Autonomy-oriented reflective practice: From teachers to learners

Wang Yi

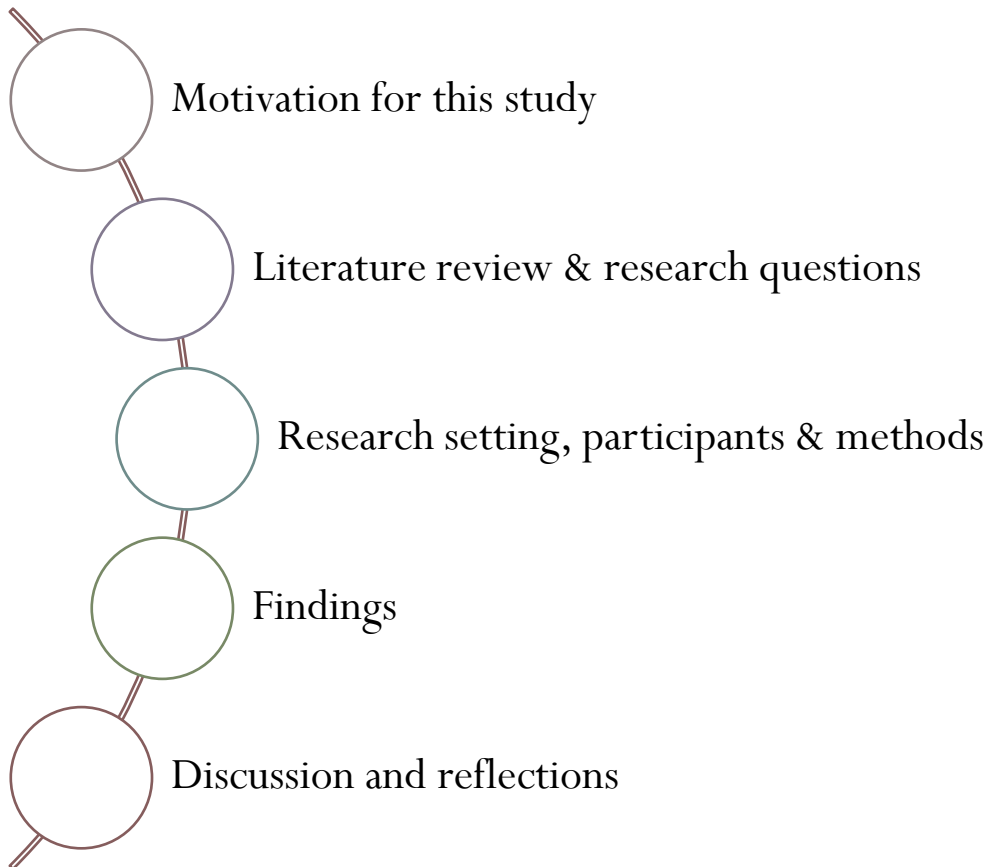Wintec

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Outline

○ Motivation for this study

○ Literature review & research questions

○ Research setting, participants & methods

○ Findings

○ Discussion and reflections

The spark

Therefore the sage says：

我 无 为, 而 民 自 化; 我 好 静, 而 民 自 正;

我 无 事, 而 民 自 富; 我 无 欲, 而 民 自 朴。

I do nothing, and the people, by themselves, evolve;

I say nothing, and the people, by themselves, go right;

I disturb nothing, and the people, by themselves, prosper;

I desire nothing, and the people, by themselves, remain simple and pure.

道

Dao (Way, Path)

A healthy society
(co-)governed
by its people

Tao Tzu (6th Century BC)

Chinese National Curriculum Reform

The New Curriculum Standards for secondary English (Years 6-9) aims to stimulate students' interest for English learning, to help them build up confidence as well as develop good study skills and effective learning strategies, and to enhance autonomous learning ability and collaborative awareness, […] so as to lay a good foundation for their lifelong learning and personal development. (China MoE, 2001)

Sage on the stage

Guide on the side
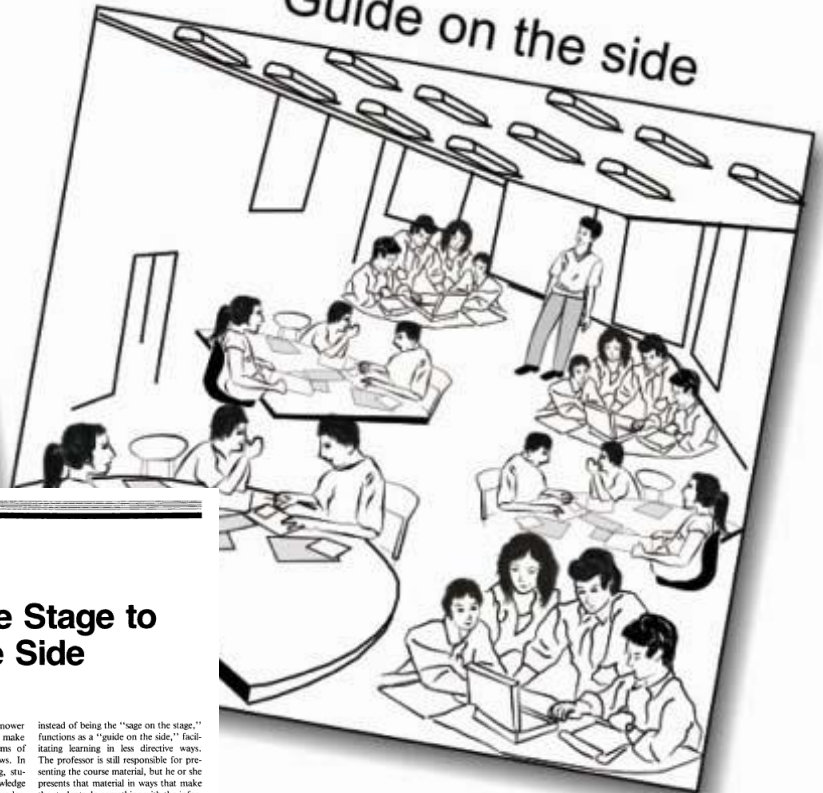
From Sage on the Stage to Guide on the Side

Alison King

In most college classrooms, the professor lectures and the students listen and take notes. The professor is the central figure, the "sage on the stage," the one who *has* the knowledge and transmits that knowledge to the students, who simply memorize the information and later reproduce it on an exam—often without even thinking about it. This model of the teaching-learning process, called the transmittal model, assumes that the student's brain is like an empty container into which the professor pours knowledge. In this view of teaching and learning, students are passive learners rather than active ones. Such a view is outdated and will not be effective for the twenty-first century, when individuals will be expected to think for themselves, pose and solve complex problems, and generally produce knowledge rather than reproduce it.

According to the current constructivist theory of learning, knowledge does not come packaged in books, or journals, or computer disks (or professors' and students' heads) to be transmitted intact from one to another. Those vessels contain information, not knowledge. Rather, knowledge is a state of understanding and can only exist in the mind of the individual knower; as such, knowledge must be constructed—or re-

constructed—by each individual knower through the process of trying to make sense of new information in terms of what that individual already knows. In this constructivist view of learning, students use their own existing knowledge and prior experience to help them understand the new material; in particular, they generate relationships between and among the new ideas and between the new material and information already in memory (see also Brown, Bransford, Ferrara, and Campione 1983; Wittrock 1990).

When students are engaged in actively processing information by reconstructing that information in such new and personally meaningful ways, they are far more likely to remember it and apply it in new situations. This approach to learning is consistent with information-processing theories (e.g., Mayer 1984), which argue that reformulating given information or generating new information based on what is provided helps one build extensive cognitive structures that connect the new ideas and link them to what is already known. According to this view, creating such elaborated memory structures aids understanding of the new material and makes it easier to remember.

In contrast to the transmittal model illustrated by the classroom lecture-note-taking scenario, the constructivist model places students at the center of the process—actively participating in thinking and discussing ideas while making meaning for themselves. And the professor,

instead of being the "sage on the stage," functions as a "guide on the side," facilitating learning in less directive ways. The professor is still responsible for presenting the course material, but he or she presents that material in ways that make the students do something with the information—interact with it—manipulate the ideas and relate them to what they already know. Essentially, the professor's role is to *facilitate* students' interaction with the material and with each other in their knowledge-producing endeavor. In the constructivist model the student is like a carpenter (or sculptor) who uses new information and prior knowledge and experience, along with previously learned cognitive tools (such as learning strategies, algorithms, and critical thinking skills) to build new knowledge structures and rearrange existing knowledge.
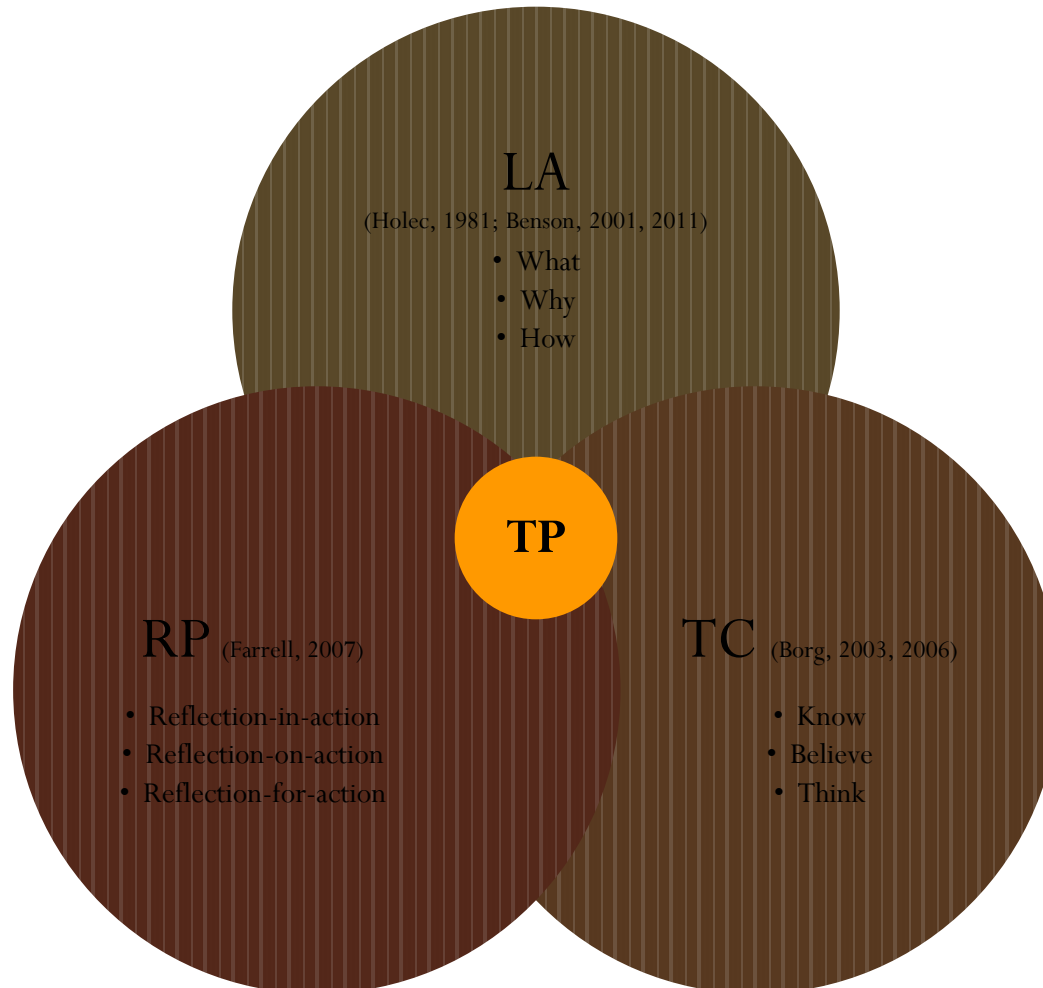
But how do we get from transmission of information to construction of meaning? Such a change can entail a considerable shift in roles for the professor, who must move away from being the one who has all the answers and does most of the talking toward being a facilitator who orchestrates the context, provides resources, and poses questions to stimulate students to think up their own answers.

Change is never easy; usually, however, changes are easier to bring about by modifying existing practices than by starting afresh. So, we will begin by looking at some practical active-learning activities that can be incorporated into a typical lecture; then we will move on to

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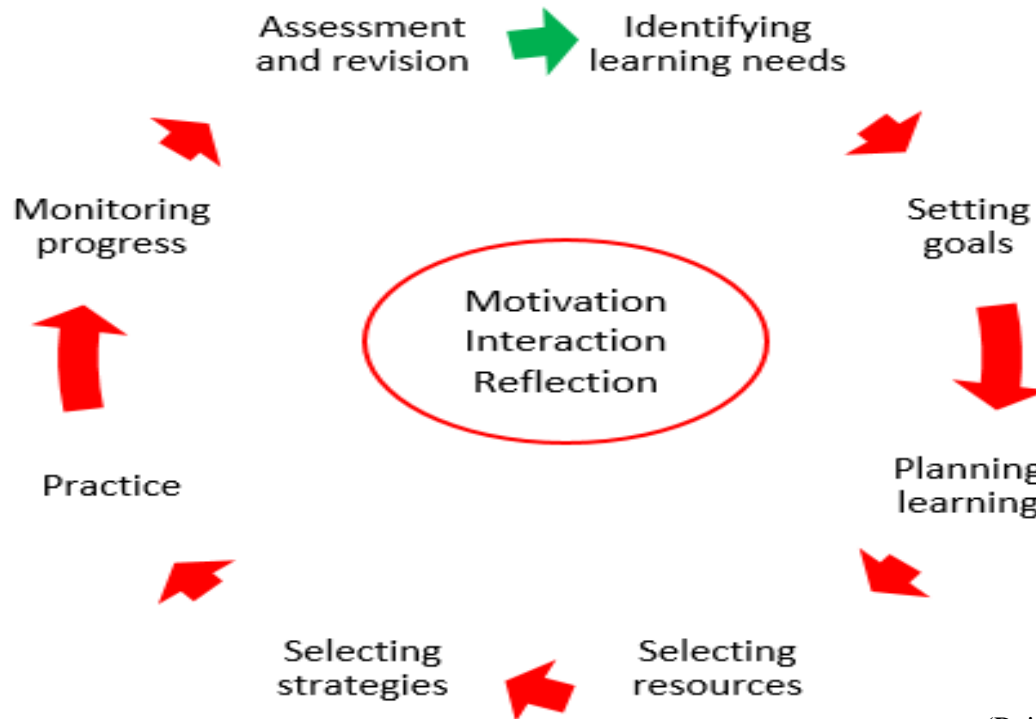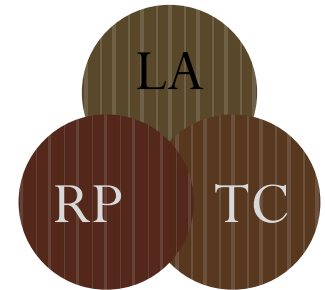
(King, 1993)
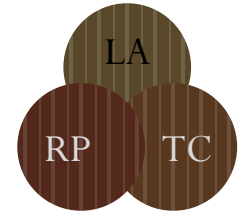
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Literature framework

LA
(Holec, 1981; Benson, 2001, 2011)
- What
- Why
- How

TP

RP (Farrell, 2007)
- Reflection-in-action
- Reflection-on-action
- Reflection-for-action

TC (Borg, 2003, 2006)
- Know
- Believe
- Think

LA: what

"the ability to take <u>charge</u> of one's own learning" *(Holec, 1981, p. 3)*

(Reinders, 2010, p. 51)

LA: what

"the ability to take <u>charge</u> of one's own learning"(Holec, 1981, p. 3)

*"a capacity for detachment, critical reflection, decision making
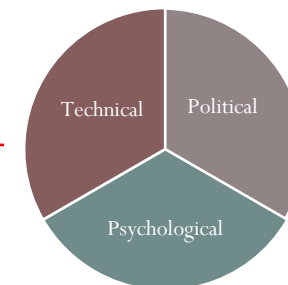and independent action"*(Little, 1991, p. 4)

"the right to be free to exercise his or her own choices"(Crabbe, 1993, p. 443)

"learners' ability and willingness to make choices independently"(Littlewood, 1996, p. 427)

"the <u>capacity</u> to take <u>control</u> of one's own learning" (Benson, 2001, p. 47; 2011, p. 58)
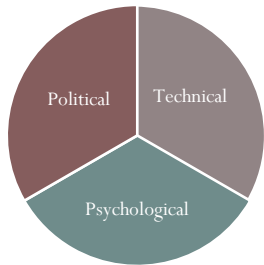
- *ability*
- *desire*
- *freedom*

- *learning management*
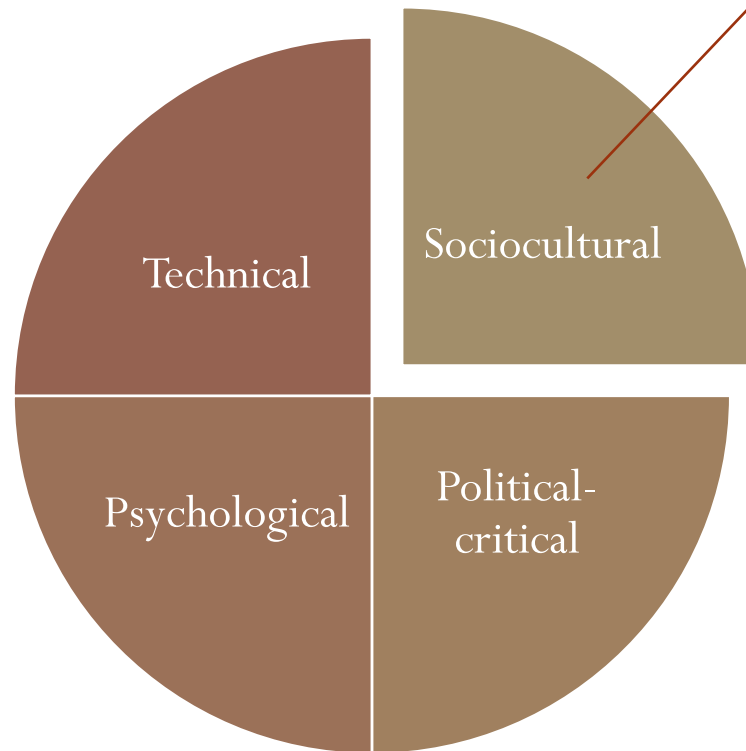- *cognitive process*
- *learning content*

Technical   Political

Psychological

(Benson, 1997)

(Huang and Benson, 2013)

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Dimensions of LA

Political

Technical

Psychological

(Benson, 1997)

Technical

Sociocultural

Psychological

Political-critical
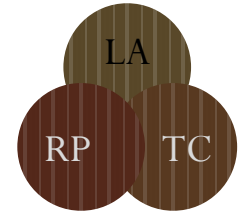
I: Vygotskyan approaches
II: Community of practice

(Oxford, 2003)
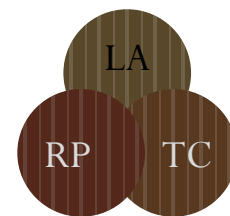
LA: Why

- LA has been widely recognised as a universally legitimate and desirable educational goal, for (Benson, 2011; Little, 1991)

  - language learning

  - learning in general

  - personal development

  - a healthy democratic society

LA: How - Control shift

- *The key factor is "the opportunity for students to make decisions regarding their learning within a collaborative and supportive environment" (Benson, 2001, p. 151).*

- *Autonomous learning demands "the teacher's power be lessened and the learner's power concomitantly increased" (Voller, 1997, p. 106).*

- *The construction of autonomy is achieved through "the deliberate surrendering of certain prerogatives by the teacher accompanied by the concomitant acceptance of responsibility by the learner or learners" (Candy, 1991, p. 9).*

Tips/pitfalls in the control transition

LA

RP TC

Role re-allocation

Appropriate support

Spontaneous actions
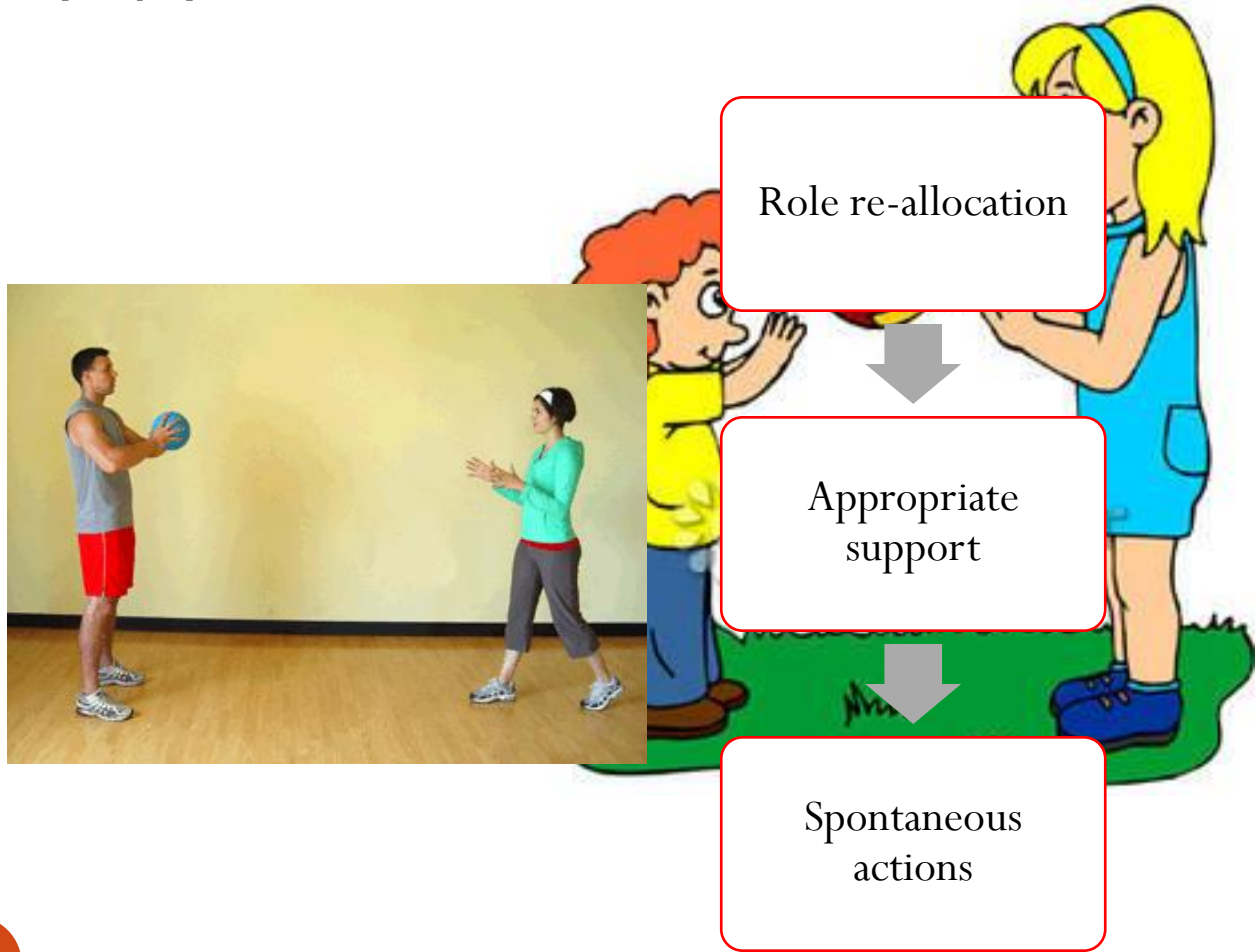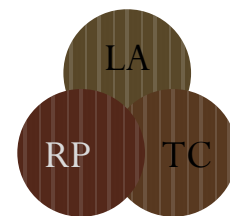
Why TC on LA?

- The effect of any new curriculum initiative depends largely on teachers' understanding of the key notions concerned in the innovations. (Wedell, 2009)

- While LA has been widely researched from various aspects, there remains "a significant gap" in exploring language teachers' understanding of the concept of LA. (Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012a, p. 3)

Connecting TC & RP
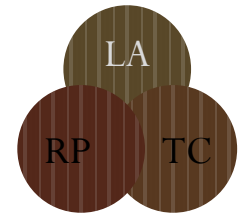
"the unobservable cognitive dimension of teaching — what teachers <u>know</u>, <u>believe</u>, and <u>think</u>" (Borg, 2003, p. 81).

Teacher cognition
(thinking)

Reflection

Reflective practice
(Farrell, 2007)

Teacher practice
(doing)

for action

in action

on action

beliefs

knowledges

thoughts

LA

RP   TC
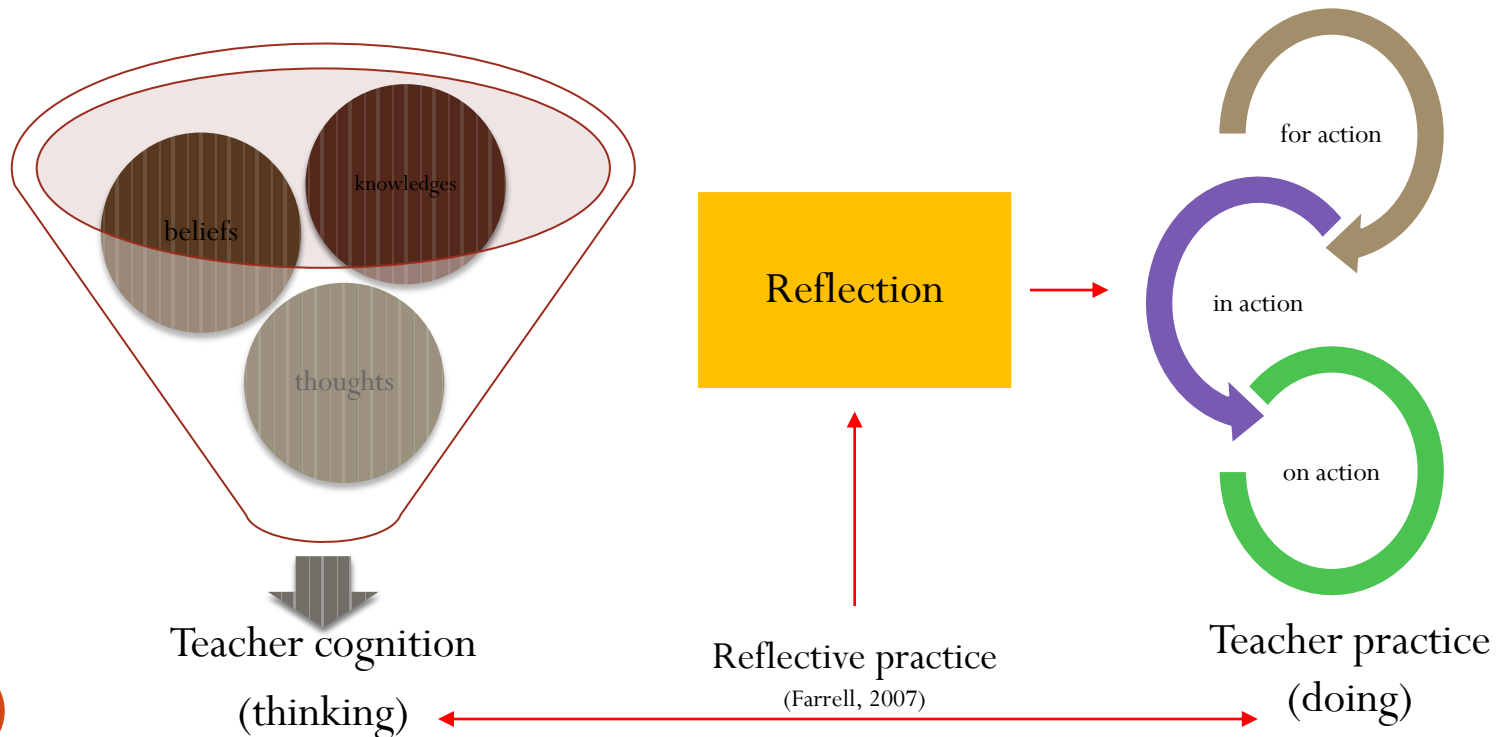
Research questions

1. In what ways was learner/teacher control supported in the context?

2. What reflections did the teachers demonstrate regarding their autonomy-oriented practice?

Research setting, participants & methods

Zia:

A Chinese private secondary school

Zia

Principal

- Interview

Executive Director

- Interviews
- Innovation project documents

T1 – T9

- Observations
- Post-lesson discussions
- Interviews

A school LA innovation project

self-study

group discussion

group presentation

A suggested ACE Model

Autonomous

Collaborative

Efficient

peer feedback

peer evaluation

internalisation

Teacher support for the LA innovation

Teacher support for
the LA innovation

Teacher training workshops (experiential learning & groupwork)

Group-based classroom management (Performance Points)

Team lesson planning (Learning Guide)

Peer observation & evaluation (Evaluation Standards)

Collective discussions & peer feedback giving (Reflective report)
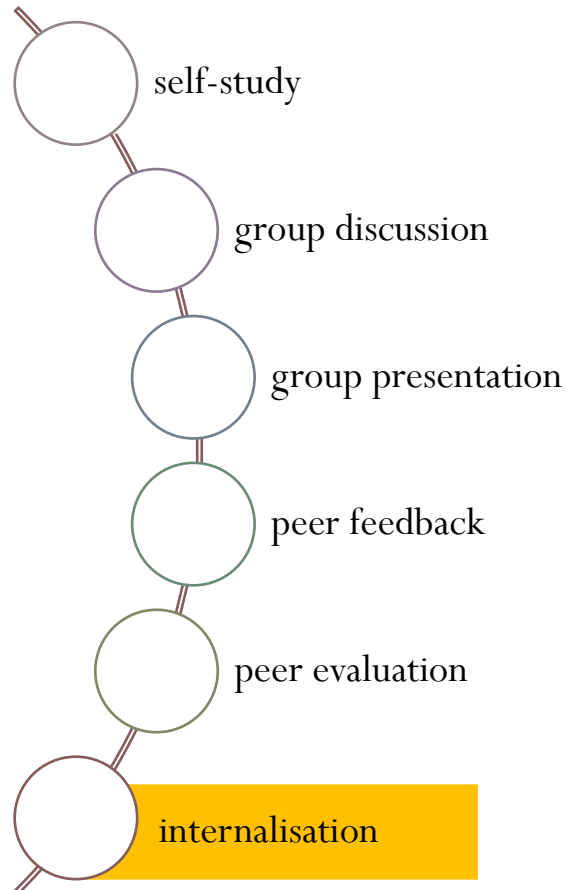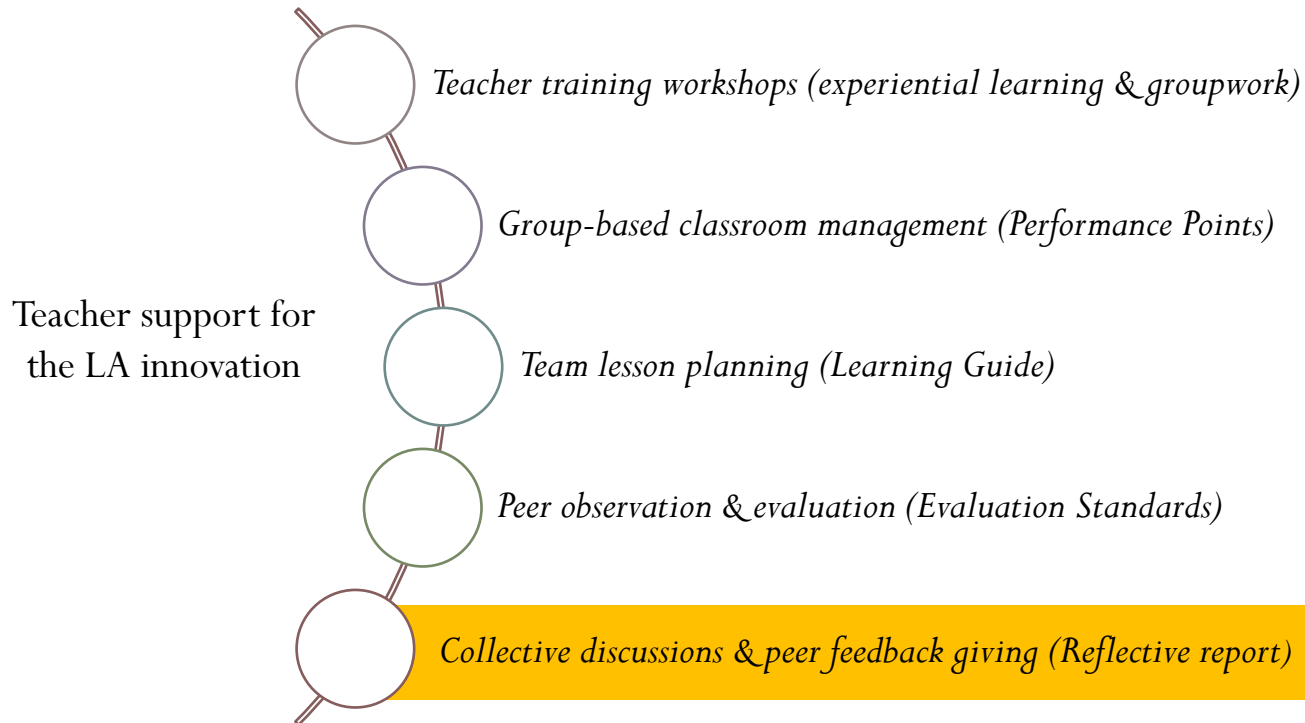
Evidence for learner control

LA-oriented practices
- pre-lesson presentation
- group-based collaborative learning
- student-led peer teaching
- reported individual practices

- Self-study
- Group work
- *Presentation*
- *Peer feedback*
- *Peer evaluation*
- *Peer teaching*
- *Choices and decision making*
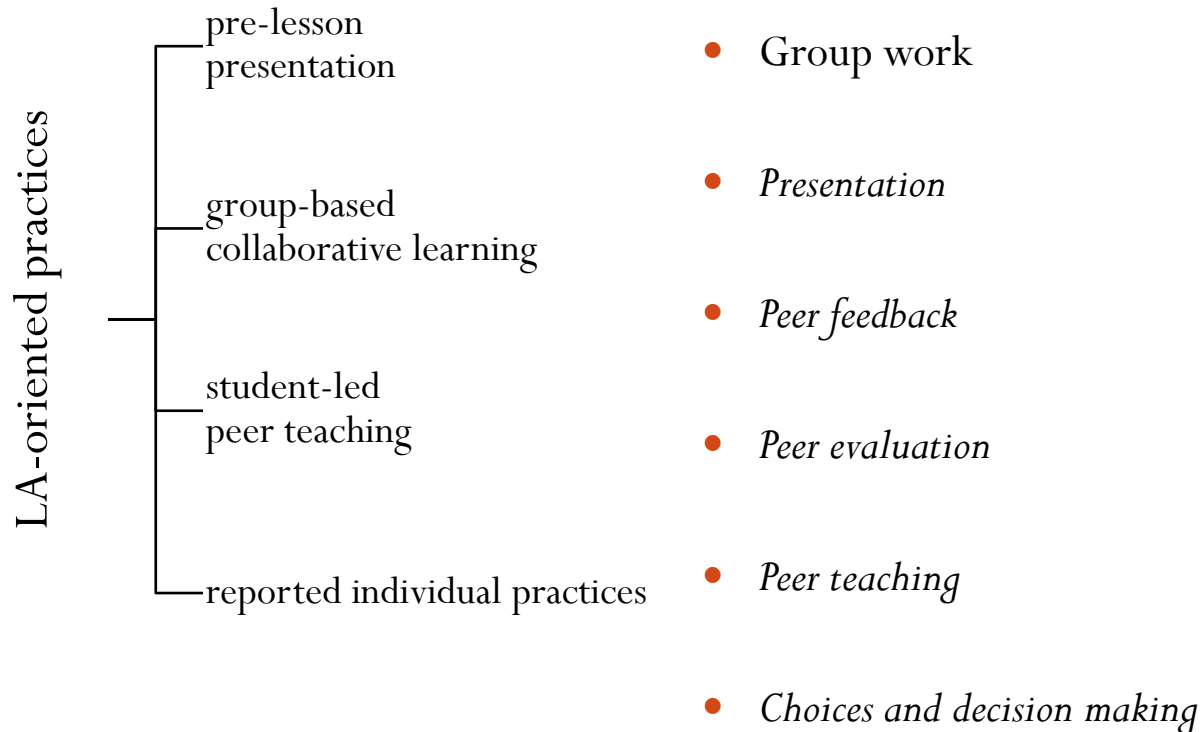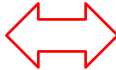
Degree of learner control varied significantly …

Reciting a text from textbook

Performing a textbook-based dialogue

Reciting a poem chosen by students but approved by teacher

Delivering a short speech of students' choice

Pattern 4

Pattern 3

Pattern 2

Pattern 1

Training ss to recite in T-favoured pronunciation & intonation
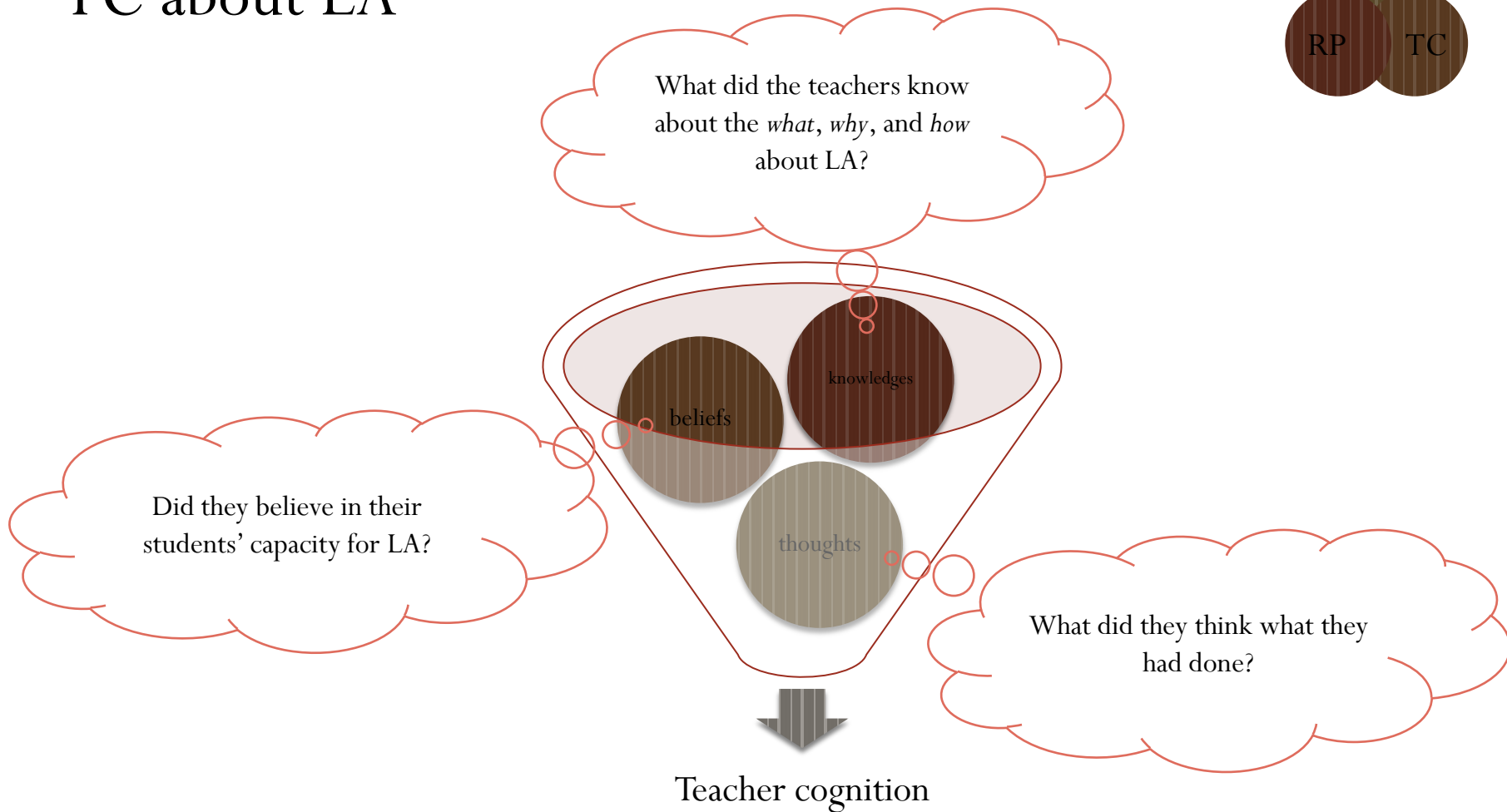
Presenters re-writing textbook dialogues

Ss nominating presenters and negotiating on text selection;

Presenter telling about the text in his own words;

Peer-evaluating the recitation

Team-presenting;

Presenter teaching vocabulary;

Ask-&-answer about the presentation

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TC about LA

LA

RP   TC

What did the teachers know about the *what*, *why*, and *how* about LA?

knowledges

beliefs

thoughts

Did they believe in their students' capacity for LA?

What did they think what they had done?

Teacher cognition

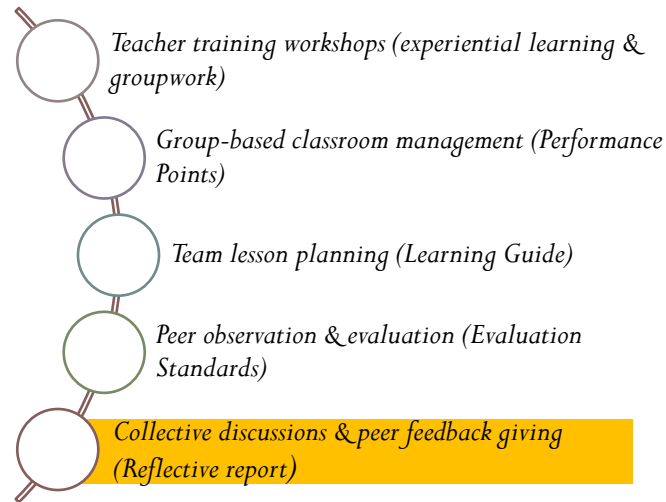# TC about LA

- *Autonomy is an inner strength, which keeps people calm and confident in all situations; it is the capacity to act independently and analyse and solve problems by oneself, with or without external help. (T2.I)*

- *As long as I let students go and provide appropriate support, students do well, and often they perform much beyond much my expectations. (T2.I)*

- It certainly takes time to let students to figure out things by themselves, but it's beneficial in the long run. (T2.L1.PLD)

- "But what on earth is autonomous learning? Having observed these many lessons, it seemed that the so-called autonomous learning was just students studying in silence. *(T1.I)*

- I know I should give *students* more opportunities for them to inquire by themselves, but I'm always concerned that they can't understand fully. *(T5.I)*

- Presentation takes a lot of time and students make mistakes, but there's just too much to cover in a lesson, so often I have to cut that short or out to move on. (T1.L1.PLD)
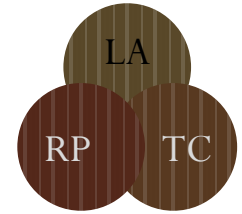
Teacher support & Teacher professional autonomy

- Collaborative inquiry about the LA innovation;

- Flexible adoption of the suggested model;

- Not concerning much about the evaluation results;

- Proactive peer-observation and seeking critical feedback.

Teacher training workshops (experiential learning & groupwork)

Group-based classroom management (Performance Points)

Team lesson planning (Learning Guide)

Peer observation & evaluation (Evaluation Standards)

Collective discussions & peer feedback giving (Reflective report)

- Compulsory participation of all workshops and required number of observations;

- Unnecessary scrutiny of T lesson plan/LG;

- Evaluative element contained in the given model;

- Compulsory all-on-all observations and feedback giving;

- Genuine systematic reflection not much in evidence.

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Revisit LA Guidelines/principles in literature

Nunan (1997)

- awareness
- involvement
- intervention
- creation
- transcendence

Benson (2003)

- be actively involved in students' learning
- provide options and resources
- offer choices and decision-making opportunities
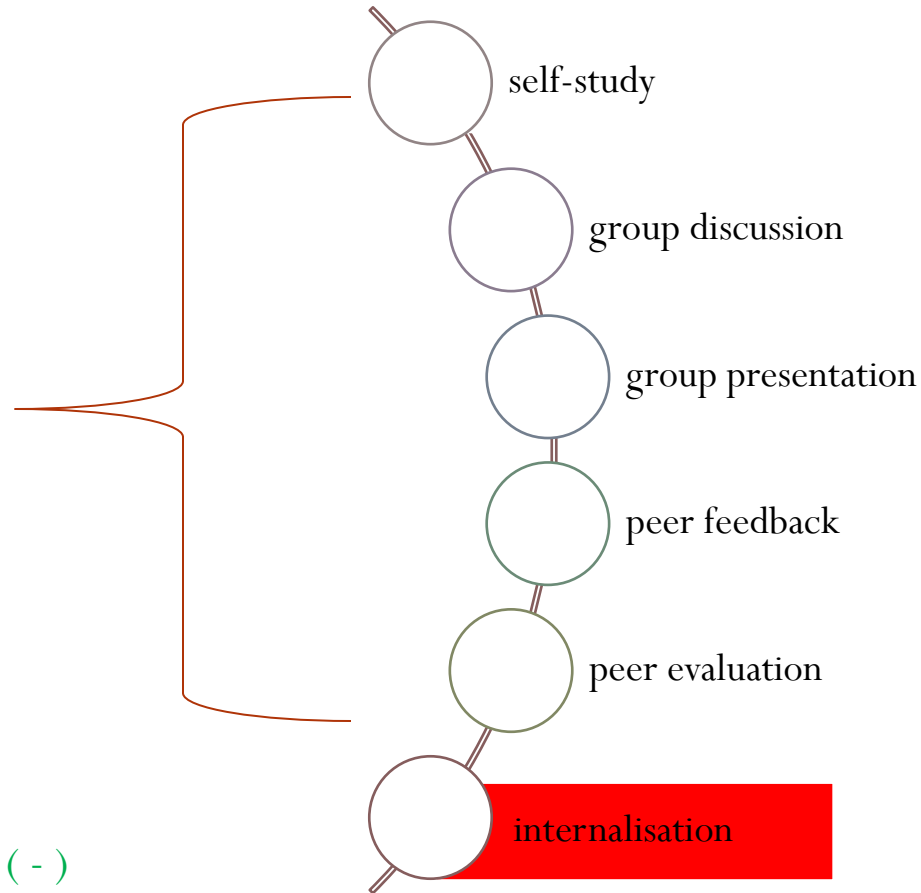- support learners
- encourage reflection

Little (1999, 2001, 2007)

- learner involvement
- learner reflection
- appropriate target language use

Examine TP in reference to LA Guidelines/principles in literature
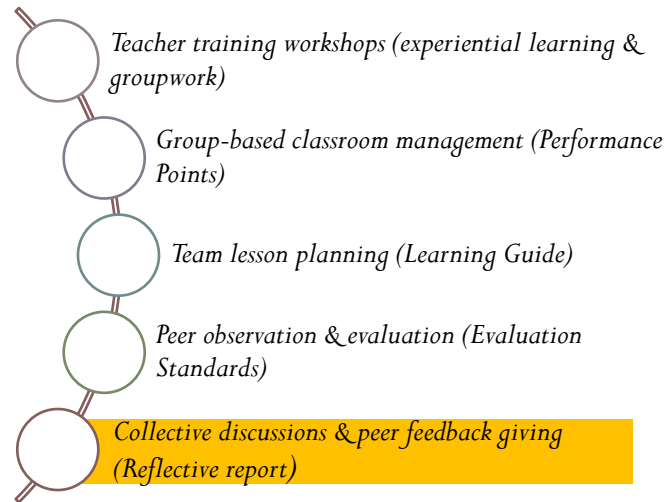
Little (1999, 2001, 2007)

- learner involvement (+)

- learner reflection (-)

- appropriate target language use (-)

self-study

group discussion

group presentation

peer feedback

peer evaluation

internalisation

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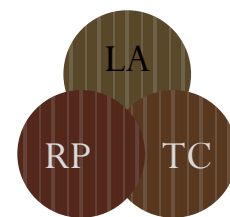
# Rethink about LA Strategies/techniques in literature

Benson (1997)

- authentic interaction with the target language and its users

- collaborative group work and collective decision making

- participation in open-ended learning tasks

- learning about the target language and its social contexts of use

- exploration of societal and personal learning goals

- criticism of learning tasks and materials

- self-production of tasks and materials

- control over the management of learning

- control over the content of learning

- control over resources

- discussion and criticism of target language norms

LA

RP   TC
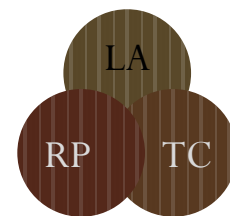
Benson (2003)

- Encouraging student preparation.

- Drawing on out-of-class experience.

- Using 'authentic' materials and 'real' language.

- Independent inquiry.

- Involve students in task design.

- Encouraging student-student interaction.

- Peer teaching.

- Encouraging divergent student outcomes.

- Self- and peer-assessment.

- Encourage reflection.
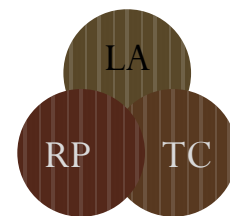
Nunan (2003)

- Step 1: Make instruction goals clear to learners
- Step 2: Allow learners to create their own goals
- Step 3: Encourage learners to use their second language outside the classroom
- Step 4: Raise awareness of learning processes
- Step 5: Help learners identify their own preferred styles and strategies
- Step 6: Encourage learner choice
- Step 7: Allow learners to generate their own tasks
- Step 8: Encourage learners to become teachers
- Step 9: Encourage learners to become researchers
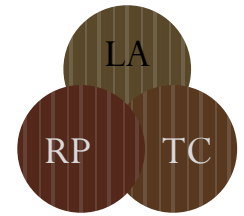
Little (2006)

- use the target language as the preferred medium of classroom communication and require the same of her learners;

- involve her learners in a non-stop quest for good learning activities, which are shared, discussed, analysed and evaluated with the whole class – in the target language, to begin with in very simple terms;

- help her learners to set their own learning targets and choose their own learning activities, subjecting them to discussion, analysis and evaluation – again, in the target language;

- require her learners to identify individual goals but pursue them through collaborative work in small groups;

- require her learners to keep a written record of their learning – plans of lessons and projects, lists of useful vocabulary, whatever texts they themselves produce;

- engage her learners in regular evaluation of their progress as individual learners and as a class – in the target language.

A tentative mapping

Teachers giving control to learners

- e.g., allowing learner choice or divergent student outcomes

Learners preparing to take control

- e.g., raise awareness of learning processes, helping learners identify their own preferred styles and strategies

Learners taking control

- e.g., involving students in task design, learners becoming teachers or researchers

Learners reflecting on control-taking

- e.g., criticism of learning tasks and materials, criticism of target language norms, and reflection

A step further to bring everything together

for action

Teachers giving control to students
- Awareness, knowledge & beliefs

in action

Learners preparing to take control
- Awareness, willingness & metacognitive knowledge of LA

Learners taking control
- Actions and interactions using target/authentic language

on action

Learners reflecting on control-taking
- Reflection

for action

in action

on action

Teachers reflecting on control-giving
- Reflection

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