasising the functional role of knowledge in skills training, they observe that the accumulation of experience, retained both consciously and subconsciously, might have an important influence on people's skills acquisition.

Skill teaching and learning objectives were famously outlined by Bloom (1956). He created the taxonomies for categorising educational objectives into three domains: cognitive (knowledge), affective (attitude) and psychomotor skills (doing). The taxonomy provides a useful structure in which the three domains are divided into subdivisions, starting from the simplest behaviours to the most complex. This taxonomy is still significant for educational curriculum development as it makes 'educational purposes more transparent' (Postance, 2008, p82). As such, it provides a platform on which the degree of skill can be assessed in a specific situation or context (Wellington, 1987).

However, some psychomotor skills might be easier to assess according to how quick, accurate, and highly coordinated the individual performs, but could be more difficult to apply when the object of assessment is a complex task, such as 'communication key skills'. This is because, as has been discussed, there are many factors involved in the process of communication; these include personal motivation, values and attitudes. Some of these involve the development of a personal understanding of facts and ideas, by not only listening but thinking, comparing, encoding, decoding, interpretation and decision-making which cannot be merely defined as sets of skills.

2.3.2.2 Varieties of communication skills

There are many kinds of micro-skills that are involved in the process of communication (Price, 1996; Hargie & Dickson, 2004). This causes a challenge when

considering how to develop the curriculum, content and teaching methodologies for a communication course. Morreale & Backlund (2002) uncover considerable variations between different communication courses by showing the results of a national survey of American communication departments when they point out that it would be difficult to reach an agreement regarding the content and topics covered in even a basic communication course. However, to acknowledge each of these 'communication skills' as identified by the different course providers might enable teachers to develop a clearer vision about the complexity of communication abilities.

2.3.2.3 Modes of language

In order that they might be interactive and communicate effectively with others, people use a variety of ways to convey and express their feelings and thoughts. These ways of communicating with others are labelled as **'modes of language'** (Janet, 2002)**.**

According to Janet (2002), different communication activities, such as non-verbal communication, thinking, listening, speaking, reading and writing are all modes of language that require a range of inter-related skills. Griffin (2000) also emphasises the importance of communication skills, believing that public speaking is a more effective way to 'solve political problems', to influence listeners, and to 'move people emotionally and stir them to action'. He concludes, therefore, that oratorical training should be a 'cornerstone of a leader's education' (p39).

Obviously, using language for discussion, negotiation or to give a presentation are important communication skills, and it is also a significant component of human

capital. Without basic reading, writing, listening and speaking skills, it is very difficult for an individual to obtain relevant information about jobs, to share his or her feelings with others, or to influence others.

Based on this recognition, much of the existing literature indicates that there is a great need for speaking, listening, reading and writing training not only in education in general, but also in the vocational education curriculum (Cameron, 2000; Allen, 2002; Morreale & Backlund, 2002; Darling & Danies, 2003; Gruba, 2004; Harter *et al*, 2004; Morreale *et al*, 2006; Worley & Worley, 2006).

2.3.2.4 Nonverbal communication skills

Whilst speaking, listening, reading and writing are the basic 'communication skills' which are highlighted by many researchers, others have placed greater emphasis on the development of nonverbal skills, given that nonverbal language accounts for more than 93% of people's communication activities (Hybels & Weaver, 2005).

Hargie and Dickson (2004) define nonverbal communication as any 'direct communication not exclusively relying on the use of words, written or spoken' (p44). Researchers see the significance of nonverbal communication skills as lying in the variety of its functions. These include replacing verbal communication in certain situations, complementing the spoken word, modifying the meaning of talk, contradicting the spoken word, deception and nonverbal cues, regulating conversations, emotions and interpersonal attitudes, negotiating relationships,

conveying personal and social identities, and contextualizing interaction (Hargie & Dickson 2004, pp50-55). Normally, non-verbal communication occurs through the use of eye contact, facial expression, gesture or body pose. It is often essential for the successful completion of a certain social actions, for instance humour (Hybels & Weaver, 2005).

For these reasons, researchers have identified a key role for nonverbal language development in the successful acquisition and performance of 'communication skills' (Spence, 2003; Hargie & Dickson, 2004).

2.3.2.5 Information technology

Following the development of information technology (often referred to as ICT, with the 'C' referring to 'communication'), the channels of communication have become more varied and complex. Dialogue is now conducted not simply through face-to-face talking but via the internet and other such technological modes. Hartley (2005) uses the word 'connectivity' to describe this multi-channelled world of information exchange; each person contacts or is contacted through multiple channels using modern information technology. It follows that the more skilled and computer literate have a wider choice – that is to say, they have more available channels for their communication and more opportunities to be involved into an international communication environment.

2.3.2.6 Social communication skills

Several studies have concluded that the abilities of communication are kinds of 'social skills'. They have highlighted the importance of social skills training for effective communication performance (Herbert, 1986; Hargie *et al*, 1994; Nemeth & Kolozsi, 1999; Spence, 2003).

In his work, Hargie (1994) identifies social communication skills as 'a set of goal-directed, inter-related, situational-appropriate social behaviours which can be learned and which are under the control of the individual' (p2). Here, one of the important aspects of social communication skills is explored, which is that social behaviours should be 'situational appropriated'. This suggests that people have to use language (verbal and nonverbal) that is appropriate to actual circumstances. However, appropriate social behaviours at least require the understanding of the context in which communication is occurring. The components of the context might not only include cultural factors but also the other's characteristics and their own communicative abilities. Using this perspective in communication teaching and learning would require the teacher to create various communication situations that would enable students to become more flexible and adaptable.

Again, if communication abilities are to be defined as social skills, it must be remembered that these kinds of skills are very complex in nature. As Hargie *et al* (1994) point out, people's 'intention, control and awareness are central to general conceptualisations of communication as skilled activities' (1994, p16). The question that arises here is whether this 'intention, control and awareness' could be taught as a

kind of skill. However, though 'communication key skills', to some extent at least, have the features of skills, such as the integration of knowing and doing, goal-oriented action, cognitive and active psychomotoric involvement, assessable performance and the dependence on a given context, these shared features do not make the two equivalent. Some abilities of communication, such as social communication skills require the cultivation of moral and social perspectives, and they are also largely dependent upon how much the individual can be involved in social interactive processes. Chapter Three will continue this discussion in the context of the application of student- centred learning.

2.3.3 Communication abilities as key skills

Communication abilities have been recognised as a kind of key or core skill in many countries (Kelly, 2001; Cornford, 2005; Winterton *et al* 2005). As mentioned in Chapter One, the notion of 'key skills' is essentially a political concept associated with what we might term economic and political necessities within a given national context. Governments expect to bridge the gap between the labour market and vocational education through an approach focussing on key skills development. The approach is usually a competence-based one. Hence, there is a growing concern about competence, skills and key skills development in Chinese vocational education institutes. However, what is being questioned in this study is whether there is a real relationship between these so-called 'key skills' and the competence-based approach

to learning. This is because, as will be further discussed below, the nature of these 'key skills' are deeper and more complex than ordinary skills.

2.3.3.1 Key skills as distinct from skills

Compared with other generic competences, key skills are deemed more popular, more advanced, more complex and more urgently required in contemporary economic development (Kelly, 2001; Cornford, 2005; Winterton *et al* 2005). The imperative need for the development of these complex competences to meet the demand of rapid change could be the reason for these competences becoming 'key skills'.

According to Zhong (2005), after China entered the World Trade Organisation, the interaction between globalisation and the development of information technology became stronger and more rapid. This, plus the open market policy, pressed China's economic development in a new direction. The new economic structure brought occupational opportunities and challenges for the Chinese workforce. Examples of the trend include the need for such jobs as interpreters, tour guides for foreign visitors, international exhibition designers and managers, cultural exchange business staff, sports club administrators, insurances service consultants and logistics administrators (p11). Obviously, these jobs are merely examples of the new competence requirements of the modern employee. Besides professional knowledge, the abilities of communication, I.T, foreign languages and soft skills like 'teamwork' are commonly highlighted in these sectors due to the situations staff face on a daily basis.

Consequently, these competences are chosen as the key skills and are used to assess whether employees are qualified for the job. From this point of view, the term 'key skills' is one which categorises those highly skills driven by the new markets and technology developments (Williams & Raggatt, 1998).

2.3.3.2 Key skills as core competence

Much literature suggests that 'key skills' are more complex and comprehensive than traditional workplace skills (Jessup, 1991; Reece & Walker, 2000; Gray *et al*, 2004; Cornford, 2005). Jessup sees key skills as 'facets of competence' (1991, p81). In some competence literature, key skills are even recognised as 'key competences', 'core competences', or as an 'essential element of competence (Jessup, 1991; Reece & Walker, 2000; Gray *et al*, 2004; Cornford, 2005). These examples all stem from the UK, but Weigel *et al* (2007) give the example of the Netherlands where:

> the knowledge, skills and attitude domains are all integrated in the current conceptualization of competence, the term of basic skills was early version of the present concept of competence.

(p60)

These definitions suggest that personal attitudes are likely to be important factors in the development of 'key skills' or competence. As discussed in section 3.2.2, an individual's attitudes are likely to influence their flexibility and adaptability in various contexts. Personal attitudes might be transferable, in that they could support different performances based on different situations or work contexts, but they cannot be learnt as kind of skill. This is because personal attitudes stem from an individual's values, understanding and social perspectives. They are usually considered to be

innate characteristics in a person, that, although they can be influenced, cannot be developed like a performance that is measured by speed, accuracy or frequency of action. Thus, if the contribution that personal attitudes make to the development of 'communication key skills' is accepted, the development of communication abilities must be seen as a process of growth in personal values and motivations which integrate cultural and moral factors as well as understanding.

2.3.3.3 Key skills and motivation

Some analysts have attempted to draw attention to an important constituent of any key skill, that of motivation (Hyland, 1999; Kelly & Horder, 2001; Van Loo & Toolsema, 2005). Motivation is described as 'individual (developed or innate) characteristics representing context-bound productivity that mainly impact productivity in an indirect manner' (Van Loo & Toolsema, 2005, p213). Hyland (1999) also refers to this, arguing that key skills should not be categorised within the term of 'skills' because they are more closely related to people's knowledge, attitudes, value concepts, and motivation (1999). According to him, an individual's character, temperance, industry, patience and so on are 'fundamentally constitutive of person' (1999, p.63). Such values which affect motivation cannot be lumped together with the definition of skills, or even competence. Kelly and Horder (2001) further developed this perspective as, according to them, 'values' can be defined as 'a set of beliefs; a particular ideology and a set of work-related ethics or rules of conduct' (2001, p696). They suggest that these value conceptions might be closely linked, but are not

equivalent to, competence. They go on to argue that the UK competence model is 'likely to minimise or downplay the significance of values' (p695). As a means of addressing this, they propose a 'reflective model of education':

> …where outcomes are not given, but are under continual review by stakeholders and where assessment processes are open to comment and critique by students and clients.

(p698)

This perspective should be considered because it suggests using a reflective model as well as a social approach to key skills teaching and learning. The essential point here is that it is social interaction that plays a key role in shaping and regulating an individual's values and moral understandings and behaviours. This is especially important for the consideration of 'communication key skills'.

2.3.3.4 Key skills as social interaction

As mentioned above, the other typical characteristic of key skills is that most cannot occur without the presence and engagement of others. Examples include 'communication key skills', teamwork skills and problem solving skills. Whitston (1998) examines this aspect of key skills from an employer's perspective. He points out that one reason employers are concerned with key skills is that they require their employees to build 'positive relationships' with others. This ability will 'facilitate the running of the business, managing others and being managed' (p312). This point serves to illustrate yet another distinction between key skills and skills. An individual may demonstrate his or her skills without the involvement of others, for example running, typing, driving, but not so his or her key skills, particularly communication.

As identified in sub-section 2.2.1, the current social and economic development in China has increased the demand for individuals to develop their higher skills such as the competence to deal with change. While the development of key skills is more often emphasised by the Chinese Government and Education Ministry, the implication of social interaction in key skills teaching and learning should also be acknowledged. The manifestation of key skills takes place against a much more complex backdrop. This 'backdrop' might be a commonplace conflict or a wider social issue: either way it may involve different participants with different opinions. Effective key skills play an important role in enabling people to understand, interpret, influence others and deal with and manage conflicts against these varying and often difficult backdrops.

2.3.3.5 Key skills as managerial skills

One of the most significant features of key skills emerging from the literature is their managerial nature. Managing conflict and influencing skills, as mentioned above, are key examples. Bennet *et al* (2000) generated four important managerial features of key skills which are: self management, information management, management of others and management of tasks. These managerial features characterise higher level key skills. As Bennet *et al* point out, each individual achieves his or her goal by the way he or she:

> identifies key features, conceptualises issues, sets and maintains priorities, identifies strategic options, plans/implements a course of action, organises subtasks, and assesses outcomes.

<div align="right">(Bennet et al, 2000, pp31-2)</div>

The abilities an individual needs to use to fulfil each of these tasks are linked to the application of communication abilities. Individuals must use such strategies to deal with any kind of complex problem, in work or social settings. Various high level communication abilities are involved. Such abilities can usually only be developed in communication key skills teaching and learning by using a variety of models such as 'problem-based' teaching and learning (Thomas, 1997; Shelton & Smith, 1998; Knowlton, 2003).

Recognising this, teachers might create ways, intentionally, to help learners monitor their working process and learn to manage their time and action and to manipulate all available resources to achieve tasks.

2.3.3.6 Key skills and their general transferability

It is often presumed that key skills can be transferred into different contexts since they are deemed to be isolated from generic competence, or 'constructed as a hierarchy of competence' (Whitston, 1998, p311). Jessup (1990), for example, thought that key skills are 'genuinely common and transferable between subjects and occupations' (1990, p5).

This statement suggests two things. Firstly, key skills have existed in various contemporary employment requirements for a number of years, and have played a significant role in individual career development. Secondly, key skills development offers the possibilities for enhancing transfer of learning to new settings. Whether or not these 'key skills' are transferable remains questionable (Halsall, 1996; Bolton &

Hyland, 2003). When an individual has to analyse a problem or to carry out procedural activities, he or she at least has to possess some basic knowledge relevant to the background of the problem. In addition, those factors which relate to people's positive or negative attitudes, motivation and values might well be transferred into different contexts; however, these factors are not usually recognised as 'skills'.

In summary, various perspectives suggest that the term 'key skills' bears no equivalence to the concept of narrow workplace skills. Although the term attempts to emphasise how these important personal abilities are urgently needed to be developed in contemporary society, the way the term 'key skills' is currently recognised and applied does not reflect their complex and comprehensive nature. This is because many of their attributes are deeply personal, are related to an individual's motivation and can only be demonstrated (and assessed) in more complex and varied social circumstances. Managerial aspects are also included, which might be transferable in some certain circumstances. The OTPAE model puts emphasis on action, on tasks and objectives, however, its aims to lead students into social interactive learning. This research will explore its impact on both 'key skills' and students learning. The question posed here is how can educators develop and assess those complex personal attitude and values by using this model? Is it possible to promote motivation? The next section will explore this further.

2.4 The communication process

According to Fullan (2007), 'meaning is motivation, motivation is energy; energy is engagement; engagement is life' (p303). This interpretation of the

relationship between meaning, motivation, energy, engagement and life provides a clue to the development of individual's value system. It might also help explain the complexity of communication abilities development. As explored in sub-section 2.3.2, there are many arguments around the concept of 'communication key skills'; however, in recent research, more and more emphasis is given to personal motivation, values and belief systems. Where do these come from? How can they be developed? This section will examine communication as a process which includes not only the individual's cognitive and affective abilities but more importantly, the interactive process, where personal motivations and values are drawn from. From the findings of the literature review thus far, it must now be recognised that 'communication key skills' teaching and learning must not only be about the development of skills, but also a process of cognition, of socialisation and social interaction.

2.4.1 Communication as a transactional and interactive process

Much communication theory emphasises the transactional and interactive nature of communication (Wiemann 1977; Hargie *et al*, 1994; Price 1996). According to Price (1996), communication should be defined as:

> an activity in which symbolic content is not merely transmitted but exchanged between human agents, who interact within a shared situational and /or discourse context.
>
> (Price, 1996, p399)

This definition emphasises the key components of exchange and interaction in communication: people share meaning and are made aware of others through this interactive exchange process.

Even the traditional communication theorists, Shannon and Weaver (1949), identified communication as a two-way interactive activity which includes a message sender and receiver. They claimed that the latter is not completely passive in the process – that is, he or she does more than simply receive information from the sender. The receiver also interprets what he or she has received, giving a response to the sender based on his or her understanding. According to Locker (1989), both a sender and a receiver have to repeat the same experience when they communicate with each other. There is a process of consideration and selection in relation to the information that is to be conveyed to the receiver. The language is encoded. The message is then transmitted by the relevant channel. The receiver has to decode and extract meaning from the message and repeat all the steps the sender has passed through before giving feedback (Locker, 1989). This is just a brief sketch of Locker's analysis, which itself draws on Shannon and Weaver. It does not aim to do justice to the rich complexity of the communicative process. This traditional model has limitations since the communication process in reality encompasses a broad range of factors such as the social context and interpersonal relationships.

2.4.2 Communication as a social process

Sigman (1987) draws attention to this interactive process of communication as a kind of interdependent activity, considering it 'a concomitant of all social life and as an exigency of social survival in general' (p124). Gerbner (1993) sees communication as a 'dynamic social process' (p15). What is interesting initially here is the notion of a

'dynamic' process which stresses not just the interactive aspect of communication but also its fluidity; its changeable and at times unpredictable nature. Communication as a socially-situated process is well researched. As Cranach and Vine (1973) point out, communication '… originates through socialization in a culturally-situated context, and the meaning of signals are considered as culturally learned' (p3).

Awareness of this can be crucial to effective communication, especially in a global community. This is because meanings and interpretations emerge through particular social and cultural contexts. The social activities and people's daily life issues strongly shape people's language and create new words through which people can exchange their information (Kress, 1996). From his perspective as a linguist, Kress points out that:

> There is therefore a habitual, though socially-determined, conjunction
> of a certain subject position and certain textual and reading positions.
> That conjunction determines the use of certain forms of language.
> Over time that habitual use becomes codified, and then becomes a code.

(p311)

The social aspect of communication impacts on the necessary features of 'communication key skills' teaching and learning, especially on teaching and learning methodologies and socio-cultural influences. Thus communication key skills must be delivered as a holistic experience in as real a situation as possible.

2.4.3 Communication as a cognitive process

A substantial amount of literature links the communication process to 'cognitive operations' (Sypher & Zorn, 1986; Delia, 2000; Griffin, 2000; Hargie & Dickson,

2004). Wyer and Gruenfeld (1995, cited by Hargie & Dickson, 2004) recommended seeing communication as an interpersonal cognitive process consisting primarily of five sub-processes: semantic encoding, organisation, storage and retrieval, inference process and response generation. What they emphasise, given their cognitive standpoint, is how people interpret the message and decode the information in their mind. This inference process in communication plays a fundamental role in enabling people to make decisions about how they should respond to the other.

Slightly differently to Wyer and Gruenfeld, Griffin (2000) thinks of the cognitive process in communication as an 'information process' consisting of five stages: sensory input, central processing, information storage, information retrieval and utilisation (pp107-9). According to him, a person's mind takes raw information discriminately at the sensory input stage. The mind tends to filter out something unexpected, leaving a mass of information 'altered to fit preconceptions and prior expectations' (p107). He highlights a 'central process' as the key where the meaning is linked to the input information. After processing in the mind, the information is stored in mental files and is retrieved and utilised when people need to express what their thinking produces (p109). Griffin's statement about the cognitive nature of the communication process explores an important relationship between information input and output that might be reflected in people's communication activities. People tend to select from the mass of raw inputting information that accords with their preconceptions and expectations. Griffin's statement demonstrates that whilst people's recognition processes may begin from information input, what is retained

might depend upon either their preconceptions or their expectations. From this point of view, for example, an individual might not retain any information due to the fact that they did not have any expectation of what they heard.

Recognising this cognitive dimension to communication is crucial for communication education pedagogy. For effective learning, the learning outcomes would need to be designed to develop students' abilities in selecting or absorbing the required information. Information processing generally is also an important component of communication courses, since it plays such significant cognitive role in the communication process.

2.4.4 Communication as affective process

The communication process is also an affective – or emotional – process. Affective expression often occurs as 'bodily experiences, expressions and feelings – physiological responses to a stimulus, rather than thoughts' (Kiely & Armistead, 2004, p27). This interpretation focuses on the role of personality in people's communication responses. Usually people use a rich nonverbal language such as facial expressions, vocal exclamations and body posture to express their emotions when communicating with others. The information people convey in their emotional expressions could be categorised as happiness, sadness, surprise, fear, anger and disgust (Zebrowitz, 1990). These emotional expressions not only determine how the perceiver understands a message's meaning but also map 'the emotion into a set of concepts representing aspects of the personality of the characters' (Martinho *et al,*

2000, p53). Zebrowitz (1990) also explores how people's emotional characteristics vary depending on such factors as age, culture, gender, expectancy and mood. Such work emphasises the important influence of the cultural context on people's emotional expressions. This point is also highlighted by several other studies (Sigman, 1987; Hargie & Dickson, 2004).

Some studies highlight the importance of the need to 'recognise emotions' in communications teaching and learning (Zebrowitz 1990; Cameron 2000). The goal of such learning is to understand others' feelings and emotions and to use such understanding in order to explain their behaviour. Spence (2003) identifies individual emotional expression skills that could be trained through a 'non-verbal responses training' model (Spence, 2003, p.90). This training model provides information on a set of particular responses and promotes emotional response skills by demonstration, rationale and practice. In contrast, Cameron (2000) emphasises how developing a vocabulary of emotional words enables a learner to talk about their feelings and identify emotional states. However, to use an emotional vocabulary might help people to express their feelings directly, but to show personal emotion in a proper manner might need long term cultural and educational experiences and a knowledge and understanding of a variety of social contexts. Whatever the recognition of the influence of emotional interaction on others or an awareness of what the emotional feedback to oneself, all learners would require lots of practice in social interactive processes. They certainly would not be captured by simply reading a textbook.

2.5 Summary of the findings in this chapter

This chapter has discussed the current need for 'communication key skills' development in Chinese vocational education. It has explored the arguments concerning the concept of 'communication key skills', the relationship between the 'communication key skills' and the broader category of 'skills' and also the relationship between 'key skills' and the concept of competence. There is also a discussion about the communication process, emphasising the complexity of the social, interactive and affective issues that influence it.

What immediately became clear from the literature is that there is no agreement about the definition of 'key skills', 'skills' or even 'competence'. Competence, and the outcomes-based model, is usually related to 'effective job performance' (Mulder *et al,* (2007) and therefore a performance standard (Grzeda, 2005). The focus of this model is on assessing and measuring students' performance that harks back to a more traditional view of the behaviourist model. Although the concept of competence has been broadened by many writers in more recent times, it is questioned whether it can be used in the development and assessment of complex communication skills and the detailed (sometimes tacit) knowledge, attitudes and values that underpin these.

One of the questions that will be raised in this research is that, at first glance, outcome models appear at odds with student-centred learning, especially when the outcome assessment is linked with predetermined performance criteria and a certain level of qualification. However, it may be possible for the competence model to be used as a way of triggering individual learning experiences, if carefully managed by the teacher.

As with the notion of competence, 'skills' often refer to activities in specific work situations. They focus on the performance of a task. On the other hand, the term 'communication key skills' must refer to the ability to understand and respond to others in a proper manner with appropriate language, to establish and mediate relationships and coordinate the solving of problems, by using various micro-communication skills. It could be also seen as the individual's ability to accomplish communicative goals by the way they coordinate their attitudes, beliefs and relevant knowledge. Although 'communication key skills' are indicated in some literature as a kind of skill, (Ruiter, 2000; Gruba & Mahmood, 2004; Littleford, 2004; Silver *et al*, 2005), the two are not equivalent. As discussed in section 2.3.2, the communication process is such a complex human activity in which not only people's commitment and logical thinking are included, but motivation, attitudes and enthusiasm are also involved. Due to their complex nature, it is unlikely that effective, high level communication skills could be developed through 'one or two training courses'. The development of effective communication key skills requires progressive cultural and social experiences and much practice in dealing with various issues and experiential situations.

Communication abilities are, as Emanuel (2007) has pointed out, 'the vehicle that allows us to recall the past, think in the present, and plan for the future' (p2). They are tools which help people make sense of their lives by enabling them to achieve their goals whilst being aware of what they are doing. The development and assessment of 'communication key skills' should focus attention both on the

participants' level of awareness – how able they are in selecting the appropriate communication activity – and on the application of the abilities of communication in a range of different, sometimes unpredictable, situations. As such, communication key skills teaching and learning should be a process of social interactive learning. The process by which students develop their abilities to draw out the real meaning of the world, the process by which they perform using knowledge, skills and key skills in various situations and the process of socialization could be seen as core to the 'communication key skills' agenda, as they are at the foundation of individual motivation. How communication key skills teaching and learning can be linked to student-centred learning methods, and whether this will be an effective approach for China will be discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter Three

Developing communication abilities by student-centred learning

3.1 Introduction

As discussed in Chapter Two, global comparisons have led Chinese vocational education institutions to become more concerned with competence-based education and 'communication key skills' development. Given the pressure on them to take action, especially by the Chinese government, educational institutions in China have to consider the conceptual nature of competence, skills and key skills so that the nature of each can be discussed and explored in relation to the Chinese context.

As it has been identified in Chapter Two, human communication is a complex and 'overlapping process' (Price, 1996, p95). A skilled communication performance is said to be 'presented as being undergirded by a complex of perceptual, cognitive, affective and performative factors operating within a person-situation framework' (Hargie *et al* 1994, p9). As such, the nature of 'communication key skills' must necessarily make a link between the communication learning process and one's own individual social experiences (Kress, 1996; Price, 1996; Harkin *et al*, 2000). Furthermore, since competence and key skills education assesses the level of task achievement in terms of learning outcomes, which themselves emphasise individuals' tangible and practical experience, it is almost inevitable that key skills teaching and learning is frequently related in the research literature to the notion of student-centred

learning and general competence education (Candy & Harris, 1990; Whitson, 1998; Harkin, 2000; Mulcahy, 2000; Weigel *et al* 2007).

Therefore, this Chapter reviews the literature regarding perspectives of student-centred learning with a view to exploring the relationship between student-centred learning and the competence-based model and analysing the distinction between the two. It will set out the basic perspectives on student-centred learning, a terrain which includes the works of such pivotal figures as Dewey (1966), Knowles (1973) and Rogers (1994). The writers that have provided the perspectives which continue to exert a profound influence over competence-based approaches are invoked both in competence and key skills development. However, this research will examine whether the competence-based model can be equated with student-centred learning, and used to inform teaching and learning in these areas. The third section explores the significance of the use of student-centred learning in communication teaching and learning. Such a move will necessarily affect the role of the teacher, and potential difficulties are explored here. A final section examines both critical perspectives on the competence-based model and problems that emerged during its implementation in western countries. It also seeks to identify possible barriers to the approach's acceptance by Chinese educators and students.

3.2 Student-centred learning and competence-based approaches

3.2.1 The notion of student-centred learning

Student-centred learning is a 'way of thinking and learning that emphasises student responsibility and activity in learning' (Cannon & Newble, 2000, p16). Light & Cox (2001) highlight that student–centred learning focuses on student outcomes rather than on teaching because 'content and knowledge occur as a result of student learning' and 'the teacher is a facilitator of this learning, having a responsibility to help students in their constructions of knowledge' (p33). These perspectives identify the four core features of student-centred learning. Firstly, they stress that students should take responsibility for their education by learning actively – that is, not relying on their teacher to tell them what they should think about, nor being dependent on established authorities. The aim is that students should produce original work. Secondly, students are supposed to manage their learning experience actively. This includes setting their study goals and handling the learning process. Thirdly, the students have to construct knowledge by themselves which encourages them to be involved in productive learning. This should allow students to develop their understanding in order to achieve their learning goals. Finally teachers, as the facilitators of learning, have to design an appropriate programme of study, organising the learning resources to meet students' learning needs, and maximising the effectiveness of the interaction between the student and his or her context of learning.

Whilst the literature on what ought to take place is clear and comprehensible, it should be noted that there is a gap between the ideal and its reality. This is especially

true in the traditional education context of China. As identified in Chapter Two, Section 2.2.2, Chinese teachers are used to following the direction of the national examination which gives signposts to teachers and follows the content of textbooks. The teachers also have to develop numerous tests to help their students to memorise this knowledge. One of the basic features of this teaching style, as Freire (2002) had revealed, could be labelled as the 'banking conception of education' in which:

> ...the scope of action allowed to the students extends only as far as receiving, filing, and storing the deposits. … [And students] are filed away through the lack of creativity transformation and knowledge in this (at best) misguided system.

<div align="right">(p72)</div>

Though Freire focuses on his democratic proposal of a problem-based education model, his critique of the dominant 'banking model of education' identifies the weakness of the Chinese traditional education system. Given this context, therefore, it is questionable whether Chinese teachers and students can easily adopt student-centred methods in communication teaching and learning.

The idea of student-centred learning has a long tradition in the west. Dewey (1938) proposes that school education should put greater stress on individual experiences and the freedom of the learner. It could be said that Dewey's view is the cornerstone of all subsequent notions concerning student-centred learning. According to him, students' own activities and experiences are the most valuable resource for their learning. He attacked severely the 'evil result' of approaches which separated cognition and experience in traditional education, pointing out that, 'learning from experience is to make a backward and forward connection between what we do and

what we enjoy or suffer from things in consequence' (Dewey, 1966, p140). He proposed that education should be based upon experience, where this experience 'is seen to be a social process'. In this social process, the teacher changes from a 'position of external boss or director' to be 'a leader of group activities' (Dewey, 1974, p59). Experiences, according to Dewey, are both the 'means and goal of education' (*ibid,* p89).

Carl Rogers (1994) continued this tradition. He points out that significant learning takes place when students are involved as a 'whole person' in activities which combine the 'logical and the intuitive, the intellect and the feelings, the concept and experience, the idea and meaning' (p37). In order to involve the student in learning activities, Rogers advocates that teachers need to 'incorporate the student-focused strategy on the continuum into a person-centred classroom' (*ibid,* p189). Rogers intended to highlight the fact that curriculum design and teaching methodology should be directed so as to pay much more attention to individual needs and contemporary social realities, and in so doing, help students to realise their individuality.

Knowles (1973) drew on similar concepts when he describes adult learners as having to be 'self-directed'. He pointed out that most adult learners have very rich experiences on which to draw for their learning; furthermore their 'readiness and problem-centred orientation to learning' can push them to more impressive achievements in knowledge, skills and competence acquisition (pp45-8). As such, the theme of Knowles' andragogical (or adult learning) model is 'the role of the learner in

planning' (1973, p109). He gives many examples of learning activities designed to involve the learner in collaborative relationships with others, and points out that this collaboration should not only be embodied in the learning processes but also in the learning that results from assessment. His argument suggests that self-direction is the basic foundation of effective learning.

Having summarised previous contributions, Kolb (1984) developed a comprehensive theory of experiential learning, in which he described what is now his well-known experiential learning cycle. The process outlined by Kolb consisted of four parts: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization and active observation. From each part of the cycle he extracted characteristics of this learning process, namely: learning as process, continuity, adaptability and creativity of knowledge. Implicit in the four characteristics is the encouragement of learners to progress repeatedly round the experiential learning cycle and thus become integrative learners (Friedman *et al,* 2002, p369).

With a slightly different focus to Dewey, Kolb's work highlighted transaction rather than interaction as the important process occurring between an individual and the environment. For learners, the learning circle involves step-by-step progress through each of the stages – that is, learners' knowledge is developed by experience from the divergent to the convergent, from the assimilative to the accommodative stage of knowledge. According to him, learning is 'the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience' (Kolb, 1984, p38).

Much of the literature agrees that student-centred learning is the best strategy for promoting students' 'social communication skills' (Price, 1996; Harkin *et al*, 2000; Gillies, 2007). Many articles suggest that student-centred learning should be a useful tool for effective student learning (Ekpenyong, 1999; Fazey & Parker, 2000; Reece & Walker, 2000; Prosser *et al*, 2000). The key point of this strategy is to help the student create his or her own meaningful learning experience or, in the words of Rogers, to 'learn how to learn' (Rogers, 1994, p152). As has been identified in Chapter Two, social interaction is a crucial factor in communications teaching and learning. The students need to be fully involved in this social interactive process to gain a sense of self-awareness and confidence. The important link between student-centred learning approaches and social interactive processes is the student's sense of 'personal agency or control as learners' (Gillies, 2007, p51) and participation in a real learning process. Thus, the 'communication key skills' teaching and learning process should be seen as a social interactive process by which a student's 'personal effectiveness in communication' that is promoted (Price, 1996). Obviously, this approach has changed teaching and learning pedagogies fundamentally because it has shifted the instructional focus from how teachers teach towards how students learn. This change presents a huge challenge to Chinese teachers.

The notion of student-centred learning was developed in China during the last century by Tao (1936), who had been Dewey's student (Wang, 2001; Song, 2008). Tao (1936) argues that practice is the first step of the learning journey and that knowledge is the result of that action（行是知之始，知是行之成

xing-shi-zhi-zhi-shi, zhi-shi-xing-zhi-cheng). He further emphasises that 'teaching by doing is real teaching, learning by doing is real learning' (cited by Song, 2008, p1). Therefore, learning should be a process in parallel with doing. In the view of Wang (2000), the essential point of Tao's educational thoughts is his emphasis on the social approach, so-called 'life is education' (Wang, 2001, p31). However, Tao's educational thoughts encountered serious criticism in 1951 due to the prevailing Chinese political context. The key point of the opposition was that Tao's educational thoughts were deemed to be a kind of 'petty bourgeoisie reformism', and the reproduction of Dewey's 'anti-revolutionary education thinking'. After this, no one in China dared to discuss Tao's educational ideas, and the new generations of teachers didn't even know who Tao was. As a result, the study of student-centred learning approaches in China became a forbidden zone for a long time (Zou, 2000). Given these circumstances, it is no surprise that communication teaching and learning in China is still today delivered by using a mainly didactic strategy. Students' learning is limited to information in their textbooks and they rarely have a chance to develop their own thinking or present creative learning outcomes.

However, influenced by student-centred perspectives on learning, many Chinese educators have come to agree that education should aim to promote individual development (Li, 2002; Zhu, 2008). The essential points of Dewey or Tao's educational thoughts have re-emerged and been studied. However, since people in China generally have a very limited knowledge of student-centred learning, implementing student-centred learning curricula and pedagogies represents a radical

change. In addition, as is emerging from the literature, the concept of student-centred learning remains ambiguous in China. For example, Her (2006) argues that student-centred learning is not suitable to be used in China because it weakens the teachers' leading role in teaching and learning (p7). As such, both the recognition of the academic and practical value of student-centred learning is still to gain wider acceptability in the contemporary Chinese education sector.

3.2.2 The competence-based model and student-centred learning

Student-centred learning has been identified by many researchers as more effectively introduced into key skills teaching and learning through the competence-based model (Whitston, 1998; Bates, 1999; Mulcahy, 2000; Eynon & Wall, 2002; Weigel *et al*, 2007). Unlike traditional education, the model is meant to be multifaceted. It underscores the importance of not only learning outcomes but also of having an integrated course design, accessible performance criteria and a suitable performance assessment (Jessup, 1990; Oates, 1992; Gokulsing *et al* 1996; Clerehan *et al* 2003). As Hyland (1994) and Whiston (1998) suggest, these features are intended to be integrated with student-centred learning approaches, aiming to promote productive, autonomous student learning.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the most significant aspect of the competence-based model is the 'learning outcome' which is defined as 'a clear and generally comprehensible description of what students are expected to know and be able to do' (Otter, 1992, p5). It proposes a 'shift of attention from structures and

method of course delivery, towards what is actually learned' (p4). The emphasis of

the 'learning outcome' is to create an individual student's own learning experiences.

This feature is firmly rooted in the notion of student-centred learning (Malcolm &

Zukas, 2001). According to Jessup (1995):

> . . . the outcomes model is based on the assumption that learning is a
> personal and individual experience and that to standardise it by adopting
> specific modes and time periods is not the most effective means for a group
> to achieve a set of learning outcomes. Individuals need to manage their own
> learning experiences in a manner which recognises where they start from,
> their preferred styles and modes of learning and the time and opportunities
> they have for learning.
>
> (p34)

Jessup's statement has provided a particular interpretation of how

student-centred learning can be integrated into the competence-based model.

According to his explanation, the learning outcomes model is not only based on the

consideration of students' attainment and their productive learning but also on

consideration of students' responsibility to manage their own learning experience.

However, as observed by Hussey and Smith (2008), though this model has been

widely used internationally in higher education, it is misused to the point of being

controversial and a bureaucratic burden (2008, p107). Many other writers argue that

the outcomes model is too simplistic and merely 'behaviourist reductionism' (Hyland,

1994; Lum, 1999; James, 2005). One of the other criticisms of the learning outcomes

model is that it does not allow teachers to apply what are generally recognised as the

key stages in the teaching and learning process, for example, 'transmit − internalize

− transfer − apply' (Dreier, 2001, p23). Further, Hussey and Smith (2008) point out

that the learning outcome is usually substituted by a performance indicator, and this means the learning outcome is 'mutated from a useful educational tool into a bureaucratic burden' (p107). Thilakaratne and Kvan (2006) reiterate that the learning outcome model is biased towards the 'occupational competence establishment' and that it cannot be accepted universally for all teaching and learning (p319).

It is evident from research literature that learning outcome assessment plays a significant role in competence and key skills teaching and learning processes (Ljungman and Silen, 2008) and this type of assessment is defined as the 'premises' of the competence-based model (Ben-David, 1999). Generally, performance skills in the worldwide vocational qualification system can be divided into 'a range of types of performance descriptors, which are used variously to accredit, assess, distinguish and categorise' (Hager, 2004, p413). This perception of outcome-based assessment places emphasis on students' attainment and encourages students to modify their behaviours through the process of outcome-based assessment development. This seems to have become an important consideration for curriculum planning and preparation of skills teaching and learning activities. As discussed in the last chapter, skills and key skills, incorporated as part of competent performance standards, have become a mainstream in vocational education in England, Australia and many EU countries (Mulcahy, 2000; Winterton *et al*, 2005). Weigel *et al* (2007) compared competence education, including key skills, in four EU member state countries (England, Germany, France and Holland) and found significant agreement that 'the most essential generic and specific competences are required for job performance' (Mulder *et al*, 2005, cited by

Weigel *et al*, 2007, p65). This perspective is widely accepted in 'communication key skills' teaching and learning practice (Luiselli *et al*, 2005; Rider *et al*, 2006; Cave *et al*, 2007).

The issue to be considered here is whether or not performance based assessment is compatible with student-centred learning. The increasing debates concerning the learning outcome model, particularly as to whether or not it is an effective approach for developing personal abilities or 'key skills' must also be taken into account. Many researchers consider the approach is deeply problematic (Lum, 1999; Canning, 2000; Eynon & Wall, 2002; Biemans *et al*, 2004; Mulder *et al*, 2007).

One focus of such arguments is the alleged 'superficiality' of the outcome assessment model (Canning, 2000; Mulder *et al*, 2007). Canning (2000) criticises the model's 'thin specification of knowledge and understanding' which he claims, 'tend[s] to emphasize surface level learning rather than deep level learning and procedural rather than conceptual knowledge' (p73). Mulder *et al* (2007) add to this debate, analysing the arguments from four selected EU member states, and finding that similar opinions exist in the German literature. Such critiques evidently fear that, as one writer puts it, the 'logical order of knowledge domains may get lost together with the educational meaning of vocational schools' (Mulder *et al* 2007, p77). Smith (1987) argues that placing 'skills' as the keystone principle can lead teachers into purely criterion-referencing assessment. He thinks that, under this model, teachers may come to renounce the holistic purposes of education, namely self-betterment, in favour of the instrumental purpose of improved skill performance. Such a role leaves

teachers as 'experts in means only' (p45). Although most of his work concerns teachers' professional development, Smith also cites the dangers of learners having only a superficial acquisition of skills as a result of poor curriculum and assessment design. The pressure on the teacher is to demonstrate what the student has learned, hence the focus is on the assessment process; what counts is the most easily measured. There is no doubt that this is a fundamental conflict between the idea of the assessment of competence and its reality. These concerns are of especial relevance to the situation in China, as demonstrated by the reaction to, and rejection of the thoughts of Tao. If competence-based learning and assessment is to function effectively in China, it must first gain widespread acceptance.

All the literature reviewed so far, however, points to the fact that the competence-based model might not be compatible with, or share the essential ideals, of student-centred learning. As Reece and Walker (2000) point out, the development of an individual's personality and self-image is promoted by a student-centred learning approach, while Biemans *et al* (2004) stress that the main weakness of the competence-based model is that it emphasises the links between learning outcomes and performance assessment, harking back to the behaviourist model of training. Although the model has a positive influence on 'skills' learning because it emphasises students' attainment, Palmerton (2005) points out that communication abilities cannot be accepted as just the ability to enact a set of skills, but must also include knowledge about how communication functions within a context. He further suggests that the recognition of communication processes is crucial to communications teaching and

learning because this facilitates an awareness of the ways in which 'communication interacts with learning, with the construction of meaning, and with the extent to which we take certain kinds of knowledge to be legitimate' (p81). This argument is consistent with the perspectives reviewed in Chapter Two which examined the complexity and overlapping nature of communication activities. These perspectives should be noted, because they provide important considerations about why the learning outcome model may not be ideally suited to effective communications teaching and learning.

3.3 The significance of student-centred learning in communications teaching and learning

As mentioned in Chapters One and Two, many researchers place great emphasis on student-centred learning, seeing it as a vital approach to effective communication teaching and learning (Price, 1996; Harkin *et al*, 2000; Gillies, 2007). Several studies go on to show that the development of effective key skills in communication is associated with improved vocational or social outcomes (for example, Luiselli *et al*, 2005; Rider *et al*, 2006; Cave *et al*, 2007). The literature indicates that it is possible for student-centred learning in communication key skills development to take a number of forms, including social interactive learning, team-based learning and student autonomous learning. These will be discussed individually below.

3.3.1 Social interactive learning approaches

Due to the fundamental role played by social communication skills in any communication process, many studies advocate strengthening social communication

skills training rather than focusing simply on speaking skills (Zebrowitz 1990**;** Cameron 2000). The design of effective communication teaching and learning programmes should place emphasis on social approaches. The aim is to provide students with an 'active and individual learning process in a rich and complex learning environment' (Van Weert & Pilot, 2003, p197).

Embedding learning within a social context or certain social situation has a specific meaning in communications teaching and learning. As discussed in Chapter Two, human communication behaviours are shaped by their social and cultural context. This suggests that 'communication key skills' development is based on individuals developing their communication abilities through social interactive processes. According to Kukulu *et al* (2006), it is only through a social interactive approach that students can learn 'how to interact appropriately with others'*,* and how to adapt to new working environments and live in relative harmony within society (p28*)*.

Much research indicates that interactive learning is not only a question of what happens between the learner and the learning environment but also of what occurs between learners and their peers (Cameron, 2000; Sprague, 2002; Spence, 2003; Dionne *et al*, 2004; King, 2006). King (2006), for example, suggests that interactive teaching and learning is a two-way process in which teachers modify their approach in response to learners' needs whilst, simultaneously, learners interact with peers, teachers and their environment. This provides a particularly useful portrayal of effective social communication teaching and learning. Morreale and Backlund (2002),

in presenting parts of an important USA educational document named 'Classification of Instructional Programs 2000' indicate that communication education should focus on 'the general communication processes and dynamics within organizations'. Their recommendation is to endorse an approach which embeds instructions within interpersonal groups so that communication could assist in socialising and supporting employees and team members (cited by Morreale & Backlund, 2002, p7). These perspectives focus on applying group learning in productive organizations, where learners are influenced by the particular organisational environment. Placed in given workplace circumstances, individual students' social communication style is moderated by contextual interactive activities. For example, in order to fully understand others' thinking and their individual needs, a skilled communicator has to ascertain what these are through empathetic conversation which 'conveys respect for the other person' (Adler & Elmhost, 1996). Without care for others, people are less likely to have 'a sympathetic response to the joy and sorrows of others' (Gsuthier, 1971, p141). Indeed, training people to be 'other oriented' and 'more flexible, more team-oriented, better at resolving the conflicts and controlling the emotion' (Cameron, 2000, p179) has practical implications for an individual's career development, especially in contemporary society.

3.3.2 Team-based learning

Some studies use the term 'team-based learning' to describe group learning strategies that promote communication abilities (Argyle & Kendon, 1972; Harkin *et*

al, 2000; Livingstone & Lynch, 2000; Ortega *et al*, 2006; Thompson *et al*, 2007)**.** The central feature of this model is that its learning activities are designed, organised, managed and assessed by the group of learners themselves. Callaghan *et al* (1994) summarise the benefits of group learning as helping students to develop their cognitive skills while also serving as a foundation for 'personal growth*'* due to the fact that it is a 'means of enhancing social skills' (cited by Livingstone & Lynch 2000, p328). Harkin *et al* (2000) highlight the importance of learning in a group in which learning becomes 'a communal affair in which a range of communal activities holds the group together' (p38). As Kilpatrick *et al* (1999) point out, group learning is about 'learning how the community behaves, what processes to follow, what attitudes and values to hold' (p131). Obviously, those perspectives again emphasise the social educational value of team-based learning.

Owing to its complexity and cross-disciplinary content, an effective team-based learning design must consider two factors. Firstly, the course or project design may have to integrate key skills training within specific tasks. Secondly, the teacher has to organise the whole class into smaller cohorts of students to ensure that 'the learning environment is structured so that students work together towards a common learning goal' (Prichard *et al* 2006, p119).

However, Parson and Drew (1996) express doubts about the team-based learning model. They are concerned that clever students would not get 'sufficient credit for their work', whilst lazy students would be able to hide their inadequacy under the cloak of group anonymity. They point out that this could lead to a lack of

differentiation in grading despite students' unequal group contributions (cited by Livingstone & Lynch, 2000, p327). These may be valid points, but in the context, to give credit to the student might not the whole educational purpose, especially when considering the development of communication skills. To encourage students to deal effectively with others is one of the important goals of communication education, and this might be started by trusting, respecting, understanding and tolerating others. The cohesion of the team, the team processes and the quality of the team's outcomes will all have an influence on each individual in the group. This influence may not result in a certain score or grade, but would be reflected in the individual's increased ability to cooperate in a group (Dionne *et al*, 2004). The bigger question here is how, and to what extent, the individual learning within teams can be demonstrated, as well as how the pressure of assessment can have a negative effect on the teaching and learning process.

It is clear that communications teaching and learning cannot be isolated from the cultural context in which it occurs. As Zebrowitz (1990) points out, a person's communicative behaviour is 'conditional upon certain situations, temporal, or internal states' which themselves reflect his/her cultural background (p41). For example, in many western countries, with their concern for human rights, individual success, equality and being 'up-front' with others, people are generally more self-aware. In contrast, people who grew up within a collective culture such as in China pay more attention to duties, norms, roles and 'losing face' (Jyengar & Brockner, 2000, cited in Hargie & Dickson, 2004, p318). While assertiveness seems perfectly valid, and

indeed natural, to one from a country dominated by an individualistic culture, it may not be seen as appropriate behaviour by Chinese people with a more collectivist culture. Therefore, whether or not team-based learning strategies could be effectively used in the Chinese education sector requires more empirical evidence, which it is hoped this study might provide.

3.3.3 Autonomous learning and self-reflection

As an important strategy, reflective pedagogy has been fairly well defined in contemporary key skills teaching and training. Burke & Dunn (2006) illustrate the value of reflexive pedagogy in students' key skills learning:

> A reflexive pedagogical approach enables the students to revisit the process involved in producing a piece of assessed work in order to evaluate and build on their experiences and positions as learners**.**
>
> (Burke & Dunn, 2006, p220)

This statement highlights that effective teaching and learning should lead students to the understanding and realisation of their study goals. This, in turn, should enable them to select and organise their own educational resources and consider everything that they have learnt in terms of their goals and feelings (Ekpenyong, 1999). The objective of reflection here is not solely to make the learning more reflexive and purposeful, but also to engage the students and teachers:

> 'in critical consideration of their subjective relation to knowledge by positioning them as knowing subjects.... drawing on and challenging their experiences, understandings, values and identities'
>
> (Burke, 2002, cited by Burke & Dunn, 2006, p221).

It is generally considered that the advantage of implementing a reflective strategy is that students can learn procedures for managing their own learning (Race, 2005; Nicol & Dick, 2006).

This reflective strategy is very important for communication key skills teaching and learning. This is because learning that involves regular feedback allows the learner to make sense of what they have done and to 'clarify and take ownership of the need to learn as defined by the intended learning outcomes' by associating the outcomes with regular reflections, feedback and assessments (Race, 2005, p95). The general consensus in the literature is that a reflective approach can really help students 'learn to learn'. By constantly undergoing a period of reflection, learners become more self–directed, self-assured and self-regulating; characteristics that make effective learning possible. However, it is clear that such a reflective approach cannot be effective by using outcomes-based assessment once or even twice; Rider *et al* (2006) acknowledge that reflective practice must take a longitudinal approach, in which repeat opportunities must be provided.

The idea of autonomy in learning is quite different to long-established Chinese concepts of education. China has a very traditional saying in the 'Three Character Classic' (which has existed for more than a thousand years) that teachers take the main responsibility for the effectiveness of teaching and learning. So, 'the teacher's laziness should be blamed if the implementation of teaching and learning is not effective' (教不严，师之惰。Jiao-Bu-Yan, Shi-Zhi-Guo, Fu, 2008). This Chinese educational 'bible' has been disseminated from the South Song（南宋，AD

1127-1279) Dynasty and has become one of the most famous children's books in China. 'Three-centred teaching' (as discussed in Chapter One) has dominated the Chinese education sector since 1949, and almost every Chinese individual understands the concept of the teacher being the first person in charge of the quality and success of learning. Her (2006) brings this argument into the present day, suggesting that student-centred learning is not a 'proper' teaching method because it relieves teachers of the responsibility for teaching and learning. His perspective suggests that student-centred learning reduces the role of teachers, as if their activity diminishes when they are implementing this pedagogical model. Evidence suggests, however, that he has underestimated the complexity of the teacher's role in student-centred learning, and there will be further discussion of this in the next section.

Despite this, Chinese educators have started to advocate the development of a student-centred learning curriculum, and the emphasis is now beginning to shift from teacher-centred to student-centred learning (Li, 2002; Liang, 2005; Zhu, 2008). The problem is how to further disseminate this into widespread educational practice in China. As a start, the competence-based approach, by its very nature, might prove to be the key in moving away from the present 'spoon feeding' teaching style in favour of one more concerned with developing autonomous learning on the part of students, especially in the area of key skills. However, how to develop a student's self-awareness and improve their self-management and self-directed learning is still unexplored in China.

3.3.4 Multiple teachers' roles in student-centred learning

However, different educational models or approaches in themselves cannot impact directly on learning; their effectiveness depends on why and how they are used. Hence, teachers' understanding of their new roles and how they adapt to new approaches are identified by many researchers as a key issue in the effectiveness of student-centred learning (Reece & Walker, 2000; Coles *et al*, 2004; Dickman, 2008). During the implementation of a key skills learning programme, teachers have various responsibilities in their new role. According to Coles *et al* (2004), the teacher must have the ability to diagnose learners' needs, design and plan training programmes, develop and use teaching and learning techniques, manage the learning process, provide learner support, assess learning outcomes as well as reflecting upon their own performance and the meeting of professional requirements. Therefore, the role of the teacher has shifted from 'a purveyor of information' (Reece & Walker, 2000, p5) to being a curriculum designer, a facilitator for students' learning, a manager of learning activities and an assessor of learning outcomes. These roles will now be examined in turn.

3.3.4.1 Curriculum designer

In his book entitled 'The Learner-Centred Curriculum', Nunan (1989) examines the implementation of migrant education language programmes in Australia and points out that:

… in a learner-centred educational system, it is the teacher who
is the principal agent of curriculum development'

<div align="right">(p152)</div>

Nunan's perspective of the teacher's role in curriculum design has been addressed by many researchers (Harden & Crosby, 2000; Gibbons & Gray, 2002; Van Weert & Pilot, 2003). According to Nunan, at the practical level, the curriculum depends on 'what the teachers actually do' (Nunan, 1989, p1). As such, the recognition of the teacher's key role in curriculum design and in the development of teaching and learning materials is widely accepted in the notion of student-centred learning (Harden & Crosby, 2000), and it is expected that an individual teacher will bridge any gap that might exist between the requirements of the curriculum and the needs of the students in practice (Kelly, 1982; Postance, 2008).

Substantial evidence is available of a range of teachers' practices in providing materials and activities for student experiential learning, especially in key skills. These include 'task-based' (Benett, 1999; Gibbons & Gray, 2002; Van Weert & Pilot, 2003), 'problem-based' (Thomas, 1997; Shelton & Smith, 1998; Knowlton, 2005) and 'performance-based' models (Hammon & Ancess, 1996; Grabinger, *et al* 1997). The purpose of these multiple learning activities is to create a positive learning experience which will motivate students to participate actively in the learning process. As Gibbons and Gray (2002) point out, teachers should design tasks that 'trigger' learning experiences. The importance of designing appropriate tasks to promote active learning has now become paramount. This view is developed by Spence (2003), who

considers that any communication course should act 'as real–world discriminative cues for triggering positive social interaction' (Spence, 2003, p90).

Creating an effective social context or interactive learning environment needs very deliberate planning. Dolmans *et al* (2005) consider that the key principle of problem-based learning is to encourage students 'toward constructive, self-directed, collaborative and contextual learning' in a way such that there is an 'alignment between all aspects of the curriculum' (p376). As they point out, this principle requires teachers to be trained to equip students with the skills necessary to plan and run programmes that promote students' independent learning.

However, in recent years, only limited attention has been given to the development of teachers' knowledge of curriculum development in China. Inadequate training and the lack of the necessary authority for teachers to make changes to the existing curriculum has resulted in teachers not being involved in curriculum development. This has seriously restricted both higher education curriculum reform and the implementation of new pedagogies (Peng & Lei, 2008). Unless teachers are provided with the skills and the authority to develop curricula to meet their own students' needs, it is difficult to see how student-centred learning can become a reality in China.

3.3.4.2 Learning facilitator

The role of the teacher as a facilitator of learning activities is also an important influence (Dickman, 2008). As identified in Chapter Two, 'communication key skills'

are complex, integrating multiple facets such as cognitive, affective and social interactive processes. As such, to be an effective facilitator, teachers have to work in different ways to help students achieve their learning outcomes. For example, Dickman (2008) points out that it is important for teachers to involve their students in 'thinking about their own planning and encouraging them to take control of their own cognitive process' (2008, p123). His perspective suggests that teachers should develop students' cognitive processes by using relevant information as well as to 'control, evaluate and monitor learning through metacognitive techniques' (*ibid*). Armitage *et al* (2003) develop this theme of deep learning, explaining that it depends on an individual's response to a whole situation. Concerning such learning, they claim:

> It is a cognitive process which involves acquiring new information which enables the learner to evolve and transform their existing knowledge and then check out and apply the new state of knowledge to new situation, and so the process goes on.
>
> (Armitage *et al*, 2003, p76)

This statement illuminates how the cognitive processes in any learning context are part of a dynamic relationship with situated practices. Driven by a goal-oriented situation, students have to search relevant information to find a solution. Only after the personal process of brainstorming, thinking, analysing, deducing, integrating and synthesising can students experience a 'flash of inspiration' and obtain a new understanding. Therefore, it is crucial for a teacher to create or manipulate the situation properly and promote 'sense-making' (Ross and Dewdney, 1998) in the learning setting. These perspectives are extremely important for communication teaching and learning because cognitive processes play a very important role in

developing learners' ability to decode specific references in the discourse 'easily, rapidly, concisely and consistently' (Chiu *et al*, 1998, p263).

Skelton (2005) points out that 'excellent' teaching is characterised by effective transaction and interaction between teachers and students, and that this requires teachers to understand students' learning needs and their personal learning styles. He considers that this is a precondition for a teacher to offer experiences which make it possible for students to 'adopt a deep approach to their learning and achieve their predicted outcomes' (p31). As already discussed, social approaches and team–based learning strategies also encourage teachers to establish a new relationship with their students, and this relationship is better described as a collective partnership rather than a presentation of knowledge (Grabinger *et al,* 1997). Mcgill & Brockbank (2004) describe this learning situation as a 'rowing boat' and the 'facilitator is becoming one of crew' (p190).

This shift towards a 'collective partnership' may be difficult to achieve in the current Chinese higher education climate. As Wu (2002) points out, the Chinese teacher is:

> remote, austere, highly respected, strict, demanding, parental, unforgiving, meticulous, punitive, quoting Confucius, quoting correct conservative authorities, and with the aim of producing good hard working loyal and obedient citizens.
>
> (cited by Skelton, 2005, p105)

Given this background, for the individual Chinese teacher to accommodate such a different concept of their role will be challenging and may take a long time.

3.3.4.3 Manager of learning activities

Though student-centred learning might help students gain more practical learning experiences, it is doubtful whether it makes the achievement of specific objectives any easier, at least without a well-conceived plan which is managed by the teacher. This applies especially to managing social interaction processes in learning. According to Harden and Crosby (2000), the teacher manages each step of the learning process, such as course planning, resource development, the facilitation of learning and outcome assessment.

Spence (2003) argues that the effectiveness of any teaching and learning method varies depending on such factors as the age of the learner, the learning outcomes, the length of the follow-up period for assessment, the location and lastly, the individuals involved with the learner. He further suggests that teachers should consider using a variety of methods to enhance long-term learning in communication and social skills. This perspective suggests that it does not matter what kind of curriculum or instructional model is used, as without the teacher's thoughtful and detailed planning and management of students' learning resources, such activities may be futile. The need for effective curriculum development has already been discussed. As Hager (2004) describes that key skills 'training packages' are normally delivered together with a set of criteria or competence standards. These provide 'the specification of the knowledge and skills and the application of that knowledge and skills to the standard of performance required in employment' (p416). These packages equip the learner with a 'tracking sheet' – that is, a record sheet for the students on which they should

note all concrete evidence of their progress. However, what they do not usually do is provide guidance to the teacher on how these learning outcomes should be achieved. The management of this process depends on the teacher, as the leader of group activities (Dewey, 1974). This role in the management of student learning is deemed an emergent one for Chinese teachers.

3.3.4.4 Assessor of learning outcomes

In competence-based assessment the teacher frequently takes sole responsibility for the assessment of his or her students, with some external verification, but usually, with no external examinations for the students. According to Harden and Crosby (2000), the teacher has the responsibility not only for assessing the students' learning outcomes but also for evaluating the effectiveness of the course as delivered. This is a new departure for Chinese teachers.

In terms of student assessment, Hammond & Ancess (1996) highlight that the performance assessment should be social, situated and task oriented. It could be incremental or longitudinal, in that the teacher should help their students to set incremental standards to develop their higher level skills. Allen (2002) demonstrates how to utilise a systematic assessment plan to develop a communication skills programme. He includes behavioural observation, skills assessment and student self-assessment activities which provide learners with a range of learning and performance processes. This allows students to be assessed according to the standards of skill performance they display throughout the task. The ideas here suggest that, for

effective teaching and learning in communication key skills, assessment must move away from bureaucratic, tedious examinations to vivid, practical and individualised assessment systems. The belief is that even if assessment is essential, it can be an insight into the processes and skills of learning, rather than simply the demonstration of memory. Here, assessment becomes part of the learning process. Again, this is a new idea in China.

Gokulsing et al (1996) point to another, philosophical shift that occurs in the assessment of learning outcomes, a change profoundly different to the traditional examination:

> …they are based upon a foundation of standards relating to the outcomes of learning, assessment relates entirely to the individuals performance against NVQ criteria rather than compared to the performance of others, there is no percentage pass mark –either you are competent, or you are not. Assessment can be (and usually is) carried out in the workplace, there is no time limit on completion of assessment and there is no specified courses of learning or study.
>
> (p38)

While this description links the criteria for assessment or the performance standard with a certain level of professional working context, the assessment method is also changed radically. Firstly, Gokulsing *et al* point out that, typically, the assessment has 'no time limit on completion of assessment', which implies a distinction between this and traditional examinations. This type of assessment is not the same as one where students sit all together in a big room and finish their answer sheets in the required time. Clearly, such a system is ineffective for the assessment of communication abilities. Secondly, learning outcome assessment is, according to Benett (1999), based on a set of tasks that provides possibilities for comparing student assessments

and self-assessments from placement to placement (Benett, 1999, p286), thus making the skills transferable. Such an assessment model requires students to reflect on their performance with the 'common fact that underpins performance' and manage their time effectively since it is incumbent upon them to finish their work before their assessment takes place. Thirdly, unlike traditional examinations, students are not measured or judged against each others' performance, but only on their ability to complete the task to the required level. There is no percentage pass mark, no ranking of students in class order. Again, this is markedly different to the existing Chinese system.

Fourthly, the whole assessment design has changed from one where local education authorities produce the examinations to one where the teacher has much more overall discretion. Although the national criteria have statements of standard performance for each level of skill, teachers still need to decode and interpret the national criteria before embodying them as learning units suitable for a particular learning milieu. Yet they must assess according to nationally recognised, professional standards at a level of competence which may be understood by those in a specific profession but may be difficult to recognise unless the teacher has training or experience in that profession.

While such perspectives place outcomes-based assessment into wider professional or sociological contexts which is to be welcomed, other researchers argue that it is very difficult, if not impossible, to implement (Eynon & Wall, 2002; Biemans *et al*, 2004). Eynon and Wall (2002) point out that both outcome statements

and assessment criteria are not easy to formulate. Primarily, it is difficult to break down the assessments into specific performance criteria. Secondly, Biemans *et al* (2004), in examining problems that arose during the implementation of an outcomes-based programme in the Netherlands, concluded that it is hard to standardise assessments satisfactorily. In addition, attitudes and values cannot usually be measured; as discussed in Chapter Two, this raises questions about the validity of such assessment where communication key skills are involved.

Ecclestone (1999) points out that, although outcome-based assessment can promote students' active learning and learner autonomy, it also endangers more critical, open-ended notions of student-centred learning. As she says:

> In particular, once learning outcomes and tighter assessment criteria are taken beyond a legitimate role in designing learning programmes and making assessment more rigorous, they seem to produce epistemological quagmires that take on a self-fulfilling life of their own.
>
> (p36)

This perspective is very important in the context of the assessment of communication key skills, which necessarily should be more open-ended. This is because communication skills assessment is compounded by cultural, ethical, critical, emotional and many others complex factors. These multiple dimensions cannot be simply pre-defined into exact specifications. The study by Higgins *et al* (2001) strongly supports Ecclestone's perspective; they point out that learning outcome assessment should be seen as a communication process rather than as simply making a judgment:

> Feedback may need to be more dialogical and ongoing. Discussion, clarification and negotiation between student and tutor can equip students

with a better appreciation of what is expected of them, and develop their understanding of academic terms and appropriate practices….

(Higgins *et al,* 2001, p274)

Thus communication about the assessment process can become part of the development of communication skills. Nevertheless, learning outcome assessment must focus on the fact that 'communicative interaction is influenced by the varying situations–contexts in which it could be performed' (Borg, 2003, p27).

Another factor which should be considered is that teachers' workload increases considerably when learning outcome assessments are employed. This includes developing the relevant assessment tasks, often associated with different contexts, and developing a set of relevant teaching and learning materials (Ban-David, 1999).

All things considered, teachers potentially face a great challenge in adjusting to a student-centred system. This is especially true for Chinese teachers. According to Han *et al* (2008), insufficient knowledge, outdated perspectives of teaching and learning, lack of experience in the design of active teaching materials and 'improper teaching behaviours' could be perceived as barriers for Chinese teachers changing from a didactic model to a more student-centred, experiential learning approach (pp42-3). Learning outcome assessment has not only changed assessment methodology but also the whole teaching and learning environment. For instance, as well as the new demands on teachers, educational institutions might need to establish connections between themselves and various workplaces which can provide a real occupational context for teaching and learning. This may be necessary to ensure that teachers engage in the design of assessments that meet both their students' and local employers' particular needs.

It is likely, therefore, that Chinese teachers will need to experience a process of 'reconstruction of teacher culture' (Zhang, 2008, p49). This will include the development of their knowledge and skills in outcomes based assessment and student-centred learning and promoting their ability to implement the new programmes.　Because of the substantial cultural shift, it may require a rebuilding of their belief and value systems.

3.4. Barriers to change in the Chinese education system

As has been explained, in response to social and economic changes, vocational education institutions in China have to redesign their teaching and learning environments to adopt student-centred learning and competence-based models (Sluijsmans *et al*, 2008). As these models are a fundamental move away from traditional teaching and learning in China, it is inevitable that certain problems and barriers to successful implementation will be encountered. Research literature has identified that barriers such as resistance to change, the mechanics of curriculum development, inadequate teaching skills and a lack of learning resources could have a negative impact when new pedagogies are implemented (Stenhouse, 1975; Fullan, 1991; Rudduck, 1991).

As mentioned in Chapter Two, a specific 'teacher, classroom, textbook centred' and 'examination–based education' has dominated China's education sector for a long time. Therefore, the implementation of student-centred learning could possibly encounter many difficulties. For example, a number of recent Chinese studies provide a clear description of the problems which might stand in the way of

changes to teaching and learning pedagogies (Gu, 2008; Han *et al*, 2008; Zhang & Wu, 2008; Zhou, 2008).

3.4.1 Teachers' attitude to change

Gross *et al* (1971) identify four barriers that teachers may encounter when they implement curriculum innovations. These include a 'lack of clarity about the new model; lack of the necessary skills and knowledge to carry it out and unavailability of required materials and equipment' (pp196-8). Stenhouse (1975) suggests that the reasons for this resistance stems from four sources: firstly, the school's capacity to provide sufficient resources**;** secondly, social perspectives which may mean that many might wish to keep to traditional teaching and learning methods, and parents, for example, may be concerned about the changes; thirdly, teachers may be resistant to change because the new ways of working are different to their 'control habits'; and finally, coping with the changes and developing competence in new ways of working mean more hard work for teachers (pp166-9).

Focusing specifically on China, Gu (2008) has identified that the first problem that may arise in implementing the new system stems from the ideological gap between government initiatives and teachers' motivation for reform. He points out that, as the teacher plays a key role in educational reform, their advocacy is crucial for success. He suggests that educational institutions should place more emphasis on the key role of the teacher in student-centred learning and give more recognition to the important role teachers' play. Hence, institutions should aim to construct a new

environment in which teacher motivation, teacher training and resource provision are effectively addressed.

The perspective above gives some indication of the complexity of teacher involvement in pedagogical reform. This not only requires teachers to change their attitudes to innovation but also educational leaders, who need to acknowledge the significant role that teachers play. As teachers have a key role in 'shaping learning for a particular group of learners' (Harkin *et al*, 2000, p75), the new curriculum has to be defined, planned and implemented by each individual teacher. Hence, educational institutions must pay much more attention to the creation of a learning milieu in which teachers will be supported and motivated and pedagogical innovation encouraged.

3.4.2 Responsibility for curriculum development

Zhou (2008) argues that the weaknesses that occur in existing Chinese teaching relate to the narrow curriculum, outdated course content, passive learning methods and the collective use of didactic teaching methods. He suggests that new curriculum developments need to be supported not only from a new system of curriculum management, but also through investment and changes to the policy of teacher employment. The constructive idea here is that the existing curriculum management mechanism, in which curriculum development and the curriculum itself are totally controlled by the central government, should be disestablished. Instead, a mechanism

of 'multidimensional curriculum development' should be formulated (p2). Ideally, this should involve staff at all levels, teachers and managers.

In many English-speaking countries, an integrated model which links 'top-down' and 'bottom up' strategies is employed for key skills curriculum development (Kirk & MacDonald, 2001). Bernstein (1993), for example, described the relationship between 'meaning–making', and the 'production of meaning'. According to him, pedagogical discourse is a kind of 'regulative discourse' made by the meaning-making level; it has to be connected with the 'instructional discourse' used in educational institutions (cited by Kirk and Macdonald, 2001, pp553-4) For teachers, change is more difficult if it is introduced in complex terms that are more relevant to institutional purposes than their own needs. Kirk and Macdonald (2001) explain that regulative discourse provides general knowledge and raw material for the construction of instructional discourse. For example, in China, each local education department or educational institution takes responsibility for the curriculum, textbook–writing and policy-making, according to the demands of local economic development and perceived student learning needs. In future, it may be necessary to encourage senior teachers to make their own contribution to curriculum reform processes; ideally, teachers should be involved as well, as they are most likely to understand the needs of their students.

Morreale & Backlund (2002) agree, explaining the Classification of Instructional Programs 2000 (CIP) in the USA is a 'descriptive model'. CIP outlines the range of tasks which should be undertaken in the various American education institutions.

However, this model stresses that each programme should be 'informed by the institutional mission' (p7). This curriculum model promotes curriculum development that involves teachers as course designers and also creates the possibility that teachers can develop the course to meet their particular students' needs or the requirements of the organisational culture.

Despite having the largest population of any country in the world, China's diverse geographic resources mean that some provinces have stronger economies than others. Each location has its specific local features of culture and history, which need to be acknowledged in the development of communication key skills. Therefore, teachers and educators involved in such curriculum development must have an awareness of local economic and social requirements. If the Chinese government and policy makers are to create an appropriate environment to engage teachers in curriculum reform, the 'top-down' curriculum model is not appropriate. It could not be adapted to the social demands and development requirements of individual organisations and local economies. As Kelly (1982) points out:

> … it is increasingly apparent that real and effective curriculum
> development must go on within individual schools rather than by
> the creation of projects or other innovations hatched out in some
> central place detached from the realities of any actual school situation.
>
> (p24)

Therefore it is clear that curriculum development needs to take place with the engagement of teachers. This is also true for the development of teaching and learning in communication key skills. Without the involvement of schools and teachers who can focus on developments based on the various demands of their particular situations, key skills development is likely to be ineffective and unsuccessful.

3.4.3 The management and provision of resources

As Lea *et al* (2003) point out, student-centred learning requires 'as much in the way of resources as other methods' (p322). Learning is best described as 'situated' since knowledge construction would be impossible without interaction in a variety of contexts. These include teachers, peers, teaching materials and other learning resources, problem situations and, of course, a particular time frame.

Fullan (1991), drawing strongly on the research of Louis and Miles (1990), presents what he sees as the six key factors for creating an organisational environment which is conducive to change, hence promoting teacher adaptability. These factors are vision, evolutionary planning, staff empowerment, resource mobilisation, problem-coping and restructuring (p81). These six interrelated factors highlight a common understanding about the meaning of change and the significance of the interaction between top managers and teachers, teachers and other staff, as well as the need for a collaborative work culture. This is because the central purpose of the six factors is to establish a positive and supportive management system which is underpinned by a new shared policy. The successful implementation of educational reform depends on creating an environment in which teachers, staff and managers can share best practice. In such an environment, adequate teaching resources can be supplied and any problems can be quickly resolved, using evaluation and feedback to monitor the change process. Therefore, these six factors are considered to be of great importance in improving the effectiveness of teaching and learning during times of

change. However, they could also become barriers if participation in the reform process is not both top-down and bottom-up.

Fullan (1991) is a well-known writer on the management of educational change, and his 'six factors' statement has congruence in China. In the opinion of Zhang and Wu (2008), for example, teachers need to remove themselves from their current, isolated work environment and interact with peers and those in other organisations to adapt more easily to curriculum reform. They further suggest that education requires adequate resources in order to provide pleasant, co-operative settings where teachers can work together. Given the above discussion of teacher involvement, this requirement is crucial to the implementation of competence-based and student-centred learning approaches.

Many articles stress that key skills teaching and learning programmes should accurately simulate the real-life occupational situations that learners can expect to encounter in their work lives (Irving & Smith, 1986; Race, 2005; Weigel *et al*, 2007). Yet, some writers reveal that the 'lack of strong connection between schools and enterprise' may be another impediment in developing new employment-focused curricula (Lan & Lo, 2008). Lan & Lo suggest that, currently, there are insufficient links between Chinese vocational educational institutions and the workplace, and they go on to suggest that Chinese teachers should be required to 'complete an internship with a business every year to enhance their understanding of the changing needs of the workplace' (p201). This would add all sorts of difficulties to a system already overburdened by change, and Lan & Lo themselves point out that it would be hard for

teachers to find the opportunities for suitable placements since 'enterprises usually perceive that teacher internship would interrupt their production schedule' (*ibid*). However, in the longer term it might be possible for local government and vocational institutes to work together to develop a deeper partnership with industrial and business organisations in order to develop a successful, relevant competence–based education.

3.5 Summary

Chinese institutes of higher vocational education have acknowledged that the development of vocational and key skills is central to social change. They have begun to examine pedagogies which will help develop such skills, including outcomes-based and student-centred learning. The literature reviewed in this Chapter suggests that student-centred learning could potentially make a valuable contribution to the improvement of communication teaching and learning, mainly through social interactive approaches. However, this literature review makes a clear distinction between competence-based models and the notion of student-centred learning. As interactive communication processes are complex and take place at many levels (Borg, 2003), student-centred learning is likely to be more suitable for use in communications teaching and learning rather than using a purely competence-based model.

What is immediately evident from the literature is that the introduction of such new teaching pedagogies in China will make fundamental changes to both teachers' and students' roles. In this review, the key role for the teacher that has emerged is a

multiple one: curriculum designer, learning facilitator and manager of learning activities as well as, importantly, assessor. This is likely to have a marked effect on Chinese teachers' workloads. Similarly, the students in this particular learning environment are expected to become autonomous learners, active thinkers and self assessors and take responsibility for their own learning.

One of the aims of this research is to evaluate the implementation of a new model, OTPAE, in the development of a communication key skills curriculum. The aim is to help individual teachers adapt a new student-centred learning approach and to develop courses that better meet the needs of the particular groups of students. As analysis of the literature in this chapter shows, there are many potential barriers to be faced before the new curriculum can be implemented effectively. The lack of common understanding about student-centred learning, resistance from traditional Chinese education institutions and its professionals and low levels of teacher motivation might all be impediments. Furthermore, Chinese teachers' lack of relevant professional knowledge and competence to deliver student-centred provision, as well as inadequate teaching and learning resources are likely to be substantial hurdles.

The problem for all the teachers, but especially for those in China, is the need to demonstrate what students have learned by means other than class examinations. At present, low level rote learning, copying and repetitive tasks all take places, and these place fewer demands on teachers and students alike. Such outcomes are more easily measured than complex communication abilities, which, it is argued, can only be

developed effectively through student-centred learning and outcomes-based assessments.

However, whether or not these approaches could succeed with Chinese teachers and students in a Chinese context needs to be explored more fully; hence this research and the introduction of a practical, pilot programme whose implementation can be evaluated and contextualised and from which valuable experiences might be discovered and further explored.

3.6 Summary of the main findings from the literature that have implications for this study

In this chapter and in Chapter two, a large body of literature has been investigated. This relates to notions of communication, of student-centred learning and the perspectives and the arguments that have emerged in the past 30 years around the concepts of 'skills', 'key skills' and 'competence'. The main findings from the literature that have implications for this study can be summarised as follows:

1. There is an obvious demand for an effective communication curriculum in the Chinese vocational education sector. This is to meet Chinese students' learning needs which have arisen as a result of economic development and globalisation and is now a government educational priority.

2. Previous studies have demonstrated that communication skills are complex and integrated not only with individual abilities in reading, writing, listening and speaking, but also with personal attitudes, values and motivations. Such complexity cannot be accepted as simply a 'skill'.

3. Research has shown that communication abilities develop through socialisation

processes and the construction of meaning through interaction with others. Therefore, communication abilities cannot be learnt and assessed in isolation.

4. Student-centred learning has been identified in the literature as an appropriate methodology for teaching and learning, especially for the development of communication abilities.

5. Student-centred learning tends to be linked with competence-based methods of learning and assessment, but many writers have criticised this approach for its simplistic, criterion-referenced assessment strategies that do not adequately capture the performance of complex tasks.

6. It is suggested that the teacher's role in creating a successful student-centred learning environment is central, and that they should be involved in designing learning experiences that best meet the needs of their students as well as having an input into curriculum development.

7. Adequate resources, including teacher time, learning resources and professional development must be provided to support student-centred learning.

Next chapter will discuss the research methodologies employed in this research.

Chapter Four

Research Methodology used in this study

4.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews the research methodologies used in this study. As introduced in Chapter One, the communication key skills' framework and criteria were initiated by the Chinese government. The Chinese National Occupational Skills Test Authority (OSTA) and the Chinese Employment Technical Training and Direction Centre (CETTEC) recommended a competence-based model entitled Objective-Tasks-Preparation-Action-Evaluation (OTPAE) to the vocational education sector with the hope of engendering key skills development in China. The CETTEC proposed a research programme called 'Research on the Theory and Implementation of Key Skills Training for Employment', and I was asked to lead the evaluation of the implementation of the 'communication key skills' teaching and learning.

As also mentioned in Chapter One, although this research maintains its independent nature as outlined below, it has a responsibility also to answer some practical questions which have concerned the government, since my research was recognised as one of the themes of the CETTEC research programme. At the same time, this research is focused on how teachers and students understand and interpret the nature of 'communication key skills' and the impact of student-centred learning on them and their colleges. I needed therefore to base my research on teachers' and students' perceptions of the changes, including the implementation of student-centred

learning in the new communication course with respect to learning outcome design, the management of learning activities and the use of outcome assessment as well as any barriers that teachers encountered during the process. Therefore, an illuminative, phenomenological and qualitative approach was formulated to underpin this research as it sought not only to evaluate but also to explore how key skills and student-centred learning were perceived and how the new communication course was valued by the teachers and students. Case studies were employed as the main strategies for this inquiry. The case studies included focus groups, interviews and class observations which were all used to obtain empirical information.

To secure validity and reliability, triangulation was employed by integrating the quantitative collection of complementary statistical data with the qualitative findings. The first stage involved a survey which was administrated in five colleges in Beijing. 3233 student respondents and 291 teacher respondents gave their feedback. Three colleges out of these five were chosen as more in-depth case studies to develop and implement the new communication course. Nine teachers, who were recommended by the colleges, took part in the process of curriculum development. In the second stage, the nine teachers, as members of the focus group, were part of the delivery of the new communication course in each of the three colleges. 446 of their students from across the institutions were involved. While the qualitative data was collected from focus group meetings, interviewing and class observations, two questionnaires, one on students' self-assessment of their communication abilities (pre and post), and a questionnaire regarding course evaluation were also undertaken twice in order to

gather additional teachers' and students' comments about the course. Hence, the main fieldwork for this study was done in these three case study colleges.

Based on these considerations of research methodology, the study employed no more 'objective' measures for evaluating the success of the new communication course, such as recording how many students had passed the course, or the number of students who had gained employment. This might be considered a limitation of this research. However, the focus of this study is the exploration of issues that might emerge during the implementation of student-centred learning in the new communication course. Thus, both teachers' and students' perspectives, and observation of the emerging issues were paramount. Therefore, interviews, focus groups, class observations and questionnaires were employed to provide 'robust evidence' for the study, in contrast to the 'objective methods' which have been criticised as resulting in studies being 'artificial and restricted in scope' (Parlett & Hamilton, 1972, p1.)

This chapter will review the rationale for the methodological choices and outline the methods used to collect both quantitative and qualitative data. In particular, it examines how the investigation, interviews and class observation were formulated and managed. The chapter is divided into five sections. The first introductory section covers the context. The second section presents consideration of the research methodologies. This includes reviewing the research problems and aims, justifying the choice of research methodologies; the validity and reliability of the research and

the use of triangulation. The basic background of the three case study colleges and the process by which they were chosen from the five possible colleges are outlined.

The third section mainly reviews the research procedures. This involved exploration of two years of a newly-developed communication course at the three colleges, with a particular focus on how it was implemented. This section also examines the positionality of the researcher as well as some ethical issues and the results of a pilot study.

The fourth section outlines how qualitative data, such as focus groups, interviews and observations was collected and processed. In addition, it describes the sampling and procedures of data collection. The details of the quantitative data collection are presented in the fourth section. Details of three quantitative surveys, the questionnaire design and sampling are then given and explained in the fifth section.

4.2 Choice of research methodologies

Silverman (2000) points out, 'A methodology defines how one will go about studying any phenomenon' (p79). What is an appropriate choice of methodology depends on the research focus; what kind of questions the research wants to answer and the context in which the questions are asked (Nelson, *et al*, 1992). These points should be clarified at the beginning of the research journey. It is necessary, therefore, to review the research aims again before the discussion of this study's methodology can continue.

4.2.1 Research aims

As introduced above, the current research is based on the CETTDC programme in China; this means that the findings of the research should provide some valid and reliable evidence to help education managers decide whether a key skills curriculum and student-centred learning approaches should be extended and embedded into the vocational education system. Hopefully, the research should also provide some suggestions for modifying and improving the practical development of the key skills curricula, in both teaching and learning aspects. Therefore, five interconnected research aims were designed to explore the understanding of, and attitudes towards, key skills and student-centred learning approaches, as well as to examine the impact of student-centred learning on the teachers, the students and their colleges. These five aims are:

1. To explore teachers' and students' understanding of 'key skills'.

2. To explore teachers' and students' attitudes to the new teaching method of student-centred learning in a Chinese context.

3. To evaluate the impact of student-centred learning on teachers and colleges where such an approach has been tried, and investigate any barriers that might stand in the way of teacher adaptation to a student-centred strategy.

4. To investigate the effectiveness of student-centred learning in promoting Chinese students' communication abilities.

5. To make recommendations for evaluating the development and implementation of a new type of curriculum model to promote student-centred learning of communication abilities in the Chinese context.

The stated research aims gave rise to two necessary conditions for my research. First, it had to be undertaken in a teaching environment where the new communication course was actually being implemented. Secondly, the data had to be collected only from those teachers and students who were engaged in the new course. These essential points required a research methodology which could provide flexibility and adaptability as well as depth for this research. Considering its evaluative and exploratory nature, a qualitative research approach was adopted.

4.2.2 Qualitative approaches

Qualitative research approaches have been identified as being the most widely used in education investigations and study activities (Cohen *et al*, 2000; Chen, 2004). Such approaches not only tackle the essential points from a broad swathe of philosophical, epistemological and sociological perspectives, which include the 'positivist, post-positivist, humanist, and naturalistic' (Nelson, 1992, p4), but also influence a lot of research paradigms such as the ethnographic, anthropomorphic, hermeneutic, and phenomenological (Cohen *et al*, 2000; Rudestam & Newton, 2001). One of the advantages of qualitative research is it can make a research design more flexible and adoptable (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Robson, 2002; Lankshear & Knobel,

2004). Its many different constituent natures make qualitative research approaches ideal for this study.

Qualitative research, as Clarke (2001) points out, concerns the 'nature of reality' and details how researchers tend to use 'smaller scale studies exploring the meaning that events and situations have for participants' (p34). This naturalistic perspective is ideal, for example in this study, for discovering what happens during the implementation of the new course; to see how various issues arose, and what the consequences were of teachers' actions. The important point here is for me as a researcher to capture episodes in real teaching and learning contexts and acquire insight and understanding from an analysis of the findings which emerged during the implementation of the course.

In addition, qualitative research manifests a holistic perspective. It seeks to 'understand phenomena in their entirety in order to develop a complete understanding of a person, program, or situation' (Rudestam & Newton, 2001, p37). Influenced by this perspective, the research data was collected from many different sources in order to avoid the over-simplification and bias that may have resulted from having too narrow a range of sources.

The interpretive paradigm also addresses the targeted social action (in this case teaching) through grasping and analysing the 'meanings that constitute that action' (Schwandt, 2000, p191). This reveals a salient feature of this research approach. The research work should closely follow genuine teaching and learning actions: that is, the data should be selected from educational practitioners who were involved in the

action itself. Correspondingly, the meaning of the action should be found during the process of the action. As Cohen *et al* (2000) point out:

> Investigators work directly with experience and understanding to build their theory on them. The data such yielded will be glossed with the meanings and purposes of those people who are their sources. Further, the theory so generated must make sense to those to whom it applies.
>
> (p23)

As my research aims to meet the practical purposes of the evaluation of a new communication course's teaching and learning in three Chinese higher vocational colleges, it is necessary to provide in-depth, multi-layered evidence for explaining and interpreting real experience. So, the main strategy for carrying out my research is through case studies.

4.2.3 The research paradigm

As this research seeks not only to explore an understanding about key skills (and 'communication key skills' in particular), but also to evaluate the impact of student-centred learning on teachers, students and their colleges according to teachers' and students' perceptions, my research paradigm was informed by a combination of phenomenology (Schutz, 1970; Cohen *et al,* 2000) and selected 'illuminative evaluation' perspectives (Parlett & Hamilton, 1972). According to Cohen *et al* (2000), phenomenology is advocated as one of the most significant interpretive traditions of research. Phenomenological studies attempt to recognise, describe and elucidate the meaning of subjective human experience; to capture the ideas which structure and build meaning is very important for the research. To achieve that, I aimed to listen to the teachers and students very carefully in order to

observe *how* they revealed their practice, not just what they said, together with the particular context. Especially, I needed to analyse their motivations when they spoke to me, and the attitudes which supported their teaching and learning practices. Schutz (1972) highlights the significant link between the individual's 'in-order-to motivation' and the meaning the individual constructs. He points out that:

> The subjective meaning-context which is the in-order to motive must first be seen and take for granted as an already constituted object in itself before any venture into deeper levers is undertaken.
>
> (p130)

This statement explores the essence of phenomenology which puts an emphasis not only on the individuals themselves but on the relationship between individuals and a specific context. It also provides a guideline for my study, to link an individual teacher's or student's discourse about their experiences of change with their college's context, their personal background and their personal development.

The other important theoretical stance which underpinned this research is 'illuminative evaluation' (Parlett & Hamilton, 1972). As they point out, this approach can be particularly relevant when a researcher wants to discover what existed before an instructional system is adopted and to discern the most significant features of the processes involved (pp9-10). Sloan & Watson (2001) consider that the illuminative evaluation 'is not a standard methodological package but a general research strategy' (p666). Parlett (1989) argues that the conventional 'predominant evaluation model' is based on 'the idea of testing educational effects under controlled conditions' and results drawn from this kind of study cannot capture the nature of educational practice but merely to present an 'artificial picture of real-world educational life' (p186). He

claims that the differences between illuminative evaluation and traditional evaluation are:

> It should set out to 'test' so much as to understand and document an innovation-examining its background, its organization, its practices, and its problems, in addition to its outcomes. It should constitute a thoroughgoing and detailed exploration of the innovation –in- action.
>
> (Parlett, 1989, p187)

His description here suggests that illuminative evaluation is based on comprehensive, detailed investigations in a teaching and learning field. The two concepts relevant to this field are those of the 'instructional system' and the 'learning milieu' (Parlett & Hamilton, 1972, p10). According to them, an instructional system not only refers to those education catalogues, prospectuses or 'elements arranged to a coherent plan' (1972, p10). It should also be flexible, showing different forms as the situation changes. It should be tied closely with the concept of the 'learning milieu'. The learning milieu is defined here as the 'social-psychological and material environment in which students and teachers work together'. Furthermore it 'represents a network or nexus of cultural, social, institutional and psychological variables' (1972, p11).

Clearly, the particular context of the study matters greatly, and this made me consider how best to collect data from real learning situations. Furthermore, it encouraged me to understand and interpret the teachers and students in their particular setting holistically. Research drawing on the principles of illuminative evaluation therefore has to pay close attention to the connecting of these two important concepts.

'The social world is complex and rarely straightforward' (Denscombe, 2007, p85). The complexity of the social world requires a study should be based upon 'rich,

substantial, and relevant data' (Charmaz, 2006, p18). In this sense, to locate my research within a real teaching and learning context meant collecting data from multi-dimensioned resources, especially, catching 'teachers', 'students' and 'class activities' as the most representative resources for data. As I initiated the programme and worked together with the teachers to develop the new teaching material, I had opportunities to attend to the actions and processes of implementation of the new communication course and to talk to and observe the teachers who were involved in the programme. This enabled me to capture the teachers' personal perceptions and the interpretations they gave to their experience. I also observed the situations in which problems existed. All of these opportunities enabled me to explore the representative factors and 'quilt' those empirical materials together in order to make meaning of new experiences so they are accessible and understood. My multiple roles in this research and my position in the research will be discussed in section 4.3.2.

Methodology, however, is 'prior to method and more fundamental, it provides the philosophical groundwork for methods' (Wilson, 2002, p11). From this point of view, I needed to choose not only the methods to collect data but think about how to 'shape' the content of the data (Charmaz, 2006). A typical feature of phenomenology is to understand people's behaviours based on 'a process of typification by means of which the observer make sense of what people do'(Cohen, et al, 2000, p24). This suggests that, in order to generate my own sense making, I should not simply try to listen to and select teachers' and students' voice but to carve out 'unacknowledged

pieces of narrative evidence that we select, edit, and deploy to border our argument'

(Braun & Clarke, 2006, p80). In terms of Charmaz (2006):

> We try to understand but do not necessarily adopt or reproduce their views as
> our own; rather we interpret them.
>
> (p19)

Weick (1995) identified the data which the researcher should focus on is the data

which is of reasonable and memorable that embodies past experience; which can be

constructed retrospectively and which captures both feeling and thought. (pp 60-61).

This perspective gave me a signpost to focus on those representative data and abstract

and construct the underlying meaning out of that data. The details about how teachers'

and students' voices have been selected and how the samples were assembled will be

given in section 4.4.4.

Indeed, although illuminative evaluation advocates multiple connections between

the teachers' and students' perspectives with the particular context, there is still 'a

danger in interpreting other peoples' meanings when all researchers bring their own

interests, assumptions and values' (Alexiadou, 2001, p55). To eliminate this possible

research bias, researchers need to 'counter-check' their findings 'for accuracy and

consistency' (Parlett, 1989, p190). This is a reminder for me to have the reflexivity to

double check whether or not my data analysis really reflected the meaning teachers

and students attributed to their experiences and to use triangulation as much as

possible to ensure reliability.

Chinese traditional study emphasises five core principles: erudition, self-

interrogation, thinking cautiously, critical analysis and practising sincerely (博学、审

问、慎思、明辨、笃行, Bo-xue, sheng-wen, shen-si, Ming-bian, Du-xing, cited by

Zhu, 2004). This guided me in doing my research with the determination to be objective in exploring the meaning which I sought. As a researcher, I have to 'bracket' (Denzin, 2000) myself as an initiator of the new communication course. This discussion will be continued in Section 4.3.2.

4.2.4 Case study research

According to Gibby (1978) case studies have a number of advantages for educational evaluation and research; firstly, case studies tend to bring the researcher 'down-to-earth' – that is, provide a natural, grounded context for research which serves as an excellent base for phenomenological and theoretical generalisation. Secondly, case studies permit generalisation from a practical case to bounded categories. As Cohen *et al* (2000) show, a case study can 'enable readers to understand how ideas and abstract principles can fit together' (p181). Thirdly, case studies represent the different perspectives of participants by carefully concentrating on different situations. Fourthly, case studies furnish the researcher with 'descriptive material' in which, through reflection and re-interpretation, he or she can create new meaning. Fifthly, case studies can be started at the beginning of the action and contribute new knowledge to it. Finally, case studies present research data and evaluative conclusions in a more accessible format which readers may find easier to digest (Gibby, 1978, p185).

These advantages make case studies a fundamental strategy in my research. As discussed above, the aims of my research required me to go for 'depth rather than

breadth of coverage' (McKernan, 1996, p77). My research programme was guided by notions of student-centred learning through the OTPAE model, but whether or not these theories can be of relevance to practice in a Chinese context was one of my main questions. The research aims required the study to explore characteristics of the Chinese experience of new communication course teaching and learning in order to generate some new concepts, or a conceptual framework, suitable for the Chinese education system. Therefore, case study methodology was chosen as an appropriate strategy to collect, analyse and present the depth and range of qualitative data.

4.2.4.1 Instrumental case studies

As categorised by Stake (2000), case studies can be divided into three types according to the purposes of the research: they are intrinsic, instrumental or collective (p437). According to him, the intrinsic case study is usually used for gaining a better understanding of an interesting phenomenon. The instrumental case study is frequently employed for providing insight into a particular issue, often to rebut a generalisation which aims at supporting a rival thesis. The collective case study is normally used to collect a number of cases which, by use of simple induction, can indicate some common characteristics of phenomena such as populations or other large groupings (p437). As approaches such as key skills development and student-centred learning are quite new in Chinese vocational education, there were no existing case studies from which to take data. Therefore, these case studies should be categorised as instrumental case studies because the chosen colleges for my case

studies are particularly relevant to my research aims. The colleges offered me a specific new communication course teaching and learning environment to survey.

4.2.4.2 Choice of cases

After discussing and negotiating with various principals of vocational education institutes in Beijing, five agreed to allow me to do my research in their college. Three of them wished to be involved in my research as case studies. There were good reasons for choosing these three colleges. Firstly, they all had typical higher vocational education provision with a vocational education curriculum which included preparation for employment. Secondly, the managers of all three colleges had decided to develop a 'communication key skills' programme in their college to enhance their students' employability. It was very important for me to find a suitable background to 'confirm or qualify the basic process or constructs that underpin the study' (Voss *et al*, 2002, p202). Thirdly, the three colleges were all non-governmental institutions; hence there was no need for special permits to set up supplementary courses within their curriculum framework.

Beside the reasons mentioned above, there was another common factor that should be noted: the majority of students at these three colleges were involved in a degree course offered by the China National Examination Institute (CNEI), a government sponsored department. CNEI has branches in each city and province of China and has more than a million examination candidates each year. However, most of the CNEI curriculum was developed thirty years ago, and the curriculum was

designed in particular for adults who had missed the opportunity to undertake higher education when they were young. This was typically because they were of educable age during the period now referred to as the 'cultural revolution', a period when all educational institutes were suspended. The established CNEI curriculum, however, is now perceived to be outdated and its relevance to modern employment practice is questionable. The CNEI retains the conventional examination model with a textbook-centred curriculum. After a college is officially permitted by CNEI to deliver its curriculum, it is then allowed to establish other supplementary courses to help full time students learn more employment skills. Along with social and economic change and more competitive pressures, there has been increasing concern for the viability of the supplementary courses in CNEI schools. Some colleges have been interested in expanding competence-based education courses in order to provide their students with useful employment skills. This was cited as the main reason for the three colleges wanting to introduce the new communication course within their CNEI provision.

Other contextual details of the three colleges will be presented separately in Chapters Six, Seven and Eight. The research programme in the three colleges will be explained in Section 4.3.

4.2.5 Validity and reliability of the research

'All research is concerned with producing valid and reliable knowledge in an ethical manner' (Amaratunga & Baldry, 2001, p163). To ensure this tenet is upheld

the researcher must pay great attention to the design stage of research. For Riege (2003), research that is valid and reliable has the singular advantage of providing 'not only confidence in the data collected but, most significantly, trust in the successful application and use of the results to managerial decision–making' (p84). This suggests that any applied educational research should provide findings which can be trusted and replicated.

For Cohen *et al* (2000), 'the concepts of validity and reliability are multi-faceted' (p105). They can exhibit themselves inform different standpoints such as internal or external, descriptive or interpretive and evaluative or theoretical. This feature leads me to consider two questions about the validity and reliability of this research. First there is the data itself; how can researchers obtain data in a way which ensures credibility and replicability? Then there is the interpretation of the data; how can theoretical developments be constructed rightly and validly to reflect the real meaning of the participants' experience and how can researchers ensure that the findings have transferability? In order to satisfy these requirements for the research, I had to review the case study which was chosen as my main research strategy both for its advantages and weaknesses.

4.2.6 Triangulation

Although case studies are complementary in form to the aims of my research, I had to insure against some of their possible limitations, analysed below, in case they compromised or jeopardised the validity and reliability of results. Normally, the

hallmark of a case study is to interpret particular situated issues or incidents rather than to draw general meaning from a set of frequent phenomena. This demonstrates some limitations of case studies, as Cohen *et al* (2000) point out:

> …they may be, by definition, inconsistent with other case studies or unable to demonstrate this positivist view of reliability.

(p184)

The problem is clear; case studies might be affected by personal bias or be unrepresentative of the social phenomenon in question. To neutralise these negative factors, it is necessarily to consider the application of triangulation strategies in my research.

Triangulation is a very useful strategy for ensuring the validity of the research process by using multiple methods (Cohen *et al*, 2000; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Amaratunga & Baldry, 2001). It can be utilised at different levels such as time, space, combined level, theoretical, investigator and even methodological triangulation (Cohen *et al*, 2000, p113). With reference to this research, triangulation might help to eliminate any personal bias and gain a greater insight into the phenomena in question.

To be more specific, triangulation is used in this research for three purposes: to combine qualitative and quantitative approaches in order to evaluate the same phenomenon by using the alternative data and to develop multiple methods to ensure the validity and reliability of the data. For example, the three questionnaires used in this research were designed from different perspectives. The first one, delivered before the new communication course, was to gain a better understanding of teachers' and students' attitudes to key skills' development and student-centred learning in China. During the implementation of the new communication course, two other

questionnaires were designed to gather teachers' and their students' opinions in order to evaluate the course. The findings from these investigations might corroborate or contradict the findings from focus groups or interviews, but the interpretation of the data should be faithful to the meaning of the experiences.

Besides this quantitative approach, other methods were used as measures for ensuring the validity and reliability of the research. As mentioned previously, three colleges were chosen as case studies rather than one single case to enhance the comparability and minimise the risk of anomalies. Multiple data resources were developed to interpret the same phenomenon or result from different angles. These included focus groups, interviews and class observations. As the triangulation designed in this research is expected to provide 'extra impetus to the direction of the qualitative analysis' (Amaratunga & Baldry, 2001, p101), to collect the empirical evidence in multi-dimensions should help me to construct significant meanings and results.

4.2.7 Quantitative approaches

Different from qualitative approaches, quantitative research approaches are underpinned by more positivist notions and are characterised by their use of experimental and statistical techniques to collect and analyses the data (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Cohen *et al*, 2000). Bryman (2004) describes quantitative research as:

> …entailing the collection of numerical data and as exhibiting a view
> of the relationship between theory and research as deductive, a
> predilection for a natural science approach (and positivism in particular),
> and as having an objectivist conception of social reality.
>
> (Bryman, 2004, p62)

An important measure to secure the validity of the research was its use of three numerical data collections to obtain quantitative data. Each inquiry had its own particular purpose. For example: the first survey, undertaken in five colleges in Beijing, was used as preliminary material for understanding the attitudes of Chinese teachers and students to 'key skills' and student-centred learning before the main investigation. Some of the quantitative data collected involved the evaluation of the course, which supplemented the results of the study. While the case studies could illustrate and interpret the findings from either individual or group perspectives, the quantitative approach aims to 'produce useful factual data from generalisations, often about characteristics of the society as a whole' (Clarke, 2001, p34). To mix research strategies might enable me to avoid 'bias by limiting the amount of personal contact between the researcher and researched' (Clarke, 2001, p34). Further details about these surveys are discussed in Section 4.4.

In summary, this section has introduced the theoretical background to my research. It elucidates the different perspectives and paradigms which have influenced research decisions during the process of the study. The next section will move the focus to explain what procedures were formulated before the research journey.

4.3 Research procedures, the researcher's position and ethical considerations

4.3.1 Research procedures

Lankshear and Knobel (2004) identify six generic elements that should be embraced in a systematic investigation. These elements require that researchers review their research carefully, making sure as they do so that it has been clearly and

carefully framed; that, for example, it is of manageable size, logically coherent, and flexibly set so the researcher can deal with any changes or problems that occur during the research process (p21)**.** As Stake (2000) describes it, 'a case study is both a process of inquiry about the case and the product of that inquiry' (p436). This aptly describes my research.

As discussed in Chapter One, China's National Vocational Qualification Appraisal Experts Committee for Key Skills Development (NVQAECKS) gave rise to the OTPAE model which is used as the standard tool in both employee training and vocational education student courses. However, this orientation, like all such government policies, needs to be located in educational institutes, vocational colleges or employee training agencies. At the same time, this research also needed a certain number of colleges to be involved with the development and implementation of the new communication curriculum. So, my first task in the research process was to initiate the programme in the target colleges.

Fortunately, I had many connections with principals working in higher vocational education institutes. They kindly offered their time to listen to my presentation about key skills criteria, its current development in China, the OTPAE model and student-centred learning. As a result, five colleges agreed to be involved with my research activities; three of them volunteering to be my target colleges and my case studies. Moreover, this school-based experiment was recognised as one of the themes of CETTDC research programme.

However, the research procedures had to be adapted according to the resources the colleges provided. The research was conducted in three stages. Stage one started in September 2005 and concluded in August 2006. The second stage lasted from September 2006 to June 2007. The third stage lasted until 2010. The main research targets of each stage are listed in Figure 4.1 below:

Figure 4.1 Summary of the stages of the research

Stage one: (October 2005 to August 2006)

Time	Typical activities
October 2005 to January 2006	First survey distributed in the five Beijing colleges (included the pilot questionnaire used before the primary investigation).
October 2005 to January 2006	Incorporated three colleges out of five into the research programme; data processing of first survey.
13-16 January 2006	Teacher training
January 2006 to August 2006	New communication course book developed.

Stage two: (September 2006 to June 2007)

Time	Typical activities
September 2006 to June 2007	Teacher training, interviews, focus group teachers' meetings, class observations.
December 2006 to January 2007	Class observation and interviewing with students in the three colleges.
September 2006 to June 2007	Students' self -assessment of their communication skills by using a Likert scale (pre/post course).
January 2006 to May 2007	The first course rating questionnaires were administrated in January and second ones were delivered in May 2007 (students and teachers)

Stage three: (July 2007 to January 2010)

Time	Typical activities
July 2007 to December 2007	Data was processed using SPSS. Literature reviewed. Structuring of thesis framework.
July 2007 to May 2008	Qualitative data analysis
June 2008 to January 2010	Writing thesis

The research process which connected these three stages was challenging, although its composition was greatly eased by the commitment of the teachers and their students. More details about my focus groups, interviews, class observation and questionnaires will be presented later. The consideration of my research position is discussed below.

4.3.2 The researcher's position

A researcher's position is determined by where the researcher 'stands in relation to the other' (Merriam *et al*, 2001, p411), the other being that which is relevant to the research. As this research programme was undertaken in a Chinese context, from which there was little previous experience on which to draw for pedagogical research, the researcher was not able to be merely 'an objective onlooker observing from afar' (Rose, 1997, cited by Barker & Smith, 2001, p142).

As mentioned above, I had to initiate the programme and launch it within the colleges I studied. This involved helping the colleges to organise work throughout the programme to a degree, leading the teachers to develop the new communication course, editing the new textbook and monitoring the progress of the implementation of the course at each college. Since I was in such a sensitive and influential position, I

needed to be conscious of my own authority which might have affected the responses of teachers and students. From a positive point of view, the engagement with initiating, facilitating and assessing the process of this specific programme put me into a real teaching and learning environment which enabled me to gain valuable insight and first-hand information for my research. However, the corollary of my position is that both teachers and students might try their best to perform positively for me in deference to my role in the programme.

To undermine these potential negative influences on my research, I made use of triangulation as much as I could. For example, during the implementation of the new communication course, I used not only questionnaires for course evaluation but also a student-self assessment questionnaire both pre- and post- course. The questionnaires required the students to assess their communication performance in order to identify any differences that the new course might have made. However, as an additional measure, the data collected from self-assessment avoided the students giving their comments to their teachers directly, in order to ensure that the findings were more reliable and comparable. The detail of this is explained in sub-section 4.5.2. Otherwise, I randomly sampled when I interviewed the students who were involved in the new communication course in each of the three colleges, in order to avoid student bias. Additionally, I paid attention to collecting qualitative data from different sources: focus group meetings were arranged parallel with teaching and learning planning so that I could identify what kinds of problems the teachers might have

encountered during their practice; class observations were undertaken in each of the three colleges, as well as semi-structured interviews.

However, to collect a diverse range of data just provides one of the important conditions for the research; to make 'analytic sense' (Charmaz, 2006) of the teachers' and students' meaning of their experience. To do that, it was important that I had to 'bracket' (Denzin, 2000) I myself as an initiator of the new communication course. This meant that I should suspend and put aside my preconceptions and concentrate on the teachers' and students' experiences and their statements. In terms of Denzin (1989) bracketing involves the following steps:

(1) Located within the personal experience, or self-story, key phrases and statements that speak directly to the phenomenon in question.
(2) Interpret the meanings of these phrases, as an informed reader.
(3) Obtain the subject's interpretations of these phrases, if possible.
(4) Inspect these meanings for what they reveal about the essential, recurring features of the phenomenon being studied.
(5) Offer a tentative statement, or definition, of the phenomenon in terms of the essential recurring features identified in step 4.

(P56)

These five steps gave me the more understanding about how I can 'hold the phenomenon up for serious inspection' (Denzin, 1989, p55). However, my focus was on evaluating the impact of a new pedagogy on students, teachers and their college through the implementation of the course rather than the course itself. This target goal of my research emphasised teachers' and students' perceptions of their experiences which I sought to understand. This is because their experiences and the meaning they gave to their experiences would uncover the substance of the issues I wished to address, such as what is the significance of student-centred learning in promoting students' communication abilities and what kind of barriers the teachers encountered

during the implementation of the new communication course. I needed to start off from those teachers' and students' personal perceptions, from their stories rather than from my assumed concepts. I had to keep this crucial reflexivity throughout whole process of data analysis. To be an effective researcher, I had to maintain a clear awareness that I was a 'neutral observer' (Dewar & Walker, 1999, p1461) entering into the 'real world' (Robson, 2002), with a critical perspective on my own role.

4.3.3 Ethical considerations

From the outset of this research, the relevant ethical ramifications were considered. According to Pendlebury & Enslin (2001), the factors that tend to give rise to ethical considerations are those of representation, identification and trust. They point out that educational research is 'unethical when it misrepresents or misidentifies and so betrays its beneficiaries or goods and values that they hold most dear' (p361). As such, I employed both qualitative and quantitative methodologies to ensure the quality of the research. A triangulation strategy was used throughout the whole research process.

Ethical issues also came into play when deciding who would be members of the focus group. In College B, I talked to each member of the focus group proved by the leadership of the college. After affirming the voluntary participation of all present, the list of names was handed to the Principal for his final signature in order to guarantee everyone was fully informed and confirmed. In College S, I came to know two focus group teachers through their involvement in the development work for the national

'communication key skills' teaching material early in 2005. They were more receptive to promoting key skills and the concept of student-centred learning because of this experience and were quite happy to serve as pioneers in delivering an innovative curriculum in their college. Unlike Colleges B and S, where the teachers were selected by the colleges, College R asked the teachers voluntarily to register their names as teachers of the new communication course. What is more, each of them then had to give a presentation in front of a panel of judges consisting of the dean and two other qualified teachers. Eight teachers were then chosen to be the new communication course teachers from the original thirty-seven applicants, and two of these were selected as focus group teachers.

The aims of the study were explained carefully to all participants and their right to withdrawal was emphasised both by the researcher and college leaders. I visited the principals of the three colleges many times to discuss the research plan and to clarify relevant issues, such as giving an allowance to the focus group teachers for their overtime work. All the information which is used conveyed in the research is anonymised and identities are protected.

4.3.4 The pilot study

Pilot studies of the questionnaires were used for a number of reasons. Firstly, they enabled me to filter out poor and problematic questions. In order to carry out the research successfully, I invited a number of principals and teachers to fill in the questionnaires when I visited and discussed the possibility of setting up my research

programme in their colleges. Since the pilot studies were completed before the formal investigation, I had useful information on which to draw when it came to implementing the student-centred approach. At the same time I had the benefit of respondents' comments regarding possible amendments to the questionnaires. This feedback was extremely useful.

The other two questionnaires were subjected to a formal pre-test run before the new course development which involved three voluntary staff from College B. Aspects of the questionnaires were clarified following the pilot work and some ambiguous words were altered to make them more easily intelligible.

4.4 Qualitative Data collection

4.4.1. Focus groups

A focus group was used to collect data from teachers and administrators (Ruyter, 1996; Nabors *et al*, 2001; Katz & Williams, 2002). The teachers in this focus group were those who had a 'common interest or characteristic' (Katz & Williams, 2002, p321), namely, that they were all involved in the implementation of 'communication key skills' teaching and learning and, as such, were one of main data sources of this research. Clearly then, the quality of the focus group activities was very important as it impinged directly on this research.

The membership of the focus group changed once at the end of the first stage owing to some personnel changes at College R. Two of the teachers from College R who had been part of the new course development left, and they were replaced by another two teachers who continued to teach the new course. However, the focus

group finally consisted of one vice principal in College B, one professor and vice principal in College S, a manager from College B with teaching responsibilities, and six other full-time teachers. The teachers' (four female, five male) had professional backgrounds; their ages are given in Table 4.2. This range of teachers and managers helped to provide a college wide perspective. More details of each member of the focus group will be introduced in Chapters Six, Seven and Eight respectively.

Table 4.2 Focus group members' ages and status

Count

		Professional title			Total
		Assistant teacher	Lecturer	Associate professor	
Age	28	1	0	0	1
	29	0	1	0	1
	30	1	0	0	1
	31	0	1	0	1
	38	1	0	0	1
	42	0	1	0	1
	61	0	0	1	1
	62	0	0	1	1
	67	0	0	1	1
Total		3	3	3	9

According to Robson (2002), a focus group is 'a group interview on a specific topic' (p284). In order to acquire qualitative data in a natural environment and at a suitable time, the focus group meetings were organised and scheduled in parallel with certain stages of the implementation of the new course such as the beginning, middle and end of academic semesters.

Since the focus group was composed of teachers or administrators of the new communication course, the main concern, naturally, was how to prepare effective

teaching activities and to anticipate any problems that might emerge during the course delivery. The discussions around the particular issues of teaching and learning which emerged during implementing the new course were usually heated. The complexity and diversity of teaching and learning contexts within the course as delivered were explored; different strategies the teachers created to deal with the problems were described. All of these enabled me to collect the data, just as Cohen *et al* (2000) point out: 'It is the interaction with the group that leads to data and outcomes' (p288). Group members were informed of the topics for each meeting at least one week in advance. Meetings were arranged to complement teaching schedules. Table 4.3 shows an example notice for a group meeting:

Table 4.3 Notice provided for a focus group meeting

Schedule	Content
Time: 2:00 PM, 13th September, 2006. **Place**: The meeting room in the Library building of College B	**Topic:** How to organise the students' learning activities during class time **Presentation:** 1. Mr Du from College S: My teaching plan for unit three. 2. Miss Jam: How to organise the students' activities. **Discussion**: 1. What did you do in the first class? 2. What problems have you encountered during the first class? 3. What do you think about the presentations today? Do you agree with what was presented? Do you have other suggestions for unit three?

Since the topics were all relevant to teachers' concerns, almost everyone had something to say. Whether their experiences were positive or negative, they wanted to talk about them with others to get feedback and advice. This provided a 'temporal

mapping' (Denzin, 1989) in which teachers not only reflected the experience of their teaching but also aired their problems. The confusions and barriers they encountered were explored. Those stories which happened during their teaching were unfolded. As a researcher, I paid a close attention not only to listen to them, but to observe with sensitivity as well as to carry out the interviews immediately after the focus group meetings. These prompt reflections helped me to get more details about the teachers' thoughts, their feelings, and their explanations of their practices. All of these helped me to overcome the potential bias which might exist in focus groups. It is significant that all the teachers volunteered to participate in the study. However, as the teachers who were involved in the focus group were both young teachers and teachers who have had more than ten or even thirty years educational experience, they might have given me the different perspectives and understandings from their own experiences. As they have had their teaching experiences in a Chinese educational context, it was clear that they would still be influenced by their previous teaching habits when they were involved into the programme. They were volunteers but this did not mean that they changed immediately after they became volunteers. The problems which they encountered happened just as they were related. It did not matter whether they were volunteers or not as long as they were involved in the change. These personal reflections and interpretation constituted the data for my further analysis. Each focus group meeting was recorded, and this provided much of my qualitative data.

Triangulation was also used in each college to supplement the focus group, using multiple methods such as individual interviews or small group discussions in each

college, questionnaires and class observations. These activities have been listed in sub-section 4.3.1. The data will be presented separately in Chapters Six, Seven and Eight. The interview schedule used for the focus group members is presented in the next section.

4.4.2 Semi-structured interviews

An interview is the most common tool used in education research (Merriam, 1988). It is used particularly when the researcher wants to understand another's 'feelings, thoughts and intentions'; how, for example, they 'interpret the world around them' (p72). Since the focus group teachers were assigned to deliver the new communication course and since the programme was an innovative one, a semi-structured interview was designed to enable teachers and students to tell their story and offer other information about the progress of course implementation. The semi-structured interview explored teachers' and students' perspectives by providing the chance for the respondents to express their feelings and opinions freely. Otherwise, face to face talking also permitted a detailed observation of other aspects such as non-verbal communication, which might help to understand the interviewee's responses in more depth.

4.4.2.1 Semi-structured interview design

In order to gain insight into the teaching process, particularly to identify any issues that arose, as well as to get better understanding of these issues, a semi-structured interview schedule was designed. The questions were intended to reveal attitudinal data relevant to student-centred learning. They also were designed to

discover any barriers that teachers and students might have encountered during the implementation of the course. Thus, the data generated should provide information to measure the value of the innovation programme and assess the effects and effectiveness of the communication course and the OTPAE model. The semi-structured interview schedules for focus group teachers and their students are given in tables 4.4 and 4.5.

Table 4.4 Semi-structured interview schedule for focus group teachers

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Semi-structured interview schedule for focus group teachers

Thank you for taking part in this interview for the CETTDC research. The researcher guarantees all the information you provided will be only used for research and remain anonymous. Thank you for your cooperation.

1. Do you think it's suitable to use student-centred learning to deliver the new communication course? Why? Or why not?

2. Do you think student-centred learning is appropriate for you to implement the new communication course? How does it benefit you?

3. Have any changes occurred in your teaching after you've tried student-centred learning? If so, how has it changed? What do you think of these changes?

4. Did you encounter any problems when using student-centred learning to deliver the new communication course? If so, what were the problems?

5. Do you think student-centred learning is effective in developing your students' communication skills? What makes you think so?

6. What kind of difficulties have your students encountered when they were involved in the new communication course learning?

7. Is the OTPAE model an effective model for the 'communication key skills' teaching and learning? Why? Or why not?

8. Did you encounter any difficulties when using the OTPAE to develop and implement the course? If so, what?

</div>

Table 4.5 Semi-structured interview schedule for students

Semi-structured interview schedule for students

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed for this CETTDC research. The researcher guarantees all the information you provide will only be used for research and remain anonymous. Thank you for your cooperation.

1. What benefits, if any, do you think you have had through the new communication course?

2. Do you think this course is necessary? Why? Or why not?

3. Did you notice any changes in the teaching method when your teachers delivered this new communication course? Do you like these changes? Why? Or why not?

4. What do you think of the quality of the teaching you have received? Do you have any additional comments?

5. What do you think of the level of your participation in learning during the new communication course? Why do you think this?

6. Do you think the assessment arranged in every unit is helpful for your study? Can you give an example?

7. Do you think you have changed since you have been involved with this new communication course? If so, how?

4.4.2.2 The procedure for the interviews

As mentioned in sub-sections 4.3.1 and 4.4.1, the focus groups met many times to develop and deliver the new communication course. They created a number of opportunities for the researcher to interview the teachers and administrators who were involved. In addition, interviews were conducted when teachers' classes were observed across the different colleges. The student interviews were normally carried

out immediately after class; the teachers' interviews during their free time at their colleges. Due to the support received from the leadership of the three colleges, the researcher and interviewees were always given a suitable place to talk. All interviews were recorded.

4.4.2.3 Interview Sampling

Nine focus group teachers and administrators were interviewed. Their general background information is given in sub-section 4.4.1; more details about each teacher will be presented in the case studies in Chapters Six, Seven and Eight.

Twenty-four students were selected to be interviewed. The interviewees were randomly selected by student number from class lists. In College B, the students numbered 1-6 came from Miss Jam's class: one class was studying Japanese, the other English. Students 7-9 had chosen to be air crew for their prospective careers. Their teacher was Mr Xum. Teacher Anm taught classes in information technology, and some of her students (numbers 19-21) were interviewed after a class observation. Mr Gao's students (numbers 22 to 24) were studying news reporting. There were just a few student interviewees (16-18) from College S because there was only a small cohort taught by two teachers. Contrary to College S, Mr Xiao and Mr Ding, who worked in College R, had a large cohort of students, with more than eighty in each class. Interviewees 10-12 were selected from a finance class which was taught by Mr Xiao. The others (numbers 13-15) were Mr Ding's students, a class majoring in

English and Tourism. The interviewees and teachers' numbers, plus their gender and

grade, are listed in table 4.6.

Table 4.6 Sample of students interviewed

Focus Teachers Number	Students' interviewee Number	Male	Female	Grade one	Grade three
TJMJ , No1,B	SJMJ No1-3	1	2	3	
TJMI,No1,B	SJMI No4-6	2	1	3	
TXMH, No2,B	SXMH No7-9	1	2	3	
TDRE,No3,R	SDRE No10-12	2	1	3	
TXRF, No4,R	SXRF No 13-15	2	1	3	
TDSS, No5,S	SDSS No 16	1			1
TWSS,No6,S	SWSS No 17-18	1	1		2
TAMI,No7,B	SAMI No 19-21	2	1	3	
TGMN,No8,B	SGMN No 22-24		3	3	
Total	24	12	12	21	3

4.4.3. Teaching observations

According to Lankshear & Knoble (2004), observed data can 'provide deep

insights into social practice, events and processes' (p219). An important data

resource, observation enabled me to record what really happened in the classroom and

to observe what kind of issues emerged as teachers and students adapted to a

student-centred learning approach. This involved the exploration of the impact of

courses on practice – that is, the extent to which learning outcomes were really

achieved by the students. Using observation gave me multiple opportunities to acquire valuable supplementary information, a boost to this study's validity and reliability. The findings from class observation will be explored in the case studies in Chapters Six, Seven and Eight.

After discussion with each member of the focus group, an observation schedule was created with set times agreed with the teachers. Eight teaching observations of 100 minutes each were carried out in total, and each was videotaped. These observations yielded rich and valuable data for the qualitative evaluation.

4.4.4 Qualitative data processing

All the interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim from an audio recording. After reading the transcripts many times, those notable phenomena or themes which emerged from interviews and class observations became the research focus. The perspectives which were presented frequently by the interviewees were categorised. At same time, those issues from data which identified similar characteristics were grouped. Then, I tried to uncover links between respondents' conversation and the contexts in which they were made, drawing comparisons between variables. After that, a topic map of data analysis was categorised and generated. As such, each question had its coding frame with sub-categories in which a variety of responses were included. The next step in the research process was to identify how these phenomena were linked together, to see what could be conveyed by those issues that emerged in the text. This included combining the data collected

from interviews with the data from observations to ensure the validity and reliability of the research.

The idea of a case study is that 'a spotlight is focused on individual instances rather than a wide spectrum' (Denscombe, 2007, p36). So, it was crucial to prioritise different parts of the data and assemble those representative samples. Taking all that has been discussed about methodological choice into account, special attention was paid to the way in which my data analysis was conducted:

Firstly, recurring phenomenon were captured. For example, the evidence emerged from the students' interviews showed that students perceived that their self-concept and self-confidence were raised after the intervention of the new communication course. They frequently demonstrated 'raised self-concept and confidence', a phrase which caught my attention and made me ask how and why this phrase appeared so many times. .

Secondly, those responses which related to the questions for which I wanted answers but could not get exact results from the quantitative data became my other focus, such as why teacher and student respondents choose the communication abilities as a set of key skills. In order to seek that out, I categorised the relevant code and contextualised and constructed the emerging meaning.

Thirdly, I paid specific attention to those negative responses and situations which emerged from interview, focus group meetings and class observations. As had discussed in Section 4.2.2 and 4.3.2, I needed to bracket myself as I had multiple roles in this programme and needed to maintain reflexivity throughout whole research

process. The essential implication of reflexivity for me is that I needed to carry out 'deconstruction and critical analysis of prior conceptions of the phenomenon' (Denzin, 1989, p48). This suggests that I cannot draw a conclusion by simply putting the data together in a pre-ordained way. Instead of that, I started my analysis from the negative responses and episodes in observed classes. For instance, I selected one observed class in College R where teacher Ding tried to use the OTPAE model to train his students to practice a repertoire of 'good manners' (see Chapter Seven). It was not a successful class, but starting from analysis of this class, I begun to question my original conception which was totally based on competence-based model. I returned to those perspectives in literature and linked this class observation with other relevant data. As result, I clarified the complex and comprehensive nature of holistic communication key skills and explored those nuances which existed between the notion of student-centred learning and competence- based model. These findings are shifted my preconceptions fundamentally.

Beside that, I illuminated the data associated with the contextualised information, and linked the typical situations with the findings which emerged from interviews and quantitative data. Furthermore, each case study was unique. I therefore had to be careful to deal with the case studies and not to extrapolate data from one context to another.

The other important consideration for this thesis is that the data had to be translated from Chinese into English. Before translating, the data transcripts (Chinese version) were confirmed by the teacher respondents. The student interview transcripts

were checked by a staff from College B. However, it is important to acknowledge that translation may not result in exactly equivalent meanings although I invited a Chinese teacher of English to help me to check my translation. This is due not only to language structures but also to differences in cultural words and conceptual understandings. Where these are significant, they will be discussed in the case studies.

The process of qualitative data analysis was the process of transformation of the meanings and implications of the new teaching approaches in Chinese vocational education, according to teachers' and their students' conception of their experiences. It led me to consider both teachers' and students' perspectives and their experiences realistically, and helped me to develop and gain a better understanding of my research findings and the achievement of my research aims.

4.5. Quantitative data collection

As mentioned above, quantitative data was collected three times during the research process. The first quantitative data collection was administered in five colleges which included not only the three case study colleges but also two other public colleges. The details of this survey are given in sub-section 4.5.1 below. Two other questionnaires were delivered during the new course implementation in the three colleges. These two investigations were carried out in the cohort that consisted of 446 students who had engaged in the new communication course in the three colleges at the second stage. The key principle of the sample chosen at this stage was that the students had to be taught by focus group teachers. Among them, 230 students of six classes came from College B, 177 students of two classes from College R and

the other 39 came from one class in College S. More information about these two questionnaires is given separately in sub-sections 4.5.2 and 4.5.3.

4.5.1. The first quantitative survey (the first stage)

Respondents to the first quantitative survey were teachers, managers and students in colleges in Beijing. Five local higher education colleges were chosen for their typical vocational education features which were relevant to the research aims. Two were public higher education institutes; the other three, private colleges. The researcher obtained the permission from the principals of each first. Then, the two questionnaires which were designed specifically for either teachers or students were sent to each college during December 2005 to January 2006. On receiving these questionnaires, the students who had a class on that day and teachers who had teaching that day were involved in completing the questionnaires.

The questionnaire design should help the researcher to achieve 'the goals of the research and, in particular, to answer the research questions' (Robson, 2002, p241). Since this research mainly aims to examine the extent to which Chinese teachers and students understand and accept or reject key skills and student-centred learning, an important task for the researcher when designing the questionnaires was to link research questions with survey questions.

4.5.1.1 Questionnaire for teachers

The questionnaire for teachers was divided into four sections. The first section collected background information such as gender, position in the college and teaching

experience. The second section concerned attitudes toward 'communication key skills' and student-centred learning. The questions were mainly about teachers' attitudes and opinions about whether a key skills course should be established in their college. It also the aimed to find out whether they thought it should be a compulsory course for students, and whether a student-centred learning strategy should be used in the new communication course. Some 'factual questions' (Oppenheim, 2005, p124) were designed in this section to test understanding and attitudes towards 'communication key skills' and student-centred learning. The teachers were asked if their colleges had offered new communication courses for the students, and if the teachers had had any experience or involvement in new course development. It was also important to find out who the curriculum decision maker in their college was, and how they made decisions to meet students' needs. The final section of the questionnaire was about gaining understanding of their comprehension of such concepts as key skills (see Appendix II).

4.5.1.2 Questionnaire for students

The structure of the questionnaires for students was quite similar to the teachers' but differed in how some questions were phrased. For example, in order to know what kind of teaching method teachers used in the new communication course, the students were asked to estimate the time taken up by the teacher talking during their communication class hour. As far as possible the questions were designed to use short

sentences and to make the language easily comprehensible to the students (see Appendix I).

4.5.1.3 Sampling

The research initially used the tactic of purposive sampling since in such a method 'samples are built up which enables the researcher to satisfy her specific needs in a project' (Robson, 2002, p265). The five colleges were chosen because of their similar features, particularly in how they provided their vocational education. After this, the hour long classes were selected by using random sampling.

4.5.1.4 Student sampling

A total of 5000 student questionnaires (1000 for each college) were sent to five colleges. There was an excellent response, with 3233 completed questionnaires returned. A 65% rate of return shows the sample was fairly representative of the student population in higher education colleges in Beijing. These students came from a large range of disciplines (foreign languages, administration, architecture, investment and finance, art design, law, economics and international trade, aviation crew services, environmental design, advertising, exhibition management, logistics, hotel management, communication engineering, psychology and Chinese medicine). Table 4.7 provides demographic information on each college and its gender breakdown.

Table 4.7 College-gender Cross tabulation of questionnaire respondents
Count (missing=14)

		Colleges					Total
		R	L	B	S	U	
Gender	female	285	267	495	423	429	1899
	male	302	323	153	264	211	1253
	2	0	67	0	0	0	67
Total		587	657	648	687	640	3219

4.5.1.5 Teacher sampling

About 500 questionnaires were sent to the teachers in the five colleges (100 for each college). The total number of respondents was 291, giving a return percentage of 58.2%. About 57% (166) teacher respondents had teaching experience of 10 years, 34% (99) had worked in education for more than 10 years. There were 142 female respondents and 116 male.

4.5.2. Students self- assessment scale (the second stage)

An attitude scale is a kind of measuring instrument that is designed to 'assess people's abilities, propensities, views, opinions and attitudes' (Robson, 2002, p292). In order to identify any difference the new course might have made, a Likert scale was designed to test students' self-assessment of their abilities in certain areas (assertiveness, responsive listening, speaking, reading and writing and other relevant communication skills). The copy sheets of the Likert scale were given twice, once in the first week of the course, and again at end of the course. As this investigation aims to reveal any changes that might occurred between the two results, the students were

told that they were free to sign their name on the questionnaire if they so wished. This offered the possibility of paired–sample t-test tracking. As a result, 151 student respondents out of 446 target students (33.8%) gave their names voluntarily. This gave me a valuable chance to use the paired t-test to analyse their questionnaires and present the data for this thesis.

4.5.2.1 Students' self- assessment scale design

This scale aimed to acquire data relating to students' self-assessment of their communication abilities as well as their understanding of key skills and 'communication key skills'. Students' assertiveness, nonverbal communication behaviours and listening, speaking, reading and writing skills assessment were important parts of this questionnaire. Each question gave a situation relevant to students' confidence to communicate with others such as, whether or not the individual student would like to introduce themselves to the other when they meet a new friend in a party; whether or not the students like to take part in social activities when they get the chance. The following responses were available: 'never do it', 'rarely do it', 'sometimes', 'very often do it' and 'always do it'. The detail of this scale can be found in the Appendix III.

4.5.2.2 Sampling

In order to compare any change that might have occurred in the students who were involved with the new course intervention, the self-test questionnaire was given twice: once in the first week of teaching; the other when the course had finished. As

mentioned above, the questionnaires asked the students to give their names voluntarily since the researcher wished to use the paired t-test to indicate any changes that occurred. Fortunately, 151 student respondents out of 446 target students signed their names on pre- and post- questionnaires, so that these 151 student respondents could be tracked, and they thus became the sample for this survey.

4.5.3 Student questionnaires for course evaluation (the second stage)

As Seroyan and Amundsen (2001) point out, student course ratings are:

> …the most commonly used evaluation method' [which] a measure of overt teaching actions and students' perceptions concerning the effect of these actions on their learning experience

(p341)

This perspective suggests that course rating can create the opportunity for useful flexible. According to Cohen *et al* (2000), rating scales can build in 'a degree of sensitivity and differentiation of response whilst still generating numbers' (p253). For this research, the course rating enabled me obtain personal evaluations on the new curriculum from most student participants, because it each student could assess teaching and the course itself by rating a set of items according to his or her own experiences. It also reflected students' opinions about the impact of the course and the teaching methods on their learning.

The items for the course rating questionnaire were developed from several sources. Rating questionnaires used at different universities in China were examined. The intention was to use an 'intrinsic, democratic and professional' curriculum evaluation model (Kelly, 2004, p152), one based on 'the recognition of education

value [that] resides in the teaching-learning itself rather than in its outcome' (Elliott, 1976, cited by Kelly 2004, p152). The course rating scale was again designed as an anonymous questionnaire to ensure its validity and reliability.

Data from students' course ratings are a means of informing teachers about 'the ways they teach and [to] help them identify potential areas where improvement could be made' (Saroyan & Amunden, 2001, p342). To assess the effectiveness of teaching during the introduction of the communication key skills course, the course rating questionnaire was administered twice, once at the end of first semester and again near the end of the second semester.

The questionnaire comprised five sections. The first section requested the student's sex, college and subject, and then went on to ask his or her feelings about the new, more self-directed learning role in the new course. Student opinions about the different teaching approaches used by the teacher during the new course and the teacher's academic knowledge and teaching skills were requested in section three. The fourth section concerned student attitudes towards new curriculum. This included asking students the extent to which they felt the course was useful. This was followed by the final section where students were asked to assess their achievements throughout the course. If they felt they had not achieved successfully, they were asked to consider the reasons why. Students were provided with a list of different possible reasons from which they could choose, the reasons were listed such as 'The course is useless', or 'I'm not interested in this course' (see Appendix IV). They also were

given the opportunity to write longer responses if they felt it necessary. The details of these course rating responses are found in Appendix VIIII.

4.5.4 Teachers' evaluation questionnaire design

The course evaluation questionnaire for teachers was designed as a tool to obtain data relating to research aims two, three, four and five, introduced earlier in sub-section 4.2.1. Teachers were asked about the usefulness of student-centred learning in their teaching, and if this pedagogical approach motivated their teaching. It was important for teachers to reflect on any change that had occurred in their teaching, since the introduction of the new programme, and to evaluate if this pedagogy was effective in developing their students' communication abilities. The questionnaires also attempted to identify any barriers that had prevented teachers from successfully implementing a student-centred learning approach, and how the new model impacted on their conception of teaching and their teaching practice. The teachers were asked to answer 19 questions, divided into five sections, by placing a tick at relevant points. They responded on a 4 point Likert-type scale for each item, which ranged from 'strongly disagree' (1) to 'strongly agree' (4). A four point scale was chosen to prevent participants from selecting a neutral, middle option. In addition, some questions contained a number of statements for selection of the one that most fitted the teacher's view. The questionnaires are presented in Appendix V.

4.5.5 Sampling for the course rating questionnaires

Eight focus group teachers completed the course rating questionnaire. The one administrator was not asked to fill this questionnaire because she had no teaching responsibility. Among the eight teachers, two were female; six were male; four were from College B, two from College R and two from College S.

The course rating questionnaires for students were also given twice. The first was given in January 2007, the second in May of the same year. Responses were received sporadically. In total, 311 students gave feedback. The students' were majoring mainly in service sector subjects, such as Air Service Crewing, Secretarial Studies, Interpreting, Information Technology and English language. Their college and their gender are presented in Tables 4.8 and table 4.9:

Table 4.8 College and gender Cross tabulation in January 2007

Count missing= 3

	Gender		Total
	Female	**male**	**Total**
College B	115	34	149
College R	89	34	123
College S	30	6	36
Total	234	74	308

Table 4.9 College and gender Cross tabulation in May 2007

Count missing=5

	Gender			Total
	Female	**Male**	**8**	**Total**
College B	109	37	1	147
College R	92	31	0	123
College S	36	0	0	36
Total	237	68	1	306

4.5.6 Quantitative data processing

A considerable body of data gathered from the three questionnaires was processed using the computer statistical package, SPSS. The use of statistics makes the findings easier to assimilate. After demographic data was coded into different variables, all the data was entered into the software; the outputs of each data were tabulated with a simple interpretation to help further analysis. The students' self-assessment was analysed using a paired two-sample t-test, which is a 'commonly used method to compare the means of two groups' (Robson, 2002, p439). The key requirement for this comparison is that the scores of the samples have to be paired. One hundred and fifty two students gave their names voluntarily, which provided the opportunity to compare the statistical difference in the variances. The questionnaires for the course evaluation were divided into two groups; one for the students, another for the focus group teachers. These questionnaires were all answered anonymously so that the data could be analysed and presented using an unpaired two-group t-test (Robson, 2002, p439).

4.6 Summary

This chapter has introduced the theoretical thinking about the choice of methodologies used in my research. As it is using approaches based on phenomenology and illuminative evaluation, case studies were chosen as the main strategies to explore teachers' and students' understanding and attitudes to the changes taking place during the implementation of the new communications course. The general background of the three colleges used as case studies has been given.

There is a discussion about the research process and the complexity of the research journey. To guarantee the validity and reliability of the research, triangulation was embedded in the methodology used. The use of rich data sources also added to the validity and reliability of the study. The focus group interviews, the student interviews, class observations, design of the three questionnaires and the sampling techniques used have all been explained in this chapter. The next chapter will present and discuss the findings drawn from quantitative data.

Chapter Five

Analysis of findings from the questionnaires

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings drawn from the quantitative data, obtained by the use of questionnaires. The study examines the effectiveness of student-centred learning in the development of a 'communication key skills' curriculum in China. This firstly explores teachers' and students' perspectives of 'key skills' and 'communication key skills' and teachers' perceptions about 'communication key skills' curriculum development and associated changes in pedagogy. Teachers' opinions about the implications of using student-centred learning in communications teaching and learning and any barriers they encountered during the implementation of the new communication courses are also examined. During this research, three different questionnaires, all designed to obtain data relevant to the specific research aims, were given out.

The findings from the quantitative data were collected in two stages, before and during the implementation of the new communication course. The first stage was a questionnaire which was administered in five colleges in Beijing. The colleges were chosen for their typical vocational education features, included two public colleges and three private ones. 3233 student respondents and 291 teacher respondents gave their answers. The main findings drawn from this investigation are presented in Section 5.2 to Section 5.9. These include the evidence related to respondents'

understanding of and attitudes to 'key skills', 'communication key skills' and student-centred learning. The current communication curriculum and pedagogies used in Chinese vocational education were explored. The intention was to reveal factors that might indicate potential barriers to teachers in adapting to student-centred learning.

The second stage, including two questionnaires, was undertaken during the implementation of a new communication course in three selected colleges out of the five: one was a student questionnaire on their self-assessment of their communication skills (pre and post the key skill communication course), the other was the questionnaire where both students and teachers evaluated the course. This cohort comprised 446 students, who were taught by focus group teachers.

Section 5.10 explores and analyses the results of students' self-assessment of their communication abilities and their understanding and attitudes toward communication. Section 5.11 and 5.12 analyses the results of the questionnaires which were designed to evaluate the new course from both students' and teachers' point of view. The effectiveness of student-centred learning and its implications for communications teaching and learning in China are explored through the discussion of the data, as well as an evaluation of the Objective-Tasks-Preparation-Action-Evaluation (OTPAE) model.

Details about the design and sampling methodology used for the questionnaires have been given in Chapter Four. The quantitative data was processed by using SPSS. As the three questionnaires have different purposes and outcomes, the data will be

displayed and analysed in three formats. The questionnaires themselves are presented in Appendix I to V. As case studies were subsequently employed to explore teachers' and students' perceptions about 'communication key skills' and student-centred learning, the focus of this thesis is on those issues that emerged during the implementation of the new communication course. The quantitative data presented here is to provide a baseline for this study.

5.2 Teacher and student understanding of 'key skills' and 'communication key skills'

To test understanding of the term 'key skill', participants were asked to select from a list of 15 skills such as cooking, driving, information technology, communication, teamwork and so on (see Appendix I & II). Evidence shows that 89.2% of the student respondents thought communication abilities should be identified as a 'key skill' (see Appendix VI). Students also considered the following skills as 'key': English language (82.7%), time management (78.0%), self improvement (75.2%), information technology (68.8%) and teamwork (71.8%). Others, such as cooking were given much lower scores (19.9%). This suggests that students might perceive 'key skills' as being abilities which could affect their employability and career development, and which were therefore more important than practical skills such a cookery. This is an indication that major differences arise in the conceptualisation of 'skills'.

There is a close correlation between the results given by teacher respondents and those results given by student respondents. About 78% of teachers (N=286) agreed that communication abilities were 'key skills'. However, it is interesting that this is

lower than the percentage of students who thought so. English language was chosen by 72.4% of teachers; teamwork, self–improvement, time management, and information technology by 58.0%, 60.5%, 60.1% and 55.2% respectively.

Clearly, it is those complex and personal abilities which are perceived by most teacher and student respondents as 'key skills'. The priority given to communication abilities as a key skill was significant, even though participants could have been 'led' by previous references to communication in the questionnaire. What is more likely, however, especially when considered with the other personal abilities identified, is that the recognition of the importance of key skills has been influenced by the phenomena of social change in China. As mentioned in Chapter Two, because of global economic and information technology development, there is an increasing demand on prompt, effective information exchange between customers and organisations, employers and employees, Chinese people and foreigners. The recognition of the importance of relevant skills may therefore be related to perceptions about employers' expectations of their employees. For example, various job descriptions and advertisements in China now specifically mention the sort of abilities and skills detailed above.

An interesting issue arising from the data is that there is a distinction made by both teacher and student respondents between those complex personal abilities such as communication, teamwork, self-improvement or time management and those that deemed more technical skills such as typing, cooking and driving. The former usually have closer links with attitude, motivation, cognitive and affective factors and are

more complex than technical skills. This result supports the findings of Ye and Li (2007), who show that current employers display a marked bias towards 'personal qualities' rather than to a student's degree. In terms of them, these personal qualities include attitudes to work, awareness of responsibility and competence in communication, and they are identified as basis for further professional development. This perspective has been supported by many researchers who point out that an individual's abilities in communication; teamwork and self improvement are complex as well as essential for economic development (Kelly, 2001; Kelly & Horder, 2001; Cornford, 2005; Van Loo & Toolsema, 2005; Winterton *et al* 2005).

5.3 Key skills awareness in higher vocational education

When teachers were asked how they had found out about key skills, only 9.8% (N=255) of the respondents indicated that they knew about key skills from official documents; 12.5% of teachers respondents said their understanding of key skills came from their college principal. In fact, three main sources of information about key skills were listed by respondents: employers, lectures and books (27.9%, 22.3% and 23% respectively). When teachers were asked how long they had known about key skills, over half of the respondents (52.3%, N=266) not surprisingly, indicated that they had only got to know about key skills relatively recently, in the past six months or so. About 30.8 teacher respondents reported that they had had little knowledge of key skills until a year ago. Only 16.1% of respondents reported they had known about key skills for a period longer than two years. This is another important finding, as it highlights, at least in the colleges under study, that regardless of the many official

discussions and attempts to implement pedagogical reforms in recent years, many

teachers still have a limited understanding of such concepts. This is likely to be a

serious barrier to effective key skills development in China. Table 5.1 summaries the

situation:

Table 5.1 How long have you known about the concept of 'key skills'?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	three months	87	29.9	32.7	32.7
	Six months	52	17.9	19.5	52.3
	one year	82	28.2	30.8	83.1
	two years	20	6.9	7.5	90.6
	three years	23	7.9	8.6	99.2
	8	2	.7	.8	100.0
	Total	266	91.4	100.0	
Missing	9	25	8.6		
Total		291	100.0		

Responses to the questionnaires suggest that there is very little information

available to teachers to clarify what 'key skills' actually mean. The evidence suggests

that teachers have gained relatively little clarification from official documents. This

lack of basic knowledge about key skills can only be compounded by the wider

ambiguities that are acknowledged to exist between the interpretation of key skills as

being essentially academic or vocational and whether they support intellectual

development and/or employability.

5.4 Teachers' and students' attitudes to communication teaching and learning

Evidence shows that both teacher and student respondents had a very positive

attitude to the idea of developing communication key skills. Students were asked

whether they thought it is necessary to learn communication key skills, while teachers were asked whether they thought that communication key skills courses should be compulsory in their college. Although not designed with this intention, these questions might be perceived as leading questions. However, in the context of China, where the term 'communication key skills' is not widely employed, to ask the question directly clarified the situation to respondents and enabled them to give frank answers. Evidence shows that 95.3% of the students thought that they should learn 'communication key skills', whilst a higher percentage (98.2 %, N=290) of teacher respondents agreed that communication key skills courses should be compulsory in their college (see Appendix VI and VII).

This result supports the perspective identified in Chapter Two, that communication skills development is one of the priorities for an education curriculum framework (Adler & Elmhorst, 1996; Chen, 2001; Emanuel, 2007; Tong and Zhong, 2008). The reason for this, as discussed in Chapter Two, is the impact of China's social and economic development. The technical and industrial changes require employees to be much more flexible and adaptable; at the same time, advanced information technology and global economic development are creating new opportunities for Chinese individuals. Therefore, the positive attitude of both teachers and students to communication key skills development might be perceived as closely connected to the challenge of economic development in China.

5.5 Existing courses which contain elements of communication in China's higher vocational education institutions

Teacher respondents were asked to indicate what kind of courses relevant to communication, if any, their college was currently providing for students. This question was designed to gain more information about existing communication teaching and learning provision.

Table 5.2 What courses that your college provides include elements of communication skills.

		Responses		Percent of Cases
		N	Percent	
27	Chinese literature	140	22.6%	50.2%
	Business negotiation	116	18.7%	41.6%
	Public relationship	121	19.5%	43.4%
	Business Communication	90	14.5%	32.3%
	Communication skills	55	8.9%	19.7%
	Business writing	79	12.7%	28.3%
	other	19	3.1%	6.8%
Total		620	100.0%	222.2%

Only 19.7% of respondents reported that communication key skills were currently being specifically taught as a subject in their colleges. However, such key skills were potentially being developed within the framework of other courses, with 43.4% indicating that their college provided courses on public relations and 41.6% responding that they provided a business communication course. 50% of respondents indicated that Chinese literature courses are relevant to communication. Other

courses, such as moral education, service psychology and presentation skills were also considered to include the development of communication skills, and three teacher respondents also pointed out that many courses contributed to skill development in other ways via a 'hidden curriculum' of cultural exchanges and student simulation activities, for example, practice news reporting. Although these are just a few examples, it is evident that teachers are increasingly appreciating the important role of individual student experiences in the development of communication abilities, and also how Chinese cultural and moral aspects are involved. Sigman (1987), Zebrowitz (1990), Martinho *et al*, (2000) and Hargie & Dickson (2004) all emphasise the influence of the cultural context on the development of communicative abilities. Interestingly, some teachers also recognise that the development of communication does not need to be purely related to communication skills teaching and learning, but can take place during, and be underpinned by, lessons in many other subjects.

5.6 Student participation in courses which include communication skills.

Students were asked six questions related to teaching methodology in order to obtain an impression of how much time was spent in active learning. They were asked to estimate the amount of the class 'hour' (usually 50 minutes in Chinese colleges) taken up by the teacher talking, to assess the amount of their own participation in learning activities and to identify what learning outcomes they thought they had achieved (see Appendix I). This was divided into four different levels of involvement. While only 10% had a minimal level of participation, the rest were more inclined to report less than full participation.

This is clarified when students were asked how long the teacher spent talking in each class 'hour' (fifty minutes) of the communication course. 62.9% (n=2992) of respondents said they usually spent more than 40 minutes (i.e. 80% of the time) listening to teachers talk. It is notable that this was deemed by the students to be a negative influence on their participation. This re-iterates Table 5.3 which shows that just over 50% (N=3073) of the respondents reported that their active participation in these communication courses was either low or very low.

Table 5.3 Student active participation in courses including communication skills

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	0	2	.1	.1	.1
	lowest level	310	9.6	10.1	10.2
	lower level	1247	38.6	40.6	50.7
	high level	806	24.9	26.2	77.0
	higher level	699	21.6	22.7	99.7
	7	1	.0	.0	99.7
	8	7	.2	.2	100.0
	13	1	.0	.0	100.0
	Total	3073	95.1	100.0	
Missing	9	160	4.9		
Total		3233	100.0		

When students were asked what kind of learning outcomes they had achieved by undertaking these courses, 47.9% of the respondents felt they had learned an amount of communication theory and 41.8% felt they had gained a better understanding of the concepts central to communication theory, but only 29.7% thought they had developed any practical communication abilities (see Appendix VI). This is a very important finding in terms of the 'communication key skills' agenda in China.

As mentioned in Chapter Three, student involvement is very important for effective learning. The findings drawn from the questionnaires give little indication that communication teaching and learning has moved on from the traditional didactic model. Yet, all the research evidence shows that didactic pedagogies will not enable the student to participate as a 'positive learner' – that is, an active, enthusiastic, and independent one (Harkin *et al*, 2000, p6).

5.7 Teachers' attitudes towards student-centred learning

Recent research evidence from England and other English-speaking countries strongly suggests that the most effective approach to key skills development is via student-centred learning (Hyland, 1994; Hammond & Ancess, 1996; Whiston, 1998). Teacher respondents in this research echoed this point of view; with 94.4% agreeing or strongly agreeing that student-centred learning is an essential pedagogy for key skills development (see Appendix VII).

This result may be explained by teachers' actual observations of the facts, which have been documented by Wang (2004) and Li *et al* (2007), that Chinese students in higher education institutes are becoming increasingly bored when they are taught to repeat concepts through a didactic approach. According to the research produced by Li *et al* (2007), students memorised many statements about how to perform as well educated and qualified individuals but they cannot explain complex social issues or even resolve trivial problems in a practical way. They point out that courses which aim to develop values and moral and personal communication abilities development are not effective; they are 'detached from contemporary life and students' learning

needs' (Li *et al,* 2007, p100). They go on to say that the didactic approach used by teachers in courses which relate to students' values, motivation and beliefs were permeated by 'dull and negative testing of the rote memory process' (*ibid*). These factors have existed in Chinese higher education for a long time, and many researchers have called for reform (Wang, 1989; Wang & He, 1989; Lu *et al*, 2008). Data from this study indicates that they still remain and, in conjunction with the other findings, represent a significant cause for concern.

5.8 Teacher experience in curriculum development

Most teacher respondents agreed that student-centred learning should be employed to develop students' communication abilities. However, the findings from colleges in this study do not provide much optimism on the progress being made in developing such approaches in 'communication key skills' courses. This is because there is evidence that most Chinese teaching is still dominated by traditional didactic approaches, together with a lack of experience of curriculum development, both of which constitute a barrier for the teachers in adapting to new roles.

Teachers were asked six questions relating to their pedagogical skills in an attempt to obtain basic information about their current knowledge of, and competence in student-centred learning strategies. The evidence showed that 77.3% of teachers revealed a lack of experience in curriculum development. This was exacerbated by the fact that a high percentage of the respondents were relatively new to the teaching profession. Table 5.4 compares teachers' length of career and experience in curriculum development.

Table 5.4 Teaching years and experience of curriculum development

Teachers' teaching experience		Have you had any experience in curriculum development?				Total
		no		yes		
Years	I- 10	137	51%	28	10%	165
	11-15	21	7%	6	2%	27
	I6-20	15	5.6%	5	1.8%	20
	21-25	11	4%	6	2%	17
	27-30	18	6.7%	11	4.1%	29
	more than 30 years	3	1%	3	1%	6
	8		0		1	1
Total			205 (77.3%)		60 (22.6%)	265

There are several possible explanations for the lack of teacher experience in curriculum development. Firstly, as was identified by Zhou (2008), the Chinese educational curriculum has been tightly controlled by the central government for a long time. Neither individual educational institutions nor teachers were encouraged to become involved in curriculum decisions and development. Secondly, the traditional 'teacher, classroom, textbook' teaching model has proscribed teachers' work; teachers have to follow the textbooks and focus their attention on helping students pass examinations. This approach has severely restricted teachers' abilities to create new teaching materials with any confidence. Thirdly, any innovative development work in an educational institute needs not only support from the management, but also investment in new teaching and learning materials and perhaps, environments. Thus funding issues might be another impediment for a teacher aiming to develop a new course or teaching materials for a particular group of students. As such, it is no

surprise that there were only a few teachers who have experience of curriculum development in this study. Yet, research has shown that a lack of experience in curriculum development is a fundamental issue in teacher development. Stenhouse (1975), Fullan (1991) and Rudduck (1991) all emphasise that inexperience in curriculum development and inadequate teaching skills are barriers for teachers who are involved in new teaching roles.

5.9 Summary of findings from the first stage

In general, the results of the first questionnaires (to teachers and students respectively) indicate there is a growing recognition of the need for the development of personal abilities (or 'key skills') and most student and teacher respondents were in favour of this. Section 2.2 of this thesis presented literature that analysed the challenges to be faced in developing 'communication key skills' in China. Social change and educational reforms have inevitably had a strong influence on students' understanding of competence and skills development, and this is supported by the survey results. Both teachers and students selected abilities which related to those complex personal abilities as 'key skills' and discriminated between these and technical skills. Teacher respondents understood that the communication curriculum should be underpinned by cultural and moral values and that might suggest the development of communication abilities is more complex than pure 'skills' training. They also understood that the development of communication abilities could occur within other, subject based courses.

However, the findings from the first survey, comprising both student and teacher questionnaires, do not indicate that the concept of 'key skills' has been disseminated widely across the Chinese vocational education sector. This is regardless of the importance of key skills being recognised by both the China Occupational Skills Test and Appraisal (OSTA) and the Chinese Education Ministry, and the fact that the government has been advocating the expansion of competence and key skills development in vocational education since 1999 (CCOCCP & NSC, 1999). The evidence presented here shows that there appears to be no set of visible policies to support key skills development, or if there is, then these policies are not being adopted by individual teachers or endorsed by college managers.

The low level of student participation and the consequentially fewer practical learning outcomes achieved by current Chinese communication courses endorse the perspectives of Wang (2002), Gu (2003), Gu (2008) and Zhou (2008), which strongly suggest that Chinese education remains largely unchanged by new employability. Despite moves towards student-centred learning, and the obvious requirements of the labour market, Chinese vocational education institutes, at least those in this study, appear to have not yet adopted the recommended new teaching and learning strategies. This is despite the fact that the 'teacher, classroom and textbook centred' model is deemed to be no longer appropriate for students' personal development, especially for the development of communication abilities.

According to Han (2008), while people recognise the need to develop competence-based education, Chinese teachers still lack knowledge of, and

competence in, curriculum design and active teaching methods. This is because curriculum development in China has historically been led by the Ministry of Education with little or no involvement by teachers themselves. This lack of curriculum development experience is likely to act as a barrier when teachers are attempting to introduce new approaches (Han, 2008). Evidence from this study reaffirms this problem.

5.10 The second stage: student self- assessment of communication abilities

During the implementation of the new communication course, a Likert scale was designed to measure changes in individual students' communication abilities in areas such as assertiveness, responsiveness, listening, speaking, reading and writing. This was for students to self-assess. In order to measure differences in their abilities before the course began and later during its implementation, a paired sample t-test method was used which compared the student respondents' pre-test scores with their post-test ones. Out of a target of 446 students, 151 responded by giving their names voluntarily, enabling the paired t-test to take place. A comparison revealed that the new communication course did affect their assessment of their communication abilities. The results of the paired sample t-test on specific student communication abilities are discussed in turn below.

5.10.1 Assertiveness

As the literature review indicated in Chapter Two, assertiveness is an important component of an individual's communicative competence. Therefore, five questions

were designed to help students to assess their assertive abilities. The responses for the first three questions show a significant improvement in their assertiveness scores after undergoing the course. The score also rises in response to the other two questions.

Table 5.4 Self-assessment of assertiveness

Questions	Mean Pre	Mean post	T	Sig.2-tailed
Do you introduce yourself first to others at a party?	2.93	3.20	-3.117	.000
Would you talk to your boss if you think you should have been promoted?	2.75	3.16	-3.715	.000
Do you think you give a good impression when you are talking with others?	2.79	3.22	-4.781	.000
Do you feel nervous when you speak to strangers?	3.36	3.41	-1.352	.178
Do you offer suggestions to your teachers in front of your classmates when required?	2.90	3.11	-2.294	.023

Key: Never=1; Rarely=2; Sometimes=3; Usually=4; Always=5

These results suggest a positive outcome for the communications course. In the second assessment (post course) they gave themselves higher scores in questions related to willingness to participate in communication. Their self-awareness and self-concept are higher than the first, pre-course assessment. Table 5.4 above gives details of the statistical means in pre-test and post-test, t-test and the probability.

5.10.2 Speaking, reading, and writing

The results showed that student respondents were satisfied with their achievement in these aspects of the communication course. Pre- and post- test comparisons indicate that improvements are shown in speaking, reading and writing, and these are statistically significant. Table 5.5 shows the details of the responses and relevant statistical information.

Table 5.5 Self- assessment of reading, writing and speaking skills

Questions	Mean Pre	Mean post	T	Sig.2-tailed
Do you speak clearly when you discuss issues with others?	3.51	3.82	-3.960	.000
Are you satisfied with your reading and writing skills?	3.03	3.39	-4.168	.000
Can you summarise information you need from reading?	3.23	3.41	-1.352	.017

5.10.3 Non-verbal skills

As discussed in the literature review, non-verbal skills play a significant role in one's ability to communicate effectively (Chapter Two, sub-section 2.3.2.2). Ability in non-verbal communication is frequently one of the criteria against which an individual's communication skills are assessed (Spence, 2003; Hargie & Dickson, 2004). This is why non-verbal attributes were included in the questionnaire. Student respondents felt that they had improved their non-verbal skills during the course. The results of the paired sample t-test show that this change was a significant one. Table 5.6 provides the details of the non-verbal characteristics used for self-assessment:

Table 5.6 Self -assessments of non-verbal skills

Questions	Mean Pre	Mean post	T	Sig.2-tailed
Do you think good manners are important when you communicate with others on formal occasions?	3.19	3.55	-3.856	.000
Do you use your facial expressions to respond to others when you are listening to them?	4.08	4.20	-1.784	.076
Do you use positive body language when you give a presentation in public?	3.81	3.90	-4.781	.228
How influential do you think personal appearance is in communication?	4.26	4.41	-2.102	.037

There is evidence of increasing awareness about the significance of nonverbal communication. This is important for Chinese students. The students grow in an educational context where the submissive, dutiful and obedient ones are habitually given praise. All depends on giving the 'right' answer, rehearsed and un-spontaneous. The influence of this expectation is that students learn to be introverted and passive as that is the way to 'save face'. The awareness of other forms and means of communication, including the ability to detect and interpret the feelings of others suggests deeper social skills and more self-awareness.

5.10.4 Understanding of 'communication key skills'

Respondents believed they had a better understanding of the notion of 'key skills' and 'communication key skills' as a result of the new courses (see Table 5.8).

Table 5.7 Understanding of key skills and communication key skills

Questions	Mean Pre	Mean post	T	Sig.2-tailed
Do you think you understand what the term 'key skills' means?	2.83	3.49	-6.500	.000
Do you think you understand what communication key skills are?	2.91	3.55	-6.859	.000

These results are encouraging, as they suggest that the new communication course, which was underpinned by notions of student-centred learning and experiential learning (Dewey, 1966; Knowles, 1973; Kolb, 1984; Rogers, 1994) had, according to the student participants, contributed to the development of their 'communication key skills', including assertiveness and non-verbal communication.

In addition, the evidence might suggest that students themselves though they had developed a greater understanding of communication *practice*, and were therefore becoming more aware of their own communication behaviours and the effect these had on others as well as the interpretation of others' non-verbal signals. They had developed in self-awareness and self-confidence. The development of these skills is especially important for Chinese students, who have been identified by many researchers as being shaped by traditional educational methods into passive listeners (Wang, 2002; Gu, 2003).

These post-course findings are in contrast with those from the first survey; in which student respondents reported that they had little active involvement in their communication classes and also that they had observed few improvements in their communication abilities as a result of the course. This suggests that the students involved in the new communication course perceived they might well have benefited from the student-centred learning approaches used.

5.11 Course-evaluation – students' views

Course evaluation is a complex process. As explained in Chapter Four, the course evaluation questionnaires used in this research aimed to obtain more information about the intrinsic educational value of the new communication course, as perceived by students and teachers, rather than simply to focus on its outcomes. In order to achieve this, five categories of questions were designed to explore students' and teachers' perspectives about the new student-centred approach in the

'communication key skills' course. The questionnaires were administrated twice, once at the end of the first semester and again at the end of the course.

Results showed that students' assessment of the course did not significantly change from the first to the second evaluation. This suggests that the course had already had its impact by the end of the first semester, and that quality of course delivery then remained the same throughout the rest of the course. In the discussion that follows, student respondents' experiences of student-centred learning and its impact on their communication abilities are presented.

The literature review in Chapter Three examined the importance of student-centred learning in the development of communication abilities. Kolb's experiential learning cycle was noted as the central philosophy associated with this pedagogy. Results from student respondents suggest that the new communication strategy is moving in that direction. In the course evaluation questionnaire, students were asked whether they felt there had been any improvement in their communication abilities. They were also asked how often they felt they received a 'real' learning experience as a result of their own initiative and action (i.e. in directing their own learning), and their attitudes towards the use of learning outcomes. Most respondents indicated that they had benefited from the new methodology. Full details are given in Appendix VIIII.

Most respondents (92.8% and 92.6%, first and second questionnaire respectively) reported that they participated actively in each unit of the new course. Over half (57.2% and 56.2%) said they usually or always were able to engage in

active participation. 90% of respondents in the first phase and 92.2% in the second phase said that they had enjoyed the benefits of experiential learning. Most students enjoyed the 'learning by doing' approach and accepted it as a way of experiencing real learning. When students were asked to evaluate whether the new communication course was useful for them, over 90% of respondents agreed that this was the case. 92.8% of students from the first questionnaire and 94.4% from the second said that they sometimes, usually or always felt that the course was having an important impact. Among these, 71.4% of students from the first group and 63.2% students from the second group said that they usually or always thought this was a useful course.

Table 5.8 gives the students' general perceptions about their achievements on the new course. Most respondents were satisfied with their achievements. About 96.7% of respondents in the first group and 94.8% in the second group thought that their achievements were significant. Only 3% of respondents in the first group and 5% of respondents in the second felt the course had made no discernible difference.

Table 5.8 Student evaluation of their learning on the course

		phase				Total	
		1st		2nd			
How do you assess the success of this course learning?	Very Effective	122	39.6%	87	28%	209	33.8%
	Effective	176	57%	206	66%	382	61.9%
	Not effective	10	3%	16	5%	26	4.2%
Total			308		309		617

The preference the students showed for the new communication course in these results might suggest that shifting the student's role from passive listener to active

learner is vital if students are to create their own meaningful learning experiences. Many researchers point out, encouraging students to take responsibility for their own learning is an important difference between the new student-centred pedagogies and conventional approaches (Knowles, 1973; Kolb, 1984; Rogers, 1994; Bennett, 1999). It can be inferred from this that the students involved in a student-centred approach would think about their learning in a different way.

As summarised in Chapter Three, social interactive and reflective processes are given a high profile in communications teaching and learning. Tasks that have been deliberately designed to trigger and promote learning should enable students to play a positive, active role in the learning process (Gibbons & Gray, 2002; Spence, 2003). A high percentage of respondents (89.9% in the first survey and 90.6% in the second) reported that, in order to achieve the specified learning outcomes, they were required to achieve tasks in which they took the initiative (see Table 5.9).

Table 5.9 Use of task-based learning

		phase				Total	
		1st		2nd			
How often do you think you were asked to achieve a task in order to meet the requirements of the learning outcomes?	never	7	2 . 2%	6	1.9%	13	2%
	rarely	23	7.4%	23	7.4%	46	7.4%
	some times	119	38.6%	132	42.6%	251	38.9%
	usually	109	35.%	110	35.4%	219	35.4%
	always	49	15.9%	39	12.6%	88	14.2%
			1		0		1
Total			308		310		618

In Chapter Three, the role of reflexive pedagogy in key skills teaching and learning was explored (Ekpenyong, 1999; Race, 2005; Burke & Dunn, 2006; Nicol &

Dick, 2006). These perspectives show that effective learning was closely related to regular assessments which enabled learners to make their learning more reflective and purposeful; these assessments could be formative or summative. In the questionnaires, the students' responses were consistent with this view. A very high percentage (93.1% from the first and 92.9% from the second) reported that the assessment of each unit sometimes, usually or always helped them to achieve their learning objectives.

Table 5.10 Use of assessment as a means of achieving objectives

		phase					
		1st		2nd		Total	
Do you think that the assessment of each unit helped you to achieve the learning objectives?	never	6	1.9%	6	1.9%	12	1.9%
	rarely	15	4.8%	14	4.5%	29	4.6%
	Some times	92	29.8%	123	39.6%	215	34.7%
	usually	119	38.6%	113	36.4%	232	37.5%
	always	76	24.6%	53	17%	129	20%
	8		0		2		2
Total			308		311		619

It is interesting to compare these findings with the results from the questionnaires given before the course started, which offered perceptions on the more traditional communications courses. These showed that students spent most of their class time in listening to the teacher talking. With the new course, students are much more involved in taking responsibility for their own learning, being involved in tasks and assessments and reflecting on their achievements. As identified by Price (1996), the communication learning process is a process in which 'the production of meaning always takes place within a specific context' (p163). Both learning outcome and

assessment design are crucial in leading students into social interactive contexts. However, questions such as whether or not the target tasks and social contexts are designed and managed effectively, and whether assessment is used as an interactive, developmental learning process, are related to the way the teacher plans and implements the course. The next three chapters will provide more evidences to support this point of view.

However, although students generally gave the impression that they were taking more responsibility for their own learning and were involved in various learning tasks and assessment activities, they had the perception that teachers could provide even more such opportunities. More than one third of the student respondents reported that they were not always participating in learning activities, but only 'sometimes'. Table 5.11 provides details of the responses.

Table 5.11 Student participation in learning activities

Count

		phase				Total	
		1st		2nd			
How often did you participate in learning actively in this new communication course?	never	4	1.2%	10	3.2%	14	2.2%
	rarely	18	5.8%	13	4.1%	31	5%
	Sometimes	110	35.7%	113	36.2%	223	36%
	usually	114	37%	113	36%	227	36.6%
	always	62	20%	62	19.9%	125	20%
Total			308		311		619

Although over half felt that they 'always' or 'usually' participated, 'sometimes' occurred as a response in 35.7% (first evaluation) and 36.2% (second evaluation). These respondents thought they were only 'sometimes' asked to achieve a task by themselves (see Appendix VIIII). There are several possible explanations for this.

Firstly, the learning outcomes might not always have been well designed; so that students needed help in interpreting them and guidance in the activities required to achieve them. This is very likely to occur when both students and teachers are still inexperienced in working in this way. Teachers may be inexperienced in using student-centred learning techniques and materials, or learning resources may still be limited. Students might not adapt to the new approaches immediately; they all have experienced at least twelve years of compulsory education which would have been mainly dominated by a didactic model. This might make it difficult for them suddenly to change into autonomous learners without substantial input from their teachers.

Teachers may also lack confidence in the new assessment methods. The shift in the focus from structures and methods of course delivery towards what the students actually have learned (Otter, 1992, p4), might lead teachers, through insecurity about the new methods, to ask students to demonstrate their performance in class immediately after the practice exercises, as a kind of extension of the notion of rote learning. However, whether this happened will be explored through the case studies. As has been pointed out elsewhere, some communication abilities, such as the ability to capture the essence of the meaning of another's talk or to interpret his/her body language requires cultural understanding, which may take time to develop. Teachers, therefore, may have to provide various materials which are relevant to cultural and social perceptions to trigger students' desire to think and learn, as well as ensuring their participation in learning activities.

5.12 Course evaluation - teachers' views

The course evaluation questionnaire for teachers was designed to elicit information about the focus group teachers' attitudes towards student-centred learning approaches. It also sought to draw out information concerning their perceptions of the new strategy and its influence on them and their colleges. Its effectiveness in promoting students' communication skills development was also explored. Lastly, it requested information about any barriers teachers had encountered during the implementation of the course and the use of the OTPAE model of assessment. All the teachers in the focus groups, except for one administrator, gave feedback twice, once at the end of the first semester and again at the end of the second semester. This corresponds with the administration of the students' evaluation questionnaires. The administrator was not asked to complete the course rating questionnaire because she did not actually teach at any point during the implementation of the new course. The full results of the teachers' course evaluation are given in Appendix X.

When teachers were asked to evaluate the effectiveness of student-centred learning in the new communications course, nearly 90% agreed or strongly agreed that student-centred learning could and should play a significant role in promoting students' communication abilities. When asked what effect the use of student-centred learning had had on them and their colleges, several changes were identified. These included the necessity of paying more attention to students' learning needs and the need to adjust to the new assessment models. More importantly, teachers were motivated by the new course and were becoming involved in curriculum development. Table 5.12 shows the details of their responses:

Table 5.12 Effects of student-centred learning on teachers and colleges

	1st phase		2nd phase	
Question	agree	Strongly agree	agree	Strongly agree
Do you think student-centred learning changed your assessment options?	3 37.5%	5 62.5%	0 0.0%	8 100%
Do you think you paid much more attention to students' learning needs when you developed new teaching materials?	2 26.8%	5 71.4%	4 50%	4 50%
Do you think student-centred learning motivates teachers to be involved in resource design and curriculum development?	1 14.3%	6 85.7%	1 12.5%	7 87.5%
Do you think student-centred learning has influenced the curriculum management of your college?	3 42.9%	4 57.1%	7 87.5%	1 12.5%

It appears that student-centred learning might have changed Chinese teachers' ways of working in a fundamental way. Evidence from data suggests that since this new approach has been employed, teachers have needed to create, collect or organise new learning resources according to individual student learning needs. The idea that one textbook could be used as the whole teaching content for a particular course for many years is undermined. The teachers' agreement to the individualised curriculum design and development might show that both teachers and their institutes are under pressure to be more flexible, especially in their approach to learning resource allocation, to keep up with the changes. The impact of student-centred learning on the curriculum management in the colleges, as indicated by the teacher respondents, might identified the implementation of any new teaching and learning approach requires changes to be made on the part of the education institutions involved (Weert & Pilot 2003) . As was shown in Section 3.3, teaching and learning reforms involve

not just the efforts of individual teachers, but also endorsement from the whole teaching and learning environment (Louis & Miles, 1990; Fullan, 1991; Gu, 2008; Zhang & Wu, 2008). Evidence here might also suggest changes may not happen as a result of only one or two individual teachers' actions. This is reflected in these research findings, where well over 90% of teachers thought that changes had to take place in the college curriculum management to facilitate curriculum innovation.

Teachers were very positive about the way that student-centred learning could be applied to the development of students' communication key skills, with 100% agreeing or strongly agreeing. This positive attitude continued throughout the course (see Table 5.13).

Table 5.13 Student-centred learning and the promotion of communication key skills

| Question | | | phase | | Total |
			1st	2nd	
Do you think the student- centred learning could play significant role in promoting students' communication abilities?	Agree	Count	1	1	2
		% within Source	12.5%	12.5%	12.5%
	Strongly Agree	Count	7	7	14
		% within Source	87.5%	87.5%	87.5%
Total		Count	8	8	16
		% within Source	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

5.12.1 Student-centred learning and the OTPAE model

Inspired by the notion of student-centred learning and the practice of competence-based education model, China's National Vocational Qualification Appraisal Experts Committee of Key Skills (NVQAECKS) introduced the OTPAE model for key skills curriculum development. OTPAE (Objective- Tasks- Preparation

-Action- Evaluation) was introduced to develop the 'key skills' curriculum and encourage vocational education teachers to create learning programmes or projects by using the model to develop students' 'key skills' and meet the needs of local employers. Table 5.14 presents the results.

Table 5.14 The OTPAE model and communication abilities

	1st phase		2nd phase	
Question	Agree	Strongly agree	Agree	Strongly agree
Do you think that the new communication course developed by using the OPTAE model promoted students' communication abilities?	0 0.0%	8 100%	3 42.9%	4 57.1%

The results from this question are interesting in that there was a subtle difference in teacher attitudes to student-centred learning approaches, which, as indicated in table 5.13, were favourable, and their views on the OTPAE model. Although all suggest they are in favour of the model in the evaluation given at the end of semester 1, the results from the second course rating show that three teachers changed their response from 'strongly agree' to 'agree'. This difference might indicate that, as the course progressed, and teachers became more involved in actual assessment, some teachers became more critical and questions about the effectiveness of the OTPAE model started to emerge.

While learning outcomes and task-based course design were identified as special characteristics of the OTPAE model, the data suggests that teacher respondents may be making a distinction between student-centred learning, which they appear fully to accept, and the specific features of the OTPAE model. A more detailed evaluation of the OTPAE model was possible during the qualitative stages of this research, using focus groups, interviews and class observations. This will be presented in the following chapters.

Results from the research so far appear to corroborate the findings of many of the previous studies in communication teaching and learning strategies. These support the idea of student-centred learning as a core strategy in the promotion of effective learning (Ekpenyong, 1999; Reece & Walker, 2000; Fazey & Parker, 2000; Prosser *et al*, 2000). As mentioned in Chapter Three (Section 3.1), the strength of student-centred learning is its central tenet, namely, that the learner is an active agent, not restricted to passive listening but learning actively from his or her own experiences (Dewey, 1974; Rogers, 1994; Cannon & Newble, 2000).

5.12.2 Barriers to the implementation of student-centred learning

One of the important aims of this research is to investigate whether there were any barriers that prevented teachers from adapting to student-centred learning approaches during the implementation of the new communication course. The teacher respondents were asked what kind of problems, if any, they encountered when they began to implement the new course. These are summarised in Table 5.15.

Table 5.15 Barriers to the implementation of student-centred learning

If relevant, can you identify reasons for any problems that you may have encountered implementing the course?	1st phase		2nd phase	
	Count	Col%	Count	Col%
a . The shortage of college investment in teaching resources.	1	12.5%	2	25.0%
b . Too much pressure from CNEI curriculum.	3	37.5%	5	62.5%
c . The college had not been permitted to do school-based curriculum development	0	0.0%	1	12.5%
d. Lack of teacher training for private college's teachers	5	62.5%	8	100.0%

The teachers involved in the course evaluation identified a number of factors that acted as barriers to effective course implementation. Interestingly, the number of barriers identified increased between the feedback from the end of the first semester and that from the end of the second. Again, this suggests teacher are becoming more critical and have greater experience of what input, they and their students required for the course to run effectively by the end of semester 2. At the second course rating, the most prominent problems which respondents listed were lack of resources, large student numbers and the limited time for teaching and learning. These findings are consistent with those of Fullan (1991) and Lan & Lo (2008) who identified lack of resources as a significant impediment to the successful implementation of new

teaching approaches. Large student numbers also present a problem in a number of ways. Firstly, more learning resources are required, and more teacher time to work on a one-to-one basis with students. Secondly, the burden of addressing individual learning needs and accommodating individualised assessment is greater. This elicits pressure on time, identified by participants as the one of major barriers.

However, the barriers that were cited need to be set against the fact that the three colleges in the study were experiencing fundamental dilemmas. Respondents indicated that one of the most important reasons for the limitations in the school-based course was from external factors, more importantly that of the need concurrently to follow the CNEI curriculum. As introduced in Chapter Four, the dated CNEI curriculum and its textbook-centred examination model meant that both teachers and students in CNEI colleges were also preparing for CNEI examinations. Consequently, the new school–based curriculum, focusing on students' personal development had to give priority to traditional examinations. This was essential, as CNEI does not recognise any school-based curriculum, including the new communication course, as part of its degree course. This highlights the fact that despite government policy there is currently no official incentive for school-based curriculum development, something that will have to change if the new communications course is to be widely accepted by colleges, teachers and students.

Returning to the barriers faced by teachers, the greatest of all was the lack of training opportunities for teachers to engage in professional development. 100% of teachers identified this as a barrier. Without the opportunity to receive initial training

in student-centred learning, and the ongoing need to meet teachers from other institutions and share experiences and perhaps learning resources, it is difficult to see how teachers can be expected successfully to implement a programme that is so different to what they have experienced before. All of the barriers listed represent issues that college managers will need to address in order for effective curriculum development and delivery in 'communication key skills'.

5.13 Summary of the findings in this chapter

One of the purposes of quantitative data analysis is to provide a framework to support and substantiate qualitative data. The findings from the first survey reveal the necessity of, and desire for, the development of communication abilities in the Chinese vocational education sector. Both teachers and students recognised and acknowledged the importance of personal communication abilities, and that they were called 'key skills'. Both teachers and students distinguished between practical skills and personal abilities. However, many teachers had only a limited understanding of the notion of key skills, and there appeared to be little in the way of literature or training materials to disseminate such information.

The results also show that teachers have a broad concept of communication abilities. Although perceptions differ, respondents identified that the development of communication abilities could take place within various other courses across the curriculum as well as in tailor-made communications courses. The findings also indicate that the teaching methods used for existing communication courses are mainly characterised by a didactic approach, with little participation from students.

Findings from the data collected from the second stage of this research show the very positive attitudes of both teachers and students to student-centred learning. Both valued their new experiences highly. Evidence from the student self-assessment questionnaires showed that they considered various communication skills, including assertiveness and responsiveness to have improved significantly. Linking this finding with the results drawn from course rating questionnaires, evidence demonstrates that the shifting of the student's role from passive listener to active learner is crucial for students to create their own meaningful learning experience. However, the analysis also indicates a lot of potential problems existing during teaching and learning. Some students felt that they were not yet being given enough opportunities to direct their own learning. Having experienced student-centred learning, and welcoming it, they wanted more. Yet, teachers were still unfamiliar with the approach and needed time to adjust as well as to develop relevant learning activities and materials. Because curriculum development had always been carried out centrally in the past, teachers had little or no experience to build on.

Although enthusiastic about student–centred learning, some teachers grew less enamoured of the OTPAE model as the course progressed. The reason for this needs further investigation, which will be undertaken in the next stage during the case studies.

Teachers also revealed those barriers which prevented the effective implementation of the new communication course. Evidence suggests that teachers require more support from their schools and education policy makers. To enhance the

effectiveness of student-centred learning and communication key skills development, teachers and administrators must engage in more school-based development work. Without the various elements of school management and effective professional development for teachers, it is difficult to see how effective student-centred learning can be promulgated.

Although the results from the quantitative data had given strong support to student-centred learning implementation in China, they cannot be used as a complete basis on which to draw definite conclusions. Questionnaire rarely illuminate the more subtle responses of students. Whilst there is clear evidence here, it was apparent that the illuminative evaluation designed in this study needed to explore the depth of understanding and the attitudes of teachers and students toward student-centred learning. The evaluative evidence for this research is what the teachers and students think about the changes, and what their real experiences actually were. For this it is necessary to carry out qualitative investigations and classroom observations in order to obtain a richer picture of the issues that arose during the implementation of the new communication course. The next Chapter begins this process by presenting the findings from the case study of College B.

Chapter Six

Creating a new teaching and learning environment:

Case Study College B

6.1. Introduction

Chapter Five has discussed the quantitative data arising from this research, but a deeper analysis of the teachers' and students' points of view and their attitudes toward student-centred learning and communication key skills require a more detailed qualitative investigation. As this study attempts to illuminate the underlying meaning of issues and situations that emerged during the implementation of the new communication course, the case study method was chosen as means to 'investigate and report the complex dynamic and unfolding interactions of events, human relationships and other factors' (Cohen *et al,* 2000, p181). This includes exploring the impact of student-centred learning on teachers and students according to their own perceptions through focus groups and interviews and triangulated by class observations. Chapters Six, Seven and Eight will present the findings based on teachers' and students' experiences of the implementation of the new communication course in each of the three colleges.

This is the first case study of the three Chinese private colleges. As explained in Chapter Four, they are all approved by the China National Examination Institute (CNEI) which enables them to run nationally recognised degree courses of higher vocational education. In addition, the colleges have some freedom to develop their

own school-based programmes; but the development of these courses is limited not only by curriculum structure but also by the non-recognition from CNEI of these degree credits. College B has some international links, whilst College S concentrates on a curriculum of administrative management. In contrast, College R has a very broad curriculum as well as a larger number of students. The three colleges have already offered some courses relevant to communication studies in a Chinese context, such as those entitled 'culture and etiquette' and 'business negotiation' but, apart from College S, they have not in the past offered specific 'communication' courses. More details about each college will be presented separately in the three case studies.

There are eight units in the new communication course. The first two units are concerned with 'self-disclosure/communication' and 'motivation/communication'. The other six units cover non-verbal language, assertiveness, listening, reading and presentation skills. Each unit has certain objectives and suggested tasks which are specifically related to the learning outcomes. This allows teachers to make changes or create new tasks and teaching materials, or to adapt learning activities dependent on their students' learning needs. For further details of the course see Appendix XII. Information about the implementation of the course in each college will also be presented in each case study.

This Chapter presents the findings drawn from the perspectives of both teachers and students in College B, who were involved in the implementation of the new communication course. It will present the issues that emerged from the class observations and interviews which demonstrated how teachers perceived the new

teaching and learning approaches, how existing concepts of teaching and learning contrasted with the new teaching and learning methods and what barriers the teachers encountered when they implemented the new course. It will indicate what changes occurred in the teacher's role as a result of the new pedagogy. It will also explore teachers' perceptions of their experiences of student-centred learning and their perception of the impact of this new approach on them. During the implementation of the new communication course, the teachers also commented what they had to do was to play a 'leadership role in shaping learning for a particular group of learners' (Harkin *et al*, 2000, p75). Evidence from class observation provides specific information about the effect of student-centred learning on the development of Chinese students' communication abilities. In order to cope with the changes, College B organised a specific staff training programme, parallel to the implementation of the course itself. The implications of this will be explored and analysed.

This Chapter is divided into four sections: Section 6.1 is a general introduction, presenting the common information for each case study. Section 6.2 is a summary of the context of College B. Section 6.3 concerns the implementation of the new communications course at College B, including a description of each of the focus group teachers' backgrounds and that of their students. The main part of this Chapter, Section 6.4, presents an analysis of the qualitative data collected from interviews, focus group meetings and class observations conducted at College B. The key factors which emerged during the whole process of delivering the course are explored and discussed. Particular themes are identified in subheadings. The first part of Section

6.4 explores the issues that teachers encountered during the implementation of the course. The second part provides evidence of the teacher's role in shaping students' learning experiences. The third part explores how the students developed their understanding of communication through an interactive learning process. The staff training programme in College B is also documented in Section 6.4.

6.2. The context of College B

College B was established in 1993 by two different educational institutions. One was an overseas college; the other was a vocational training centre in Beijing. It is a medium sized college by Chinese standards, with 6235 full-time students studying in five faculties: Commerce and English; Information Technology; Foreign Languages and Services; Art and International Education. Given its starting point, the College has a particular interest in promoting international education. It has developed an internationally-based curriculum resulting from collaboration with several foreign universities. This has meant that about thirty foreign teachers come from different countries to work in the College each year. English is a compulsory course for every student in the College. English conversational classes are arranged for small cohorts of students to give them the opportunity to speak. All these developments make the College quite unusual amongst the numerous non-governmental colleges in Beijing.

At the same time, the majority of students at College B are involved in degree programmes offered by the CNEI (see sub-section 2.4.3). Each degree includes at least fifteen different compulsory courses that are examined four times a year by CNEI. These usually place teachers and students under considerable pressure. CNEI

does not organise any teacher training, seminars or symposiums for (as CNEI puts it) political reasons. Moreover the CNEI curriculum and examinations remain traditional in style: topics are drawn from the textbook; questions are answered in an answer booklet in order to direct students to the topics that they should focus on and repeat. What the students need to do is to rote learn questions and answers as well as they can. Therefore, the CNEI curriculum and its examination are based on memory, on rote learning and the recall of textbook knowledge.

However, the implementation of international education cooperative programmes in College B has had an influence on teachers' perceptions about teaching and learning. As a result, the management of the College and their staff and teachers are more open-minded towards curriculum development and they welcomed the implementation of a new communication course in their College.

6.3. The implementation of the new communication course

One senior manager and four different teachers were engaged in a focus group in College B. The administrator had more than 30 years' educational experience. As a Vice Principal of the College, she was in charge of students' moral and ethical education as well as being responsible for graduate employment. She considered the new communication course would benefit students by ensuring that they at least had the 'basic skills to build a good relationship with others' and that 'it would motivate students with a concern to commit themselves to contribute to society' (Tem, B). As such, the new communication course, in her mind, looked relevant to students' cultural, moral, social and career development, and she felt it would also provide a

new opportunity for the College. Hence, she actively assisted the whole process as the head of the programme in College B, although she had no responsibility for teaching the new course.

Teacher Anm's major was Chinese literature when she studied at university. She had been in teaching for 18 years by the time she became involved with this programme. Her students for this new course were from the Information Technology faculty. More than half the students in her class were male (27 boys to 13 girls) and her students' lack of motivation to learn was a matter of great concern for her. More details about her story will be outlined in the next section.

Mr Xum had one more year's teaching experience than Anm. He taught moral education courses in College B, which did not require a national examination and was consequently not subject to CNEI pressures. However, besides his teaching, he was Vice Dean of the foreign languages faculty. These responsibilities kept him busy all the time. The new communication course resulted in considerable work for him. He was in charge of three different classes, one of 36 students majoring in Law, another of 42 students of Chinese language. The third contained 32 students studying courses in Aviation Services.

The third teacher, Gom, who was very experienced, unfortunately fell ill and was subsequently unable to continue his teaching in the middle of the first semester of the new course. He was replaced by Miss Jam, the youngest teacher in the focus group. Jam took over one class when Gom went on sick leave. The class consisted of 35 students studying Japanese. She was in charge of another class in which 45 students

were mainly studying modules relevant to English language. Not only was she younger, Jam only had one year's teaching experience when she became involved with the new course. Nevertheless she was very keen to learn everything required; she took, for example, a keen interest in the new pedagogies that were to be employed in the new courses.

The course began in September 2006 with a new group of students. There were two class 'hours' a week (fifty minutes each) which were extra to the regular schedule. The whole process lasted two semesters and finished in June 2007. Each class of students was divided into at least six or seven groups with around five or six students. Students did role-plays and simulation activities and produced oral presentations for each other on differing topics. The last three units were covered in the second semester and took almost 15 weeks to finish as the students needed more time than originally scheduled to complete the learning tasks. Writing skills were included only informally as part of the course because the College taught writing as a separate module. However, writing skills were addressed more in the final unit of the course.

With an emphasis on different communication abilities, each unit included specific tasks which addressed relevant learning outcomes. Teachers could use the designed tasks in the new textbook or develop new tasks according to the needs of their students' vocational background and the unit objectives. The students could contribute their ideas or make an oral presentation during their group meetings. The teacher would tutor each group, and give assistance where and when necessary. To

encourage students' participation and autonomous learning, teachers usually chose a group, or an individual from the group, to present their work in front of the whole class. These activities were frequently undertaken in order to draw together the assessments. In the second semester, the teachers combined the reading and presentation units, thus aiming to develop various communication abilities holistically. It created a good opportunity for the students to practise all their reading, writing and oral skills in a single task. It was apparent that both teaching materials and teaching and learning methods were quite different from what occurred on the CNEI courses. The impact of the new teaching and learning approaches on teachers, students and College B itself will be explored in Section 6.4.

6.4 Key issues that emerged during the implementation of the course

6.4.1 The first impact

At the beginning of the course, teachers had to deal with lots of unanticipated problems. They found it especially difficult to encourage student participation in learning. The following explores why this occurred.

Teacher Anm was involved in the design of this programme. She felt very confident about offering the course. In her words, she 'had got the basic idea of how to do it' (Anm, B). However, after two weeks' actual teaching, she doubted whether she could finish the course. She expressed her feeling in a focus group meeting:

> Their [students'] levels are too low to enter this course. They don't want to respond to my questions... You can't ask them to discuss anything in a group, they just don't do it. I found this very embarrassing. I think I shouldn't continue with this course any more.
>
> (Anm, B)

She looked disappointed as she spoke. She felt anxious that she could not carry out what she had intended to do. On the other hand, she wanted to find a way to change the situation, which was why she chose to talk about the problems she had encountered in the focus group meeting. For her, students' reluctance to participate in learning activities was the biggest barrier. The reasons she identified for students' lack of active participation are more complicated. They depend on several factors, including their backgrounds, their concepts of teaching and learning and their study skills. It might however also be that the teacher was not prepared sufficiently for delivering the new course. Anm's explanation nevertheless centred on the attitude of the students:

> I have a large group of naughty boys. I presume that one of the main reasons they selected IT as their major is that they wanted to avoid studying literature, writing, and speaking. They seem to have little interest in learning. This is a big problem.

(Anm, B)

'Naughty boys' is the best translation available but it fails to capture the precise nuances of the term in Chinese. In China, the term 淘气包（tao-qi-bao）is used to describe those who, though talented in practical matters, are not good at following rules obediently. Anm thought the problem the students had was that they had no passion for learning 'literature, writing, and speaking'. The problem appeared to be that these students had had 12 years' compulsory education in which literature and writing were all taught through a didactic approach. At the same time, they had few, or no chances for interactive learning, or even of giving presentations to the whole class, especially since they seemed to have accepted the label and role of being the so-called 'naughty boys'. As mentioned in Chapter Two, those students in China who

are not outstanding academically are largely marginalised. Wang (2004) points out that students in Chinese higher education retain the influences of traditional education, and they often feel bored with study precisely as a result of the didactic teaching methods used (2004, p87). Those who do not adapt have their own way of amusing themselves (Cullingford, 2010). As such, it is a big challenge for those students who have never previously considered education as something of interest of them, nor as something they are responsible for or which shapes their identity and their future view of the world. Teacher Anm even wanted to give up because she thought her students' academic level was too low for the course. She recognised, however, that the students could not change immediately after such long a time as passive learners. Anm continued:

> It takes too much effort to adapt to the position of change; both the students and I have to try to get used to our new roles. It is too difficult to guide the students in their practical action. I find it is much easier just to talk to them. I cannot change my role overnight. It will take a long time.

<div align="right">(Anm, B)</div>

This statement shows that both the teacher and her students still bear the marks of traditional transmissive approaches. After twelve years studying in a didactic educational context, the students are shaped into being the 'containers' which are ready to be 'filled' by the teachers (Freire, 2002, p72). They cannot be immediately converted into 'whole persons' who can actively contribute their ideas and then apply them in such a way as to be responsive learners. The evidence also reveals that the teacher respondent, by her own admission, had a tendency to revert to her original way of teaching. This is because both she and her students were familiar and comfortable with (even if critical of) the didactic approach. It was easier for her to

continue with this approach rather than risk a situation where she might experience difficulties in encouraging her students to participate. A second one, Tem, expressed similar thinking:

> Most of the students in private colleges don't have very good study skills. They don't have higher expectations for their learning. It needs time for them to take over learning responsibilities such as autonomous learning, self-improvement and self -regulation. This is a long process.
>
> (Tem, B)

This perspective is significant because it indicates that the teacher has realised that the development of students' communication abilities is a complex process. To change students' attitudes to learning is relevant to 'their expectations for their learning' (Tem, B). She indicates that communication abilities are not only about reading, writing, speaking and listening skills but also relate to students' motivation and self-awareness. This links with the findings in Chapter Five where both teacher and student respondents identified communication, teamwork and self-improvement as communication abilities, revealing a broad conceptual framework. As identified in Chapter Two, it is an individual's 'intention, control and awareness' that underpins various social communication performances (Hargie *et al*, 1994, p16). It is unlikely that such 'intention, control and awareness' can be shaped in the early stages of a communication course, as they are unlikely to result from only one course intervention, but rather might need to rely on the establishment of a more holistic teaching and learning environment in which students are encouraged to demonstrate their thinking, imagination and creativity. This environment cannot be constructed by pedagogical reform alone, but must also be central to college policy and that of the

whole system. It must be said that students' learning skills and student-centred learning should ideally be addressed at an earlier stage before long-term habits are inculcated. The teachers surveyed here indicate that such changes are unlikely to occur in one day. This shows that traditional ideas about the purpose of education that teachers and students hold and the traditional teaching and learning methods they were used to colour the implementation of the new pedagogy.

6.4.1.1 Preparing for the CNEI examination

Teachers said that they also met with obstacles. As a college offering CNEI degree courses, College B had to prepare their students for CNEI examinations in order for them to obtain a nationally recognised degree. These examinations take place four times a year, in January, April, July and October. These 'rote competition' examinations exercise teachers and students very much, because CNEI colleges have to be very committed to intensive training for their students since the degree obtained is deemed by Chinese students and their parents as the most important goal of higher education. Therefore, the students' enthusiasm for achieving their communication course learning outcomes waned while they were preparing for CNEI examinations.

Teacher Jam explained:

> The new communication course requires students to do lots of work on their learning outcomes after their class time, but you can't ask your students to do more work when they say "I have to prepare for a national examination". For them, it is more important to deal with the examination than with competence development.
>
> (Jam, B)

Being placed in these circumstances, teachers might find themselves in 'ambivalent situations' as they have to work harder to 'bridge the call for a powerful learning environment' (Tillema & Kermer-Hayon, 2005). At the same time, they are:

> ...immersed in the conditional demands and affordances of permissive or restrictive environments that lay down a baseline to their teaching quality.   (Tillema & Kermer-Hayon, 2005, p204)

This experience of teachers is not confined to College B, but occurs in China as a whole. The CNEI curriculum does not focus on vocational aspects; both the course content and the examination system are academic in nature. This causes tensions if, at the same time, teachers have to deliver a new course such as 'communication key skills' in response to government proposals. This lack of consistency in educational policy creates difficulties for teachers who have to deal with such conflicts when they implement the new courses. Xum expressed his disquiet:

> The students are under a great pressure of CNEI courses. Dealing with the examination, they have to ignore any other courses which are deemed not closely relevant to the national examination. Though communication abilities development is very important for their future, they didn't pay enough attention to it. That is big problem for my teaching.
>
> (Xum, B)

Evidence shows that teachers who were involved in the innovative work were in a difficult situation. The implementation of the new programme is 'full of the signs of the struggle to cope, survive and to keep going' (Cullingford, 2010, p20). The findings from College B also suggest that the reformation of teaching pedagogy might depend on whether the educational goal of 'competence' is nationally recognised and embedded in educational policy via the curriculum framework in the higher vocational education sector. Teachers may expect to experience difficulties if they

don't have support from the whole educational establishment when implementing the new pedagogy.

6.4.1.2 The students: 'It is artificial play'

A typically negative response to the new programme came from one student GMJ, No 23. She felt the class simulation exercises were simply a kind of game:

> It is play between the classmates; it is artificial play – not real. I don't think my communication skills were promoted through it.
>
> (GMJ, No 23)

This statement reflects her perceptions about what learning involves. Firstly, she did not think the class simulation or role-playing was a kind of learning. She thought the practice in the class was:

> ... simply an entertainment programme. It wasn't about teaching or learning. Additionally, this is not the national examination course, so, we didn't pay much attention to it.
>
> (GMJ, No 23)

This extract gives the reason why she thought that the role-play was not learning. In her mind, learning was only something that happened when she was studying for exams. The role-play, for her, had no educational value; its only purpose was entertainment. This perspective on learning reflects the conventional view of education held by this student. She might think of learning only as rote learning, or she might consider the tasks set by her teacher to be insufficiently challenging and therefore was not motivated to participate in the learning process. Teacher Jam commented further:

> Some students are suspicious of the value of this course. They didn't fully understand the new teaching method.
>
> (Jam, B)

Although only one student voiced such a clearly negative reaction to the course, comments on the importance of exam results reflected the whole student contingent's views.

However, to provide meaningful tasks in diverse situations is difficult for teachers since the tasks the teacher chooses for class practice need to be matched to the students' vocational background and social interactive learning (Cameron, 2000; Sprague, 2002; Spence, 2003; Dionne *et al*, 2004; King, 2006). As identified in Chapter Three (Section 3.3), to create the context for an interactive learning environment needs careful planning. If this is to occur in reality, task design should take account of such factors as students' intended vocational careers, their age, interests, and lastly, their orientation to learning. The students need to feel that the communications course, and the activities within it, are nationally recognised and endorsed.

6.4.1.3 The lack of resources

The findings from the interview data in College B are consistent with the findings of the quantitative data which explored teachers' perceptions that a shortage of resources was another challenge to the implementation of student-centred learning. The findings drawn from both teacher and student interviews confirm this point. As an example, one student gave his opinion after the class:

> Well, today's class let us know how to select the information we needed for our task. However, I think we should have more practice hours in this room. Only these two hours are not long enough for me.
>
> (AMI, No 21)

This class focused on how to use the internet to search for and select information for achieving a communication task. Teacher Anm used the College computer room for her students for this. There was however, no more practice time allowed for these students in this computer room after class hours. The reason Anm could not arrange more IT hours for the students was that the computer room was fully booked, and according to the College's management regulations, technical staff had to be present when the students used the computer room. That meant that in order for the students to be able to use the facilities during certain hours the technical staff had to volunteer to be present without being paid. No allowance had been made for servicing the additional work. This issue highlights the perspectives discussed in Chapter Three (Section 3.4) in which both Fullan (1991) and Zhang and Wu (2008) concluded that institutional-wide changes may be necessary when implementing a new curriculum. For them, these needed to include not only cross college planning but also enough resources and assistance to support teachers' work in a pleasant and co-operative sets (Fullan, 1991; Zhang & Wu, 2008).

Further evidence of the lack of resources was also presented by teachers. For example, Mr Xum complained that:

> I could never get the teaching equipment like the video machines from our IT department that I needed for communication classes. They were always in use and the computer classroom was always busy too.
>
> (Xum, B)

As discussed in Chapter Three (Section 3.3), an effective communication course requires the students to be involved with cognitive processes, working out solutions for themselves. This might demand that the teacher provides a variety of cognitive

resources (Ireson, 2008). Access to library books, the internet and audio-visual equipment –this would all be a basic requirement for an institution seriously committed to providing a course employing student-centred learning. Evidence suggests it is essential to support teachers' innovative practice. In College B, resources seem to be lacking. Tem showed her disappointment:

> We are unable to do what we wanted to do. Teachers don't even have computers to search for the information they require for the learning activities. They have to use the students' computer classroom instead… Otherwise, we would design some tasks related to the real social environment or work places that might make the students to learn more effectively. But we know that's impossible, the college doesn't have enough money in the budget to support these kinds of activities. It's a real pity.
>
> (Tem, B)

It is no surprise that she expressed her disappointment here, especially since she had a passion to demonstrate her ideas and commitment but lacks the necessary resources, including personal access to the internet outside class time. As Day *et al* (2007) point out, teachers only feel recognition and respect for their work when they benefit from a supportive environment (2007, p129). The lack of adequate teaching time, the shortage of resources and the wholesale emphasis on preparation for traditional exams are institutional problems which reduced the effectiveness of teaching and learning in the new course. The acquisition of communication abilities demands that students have a positive motivation and self-awareness to take part in the communication process in the first place. At present, because of their past experiences of didactic teaching methods, evidence from College B suggests that some students are not taking the student-centred approach seriously. This situation needs to be addressed if student-centred learning is to succeed in College B.

6.4.2 The teacher's role

Research in College B suggests that teachers feel that they play a key role in shaping students' learning experiences in a student-centred learning context. Mr Xum claimed:

> Student-centred learning demands more work on course design in which teachers need to do much more preparation. I feel that it is more difficult. Where can I find the time?
>
> (Xum, B)

Xum's comment revealed that he had developed an understanding of the teacher's new role in student-centred learning. He knows that the teacher is solely accountable for the preparation of a careful teaching plan and associated course activities. This is a new role for Chinese teachers. They are not textbook presenters any more, but have to develop activities and materials for their students. Xum felt he faced difficulties in his new role. He gave the limited amount of time as an example.

The big change for teacher, Xum was also that:

> Before, my focus was on whether or not the students were clear enough about what I taught. Now, my concern is whether or not the students can do something. I think that's a big change. It shifts teaching aims from textbook knowledge to competence.
>
> (Xum, B)

Clearly, at least in his case, student-centred learning has changed the perspective of what is required of teachers and students. Xum has observed that he has to shift his attention from what he, as a teacher, does to what students can do. The focus now is placed on the kind of experiences that can help students develop their abilities. This important piece of evidence shows that the teacher has had to rethink the purpose of

education. His statement also reveals that the implementation of student-centred learning is more complex than the didactic approach it replaces. As he put it:

> Before, I felt I had finished my work when I ended my speech to the students in the class. All I had to do was tell the students what the important part in the text which might be tested was and let them underline and remember it. But now, the teacher has to plan for assessments at each stage. The assessment is a central line through the whole teaching and learning process… This is quite different.
>
> (Xum, B)

He has realised the importance of using a reflective approach to challenge his students. His input no longer ends with an emphasis on key, examinable facts. Instead, he has to plan out formative and summative assessment tasks. Assessment is not used as a test after a period of teaching but is used as regular, formative feedback during the learning process.

During a focus group meeting, Miss Jam described what she had been doing in her class. Her students were asked to work in a group and investigate the management of the College's three canteens. The aim of this exercise was to develop the students' interview skills and speaking abilities. Jam introduced the topic a number of weeks before the date set for the student presentation of their findings in the classroom. She asked the students to discuss their interview schedule and content and to make a plan. Each student had a certain target. After the canteen investigation, the groups had to define each canteen's management issues and analyse any problems as well as summarise the main points of the group discussion. Each student had to report his or her findings and conclusions in front of the whole group, and the speaker's performance was assessed by his or her peers. According to her, this activity motivated the students

to participate effectively. She then gave an account of her understanding of the new assessment:

> The validity of assessment depends on the integrative assessment; this includes participation in the learning activities and social practices. The assessment should be integrative, three-dimensional, in-depth and concrete so as to help the students' competence build step by step.
>
> <div align="right">(Jam, B)</div>

This teacher was aware that communications teaching and learning is linked with social practice and an integrative assessment process. Her story shows that she was concerned not only to break away from the limitation of the textbook but also of the classroom. She used the college's canteens as a case study and attempted to promote students' communication abilities through investigative activities. The tasks for teaching and learning here are complex, integrative ones; she considered that this enabled her students to have real learning experiences. In this, she demonstrates a sophisticated understanding of appropriate strategies for student-centred learning and outcomes-based assessment as well as the selection of tasks to motivate her students.

Anm also gave an example of her work in a focus group meeting. It shows how she tried to motivate her students into active learning through an approach which she felt would interest her group of 'naughty boys':

> I analysed what my students' favourites are, and found that most boy students are interested in sport, cars and computer games, so I thought I must find an issue which could capture their attention and lead them into the learning process. I organised an activity entitled 'a car sale workshop'.
>
> <div align="right">(Anm, B)</div>

The implication here is that student-centred learning encouraged this teacher to study her students. She looked hard to discover what would interest them. Then Anm devised and organised this specific task. She said she asked her students to 'work as a

real car salesman and use computer skills as much as you can'. According to her, the use of the words 'real salesman' encouraged her students to observe the communication process of those salesmen in workplaces. The students were asked to work in their groups to select information in order to achieve the group outcomes together. She found that both male and female students were excited and engaged by this specific activity. They went to a car shop to inquire what customers needed to know before they buy, and to observe how salesmen communicated with their customers. They searched the internet to select relevant information about different types of cars; they also wrote brief introductions about the cars together with pictures of the various models. They used IT technology; they also decorated their classroom as if it was a car shop. When the 'car sale workshop' opened, Anm said that each group of students actively talked to their 'customers', and demonstrated their enthusiasm for communicating throughout their 'pitches'. Anm concluded:

> They got to know that communication skills are important for them and felt much more confident they can learn these skills. And this case tells me that I have to know my students well, know what interests them.
>
> (Anm, B)

She had embraced current learning theories which emphasise the 'importance of the emotional and personal side of learning, particularly that which emphasised the importance of adults as being self-directed and working towards self-actualisation' (Light & Cox, 2001 p74). This approach places emphasis on designing productive learning activities rather than simply expecting students to memorise or regurgitate knowledge from the textbook. These new theories guided her in diagnosing her

students' learning needs, in designing relevant tasks and finding a coherent means of delivering them. Therefore they perceived the activity as real, not 'artificial play'.

Data collected from interviewing her students indicated that they also felt the benefit of this activity. One student said:

> I think the course is very practical; it improves my participation in learning.
>
> (AMI06, No 21)

Another student mentioned her experience in this class:

> I'm a group leader; I always participate in the activities of this course… For instance, the car dealing workshop is the one that impressed me most. We introduced the use and advantages of the car we had chosen for the 'customer'.
>
> (AMI06, No 20)

We can see quite clearly in College B that students' commitment to their learning depends on how teachers shape their students' learning experiences through effective task design. The quality of learning increases when students felt the tasks were interesting and meaningful. Anm further summarised:

> If you have no detailed course design which could stimulate your students' interest to learn, you would have no good students
>
> (Anm, B).

The message conveyed here is an important conceptual change: Anm's perspective on effective teaching in the future is that teachers have to understand their students and have the necessary knowledge and competence to identify tasks and activities to meet students' learning needs. Anm realised it was not that her 'naughty students' had no potential to learn but that she herself had a lot more work to do in leading her students to learn. This accords with Gibbons & Gray (2002) who point out that keeping an

open mind and being sensitive to social issues and topics relevant to students'
vocational backgrounds will help find the 'trigger experience'. This is perceived by
this teacher as crucial in order to engage with students successfully. This teacher also
perceived that the new learning approach had improved the quality of her teaching;
the new pedagogy encouraged her to plan in such a way that it became possible to
change her students from 'naughty boys' into 'good students'.

The results from College B do not support the standpoint of Her (2006),
discussed in Chapter Three (sub-section 1.2.3), in which it is claimed that
student-centred learning weakens the role of teachers. Evidence from College B
appears to show that the opposite is true. When designing activities to help students
achieve their learning outcomes, teachers had to spend more time and work harder to
provide more learning resources. They were more involved and even more essential,
but in a different way. The teachers in College B demonstrated how hard it was to
create the context for learning activities; they also had to develop or test the value of
teaching materials and make decisions about which were suitable for different groups.
Their perceptions, according to their stories, support the notion expressed by Harden
& Crosby (2000), which emphasises that teachers have to play at least six new
academic roles in the student-centred learning environment such as 'course planner'
and 'resource developer' (2000, p336). In order to make the learning programme
worthwhile and achievable, the key requisite for the successful implementation of
student-centred learning is that teachers are willing to 'graft new experiences on to
existing healthy and fruitful experiences' (Harkin *et al*, 2000, p65). Students must be

given a central role in the learning activities, but this does not mean also transferring teachers' responsibilities for planning, leading, organising, managing, facilitating and assessing.

If students are to learn under the direction of teachers, the quality of their learning will depend on the environment in which they learn. As Hybels and Weaver (2005) point out, there are many subtle influences on learning, and communicative capacity depends on the students' ability to understand and adapt to these influences. The learning environment or the milieu in which students learn involves 'participation [in] the cultural practice in which knowledge exists' (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p98). Even with student-centred learning, teachers retain some control over the 'community of practice', or the conditions in which students learn.

6.4.3 Learning through interactive communication processes

As has been identified in Chapter Three, the acquisition of communication abilities depends on the extent to which the individual is involved in social interactive communication processes (Kukulu *et al*, 2006, King, 2006). Some researchers have identified that during interactive learning, students can gain an enhanced perception of themselves and of their personal identity (Price, 1996; Gillies, 2007). Evidence from class observations at College B supports these perspectives. The following example, drawn from a class observation in Teacher Jam's class, presents a small part of an assessment of a student's communication performance. Two students had just finished their role-play in which a staff member from an internet service company had

negotiated with one of its customers who complained about the quality of their work

(T=teacher; S1-S6=students):

T: Any comment about their performance? What do we think of this member of staff? Do you think he successfully negotiated with his customer? How did he do?

S1: I think he could have listened to the customer's complaint more carefully and patiently. That's important personal quality for service work, especially when your customer is angry.

S2: He took some tangible measures to check what problem existed in their service system. For example, he phoned the relevant office to ask whether they had checked the web system in front of this customer, and this made the customer feel better. The customer calmed down.

S3: This clerk has showed that he really cared about this customer and wanted to help him to solve the problem sincerely. That is the key to successful communication.

S4: But I think he should not always explain what difficulties his department has.

S5: I think that's necessary because it enables the customer to feel better, doesn't it?

S6: I think it would have been better if he had made notes whilst listening to the customer. That would demonstrate he has a more professional manner.

The implication here is that the role play by these two students resulted in all the students in the class taking part in the process of finding a solution to a problem by using discussion. The formative assessment here is not related to any score or attainment, but is a learning process through which students reached an understanding about the effectiveness of communication. The principle of 'taking care of others', as basic knowledge of effective communication, should be borne in mind when people communicating. It is not 'taught' as such but is captured by students' participation in interactive learning processes. This is the real significance of student-centred learning in College B: the meaning drawn from the discussion of the social communicative issues by students themselves, when these issues are presented and discussed and when all the students are involved.

Using these approaches, the students appeared to have learnt how to change their attitudes to response to each other. One student said:

> I feel that…, before, I was self-centred when I spoke to someone else. What I said was just what I wanted to say. It seemed like… I suddenly realised, you couldn't… you can't have a conversation entirely on what you want to say, you have to consider the listener, consider the other's feelings. You need to communicate by using positive sentences with enthusiasm.
>
> (JMJ0607, No 3)

There are similarities between the attitude expressed by this student and the findings drawn from the quantitative data in Chapter Five. Both the quantitative and qualitative data have shown the development of students' responsiveness in communication situations. This particular student knows she had achieved a sense of social responsibility as she had given thought to others' feelings and that this had influenced her responses. The important thing is that she has *realised* this, and understood it is due to a process of personal reflection, rather than simply being *told* about it. The impact of interactive communication on her, according to her account, has been to change her primary motivation for communicating. In other words, she had not merely learnt the knowledge from a textbook; she has developed her attitudes and motivation towards effective, two-way communication. Evidence here gives support to the perspective identified in Chapters One and Two, which indicates that the abilities of communication are much more complex than 'skills' because they are closely linked with individual motivation, beliefs and attitudes. Another student gave further evidence for this:

> Skilled communication can mediate interpersonal relationships. It can make people feel better, it happens everywhere, all the time. For example, we have lunch in our canteen very often. Before, I just handed over my card and told the staff what I wanted. Now I like to say 'hello' with a smile on my face.

> The staff members look happier to serve me. It is small thing, but it brought me a good feeling.
>
> <div align="right">(XMH0602, No.9)</div>

Saying 'hello' and being friendly to others may be a very small thing; even three year old children can do it, but why did this student regard it as a kind of achievement from this course? The key issue is that she recognised that to treat others well is crucial to building good interpersonal relationships. This is a change in attitude as well as the development of a skill. Working on such abilities can give students an impression of how they come across to others and what image of themselves they project to the world. These complex human activities involve commitment, logical thinking, as well as relevant and tacit knowledge. They also require positive attitudes and enthusiasm.

Another student explained what a difference the course had made to her:

> I like this course. The knowledge seemed the same as in any other book, but it is conveyed and taught in a different way. Mu… for example: you have to show what you have learned, that makes me understand the knowledge better.
>
> <div align="right">(XMH0602 No 8)</div>

One student thought the value of the course lay in it teaching what was not found in any textbook:

> When you take part in that situation, you can feel something; you can get a better understanding of the concepts and knowledge involved, more than you could get from a textbook.
>
> <div align="right">(JMJ0607, No 3)</div>

It is probably safe to infer from this evidence that experiential learning has brought about attitudinal changes in this student in that he could 'feel something' as well as having a 'better understanding'; processes of cognition and of personal internalisation of social understanding are taking place. As teacher Xum said:

> Students have to gain understanding of something from their own practices; their own perceptions, their own feelings. It was not like before, when the teacher did everything.

> (Xum, B)

Teachers have begun to appreciate that students are not empty vessels when they come to class. Teachers now realise they can be active learners too, ones who create their own understanding through interactive learning. One teacher stated this notion very clearly:

> The aim of teaching, ultimately, is non-teaching. It is to lead student learning through their doing. In fact, it is this that enables them to learn how to learn. To teach students in communication through their communicative activities – that is the way of student-centred learning. It's killing two birds with one stone. It is the best way to achieve the goals of education.

> (Gom, B)

It is clear that the implementation of student-centred learning in the communications course has led teachers to view their students in a different light, particularly regarding their ability to learn and understand. They have started to realise that it is the process of interaction that makes learners modify and reshape their communication behaviours and attitudes. The quotations from these two teachers show that they have understood the effectiveness of student-centred approaches in promoting Chinese students' communication abilities.

6.4.4. Teachers' professional development

Throughout the new course there was a perceived need for the teachers of College B to undergo further professional development. One teacher said:

> We don't know much about the new communication theory. We don't know much about new enterprise development and their new entry criteria for

employees. Without such knowledge, how can we design appropriate tasks for teaching and learning?

<div align="right">(Xum, B)</div>

The evidence indicates that it has been a challenge for teachers to adopt the new teaching and learning pedagogies. As was identified in Chapter Two, social and economic changes in China have created diversity and a wider social culture and the implication of these changes will have an inevitable impact on the education curriculum. Harkin *et al* (2000) claim that 'what happens within education is, in part, dependent on what happens outside education, in homes, communities and workplace' (p5). Since teachers have the responsibility to equip students with the necessary abilities to deal with social change, they have to have more knowledge than their students about such matters. Yet students may be more expert in this area than their teachers. For example, Tem stated that teachers were 'novices' in the implementation of the new communication course using student-centred learning. Her exact words were:

> We are novices; we have to grope for the stepping stone to bridge the river for crossing. We need to learn more.
>
> <div align="right">(Tem, B)</div>

The term 'novices', which she applies to teachers, includes even those teachers who have lengthy teaching experience and highlights the apprehension when they were asked to change. The teachers' desire to learn more reflects the lack of training opportunities offered to those who, like them, work in private educational institutions.

Fortunately, since Tem was the head of the programme in College B, she organised teacher training sessions throughout the whole implementation stage of the

course. Restricted by resources, the training activities were organised mainly in three areas, as outlined below.

6.4.4.1 The weekly teachers' meetings

Tem organised weekly teachers' meetings which created an opportunity for the teachers to share their resources, reflect on teaching and learning and discuss or create strategies to solve the problems they encountered. They started by exchanging teaching experiences and then reflected on their individual class teaching. Subsequently, they explored the conflicts and problems which they encountered during their teaching, and then they took turns to present the teaching plans they had developed for the next unit. This provided opportunities in which teachers could learn from each other and share resources. One teacher indicated how much he valued that meeting:

> We are lucky that we have a good leader to organise teachers' meetings every week. This offers us a good chance to discuss the coping strategy to deal with the problems we encountered in teaching.
>
> (Xum, B)

Xum's comment reveals one important impact of student-centred learning on the management of College B. Management is not simply about delivering policies, document, assessments and offering a direction, though it is partially about all of these things, but rather it is about helping to create a 'professional learning community' (Fullan, 2007, p139). The leader, Tem, has started to build a teachers' learning community in College B and involve the teachers in the development process. The implication here is that this has helped the teachers to break out of their

independent work style and develop a more collective work model. This model will enable them to rethink their pedagogies and reflect constructively on their practice. The training was mainly developed via the teachers' group work activities, where teachers could learn from each other and share those fresh, first-hand and pragmatic strategies that other teachers had created and perhaps already tried. Once a successful example of task design was presented to the group, it immediately helped other teachers construct similar approaches. A discussion around one important element of communication skills could elicit information and critical awareness which expanded teachers' academic knowledge. Good examples that were selected for one particular unit were shared by the whole group. For example, some teachers recorded students' performance on CD, and these recordings became popular supplementary teaching material later on. The reflection on their own practice enabled teachers to become more concerned with their own teaching competence and professional development.

6.4.4.2 Peer observation

Peer observation was another typical teacher development activity in College B. Each teacher's observation hours were scheduled by Tem in order that other teachers could come to watch and see how their colleagues applied student-centred learning in their classes. This appeared to help teachers to improve their own practice in terms of the new insights gained from open class analysis. Anm said:

> I'm quite enjoying the teachers' meetings and class observations, I really learn a lot from other teachers. Without that, I don't think I could keep on implementing this programme.
>
> (Anm, B)

This comment on the value of peer observation is especially important in coming from Anm, who had previously wanted to give up the programme.

As educational practices have been transformed by social and economic changes, there is pressure on teachers to increase their competence and professional knowledge to cope with these changes. Teachers wanted to feel confident enough to develop their own pedagogical strategies. However, confidence is generated not only from a teacher's internal world but from the appreciation of others, especially the understanding and encouragement of their leadership and managers. The statement here shows that this teacher benefited from the peer observation and regular communication with other teachers because she could gain inspiration from colleagues' classes and was inspired by the ideas that they introduced. That helped her not only to know why but how to deliver student-centred learning in her own class. Such encouragement was probably crucial in helping to promote her teaching skills as well as keeping her as a teacher on the course.

As the youngest one, Jam thought that class observations enabled her to expand her knowledge of teaching and learning. She said:

> After class observation, I get to know that the preparation for the teaching and learning is very important. I had one year's teaching experience in Shanghai. I taught sociology. The lesson plan was easy for me in that time. I prepared some key content to deal with the examination. I'd speak to the class; the students made notes. That was all. Now, the preparation is more difficult, so, I have to learn some skills from class observation.
>
> (Jam, B)

The above two teachers' statements identified the value of pedagogical discussions between teachers, which is linked to the shared observation of teachers' practice.

Evidence from College B suggests that teacher development, including discussion based on class observations, is an effective way of helping teachers learn from each other and will enable them further to develop their skills in managing student-centred learning.

6.4.4.3 Attendance at focus group meetings

As outlined in Chapter Four, the teachers in the focus group came from all three colleges and had meetings organised regularly. These meetings were not just for the focus group teachers but also for college managers, whose responsibilities included teaching quality control and moral education. This benefited the teachers and staff in College B, as they were able to share experiences with teachers at other colleges. The meetings also provided guidance for teachers and staff to extend their knowledge of teaching and learning in communication and the new pedagogies. Miss Jam said:

> I feel I am supported by the class monitor now. Before, those class monitors couldn't understand how important my teaching work is. They thought my class looked like a game, now, they have accepted me and asked me to give more tutoring to their students.
>
> (Jam, B)

'Class monitors' are the full time employed teachers living in College B whose responsibilities are to manage students' moral welfare and learning. Each monitor usually looks after two classes of students. They have a duty to organise students' independent learning and review their academic achievement. Normally, the perspective of a monitor would influence his or her students because he or she is the first person to deal directly and closely with students in classes. These class monitors

were invited to attend the focus group meetings, and this enabled them to understand why and how the new communication course was being implemented. The idea was to gain their support for the new course and its student-centred methods. The clear implication of Jam's statement is that a holistic teaching environment is conducive to efficient teaching. As has been shown in Chapter Three, educational institutions need to have a common educational vision (Fullan, 1991). As Marris (1975) claims, innovation 'cannot be assimilated unless its meaning is shared' (cited by Fullan, 1991, p31). The successful implementation of a new course needs the teachers and others involved to have a common understanding of the significance of the course and to be fully supportive of it. The practice of focus group meetings in College B established a common understanding about the meaning of the changes taking place and the importance of interaction between managers, teachers and other staff. Support from senior managers encouraged the course teachers to maintain their innovative work, despite the considerable burdens placed on them.

6.5 Summary

This Chapter has discussed some of the issues that emerged during the implementation of the new communication course at College B. One of the first to be identified was the difficulties of introducing student-centred learning methods, due to previous experiences of traditional didactic approaches. Some students were also considered to possess poor study skills, and externally examined courses had to be given preference. Shortage of resources (time, PCs), also played a part. However, from the teachers' point of view, the implementation of student-centred learning did

have a marked impact on the way they see their teaching. It drew their attention from how the teacher teaches to how students learn; from how to prepare a good lecture to how to design experiences that stimulate students' interest and, as a result, engendered more active learning. Teachers began to reconstruct their ideas of what is valuable for students to learn and their attitudes changed from how to enable students to remember textbook knowledge to how to enable students to develop their ability to communicate. Teachers had to get to know their students better, to understand their needs and to design learning activities that were relevant to their interests. Only then could students be fully motivated to learn. There were a number of examples in College B where this was done very successfully.

Evidence also shows that student-centred learning has had some impact on the management of College B. A specific teacher training programme in College B created a more democratic environment, a place where teachers were able to express their views and ideas and where the management was less bureaucratic and more geared towards the individual. Teachers were invited to take part in training activities in which they had the chance to exchange their ideas about students' learning. This programme played an important administrative and coordinating role. Evidence shows that the teachers involved in student-centred learning were inevitably expected to devise many learning tasks to be used in their teaching. The meetings provided a forum to share and develop ideas and to help other college staff understand and accept the new course. Teachers at College B understood that a key aspect of their role was to shape students' own learning experiences. Without thoughtful and careful

preparation and the provision of learning resources, students could not take responsibility or become fully autonomous learners. This does not mean a lesser role for the teacher; just a different one.

This chapter has documented the difficult start of the implementation of the new communication course in College B. Different perspectives have been explored and analysed. As each college case study offers specific and different insights into the new curriculum, the next chapter will present evidence on the issues teachers encountered during the progress of the new course in College R.

Chapter Seven

Barriers to the implementation of student-centred learning:

Case study: College R

7.1 Introduction

Although Chapter Five showed that 100% of teacher respondents who were in charge of the implementation of the new communication course had very positive attitudes toward student-centred learning, the perceptions of teachers and students from College B, which were presented in Chapter Six, have shown differing attitudes to its implementation. The case study in this chapter explores the issues that arose during course implementation in College R. This will begin with an analysis of a class observation. Teachers' comments about the OTPAE model are also examined. Students' understanding of 'communication key skills' are also discussed.

Following the introduction, Section 7.2 explains the context of College R. The implementation of the new communication course in the College will be examined in Section 7.3.   Section 7.4 presents the qualitative data collected in College R. This includes an interpretation of a class observation and a discussion of the factors which influence teacher effectiveness, based on teachers' responses. Teachers' comments on the OTPAE model and student perceptions of the key skills of communication are also examined.

7.2 The context of College R

College R is the largest of the three colleges. It was established in 1984, making it one of Beijing's earliest private colleges. After expanding the range of its curriculum in 2002, student numbers were greatly increased. At the end of 2007, there were over 20,000 full-time students studying at the College. At the time of writing, the College offers a large range of majors: information technology, international finance, international trade, international business management, politics and law, foreign languages, technology, art, fashion and dress, advertising, international education, Chinese kung fu, Chinese printing, international air service and horsemanship. The new communication course was delivered in the largest, new campus of the College (2000 Chinese Mu, equal to about 300 English acres) in which about 7000 full-time students study. The campus is located close to the Great Wall, about 80 kilometres from the centre of Beijing. Some teaching and library buildings were still being constructed when the campus was first opened to students. The increased number of students, the large range of faculties and the expansion of the campus all put the College under great pressure financially.

College R aims to encourage the moral, intellectual and physical development of its students, which has been a basic aim of Chinese education since it was advocated by Chairman Mao in the early 1950s. The leadership of this College believes that the essential purpose of a college is to enable students to learn 'proper' behaviour, that is, behaviour which is acceptable in the established Chinese social and cultural context. In pursuit of this goal, the College appointed many of its full-time staff as 'class monitors'. Class monitors are meant to be in charge of students' moral and ethical

development. Each monitor is responsible for looking after two classes, with one class containing in excess of 80 students. However, College R also decided to use these monitors as the primary source of teaching on the new communication course. The college believed that selecting the teachers from the class monitors would ensure that the course would be one that trained students to have positive attitudes and to deal with others in a manner that assisted the building of harmonious interpersonal relationships (Wang, 2006). This factor corroborates the previous analysis of quantitative data presented in Chapter Five, which showed that the teacher respondents linked communication teaching and learning with a broad range of disciplines and affective behaviour. For the leadership of College R, the development of communication abilities is associated with students' moral and ethical development, which is why they identified class monitors as the most appropriate teachers to support students in promoting their communication abilities.

7.3 The implementation of the new communication course

Just as at College B, the new communication course was offered to first year students. Mr Ding and Mr Xiao were chosen from amongst the class monitors to be the focus group teachers responsible for the new course. Mr Ding graduated from a university located in a middle-sized city in the north of China. After two years' teaching experience in a vocational school, he decided to move to Beijing and obtained a post as one of the class monitors in College R. He was 26 when he became involved in this programme. His future plan is to become a full time teacher of human

resource development rather than a monitor. The class Mr Ding looked after was one in which all the ninety students majored in English language and tourism.

Mr Xiao graduated from one of the top universities in Beijing, majoring in finance. According to him, his motivation for taking part in the new programme was to 'challenge himself'; he thought the programme offered a 'good opportunity to learn'. He had no previous teaching experience. Being a class monitor was his first job after graduation from university in 2005. The class was taught by Mr Xiao under the aegis of the faculty of international finance. His eighty-seven students mainly read for degrees in Finance and Accounting. More than 85% of the students came from different provinces in China. Although at twenty-five, he was only four years older than his students, his commitment to his work and his educational background were respected by his students. One student, who thought particularly highly of Xiao, gave her reasons:

> Our teacher Xiao is excellent! He graduated from a top university; he also has excellent learning skills and lots of experience. He looks after us very well and teaches us lots of things, small things from everyday life. He is a very good teacher.
>
> (SXRF, No.13)

The student, when asked to evaluate the new communication course, was most effusive about 'our teacher Xiao'. As is clear, she wanted to defend her teacher's reputation, a characteristic of Chinese students' attitudes towards their teachers. Students generally appreciate what teachers have done for them and don't criticise their efforts. As the college's campus was quite distant from the centre of the city, all

the students lived in student dormitories. The isolated environment made those class monitors, who live with their students day-to-day, very important people to them.

As mentioned in Chapter Four, the teachers from College R who had been involved with the development of the new communication course were replaced by the two monitors without any prior experience of communication teaching. These were assigned their new responsibilities only two weeks before the beginning of the new semester. Given the unpredictable nature of the challenge, the two young teachers felt under a great deal of pressure. To help them adapt to the new approach, the course started one month later than originally planned. I also arranged a three day training programme for them in their College before they started work. Because of this, the new communication course in College R finished a little later than those in the other two colleges.

The course duration was one academic year which comprised two semesters. Constrained by limited resources, particularly the lack of suitable classrooms and computer labs, the course was delivered in large classes. Mr Ding had 90 students whilst Mr Xiao had 87 students in his class. Although the College was enthusiastic about the new key skills course, there was a general concern that the teachers might encounter difficulties in this programme with such large classes.

7.4 Key issues that emerged during the implementation of the course

The first evidence presented below is an episode which occurred in a class delivered by Mr Ding. Subsequently, discussion will be developed around this class observation. The first section draws on the actual observation to record what

happened in a real teaching and learning environment. The second section goes on to explore the factors which affected teacher effectiveness in teaching and learning and provides an analysis of why the teachers failed to provide suitable resources to facilitate interactive learning. The third section discusses the impact of the OTPAE model on teacher adaptation to student-centred learning, from their perspectives. The final section explores student understanding of 'communication key skills'.

7.4.1 A class episode

This class focus was on nonverbal language. As this observation took place just three weeks after the beginning of the course, Mr Ding was a little nervous. The class started with a story which Mr Ding brought in to describe the important role of language in human communication activities. Then he wrote the title of the new lesson on the blackboard: 'The proper way to present yourself to others'. Mr Ding then gave a very detailed explanation about how to make a good impression on others. He emphasised four things: maintaining a clean and tidy appearance; wearing appropriate makeup; dressing properly and conducting oneself in the correct manner when meeting and introducing oneself to others. He talked for the whole of the first lesson hour and went 15 minutes into the second. The session then proceeded as follows (T=teacher; S1-S3=students):

> T: Ok! I have talked too much about how to establish yourself in good manner for communication and what is a proper way to present yourself. Now, would you like to have a practice? First, I'll invite some students to have a go in front of us. Who would like to try?
> (Students laughing)
> T: Well, you two. Could you please give the order for the beginning of the show?

(The two students 1 and student 2 come to front, the third student stands at the side of the stage)

T: You know each other, right?

S1: Yes, of course.

T: That's good.

S3: Action! (Students' laughing)

S2: Oh, I can't start it, who is who?

T: Ok, you are manager of the company (refers to student 1), and you are the one who wants to cooperate with him, ok?

S2: (walks towards S1 and, looking nervous, holds hand to S1): How are you? Mr Zhou!

T: Come on! You are too nervous! Imagine both of you are successful businessmen! Could you try it for us? (He nods to student 3)

S3: Wol!

S2: Action!

S3: (walks toward S1 and offers hand to S1 but forgets what he should say to S1): (All students applaud and laugh. After that, the other four groups were invited one by one, they came in front of the classroom to demonstrate their performance, and the other students were asked to give their evaluation for the showing. However, the total numbers of the students who were involved into the real action were 15 students; the rest only took part in the assessment).

Although the students here looked quite happy and interested in class activities, it was not a typical student-centred learning session. The problem observed here is that the learning activities did not allow students to be 'mentally engaged' (Delong & Winter, 1998, p349). The class was unable to demonstrate involvement in learning as a 'whole person' (Rogers, 1994), and the complex communication processes which integrate not only language and non-verbal language but also cognitive, affective and social interactive processes were not explained or demonstrated. Because the class activity had not been carefully designed and the students prepared and briefed as to what the outcomes should be, they didn't have the chance to construct conceptions of what counts as the proper manner of communication. Here, the only knowledge resource was the teacher and all the concepts were 'told' by the teacher. The teacher's

talking took just over half the entire lesson. The students were not asked to contribute their perspectives about effective communication. No alternative social contexts were provided for students for discussion and analysis, such as different episodes of interpersonal communication which shed light on the distinction between proper and improper manners of communication. Had that kind of material been provided, the students might have been better able to develop an independently-reasoned discussion or argument rather than Mr. Ding doing it for them. The teaching and learning process was oversimplified. Unprepared, the students could not take the role-play seriously. The key step which was missing in this case was the adequate design and organisation of learning resources. The criticism of student-centred learning as 'play' that arose in the last chapter seems to have justification in this context.

The episode did not show any fundamental shift in learning. It was still founded in traditional teaching. It did not show any significant change in the teacher's role, students' learning approaches or learning environment.

7.4.2 The need for a clear vision of change

In Chapter Three, Fullan (1991) identifies six key factors for the building of a new environment to help teachers adapt to change. One of the six factors is a clear vision of change which 'permeates the organisation with value, purpose, and integrity for both the what and how of improvement' (p81). He also points out that 'sharing and developing this know-how should be a major goal of those interested of

educational change' (p80). Evidence shows that this factor, or the lack of its existence, influenced the implementation of the new pedagogy in College R.

After discussing the class observation, Mr Ding realised there were things that could have been improved. He explained:

> Traditionally, the teacher's talking dominates the class hour from beginning to end. We all grew up with that at school - it must have been for more than sixteen years. The teachers would give their speeches in front of the lecture desk. We sat in ranks and listened to them…There was very little interaction between the teachers and students. Compared with that, I thought I had allowed a lot of time for student practice in this class.
>
> (Ding, R)

Two messages are conveyed by this statement. Firstly, the teacher did not have a clear vision of student-centred learning approaches, and how to devote class time to a learning activity. The student-centred learning environment should not only give time for the student to practise, but also give the teacher time to facilitate the students' activities and make sure that they can decode, retrieve, analyse and refine the relevant concepts and meanings through interactive communication processes. This means that teachers have to 'propel the [learning] process with high quality teaching and training materials (print, video, electronic)' (Fullan, 2000, p23) and lead the students into meaningful and productive learning experiences. Without this, role play becomes a kind of show which loses the real meaning of experiential learning. Secondly, Ding revealed the influence of traditional pedagogies on his own teaching. It seems that his experience of being taught had influenced him to develop his image of what teaching is. This influence hindered his understanding of fundamental pedagogical change;

instead he interpreted his role, as an extension of talking, into closely managing the practical activities.

Evidence shows that, in the early stages of course implementation, the OTPAE model might be misleading the teachers in College R in their understanding of student-centred learning in communication. Evidence from one of the teacher interviews explores this weakness:

> The most significant part of this model is the 'action' stage, for which the model gives clear instructions. I thought of this stage as like physical training, which of course is another type of skills' training. But the model is quite similar to OTPAE. The teacher just gives a brief talk about the essential point of the skills. Most of the class time is set aside for the students' active participation.

> (Xiao, R)

This statement shows that this teacher might have simplified the concept of communication teaching and learning due to the intervention of the OTPAE model. It seems that this teacher's conception of communication teaching and learning was reduced to an exercise in 'psycho-motor dexterity [with] experience that comes from training or practice' (Bolton & Land, 2003, p17). The other teacher in College R made a similar comment:

> Regarding the OTPAE, I felt that it was a completely operative model. It starts from the purposes of teaching and finishes at the learning outcome assessment…Though I can't say which of these five stages is the most important, I can say now that most of the class time, around 90%, was given over to student practice.

> (Ding, R)

A notable phenomenon in this extract is that this teacher had not got a very clear idea about essential points of the teacher's role in facilitating students' learning. As mentioned above, it is inefficient if the teacher simply gives class time to students

without any really constructive tasks or developmental discussion. Research has demonstrated the complexity of the teaching and learning process in communication studies (Gerbner, 1994; Price, 1996; Hargie & Dickson, 2004). These perspectives identified that a social interactive approach plays an important role in communication teaching and learning. To achieve this, a teacher needs to pay attention to the students' construction of social meaning through a discussion of social issues and different contexts. Communication cannot be thought of as an 'action skill', which is a skill learnt by repetition of an action until the movements are performance standard. As observed in the class, without a detailed plan underpinned by adequate resources the learning of communication skills could become quite superficial.

7.4.3 Pressures of work

Mr Ding and Xiao were both chosen from the class monitors in College R to be teachers on the new communications course. This arrangement came from the leadership in College R which linked communication teaching and learning with students' moral and ethical development. However, this put particular pressure on the two teachers. In most Chinese private boarding colleges, a class monitor has multiple responsibilities. According to Luo (2008), the class monitor is meant to be responsible for everything his or her students do. They are the first people to be 'blamed' if something goes wrong. This responsibility ensures that class monitors are 'busy the whole day after getting up, even keeping watch during sleep' (Luo, 2008, p1). This is an apt description of the situation Mr Ding and Mr Xiao were in.

As monitors, Ding and Xiao had to check whether students met a whole set of criteria; from checking attendance to independent learning, and the successful completion of the national examination course. They also had to organise a review of those courses which were to be tested by CNEI. At the same time, they were responsible for maintaining links between the college and the students' parents, contacting them if and when necessary. Monitors have to be sensitive to students' practical or personal problems such as learning difficulties, interpersonal relationships, being homesick or recurring health problems. On the face of it, such broad responsibilities suggest the position of a mentor or facilitator of learning. They are more than monitors. They have little personal time due to being faced with an excessive workload. This overload impacted adversely on the two teachers. Mr Xiao said:

> As a monitor of a class, you have to care about the details of things and manage your class students. This is extremely detailed work. So, you may not be able to throw yourself into key skills teaching as much as you would like.
>
> (Xiao, R)

His comments reflect his willingness to concentrate on his communications teaching and also show his discomfort about his complex working situation. Mr Ding expressed similar sentiments about his work:

> I think the achievement of the teaching depends on my mood. (laughs) You know, as a class monitor, you have to take care of many things. Some times, you can't do things according to your previous plans, otherwise, for my leader; my first role is class monitor but a communication teacher. I thought I would do better if I could get more support from my direct leadership.
>
> (Ding, R)

Ding's statement reveals an important fact, to which the leadership of each educational institution should pay attention. This is that teachers' effectiveness is connected with their private lives, their personal values and their need for job satisfaction (Day *et al*, 2007, p34). Teachers need to have 'professional identities' in order to achieve their professional goals. Student-centred learning has made teaching much more complex, and teachers require time and space for planning, preparing and reflecting on their work. This does not sit well with the constant monitoring and overseeing role of the monitor. Compared to Mr Du and Mr Wu, both of whom work at College S as full time teachers, Xiao and Ding lacked sufficient time to develop their abilities or to plan their teaching effectively. These findings suggest that it might not be an appropriate choice to let staff who have a lot of management and pastoral responsibilities take on more teaching and learning work, especially using new and varied methods.

7.4.4 Large class sizes

The other factor which appears to have a marked effect on the implementation of the course is large class sizes, which made it difficult for the two teachers in College R to use student-centred learning effectively. Xiao gave his example:

> My class has 87 students. A great part of the students do not get the opportunity to be tutored individually. I counter this as best as I can. I made a tutoring plan according to the student name list and to help students respectively. Obviously though, there was still not enough time for each student.
>
> (Xiao, R)

Three factors emerged here. Firstly, Xiao understands that he ought to pay attention to individual students' learning needs. However, compared with College S, in which assessment and tutoring functions were undertaken by students as well as teachers, Xiao's outlook might be fairly described as comparatively teacher-centred. Frankly, he has little choice with such a large group. Secondly, the only classrooms big enough for 87 students are not very convenient for group activities. Yet, Xiao explains how he thinks the course should concentrate on how to change student behaviour, and that assessment should focus on this:

> The other important point is…the crucial change of this model is the stage of 'evaluation'. The assessment changes according to the student's performance, what kind of change the students have undergone. The assessment depends not on how excellent the teacher's talking is but on how your student's behaviour goes in a positive direction. That is the criteria of your effectiveness of teaching and learning.
>
> (Xiao, R)

He clearly points to the fact that the accent is now on student achievement, not 'teachers talking'. He links the assessment of performance with the students' growth and behavioural changes. What he addresses here is how best to develop 'communication key skills' through the process of assessment. Xiao gave a detailed explanation of his understanding:

> How do we make an assessment? It does not mean you ask your students to answer your question correctly; rather it means you ask your students to show those essential skills during the process of their implementing of the tasks. They must show me whether or not their competence has been promoted. Their behaviours changing is a pragmatic matter, at least, the knowledge should be used when people really do some thing.
>
> (Xiao, R)

Xiao's statement focuses on students' own experiences. It also indicates his awareness of the pragmatic influence of prompt assessment on the learning process.

Despite this understanding of how individual assessment should be undertaken, the limited classroom space and large number of students made it difficult to implement this effectively. Observation indicated that the teacher could not monitor students' group activities because there was no space for him to come through; similarly, assessment was carried out with a small number of students who were asked to demonstrate their performance in front of the whole class.

Class size was an issue for the students too. When asked whether or not they noticed any weaknesses during the implementation of the course, most cited large class sizes as an example of something that was a barrier for the teacher. As one student put it:

> As to the shortcomings of this course, I don't think our teacher was to blame. Our teacher is very good. How he can do better when faced with so large a class? We are more than eighty students in the classroom; the rate of practice opportunity is still lower.
>
> (SXRF, No 13)

Another student voiced similar thoughts:

> The class is too large; you can't ask the teacher to take care of each person individually. Our teacher is very good.
>
> (SXRF, No 14)

We can see that students as well as teachers considered the large class sizes to be inappropriate for the new communication course. Unsurprisingly, students wanted to have the opportunity to practise and be tutored individually. Normally, the average class size in Chinese vocational education college is about 40 or 45 students; the average class size in equivalent institutions in the UK is usually much less. For example, 'Oxford Tutorial System of Undergraduates', it is characterised by

individualized teaching and small class (20 in each) instruction (Zhang, 1994, p145). Comparing this difference, it is no surprise that a Chinese teacher has some difficulties to respond to student's individual learning needs to any great extent.

7.4.5 Provision of resources

The evidence from the interviews in College R shows that the teachers wanted to expand their professional knowledge and their use of classroom resources. Questioned about barriers he may have encountered during the implementation of the new course, Mr Ding said:

> We should be provided with the relevant information resources. In addition, we need the necessary equipment, such as overhead projectors and computer media, to communicate such information in an optimal manner.
>
> (Ding, R)

Obviously, College R had just moved into the new large campus in which a lot of basic construction was still incomplete. The resources necessary for teaching had not yet been taken into account. This might explain why Mr Ding found it difficult to prepare lessons effectively. He also explained that time was a problem:

> I know I need to spend much more time preparing the coursework. Firstly you have to select relevant information and resources for the students; secondly, I need to tutor my students more. If I want to carry out certain objectives, I need to have more time.
>
> (Ding, R)

This statement shows this teacher realised that he needs to be creative in selecting information and resources to foster his students' desire to learn and respond to their learning needs. However, as mentioned previously, both Ding and Xiao were class

monitors. The complexity of their roles did not allow them time to focus on their new teaching roles. This was a practical problem which affected their performance. Apart from that, the two teachers often mentioned their own professional development. Xiao summarised his thinking:

> To be honest, for me, my knowledge structure is not rich enough for this teaching job, especially the lack of teaching pedagogical knowledge. I'm a real novice. At the beginning, I have to ask teachers who teach other courses in my class how to prepare the teaching plan. The difficulties I encountered were not only the information resources but my teaching competence and the subject knowledge. That is fundamental problem. I need to have opportunities to learn.
>
> (Xiao, R).

These comments reveal that he perceived the barriers which impeded his adaptation to the new approach were not only related to the external environment but also to his own lack of experience in both teaching methodology and subject matter. He could not however, have been expected to do more, given his lack of experience and the short notice he had before beginning the course. This evidence supports the perspective which has been identified by Han *et al* (2008) that Chinese teachers need to expand their knowledge and competence to adapt to new strategies. However, support services are also perceived by teachers to be important for effective teaching. This support comes not only from the provision of adequate resources but also in the provision of teacher training and consideration of their career development needs. The following interview extract is instructive:

> Regarding occupational task design, we need to know what happens in the work place; at least, we need more information than we at present receive. Task design is relevant to the enterprise, craft, and human resource management in many different organisations. (Ding, R)

This comment reflects on the teacher's lack of opportunity to gain or update his knowledge of the skills required in the modern workplace brought about by aspects of Chinese social change. Both Ding and Xiao thought that they needed to be 'power charged' and 'equipped with communication competence firstly' (Ding, R). As with the other evidence collected, there is a preference for teachers' professional development to focus not only on subject knowledge but also on their abilities to deal with pedagogical change. As such, the implementation of the communication key skills curriculum using student-centred learning challenges both the teachers themselves and the whole human resource management and support system of an educational institution.

This section has revealed the interconnected factors which tended to reduce the effectiveness of teaching in College R. The barriers which have emerged suggest that the implementation of student-centred learning cannot simply rely on teachers' commitment to their work, is but also dependent upon the whole teaching and learning establishment setting manageable workloads and providing resources. Teachers' passion for their work is shaped by their institutional context. Whether or not their need for professional development or their personal 'well-being' (Day *et al*, 2007) are considered, whether or not their work has adequate resource support; these are all important management issues which link closely with effective teaching and learning.

7.5 Teachers' perceptions of the OTPAE model

The findings below are related to teachers' perceptions of the OTPAE model. The OTPAE model, as introduced in Chapter One, was proposed to help teachers and tutors adapt student-centred learning and competence-based approaches to their own work. It was supposed to enable teachers and tutors to develop an appropriate learning programme and to manage teaching and learning using new methods. When the teacher respondents were asked about what differences they had observed as they carried out the OTPAE model in their teaching, most mentioned the change in the teacher's role. One teacher said:

> This requires that the learning activities be well organised. Teachers must instil the desire to be active in their students. To do this they must provide an environment in which students can present the best of themselves.
>
> (Ding, R)

Several things are clear from the teacher's response. First, the teacher accepted the need to engage their students in active learning. Secondly, the respondent has acknowledged the particular value of student-centred learning as a pillar of the OTPAE model. This is clear from Ding's acknowledgment that his teaching time had been reduced in favour of student practice. Thirdly, it can be seen from his description that the implementation of OTPAE has led him to encourage his students to reveal themselves; he has consciously influenced his students to focus on their own learning. His aim has been to provide the best learning environment he can rather than to emphasise the transmission of information through his lecturing.

Xiao also spoke about the change in the teacher's role:

> There is a shift from emphasising textbook knowledge to competence teaching and learning. Yes, such knowledge remains an important aim, but more importantly, you need to design the students' activities…The lesson

> preparation is changed from preparation of the textbook knowledge to the machinating of students' activities.

> (Xiao, R)

The comment from this teacher shows that he realised that his responsibilities include designing and developing the teaching materials he will use. As Weert and Pilot (2003) show, this curricular design requires teachers to base activities on real-life tasks. This is a well-documented trend within competence-based education, and has been shown in Chapter Six to work effectively in College B. To meet this requirement, teachers need to be creative. The teacher's comments above stress how his teaching has changed from textbook-oriented to activities-oriented and highlight his recognition that he is responsible for planning students' learning activities.

Mr Ding, in his comments, directly addresses the issue of interactive processes in teaching, a constant aspect of the literature. As he puts it:

> This model is about an interactive teaching and learning process. It is mainly based on student actions. I think it is suitable for an individual student's competence learning.

> (Ding, R)

Whilst his statement shows that he had thought about how to lead his students in interactive learning processes, Mr Xiao also shows an appreciation of the occupational tasks designed to benefit students' key skills development. He mentions that:

> In my case, I collect my task designs from two sources: first, from life itself; second, from the vocational job. The tasks design should be linked with a vocational job. For example, my students' major is accountancy and finance, so one of the communication activities I designed for my students was to help a customer to open an account in the bank. How clerks deal with their customers is an instance of a communicative process. Then, let them analyse what the skills were involved into this process.

> (Xiao, R)

Evidence shows that Xiao has accepted the idea that social issues or vocational tasks are useful triggers for student learning. This accords with Cheetham & Chivers (1996), Gibbons & Gray (2002), Spence (2003) and Van Weert & Pilot (2003). The teacher's comment on his experience reveals that the OTPAE model causes him to be involved in a process of course design and pedagogical decision-making according to his students' needs. As China is such large country, students in each different location or varying learning contexts will have differentiated learning needs. Therefore, Chinese vocational education should ideally develop a variety of strategies to carry out its mission to meet the learning needs of a particular area or target group of students.

However, while the two teachers gave positive feedback about the use of the OTPAE model, other evidence, which appears in sub-section 7.4.2, explored the problems which were initially encountered when the model was newly introduced. Both teacher respondents interpreted its use in a simplistic way, as a straightforward assessment of practical skills, thus failing to recognise the complexity of communication skills assessment. However, other findings also suggest that the model is in need of modification. One reason is because the model, as it stands, does not tackle the issue of how to organise resources and prepare students for learning.

7.6 Students' perceptions of 'communication key skills'

Though Chapter Five has presented the findings from quantitative data which is relevant to teachers' and students' understanding of key skills, the qualitative data collected from interviews in College R provides a deeper explanation of students'

perceptions and understanding of the 'communication key skills'. Interpretation of the

evidence shows that students tended to view 'communication key skills' in a number

of ways. These are outlined and explained below.

7.6.1 'Communication key skills' as employability skills

Some students in College R viewed communication key skills as 'employability

skills'. They thought that development would increase their competence in modern

society. They realised that acquiring a set of communication skills could improve

their prospects:

> ...we must develop our capacity to behave interactively. Learning the
> knowledge is not enough. We must also learn how to communicate it to
> other people in the workplace. Equipped with these things, we could occupy
> an invincible position in society. This is the where the effectiveness of key
> skills lies.
>
> (SDRE, No.10)

This student used the phrase 'invincible position' to describe how important he

considers the role communication abilities play in his life. Here it can be seen that this

student clearly links his future social status to his ability to master 'communication

key skills'. It indicates that social and economic change and new demands on the

Chinese workforce have influenced his views. Another student talked about how his

achievements in 'communication key skills' could help him perform more effectively

in the workplace:

> Living, as we were, in a mini-society, what we learned in the college is very
> important for our future. Since communication skills are about how to deal
> competently with others, they are very important. I believe that my excellent
> communication skills could help me to show better performance to my boss in
> future.
>
> (SDRE, No 11)

These students thought that proficiency in 'communication key skills' will help them to get better jobs or gain a more influential role in society. Indeed, the assertiveness of the second respondent suggests that he has already learned some modern principles. To those attending College R who might previously have thought themselves 'failures' because they did not attend a national public university, the development of 'communication key skills' has enabled them to improve their self-confidence. As a third, female, student points out:

> I was greatly depressed by the result of the national examination for entrance to higher education. …… The overwhelming pressure on me was making me think that my future might be extremely mediocre. But, influenced by this course, especially by teacher Xiao who taught us how to improve our communication skills, I feel much better than before. As teacher Xiao said, we should be brave in facing up to reality, to those challenges as solid as the Tai mountain. …… Now, I look forward to presenting in public, at the front of the class. I would like to practise my speech actively. I keep my enthusiasm even though sometimes the teacher couldn't give an opportunity to me.
>
> (SXRF, No.13)

The messages conveyed by this comment are very important. It explores one of the essential points of communication teaching and learning, that is to enable students to enhance their self-confidence and self-esteem. For this student, engagement in a communication activity is a means of finding her identity and her value. Communication with her classmates has helped her to feel confident in her position which is defined by Price (1996) as the 'capacity to do something and the active use of that capacity' (p228). This has spurred her to have a greater involvement in the learning process.

7.6.2 'Communication key skills' as social and interpersonal skills

Students in College R were asked about any benefits they had gained as a result of the new communication course. Some respondents thought that the course improved their ability to understand others. Typical of this was the respondent who said:

> Communication skills are not only the skills to use language as a means of communicating with others. They also help you to perceive others. The same discourse, in another's conversation, can often have many different interpretations.

> (SDRE, No 10)

Evidence here supports the idea identified by a number of researchers, that of the complexity and social interactive nature of communication processes (Gerbner, 1993; Hargie *et al,* 1994; Price, 1996). As this student has acknowledged, when an individual is involved in a communication activity, she has to have a good perception of what her respondent is thinking and feeling. The individual has to make a judgement as to what underlies the discourse presented by others. In addition to this, another respondent thought that the communication process should involve 'logical thinking' and 'cognitive activity':

> Participation in communication should include two important factors: one is practice, the other is active thinking. …... we have to consider seriously the topic that the teacher has provided – that is, make our thinking logical and objective. This may help us to improve our ability to think logically in our communication activities.

> (SXRE, No 15)

These respondents increasingly recognise the complexity of communication processes as a result of their course.

A number of respondents viewed the new communication course as a means of simulating 'life experiences' that they might encounter later on. These included attitudes, reliability and co-operation with others. A typical comment from an interviewee in College R was:

> This course is linked with our living closely…I mean it is the sort of thing you can use unconsciously. It is an indirect, tacit knowledge… which will make our living more comfortable and easy. Or, you can say, this is a social course, a kind of life experience… it enables us to understand others well and get along better with them, allowing us to express our thoughts and feelings accurately and properly. This helps us achieve our purposes successfully. A positive attitude is very important; this course enables us to communicate with others using a positive attitude.
>
> (SXRE, No 14)

Again, this concurs with the perspectives presented in Chapter Two which identified that key skills are closely linked with individual motivation, attitudes and value system (Hyland, 1999; Kelly & Horder, 2001; Van Loo & Toolsema, 2005).

Some students in College R talked a lot about the interpersonal function of 'communication key skills'. They recognised the value of 'communication key skills' for future employment prospects and as a useful tool in the mediating of interpersonal relationships. One respondent give an example:

> What's changed for me is that I have more communication with others. It is a useful tool… for interpersonal relationships. We classmates have much more communication than before we had this course… and have made more friends. For example, in our dormitory, I was an introverted person… I wouldn't like to speak much. Now, we communicate with each other much more and have a deeper understanding of each other's needs.
>
> (SDRE, No. 11)

The positive comments here appear to emphasise what is perceived as the general transferability of the 'communication key skills', whether in work or social situations. Another aspect that some student respondents found particularly valuable was

learning about the ability of self-presentation. They understood that these are personal

behaviours that, once they were aware of them, could be modified according to the

situation:

> Some detail things in communication I had never thought about them before;
> voice, phonetic sound, using euphemisms to alleviate atmosphere… One class
> which was focused on appearance and euphemism made a great impression on
> me. Mu… that is good… I mean the skills can be used directly in life.

> (SXRE, No 14)

As well as life skills, an awareness of self-presentation should be valuable in a

professional situation, as one student pointed out:

> When communicating with others, you have to pay attention to your
> appearance. You should show a clear and formal appearance when you are in
> the workplace… Sometimes, you have to know the necessary customs and
> rituals when you have meetings with others; for example, how to shake your
> hands with others. It is clear that our classmates have made great big progress
> in this factor. Lots of my classmates would pay more attention to their personal
> appearance now, having their hair washed and dress well, much better.
> (Laughs)

> (SDRE, No 14)

As personal behaviours are 'a product of the environment' (Schwalbe, 2004,

p92), the circumstances under which such skills are developed are critical. The typical

Chinese ancestor used to educate an individual in good manners through such

activities as music, handwriting, painting and Chinese chess-playing exercises. This

was in accordance with the belief that the environment, rituals and activities have a

great power to mould personal behaviours. This is not enough for today's students and

a communication course may therefore be the best way for individual students to

develop what are considered in China to be civilised communication behaviours,

providing various communication environments and allowing students to practise.

7.7 Summary

This chapter has explored the main factors that emerged during the implementation of the new communication course in College R. An analysis of a class observation explored the problems teachers encountered during the early stages. As with College B, there were some difficulties in teachers adapting to their new role, considering, for example, that if they only talked for half the time they were being student-centred. Also, insufficient time and consideration was given to the need to plan student activities that would motivate and promote active learning. There was some uncertainty about the nature of key skills assessment, which had been oversimplified in teachers' minds. These shortcomings were related to teacher workload and a lack of training in the new role, as well as large class sizes and few resources.

The evidence from College R showed that the OTPAE model had both a positive and negative influence on the teachers. The model could help teachers develop their conception of student-centred learning and help them engage in new teaching material development. However, it also appears to cause some confusion about the complexity of communications teaching and learning, especially the role of assessment. It can be inferred from College R that further development of this model is required.

Evidence drawn from student interviews showed a strong support for the idea of developing communication key skills. Students cited enhanced employability, a better understanding of social situations and other people's points of view, increased confidence and better self-presentation as positive course outcomes.

Chapter Eight

Learning in a group: Case Study College S

8.1 Introduction

This case study concerns the implementation of the new communication course at College S. Compared to the previous two colleges; College S is a smaller, medium-sized educational institution in Beijing with more than 4000 students. The case study analyses how the students of College S were motivated to take part in learning actively in groups, as this was particularly successful in this college. The findings drawn from the class observations and interviews support the perspectives on the social and interactive value of team-based learning which were identified in Chapter Three. The implications of learning outcomes assessment for 'communication key skills' will be explored through the teachers' and students' perspectives. A new relationship between the teachers and their students seemed to emerge during the course and the features of this will be examined. However, certain complexities were highlighted by the teachers of College S when they revealed the barriers they encountered during course delivery. This includes issues such as the resources needed for supporting the implementation of student-centred learning.

This chapter is divided into four sections. Following the introduction, the college background is presented in section 8.2. Section 8.3 describes the implementation of the new course in College S. As the main part of the chapter, section 8.4 will discuss the key issues that emerged during course implementation.

8.2 The context of College S

College S was also established in 1993 with a curriculum aimed at those destined for the administration or service sectors. As at Colleges B and R, College S also provides degree courses under the China National Examination Institute (CNEI). In addition to this, the College has developed many vocational training programmes to promote the employability of its graduates.

Since the mission of the college is to cultivate qualified secretarial and administrative staff, the subject of general communication, which had been previously taught by traditional lectures, is one of the most important parts of its curriculum. The content of the course included the basic principles of communication and emphasised how to manage interpersonal relationships in both business and social life. However, unprecedented employment pressure on the graduates of College S made the leaders of this college try to find a new approach to build up their students' competitive advantage in the job market. This was the main reason for launching the new communication course in the College. They were keen to find a better way to promote their students' ability to communicate with others effectively.

8.3 Implementation of the new communication course

Mr Du and Mr Wu were in charge of the implementation of the new communication course at College S. Mr Du had first graduated from and then worked for many years at one of the most prestigious Chinese universities. He was a professor of electronic and information technology. However, after he retired from his original work, he did college administration and taught subjects such as customer services and communication at College S from 2001. Before the year 2000, working

in a well-regarded, government-established university, a teacher would not have been too concerned about student employment since the government guaranteed a job for each graduate who finished his or her study in a public university. As a manager and a teacher in a private college, however, Mr Du had been facing the issue of student employment directly, and thus recognised the need for curriculum reform in communication teaching. He described how events had prompted this recognition:

> As it happened, we had started to think about curriculum reform a few years ago. As you know, the curriculum in the CNEI colleges is dominated by the national exam subjects which are difficult to change. However, changing social conditions required us to provide more competent graduates. Therefore, we had developed some courses such as business etiquette, the psychology of success, and communication. These school-based courses were not part of the national examination; I mean, we are not forced to provide them, but I think our students need that. We have the responsibility to empower them with employability.
>
> (Du, S)

His answer touches on two issues relevant to CNEI colleges. Firstly, the CNEI colleges are under pressure from a competitive job market. As a result, the college had an intrinsic reason to reform its curriculum to enhance student employability and to promote the competitiveness of the college. Secondly, College S has made it an educational mission to enhance its students' employability. As Mr Du said, he perceived that it is a teacher's responsibility to move the curriculum away from the focus on examinations to students' career development.

The second teacher, Mr Wu, graduated from a local normal university, after which he came to Beijing and taught communications in a company for one year and then in three different colleges for another three years. The general communication courses that he taught were delivered in the conventional didactic way. After that, he

worked at College S as a full time teacher for another two years before he became involved with this programme. As a young teacher, he was keen to have a successful career; his ambition motivated him to work hard and he was very committed to the implementation of the new communication course.

There were two groups of totally different students who took the new communication course. The first group was made up of 3rd year students who participated in the course during the first semester, from September 2006 to the end of January 2007. The next group of students were first year students, who commenced the course in February 2007 and finished by the end of June 2007. Since the year three students would finish their study in that academic year, College S wished the course to be taught in one semester with the expectation of enhancing the students' communication abilities and helping them to find jobs. Therefore, they increased the allocated time per week to six lessons (6 hours) in order that it could be finished in time. Teachers saw their students three times a week with two lesson hours for each (fifty minutes for each lesson's 'hour'). It was, in short, an intensive programme of study.

The implementation of the new communication course in College S was characterised by team-based learning. At the beginning of the course, the teachers declared that the course programme would be arranged in separate groups. They asked the students to pick up number cards which divided them into a group and these groups were kept until the end of the course. In order to motivate the students to help each other, the two teachers began with simple role plays or easy tasks, things which

helped group members to build a positive relationship with each other. Step by step, tasks were developed that were more complex. In the final unit, the students were asked to give a ten minute presentation. Normally, the two teachers cooperated and presented in the same classroom together. One of them would manage the learning activities and give a brief introduction about essential points of the course content when it was necessary; the other would do more facilitative work. They were both involved in tutoring the students in the groups. This new teaching and learning approach was totally different to any they had previously used. The issues that emerged when the teachers carried out the new course will be analysed in Section 8.4.

Student tasks were designed to promote different skills in every unit, with each task addressing particular communication ability. Each student's performance was assessed by the other members of his or her group; assessments were also carried out between groups. The teacher, whilst facilitating the groups' learning activities, gave guidance on how to complete the tasks successfully.

8.4 Key issues that emerged in the implementation of the course

8.4.1 Learning in a group

As Becvar (1974) has contended, team-based learning provides a different way to help students learn communication effectively. Evidence which will be presented below is consistent with this perspective. The findings which are drawn from the class observation and interviews show that the students responded favourably to aspects of group learning and these promoted their participation in learning activities. It was also

designed to develop self-awareness and self-confidence. The following example is selected from a class observation:

> This task was designed to improve students' ability to give a brief personal introduction and respond to the questions of job interviewers. Each group had information about a particular company from the Teacher, Mr Wu. Students in the group started their work by developing questions and practising the interview. The episode below describes the activities in Group A:
>
> S1 (the group leader): Well, I think we should have different roles. First of all, who would like to be first interviewee in this task?
>
> S4: I would like to try.
>
> S1: Do you all agree? (She asked the other members and got an agreement from the other three).
>
> S1: Ok! Now, you prepare for your interview now. The company representatives, prepare the questions we need to ask during the interview.
>
> S4: What kind of question would you ask?
>
> S2: I think you need to do your resume first.
>
> S3: Don't forget to state what qualifications you've got. I was asked to show them when I was interviewed for a part time job last summer.
>
> S4: Shall we have different titles when we simulate the interview?
>
> S5: Look here, this is Dai-men-De Company. (She held up the paper Teacher Wu gave to them) The company runs a jewellery business. It is a large company, isn't it?
>
> S3: Yes! I think you could be vice-manager of this company (refer to S1), I could be a member of the human resources department.
>
> (Students laugh)
>
> S1: Ok! Now, I think I could be the head of human resource department; you (referring to S5) could be the vice-manager. We three will work together preparing the interview questions; you (referring to S2) help her (S4) to prepare the interview for the job. Remember, this is a sales assistant vacancy.

We can gather several things from this situation observed in the classroom. Firstly, the task design clearly interested the students and enabled each to participate. Secondly, each student realised that they had to contribute their own opinions and perspectives. Thirdly, the learning process, as it happened here, was dynamic and interactive. Each student had to respond to the others immediately. Fourthly, the activity was conducive to negotiation, compromise, and cooperation. The participants

had to listen to the opinions of others and agree a way forward in order to complete the task successfully.

The background to the learning of co-operative skills is an interesting one. As identified in Chapter two, China is now integrated within the global economic market. Many well-known companies have set up subsidiary organisations in China. As such, many Chinese employees are placed in an environment which is labelled as 'corporate communication' (Kitchen & Schultz, 2001, p45). Individuals have to show their ability to cooperate with others and learn to create their own identities in an organisational setting. Thus they learn that co-operation is an important aspect of communication. However, there are a lot of concepts relevant to co-operative abilities, such as 'co-operation', 'care of others' that are identified as the most important rules in communication or ethics education textbooks in China. Usually, these rules are taught separately from student practice (Li *et al*, 2007). Li *et al* argue that this type of textbook learning leads students to 'speak aloud but do nothing' and students 'make their notes in the class, copy others' notes after class, memorise the notes before the examination and forget everything after that' (Li *et al,* 2007, p101). It is hardly surprising that this kind of rote learning of rules is likely to be forgotten because it is perceived merely as dogma to be regurgitated when necessary. Divorced from their individual experiences, students are unable to assimilate the meaning behind the words and sentences they repeat. As Rogers (1994) points out, without the involvement of thinking and reflection, knowledge from textbooks can appear to the students to be nothing more than 'nonsensical syllables' (p35).

On the contrary, in this case, the students did not discuss the theory of 'co-operation' but they were actually doing it – that is, co-operating. After everyone had accepted their task, the three students in the group developed interview questions, and the other two worked together for the interview preparation. Those included questions for gathering general personal information and questions that explored the interviewee's personal qualities, for example: 'What was your greatest achievement when you were studying?' Then they asked questions relevant to the interviewee's work experience: 'What kind of work experiences have you had during your study at the college?' 'Our company is looking for a sales assistant; what kind of competence do you think is necessary for a sales person to have?' In the final part, they even asked 'Could you tell me what you expect as a salary?' In the context of the interviews performed by the students of the group, the dialogue developed by the students consisted of information exchange. Each individual had a certain role during the practice, and this enhanced their cooperative endeavour.

As Lowe (2003) points out, in order to be productive, co-operative learning groups must 'be structured to include the essential elements of positive interdependence' (p130). According to him, this 'positive interdependence' could encourage students to support each other because 'each member can succeed only if all members succeed' *(ibid).* Evidence from the students' interviews in College S seems to support this perspective. One student said:

> I felt I'd found my place in the group. Each member in the group is important. We gained a greater understanding of each other and support from everyone and I can break through my isolation with the support of group members.
>
> <div align="right">(SWSS04, No 18)</div>

This student perceived that he had found his place in the group and thought a mutually supportive relationship was established during group learning. For him, the significance of group learning was to create opportunities for him to participate in communication which embodied practical cooperation. He gave further evidence:

> I realised that, if you would like to exert your influence on another, or on society, you must learn to communicate with that other effectively. The other people would not guess what you think, what kind of idea you have had, or what personality you have. The only way is that you have to communicate with each other, and let others know you.
>
> <div align="right">(SWSS04, No 18)</div>

What this student said demonstrates that he had realised he could influence others if he had a positive attitude towards engaging in the communication process. This might suggest that the group activities had helped him toward self-awareness and self-confidence. He was more willing to reveal himself in front of others:

> I think I'm more open than before. I feel more confident to contact others and realised that I should communicate with others positively, because only when you communicate with others and explore yourself with others, can others understand you. I believe this is particularly important for my personal development.
>
> <div align="right">(SWSS04, No 18)</div>

This statement might reveal that the student had established trust with the others. He realised that his active participation in communication was essential for him to build a connection with other people. As such he could be 'more open now'. Evidence here is consistent with that of Callaghan *et al* (1994) and Harkin *et al* (2000), who highlight the social-education value of team-based learning. To be open-minded in a communication process is a new development for Chinese students. Information

technology demands transactional, interactive and dynamic social processes (Wiemann, 1977; Hargie et al, 1994; Gerbner, 1993; Price, 1996).

Discussing the benefit of this particular course, one student expressed her feeling:

> I like this change very much, the teacher led me into the practice, and then you were involved to learn naturally. I was not a very confident person before, and I feel I'm more assertive now…I have never had this kind of experience before.
>
> (SWSS04, No 16)

Here, the new teaching and learning approach was described by this student as a significant learning experience because it led her naturally into practice and the learning process. As a result of this new experience her assertiveness and confidence have developed. Linking this statement with the findings drawn from the quantitative data and evidence from the other two case studies, the findings corroborate those classical perspectives which emphasise that student-centred learning could help emancipate students from the limitations of traditional education methods and help them to enhance their self-concept and release their potential (Knowles, 1973; Dewey, 1974; Rogers, 1994; Brandes & Ginnis, 1996).

One student thought that she had gained a real experience of communication in this course. She said:

> The most significant benefit of this course for me is that the course aims to promote our competence rather than to memorise conventional rules and regulations. I can get a real experience of communication which makes me feel much more confident now.
>
> (SWSS04, No 17)

The importance of interaction with others was a dominant topic throughout the interviews, with students comparing team-based learning to the conventional approach and emphasising the distinction:

> The most important change in this class is that the teaching model is not like the traditional one. We learn through practice actively in the group. It is not as stiff as a poker. I do like this model very much.
>
> <div align="right">(SWSS04, No 16)</div>

Students perceive the importance of team-based learning. They thought that it helped them to be more communicative with others; to understand how they must co-operate with others when asked to achieve a task; to enhance their willingness to help others to be successful and to find their identities in a particular community. These are very positive outcomes and show that the implementation of the communications course in College S has been very successful.

Teacher Du explained the necessity of the change to student-centred learning:

> I think it is impossible to develop students' key competences, things like the key skills of communication, by using didactic teaching methods. Competence is quite different from knowledge; it is a mixture of knowledge and skills. …Without their own experience, they cannot show the competence you describe even if you repeat it to them many times.
>
> <div align="right">(Du, S)</div>

This teacher recognised the complex nature of competence and the need to give space and time for student practice in the classroom. There were similarities between the attitudes expressed by the teacher in this interview and those described by Rogers (1994), Prosser *et al* (2000) and Stavenga *et al* (2006), who all placed great emphasis on facilitating students' involvement. In a response similar to Du, Wu claims that communication teaching and learning has to engage students in interactive learning within a community:

We need to change class patterns. Before it had been students sitting in ranks, the teacher stand at the front, his textbook open whilst he spoke. That was the original situation. Now, we are organised in dynamic groups, students sit face-to-face, in groups…. You must give the stage to your students rather than use it to present a lecture.

(Wu, S)

The evidence here shows that Mr Wu had recognised the idea of collaborative learning as changing a class group into a learning community (Kilpatrick *et al*, 1999). For him, collaborative learning is a pedagogical choice that he would make for himself and his students, rather than simply following a trend or the dictates of a college curriculum.

8.4.2 Learning through evaluation and reflection

As identified in Chapter Three, using reflection and evaluation as part of the assessment of learning outcomes in a group context tends to increase the interactions between group members (Burke & Dunn, 2006). The assessment of learning outcomes is generally accepted as being a 'central issue' (Otter, 1992) in key skills teaching and learning. During the implementation of the new communication course, the two teachers, Mr Wu and Du, tried to arrange the assessment of each student's learning outcome in a collaborative learning milieu. What follows is an example selected from the class observations in College S. This is a scene from an assessment acted out by the two groups. One female student (student 4) had just finished her 'job interview':

Wu: Ok! Now, could you please comment on S4's performance? From an employers' point of view firstly? (He nodded his head to members of group two).

S7 (group two) I thought her performance was quite good. Mu…She could keep smiling while she answered the questions. Her manner was very proper throughout the whole interview process.

S8: (group two) Additionally, she kept eye contact with the interviewers; that's very important for a successful interviews.

S6: (group two) Yes! I agree.

S11: (group two) But, I think her response to the question of 'What was your best achievement during your study' was not satisfactory. You see, you told us you had some part time work experience during college years; however, you didn't mention anything about your work experience but instead gave an example how you arranged a duty schedule for your class mate to clean your classroom. I think the interviewer who asked this question wanted to know some details of your performance in your part time job but you didn't catch her meaning. If I were an interviewer, I would have doubted whether or not you were successful in your part time job.

(During S11 speaking, S4 nodded her head and kept writing notes)

S10: (group two) The content of your one minute self-introduction should be changed a little. You presented too many qualifications, such as the third level of oral English, a certificate for second level in information technology. For me, one minute is a short time; you should use it to introduce your abilities and your personality. Mu…, for example, what about your favourite activities; why you would like to apply for this job? If I were you, I would say, these are my qualifications that show my skills in oral English and information technology whilst handing copies to the employers. This would be better than taking most of your time to talk about it.

(S4 smiled and said 'Thank you' to student 10)

S6: (group two) I was impressed by their question design. I mean it looked like a real interview.

S16: (group 3) Teacher, I think this task should have been given to us a week before; so we could prepare more information …. Include our resumes.

(Teacher Wu nodded his head).

Du: I would suggest you practise your speaking more. Some pet phrases should be avoided, such as 'do you know what I mean'; you repeat it quite often when you are speaking. What do you think?

S4: Yes! Thank you!

Again, this scene replicates some of the findings of previous studies in the field of communication. Firstly, it shows that feedback allows learners to make sense of what they have done and to 'clarify and take ownership of the need to learn as defined by the intended learning outcomes' by associating these said outcomes with regular reflection, feedback and assessment (Race, 2005, p95). Secondly, it indicates

that team-based learning provides an opportunity for a student to 'reflect on what happened during the task with the other group members' (Prichard *et al*, 2006, p123). All the group members, not just the teacher, observed the performances. During the assessment process, the teacher's role was that of guide; knowledge and information emerged from the multiple interactions between group members. The students indicated what was most important for an interviewee and how to make an impression on the interviewers. The merits of the performance were noticed and praised, and failings were pointed out. The teacher did not need to make great efforts to motivate the students because the learning activity had captured their imagination. The teacher did not need to provide much feedback because the majority of points had already been made by the students. Nicol & Dick (2006) point out that learning outcomes assessment helps students to construct meaning and understanding from 'feedback messages' and how to regulate their performance (p210). This was clearly happening in the above example.

One student gave her assessment of group evaluation:

> The assessment of learning outcomes was delivered in a group; it is an effective way to alter my communicative behaviours. Both the teacher and my classmates tell me what I should change. It is a great help to me
>
> <div align="right">(SWSS04, No 17)</div>

This comment reflected the benefits this student perceived in collaborative assessment. Students not only demonstrate their own learning but value others' assessment and feedback. The student continued:

> The conventional course highlighted the information in the textbook which one might used to deal with the examination. This course is different; it is examined by our classmates and our teachers. And it stresses practicality, the real abilities you can use in communication.   (SWSS04, No 17)

The comment here shows that the change of assessment enabled her to learn something 'practical', related to real life. This is especially important for communication abilities development in China. This is because the objective of the assessment here is not solely to give a score for a student's performance but to engage students and teachers 'in critical consideration of their subjective relation to knowledge by positioning them as knowing subjects' which involves them in 'drawing on and challenging their experiences, understandings, values and identities' (Burke, 2002, cited by Burke & Dunn, 2006, p221). This contrasts with the traditional examination in China which focuses on testing students' memory of textbook knowledge.

Teacher Wu gave his account of the ongoing assessment methods:

> The assessment has changed. It is not only about the method but also the content. Students' performances were evaluated in groups; they have to show what they can do after study. The students comment on each other and learn from each other. The assessment is begun from the first unit till the end. Not like before, where the final paper examination decided everything.
>
> (Wu, S)

It is notable that he mentioned that assessment is not only a kind of teaching 'method' but also the learning 'content'. The assessment the teachers employed here is used as a learning process in which students could learn from each other. As such, the perspectives of the teachers and students confirm the picture which emerges from this research which is that learning outcomes assessment is not only part of the communications teaching and learning process, but also an interactive learning process. It is not only a purpose of learning but a means to learn.

Comparing this case with a class episode presented in Chapter Seven which was class taught by Mr Ding in College R, there is a clear difference between the two. Although they both emphasised students' learning outcomes assessment, there were many distinctions between them when they implemented the course. In College R the knowledge only came from the teacher, but in College S relevant information was provided not only by the teacher but the students themselves. The assessments in College R were controlled by predefined performance criteria which emphasise a standard reference to a set repertoire. In the case of College S the assessments were taken in a more flexible manner. However, ensuring that students have an intrinsic desire to learn and wish to engage actively in learning is essential for an effective educational experience. As this research has shown, time and space are not the only factors needed for effective communication skills development. The tasks must be well designed to meet students' learning needs and to serve their professional development. If they are, they will motivate students to engage fully in the learning process and thus improve their learning outcomes and hopefully their career prospects.

8.4.3 The new relationship between teachers and students

In the class observation described in Section 8.4, students gave feedback about their experiences when their teachers asked them to assess a fellow student's performance in an interview simulation. One student had said during the discussion:

S16: (group 3) Teacher, I think this task should have been given to us last week; we
        could have prepared more details …. Like our resumes.
        (Teacher Wu nodded his head).

What happened here deserves comment. The student offered his suggestion to the teacher, not in the teacher's office but in the middle of the class. Chinese students are usually trained to obey their teachers without question (Gu, 2008). Why did this student make his comment in front of the whole class? The student gave his explanation:

> This course is taught in a very different way, the teacher going to us, not like before when teachers looked far away from us. He looked very flexible and very close to us.
>
> <div align="right">(SWSS04, No 18)</div>

This feedback supports the idea put forward in Chapter Three, that both the social approach and collaborative learning strategies help teachers to establish new relationships with their students. This new relationship is better described as being part of a mutual partnership rather than as teachers being presenters of knowledge (Grabinger *et al*, 1997; Mcgill and Brockbank, 2004). This is an important change in the Chinese education system. Mr Wu gave his analysis of this:

> Well, to develop students' key competences, the teachers have to put themselves in the students' position. Actually, how much teachers speak in the class is one thing, how much students actually understand is another.
>
> <div align="right">(Wu, S)</div>

The impact of student-centred learning on this teacher is perceived by him as that of putting himself 'in the students' position'. The concern is with how to encourage students to learn rather than how to present knowledge in the class. He further confirmed his approval of student experiential learning:

> Effective learning is about whether the students can gain real understanding. The teachers have to modify their angle to think and encourage the students to have more experience. ….. For them, the more they participate; that is, do, the more they will understand. This is their reward.
>
> <div align="right">(Wu, S)</div>

This comment reflects his perception about 'learning-by-doing' and his confirmation of student-centred learning as a valuable learning method. It also demonstrates that Wu has paid attention to developing learning activities according to students' learning needs. Hence the success of the activity observed in the classroom. It is worth noticing that he was not only commenting on the learning activities in the classroom but also on how to control the quality of learning activities outside class time. He summarised his experience as having some crucial components:

> I think group learning depends on, mu… You have to be aware that students' out-of-class activities are also important. You should reflect this in your lesson planning. This is because the learning outcomes require time and resources outside the classroom. You must consider how they can keep learning after they have finished your classes.
>
> (Wu, S)

We see that the teacher's managing of the interactive process, in a way similar to Wu's example, was intended to extend beyond the classroom. He introduced how he organises his work alongside that of his student group leaders:

> You have to work well with the group leaders; they can act as your assistants. You don't have enough time to check everyone's work every day, but, if you have good group leaders, they will help you organise matters well after the class.   (Wu, S)

Wu's summary about the relationship built between him and his student group leaders suggested that the teachers had allied themselves with the groups' leaders to achieve common goals. His experiences emphasise the important role that Chinese student group leaders could play in a student-centred learning environment. It also demonstrates a fundamental change in the students' position. As this class observation indicates, the relationship between teacher and students can move to a kind of

partnership in which responsibility for learning is shared. To facilitate students'
learning, the teachers might have to change their position from being the presenter of
knowledge to being one of the crew in a learning 'rowing boat' (Mcgill and
Brockbank, 2004). If this analogy captures the spirit of the class then it is no surprise
that the student felt able to make a suggestion to the teacher in the classroom. The
student seemed to have seen the teacher as a colleague in a cooperative endeavour. It
also implies that being respectful doesn't just mean being passive but working
productively together.

8.4.4. Barriers to the implementation of the new course

The findings discussed below are drawn from the qualitative data collected
during the implementation of the course in College S. Some issues emerged that
indicated there was still a significant gap between the ideal situation and the reality
when it came to student-centred learning being carried out in College S. There were
three main issues:

8.4.4.1 Difficulty in designing learning outcomes

The literature review shows that the design of appropriate learning outcomes is
an essential part of effective key skills teaching (Hager, 2004; Malcolm & Zukas,
2001). Learning outcomes normally include target objectives which are often linked
with specific operational tasks (Benett, 1999; Gibbons & Gray, 2002; Van Weert &
Pilot, 2003) or a required performance (Hammon & Ancess, 1996; Grabinger *et al*,
1997). However, a critique from Hussey and Smith (2008) points out that a learning

outcome was usually substituted by a performance indicator, and that this meant that

the learning outcome 'mutated from a useful educational tool into a bureaucratic

burden' (p107). Evidence from the teacher interviews supports this criticism. Wu gave

his example:

> The performance of communication skills learning outcomes should be presented as a whole process. It is difficult to break communication skills down into separate units. How do you isolate one of the communication skills from the whole process of communication?
>
> (Wu, S)

This teacher's comment explored the difficulty he encountered when learning

outcomes were required as a specific statement for each separate task. He perceives

that the learning outcome of communication should be demonstrated as a

comprehensive and integrative process. He felt it is difficult to define communication

abilities as separate skills, as might be done with technical or practical skills. His

views are consistent with the perspective of this research which stresses the

integrative nature and complexity of 'communication key skills'. As identified in

Chapter Two, there are many kinds of micro-skills involved in the process of

communication which result in a consideration of how to develop a communication

curriculum and establish the content for a communication course. While the outcome

or performance competence model is used to follow students' communication

development, the tacit, general and holistic nature of competence in communication

should also be considered when a communication curriculum is designed. In this

teacher's mind, each task of communication should be a complete and integrated

experience. He said:

For example, with nonverbal language, you can't let your students practise their nonverbal language without speaking; and you cannot also let your students practise their listening skills without other activities. Actually, communication is a complete process so that the teaching and learning should be based on the whole process.

(Wu, S)

Wu's examples reveal two aspects of his understanding of the key skills of communication. Firstly, as a social process, communication teaching needs to be located in a wholly practical communicative setting where the students' performance should incorporate their recognition, thinking and emotional expression alongside message sending and response skills.

Secondly, while such a comment recognises the complexity of communicative competence, it could also help explore the problems that might exist during the design of a new communication course. Some learning outcome assessments might break down performance into small, fragmented attainment targets which will be problematic if a holistic assessment is required. Such a difficulty was regarded by Du as confusing:

I have not got a very clear idea about task design; sometimes you need an explicit situation or, say, a task to lead your students to achieve the objectives of the units. But how can one design a task which fits each performance statement directly?

(Du, S)

This statement reflected a similarity between the two teachers' attitudes to the learning outcome design. They both ask how specific tasks can be designed to meet specific learning outcomes. This hints at a dissonance with the OTPAE model in terms of arranging assessments according to each predefined task performance. The

teachers' perspective also appears to support the views of Smith (1987), Lum (1999) Canning (2000) and Muder *et al*, (2007) who argue that the outcomes model leads teachers to rely purely on criterion-referenced assessments, which results in a loss of the holistic purpose of education. This type of assessment, evidence suggests, will not be effective for complex communication skills. Mr Du's comments show that even experienced teachers can feel anxious and unsure of their abilities when it comes to course design. This may be because teachers in China are not used to producing learning outcomes since traditionally, the objectives and learning outcomes used by Chinese teachers come from a standard textbook. The challenge here is the adaptation to a new approach that requires teachers to abandon conventional methods and shift their attention towards the creation of holistic learning and assessment for students.

These two teachers suggest that communication learning outcomes can be designed to be assessed at the completion of a holistic task rather than to be split into aspects of performance criteria. This would seem to be an appropriate way forward, for, as has been identified in Chapter Two, communication processes involve multiple aspects, including interaction with others and the integration of knowledge, skills and attitudes in social communication practice.

8.4.4.2 Lack of teaching experience

Another reason underlying the difficulty of designing learning outcomes, as teachers explained, is the need for teachers' knowledge to be constantly updated. The two teachers in College S frequently mentioned the unsatisfactory system of training

for vocational education teachers. Du thought this a very 'urgent problem' which had

a negative influence on his teaching:

> Lack of experience is a big obstacle for my teaching now, especially workplace experience. Both teachers and students have very limited work experience in vocational contexts from where the suitable tasks should be chosen for students to practise. The world outside the college has changed greatly. We, being the teachers, should know something about it. That is an urgent problem.
>
> (Du, S)

This statement largely speaks for itself; effective communications teaching

and learning happens when a relevant professional task or a social issue is presented

to motivate student participation (Luiseli *et al*, 2005; Rider *et al*, 2006; Cave *et al*,

2007). Mr Du's desire to extend his knowledge about social changes and key skills

application in the modern workplace has exposed a real need for the further

professional development of teachers. Obviously, opportunities for such development

could help teachers access current, relevant information which would help support

and facilitate their students' own experiential learning.

8.4.4.3 Resource problems

The teachers in College S were concerned about the lack of resources to support

student-centred learning. Although the leadership of College S wished – and still

wishes – to utilise student-centred learning to enhance their students' communication

abilities, the lack of resources was a potential obstacle to course implementation. For

example, when Mr Du and Mr Wu wanted to use video equipment to record students'

performances, they found it was difficult to obtain. The college has only a few sets of

this equipment and they were retained by the technical staff on one campus. If Mr Du and Mr Wu wanted to use a video, they had to place an application and arrange transport for both technical staff and the equipment. They also had to apply to borrow equipment to show the recording to the students. Again, they had to arrange the transport for returning these items. As Mr Du explained:

> We don't have suitable equipment to support the implementation of the new course. Sometimes, we need to record the students' performance as part of their self- assessment or group reflection. But we were not provided with even one set of video equipment.
>
> (Du, S)

As already discussed, the communication process involves complex factors and diverse micro-skills. The best way to hone these micro-skills, according to the two teachers, was to provide opportunities for students to observe what happened during their performance. For instance, if a student wanted to assess her use of non-verbal language communication, the best way is let her see a video recording of herself. While a group watch an individual performance on video, they could discuss the merits and shortcomings of what they were watching. They could learn how to prevent the shortcomings in a constructive way. This is why the teacher thought that this equipment should be a dedicated resource for interactive teaching and learning. However, the pure effort of repeatedly reserving and arranging transport for staff and machines from another campus made this exercise so complex as to be almost impossible to offer on a regular basis.

There were other logistical problems too. For example, Du points out that the classroom used for student-centred learning should be convenient for small group work. As he says:

> Now, we move our desks and chairs out of the way every time. Because there is only one classroom pattern that exists in the college; a speaking table for the teacher, chairs placed in ranks. We have to move them in groups before the beginning of the class. Each time, we have to move them back after the class.

(Du, S)

Moving classroom desks and chairs should not be seen as regular work that a teacher is required do. However, Du and Wu had to do this because both of them wished to provide a more student-centred learning environment for their students. Again, the leadership of the college may have agreed in principle that students needed to acquire 'communication key skills' through a student-centred learning approach, but then subsequently this was not supported through the allocation of suitable resources. Along with the expanding number of students in higher education, the shortage of resources in China is a major concern which should be taken into account when institutions make changes to their teaching methodologies.

8.5 Summary

In College S, the perception is that team-based learning has proven to be a beneficial tool for students to engage in interactive and experiential learning. There were many examples of well designed activities, and the students valued their learning experiences highly, especially those which put them at the centre of interactive and co-operative activities with their peers. These experiences are echoed in the literature, which identifies the significant role that collaborative and situated

learning plays in promoting effective teaching and learning. They also highlighted the more critical, open-ended, process-focused features in learning outcome assessments.

Evidence shows that students made meaningful improvements through collaborative learning. They felt that they were not only more confident in speaking publicly but also more aware of how they interacted with others. In addition, they enjoyed the opportunities provided to allow them to engage in evaluation and reflection on their own and others' performances. They liked this course because they had a new, closer relationship with their teachers. The teacher was considered to be a team member, and students were no longer afraid to challenge his authority in class.

However, there were still barriers encountered by teachers during the implementation of the course in College S. The desire to design learning outcomes that captured the holistic nature of communication skills was problematic, especially as the OTPAE model recommends assessments based on pre-defined tasks. A second, more irritating (and debilitating) barrier was the lack of dedicated resources for communication key skills. The need for complex transfer arrangements for audio visual equipment and the need to move chairs into group working configurations (and back again) acted as considerable deterrents. Finally, teachers in College S were frustrated by a lack of recent workplace experience or contemporary knowledge of the needs of modern business and industry which they felt they needed in order to design relevant vocational learning and assessment tasks.

This concludes the discussion of the three college case studies. Each college has provided a different insight into the implementation of the new communications

course, but there are many shared issues, especially in relation to the barriers that they faced. These will be drawn together and discussed in the next chapter as part of the conclusions and recommendations of this research.

Chapter Nine

Conclusions and recommendations arising from the research

9.1. Introduction

This research was undertaken to assess the effectiveness of student-centred learning in the execution of a new 'communication key skills' curriculum, using three Chinese colleges as case studies. Following the process of course development and implementation, the research explored how teachers and students understand and perceive student-centred learning and the concepts of 'key skills' and 'communication key skills'. The findings drawn from the quantitative data have been presented and discussed in Chapter Five, and the issues emerging from the three case studies have been analysed and interpreted in Chapters Six, Seven and Eight respectively. As this research is informed by a combination of phenomenology (Schutz, 1970; Cohen, 2000) and selected 'illuminative evaluation' perspectives (Parlett and Hamilton, 1972), it has attempted to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences of both teachers and students as they began the new course and practised student-centred learning methods for the first time. Issues that emerged as the course progressed were examined and the perceptions of all those involved were analysed. Particular attention has been paid to any problems or barriers that emerged during the implementation of the new programme.

The study began as a result of the increasing concern about the development of students' communication abilities in vocational education programmes in China. This

chapter summarises the findings of the research and explores their implications for the Chinese vocational education sector. It is divided into sections that relate to the research aims, which are repeated here for clarity:

1. To explore teachers' and students' understanding of 'key skills'.

2. To explore teachers' and students' attitudes to the new teaching method of student-centred learning in a Chinese context.

3. To evaluate the impact of student-centred learning on teachers and colleges where such an approach has been tried, and investigate any barriers that might stand in the way of teacher adaptation to a student-centred strategy.

4. To investigate the effectiveness of student-centred learning in promoting Chinese students' communication abilities.

5. To make recommendations for evaluating the development and implementation of a new type of curriculum model to promote student-centred learning of communication abilities in the Chinese context.

The first section of this chapter summarises the research aims and explains the structure of the chapter. Teachers' and students' understanding of key skills and their perceptions of 'communication key skills' are then investigated. The development of 'communication key skills' using a student-centred learning approach is analysed using teachers' and students' perceptions of their experiences. Barriers that emerged during the implementation of courses are next explored. The penultimate section summarises the findings of this research and makes recommendations that arise from

it. The final section discusses some of the implications of the findings for future research.

9.2 Teachers' and students' understanding of key skills

This section summarises the findings related to the first research aim, which of exploring teachers' and students' understanding of key skills and their attitudes towards them. Both teachers and students recognised the significance of personal communication abilities and identified that they could be described as 'key skills'. The majority of student respondents (89.2%) and teacher respondents (78.0%) acknowledged communication abilities as a kind of 'key skill'. They could distinguish between the practical and technical skills usually developed in vocational programmes and the more general personal competence that are a deeper result of education. The need for the Chinese workforce to develop effective 'communication key skills' in order to compete in a contemporary economy, was widely recognised. Some concerns were expressed about the effectiveness of the current provision, based as it was on outdated didactic teaching methods with little student participation, therefore not necessarily developing more significant abilities.

Over 90% of student and teacher respondents thought it was necessary for their colleges to set up key skills courses. These results support the views of a number of Chinese researchers who emphasise the necessity of 'new skills' and competence development in China (Yu, 2000; You, 2005; Du, 2006; Ye & Li, 2007; Zhou, 2008). However, it was acknowledged that 'communication key skills' development could also take place within the framework of other courses, especially if they had a cultural

or moral focus. As a consequence of China's rapid social economic development, employers now require not just technical skills, but those more complex personal competence, such as communication, team-work, problem solving and self-development, that have been identified as 'key skills' by many countries. Despite this widespread demand, some teachers still had a limited understanding of what key skills development actually involved, or were unsure how to go about it. There appeared to be little in the way of literature or guidance materials for teachers being produced or disseminated by the Chinese government. This is despite communication abilities being recognised as an educational priority. The responses of many teachers and students show that they perceived 'communication key skills' as complex, overlapping a number of factors which could only be developed by experiences gained in a number of different contexts.

A deeper exploration of the concept of 'communication key skills' arose from the case studies, especially the findings from College R. Students perceived them not only as a set of employment skills relevant to their professional development but also as a set of cognitive abilities relevant to the development of their thinking. An understanding of the power of effective communication enabled students to perceive themselves as independent people with the capacity to interact with and influence others. They thought that the acquisition of these personal competences would help them to be more flexible and adaptable, and help them to integrate more effectively into social and professional communities.

Both teachers and college managers perceived that communication abilities development would also enhance a student's moral and ethical development. This has some resonance in China and accords with Wang (2006). It also goes beyond the considerations of Sigman (1987), who indicated that communication abilities are just 'an exigency of social survival in general' (p124). Wang's view is supported by teacher and student respondents who highlighted the connection between individual communication abilities and personal self-concept, motivation, attitudes and values. Therefore, it may be concluded that communication abilities are far more complex than the notion of a simple practical 'skill'.

The complexity of these 'key skills' need to be highlighted when they are introduced into the Chinese vocational education system. This would prevent the whole concept from being widely perceived as a set of simple practical skills and vocational education narrowed to mere mechanistic training programmes.

9.3 Attitudes to student-centred learning

This section summarises the findings of the second research aim, which was to explore teachers' attitudes towards student-centred learning approaches in the Chinese context.   There was a marked interest in the adoption of the approach with 94.4% of teachers agreeing or strongly agreeing that it would be a valuable tool for 'communication key skills' development. This perspective was echoed by the focus group teachers, who confirmed that they were strongly in favour of using student-centred learning (see Table 5.13 in Chapter Five).

However, a number of different perspectives underpinned this advocacy of

student-centred learning.   The majority of teachers perceived that the new approach

was a way of promoting the effectiveness of teaching and learning. This is because

they perceived that student-centred learning would place an emphasis on the students'

own learning experiences:

> We need to change the class pattern…You must give the stage to your
> students rather than use it to present a lecture.
>
> (Wu, S)

Thus student activities should dominate; students should engage in active learning.

This was the only way for the student to 'learn how to learn':

> The aim of teaching, ultimately, is non-teaching. It is to lead student learning
> through their doing. In fact, it is this which enables them to learn how to
> learn.
>
> (Gom, B)

The evidence suggested that teachers believed that student-centred methods were

likely to be the only way to develop certain key communication abilities:

> I think it is impossible to develop students' key competence, things like the
> communication abilities, by using didactic teaching method… Without their
> own experience, they cannot show the competence you described even if you
> repeat to them many times.
>
> (Du, S)

These perspectives showed similarities with the many research articles that recognise

the effectiveness of student-centred learning (Ekpenyong, 1999; Reece & Walker,

2000; Fazey & Parker, 2000; Prosser *et al*, 2000).

Interestingly, some teachers perceived that they should have a responsibility to provide a set of external conditions to make classroom become a stage of students' self-presentation:

> Teachers… must provide an environment in which students can present the best of themselves.
>
> (Ding, R)

Other teachers thought that the adoption of student-centred approaches would help them in what was becoming a key responsibility, that of promoting students' employability:

> In my case, I collect my task designs from two sources: first, from life itself; second, from the vocational job. The task design should be linked with a vocational job.
>
> (Xiao, R)

Another said:

> Changing social conditions required us to provide more competent graduates…We have the responsibility to empower them in terms of employability.
>
> (Du. S)

Thus, pedagogic reform was essential not only for the students, but for their college's success, measured by employment data. Teachers who had previously focused on preparing students for examinations were now considering the development of the 'whole person':

> These [communication] courses were not part of the national examination, I mean, we are not forced to provide them, but I think our students need that.
>
> (Du, S).

These statements suggest that the acceptance of student-centred learning approaches is based on teachers' expectation of their students' success. Thus they perceive pedagogical reform as a priority, even though they know it will not be easy to make changes.

9.4 The impact of student-centred learning on the teachers and their colleges

In general, the implementation of student-centred learning produced a positive effect on teachers and their colleges. There were also many barriers to be faced; these will be summarised in the next section. One of the most fundamental influences on teachers was that it led them to re-think the purposes of education. It had a manifest impact on the way they saw their teaching. It enabled them to think about the integrated development of students' knowledge, values and competence, rather than simply following the direction of examination-based education. The emphasis shifts from how teachers teach to how students learn.   As Wu made clear:

> …how much teacher speaks in the class is one thing, how much students actually understand is another.
>
> (Wu, S)

The student-centred learning approach moved teachers' attention from the methods they should use in their teaching to the strategies they should employ for students' learning. Teachers had to revisit their understanding of the use of objectives in teaching and learning and focus on the significance of the students' own experiences. All of the focus group teachers agreed that they needed to pay more attention to students' learning needs when they prepared learning materials. Teachers had to analyse their students' backgrounds and interests. They were

attempting to design assessment tasks that linked with the students' vocational areas in order to capture their imagination, or to make tasks relevant in other ways, such as the job interview simulation carried out in College S.

The teachers claimed that student-centred learning had encouraged them to become involved in the development of teaching and learning materials and curriculum development generally. This was something which Chinese teachers were not used to, as the Chinese curriculum and associated textbooks had previously been prepared centrally. To implement student-centred learning, teachers were involved in much more preparation, both in the detailed planning of individual learning activities and the development of the resource materials to support these. As teacher Anm, in College B stated:

> If you have no detailed course design which could stimulate your students' interests to learn, you would have no good students.

(Anm, B)

The use of student-centred learning represents a fundamental difference to the traditional didactic teaching methods that have dominated China for over two thousand years. The teacher no longer acts as a textbook presenter; instead, he or she has to be a designer who has to exert his or her creative capacity to establish a learning environment, including appropriate resources, to meet students' needs. They need to be facilitators of student learning, managers of learning activities and assessors of learning outcomes.

Teachers learnt to use a social, interactive approach to promote students' communication abilities. As Mr Wu in College S pointed out:

Now we are organised in dynamic groups. Students sit face to face, in groups.

(Wu, S)

Teachers also noticed that student-centred learning had changed the relationship between them and their students. A typical example occurred in College S, when a student suggested, in front of the class, that the teacher could have given his students more preparation time. This was done in a constructive way (perhaps in line with the student's own communication abilities' development) but would have been unprecedented under the old system. Teachers felt closer to their students, and were perceived as part of the 'team'.

Assessment methods also changed. There were no formal examinations. Evidence drawn from class observation in College S and B show that the learning outcome assessment was organised in groups through discussion and negotiation. The students received no score or class ranking. The teacher was not the only one who assessed learning. Instead, the students themselves were involved, and the process has now become part of their learning. During the process of assessment, the teacher acts as a guide; knowledge and information emerge from the interactions between student group members. Students comment on each other's performance and learn from each other. However, observed assessments varied according to the different colleges' contexts. Evidence show that the assessments in College B and S, which were presented in Chapter Six and Eight, showed more features of an open-ended, autonomous approach whilst the case of College R showed a more pre-defined, performance standardised method.

Finally, the implementation of student-centred learning had an impact on the colleges' management systems. Leaders in both College B and College S were very much involved in the introduction of the new courses. They created opportunities for teacher participation in curriculum development. In addition, teachers in College B were supported by a specific training programme to establish a common understanding of the new course and to enhance their capacity to deliver it effectively. This created a democratic and collaborative environment that made teachers feel supported. They felt able to express their views on the new course, and regular meetings enabled them to share learning activities and resources and helped further to develop their ideas.

Evidence from College B in particular showed that the successful implementation of the communication course requires a change in the entire educational environment, not simply in individual teacher attitudes.

9.5 Barriers to change

Teachers encountered a number of problems or barriers which have been identified by other researchers (Fullan, 1991; Rudduck, 1991; Gu 2008; Zhou, 2008) during the implementation of the new course. They all lacked experience in student-centred approaches, as well as in course development; they had not previously undertaken the design of learning activities and materials nor outcomes-based assessment. Their lack of experience in curriculum development was to be expected, as Chinese teachers have not been involved in making decisions about the curriculum

owing to centralised government control of content. Teachers also referred to their 'lack of knowledge', by which they meant they had very little opportunity to extend their knowledge of communication theories, social and economic changes or to explore teaching theory. Teachers experienced initial difficulties in adjusting to changes in pedagogy - the need to move the classroom focus from textbook to competence development, from a teacher 'delivering knowledge' to student learning outcomes, from a teacher in the front of a whole class to 'dynamic groups'. All these developments indicate a fundamental shift in teachers' ways of working. Some had an initial resistance to the changes:

> It takes too much effort to adapt to the position of change, both students and I have to try to get used to our new roles. It is too difficult to guide the students in their practical action. I find it is much easier just to talk to them.

(Anm, B)

A class observation revealed that even when the teacher thought he had 'allowed a lot of time for student practice' (Ding, R), he still gave a long speech about appropriate modes of communication rather than giving students the initiative to develop their own abilities. Linked with the fact that both teachers and students have been placed in a 'teacher, classroom and textbook' centred environment for so long, such difficulties were no doubt inevitable. As another teacher pointed out:

> 'I cannot change my role overnight. It will take a long time'.

(Anm, B)

All the focus group teachers asked to have more opportunities to learn. For example, one teacher said:

> We don't know much about the new communication theory. We don't know much about new enterprise development and their new entry criteria for

employees. Without such knowledge, how can we design appropriate tasks and material for teaching and learning?

(Xum, B)

Even established teachers wanted to update their knowledge. The lack of recent experience in business or industry was considered to be a barrier when attempting to design relevant vocational learning tasks. Therefore, teachers considered that professional development should become a priority, to enable them to adopt the new methods successfully. Such evidence was exemplified in statements, such as:

We are novices…we need to learn more' (Tem, B)

My knowledge structure is not rich enough for this teaching job, especially the lack of teaching pedagogical knowledge.

(Xiao, R)

We need to know what happens in the work place; at least, we need more information than we at present receive.

(Ding, R).

Of the three colleges, College B provided the most effective staff development through its structure of regular meetings where teachers could share resources and experiences. However, this could not compensate for the more formal training that should ideally have been provided before the course began.

Another problem that teachers encountered was the lack of any visible policies to support 'communication key skills' development. No documents that clarified what 'key skills' actually means in a Chinese context could be located, and this was problematic as ambiguity still exists in colleges and amongst teachers about 'key skills', whether they are essentially academic or vocational and whether they support intellectual development or employability. Evidence from the case studies suggested

that the term 'communication key skills' might cause teachers to assume that these could be assessed in the same way as vocational skills.

In the context of the CNEI colleges, there was no college policy related to the promotion of 'key skills' or 'communication key skills' development. Even in the three colleges that implemented the new communication course, there were only a limited number of teachers and staff who were involved in discussions about the purpose and meaning of the programme. While the teachers in this study appreciated the importance of pedagogic reform, this was not necessarily accepted by each manager, and therefore its value was not recognised throughout the college. For example, one teacher worried that, in colleagues' minds, her class was not formal enough to be seen as a teaching environment:

> …those class monitors don't think how important my work is; they thought my class looked like a game.

(Jam, B)

This teacher did not feel comfortable using new student-centred approaches because she didn't know how her work would be perceived by colleagues. Another problem was that teachers and students were expected to give priority to CNEI examinations courses. As analysed in the case study of College B, to feel supported, teachers need to work in an environment where new approaches in teaching and learning can be shared with colleagues. Teachers showed themselves, however, willing to embrace the changes, even if they longed for more support from their colleges and from educational policy makers.

The use of a competence-based model meant that teachers encountered a number of problems when they attempted to design learning outcomes. For example, evidence from a class observation in College R showed that the teacher did not fully realise the importance of organising and providing the resources for his students to develop their communication abilities. His class activities were organised to demonstrate a narrow repertoire of skills. Lum's (1999) criticism of competence-based approaches, that they oversimplify the 'rich nature of human capabilities in favour of reductionist statements of outcome' (p411) appears valid here. This argument, in essence, concerns the knowledge and understanding which underpin competent practice as opposed to a mere performance of skills. Returning to Chapter Two's exploration where the arguments concern the complexity of 'communication key skills', these findings might suggest that the competence-based model is not perfect for the development of communication abilities. In addition, if carried out correctly, the process of assessment was much more time consuming than traditional methods, and this had not been taken into account when the course was timetabled.

Evidence from both class observations and the interviews showed that the resistance to the changes in methodology were not only related to teachers' didactic inclinations but also to students' passive learning styles. These Chinese students' education had been dominated by traditional educational methods for their whole time in compulsory education. Initially, they did not respond to the new approach, and were therefore assumed, by one teacher at least, to 'have no interest in learning'

(Anm, B). Another teacher suggested that these problems occurred because of a 'lack of study skills' (Tem, B). They didn't yet know how to be independent learners. A typical example appeared in the case study of College B, where a student viewed the new methodology as 'artificial play' (GMJ 0601, No.23).

Another major barrier was inadequate resources, which greatly concerned the teachers and prevented them, in some cases, from teaching effectively. The administrative work that some teachers had to do in addition to their teaching meant they had little time for thinking, planning and preparing their teaching. The large class sizes in College R resulted in teachers experiencing problems in managing students' learning activities. Another common problem was that both teachers and students felt there was not enough time to demonstrate what the students had learnt. The lack of dedicated resources, including ICT and audio visual equipment, as well as teaching rooms arranged for small group work, all added to the difficulties that teachers faced.

However, such barriers are to be expected during educational change. As Fullan (2007) points out:

> A large part of the problem of educational change may be less a question of dogmatic resistance and bad intentions (although there is certainly some of both) and more a question of the difficulties related to planning and coordinating a multi-level social process involving thousands of people.
>
> (Fullan, 2007, p84)

This statement helps illuminate the realities of educational change. The effective implementation of the new programme is not just related to teachers' attitudes toward student-centred learning, or their individual abilities and knowledge. Rather, it depends on the creation of a climate in which the meanings of educational change are

shared and understood by all involved. The findings of the research literature are clear

and consistent, but the reality is more complex. Changes cannot simply be imposed.

Adequate information, training and resources must also be provided and the teachers,

just as they believe in the capacity of their students, must themselves be trusted to

carry out their new role effectively.

9.6 The effectiveness of student-centred learning in promoting Chinese students' communication abilities

Evidence from both the quantitative data and the case studies showed that the

teachers and students valued the use of student-centred learning in the new

communication course. It increased student participation in class, and they greatly

valued their new experiences. As the course progressed, students perceived that they

developed more confidence and a greater willingness to become involved in

interactive and reflective learning approaches. They pointed out they had gained more

understanding through their own learning experiences:

> When you take part in that situation, you can feel something; you can get a better understanding of the concepts and knowledge involved, more than you could learn from a textbook.
>
> (JMJ 0607, No. 3)

As another student said:

> The most significant benefit of this course for me is that the course aims to promote our competence rather than to memorise those conventional rules and regulations. I can get a real experience of communication which makes me feel much more confident now.
>
> (SWSS04, No. 17)

Contrasting this sense of participation with the findings drawn from the first survey, the difference is clear. In the first survey, which was undertaken before the implementation of the new communication course, the questionnaires showed that only 50% of the student respondents reported they had any experience of participation in their communication courses. Most of these were taught in traditional way with the teachers talking whilst the students made notes and memorised.

Evidence drawn from the case study in College S supports the use of a team-based approach to interactive learning. Students felt 'more confident in their contact with others' (SWSS, No.18) within the small groups, and this enabled them 'to understand others well and get along better with them' (SWSS, No.16). Students spoke of overcoming shyness, more assertiveness, increased confidence in public speaking and better responsiveness to others. They were better able to consider other people's feelings and thought that this brought benefits, not just for interpersonal relationships in a social setting, but also for their future professional lives. These results corroborate findings which concluded that interactive group learning promotes flexibility and adaptability (Morreale & Backlund, 2002; Ortega *et al*, 2006; Webb *et al*, 2009).

Also of interest is the fact that the students perceived the assessment process as part of the learning process. They found that formative assessment helped them to achieve their learning objectives, often through the sharing of knowledge and giving feedback to each other. As one student put it:

> Assessment is an effective way to alter my communicative behaviours. Both teacher and my classmates tell me what I should change. It is a great help to me.
>
> (SWSS04, No. 17)

The design of relevant assessments provides an important context where knowledge can be shared interactively. The case studies showed that, where this was working well, information was exchanged between students and between students and teacher. The assessment tasks were integrated with the learning outcomes, and the assessment process became a discussion which helped to promote understanding of the social context of the task, the attitudes required, the knowledge and competences needed and the procedures required for problem solving. As such, the assessment process provided a good opportunity for the students not only to acquire information, knowledge and skills, but also to experience live examples of how others perform in given situations and to identify why they are successful or unsuccessful. However, whether the task, social context and assessment strategy are closely related in this way depends firmly in the quality of the teacher's management of the situation.

Student-centred learning provides a different learning climate, one in which students can feel trusted, accepted and understood by each other. These factors form the keystone for students to enhance their confidence and their communication abilities. This research has demonstrated the possibilities that Chinese students, if they are supported in a suitable learning environment, to learn in a new way. Despite their long experience of having learning imposed on them, of guessing what the teacher wants them to do and 'obeying' the textbook, they saw the benefits of the new approaches. In the right classroom conditions, and without the immediate pressure of

tests, the Chinese students in the case study colleges welcome the new way of working and perceive its relevance and value.

The effectiveness and success of the communications initiative is based on students' self-assessment and on their acknowledgment of the process, whereas traditional approaches concentrated on measurable outcomes, so that whole programmes were directed towards what could be recognised as having taken place on a before and after basis. The attitudes revealed in this research show a different way of thinking, critical, personal and exploratory. The confidence with which they can talk about this is itself a central, measurable, outcome.

9.7 The OTPAE model for 'communication key skills' curriculum development

As explained in Chapter One, the Objective- (Target) Tasks- Preparations-Actions- Evaluations (OTPAE) model was established to develop the key skills curriculum in Chinese vocational education institutions. Its purpose was to encourage vocational education teachers to create learning programmes to develop students' key skills and meet the needs of local employers.

The results of the study show that teachers perceived the OTPAE model had both positive and negative influences. Disappointingly, one teacher perceived the OTPAE model as 'a completely operative model', aligning it with competence-based assessment which, as has been shown, represents an oversimplification of the communication assessment process. This suggests that the new model should have been more carefully introduced, perhaps through dedicated staff development sessions. However, other teachers claimed that the model had helped them understood

how to use a student-centred learning approach in the communication course and how to link with specific learning outcomes. This has helped teachers to understand how lesson preparation could change from the use of textbook knowledge to the design of students' learning activities.

In fact, most teachers thought that the model enabled them to rethink the purpose of communication courses and to explore the teaching and learning strategies required for effective learning. It also enabled them to become involved in the course design process. Influenced by the model, teachers have developed new materials to meet their students' learning needs; they have tried to lead their students into interactive learning by the use of different social contexts. However, the picture that emerged from the class observation in College R shows there is a weakness in the OPTAE model in that it might not make clear the distinction between communication abilities and skills' training. Evidence showed that the model proved unhelpful to some teachers, in that they did not understand the strategies they could use to develop students' communication abilities, nor how to provide and organise learning resources.

As a result, this research recommends that the OTP**A**E model should be changed to be OT**R**AE. The letter '**R**' here is to emphasise the importance of resource preparation when organising communications teaching and learning. The new OT**R**AE model would provide a more pragmatic guidance to the curriculum changes, but it could do more than this. By drawing attention to the centrality of resources, the OT**R**AE model subtly gives a greater emphasis on establishing an appropriate

learning environment, both in the classroom and in the institution. The problem of inadequate resourcing is partly a lack of time, rooms, and equipment and learning materials. At a deeper level the significance of highlighting **'R**esources' is to emphasise their central importance to thinking about the new communication curriculum development and teaching and learning environment establishment.

9.8 The implications of the research findings

The findings of this research have explored the experience and significance of the implementation of the new communication course in three Chinese colleges. The teachers' and students' attitudes towards student-centred learning and its impact on them have been analysed and presented. Despite the barriers they encountered during the implementation of the course, those involved understood its value as well as the unprecedented implications of a new and challenging way of working. The findings document the teachers' experiences of change, their understanding of it and their implementation of student-centred learning strategies. All these have major implications for the development of communication studies and the progress of students in Chinese vocational education.

The most significant implication of the research lies, however, in the change of attitude that took place; the willingness of teachers and students to embrace a change from traditional didactic habits and the potential of this to enhance Chinese education.

9.8.1 The Complexity of communication key skills

This research has provides both qualitative and quantitative data to explore the teachers' and students' perceptions about 'key skills' and 'communication key skills'. One of the most significant results of the survey is the complex, social and integrative nature of communication abilities as revealed in the attitudes of those taking part.

A successful communication performance, as identified by many researchers, is an integration of various factors, perceptual, cognitive and affective and in a specific social context (Hargie et al 1994). Evidence drawn from this research supports this perspective. Results from the first survey shows that both teacher and student respondents could make a distinction between those technical or ordinary skills and those at a different level. The students selected those which involved more complex and integrative abilities as 'key skills'. The students not only linked the 'communication key skills' with the demands of the new employment market but with their own attitudes and motivations. Moreover, the students perceived that they had become more open and more positive about communication activities. This evidence demonstrates that students perceive that the value of communication teaching and learning achievement is not simply a way of becoming more employable, but also a means of helping them to be more flexible and adaptable through their raised self-awareness and attention to others.

These perceptions demonstrated that communication activities could be seen as part of an individual's personal cognition and socialisation process, a process that includes personal psychological, cognitive and emotional skills, including the ability

to cooperate with others (Cherry, 1993; Hargie et al 1994; Fussell & Kreuz, 1998). These factors of motivation, attitude and personal value systems which are embedded in communication are not 'skills' in terms of simple demonstrable outcomes, as they were presented in the competence-based approach (Kelly & Horder, 2001, p695). Chinese teachers learned to perceive the communication process as an integrative one which involved knowledge, motivation, values and attitudes development.

9.8.2 The significance of student-centred learning in China

The results of this research demonstrate that student-centred learning could play a significant role in promoting students' communication abilities in China. All the evidence drawn from this research suggests that the most useful strategy in 'communication key skills' teaching and learning is to embed students' communication abilities development within structured activities. The students who were involved in the new communication course perceived that they have benefited from developing their own learning practice rather than learning only from a textbook. The following conclusions can be drawn from the present study.

Firstly, the students perceived that their self-concept and self-confidence have been boosted through the implementation of the student-centred learning approach. Evidence from the case studies and self- assessment questionnaires show that students appreciated how they were supported and valued by their peers and their teacher in a more open, and trusting environment. It also shows how the students appreciated finding themselves in a learning community; making decisions about their learning

activities and interacting with others. Students' self-awareness and sense of their responsibilities arose as a result of the process of completing a group task. This promotion of self-confidence, independence, as many students in case studies have identified, was a cornerstone for them to develop their abilities. This is because self-awareness means the 'realisation of the social, political, and economic contradictions in the world and the initiation of action individually or with peers to change matters' (Withall, 1991, p93). Self-awareness or self-concept, as defined by Hamache (1992), is 'the cognitive part of self–perception' (p31). As discussed in Chapter Two, the development of such cognitive processes goes well beyond traditional practical skills training. Students also perceived that they owe a lot from the new teaching and learning methods because it helped them to gain deeper understanding of communication. Their opinions are also echoed the arguments raised by Chinese researchers who explored the weakness of didactic teaching methods in limiting students' development (Wang, 2002; Gu, 2003; Gu, 2008). As Wang (2003), put it, the situation in a current Chinese class can be described as 'teacher's speech displaced students' learning; pressure displaced dialogue; students have no alternative but to be oppressed individuals and this pressure undermined the whole foundation of their self-esteem' (p10). Being placed in such a climate, students cannot realise their potential to learn; they cannot develop their creative thinking and produce original work. It is crucial that they should be given the opportunities to appreciate their own identity and their own influence and power, especially in communication teaching and learning. This is significant finding, as it could be an indicator that the new

student-centred approach is working as anticipated, in developing communicative skills, cognitive understanding and attitudinal changes. It is the first indication from a study in China that student-centred approaches may have the desired effect on student learning.

Secondly, the students perceived that the level of their participation in learning is higher than before, and they linked this with those learning activities which were not taken exclusively from a textbook. A real understanding of social meaning has to be obtained through one's own perception. It is a process in which students discover and recognise the meaning of what they communicate and their responsibilities to others; it is also one in which they begin to realise what kind of skills should be employed for achieving their purposes. Growing with these experiences, students become 'knowledge producers, knowledge users and socially responsible citizens' (Gillies, 2007, p228). As communication is a dominant activity in a student-centred learning approach which involves multiple transactions of information, perceptions, and reflective comments between peers and teachers, students are not only interested in taking part in learning but also in seeking their own learning experiences.

Thirdly, the evidence shows that student-centred learning strategies help students to have more understanding of the meaning of 'cooperation'. In a competitive examination system where individual success is all, the contrast with the needs of collaboration in the workplace is clear. The findings of this research enhance our understanding of student-centred learning that focuses 'on the personal and interpersonal relationships, beliefs, and perceptions that are affected or supported by

the educational system as a whole' (Gillies, 2007, p228). Being placed in communication process, the student can perceive how others understand and relate to him or her, and how his or her opinions impact on others. There is also the opportunity to challenge students' perspectives and 'develop new or alternative positions or arguments that are logical and that others will accept as valid' (Gillies, 2007, p7).

The findings of this study demonstrated the value and utility of student-centre learning for promoting students' awareness of themselves and their recognition the importance of cooperation. It is a means for enhancing students' productive, interactive and autonomous learning in the Chinese context, and a way of giving them the confidence to learn for themselves. Embedding student-centred learning within a policy framework that still invokes the recognised and traditional behavioural assumptions of 'key skills', the educational system is being encouraged to change in a way that does not seem at first sight particularly different or new. But the real effects are fundamental. The Chinese government, like others, still tends to emphasise the need for the skills that are supposed to create the new type of workforce it desires, but by allowing this to be achieved through student-centred learning, it is creating the potential for very different citizens to emerge.

9.8.3 The teachers' new role and their professional development

The findings of this research emphasise that the teacher has an essential role to play in ensuring successful communication abilities development through student-centred learning approaches. As facilitators of students' learning, teachers need to develop their students' desire to learn and to understand how to motivate them to pursue this desire. They also have to work harder to create a positive learning milieu. To deliver student-centred learning effectively, they need clear learning outcomes and the ability to design assessment strategies, develop resources and plan learning activities. All this emphasises the complexity of learning. This 'learning', especially in communication, as evidence of this research has been identified, is not the learning which demanded that students should cope with the requirements of textbooks but one which encompasses students' intellectual, social, cultural, moral and emotional development. The primary concern of the learning, as Light & Cox (2001) point out, is to 'make personal meaning with and out of the shared meanings available' (p49). As such, some basic principles might need to be developed.

Firstly, the evidence of this research suggests that teachers have to establish a new attitude toward their students. Students cannot be seen as empty vases or passive learners; they should be recognised as an individual 'whole person' in the learning process. This is especially important for Chinese teachers. As case studies in college B have shown, without a deep understanding of students, it is very difficult for a teacher to guide students into a student-centred learning context, because the tasks

teachers design might be inappropriate for the interests of the students. Students' own perceptions should be fully understood and appreciated.

Secondly, enhancing the interaction between the external environment and students' internal learning needs, teachers have to develop a set of suitable teaching and learning materials, not only books but the internet, computers, and video. As case studies have suggested, those facilities which give access to current social issues, if used well, could help students to participate in their learning effectively. The quality of students' learning will depend on the environment in which they learn. As Hybels and Weaver (2005) point out, there are many subtle influences on learning, and communicative capacity depends on the students' ability to understand and adapt to these influences. The learning environment or the milieu in which students learn involves 'participation [in] the cultural practice in which knowledge exists' (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p98). Even with student-centred learning, teachers retain some control over the 'community of practice', or the conditions in which students learn.

Thirdly, evidence in this study suggested that learning outcome assessment can be employed as a tool to lead students into learning. This is because learning contexts, as well as assessment criteria and methods can also help students to have a sense of responsibility for their learning. Assessment does not have to be implying a terminal grade. It can also bring about students' own interest in learning, and their awareness of themselves as individual learners.

The evidence from the case studies shows that teachers have had to clarify their conception of 'communication key skills' and of 'student learning'. Communication

is a complex, multi-dimensional process, and the teaching and learning activities that focus on it have to be based on a range of social and vocational contexts.

Teachers do need more opportunities to expand their professional knowledge and new teaching strategies. Evidence of this study strong suggested that teachers' professional development should take the priority during a process of pedagogical reformation. As the first person who have to bridge the gap between the idea and realistic learning, teachers need to understand the meaning of change, the new concept of learning, what significance their new roles are, and how to make a real learning happen. The new development not only requires teachers to change their concept of teaching and learning but also to develop their new teaching methods, strategies and skills. As evidence of this study have showed, teachers have a strong willing to be developed and their needs clearly should be taken into account when the leadership of a college wish to develop student-centred learning in communication education.

9.8.4 Development of the OTPAE model

The findings also suggest that the OTPAE model generally had a positive impact on teachers' adaptation to student-centred learning approaches. The implication here is that the model provided some procedures for teachers gradually to apply their knowledge through each stage of the development. The model for key skills teaching and learning helped teachers to perceive teaching and learning as a process. The amendment to the model to include resources (see Section 9.7) could, however, be efficacious without disrupting the overall plan.

The experience of the implemented OTPAE model for communication teaching and learning showed that it has positive effect on educational progress, being a pedagogical model rather than a textbook. It encouraged teachers to exert their creative and potential in teaching and learning and engaged teachers in curriculum development and course design. This kind of course design is different from the traditional one because it develops the particular learning needs of a group of students. In the contemporary Chinese vocational education context, it is extremely important to encourage teachers to develop courses according to the needs of students. The variety of learning needs and the complexity of social economic development demands that Chinese vocational education needs to have a curriculum management system associated with the integration of top-down *and* school or college-based curriculum mechanisms. This would enable the colleges to research both students' learning needs and local economic demands and to develop the curriculum accordingly. The notion of a standard curriculum dominated by one textbook is unsustainable, especially for a country of such diversity and such rapid development.

In this context, implementing models to assist teachers to develop relevant courses and appropriate pedagogical tools seems a priority in order to bridge the gap between theory and practice and to enhance students' experience. Successful implementation does, however, depend on support from the school management and a sympathetic teaching and learning environment.

The evidence shows that the OTPAE model has its weakness. Teachers do not understand what is meant by 'preparation'. A way forward is to change '**P**'

(preparation) to '**R**' (resource). The effect of this is to enhance teachers understanding of student-centred learning and its influence on the key skills of communication, and also to remind them to be more aware of the subtleties of learning and the effects of different learning resources in contrast to the imposition of a predetermined prepared plan.

9.8.5 The teaching and learning environment

The implementation of student-centred learning in China cannot rely solely on the commitment of teachers. It should also embrace the whole teaching and learning environment and establishment. The evidence from this thesis makes this clear. As Day *et al* (2007) show, teachers' effective teaching and learning are 'mediated by factors in their workplace, personal lives and by the kind of direction and pace of national and local interventions in curriculum, and governance of schools' (p236). Educational institutions need to have a shared educational vision, evolutionary planning, empowerment and resources (Fullan, 1991, p81). A successful implementation of a new course needs teachers to have a common understanding supported by sympathetic management willing to provide the necessary support. All this emphasises the importance of the context in which learning takes place, the 'community of practice' (Lave and Wenger) which is positive and all-embracing rather than restrictive. As College B demonstrates, a shared perception of change encourages all who participate in it and the more inclusive the general atmosphere and milieu, the more effective change becomes.

9.8.6 Educational policy

The implementation of a model rather than a textbook and the encouragement of student-centred learning are both significant. This suggests that the Chinese government should be encouraged to take this further. It could develop a set of policies to support the implementation of student-centred learning. The development of students' communication abilities through a student-centred learning approach, as the purpose and the means of education, should not only be emphasised in higher vocational education but also highlighted throughout the whole education system (Cheng, 2001; Zhang, 2001; Xu & Gong, 2001; Wang, 2002; Li & Li, 2008). This does, of course, have resource implications; a matter that the Education Ministry may have difficulty in facing.

Evidence from this study shows that the implementation of student-centred leaning as a pedagogical approach has helped students to increase their self-awareness and their active learning. This has shaped the students' experiences of self-fulfilment. As such, it is important to highlight the significance of this pedagogy for widening participation, not only in higher education but for compulsory education. Many students in this study have reported their increased self-confidence. From this point of view, to promote Chinese students' self-awareness and confidence would be best cultivated earlier at school. This does not mean having to establish a more formal curriculum but to accept a new pedagogy in which students can feel trusted and encouraged, free to express their own thinking and opinions. Evidence has also shown the success of a curriculum design that pays attention to the diversity of students'

learning needs. As such, curriculum development would benefit from being more school or college-based. Evidence suggests that introducing students to communication issues in a way that relates to their social and personal lives should help lead them to improve their flexibility and adaptability in various contexts. It might also give opportunities for students to voice their ideas, develop their imagination and promote their confidence and self-awareness.

Importantly, it is to be hoped, given the Chinese government's position, that the whole CNEI curriculum management, together with its degree authority system, will give their colleges more space to develop school and student based curricula. The curriculum that has been developed to meet those various students' learning needs and help their professional capacity for employability should have be assessed and approved by CNEI and recognised as official credits or as part of the degree programme.

Finally, it is clear that the teachers' training and their professional development must be a priority for educational reform. In terms of Day *et al* (2007), the policy used to improve students' learning 'has to be mediated through teachers in the classroom' (p242). To implement a student-centred learning approach, therefore, the opportunities for teachers themselves to learn should be stressed and scheduled by both government and institutions.

9.8.7 College context

Evidence has drawn from case studies shows that a supportive workplace encourages teachers to have more positive attitudes to teaching and learning. This should be a top priority for college leadership. The findings from College B, for instance, indicate that teachers would have felt more valued and supported if their colleagues had reached a consensus as to the value of their work.

Teachers' professional lives and their personal development should be prioritised. Of the three case studies, the teachers who worked at College S had the greatest sense of direction and momentum towards their professional development. This enhanced their teaching experience and gave them a springboard for curriculum development. In contrast, the teachers in College R were faced with too many responsibilities for effective student management. The pressure to which they were subjected meant that many teachers experienced a negative influence on their teaching and learning. Teachers' personal development depends on their sense of autonomy. As this research has shown, teacher morale is as important a factor as logistical matters such as adequate resources. Morale can, of course, be affected by such practicalities.

9.8.8 Resource support

Evidence shows that the implementation of student-centred learning in such a communication course does, however, need significant resources. These resources include internet access, multi-media resources, and equipment for student learning,

the space and time for students' learning activities and suitable equipment for learning outcomes to be assessed such as recoding and audio visual equipment. In addition, vocational education colleges should make links with business and enterprise organisations so that teachers get information about industrial and employment requirements and keep up to date in their knowledge of vocational and professional change. This will enable staff to select relevant communication tasks which will stimulate students and trigger their desire to learn. If students can be found a work placement, this would also be beneficial to the development of their communication abilities. However, each of the resources can be used to constitute or formalise a pedagogic design, or particular teaching and learning milieu. The effectiveness of resource using depends on teachers' creation and their deliberate work.

9.9 Further research

This thesis has examined the notion of student-centred learning, explored competence-based education and the development of communication teaching and learning within a Chinese context. It also examined the practicalities of assessment design, the diversity of pedagogical strategies and the impact of change on the three case study colleges. There is a disparity in the historical, social and educational context between that of western countries and that of China, so this research, given its location, is important. There is still much that needs to be done in China.

A wider range of pedagogical experience associated with student-centred learning, such as tutoring or group learning, ought to be observed and documented. Problem-based learning projects could be researched further. There are many

questions to be pursued. How can teachers schedule their work effectively and pertinently? What influence does small group learning have on the students and their participation in the learning activities? The impact of student-centred learning should be investigated not only from the perspectives of teachers and students who were involved with the programme but also those who might not be involved but are relevant to the innovative work, such as deans of colleges, policy makers and others. The data from this research could lead to the exploration of the longer term impact of the new pedagogies on the colleges.

The current study has extended previous research by examining how student-centred learning was used to improve the development of this particular communication course and its pedagogies. The three colleges were awarded the title of 'Experimental College for the Development of China's National Key Skills' by OSTA after the initial research programme was completed in January 2008. Five teachers who were members in the focus group in this research have passed the evaluation and obtained qualification as the 'communication key skills' teachers by CETTIC. Two of the colleges are still continuing with the course. One of three dropped because the leadership has been changed and the new one did not wish to continue the initiative. I hope that my thesis creates opportunities to extend the study of student-centred learning and communication and that the information presented in these chapters is valuable to teachers and managers in Chinese higher vocational education institutions. I hope it will trigger more discussion and investigation into the reform of the curricula and the development of pedagogy in China.

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Appendix

Appendix I First Survey: Key skill Questionnaire 1-1
——Students (October 2005 to January 2006)

Hello everyone:

This questionnaire is designed for investigating the common understanding of key skills development in China. Your feedbacks are much appreciated and valuable for the research. The researcher guarantees that all the information you provided will be used purely in the research and anonymity. Thank you for your kind assistance.

Researcher   09/10/2005

（1）Category: 1. Public college___   2.Privade college___

(2) Gender: (3) College name

(4) Subject: (5) Age: (6) Year:

(7) Do you know what 'Key skills' means?   yes   n o □

(8) Do you think it is necessary for the students to learn 'Key Skills'?

yes□   n o □

(9) Do you think it is necessary for students to learn 'communication key skills'?

yes□   no□

(10) Do you think that the communication courses which you have learnt have promoted your communication skills?   yes   no□

(11) Which skill do you think is a key skill?

Driving skill：   Yes □   No □   Cooking skill：   Yes □   No □

Speaking skill： Yes □   No □   Self-Improving skills： Yes □   No □

Typing skills   Yes □   No □   Communication abilities Yes □   No □

Information technology： yes □   n o □   Selling skill：   yes □   no □

Learning skill： Yes □   No □   Term work skill：   Yes □   No □

Drawing skill： Yes □   No □   Numeric skill：   Yes □   No □

Invention skill： Yes □　No □　　　　　　　　English language：　　Yes □　No □

Time management skill： Yes □　　No □

(12) What kind of communication courses did your college provide to the students?

Chinese literature□　　Business negotiation□　　Public relationship□

Business communication□　　Communication skills□　　Business writing□

Any other: _

(13) How many teaching hours of these courses did you have each week?

2 hours□　　4 hours□　　6 hours□

(14) These courses are taught in:

1 semester □　　2 semesters□　　4 semesters □

(15) What kind of teaching materials were used in these courses?

National unique textbook □　　The CNEI learning textbook□

The college's textbook□　　　The teacher's handout □

(16) How long did the teacher usually take speaking in one class hour in your communication courses?

15 minutes□　　20 minutes□　　30 minutes□　　40 minutes□　　45 minutes□

(17) What do you think you have learnt from these courses?

Conception□　　　　Textbook knowledge□　　managerial knowledge □

Memory□　　　　　The skills of listening, speaking, writing and reading□

(18) How high would you rate your participation in these communication courses?

Higher level□　　Middle level□　　Lower level□　　lowest level□

(19) Do you think the current communication courses could help you to develop your career?
Yes, very much so□　　yes □　　　very little □　　n o t at all□

Appendix II First Survey: Key skill Questionnaire 1-2

—— teacher administrator (October 2005 to January 2006)

Dear teachers:

This questionnaire is designed to investigate the understanding of key skills and current curriculum relevant to communication teaching and learning. The information you provide will be purely used for this research. You need not have to sign your name as all the result will be presented anonymous. Thank you for your cooperation!

                                                              Researcher

 (1) Category : Public college___ Private college____   (2) Gender: _ _ _ _ _

 (3) College name: _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _

 (4) You are: president □   ad min istrato r□   teach er□   k ey sk ill teach er□

 (5) Age : 20-30 □   3 1-40   □   4 1 -50 □   5 1-60 □   61-70 □

 (6) Years of teaching :

     In 10 years □ in 15 years □ in 20 years □ in 25 years □ more than26 year □ more

     than 30 years □

 (7) How much do you know about the term 'key skills'?

     Very well □   A little □   Not very much □   Not at all □

 (8) How much do you know about curriculum development?

     Very well □   A little □   Not very much □   Not at all □

 (9) How much do you know about student-centred learning?

     Very well □   A little □   Not very much □   Not at all □

 (10) Do you think that it is necessary the college should offer key skills courses to

      the students?

     Absolutely agree □   Agree □   Don't agree □ Absolutely don't agree □

 (11) Do you think that communication key skills courses should be compulsory in

      the college?

     Absolutely agree □   Agree □   Don't agree □   Absolutely don't agree □

（12）Do you think that curriculum development and course design are part of the job that teachers have to do?

　　Absolutely agree □　　　Agree □　Don't agree □　Absolutely don't agree □

（13）Do you think students-centred learning should be employed in 'communication key skills' teaching and learning?

　　Absolutely agree □　　　Agree □　Don't agree □　Absolutely don't agree □

（14）Do you think that the current communication courses promote students communication abilities effectively?

　　Absolutely agree □　　　Agree □　Don't agree □　Absolutely don't agree □

（15）Do you think curriculum development is part of the regular work of a college?

　　Absolutely agree □　　　Agree □　Don't agree □　Absolutely don't agree □

（16）Do you think that the current communication courses have met students' learning needs?

　　Absolutely agree □　　　Agree □　Don't agree □　Absolutely don't agree □

（17）How effective do you think the current communication courses are to build the students' proper communication behaviours?

　　Very effective □　　　effective □　　A little □　　　Not at all □

（18）Have you had any experience in key skills teaching and learning?

　　Yes □　　n o □

（19）Have you had any experience in curriculum development?

　　Yes □　　n o □

（20）Do you think that student-centred learning approaches are currently employed in communication key skills teaching and learning?

　　Yes □　　n o □

（21）Has your college provided communication courses for students already?

　　Yes □　　n o □

（22）Did your college investigate the students' learning needs before the

development of communication key skills courses?

Yes □ n o □

（23）Who was the decision maker for your college to develop a key skills course?

〈choose only one〉

National education ministry □ Local education committee □ President

□ Employer □ Teacher □

（24）From where did you get to know about the definition of 'key skills'?

Teaching material □ Government documents □ President □

Employers □ Lecture □

（25）How long have you known about the concept of 'key skills'?

Six months □ Three months □ One year □ Two years

□ Three years □

（26）What do you think curriculum development is?

Is it: Make a discipline planning? □

Teaching material development? □

Make a lesson planning? □

Make a decision for new subject? □

Other? _

（27）What courses that your college provides include elements of communication

skills?

Chinese literature □business negotiation □ public relationship □ business

communication □ communication skills □ business writing □

other： _

_

（28）What kind assessment methods does your college employ to evaluate students'

communication abilities?

Final examination which is pencil and paper style: □

Assessments were held during training process and final examination: □

Face to face communication and performance assessment: □

other：_ _

（29）From the skills listed below, which do you think are key skills?

Driving skill：Yes □　No □　　　　　Cooking skill：　　　　Yes □　　No □

Speaking skill：Yes □　No □　　　　　Self-Improving skills：Yes □　　No □

Typing skills　Yes □　No □　　　　　Communication abilities: Yes □　No □

Information technology：yes □　n o　□　Selling skill：　　　　yes □　no □

Learning skill：Yes □　No □　　　　　Teamwork skill：　　　Yes □　No □

Drawing skill：　Yes □　No □　　Numeric skill：　Yes □　No □

Invention skill：Yes □　No □　　English language：Yes □　No □

Time management skill：Yes □　　No □

Appendix III Questionnaire 2 Self-Assessment Report

Dear students:

This questionnaire is designed for your self-assessment of communication abilities. The information you provided will be purely used for this research. You need not have to sign your name as all the result will be presented anonymous. However, it would be are much appreciated if you would like to tell us who you are and about your understanding of key skills communication. Thank you for your cooperation!

Section one:

		1	2	3	4	5
Items (the original order number is in the brackets)	absolutely Don't understand	understand A little	understand	Understand well	absolutely understand	
1. (1) Do you think you understand what the term 'key skills' means?						
2. (2) Do you think you understand what communication key skills are?						

Section two:

	1	2	3	4	5
Items	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Usually	Always
3. Have you had a 'communication key skills' course before?					
4. Do you like to take part in social activities when you have the opportunities?					
5. Can you summarise information you need from reading?					
6. Do you use your facial expressions to respond to others when you are listening to them?					
7. Do you speak clearly when you discuss some issues with others?					
8. Do you use positive body language when you give a presentation in public?					

Items					
9. Are you satisfied with your reading and writing skills?					
10. Do you give some suggestions to your teachers in front of your classmates when required?					
11. Would you talk to your boss if you think you should have been promoted?					
12. Do you give a good impression when you are talking with others?					
13. Do you introduce yourself to others firstly at a party?					

Section Three:

Items	1 Always	2 Usually	3 Sometimes	4 Rarely	5 Never
14. (7) Do you prefer to present yourself as an emotionless person?					
15. (9) Do you feel nervous when you speak to strangers?					

Section Four:

Items	1 Not at all	2 Not very	3 Important	4 Very important	5 Extremely important
16. (4) How influential do you think personal appearance is in communication?					
17. (5) Do you think good manners are important when you communicate with others on formal occasions?					

Final Question (pre-post)

Item	Strongly don't agree	Don't agree	Agree	Areongly agree
Do you think this new communication course can help you to promote your communication abilities? (pre)				
Do you think this new communication course have promoted your communication abilities? (post)				

Appendix IV Questionnaire 3-1 Course Rating (students)

Hello every one:

In order to improve the quality of communication course teaching and learning, the researcher world likes to collect your assessment about this new communication course. Your opinion will be much appreciated and treasured. The questionnaire is anonymous; you needn't have to sign your name. Thank you for your cooperation.

13/12/2006

gender： college： class：

grade：

Question: （one tick only ）

		Never	**Rarely**	**Some times**	**Very often**	**Always**
About learning	1. How often did you participate in learning actively in this new communication course?					
	2. Do you think that the assessment of each unit helped you to achieve the learning objectives?					
	3. How often do you think you have got the real learning experiences through Learning by doing in this new communication course?					
	4. How often do you think you were asked to achieve a task in order to meet the requirements of the learning outcome?					
About teacher	5. How often your teacher able to gave a brief and well structured presentation and the key points which related to course content were well stressed.					
	6. How often do you think your teacher organized the classroom activities effectively and provided helpful feedback on your performance?					
	7. How often do you think you could got help from your teacher for your					

	communication practices					
	8. How often do you think your teacher able to show his/her adequate knowledge about communication and his/her communication competence in the classroom?					
About course	9. How often do you think it is a very useful course and has developed your communication abilities effectively?					
	10. How often do you think each unit of this course enables you to apply your knowledge and skills to solve problems?					
	11. How often do you feel that you like this new textbook design?					
	12. How often do you I think you have learned a lot from each unit of this course and your communication abilities have been improved?					

Assessment of your self

13. How do you assess the success of this course learning? Effective? Or no?

A、very effective 【　　】

B、effective 【　　】

C、not effective 【　　】

14. What is the most important reason for you if you chosen C in item 13? (only 13, C, need to choose one from the answers below)

A. The course is useless. 【　　】

B. I'm not interested in this course 【　　】

C. I couldn't adapt the new teaching method. 【　　】

D. The teacher didn't help me much 【　　】

E. I couldn't get a chance to be tutored as there were too many students in my class. 【　　】

F. It is because I didn't do my assignment very regular. 【　　】

Appendix V Questionnaire 3-2 Course Rating (teachers)

2006 . 9 —— 2007.7

Dear teachers：

It will be much appreciated if you could fill in this questionnaire which intents to evaluate the effectiveness of student-centred learning in promoting student' key skills of communication. The information gathered is purely for this research. You need not have to sign your name as all the result will be presented anonymous. Thank you for your cooperation.

Gender: _____   **College Name: _____**

1. About Student-centred learning

	Strongly Disagree	Little Disagree	Agree	strongly Agree
1) Do you think it is crucial to use student-centred learning in communication teaching and learning?	□	□	□	□

2. Investigate the impact of student-centred leaning on the teachers and colleges, any barriers that block the way for the teachers to adapt to a student-centred strategy to develop and implement key communication skills.

2) What the influence of student-centred learning has had on you during the implementation of new communication course?				
a．Do you think you have more understanding about the new pedagogy?	□	□	□	□
b．Do you think you have made some changes in your teaching methods?	□	□	□	□

c．Do you think you have got positive experiences in teaching materials development from this course?

□ □ □ □

d．Have you paid more attention to learning outcome and assessment design since implementing the course?

□ □ □ □

e．Do you think the student-centred learning enabled you to promote teaching and learning quality?

□ □ □ □

3) What the influence of student-centred learning has been on your college during the implementation of new communication course?

a．Do you think student-centred learning changed your assessment options?

□ □ □ □

b．Do you think you paid much more attention to students' learning needs when you developed new teaching materials?

□ □ □ □

c. Do you think you have understood the new competence-based curriculum development model?

□ □ □ □

d．Do you think student-centred learning motivates teachers to be involved in resource design and curriculum development?

□ □ □ □

e. Do you think student-centred learning influenced the curriculum management of your college?

□ □ □ □

4) What problems did you encounter during the development and implementation of the new communication courses?

  a．I didn't understand the new teaching method.

  b．I didn't know how to control the students' practice time in class.

  c．The time for completing the teaching and learning tasks was too limited.

  d．I didn't have adequate resources to support my teaching

  e．There were too many students in my class to be tutored

  f．I didn't get enough support from school.

  g．The new textbook was not suitable to teach.

  h．The students did not cooperate with me

  i. others: _____

  _____

  _____

5) If relevant, what were the reasons, do you think, which made you encounter problems A and B in question 4?

  a．Lack of training for teaching methods   □

  b. Lack of knowledge about modern
  communication theory   □

  c．Lack of discussing with other teachers   □

  d．Lack of time to prepare the lesson plan   □

  Others ....

  ....

6) If relevant, what were the reasons, do you think, which made you encounter problems C, D and E in question 4?

  a．The shortage of college investment in   □

teaching resources.

b．Too much pressure from CNEI
curriculum. □

c．The college had not been permitted to
do school-based curriculum development □

d．Lack of teacher training for private
college's teachers □

Others ⸺⸺⸺⸺⸺⸺⸺⸺⸺⸺⸺⸺⸺

7) If relevant, what were the reasons, do you think, which made you encounter
problem F in question 4?

a．The leaders had no awareness of the
importance of the innovation course. □

b The leaders had not reached a consensus
about the new communication course. □

c．No one was appointed to be in charge of
the new communication course management. □

d．Lack of managerial communication
□

Others ⸺⸺⸺⸺⸺⸺⸺⸺⸺⸺⸺⸺⸺

8. If relevant, what were the reasons, do you think, which made you encounter
problem F in question 4?

a．I could not arrange so many students'
activities in the class. □

b．Too much preparation work had to be
done before the teaching, I could not handle it □

c．The textbook was too difficult for the □
students

d．I don't agree this new teaching and □
learning method

Others ···

···

9. If relevant, what were the reasons, do you think, which made you encounter problem H in question 4?

a．The students did not like to learn this course. □

b．I could not be interactive with my students. □

c．The students had no good learning skills and

learning habits. □

d．The students were not qualified to learn this

course. □

Others ···

···

3. **Investigation of the effectiveness of student-centred learning in promoting Chinese students' communication skills.**

Strong   Little   Agree   Strongly

	disagree	disagree		agree
10) Do you think the student-centred learning could play a significant role in promoting students' communication abilities?	□	□	□	□
11) Do you think the student-centred learning could help students to know how to learn?	□	□	□	□
12) Do you think that 'Learning by doing' could help students to obtain a real learning experience?	□	□	□	□
13) Do you think the learning outcome model enables the students to solve the problems by themselves?	□	□	□	□
14) Do you think the self-assessment of each unit enables students to have a clearer learning goal and help them to be autonomous learners?	□	□	□	□

4. **Evaluation of the development and implementation of a new type of curriculum model in a Chinese context.**

	Strong disagree	Little disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
15) Do you think the OTPAE model is a useful tool for you to develop a new communication course?	□	□	□	□
16) Do you think that the OTPAE model enabled you to understand and implement student- centred learning?	□	□	□	□
17) Do you think the OTPAE model enabled you to change your	□	□	□	□

teaching method?

18) Do you think that the new
communication course developed by
using the OPTAE model promoted   □   □   □   □
the students' communication
abilities?

19) What problems, if any, did you encounter when you used the OPTAE to design
your communication course?

    a．I had very little experience in course
      development.   □
    b．I didn't have enough resources, so I could not choose
      the suitable cases relevant to social contexts.   □
    c．I lacked knowledge of new communication
      theories.   □
    d．I lacked understanding of student-centred learning   □
    e．I couldn't understand the OTPAE model.   □

Others ....

        ....

Appendix VI Output of students' quantitative data 1-1

There were 3233 students gave their response.

2. Gender

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	female	1900	58.8	59.0	59.0
	male	1255	38.8	39.0	97.9
	2	67	2.1	2.1	100.0
	Total	3222	99.7	100.0	
Missing	9	10	.3		
	System	1	.0		
	Total	11	.3		
Total		3233	100.0		

3.College and respondents

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Beijing R.W. University	588	18.2	18.2	18.2
	Beijing P.L. Vocational college	658	20.4	20.4	38.6
	Beijing-B. college of English	648	20.0	20.1	58.7
	Beijing H.S. college	689	21.3	21.3	80.0
	Beijing U. University	645	20.0	20.0	100.0
	Total	3228	99.8	100.0	
Missing	9	2	.1		
	System	3	.1		
	Total	5	.2		
Total		3233	100.0		

5.Age

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
15	5	.2	.2	.3
16	27	.8	.8	1.1
17	57	1.8	1.8	2.9
18	527	16.3	16.4	19.3
19	929	28.7	28.9	48.2
20	926	28.6	28.8	77.1
21	448	13.9	14.0	91.0
22	193	6.0	6.0	97.0
23	57	1.8	1.8	98.8
24	27	.8	.8	99.7
25	6	.2	.2	99.8
26	5	.2	.2	99.9
30	4	.1	.1	100.0
Total	3211	99.3	100.0	
Missing 99	22	.7		
Total	3233	100.0		

4. Subject

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	11	.3	.3	.3
`	1	.0	.0	.4
9	2	.1	.1	.4
Account	173	5.4	5.4	5.8
Account management	26	.8	.8	6.6
Administration	128	4.0	4.0	10.5
Administration management	37	1.1	1.1	11.7
Administration secretary	62	1.9	1.9	13.6
Advertisement	101	3.1	3.1	16.7
Aircraft service	77	2.4	2.4	19.1
Arabic	1	.0	.0	19.1
Architecture	95	2.9	2.9	22.1
Art	1	.0	.0	22.1
Art and crafts	6	.2	.2	22.3
Art and painting	5	.2	.2	22.5
Art design	4	.1	.1	22.6
Business diplomacy	79	2.4	2.4	25.0
Business English	17	.5	.5	25.5
Business management	118	3.6	3.6	29.2
Business secretary	125	3.9	3.9	33.1

Chinese medicine	8	.2	.2	33.3
Communication engineering	5	.2	.2	33.5
Computer application	203	6.3	6.3	39.7
Computer art	12	.4	.4	40.1
Decoration design	2	.1	.1	40.2
e-commercial	228	7.1	7.1	47.2
English	61	1.9	1.9	49.1
English foundation	49	1.5	1.5	50.6
English interpretation	112	3.5	3.5	54.1
Environment & art	4	.1	.1	54.2
Exhibition management	30	.9	.9	55.2
Finance	22	.7	.7	55.8
Finance & secretary	4	.1	.1	56.0
Finance and investment	26	.8	.8	56.8
Foreign trade secretary	19	.6	.6	57.3
Graphic design	35	1.1	1.1	58.4
Higher secretary	86	2.7	2.7	61.1
Higher Secretary	7	.2	.2	61.3
Hotel management	1	.0	.0	61.3
Information management	106	3.3	3.3	64.6
Information technology	1	.0	.0	64.6
International business	55	1.7	1.7	66.3
International economic	20	.6	.6	67.0
International trade	255	7.9	7.9	74.9
International trade &Engli	340	10.5	10.5	85.4
Japanese	26	.8	.8	86.2
law	24	.7	.7	86.9
Law and secretary	12	.4	.4	87.3
Logistic management	1	.0	.0	87.3
Logistics	48	1.5	1.5	88.8
Logistics management	49	1.5	1.5	90.3
Management	2	.1	.1	90.4
Management and information	19	.6	.6	91.0
Marketing	98	3.0	3.0	94.0
Media design	9	.3	.3	94.3
News & interview	1	.0	.0	94.3
News editing	13	.4	.4	94.7
News& advertisement	2	.1	.1	94.8
psychology	6	.2	.2	95.0
Russian language	1	.0	.0	95.0
Secretary	40	1.2	1.2	96.2
Taxation	2	.1	.1	96.3

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	Taxation & account	59	1.8	1.8	98.1
	Tourist English	1	.0	.0	98.1
	Tourist management	22	.7	.7	98.8
	Web management	38	1.2	1.2	100.0
	Total	3233	100.0	100.0	

6. Year

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	0	7	.2	.2	.2
	1	1775	54.9	55.5	55.7
	2	868	26.8	27.1	82.8
	3	435	13.5	13.6	96.4
	4	101	3.1	3.2	99.6
	8	13	.4	.4	100.0
	Total	3199	98.9	100.0	
Missing	9	24	.7		
	System	10	.3		
	Total	34	1.1		
Total		3233	100.0		

7. Do you know what 'Key skills' means?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No	1773	54.8	55.3	55.3
	Yes	1433	44.3	44.7	100.0
	14	1	.0	.0	100.0
	Total	3207	99.2	100.0	
Missing	9	26	.8		
Total		3233	100.0		

8. Do you think it is necessary for the students to learn 'Key Skills'?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No	259	8.0	8.1	8.1
	Yes	2954	91.4	91.9	100.0
	8	1	.0	.0	100.0
	Total	3214	99.4	100.0	
Missing	9	19	.6		
Total		3233	100.0		

9. Do you think it is necessary for students to learn 'communication key skills'?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No	153	4.7	4.7	4.7
	Yes	3073	95.1	95.3	100.0
	Total	3226	99.8	100.0	
Missing	9	7	.2		
Total		3233	100.0		

10. Do you think that the communication courses which you have learnt have promoted your communication skills?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No	1367	42.3	42.7	42.7
	Yes	1838	56.9	57.3	100.0
	Total	3205	99.1	100.0	
Missing	9	28	.9		
Total		3233	100.0		

Table 11 . Which skill do you think is the key skill?

N=3224、3223、3224、3224、3224、3224、3224、3224、3223、3222、3224、3223、3223、3224

Statement	Frequency	Valid percentage
driving skill	1695	52.6%
cooking skill	641	19.9%
speaking skill	2485	77.1%
Self-improving skills	2424	75.2%
typing skill	1495	46.4%
communication abilities	2877	89.2%
information technology	2219	68.8%
selling skill	1581	49%
learning skill	2155	66.8%
teamwork skill	2314	71.8%
drawing skill	2376	73.7%
numeric skill	894	27.7%
invention skill	1815	56.3%
English language	2666	82.7%
time management skill	2516	78%

12. What kind of communication courses did your college provide to the students?

N=2942、2935、2935、2935、2935、2934、2932

Statement	Frequency	Valid percentage
Chinese literature	1803	61.3%
Business negotiation	715	24.4%
Public relationship	669	22.8%
Business communication	745	25.4%
Communication skills	693	23.6%
Business writing	542	18.5%
Any other	705	24%

13. How many teaching hours of these courses did you have each week?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	0	6	.2	.3	.3
	2 hours	996	30.8	48.4	48.7
	4 hours	855	26.4	41.6	90.3
	6 hours	168	5.2	8.2	98.4
	4	3	.1	.1	98.6
	6	1	.0	.0	98.6
	8	27	.8	1.3	100.0
	14	1	.0	.0	100.0
	Total	2057	63.6	100.0	
Missing	9	1175	36.3		
	System	1	.0		
	Total	1176	36.4		
Total		3233	100.0		

14, How many semesters these courses you have will covered in your college?(SEM)

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	0	1	.0	.0	.0
	1 semester	1144	35.4	55.1	55.2
	2 semesters	620	19.2	29.9	85.1
	4 semesters	296	9.2	14.3	99.3
	8	13	.4	.6	100.0
	22	1	.0	.0	100.0
	Total	2075	64.2	100.0	
Missing	9	1158	35.8		

Total		3233	100.0		

15. What kind of teaching materials were used in these courses?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	The teacher's handout	82	2.5	2.8	2.8
	The college's textbook	160	4.9	5.4	8.1
	The CNEI learning textbook	1711	52.9	57.5	65.6
	National unique textbook	862	26.7	29.0	94.6
	5	3	.1	.1	94.7
	8	158	4.9	5.3	100.0
	Total	2976	92.1	100.0	
Missing	9	257	7.9		
Total		3233	100.0		

16. How long did the teacher usually take speaking in one class hour in your communication courses?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	0	4	.1	.1	.1
	15 minutes	205	6.3	6.8	6.9
	20 minutes	311	9.6	10.3	17.3
	30 minutes	583	18.0	19.3	36.6
	40 minutes	625	19.3	20.7	57.4
	45 minutes	1268	39.2	42.1	99.4
	8	17	.5	.6	100.0
	Total	3013	93.2	100.0	
Missing	9	219	6.8		
	System	1	.0		
	Total	220	6.8		
Total		3233	100.0		

17. What do you think you have learnt from these courses?

N=3024、3026、3026、3026、3023

Statement	Frequency	Valid percentage
Textbook knowledge	1450	47.9%
Conception	1265	41.8%
The managerial knowledge	1087	35.9%

The skills of listening, speaking, writing and reading	899	29.7%
Memory	425	14.10%

18. How high would you rate your participation in these communication courses?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	0	2	.1	.1	.1
	Lowest level	310	9.6	10.1	10.2
	Lower level	1247	38.6	40.6	50.7
	Middle level	806	24.9	26.2	77.0
	Higher level	699	21.6	22.7	99.7
	7	1	.0	.0	99.7
	8	7	.2	.2	100.0
	13	1	.0	.0	100.0
	Total	3073	95.1	100.0	
Missing	9	160	4.9		
Total		3233	100.0		

19.Do you think the current communication courses could help you to develop your career?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	0	2	.1	.1	.1
	not at all	161	5.0	5.2	5.3
	very little	783	24.2	25.4	30.7
	yes	1106	34.2	35.9	66.6
	Yes, very much so	1022	31.6	33.2	99.8
	8	5	.2	.2	100.0
	Total	3079	95.2	100.0	
Missing	9	154	4.8		
Total		3233	100.0		

Appendix VII: Output of teachers' quantitative data 1-2

There were 291 teacher respondents. Question one is about college code.

2. Gender

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	female	149	51.2	53.2	53.2
	male	130	44.7	46.4	99.6
	13	1	.3	.4	100.0
	Total	280	96.2	100.0	
Missing	9	11	3.8		
Total		291	100.0		

3. College and respondents

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Beijing R.W. University	107	36.8	36.8	36.8
	Beijing P.L. Vocational college	34	11.7	11.7	48.5
	Beijing-U. college of English	128	44.0	44.0	92.4
	Beijing H.S. college	3	1.0	1.0	93.5
	Beijing U. University	19	6.5	6.5	100.0
	Total	291	100.0	100.0	

4. You are

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	teacher	108	37.1	37.6	37.6
	administrator	171	58.8	59.6	97.2
	president	4	1.4	1.4	98.6
	5	1	.3	.3	99.0
	8	3	1.0	1.0	100.0
	Total	287	98.6	100.0	
Missing	9	4	1.4		
Total		291	100.0		

5. Age

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	20-30	126	43.3	43.9	43.9
	31-40	44	15.1	15.3	59.2
	41-50	50	17.2	17.4	76.7
	51-60	56	19.2	19.5	96.2
	61-70	11	3.8	3.8	100.0
	Total	287	98.6	100.0	
Missing	9	4	1.4		
Total		291	100.0		

6. Years of teaching

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	in ten years	166	57.0	61.9	61.9
	in fifteen years	27	9.3	10.1	72.0
	in twenty years	20	6.9	7.5	79.5
	in twenty-five year	17	5.8	6.3	85.8
	more than twenty six years	37	12.7	13.8	99.6
	8	1	.3	.4	100.0
	Total	268	92.1	100.0	
Missing	9	23	7.9		
Total		291	100.0		

7. How much do you know about the term 'key skills'?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Not at all	16	5.5	5.5	5.5
	Not very much	85	29.2	29.3	34.8
	know	112	38.5	38.6	73.4
	Very well	76	26.1	26.2	99.7
	8	1	.3	.3	100.0
	Total	290	99.7	100.0	
Missing	9	1	.3		
Total		291	100.0		

8.How much do you know about curriculum development?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Not at all	16	5.5	5.5	5.5
	Not very much	82	28.2	28.3	33.8
	know	116	39.9	40.0	73.8
	Very well	76	26.1	26.2	100.0
	Total	290	99.7	100.0	
Missing	9	1	.3		
Total		291	100.0		

9. How much do you know about student-centred learning?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Not at all	18	6.2	6.3	6.3
	Not very much	76	26.1	26.6	32.9
	know	105	36.1	36.7	69.6
	Very well	87	29.9	30.4	100.0
	Total	286	98.3	100.0	
Missing	9	5	1.7		
Total		291	100.0		

10. Do you think that it is necessary the college should offer key skills courses to the students?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	absolutely don't agree	1	.3	.3	.3
	Don't agree	7	2.4	2.4	2.7
	agree	130	44.7	44.7	47.4
	absolutely agree	153	52.6	52.6	100.0
	Total	291	100.0	100.0	

11. Do you think that communication key skills courses should be compulsory in the college?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	absolutely don't agree	2	.7	.7	.7
	Don't agree	3	1.0	1.0	1.7
	agree	97	33.3	33.4	35.2
	absolutely agree	188	64.6	64.8	100.0
	Total	290	99.7	100.0	
Missing	9	1	.3		
Total		291	100.0		

12. Do you think that curriculum development and course design is part of the job that teachers have to do?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Don't agree	11	3.8	3.8	3.8
	agree	152	51.9	52.1	55.9
	absolutely agree	128	44.0	44.1	100.0
	Total	290	99.7	100.0	
Missing	9	1	.3		
Total		291	100.0		

13. Do you think student-centred learning should be employed in 'communication key skills' teaching and learning?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	absolutely don't agree	3	1.0	1.0	1.0
	Don't agree	13	4.5	4.5	5.6
	agree	167	57.4	58.2	63.8
	absolutely agree	104	35.7	36.2	100.0
	Total	287	98.6	100.0	
Missing	9	4	1.4		
Total		291	100.0		

14. Do you think that the current communication courses promote students communication abilities effectively?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	absolutely don't agree	3	1.0	1.0	1.0
	Don't agree	93	32.0	32.1	33.1
	agree	127	43.6	43.8	76.9
	absolutely agree	67	23.0	23.1	100.0
	Total	290	99.7	100.0	
Missing	9	1	.3		
Total		291	100.0		

15. Do you think curriculum development is part of the regular work of a college?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Don't agree	13	4.5	4.5	4.5
	agree	147	50.5	50.7	55.2
	absolutely agree	130	44.7	44.8	100.0
	Total	290	99.7	100.0	
Missing	9	1	.3		
Total		291	100.0		

16. Do you think that the current communication courses have met students' learning needs?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	absolutely don't agree	13	4.5	4.5	4.5
	Don't agree	102	35.1	35.3	39.8
	agree	113	38.8	39.1	78.9
	absolutely agree	61	21.0	21.1	100.0
	Total	289	99.3	100.0	
Missing	9	2	.7		
Total		291	100.0		

17.How effective do you think the current communication courses are to build the students' proper communication behaviours?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Not at all	1	.3	.3	.3
	A little	90	30.9	31.0	31.4
	Effective	120	41.2	41.4	72.8
	Very effective	79	27.1	27.2	100.0
	Total	290	99.7	100.0	
Missing	9	1	.3		
Total		291	100.0		

18.Have you had any experience in key skills teaching and learning?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No	251	86.3	87.2	87.2
	Yes	37	12.7	12.8	100.0
	Total	288	99.0	100.0	
Missing	9	3	1.0		
Total		291	100.0		

19.Have you had any experience in curriculum development?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No	228	78.4	79.2	79.2
	Yes	60	20.6	20.8	100.0
	Total	288	99.0	100.0	
Missing	9	3	1.0		
Total		291	100.0		

20.Do you think that student-centred learning approaches are currently employed in communication key skills teaching and learning?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No	129	44.3	46.4	46.4
	Yes	149	51.2	53.6	100.0
	Total	278	95.5	100.0	
Missing	9	13	4.5		
Total		291	100.0		

21. Has your college provided communication courses for students already?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No	131	45.0	46.5	46.5
	Yes	152	51.9	53.5	100.0
	Total	282	96.9	100.0	
Missing	9	9	3.1		
Total		291	100.0		

22.Did your college investigate the students' learning needs before the development of communication key skills courses?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No	50	17.2	17.7	17.7
	Yes	232	79.7	82.3	100.0
	Total	282	96.9	100.0	
Missing	9	9	3.1		
Total		291	100.0		

23.Who was the decision maker for your college to develop a key skills course? (Choose only one)

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	teacher	5	1.7	1.7	1.7
	employer	59	20.3	20.6	22.3
	president	96	33.0	33.4	55.7
	local education committee	59	20.3	20.6	76.3
	National education ministry	60	20.6	20.9	97.2
	8	8	2.7	2.8	100.0
	Total	287	98.6	100.0	
Missing	9	4	1.4		
Total		291	100.0		

24.From where did you get to know about the definition of 'key skills'?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Lecture	59	20.3	22.3	22.3
	Employers	74	25.4	27.9	50.2
	President	33	11.3	12.5	62.6
	Government documents	26	8.9	9.8	72.5
	Teaching material	61	21.0	23.0	95.5
	other	2	.7	.8	96.2
	8	10	3.4	3.8	100.0
	Total	265	91.1	100.0	
Missing	9	26	8.9		
Total		291	100.0		

25.How long have you known about the concept of 'key skills'?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	three months	87	29.9	32.7	32.7
	Six months	52	17.9	19.5	52.3
	one year	82	28.2	30.8	83.1
	two years	20	6.9	7.5	90.6
	three years	23	7.9	8.6	99.2
	8	2	.7	.8	100.0
	Total	266	91.4	100.0	
Missing	9	25	8.6		
Total		291	100.0		

26 What do you think curriculum development is?

N=283

		Responses		Percent of Cases
		N	Percent	
26	It is a teaching planning development	142	41.6%	50.2%
	It is a teaching material development	76	22.3%	26.9%
	It is a class leaching planning preparation	26	7.6%	9.2%
	It is a decision making about establishing a new course	81	23.8%	28.6%
	other	16	4.7%	5.7%
Total		341	100.0%	120.5%

27 What courses that your college provides include elements of communication skills?

N=279

		Responses		Percent of Cases
		N	Percent	
27	Chinese literature	140	22.6%	50.2%
	Business negotiation	116	18.7%	41.6%
	Public relationship	121	19.5%	43.4%
	Business Communication	90	14.5%	32.3%
	Communication skills	55	8.9%	19.7%
	Business writing	79	12.7%	28.3%
	other	19	3.1%	6.8%
Total		620	100.0%	222.2%

Other: moral education (2); business negotiation (2); service psychology (1); presentation skills (1) active course: interviewing, cultural parties (3).

28 What kind assessment methods dose your college employ to evaluate students' communication abilities?

N = 233

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	other	12	4.1	5.2	5.2
	Face to face communication and performance assessment	34	11.7	14.6	19.7
	Assessment were held during training process and final examination	117	40.2	50.2	70.0
	Final examination which is pencil and paper style	36	12.4	15.5	85.4
	8	34	11.7	14.6	100.0
	Total	233	80.1	100.0	
Missing	9	58	19.9		
Total		291	100.0		

29 From the skills list below, which do you think are key skill?

N=286

Statement		Responses		Percent of Cases
		N	Percent	
29	Driving skill	106	5.2%	37.1%
	Cooking skill	26	1.3%	9.1%
	Speaking skill	159	7.7%	55.6%
	Self-improving skills	173	8.4%	60.5%
	Typing skill	77	3.8%	26.9%
	Communication abilities	223	10.9%	78.0%
	Information technology	158	7.7%	55.2%
	Selling skill	101	4.9%	35.3%
	Learning skill	132	6.4%	46.2%
	Term work skills	168	8.2%	58.7%
	Drawing skills	167	8.1%	58.4%
	Numeric skills	61	3.0%	21.3%
	Invention skills	123	6.0%	43.0%
	English language	207	10.1%	72.4%
	Time management skills	172	8.4%	60.1%
Total		2053	100.0%	717.8%

Appendix VIII Output of Students' Self -Assessment Questionnaire 2
(Merge File & Compared T- Test)

Paired Samples Statistics

		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
			Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
		Mean			Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Do you think you understand what doses mean key skills - Do you think you understand what doses mean key skills	-.664	1.260	.102	-.866	-.462	-6.500	151	.000
Pair 2	Do you think you understand what key skills communication is - Do you think you understand what key skills communication is	-.645	1.159	.094	-.830	-.459	-6.859	151	.000
Pair 3	Have you had the key skills training before - Have you had the key skills training before	-.868	1.389	.113	-1.091	-.646	-7.708	151	.000
Pair 4	How important do you think the personal appearance influence on communication - How important do you think the personal appearance influence on communication	-.145	.849	.069	-.281	-.009	-2.102	151	.037
Pair 5	Do you think the suitable manner is important for you to communicate with other? - Do you think the suitable manner is important for you to communicate with other?	-.355	1.136	.092	-.537	-.173	-3.856	151	.000

		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Lower	Upper	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pair 6	Would you like to take part in the social activities when you have the opportunities? - would you like to take part in the social activities when you have the opportunities?	-.033	1.124	.091	-.213	.147	-.361	151	.719
Pair 7	Do you prefer to perform your self as an emotionless person? - Do you prefer to perform your self as an emotionless person?	-.171	1.002	.081	-.332	-.011	-2.105	151	.037
Pair 8	Would you like introduce your self to others first when you take part in a party? - would you like introduce your self to others first when you take part in a party?	-.276	1.093	.089	-.451	-.101	-3.117	151	.002
Pair 9	Do you feel nervous when you speak to strangers? - Do you feel nervous when you speak to strangers?	-.112	1.020	.083	-.275	.052	-1.352	151	.178
Pair 10	Could you summarise the information you needed from reading for specific aims? - Could you summarise the information you needed from reading for specific aims?	-.184	.945	.077	-.336	-.033	-2.403	151	.017
Pair 11	Could you use your facial expression to respond others when you listening to them? - Could you use your facial expression to respond others when you listening to them?	-.125	.864	.070	-.263	.013	-1.784	151	.076

Pair 12	Could you make a clear enough speaking when you discuss some issues with others? - Could you make a clear enough speaking when you discuss some issues with others?	-.303	.942	.076	-.454	-.152	-3.960	151	.000
Pair 13	Do you use your body language when you give the presentation in public? - Do you use your body language when you give the presentation in public?	-.092	.937	.076	-.242	.058	-1.211	151	.228
Pair 14	Do you satisfy your reading and writing skills/ - Do you satisfy your reading and writing skills/	-.368	1.090	.088	-.543	-.194	-4.168	151	.000
Pair 15	Would you like to give some suggestions to your teachers in front your classmates when they need you to do that? - Would you like to give some suggestions to your teachers in front your classmates when they need you to do that?	-.211	1.131	.092	-.392	-.029	-2.294	151	.023
Pair 16	would you talk to your boss when you think you should have been being promoted? - would you talk to your boss when you think you should have been being promoted?	-.408	1.354	.110	-.625	-.191	-3.715	151	.000
Pair 17	Could you give a good impression when you talk to others? - Could you give a good impression when you talk to others?	-.434	1.120	.091	-.614	-.255	-4.781	151	.000

Pair 18	Would you like promote your key skills communication from though this course? - would you like promote your key skills communication from though this course?	.184	.999	.081	.024	.344	2.272	151	.024

Appendix VIIII Output of Course Rating Questionnaire 3-1 (students)

1. Crosstab

Count

		time		
		1	2	Total
How often did you	never	4	10	14
participate in learning	rarely	18	13	31
activities in this new	some times	110	113	223
communication course?	very often	114	113	227
	always	63	62	125
Total		309	311	620

2.Crosstab

Count

		time		
		1	2	Total
Do you think that	never	6	6	12
the assessment of	rarely	15	14	29
each unit helped	some times	92	123	215
you to achieve the	very often	119	113	232
learning	always	76	53	129
objectives?	8	0	2	2
Total		308	311	619

3. Crosstab

Count

		time		
		1	2	Total
Did you get a real	never	9	3	12
learning experience	rarely	21	21	42
through Learning by	some times	111	146	257
doing in this new	very often	99	90	189
communication	always	67	51	118
course?				
Total		307	311	618

4. Crosstab

Count

		time		Total
		1	2	
How often do you think you were asked to achieve a task to meet the requirement of the learning outcomes?	never	7	6	13
	rarely	23	23	46
	some times	119	132	251
	very often	109	110	219
	always	49	39	88
	8	1	0	1
Total		308	310	618

5. Crosstab

Count

		time		Total
		1	2	
Did your teacher give brief and well- structured presentations in which the key points related to course content were well stressed?	never	5	4	9
	rarely	11	10	21
	some times	82	94	176
	very often	128	119	247
	always	83	78	161
	8	1	0	1
Total		310	305	615

6. Crosstab

Crosstab

Count

		time		Total
		1	2	
Did your teacher organise the classroom activities effectively and provide helpful feedback on your performance?	never	6	5	11
	rarely	11	13	24
	some times	72	77	149
	very often	128	147	275
	always	90	69	159
Total		307	311	618

7. Crosstab

Count

		time		
		1	2	Total
Did your teacher give	never	5	2	7
assistance to your	rarely	14	19	33
communication	some times	104	122	226
practice?	very often	110	104	214
	always	72	63	135
	8	2	0	2
Total		307	310	617

8. Crosstab

Count

		time		
		1	2	Total
Did your teacher show	never	4	5	9
his/her adequate	rarely	11	9	20
knowledge about	some times	69	75	144
communication and his/her	very often	124	129	253
communication	always	97	86	183
competence in the	8	3	4	7
classroom?				
Total		308	308	616

9. Crosstab

Count

		time		
		1	2	Total
Do you think the	never	2	6	8
content of each unit	rarely	19	10	29
was useful?	some times	66	95	161
	very often	101	107	208
	always	119	86	205
	8	1	1	2
Total		308	305	613

10. Crosstab

Count

		time		Total
		1	2	
How often do you think	never	5	5	10
you got more work done	rarely	17	18	35
by the OTPAE model than	some times	104	125	229
you would have done with	very often	129	110	239
the old teaching method?	always	46	51	97
	8	4	0	4
Total		305	309	614

11. Crosstab

Count

		time		Total
		1	2	
Were you	never	8	8	16
satisfied with	rarely	22	22	44
this new	some times	118	137	255
textbook	very often	89	95	184
design?	always	68	49	117
	8	1	0	1
Total		306	311	617

12. Were you satisfied with what you have learned from this course?

Count

		time		Total
		1	2	
Were you satisfied with	never	8	6	14
what you have learned	rarely	18	18	36
from this course?	some times	120	131	251
	very often	101	96	197
	always	61	59	120
Total		308	310	618

13. Crosstab

Count

		time		
		1	2	Total
How do you assess the success of this course learning?	Very Effective	122	87	209
	effective	176	206	382
	Not effective	10	16	26
Total		308	309	617

Crosstab

Count

		time		
		1	2	Total
effective	no	132	103	235
	yes	176	206	382
Total		308	309	617

Crosstab

Count

		time		
		1	2	Total
not effective	no	298	293	591
	yes	10	16	26
Total		308	309	617

Items 14: Frequency Table 05/2007

What is the most important reason for you if you chose C in item 13? (Only if you choose13C,

please select one from the answers below)

A) The course is useless. (7)

B) I am not interested in this course. (7)

C) I could not adapt to the new teaching method. (2)

D) The teacher did not help me much. (4)

E) I could not get a chance to be tutored as there too many students in my class. (3)

F) It is because I did not finish my assignment regularly.　(2)

A、The course is useless.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	no	8	50.0	53.3	53.3
Valid	yes	7	43.8	46.7	100.0
	Total	15	93.8	100.0	
Missing	9	1	6.3		
Total		16	100.0		

B、I am not interested in this course. (7)

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	no	8	50.0	53.3	53.3
Valid	yes	7	43.8	46.7	100.0
	Total	15	93.8	100.0	
Missing	9	1	6.3		
Total		16	100.0		

C、I could not adapt to the new teaching method (2)

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	no	13	81.3	86.7	86.7
Valid	yes	2	12.5	13.3	100.0
	Total	15	93.8	100.0	
Missing	9	1	6.3		
Total		16	100.0		

D、The teacher did not help me much. (4)

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	no	11	68.8	73.3	73.3
Valid	yes	4	25.0	26.7	100.0
	Total	15	93.8	100.0	
Missing	9	1	6.3		

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Total		16	100.0		

E、I could not get a chance to be tutored as there too many students in my class. (3)

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	否	12	75.0	80.0	80.0
	是	3	18.8	20.0	100.0
	Total	15	93.8	100.0	
Missing	9	1	6.3		
Total		16	100.0		

F、It is because I did not finish my assignment regularly.   (2)

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	no	13	81.3	86.7	86.7
	yes	2	12.5	13.3	100.0
	Total	15	93.8	100.0	
Missing	9	1	6.3		
Total		16	100.0		

Appendix X Output of Course Rating Questionnaire 3-2 (teachers)

Question 1

Do you think it is crucial to use student- centred learning in communication teaching and learning? *

Source Crosstabulation

			Source		Total
			Wave1	Wave2	Total
Do you think it is crucial to use student-centred learning in communication teaching and learning?	Strongly Agree	Count	8	8	16
		% within Source	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Total		Count	8	8	16
		% within Source	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Question 2

What the influence of student-centred learning has had on you during the implementation of new communication course?

Do you think you have more understanding about the new pedagogy?* Source Crosstabulation

			Source		Total
			Wave1	Wave2	Total
Do you think you have more understanding about the new pedagogy?	Strongly Agree	Count	8	8	16
		% within Source	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Total		Count	8	8	16
		% within Source	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Do you think you have had some changes in your teaching methods? * Source Crosstabulation

			Source		Total
			Wave1	Wave2	Total
Do you think you have made some changes in your teaching methods?	Strongly Agree	Count	8	8	16
		% within Source	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Total		Count	8	8	16
		% within Source	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Do you think you have got positive experiences in teaching materials development from this course? *

Source Crosstabulation

			Source		Total
			Wave1	Wave2	Total
Do you think you have got positive experiences in teaching materials development from this course?	Agree	Count	1	0	1
		% within Source	12.5%	0.0%	6.3%
	Strongly Agree	Count	7	8	15
		% within Source	87.5%	100.0%	93.8%
Total		Count	8	8	16
		% within Source	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Have you paid more attention to learning outcome and assessment design since implementing the course? * Source Crosstabulation

			Source		
			Wave1	Wave2	Total
Have you paid more attention to learning outcome and assessment design since implementing the course?	Strongly Agree	Count	8	8	16
		% within Source	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Total		Count	8	8	16
		% within Source	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Do you think the student-centred learning enabled you to promote teaching and learning quality? * Source Crosstabulation

			Source		
			Wave1	Wave2	Total
Do you think the student-centred learning enabled you to promote teaching and learning quality?	Agree	Count	1	0	1
		% within Source	12.5%	0.0%	6.3%
	Strongly Agree	Count	7	8	15
		% within Source	87.5%	100.0%	93.8%
Total		Count	8	8	16
		% within Source	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Question 3

What the influence of student-centred learning has been on your college during the implementation of new communication course?

Do you think it changed assessment method * Source Crosstabulation

			Source		
			Wave1	Wave2	Total
Do you think student-centred learning changed your assessment options?	Agree	Count	3	0	3
		% within Source	37.5%	0.0%	18.8%
	Strongly Agree	Count	5	8	13
		% within Source	62.5%	100.0%	81.3%
Total		Count	8	8	16
		% within Source	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Do you think you did pay much more attention to students' learning needs when you developed new teaching materials?

* Source Crosstabulation

			Source		
			Wave1	Wave2	Total
Do you think you paid much more attention to students' learning needs when you developed new teaching materials?	Agree	Count	2	4	6
		% within Source	28.6%	50.0%	40.0%
	Strongly Agree	Count	5	4	9
		% within Source	71.4%	50.0%	60.0%
Total		Count	7	8	15
		% within Source	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Do you think you have understood the new competence-based curriculum development model?

* Source Crosstabulation

			Source		Total
			Wave1	Wave2	
Do you think you have understood the new competence-based curriculum development model?	Agree	Count	0	1	1
		% within Source	0.0%	12.5%	6.3%
	Strongly	Count	8	7	15
	Agree	% within Source	100.0%	87.5%	93.8%
Total		Count	8	8	16
		% within Source	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Do you think student-centred learning motivated teachers to be involved in resource design and curriculum development?

* Source Crosstabulation

			Source		Total
			Wave1	Wave2	
Do you think student-centred learning motivated teachers to be involved in resource design and curriculum development?	Agree	Count	1	1	2
		% within Source	14.3%	12.5%	13.3%
	Strongly	Count	6	7	13
	Agree	% within Source	85.7%	87.5%	86.7%
Total		Count	7	8	15
		% within Source	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Do you think student-centred learning has influenced the curriculum management of your college?

* Source Crosstabulation

			Source		Total
			Wave1	Wave2	
Do you think student-centred learning has influenced the curriculum management of your college?	Agree	Count	3	7	10
		% within Source	42.9%	87.5%	66.7%
	Strongly	Count	4	1	5
	Agree	% within Source	57.1%	12.5%	33.3%
Total		Count	7	8	15
		% within Source	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Question 4

What problems did you encounter during the development and implementation of the new communication courses?

What problems did you encounter during the development and implementation of the new communication course?	Wave1	Wave2	Wave2-Wave1
A. I didn't understand the new teaching method.	0.0%	12.5%	12.5%
B. I didn't know how to control the students' practice time in class.	25.0%	12.5%	-12.5%
C. The time for completing the teaching and learning tasks was too limited.	25.0%	37.5%	12.5%
D. I didn't have adequate resources to support my teaching	87.5%	87.5%	0.0%
E. There were too many students in my class to be tutored	25.0%	50.0%	25.0%
F. I didn't get enough support from school	0.0%	12.5%	12.5%
G. The new textbook was not suitable to teach.	12.5%	12.5%	0.0%
H. The students did not cooperate with me	25.0%	12.5%	-12.5%
others:	37.5%	25.0%	-12.5%

Question 5

If relevant, what were the reasons, do you think, which made you encounter problem A and B in question 4?

If relevant, what were the reasons, do you think, which made you encounter problem A and B in question 4?	Wavw1		Wave2		Wave2-Wave1	
	Count	Col%	Count	Col%	Count	Col%
Lack of training for teaching methods	2	28.6%	1	12.5%	-1	-16.1%
Lack of knowledge about modern communication theory	3	42.9%	3	37.5%	0	-5.4%
Lack of discussing with other teachers	5	71.4%	4	50.0%	-1	-21.4%
Lack of time to prepare the lesson plan	3	42.9%	2	25.0%	-1	-17.9%
Others	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%

Question 6
If relevant, what were the reasons, do you think, which made you encounter problem C, D and E in question 4?

If relevant, what were the reasons, do you think, which made you encounter problem C, D and E in question 4?	Wavw1		Wave2		Wave2-Wave1	
	Count	Col%	Count	Col%	Count	Col%
The shortage of college investment in teaching resources	1	12.5%	2	25.0%	1	12.5%
Too much pressure from CNEI curriculum.	3	37.5%	5	62.5%	2	25.0%
The college had not been permitted to do school -based curriculum development	0	0.0%	1	12.5%	1	12.5%
Lack of teacher training for private college's teachers	5	62.5%	8	100.0%	3	37.5%
Others	2	25.0%	1	12.5%	-1	-12.5%

Question 7
If relevant, what were the reasons, do you think, which made you encounter problem F in question 4?

If relevant, what were the reasons, do you think, which made you encounter problem F in question 4?	Wavw1		Wave2		Wave2-Wave1	
	Count	Col%	Count	Col%	Count	Col%
The leaders had no awareness of the importance of the innovation course.	1	12.5%	1	12.5%	0	0.0%
The leaders have not reached a consensus about the new communication course	1	12.5%	1	12.5%	0	0.0%
No one was appointed to be in charge of the new communication course management.	3	37.5%	2	25.0%	-1	-12.5%
Lack of managerial communication	3	37.5%	2	25.0%	-1	-12.5%
Others	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%

Question 8

If relevant, what were the reasons, do you think, which made you encounter problem F in question 4?

If relevant, what were the reasons, do you think, which made you encounter problem F in question 4?	Wavw1		Wave2		Wave2-Wave1	
	Count	Col%	Count	Col%	Count	Col%
I could not arrange so many students' activities in the class.	1	12.5%	2	25.0%	1	12.5%
Too much preparation work had to be done before the teaching, I could not handle it	2	25.0%	0	0.0%	-2	-25.0%
The textbook was too difficult for the students	1	12.5%	3	37.5%	2	25.0%
I don't agree this new teaching and learning method	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Others	2	25.0%	1	12.5%	-1	-12.5%

Question 9

If relevant, what were the reasons, do you think, which made you encounter problem H in question 4?

If relevant, what were the reasons, do you think, which made you encounter problem H in question 4?	Wavw1		Wave2		Wave2-Wave1	
	Count	Col%	Count	Col%	Count	Col%
The students did not like to learn this course.	1	12.5%	1	12.5%	0	0.0%
I could not be interactive with my students.	2	25.0%	1	12.5%	-1	-12.5%
The students had no good learning skills and learning habits	3	37.5%	2	25.0%	-1	-12.5%
The students were not qualified to learn this course.	0	0.0%	2	25.0%	2	25.0%
Others	0	0.0%	2	25.0%	2	25.0%

Question 10

Do you think the student- centred learning could play a significant role in promoting students' communication abilities?* Source Crosstabulation

			Source		Total
			Wave1	Wave2	
Do you think the student- centred learning could play a significant role in promoting students' communication abilities?	Agree	Count	1	1	2
		% within Source	12.5%	12.5%	12.5%
	Strongly Agree	Count	7	7	14
		% within Source	87.5%	87.5%	87.5%
Total		Count	8	8	16
		% within Source	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Question 11

Do you think the student- centred learning could help students to know how to learn?

* Source Crosstabulation

			Source		Total
			Wave1	Wave2	
Do you think the student- centred learning could help students to know how to learn?	Little Disagree	Count	0	1	1
		% within Source	0.0%	12.5%	6.3%
	Agree	Count	1	1	2
		% within Source	12.5%	12.5%	12.5%
	Strongly Agree	Count	7	6	13
		% within Source	87.5%	75.0%	81.3%
Total		Count	8	8	16
		% within Source	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Question 12

Do you think that 'Learning by doing' could help student to obtain a real learning experience?

* Source Crosstabulation

			Source		Total
			Wave1	Wave2	
Do you think that 'Learning by doing' could help student to obtain a real learning experience? "	Agree	Count	0	1	1
		% within Source	0.0%	12.5%	6.3%
	Strongly Agree	Count	8	7	15
		% within Source	100.0%	87.5%	93.8%
Total		Count	8	8	16
		% within Source	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Question 13

Do you think the learning outcome model enables the students to solve the problems by themselves?

* Source Crosstabulation

			Source		
			Wave1	Wave2	Total
Do you think the learning outcome model enables the students to solve the problems by themselves?	Agree	Count	3	3	6
		% within Source	37.5%	37.5%	37.5%
	Strongly Agree	Count	5	5	10
		% within Source	62.5%	62.5%	62.5%
Total		Count	8	8	16
		% within Source	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Question 14

Do you think the self-assessment of each unit enables students to have a clear learning goal and help them to be autonomous learners?

* Source Crosstabulation

			Source		
			Wave1	Wave2	Total
Do you think the self-assessment of each unit enables students to have a clear learning goal and help them to be autonomous learners?	Agree	Count	4	3	7
		% within Source	50.0%	37.5%	43.8%
	Strongly Agree	Count	4	5	9
		% within Source	50.0%	62.5%	56.3%
Total		Count	8	8	16
		% within Source	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Question 15

Do you think the OTPAE model is a useful tool for you to develop a new communication course?

* Source Crosstabulation

			Source		
			Wave1	Wave2	Total
Do you think the OTPAE model is a useful tool for you to develop a new communication course?	Agree	Count	2	0	2
		% within Source	28.6%	0.0%	14.3%
	Strongly Agree	Count	5	7	12
		% within Source	71.4%	100.0%	85.7%
Total		Count	7	7	14
		% within Source	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Question 16

Do you think that the OTPAE model enabled you to understand and implement student-centred learning? * Source Crosstabulation

			Source		Total
			Wave1	Wave2	
Do you think that the OTPAE model enabled you to understand and implement student- centred learning?	Agree	Count	1	0	1
		% within Source	12.5%	0.0%	6.7%
	Strongly Agree	Count	7	7	14
		% within Source	87.5%	100.0%	93.3%
Total		Count	8	7	15
		% within Source	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Question 17

Do you think the OTPAE model enabled you to change your teaching method? * Source Crosstabulation

			Source		Total
			Wave1	Wave2	
Do you think the OTPAE model enabled you to change your teaching method?	Little Disagree	Count	0	1	1
		% within Source	0.0%	14.3%	6.7%
	Strongly Agree	Count	8	6	14
		% within Source	100.0%	85.7%	93.3%
Total		Count	8	7	15
		% within Source	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Question 18

Do you think that the new communication course developed by using the OPTAE model promoted the students' communication abilities?

* Source Crosstabulation

			Source		Total
			Wave1	Wave2	
Do you think that the new communication course developed by using the OPTAE model promoted the students' communication abilities?	Agree	Count	0	3	3
		% within Source	0.0%	42.9%	20.0%
	Strongly Agree	Count	8	4	12
		% within Source	100.0%	57.1%	80.0%
Total		Count	8	7	15
		% within Source	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Question 19

	Wavw1		Wave2		Wave2-Wave1	
What problems, if any, did you encounter when you used the OPTAE to design your communication course?	Count	Col%	Count	Col%	Count	Col%
I had very little experience in course development.	6	75.0%	5	62.5%	-1	-12.5%
I didn't have enough resources, so I could not choose the suitable cases relevant to social contexts.	5	62.5%	7	87.5%	2	25.0%
I lacked knowledge of new communication theory.	1	12.5%	3	37.5%	2	25.0%
I Lacked understanding of student-centred learning	0	0.0%	1	12.5%	1	12.5%
I couldn't understand the OTPAE model.	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Others	0	0.0%	1	12.5%	1	12.5%

Appendix XI Sample of Interview's Transcription (Teachers of College S)

Date: 4th January 2007
Place: College S
Interviewees: Mr Du &Mr Wu

Q: Well, we have implemented the new communication course for a semester, could you tell me what you think about this course?

Du: I would like to give a brief introduction about why we established this new communication course. As it happened, we had started to think about curriculum reform a few years ago. As you know, our college is one of the CNEI colleges; the curriculum in the CNEI colleges is dominated by the national exam subjects which are difficult to change. Most of our teachers are used to giving lecture to the students to meet the requirement of CNEI examination for many years, they might repeat these lectures for many times, and this situation is also difficult to be changed. However, changing social conditions required us to provide more competent graduates, more professional and competent ones. Therefore, our college has acknowledged the importance of curriculum reform years ago. However, we had developed some courses such as business etiquette, the psychology of success, and communication. These school-based courses were not part of the national examination; I mean, we are not forced to provide them, but I think our students need that. We have the responsibility to empower them with employability. We don't have many experiences in competence education. We perceived that we should provide more cases, as case studies which could place the students into particular situations and let students to do role play in a specific context. At same time, it is important to enhance interaction between teachers and students. We had tried to do that, attempted to do it. After one semester practice, we felt more clear and precise about how to carry out this competence-based education. Actually, the student-centred learning is vital of teaching strategies. Also the OTPAE model, I should say, is useful for vocational education especially for competence teaching and learning. It could be used not only in communication teaching and learning but some other courses should use some perspectives this model provided. I have thought about reform for a long time, and wanted to learn some thing from experiences of other countries. This practice (new communication course) gave me a chance to learn and let me learn more from my practice. It has enabled me to learn more.

Wu: well, I think it is significant to implement 'key skills' curriculum. As one of the pioneer colleges, our college took part in this empirical programme since 2005; this was because we agreed with this idea. However, we did not really develop many more courses though we had acknowledged the importance of competence education. This course allowed us to carry out and put our thinking into practice.

We totally agreed that communication abilities are core to competence. Whatever students will do in future, they really need to have these core competences, especially communication. We have had one semester experience and tried to find new way to teach and do coursework. The students' response is deemed quite well. We also interviewed some of them, some of them wrote pieces of reports. Generally saying, it was carried out in a right direction. We would like to make betterment in next semester.

Q1: How do you think about student-centred learning? Do you think it's suitable to use student-centred learning in China for communication teaching and learning? Why? Why not?

Du: I think it is impossible to develop students' key competences, i.e. things like the key skills of communication, by using didactic teaching methods. Competence is quite different from knowledge; it is a mixture of knowledge and skills. For example: when we come to learn to swim, you cannot do it without practice, so, student-centred learning needs to release students' own potential. Without their own experience, they cannot show the competence you describe even if you repeat it to them many times.

Wu: Well, to develop students' key competences, the teachers have to put themselves in the students' position. Actually, how much teacher talks in the class is one thing, how much students actually understand is another. The effectiveness of teaching and learning in a class is mainly depends on how much students have gained. Student-centred learning provides more chances for students practice; allow them to have experience fully. The teacher's role has to be shifted. They were simply to teach knowledge, but now they are tutors who should able to point out those that needed to be improved. Students' participation is very important, that is key point of student-centred learning. As someone had said, 'gaining a depth understanding depends on a fully engagement'. You cannot expect to get the effective teaching only through the way that simply let your students listen to you.

Q2: Do you think student-centred learning is appropriate for you to implement the new communication course? How does it benefit you?

Du: From my point of view, there is an increasing requirement of teachers' abilities for the teachers who are engaged into the process of implementation of this new teaching and learning strategy. This is a higher standard, not lower. This is because, you have to motivate your students and put them into learning; you also have to organise students learning activities and enable them have benefits from their learning. You have to direct them to do so; you have also to assess students' learning activities in time and point out how to improve the qualities of their learning. I thought teachers need to be flexible; you are needed to be able to control class activities, lots of them might not follow what you have prepared. At the same time, you have to observe, analysis, how to improve the quality of teaching and

learning. I thought this is higher requirements for a teacher. Actually, we think that the teaching now is not as easy as before, so, we had to spent lots of time working together analysis and discussing how to delivery the course.

Wu: I belive that this new strategy promoted teachers' teaching and students' learning and enhance each others. Like what Mr Du said, before, the preparation of coursework was not a difficult thing, simply interpreted the textbook knowledge. That was all. Now, it needs to be prepared not only from the knowledge in the textbook but to understand your students. We teachers worked together to prepare the teaching plan and you have to analyse what the situations might happen in the class time. Some times the situation happened unpredictable,

Du: The class activities cannot be delivered according to your original plan, you have to alter it immediately, quite often.

Wu: Yes, like what Du said, it (student-centred learning) is not a simply way, someone might think it releases teachers' work but that is not true. On the contrary, it raises the requirements for teachers. A shift the teacher changed from an actor to be a director who has more abilities. So I think this new way enables me to promote my teaching quality.

Q3: Have any changes occurred in your teaching after you've tried student-centred learning? If so, how has it changed? What do you think of these changes?

Wu: We have several changes during the implementation of this course. The first change is our class pattern. We need to change class patterns. Before it had been students sitting in ranks, the teacher stand at the front, his textbook open whilst he spoke. That was the original situation. Now, we are organised in dynamic groups, students sit face-to-face, in groups. Each group have six to eight students, we finally made a group to be composed in six students.

Du: eight is too many, six is ideal.

Wu: The problem was that we don't have a specific classroom for this course, so that we have to move the tables and chairs for group learning, this was a limited condition and this brought a negative influence on group learning. The learning environment is important for students learning; you must give the stage to your students rather than use it to present a lecture.

Second change is our coursework preparation. We did not do our teaching plan by one teacher, we worked together. This did not only including our college teachers to work together but also those focus group teachers meetings crossed three colleges. We helped each other. Each time we can conclude the last experiences and made clear goals about next step.

It is also, like what I had said, an important change that the teacher's role shifted from an actor to be a director. If the past, you would think about how to present the knowledge and lead your student to learn; now you need to get off from the stage, put your students into central area and let your students show. You are a

tutor now, who has a responsibility to guide learning. I think the main changes are these.

Additionally, the assessment has changed. It is not only about the method but also the content. We establish a learning activity, and evaluate students' performance through this activity. Students' performances were evaluated in groups; they have to show what they can do after study. The students comment on each other and learn from each other. The assessment is began from the first unit till the end. Not like before, where the final paper examination decided everything. We also evaluated group performance; we choose one excellent group after evaluation in each unit. I told my students that the assessment started as soon as the beginning of each class hour and till the end of unit, we would know which group is best through the process. At the end of this semester, we chosen one group as the best one, who made consistent assessment activities throughout the whole semester. I think this could really let us know whether the students have had an improvement. This improvement should be a real one. You cannot know whether students had improved if you only use paper and pen to examine, especially if you only ask your students to recite something. I think we have been being in a right direction now, of course, we still need to make betterments in the next implementation.

Q4. Did you encounter any problems when using student-centred learning to deliver the new communication course? If so, what were the problems?

Du: I would like to say something about this. There were two kinds of problems we encountered. The first one was the time for preparation for the coursework, especially, when we started to make this kind of teaching plan. I always feel I have not enough time for teaching and learning preparation. It is a long-term process to get a real understanding for this new teaching and learning, especially for the leadership of the college. According to current arrangement of our college, the coursework time for this new course was calculated as the same as traditional one. That is not enough for us. I thought I needed to do lots of work before the class hour, but I never had time to finish it. For example, I needed to develop some audio program, or select some cases even piece of dramas from internet for communication teaching and learning, this work needed lot of research time. I need much more preparation time than before. You cannot prepare well without enough time. The learning activity you designed needs to meet students' situation, how you engender students' desire to learn and enable them to have benefits. It needs more time to get ready, searching information. We felt there was not enough time to do this work. We have learnt some thing from this experience and would do better later. We felt that we had inadequate time to prepare for it.

Secondly, we don't have suitable equipment to support the implementation of the new course. Sometimes, we need to record the students' performance as part of their self-assessment or group reflection that would enable us to make better performance. But we were not provided with even one set of video equipment. We do need some

specific equipment, like a classroom for communication course which has had a set of equipment. If we had that classroom, we needn't to move everything before the class time and removed after class time. Now, we move our desks and chairs out of the way every time. Because there is only one classroom pattern that exists in the college; a speaking table for the teacher, chairs placed in ranks. We have to move them in groups before the beginning of the class. Each time, we have to move them back after the class.

The other is the selection of cases. I think it is important to provide a suitable case in communication teaching and learning. One good case could trigger whole class activities, and students can get a deeply understanding through that. They would also learn more if the assessment could be arranged properly. If the cases (tasks) were not selected properly, you will see that students had a little interest in learning. Case choosing was limited by our experiences, especially on occupational sector. Lack of experience is a big obstacle for my teaching now, especially workplace experience. Both teachers and students have very limited work experience in vocational contexts from where the suitable tasks should be chosen for students to practise. The world outside the college has changed greatly. We, being the teachers, should know something about it. That is an urgent problem. We knew little about situations in enterprise organisation, don't have any experience in these enterprises, so, we had very limited cases, we have to search for them. We need to do more, search for some practical situations in current vocational workplaces, in order to promote the quality of our course material development.

5. Do you think student-centred learning is effective in developing your students' communication skills? What makes you think so?

Wu: Effective learning is about whether the students can gain real understanding. The teachers have to modify their angle to think and encourage the students to have more experience. This (effectiveness) could be found from several factors: firstly, the students' enthusiasm of participation in learning was increased. For them, the more they participate, that is, do, the more they will understand. This is their reward. We say our teachers worked as directors now, you have to give a suitable role for each student who plays in a suitable case. Student wanted to show themselves. Our groups were divided according to academic thinking. It was no possible that each one in the group can get chance to participant in learning activities if there were many members in one group. The ideal situation is six students. For instance, role play, showing performance in work place situation, each one has his/her own role that motivate individual student's participation. Secondly, the students in a group need to help and supervise each other. You have to work well with the group leaders; they can act as your assistants. You don't have enough time to check everyone's work every day, but, if you have good group leaders, they will help you organise matters well after the class. I think this is another good thing, some groups worked very well, the group leaders organised students do preparation (before the assessments). I can see it because the students cannot show such good performance in just ten minutes practice.

So, I think they are effective in teaching and learning: students' participation, and practice in group after class. I think group learning depends on, mu… You have to be aware that students' out-of-class activities are also important. You should reflect this in your lesson planning. This is because the learning outcomes require time and resources outside the classroom. You must consider how they can keep learning after they have finished your classes

Du: I still felt that students didn't have enough practice. This is because we didn't provide adequate background information and they didn't have much too. As such, it is difficult for a student to place him/her into the situation and played well. This is more difficult. We think we need to develop more information and situations, what happened in multiple situations in workplace. He/she could give a suitable expression in term of his/her basic knowledge of that situation. Therefore, he/she would speak very limited sentences because he/she had no thing more to say, they were not professional, and have very limited information about this situation. These were many problems like this
.
Wu: Some students still remained lower participation. The reason for that might be seen as subjective and objective ones. Introversion could be seen as subjective reason; some students who have introverted personality deemed reluctant to be involved. From objective point of view, teachers, we needed to be promoted.

Du: we have observed the students who have had developed, progressed. It is difficulty to require each one to reach the same standard. This needs time, it is a process. Generally speaking, they are promoted and benefited from this course.

6. What kind of difficulties have your students encountered when they were involved in the new communication course learning?

Wu: Mr Du has talked most problems we encountered.
Q: Have you had any thing more?
Wu: As I have mentioned above, there were few students who did not take part in learning activities positively. For example, one or two students in their group did not show their higher participation, one for his personality, the other thought that she was not paid enough attention when the group managed to do the role play. Other situation was the whole group did not worked well. Once, one group attendance was not good, only two or three students in this group came to class whilst other groups were all presented. Then, I thought of that, I might have made a wrong choice of the group leader for this team. The leader I chosen was not talkative; he was very introverted person and not very positive one. His attitude influenced his team. I think this is one important factor for group-based learning. Two things were important for group learning, dividing groups and electing group leaders. Choosing a core one to be a leader who has positive influence on the group that is the key in the new teaching and learning activities.

7. Is the OTPAE model an effective model for the 'communication key skills' teaching and learning? Why? Why not?

Wu: I think this is quite a good model. O is objective, T is task, P is Preparation, and action and evaluation. The model interest of the students and teachers for…. It leads the teachers to think about coursework. In order to achieve the tasks, you have to fix your objectives of your teaching, and search for suitable tasks. The objectives should be clearly embedded into the tasks. Then you have to develop those materials for extending students' knowledge and competence. The actions enhance students' abilities through their own practices. Evaluation is also an important step. The five key steps are not only guide teachers to develop their teaching material but also to help students to learn how to deal with a job. I think you have to follow this order to do one thing. It has general meaning.

Du: we have lots of CNEI curriculum, National Examination courses are the main part of our courses. Besides that, we developed some school –based courses for promoting students' employability. But, lots of teachers don't know how to make a coursework. We even found they had no detailed teaching plans when we evaluate the teaching quality. What they did were just simply to repeat what textbook said. So, I think we can ask them to make coursework by using this OTPAE model. It is useful for teachers, especially for younger teachers. You should have a teaching plan, how you prepare for teaching. This model enables us to have a technical specification to develop coursework. You should have some ideas before you start your teaching plan. What are your teaching objectives? How to define your objectives by using a specific case or task? What are basic knowledge and competence the students at least should have? Students' learning activities are processes in which students construct and enhance what they had learnt. Finally is the evaluation. This is whole process, very specific. But I think there are some weaknesses emerged in this new course. Firstly, it is our teaching material which needs to be revised and promoted. It was not very perfect. Teachers need some teaching references, and these resources development relies on teachers' cooperation. For example, case studies, how teachers can have more professional cases? Some material should be given to the students. You need not to explain these cases to students as students have had basic abilities to understand this social and human science when they read them. Teacher should provide some key points in the class rather than repeat what students have acknowledged. What you should say in the class? So teaching references should be developed to be multilateral and richer. At least, you should have much more materials than those you have given to your students. I think this preparation is a process. As I have said, the time for us is too limited. It was difficulty to do everything for all units. It should be better if each teacher could contribute his/her creations. We can share together. Some one might have to organise us to do that. Do more teaching resources development that would be great help for our teachers.

8. Did you encounter any difficulties when using the OTPAE to develop and implement the course? If so, what?

Du: I think this model is a useful tool for our school-based curriculum and competence-based course development. Those five steps are clarified. I thought it is like technical specifications. You should think about these, you can only come to lecture desk after you have had a clear thinking about these steps, then, you can organise class activities well. Students need to assess each other and teacher is also required to give some comments. I have not got a very clear idea about task design; sometimes you need an explicit situation or, say, a task to lead your students to achieve the objectives of the units. But how can one design a task which fits each performance statement directly? So, when I design task for learning activities, I just provide a situation, and link the objectives with this specific situations, that what I did.

Wu: The tasks, or learning outcome, when we carried out the teaching and learning….
Du: We did not pay much attention to it.
Wu: This is because, the tasks is linked with actions closely. Especially, the performance of communication learning outcomes should be presented as a whole process. It is difficult to break communication skills down into separate units. How do you isolate one of the communication skills from the whole process of communication? For example, with nonverbal language, you can't let your students practise their nonverbal language without speaking; and you cannot also let your students practise their listening skills without other activities. Actually, communication is a complete process so that the teaching and learning should be based on the whole process.

Du: Yes, yes! It is not necessary to achieve learning outcomes by designing those separate and trivial tasks. Actually, we would design objectives of each unit after a very deliberate thinking. What are your requirements? What students could do after their learning? These are most important things.
Q: Any more things? Especially, the problems you have faced?
Wu: As we mentioned above, the relationship between tasks and outcomes, it is said that should be related closely, but not really do. We might have ignored this quite often.
Du: The other one is the evaluation. Evaluation is the assessment of students' learning outcome. This requires our teachers to have close relationship with our students. You have to facilitate students' learning. Usually, we would come in time before the class starts and we have to go after the class. So we did not help students very much and we need to make some change next semester. We have three campuses; the transportation is not very convenient. You were hurried come in to class, as soon as the bell rings. Then after class, the college bus was waiting for you as well as other teachers and you cannot let them waiting for you, so you have to go quickly. So, we didn't have more

communication with our students after class. I think we have not examined the students' learning outcomes very well. This is the reason for barriers for delivering outcome assessments. If we have only one campus, we need not to hurry up to change the places in a day, we can have more time to facilitate students, and help them to achieve their learning outcomes. Now, to finish the learning outcomes this textbook required, students had to spend some weeks after class.

Wu: We don't have lot of staff who could be involved in this programme. I think College R is a good example, as they invited class monitors to help. However, though I discussed with Mr Du about this, we have to think about whether or not the monitors have had qualification to do this. The communication teaching and learning is not simply asking the teacher to understand one unit, or prepare one unit teaching; you have to understand the communication theory. We have read lot of books relevant to communication and many chapters. You need to have a complete understanding. This is basic for you to implement your teaching and learning, step by step. Teachers' abilities which were used for this course teaching should be higher than you used for ordinary courses teaching. It is difficult to say, whether we promote students' one skill through one unit. You may detach knowledge into small pieces, but you cannot separate practice and instruction. Students' activities also not only focus on one objective, you cannot do that. For example, body language, you cannot ask your students to practice body language without speaking, you also cannot ask students simply to practice listening comprehension without other activities. In fact, communication teaching and learning is a whole process; this must be understood. I had discussed with Prof. Du about what we should do in next. We think this (communication course) could be implemented as kind of course for personal comprehensive qualities development. The course not only linked to those communication skills teaching and learning. Actually, it is related to those personal' moral qualities. How do you become a qualified person? You have to know this firstly, and then you can communicate with others well. We wanted to embed the courses into this (moral education). The class monitors have these responsibilities to do this. So, we would think about how to divide the units. En …it needs more thought. They (monitors) hope to organise these learning activities to develop students' competence. This also helps students to develop their comprehensive abilities. We wanted to use this new method, we would design the course and invite monitors to observe our class, and move this kind of learning activities into their class. Then, you can change, you can make betterment. Observation is also a course preparation, you can do it too. Our leadership would like to support us. This is for the next step.

Q: Ok! Thank you so much for your time, and thanks for all you have told us.

Wu &Du: Not at all, thank you!

Appendix XII Topics in the new communication key skills textbook

Topics	Sample of tasks
1.Self disclosure and communication	To introduce yourself in your group and talk about a communication matter which you collected from daily live
2. Motivation and communication	Role playing: to deal with a conflict, for example: to turn down an offer by an uninvited insurance represent in a proper way.
3. Listening skills	Role play: transfer an important message from one person to another.
4. Nonverbal skills	Business party simulation: self-introduction and introduce your colleague to another person.
5. Assertiveness skills	To take part in a group discussion about one topic, for example: your hobbies.
6. Presentation skills (1)	To give a presentation to the group as a representative of a company to sell a product.
7. Presentation skills (2)	To give a presentation to the class to promote yourself as a candidate for the chairman of Student' Government.
8. Reading skills	according to the task, select what the information you need and draw out the important data, factors, and case to support your idea.