MEETING THE NEEDS OF VISITING IN-SERVICE EFL TEACHERS FROM CHINA

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Abstract

Providing short term intensive professional development courses that successfully meet the needs of course participants can be a challenging task. This paper discusses a tailor- made programme for visiting overseas teachers to a New Zealand university. It presents the pedagogical principles underpinning the course, and the considerations and processes taken in designing the course to meet participants' needs. The paper discuss the extent to which these needs were met on the course as well as looking at how the learning was applied once the teachers were in back in their teaching context in China. It concludes with the language teacher educators' insights into establishing and meeting needs, the value of reflections and the effectiveness of learning transfer

Introduction

In recent years, international language teaching professionals have been coming from a wide range of environments to visit and study in tertiary institutions in New Zealand. These professionals may be teachers-in-training, novice teachers or expert teachers. Some enrol in existing programmes for extensive periods of time, for example postgraduate study, while others come for tailor-made short term courses, often referred to as short term international experiences (STIE).

Among those discussing courses for teachers travelling abroad for the international experience is Willard-Holt (2001) who records the value of an international experience for mainstream pre-service teachers, both during and after the course. Carrier (2003) suggests how an introductory course can adequately address the needs of non-native speaker (NNS) English language teacher trainees in a Western-based TESOL programme. Barkhuizen and Feryok (2006) draw conclusions about ways host institutions can improve the STIE for international NNS pre-service English language teachers. These include making sure the experience is truly an international one where the programme presents "innovative ways of offering more intercultural and interlingual contact" (p. 132).

This paper looks at the STIE of a group of eight experienced NNS English language teachers visiting from China. It examines how far the teachers' needs were met on the course, and what learning the teachers applied once they returned to their own teaching context. We present the main pedagogical principles underpinning the course, ways to gather data to inform course design, and evaluation tools used to ascertain how far participants' needs were met. The study draws on data gathered before the course, during the course and over a six month period after the course and we conclude with further insights in ways to meet course participants' needs.

Pedagogical Principles

When preparing an STIE course, we believe that there are four key principles to consider. The course needs to be context responsive, encourage transfer of learning to a new context, be based on experiential learning, and provide extensive opportunities for participant reflection.

Context responsive

Context responsive courses consider a number of factors. These include the teaching situation where participants will be applying the new learning, as well as the participants' background and level of experience. Furthermore, the course needs to create an environment where there can be a mutual exchange of teaching and learning. Bax (2003) and Carrier (2003) have discussed the need for Western-based TESOL programmes to take into account the situations in which both teacher trainees (native and non-native) will be teaching once they enter the profession. Teachers' level of experience is another factor to consider. Berliner (cited in Freeman, 2002) suggests that the novice teachers (those with less than three years of classroom experience) are mainly concerned with managerial matters such as organising the classroom and controlling the students. On the other hand, expert teachers, (with more than five years teaching experience) tend to be more concerned with the purposes and aims of their teaching and how they can meet their teaching goals. Course content then, may be significantly influenced by the participants' experience and stage of career. While novice teachers may want to focus more on pedagogical skills, such as an effective lesson staging model, experienced teachers will benefit from understanding alternative approaches to lesson staging and making informed decisions about future practice in their own context. Context-sensitive teacher education programmes need to provide an atmosphere conducive to interaction (Bax, 1997). Experienced international teachers bring a depth of professional knowledge, providing opportunities for collegial exchange with the language teacher educators educators. Interaction with other professionals in the wider context (such as other teachers in the school) can further increase mutual understanding of educational contexts.

Transfer of learning

The ultimate goal of language teacher education programmes is for application of new learning beyond the course. James (2006) notes concern for the impact of instruction outside the classroom, suggesting impact of a course has to do with the transfer of learning, but classroom learning, beyond basic skills, may not necessarily always occur. Perkins and Solomon (cited in James, 2006) suggest there is "high road" and "low road" transfer. Low road transfer is the unconscious process that triggers connections between previous situations where learning occurred and application to new situations. High road occurs when a conscious link is made between two situations that do not immediately appear to be similar. James identifies a number of instructional strategies language teachers can use to enhance transfer which can also be used in language teacher education. Low road transfer strategies include setting learner expectations, matching learning experience to future applications of learning, as well as modelling and providing real-world tasks. High road transfer strategies include asking participants to generalise concepts by drawing on principles from the classroom that could be applied in other situations; and also asking them to anticipate applications, by considering new ways and contexts in which they can use their new understanding. Incorporating opportunities for transfer can enhance the effectiveness of a course for participants.

Experiential learning, loop input

Multi-sensory experiential learning can encourage deeper participant experience (Woodward, 2003), and making the learning experience conscious can influence teachers' personal beliefs (Carrier, 2003; Freeman & Richards, 1993). When teachers have the chance to try out a new process they can have a more memorable experience than just reading about the activity. Follow up discussion encourages deeper understanding of the process. Even deeper learning opportunities can be provided with the use of loop input, a type of experiential learning in which the process (eg. jigsaw reading) and content (texts on the topic of jigsaw reading) are closely aligned. Therefore, an effective course needs to provide opportunities for learners to deeply process information through their experiences.

Reflection

Reflective practice is seen as a "central pillar in teacher education" that enables teachers to weave together their past and present experiences, and to "find and establish meaning in their work" (Freeman, 2002, p. 11). Reflective practice can be used for participants to reflect on their own teaching practice, to reflect on their observation of another teacher, or it may be used by participants to reflect on the way they are being taught and their subsequent learning. Post-event diaries and journals are often used for formalising the recording of reflections. They are a means of encouraging teacher development, can provide useful data for the researcher (Borg, 2001; Halbach, 1999; Moon, 1999; Nunan, 1992) and they may be used to enhance language proficiency (Orem, 2001). To maximise reflective practice it is important that participants have an understanding of both the purpose of reflection, and knowledge of how to approach it. Another consideration is the extent to which language teacher educators provide guidance and structure to promote useful reflection, rather than just description of events.

Preparing courses to meet participant needs

Devising effective courses to meet participant needs is a detailed, complex process involving a range of steps from assessment to analysis, to course implementation and course evaluation. These steps may not necessarily be discrete or chronological. The process, involving decisions, actions and reflections, is cyclical in nature (Graves, 2000) and includes a number of informants. When writing about a client-centred approach to teacher development, Nunan (1998a) notes that it is important to develop content and methodology through a consultation and negotiation process with learners. In the case of STIE courses, consultation with the overseas institution can have a strong influence on course content (Barkhuizen & Feryok, 2006).

The starting point in designing a course is commonly needs assessment and analysis. Needs assessment encompasses deciding what information to gather, the best way to gather it, when, how and from whom, (Graves, 1996; Long, 2005; Nunan, 1998b; West, 1994). Several procedures exist for collecting data about participants and their needs. They may include unstructured interviews, surveys, questionnaires, observation, diaries, logs and task based criterion referenced tests and the choice of tool depends on time, resources and expertise available. In small scale projects, there may be less opportunity for face-to-face interviews or observation or detailed questionnaires and where time for gathering data and preparing a

course is limited, Gardner and Winslow (cited in West, 1994) suggest that frequently needs assessments may not be carried out because of pressure on staff time. However if the goal is a tailor-made course, it is essential to make time for some form of needs assessment before participants arrive. While needs assessment involves the collection of data, needs analysis assigns value to the data gathered (Pomeroy cited in Graves, 1996). The findings of the analysis inform the course design which is also influenced by the educators' previous teaching and planning experience (Dubin & Olshtain, 1986) and their pedagogical beliefs and principles. In our case the guiding principles were context-responsiveness, transfer of learning, experiential learning, and reflection.

Judging course effectiveness in meeting participants' needs

As mentioned previously, preparing a course to meet participant needs is a complex and process and so also is evaluating a course. There are a number of purposes for evaluation, stages at which evaluation may be carried out, as well as a range of ways for gaining an understanding of how effective the course is.

Two main reasons for course evaluation are accountability purposes and programme development. In addition, it is important to consider the audience and the course information they are interested in receiving. For example, while teacher educators will be interested in the quality of teaching and learning, managers and administrators may be more interested in receiving a report on the overall goal achievement, and management of any difficulties that arose during the course. The timing of course evaluation may vary. Summative evaluations done at the end of a course are usually for accountability purposes and to inform the development of future courses. Mid-course evaluations are formative and seek to find out the appropriateness of course aspects for the participants, such as the level of the course, the pace, the content, and the methodology. The data gathered may be used to address any problems identified and to improve delivery of the current programme.

Another consideration is the way course evaluations are carried out. They can be administered by the teacher, the students, or an independent administrator using a range of instruments including structured feedback forms, questionnaires, interviews, diaries and journals, written or oral reports, teachers' records, and observation. Some tools gather richer data than others, for example interviews provide a large amount of useful data but are time-consuming to undertake with anything more than a small group. Block's study (1998) comparing two different ways of capturing language learners' evaluation (questionnaire and interviews) concluded that an evaluation that produces valuable data needs to be "more than just a pen and paper questionnaire . . . and has to involve the teacher and the students in ongoing, in-depth and personalised contact," (p. 173). Diaries and journals, as a source of information on participants' reactions to course content (McDonough, 1994), provide a basis for a negotiated syllabus between teacher and student (O'Brien cited in West, 1994). Furthermore, they have pedagogical use in that they offer the reader insights into participants' needs during the course. This negotiation assists in the ongoing development of the current course, and end-of-course evaluation gives feedback for future courses. However course effectiveness must ultimately be judged by the participants' perceptions of course usefulness once they are back in their own teaching context. Post-course evaluation is often logistically difficult to carry out, especially when it involves gathering data a number of times over an extended period beyond the course. However, it provides significant insights into the extent to which the course has

met participant needs. Furthermore, other needs may also emerge, providing opportunities for ongoing dialogue with course participants and possibilities of developing future courses. One tool for gathering post-course data is the questionnaire, but as Halbach (1999) suggests, the information obtained from evaluation questionnaires can be insufficient, not necessarily faithfully reflecting what participants really think. The nature of the less structured reflective journal provides an alternative tool that yields detailed, personalised information which can then be categorised and interpreted to reveal long-term course usefulness.

The study

A range of data was collected to inform the design of a course for international language teaching professionals. The first data came from a formal memorandum of understanding between our university and an institution in Shanghai, as a result of a previously submitted proposal with a general framework for teacher education possibilities. We received notice that eight Chinese teachers from a vocational polytechnic in Shanghai were to be sent for an intensive three week in-service professional development course. Reading current articles and talking to Chinese colleagues in the university informed us of the likely background of these teachers and their potential needs and assisted us in preparing a needs assessment questionnaire to gather more detailed data from the individual course participants. This tool (see Appendix A) asked factual, behavioural and attitudinal questions (Dornyei, 2003; Richards, 2001). The questions were mostly short, open and written in English using simple structures as we were unsure of the language level of the cohort that would be arriving. The questionnaire was administered by a colleague who was visiting the Chinese institution. She had the assistance of a Chinese interpreter who was able to answer any questions. The colleague returned the completed questionnaires along with photos of the teachers and their institution, which helped introduce us to the course participants.

The reading and discussions with colleagues indicated that the group coming to study would probably be teaching large classes in China and they might have a range of experience in teaching structural, communicative or task-based syllabi (Cheng & Wang, 2004; Cortazzi & Jin, 1996; Liao, 2004). Testing would be an important part of their curriculum and teaching programme. The teachers could have a range of language teaching qualifications and their teacher education courses would have had a strong focus on the development of their English language skills, content knowledge and academic proficiency (Cheng & Wang). The teachers were also likely to have had only a brief practicum experience on their initial teaching course and their classroom skills would probably have been developed by being mentored by more experienced teachers (Cheng & Wang).

The analysis of the needs assessment questionnaire provided us with more detailed information about the particular group. We noted that while some teachers were fluent and informative in their written responses to the questions, others gave very limited responses. This may have been because of a lack of familiarity with the needs assessment procedure. "The process itself may engender uncertainty in the students, as knowing their needs is presumably the responsibility of the teacher or institution" (Graves, 1996, p. 160). In addition, completing the questionnaire in detail may not have been a priority in teachers' busy lives. Furthermore the simplicity of the questions may not have encouraged deep, elaborated answers. However, the data we received indicated the teachers were all very positive about teaching English, they were experienced at English language teaching (ranging from 2 to 13

years) and they all used English more than 50% of the time with their classes. They had a very clear idea of what they wanted for their students and also what they hoped to gain from their time in New Zealand. In addition, although the responses were sometimes brief, they gave us an indication of the level at which we should pitch the course in terms of content and language demands and clearly revealed the following five key areas of teachers' needs:

- motivating their students
- developing knowledge of new techniques and new ideas about teaching
- improving their own language, both oral and written
- comparing education in China and New Zealand
- learning about New Zealand life and customs.

Using the data gathered from the range of sources, we were then able to start planning the three week intensive course to meet these needs. The course content and method of delivery were planned according to our beliefs in context-responsive courses involving experiential learning and reflective practice, drawing on our pre- and in-service language teacher education background.

The choice of course content and mode of delivery were tightly linked in the course we designed to meet the teachers' needs. For example, we aimed to meet the need to 'motivate their students' by delivering Approaches to the Four Skills in a task-based learning mode. As the Chinese teachers had clearly expressed their desire to know about how we teach language in our university, it was important to give them the experience of being active learners in a communicative, task-based environment. At the same time we wanted to encourage collegiality, open discussion and sharing ideas about teaching and learning in different contexts. (See Figure 1 for a summary of the course content and delivery mode).

Figure 1: Course Content and Delivery Mode

COURSE CONTENT	DELIVERY MODE
History of Methodology	Readings
Reflective Practice	Interactive tasks
Approaches to Four Skills	Reflective journals
Vocabulary development	Observations and discussions
Phonology	Task-based learning
Testing and assessments	Project work
Content-based teaching	Seminars
Cross-cultural communication	Panel discussions
Exploiting course books	Experiential learning
Expectations of students in New Zealand	
The New Zealand experience	

Throughout the course, each participant completed a minimum of six entries in guided reflective journals (see Appendix B). We used these journals as a means of establishing a dialogue with the individual Chinese teachers, and as well to gauge their level of satisfaction, and to note ongoing interests and issues in language learning and teaching. We also started to

see how far we were meeting the Chinese teachers' needs. The reflections revealed two new areas of interest in addition to the five previously identified needs:

- Teacher roles
- Resources.

The emergence of these two areas informed further course content. In the initial timetabling, flexi slots had been scheduled enabling us to respond to teachers' needs as they arose.

We carried out two of end-of-course evaluations: a summary letter and a questionnaire. The teachers were asked to write a summary of their journals in the form of a letter to a colleague (see Appendix C), reflecting on their time in New Zealand, and the impact the course had had on their ideas of teaching and learning. The questionnaire was directly linked to the teachers' expression of their needs, as well as to the content covered in the programme (see Appendix D). We analysed the data from these two instruments, firstly to see the extent to which participants felt their needs had been met, and secondly to provide a basis for improving future courses.

When we had run short courses in the past, we were mainly concerned to see how far the course met the participants' needs as stated in their needs assessment. This time we wanted to know how far the learning from the course was meeting the teachers' needs once they returned to their Chinese teaching context. So following the course, we asked the Chinese teachers to complete three post-course reflections over a six month period. We asked them to write reflections on any class that they were teaching, focusing on any aspect of teaching and learning. We then analysed and coded the data to see the extent to which the course met the teachers' needs once they were back in China.

Discussion: Extent to which participant needs were met

In this section we discuss our findings on how far the course met the seven identified needs of the Chinese teachers, and provide evidence from data gathered during and after the course.

Motivating students, learning new techniques and improving oral and written language

The strongest need that the course participants expressed was their desire to motivate their students. They wanted to know how to "encourage students to grasp the knowledge in class," how to "attack the interest of students" and how to "help students to learn actively." A second important need was learning new teaching techniques: "I want to show my students new and fresh things." "I want more advanced methods of English teaching." "I want to know about interesting styles." All of the teachers wanted to further develop their own language skills and to know more about English grammar and phrases, and idioms and slang in everyday life.

Both the needs to motivate students and to gain new teaching techniques are intrinsically linked. Introducing the teachers to a range of methodologies was a way we believed we could meet these two needs, as well as develop the teachers' oral and written English. We felt that experiential learning would help the Chinese teachers understand ways they could develop student motivation as well as gain an understanding of a new technique, as for example in the following listening task.

Early on in the course, the Chinese teachers visited our local art gallery with a questionnaire about their art preferences. Previously the language teacher education lecturers had created a taped listening dialogue based around the art on display. We then taught a listening lesson to the Chinese teachers with pre-listening, while-listening and post-listening tasks. After they had completed the lesson, we provided an opportunity for discussion on how the lesson had been delivered, and its effectiveness and relevance of the technique to their context in China. Over the following week the teachers worked in small groups to prepare their own listening text and lesson about a visit they made to a local place of interest in Auckland. In the last week of the course, the teachers delivered their lesson to their colleagues and this was followed by individual written reflections on the listening task process.

Although the Chinese teachers were initially daunted, their on-course reflections indicated that the task had been effective on many levels. It was motivating for the Chinese teachers, it provided exposure to a new teaching technique and it helped them to focus on their language skills. As well, it met a number of other identified needs. The task provided a strong link between the classroom and the new environment, encouraging teachers to find out more about New Zealand culture. In addition, the group work fostered a new collegiality and gave the teachers exposure to working on group assignments, which is a significant difference between studying in a Chinese institution and some tertiary environments in New Zealand.

There was significant evidence in the teachers' reflections, both during the course and post course, that the listening task had an application for their own teaching context. In her final summary letter to a friend, one teacher wrote:

> After doing some listening practice about the art gallery according to the tape, much to my surprise it was not the end of the lesson. We still had an important task to do. We must do the listening presentation. That meant we had to find a good place to visit, prepare our dialogue, record it, then design questions from general to detailed. And the last thing is to do our presentation. Isn't it interesting? I'm sure both the teachers and the students will like this way because you can achieve a lot from it. You're not only teaching students some knowledge to pass the exam, but also teaching them the way to study by themselves.

Another teacher in his post-course reflections indicated he was implementing this new technique successfully back in China with his beginner listening class of 41 students. He mentions that earlier his students were unmotivated, showing little interest in his English listening lessons. "My students felt very bored. They were sleepy in my listening classes, although they knew listening was very important." He describes how he made his own listening material and gave an account of recording English dialogues at a local football match and making up listening material based on the dialogue. He gave students an opportunity to practise their oral English and was pleased with this lesson. "The effect of this class was perfect." and he was pleased with the "wonderful" new teaching method. "Now the students are not sleepy any more in my class."

In the end-of-course evaluation questionnaire, all teachers indicated they had significantly improved their knowledge in how to motivate their Chinese students, help them learn actively, and encourage them to talk more in class. Nearly all of the teachers felt they had improved their oral English and all of them indicated a degree of improvement in their knowledge of new teaching methods.

Comparing education in China and NZ

The Chinese teachers wanted to compare education between the two countries. They particularly wanted to look at this from the perspective of a Chinese student studying in New Zealand. They were interested in "feeling the atmosphere in a foreign university," "finding out about the Chinese students in New Zealand," and getting to know more about the "living conditions of the students."

So that the teachers were able to compare education in China and New Zealand, we provided opportunities for them to observe a range of English language classes and levels being taught in our university. We also arranged two panel discussions. Chinese students studying in mainstream classes came to talk about their academic experience in New Zealand and answered questions from the Chinese teachers. On another occasion, staff in our school met with the Chinese teachers for discussion to get a better understanding of the educational challenges and differences in a different context. All the panel participants prepared questions beforehand to focus the discussion.

In their reflections and summary letters, the Chinese teachers commented on the similarities and the differences in teaching in both countries. Similarities included the fact that both Chinese and NZ teachers worked a full day, planning, teaching and marking as well as following the same teaching procedure: "prepare, do, recall, reflect, conclude, prepare." All of the teachers reflected on differences in size of class, age of the students, course aims, length of class teaching periods, and the variety of teaching styles, and noted the student-centred lessons with a focus on learner independence.

> You'll find the teachers here are so lucky because there are only twenty to thirty students in a class and nearly all the students study English actively and independently. Isn't it quite different from what we have seen in China? . . . .The aim for students learning English is not to pass an exam but to use this language fluently so they are not afraid of making mistakes and are willing to use it at any time.

The end-of-course evaluation showed all teachers had increased their understanding of a foreign university and their knowledge about study and life for Chinese students in New Zealand.

Exploring the teacher/learner role

Early on in their reflections the Chinese teachers commented on the differences in teacher-student relationships in our university class and the different roles the teacher played in the classroom in New Zealand. Classroom observations, project presentations and discussions gave them opportunities for processing their thoughts about the varying teacher roles.

For example, a book review project, where they reviewed and presented key findings on a self-chosen language teacher education book, allowed teachers to explore various topics of personal interest including teacher-student roles. One teacher wrote:

> I'm interested in chapter 11 because it deals with classroom management. . . . I think the role of teacher is well worth reading about because I think that in China even if a teacher has taught you for one day, you should treat him like your father for your

whole life. So in old teaching method, many teachers acted as a controller, rather than a guide or an organiser . . . now teachers and students have a very good relationship, something like friends. . . . A teacher should be a tutor, an organiser, an assessor, a prompter and a participant, not merely a controller. After three weeks training I feel more confident than before.

After observing her first class, one teacher Carol commented in her reflections: "I found the atmosphere was very active. [Lecturer Z] looked like a guide and organiser rather than a teacher, and the students have more chance to practise their oral English."

Many of the teachers continued to reflect on the teacher-student roles once back in China.

We should show respect for [the students] so that they are confident to say anything in front of you. Never give them too much pressure. Regard the students as your friends . . . allow the students to ask any questions or say anything freely . . . they can do it without standing up and I will not forget the praise. The result is now most of the students are not afraid of speaking simple English in my class.

Sharing and developing teaching resources

When designing the course, we had looked at a range of Chinese ELT text books commonly used in China and prepared a session on ways Chinese teachers could exploit and supplement these course books. The session began with a brief visit to our ESOL resource room and was to be followed by a discussion on the advantages and disadvantages of using texts. However the resource room visit aroused such great interest that the teachers stayed there for the full session. In their reflections the teachers commented on the large range of texts and the variety of teaching materials. They particularly noted the folders of up-to-date teacher-prepared materials for all levels of general English classes which set English in every day contexts. The idea of teachers preparing materials for their learners and then categorising and sharing them with other colleagues teaching at the same level was completely new to the Chinese teachers. They could see the benefits of sharing resources related to every day life and they were all keen to establish a sharing system of their own when they returned to China.

I got the first surprise when I was visiting their resource room. There were so many teaching materials - magazines, journals, course books, newspapers, tapes, video tapes, reference books of all levels - they were all on teaching language. I was even astonished when I learned that some teachers didn't have textbooks and they could choose suitable materials that they would like to teach students. It is impossible at [our institution].

In each folder there were rich teaching materials which were made by teachers. Some were designed by the teachers themselves. I was told that the teachers often added something new to the folders and deleted the materials that were out of date. I think in my future teaching I will try making this kind of folder.

In spite of their enthusiasm and intention to increase and share their language teaching resources on their return to China, there was little mention of this in their post-course

reflections, except for one teacher who commented that they needed more financial support, and their principal had not had time to talk to them about this.

Learning about New Zealand life and customs

When asked about what they were looking forward to seeing in New Zealand, the teachers made comments such as "the ocean and the architecture" and "museums and the living areas of the local people." To meet this need to know more about life in New Zealand, we arranged a number of activities, outings and social occasions. Some of these were arranged for teachers to do independently, and others included university teaching staff.

The final section of the end-of course questionnaire, asked students about their level of satisfaction with visits to places of interest, and their satisfaction with the socialising opportunities. Of the six activities listed, dinner in a language teacher education lecturer's home with other staff and their families, and a relaxed trip to the beach with a lecturer were considered the highlights of their stay. Both of these situations were very informal and offered the teachers real insights into how New Zealanders spend their time. Other outings, for example visits to the museum and a local shopping centre, were less satisfying. It was interesting to note from the data that the areas teachers were most satisfied with were those which were followed up and exploited in the classroom by the language teacher education staff. The summary letter and on-course reflections supported the end-of-course evaluation findings.

> [X lecturer] took us to the beach in his class. It's a really happy morning and he bought us ice-creams. That's cool. I think today is the first day we really feel relaxed. We forgot the presentation, the homework. Muriwai beach . . . – peace, blue, quiet sea without the noise of human world. Everyone is crazy with this wonderful beach, taking off the shoes and playing with the water, picking up lovely shells.

All of the teachers commented enthusiastically on the dinner in a New Zealand home, in particular they mentioned the Kiwi hospitality, the friendly nature of the lecturers, the wide variety of delicious new food, and the home itself.

> I never expected that I could have such delicious beef in a foreigner's house. . . . I was impressed by the photographs I saw at [Y lecturer's] home. The pictures described the process that Y and her husband created (sic) their home. They did everything themselves. . . . It was really a great job which was incredible to us Chinese people.

Although there was considerable mention of the New Zealand experience in the pre-course needs assessment and in the on-course reflections, no mention of the experience in the new culture was made in the post-course reflections.

Conclusion and Implications

A number of conclusions and implications can be drawn from this study.

Needs

Before designing a course to meet participant needs, it is not only important to carry out a pre-course assessment, but to read and talk to colleagues about the likely context the participants will be coming from. Although our needs assessment provided more detailed data on the participants' needs, we feel that it could have provided more extensive, in-depth data if the Chinese teachers had had an explanation of the purpose of the needs assessment. As a result, before courses in the future we will send a covering letter outlining the reasons for the needs assessment and the impact this will have on designing a tailor-made course for participants. We also recognise the importance of establishing dialogue with course participants early on during the course to ensure that we are aware of any other needs that arise so that we can cater for them. Catering for additional needs is made easier if, at the course design stage, timetables incorporate flexislots (i.e. sessions with no scheduled content) to allow continuing course development.

Reflections

The Chinese teachers responded well to the reflective practice component of the course as it was not a new concept for them, but they appreciated the guidance the journals provided. Their on-course reflections revealed a focus on developing their knowledge about teaching and learning. We found, unlike Barkhuizen and Feryok (2006), that there were not many comments about more affective factors. This may have been because the teachers were mainly expert rather than pre-service or novice teachers, resulting in their interests being more concerned with objectives related to their teaching goals. With regard to post-course follow-up reflections we have learned they are enlightening and worthwhile. The data gained after the course validated in general our choice of content and approach to delivery. The reflections were effective in yielding useful data. We feel this was because the Chinese teachers had had practice with guided reflections on the course, and engagement in dialogue with the LTE educators through the journals. This made it easy for us all to continue the dialogue once the teachers were back in their own environment.

While in general the course reflections showed that teachers' needs were met, there are two implications for improving future courses. As mentioned earlier, Barkhuizen and Feryok (2006) call for STIE programmes to provide a range of interlingual and intercultural contact. To a large extent we feel we were able to provide multiple opportunities for this. There was contact with a wide range of staff members in our institution, (eg panel discussions, observation debriefs, social gatherings), project work where teachers met New Zealanders, as well as outings and social occasions with language teacher education staff and family. Less successful were independent outings where the Chinese teachers were not accompanied by a lecturer. So another time we would arrange for a staff member to go with the teachers on local visits to provide opportunities for discussion and cultural exchange.

Transfer

The low road strategies (Perkins & Solomon cited in James, 2006) we used with the Chinese teachers encouraged transfer of learning into the teachers' context. Post-course reflections indicated that some months after the course, teachers were using new techniques to motivate their students, trying project work with classes, and exploring the role of the teacher. However, there was little mention in their post-course reflections of building up a shared bank of resources and no mention of using their experience in a new culture. These areas had received significant comment both before the course and on the course. It may be that the participants saw the New Zealand experience as valuable for increasing their personal knowledge, rather than being a source of useful teaching material. For future courses we have designed a learning application proforma (see Appendix E) to prompt awareness of how new learning might be used in another context. A further plan for future courses is to encourage group discussion of the completed proforma, or of participants' reflections. As Boud (2001)) suggests, having pair or group discussions on reflections is more powerful than just reflecting in isolation.

Reflecting together on our study has given us a much greater understanding in a number of areas. We understand the importance of gaining a wide knowledge of the participants' context which informs the needs assessment tools and administrative procedures. We have an increased awareness of the value of providing tools (ie guided reflections, transfer proforma) to encourage participant reflection, and of offering subsequent opportunities for discussion to enhance learning transfer. Working together through discussion and debate can be mutually beneficial for course participants and language teacher educators, helping all those involved with the course to gain a deeper understanding of learning and teaching issues. Having a greater understanding of these areas will help us be even more effective in meeting the needs of participants on short term professional development courses, both locally and internationally.

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Appendix A:
Needs Assessment Questionnaire
(Original questionnaire on 2 pages with space for written responses)

Hello
We are looking forward to meeting and working with you when you come to New Zealand. To help us with our programme planning and organising could you please answer the following questions:

Please use the space provided and write your answers in English.

How long have you been teaching?
What subjects do you teach?
What do you like about teaching?
How much English do you use when you teach?
How often do you use English in areas other than teaching?
Which do you think is your strongest skill in English?
Which area of English language would you like to know more about?
Which area of teaching English would you like to know more about?
What are you looking forward to doing when you come to New Zealand?
What are you looking forward to seeing when you come to New Zealand?

Thank you for your time.
Course Planners

Appendix B:
Reflective Practice

Name: ………………..Date: …………….		
As a guide to writing reflections in English you may initially like to consider one or more of the following areas.		
Warm – up	Lesson openers	
Feedback to students	Groupings	Student teacher interaction
Teaching grammar	Teaching and learning roles	Classroom energy and motivation
Personalising the lesson for students	Lesson phases and transitions Other ……..	Questioning
Focus on a particular event in the day or week either inside or outside the classroom which was significant for you and respond to these questions: What happened? Why was it significant? How did you react and why? Has this incident changed/ reinforced your beliefs about good teaching practice?		

Appendix C:
Summary Letter Writing Guidelines

This is the time now for deeper reflection on the entire course. So you can give a balanced opinion about your teaching and learning at AUT, use these questions below to guide you in your planning.

Before you start writing, decide which colleague or group of colleagues you are writing to and the level of formality you need.

Focus on the things you have found at AUT that are the same as in your teaching and learning environment in Shanghai.

Identify anything that you have particularly noticed that is different.

Identify one area that you have found particularly interesting in the teaching and learning context at AUT that you would like to try out in your teaching in Shanghai. Give some details as to how this could be incorporated in your programme.

Clearly the learning experience for you has gone well beyond the classroom. It would be good for you to be able to inform some of your colleagues of any highlights of the trip and also give advice to a colleague who may come here in the future.

The letter may follow this form:
Introduction - includes a greeting and setting the context.
Body of letter – approximately four paragraphs
Short conclusion – summing up

Appendix D:
Programme Evaluation

(Students were asked to respond on a 5 Likert scale where 1 means 'no' and 5 means 'a lot.')

Your Needs Analysis indicated that you wanted to know more about different areas in English Language Teaching and Life and Visits in New Zealand. On the scale below, please indicate how well you feel these needs have been met.
English Language Teaching
I have improved my knowledge in…
1. how to motivate students
2. new teaching methods
3. how to help students learn actively
4. encouraging students to grasp knowledge
5. practical activities to encourage students to talk more in class
6. the differences in teaching methods in China and New Zealand
Life in NZ
I have developed …
1. my knowledge of NZ customs
2. my oral English
3. my understanding of a foreign university
4. my knowledge about study and life for Chinese students in NZ
Visits
I was satisfied with the visits to…
1. Auckland City Art Gallery
2. Botany Downs Shopping Centre
3. Dinner at [Lecturer Y] house
4. Muriwai Beach
5. Rotorua
6. Auckland Memorial Museum
7. Other…
General Comments
What has been the best part of the course for you?
What suggestions have you got for improving the course?

Appendix E:
Application of New Learning
    (Pro-forma for use in future professional development sessions, conferences, etc.)

Title of Session: Venue: Presenter: Date:	
1. Aim of session 2. Has this got an application? (What? Who for? Where?) 3. How could I apply it? (Adapt this format? Take key ideas and produce own format?)	How did the presenter do it?