

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHODOLOGY**

The study explored the teaching experience of an American English teacher in Taiwan. Three aspects were examined: (a) the participant's past teaching experience and its influence, (b) the participant's classroom practices, teaching effectiveness and teaching problems and (c) the difficulties he encountered in Taiwan. In order to obtain an in-depth understanding of these three aspects, a case study approach was adopted because "a case study investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context and does not aim at making generalizations about populations or universes, but rather at expanding or generalizing theoretical propositions" (Yin, 2003, p.13). This chapter describes the instruments, participants and the teaching context, procedures and data analysis of the study.

#### **3.1 Instruments**

Since a case study must present sufficient data for the reader to draw conclusions other than those presented directly by the writer (Denny, 1978, as cited in Nunan, 1992), the common type of case study involves detailed description and analysis of an individual subject, from whom observations, interviews, and histories provide the database (Nunan, 1992). Thus, the researcher investigated the participant's experience, his classroom practices and the difficulties he encountered in Taiwan by incorporating the following instruments: interviews, classroom observations, and collection of related documents.

##### **3.1.1 Interviews**

One of the most important sources of case study information is the interview (Yin, 2003). The major interviews of this study were conducted in two ways. First, lengthy semi-structured interviews were employed to probe into the participant's

background information, his past learning and teaching experience and the problems he encountered in Taiwan. As explained by Wallace (1988), in semi-structured interviews, “there will be almost a prepared interview schedule, but most of the questions will probably be open questions” (p.147). They combine a certain degree of control with a certain amount of freedom to develop the interview and contain certain prompts (i.e. comments, examples or follow-up questions) to encourages the interviewee to give fuller, more detailed responses (Wallace, 1998). As for the interview questions (see Appendix 1), they were developed and synthesized from the past literature which the researcher has reviewed.

The second type of interview referred to the post-observation interview. This type of interview was adopted soon after each teaching session which the researcher has observed. It was aimed to explore the reasons why the participant performed some specific teaching techniques or activities during the classroom, which may also help the researcher to explain the effectiveness of the participant’s teaching and the reasons behind his teaching behaviors.

Moreover, in order to further explore the effectiveness of the participant’s teaching, the informal conversations with the participant, the participant’s students, colleagues, and the owner of the cram school where he is currently working were also conducted.

### **3.1.2 Classroom Observations**

It is widely believed that observation is a major tool used in qualitative research as it allows close-up examination of a phenomenon (Yin, 2003). Thus, with the view of investigating the participant’s classroom practices and its effectiveness, non-participant observations of real classroom practice were conducted. In addition, the observations of each period of the participant’s classroom teaching were video-taped because one of the advantages of video-taping is that it can be replayed

and examined many times and can capture many details of a lesson that cannot be easily observed by other means (Richards & Lockhart, 1996). Apart from video-taping, all classroom observations were supplemented by field notes in order to mend the drawbacks of video-taping classroom practices, such as the limited range of a recording device which may capture only the participant's teaching behaviors rather than students' reactions.

### **3.1.3 Document Collections**

Apart from collecting data through interviews and classroom observation, the researcher also collected such materials as the textbooks, handouts and test sheets, in hope of further capturing the panorama of the participant's teaching. It is believed that these existing documents are another source that may shed lights into the questions investigated (Johnson, 1992, as cited in Wang, 2007).

## **3.2 The Participant**

### **3.2.1 Criteria of Choosing the Participant**

The research was designed to investigate one NEST's teaching experience, his classroom practices, teaching effectiveness, problems and the difficulties that he has encountered and how he solved the problems when living and teaching English in Taiwan. In order to answer the research questions, the researcher selected a representative who is qualified under the following criteria: (a) a NEST who has taught English in Taiwan for at least three years, (b) a NEST who has the teaching experience both in private language institutes and in public schools in Taiwan, (c) a NEST who has taught students whose levels range from basic to advanced, and (d) a NEST who is willing to participant in the study.

First of all, the reason why the researcher was to find a participant who has at least three years of teaching experience was that he or she may have richer experience in teaching English in Taiwan than most of the NESTs in Taiwan who have only one

or two years of teaching experience in average (Chen, 2007; Chou, 2004). As the contract is normally made for one or two years among English cram schools in Taiwan, if a NEST has taught English for more than 3 years, he/she may show a comparatively higher preference for teaching English in Taiwan as his/her career rather than those who stay in Taiwan only for a short period of time and consider teaching English as merely a means of making money. Accordingly, investigating this kind of NEST's teaching and its effectiveness would be relatively more meaningful.

Second, the reason why the second and third criteria were set up was to select a NEST who is familiar with different teaching contexts in Taiwan and thereby the problems he/she encountered would be more various.

Lastly, the study was conducted in a case study method; namely, all the procedure of data collection might have been time-consuming. Therefore, it is crucial to find a NEST who would be willing to spare his or her time to cooperate with the researcher patiently. With all the criteria taken into account, Bert, who has taught English in Taiwan for fourteen and a half years, was selected as the participant of the study.

### **3.2.2 The Participant**

Bert<sup>1</sup> was born in the United States and graduated from a university in southern America. Though majoring in World History, Bert joined the Air Force upon graduation only to fulfill his dream as a pilot since his childhood. Unfortunately, one of his eyes accidentally got shot during a secret mission and his eyesight was seriously damaged. Thus, he was forced to discharge from the Air Force. After leaving the Air Force, Bert planned a trip to Asia and thought about his future during

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<sup>1</sup> In order to protect the privacy of the participant, the researcher adopted a pseudo-name to represent the participant of this study.

the trip. At that time, Taiwan was his first choice after a thorough consideration. Bert originally planned to travel in Taiwan for only three months and then returned to the United States for a brand new start. However, as soon as he stepped down the airplane and began his journey as an English teacher in Taiwan, he was fascinated by the environment and the people here. Since then, the idea of returning to the United States has seldom occurred to him.

Nowadays, Bert has been an English teacher for fourteen and a half years in Taiwan. He has taught at numerous crams schools and public institutions, and the students' occupations range from elementary students to business professionals. Some of these schools which Bert taught were Kaohsiung Shu-Da Vocational School, Ba-Da Junior High School, Li-Li<sup>2</sup> junior High School, Chung-Li Junior High School, Doris' English Center, Green Village, and Jolly School. Currently, he is teaching at I-School<sup>3</sup> in Taoyuan City, a cram school which provides several kinds of English courses for students from elementary schools to senior high schools.

### **3.3 The Teaching Context**

Due to the fact that Bert was teaching English in two different teaching contexts (i.e., a public school and a cram school) when the researcher initiated the study, one class in each of the two teaching contexts was therefore observed. One of the classes was Class 225 in the Li-Li junior high school, a public junior high school in northern Taiwan. The other was a class at Bert's cram school, I-School<sup>3</sup>. The basic information of these two classes was respectively described in the following sections.

#### **3.3.1 Class 225 in Li-Li Junior High School**

When the researcher conducted the classroom observation in Li-Li Junior High

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<sup>2</sup> The researcher observed one of the classes in this school. For ethical considerations, it was given a pseudo name.

<sup>3</sup> This was also a pseudo-name.

School, Class 225 was in the eighth grade. Before enrolling to the Li-Li Junior High School, the students in this class were selected beforehand through a severe examination on music theories and the performing skills of musical instruments. Only those who passed the exam could enter this class and became members of the school wind band. Therefore, this class was called “The Wind Band Class.” In this class, almost all of the students had good performance not only in music but also in all their school subjects, including English. When the second semester started, the school administrators hired two foreign teachers to teach conversation skills and articles reading in two respective periods under the pressure given by the parents of this class. The purpose of hiring NESTs was to improve the students’ English conversation skills and reading comprehension, which were the two highly-emphasized abilities in the National Junior High School’s English Curriculum (MOE website). Having taught one of the principal’s children and earned himself a good reputation, Bert was then recommended by the principal of the Li-Li Junior High School to teach reading comprehension (see Appendix 2 for the excerpt of the textbook).

These NEST-taught classes took place every Wednesday afternoon, from 2: 05 p.m to 2:50 p.m in the second semester and lasted for two semesters in a row (i.e. the second and the third semester). However, just when the fourth semester was about to start, the other foreign teacher left Taiwan for unknown reasons. Without hiring any other foreign teacher for substitution, the school authority shortened the students’ learning hours from two periods to one, letting Bert teach the reading comprehension to Class 225 per week only. This was the very semester when the researcher initiated the observations in this class. However, the reading course taught by Bert was terminated as soon as the fourth semester came to an end.

### 3.3.2 The Class at I-School

As mentioned earlier (see 2.2.2), I-School was a private English cram school in northern Taiwan, providing the students with a variety of intensive English learning courses. The class observed at I-School consisted of 12 students. Eight of them were the sixth-graders from different elementary schools in the neighborhood while the other four were junior high school students. Nearly 90 % of them had been taught by Bert for two consecutive years. The level of the whole class was intermediate when the researcher observed the class. The teaching hours for this class began from seven-thirty p.m. to nine-thirty p.m. every Tuesday and Thursday. Basically, Bert divided the English class up into two parts. In the first hour, each student was asked to orally present the news that happened during the previous week to the whole class. In the second hour, Bert would then focus on the content of the textbook (see Appendix 3).

### 3.4 Procedures

The data of this study were collected from September, 2006 to March, 2008. The data collection procedures could be roughly divided up into five steps. From Step One to Step Three, the researcher focused on collecting data of Bert's teaching in the public school. From Step Four to Step Five, the researcher primarily gathered information on Bert's teaching in the cram school. To be more precise, the procedures of data collection were illustrated step by step in a chronological order as follows:

**Step One:** The observations in Class 225 in Li-Li junior high school were conducted every Wednesday afternoon from September to November in 2006. The researcher observed Bert's teaching of two complete units in the textbook. During the observations, copies of the teaching materials used in Bert's classes were collected so that the researcher could have a better understanding of what was going on in the

classroom. Eventually, a total of four periods in Li-Li junior high school were observed and each lasted for 45 minutes (see Table 1).

**Table 1**  
**Classroom Observations in Li-Li Junior High School**

|   | Date          | Class | Teaching Unit                             |
|---|---------------|-------|---|
| 1 | Sep. 27, 2006 | 225   | Unit 10 Neighbors Fed Up with Loud Music* |
| 2 | Nov. 1, 2006  | 225   | Unit 10 Neighbors Fed Up with Loud Music  |
| 3 | Nov. 8, 2006  | 225   | Unit 11 Prison Escape is Easy as Pie      |
| 4 | Nov. 15, 2006 | 225   | Unit 11 Prison Escape is Easy as Pie      |

\* The textbook used in Li-Li was *Can You Believe It? Stories and Idioms from Real Life* (Book 1) by Jann Huizenga, Oxford University Press, 2000

**Step Two:** During the following winter vacation in February, 2007, six semi-structured interviews were conducted (see Table 2). Information was elicited in terms of Bert's background, past learning and working experiences, his philosophy of teaching, his English teaching situations in Li-Li Junior High School, the problems he encountered in Taiwan as a foreign English teacher, and his opinions on issues related to NEST and NESTs. In addition, the questions generated from a preliminary analysis of the classroom observations in Step One were asked for clarification and verification. All interviews were carried out in English and took place after Bert finished teaching his class at I-School at 9: 30 p.m. Thus, the length of each interview diversified from thirty-seven minutes to one and half hours according to Bert's energy when the interview was conducted.

**Table 2**  
**Semi-Structured Interview Sessions**

|   | Date          | Time    | Topic   |
|---|---------------|---------|---|
| 1 | Feb. 8, 2007  | 45 min. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Background Information</li> <li>• Past learning &amp; working experiences</li> </ul> |
| 2 | Feb. 15, 2007 | 37 min. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opinions about English teaching</li> </ul>   |
| 3 | Feb. 22, 2007 | 55 min. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Native and non-native issues</li> <li>• Problems encountered in Taiwan</li> </ul>    |

|   |               |         |  |
|---|---------------|---------|--|
| 4 | Feb. 26, 2007 | 77 min. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teaching experience in Taiwan</li> <li>• Teaching situations in Li-Li</li> </ul>                                      |
| 5 | Feb. 28, 2007 | 80 min  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teaching situations in Li-Li</li> <li>• Learners and its characteristics in Li-Li</li> </ul>                          |
| 6 | Mar. 5, 2007  | 90 min  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teaching preparation</li> <li>• Techniques &amp; activities in Li-Li</li> <li>• Assessments &amp; Homework</li> </ul> |

**Step Three:** Apart from conducting personal interviews to Bert, six of his students in Class 225 were interviewed twice. During these two interviews, three students together were interviewed in a group each time. The purpose of the interviews was to check to what extent the students were influenced by Bert's teaching and how effective Bert's teaching was. These six students were recommended and selected with the assistance of their Chinese English teacher in Li-Li Junior High School. The English proficiency levels of these six students varied from basic to high-intermediate.

**Step Four:** A total of ten interviews were conducted from late August to mid-November in 2007, including both the semi-structured interviews and post-observation interviews. In late August, 2007, the first three semi-conducted interviews were initiated by the researcher to explore Bert's cram school teaching experience. Also, the preliminary analyses of the data collected in Step One and Step Two were also given to Bert for verification and clarification in these three interviews.

As for the following seven interviews, all of them were conducted soon after the classroom observation on the same day. From then on, the researcher observed the participant's teaching first and later initiated the interview after class by asking Bert questions about the lesson the researcher had just finished observing. If there

was still time permitted to ask some more questions, the researcher would further continue the interview and ask questions related regarding to the other research topics (see Table 3). When the classroom observations were over, the researcher conducted yet another interview with Bert on November 7, 2007, with a special focus on his teaching experience in K-School, which the researcher had found no time to ask Bert about during the whole process of classroom observations at I-School.

Meanwhile, an informal conversation with the owner of I-School was conducted on September 6, 2007. Before the researcher observed the class that day, the owner was requested to comment on Bert's teaching at I-School and the current situation of hiring NESTs among English cram schools in Taiwan.

**Table 3**

| <b>Semi-Structured Interview Sessions at I-School</b> |               |         |   |
|---|---------------|---------|---|
| 1   | Aug. 23, 2007 | 36 min. | • Cram school teaching experience   |
| 2   | Aug. 28, 2007 | 43 min. | • Cram school teaching experience   |
| 3   | Aug. 30, 2007 | 48 min. | • Cram school teaching experience   |
| 4   | Sep. 6, 2007  | 40 min. | • Post-observation interview  |
| 5   | Sep. 11, 2007 | 58 min. | • Post-observation interview<br>• Problems encountered<br>• Opinions about Taiwan Education |
| 6   | Oct. 9, 2007  | 23 min. | • Post-observation interview  |
| 7   | Oct. 11, 2007 | 26 min. | • Post-observation interview  |
| 8   | Oct. 16, 2007 | 60 min. | • Post-observation interview  |
| 9   | Oct. 18, 2007 | 60 min. | • Problems encountered<br>• Teaching situation  |
| 10  | Nov. 7, 2007  | 48 min. | • Teaching Experience in Kaohsiung American School  |

**Step Five:** Six classroom observations at I-School were held in this step. The researcher intended to follow Bert through two complete units of his teaching at I-School. However, the researcher had extended the time frame of the classroom

observation for the purpose of witnessing how Bert taught students to translate the Chinese paragraph into English (see Appendix 4 for the handout) and how he gave them mock exams of GEPT (see Appendix 5). The whole observation, therefore, lasted from September 6 to October 18, 2007. Totally, twelve hours of teaching was observed. (See Table 4).

**Table 4**

**Classroom Observations at I-School**

|   | Date          | Class    | Teaching Unit                        |
|---|---------------|----------|--------------------------------------|
| 1 | Sep. 6, 2007  | I-School | Unit 16 Pirates*                     |
| 2 | Sep. 11, 2007 | I-School | Unit 17 Agatha Christie saves a life |
| 3 | Oct. 9, 2007  | I-School | News-Telling & Unit 19 Diamonds      |
| 4 | Oct. 11, 2007 | I-School | News-Telling & Unit 19 Diamonds      |
| 5 | Oct. 16, 2007 | I-School | Unit 19 Diamonds & Simulated Exam    |
| 6 | Oct. 18, 2007 | I-School | News-Telling & Translation Practice  |

\* The textbook used at this class was *New Century Readings*, New Edition, Level 4, by K. Methold & H. Jones, Crane Publishing Co., LTD., 2000

Noteworthy, among 10 classroom observations conducted in this study, the researcher kept field notes in each period to serve as a supplement for video-taping. In addition, since the field notes in each teaching period were taken in English, they were given to Bert immediately after class so as to verify its accuracy and to serve as a stimulant in the post-observation interviews for Bert to recall his teaching and answer the questions proposed.

**3.5 Data Analysis**

The primary data the researcher collected for analysis throughout the whole procedures included sixteen interviews, fifteen instruction hours of classroom observations, and the related materials. First, the data from the interviews and classroom observations were all transcribed verbatim (see Appendix 6). The

transcriptions of the classroom observation were then presented by using the table which was modified from Wang (2007)'s study. It consisted of "activity type", "short description of the activities", "time", and "notes" (see Appendix 7). Second, as suggested by Tsai (2003), the analysis of the data was "an ongoing process that was carried out in tandem with data collection" (p. 75). Although observing the class and interviewing the participants personally, the researcher re-read the data she collected at the same time so as to evaluate and interpret the data preliminarily. Three categories generated from the past literature were used as priori codes for this study—Bert's past teaching experience, his classroom practices and the difficulties Bert has encountered in Taiwan. Once the preliminary analysis of the data collected was made, it served as the basis of the directions for the follow-up classroom observations and interviews and a reminder for the researcher to pay more attention in the following observation. Third, after the data were fully collected and coded, the researcher identified significant events, patterns or statements which could be emphasized by Bert with repetitive mentions and checked if these accounted for Bert's teaching behaviors, the effectiveness of his teaching, and the problems he has encountered. Lastly, the results were again presented to Bert as clearly as possible for final verification before presented.

### **3.6 Ethical Considerations**

In any research work, ethical issues permeate the whole process (Wong, 2003). This study was aimed to explore one American's English teaching experience in Taiwan, his classroom practices and the difficulties he has encountered in Taiwan. Consequently, it was closely related to the participant's personal life history, thoughts and behaviors. As Stake (1994) stated, "qualitative researchers are guests in the private spaces of the world. Their manners should be good and their code of ethics strict" (p.244). Thus, the researcher adopted the following steps to attend to ethical

considerations before and during the research process.

1. Describe fully details about the research to the participant. It included the purpose of the study, the method conducted and the right of the participants.
2. Ensure the confidentiality of the name of the participants, their school. The interview data would stay within this study only.
3. Devote time and effort to build up a mutual trust and confident relationship with the participants. Consequently, the participants were able to reveal their points of view confidently and, furthermore, they would have faith in the researcher in interpreting, representing and using both their self-elicited data and observational data correctly.
4. Maintain an authentic and natural research setting and observe the classroom naturally without altering the teacher's teaching plans or disturbing the flow of teaching activity.
5. Discuss the result with the participant to let him further reflect on the issue about his experience as an English teacher, his teaching behaviors and its effectiveness, and the problems he has encountered in Taiwan.