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## Understanding Hong Kong Business Teachers in Action: The Case of Formulation of Teaching Strategies

*This article examines four categories of teaching strategy used in business classes by a group of 26 secondary school business teachers in Hong Kong, using grounded theoretical coding techniques in the analysis. Each of the teaching categories is illustrated with typical extracts from interviews and is discussed in relation to its effectiveness and the formulation of teaching strategies. The study found that the teachers used varied teaching approaches to develop students' competence, with diverse considerations of influential factors in formulating their teaching strategies. It is recommended that teachers increase their awareness of their teaching approaches in classroom practice, formulate the most effective teaching strategies for their business classes, and develop an open learning space to promote their professional judgment on the formulation of teaching strategies.*

*Cet article étudie quatre catégories de stratégies pédagogiques qu'emploient 26 enseignants au secondaire dans des cours d'affaires à Hong Kong. L'analyse repose sur des techniques de codage à base empirique. Chacune des catégories est expliquée avec des extraits représentatifs d'entrevues et discutée en fonction de son efficacité et la formulation de stratégies pédagogiques. Les résultats indiquent que les enseignants emploient des approches appropriées pour développer les compétences des élèves en tenant compte de divers facteurs d'influence. Nous recommandons que les enseignants deviennent plus conscients de leurs stratégies pédagogiques en classe, qu'ils établissent quelles stratégies sont les plus efficaces pour les cours d'affaires, et qu'ils développent un espace d'apprentissage ouvert pour promouvoir leur évaluation professionnelle de la formulation de stratégies pédagogiques.*

### Introduction

In Hong Kong, economic restructuring and technological advancement are continually revolutionizing the business environment, presenting challenges in upgrading the level of students' competence in business education. The school business curriculum keeps changing and requires students to transfer their learning to the real world. Business teachers should, therefore, focus on their teaching strategies (or pedagogical practices) in order to enable students to develop a high level of competence for effecting this transfer successfully. This study explores the teaching strategies that business teachers use in business lessons for developing students' competence and focuses on understanding how they formulate their teaching strategies.

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### *The Teacher-Centered Approach and its Teaching Strategies*

The traditional classroom has been dominated over the past 50 years by a teacher-centered approach to teaching (Feden, 1994). Lecturing, modeling, instructing, illustrating, demonstrating, and coaching are the main teaching strategies of a teacher-centered approach (Brown, 1998; Castling, 1996). These strategies mainly involve the teacher in making a formal exposition of a desired teaching content. They represent possible ways to teach rules, procedures, and basic skills to younger students or low academic achievers (Muijs & Reynolds, 2001).

The teacher-centered teaching approach is sometimes criticized for its dictatorial style, one-way communication, and suppression of individuality, which may lead to loss of interest (Cheng, 1996; Ho, 1999). However, the teacher-centered approach is still the main teaching approach used in Chinese societies under the influence of Confucian collectivistic culture (Cheung & Lau, 1985; Ho, 1981, 1986; Leung, Salili, & Barber, 1986; Salili, 1996). Good Chinese teachers are expected to teach and develop good behavior in Confucian schooling (Cortazzi & Lixian, 2001; Ho, 2001; Yuan, 1984). Moreover, Ho found that Hong Kong teachers readily used isolation and detention to manage disciplinary problems, and students were still active even in large classes when a teacher-centered teaching approach was used, which calls into question the prevalence of the student-centered teaching approach in Western culture (Cortazzi & Lixian; Ho; Watkins & Biggs, 2001).

### *The Student-Centered Approach and its Teaching Strategies*

A student-centered teaching approach focuses on empowering the learners by providing them with sufficient guidance, practical experience, metacognition, and self-evaluation through small-group interaction (Brown, 1998). Its teaching strategies may include group discussions, debates, simulation games, role-playing, case studies, projects, field trips, cooperative learning, and problem-based learning. These strategies are "process oriented, problem based, contextual, interdisciplinary and metacognitive in nature" (Brown, p. 49). As knowledge is the result of social interaction rather than an individual experience (Cobb & Yackel, 1996; Doolittle & Camp, 1999) and cognitive learning requires a mental self-controlled process (metacognition) for thorough understanding (Wittrock, 1990), these strategies address the limitations of individual work and provide opportunities for intellectual challenge. Students learn how to identify and solve problems rather than simply modeling answers. As a result, they achieve more in-depth learning and a higher level of competence. However, some students find it difficult to share their materials in classrooms, to participate in groups owing to their shyness or uncooperativeness, and to listen and communicate their ideas effectively to others (Cheng, 1996; Muijs & Reynolds, 2001). Student-centered strategies may sometimes lead to low academic achievement if the task is too simple and there is no opportunity to construct and reflect deeper meaning (Brown; McKeachie, 1999). Gagnon and Collay (2001) suggest six basic steps in using student-centered activities: (a) framing the learning into a situation, (b) grouping students, (c) bridging students' prior knowledge with new content, (d) asking challenging questions to foster in-depth learning, (e) letting students present their learning publicly, and (f) receiving individual and collective critical review.

*Using Both Teacher-Centered and Student-Centered Approaches  
in Business Teaching*

Business is a "social system in which what one person is able to do depends fundamentally on what others do ... actions are intimately connected with things and events" (Berryman, 1990, pp. 11-12). Jones and Moore (1995) also acknowledge that "competence is tacit, informally acquired, culturally embedded and contextually located in practice" (pp. 88-90). Such a sociocultural view proposes that developing competence is the product of a collaborative construction of understanding between two individuals based on their social relationships and culture of practice (Billett, 1994). Increasing the comprehensiveness of students' understanding through various experiences is also essential in developing competence (Sandberg, 1994, 2001). Therefore, to maximize the students' business competence, their learning should take place through student-centered strategies in addition to the traditional teacher-centered strategies (Billett, 1996; Brown, 1998; Doolittle & Camp, 1999; Simpson, 2002).

Cheng's (1996) survey of the acceptance of teaching approaches used in Hong Kong A-level business studies found that a strategy of using both the teacher-centered and student-centered teaching approaches, involving lecturing, case studies, group discussions, field trips and visits, and newspaper cuttings, received a higher student acceptance rate. Bonner (1999) also advocates the integrated use of both teaching approaches to achieve the complex learning objectives in accounting education. However, in a case study of mathematics teachers' teaching practices, Herbel-Eisenmann, Lubienski, and Id-Deen (2006) found that textbooks and parental expectations were consistently shaping pedagogical practices. Some studies also suggest that although teachers' practices are generally in line with their beliefs about teaching, they may not be a completely true reflection of them due to practical considerations (Boulton-Lewis, Smith, McCrindle, Burnett, & Campbell, 2001; Campbell, Brownlee, & Smith, 1996; Gao & Watkins, 2001). Studies of teachers' practices must consider factors at the school level such as the school organization, particularly in times of change (Newmann & Associates, 1996). It can be seen that teachers' teaching practices are not simply based on teaching and learning theories, but are influenced by a number of other factors that require detailed examination. Therefore, this study aims to identify qualitatively the teaching strategies that business teachers say they use and to explore how they formulate these teaching strategies.

*Methodology*

I used the following research question to frame the exploration of how and why various teaching strategies are used by secondary school teachers in their business lessons: How do secondary business teachers develop their students' business education competence in their lessons? I applied grounded theoretical coding techniques to develop an independent interpretation of the data by analyzing a phenomenon (Charmaz, 1983; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). According to Charmaz and Strauss and Corbin, grounded theoretical coding techniques employ three major analytic procedures: (a) open, (b) axial, and (c) selective. The first step, open coding, involves developing categories by identifying and grouping data with similar characteristics. The second step, axial coding, involves pooling the categories and making

connections between them. Thus subcategories and their relationship to the parent category can be explored. The third step, selective coding, involves integrating the categories into core categories to understand and explain the study. The data analysis shows how I conducted these three analytical procedures in this study.

### *Sample*

As Patton (1990) stresses, "Any common patterns that emerge from great variation are of particular interest and value in capturing the core experiences and central, shared aspects" (p. 172). Therefore, the basic criterion for selecting the participants in this study was to have the greatest possible variation in experience of the phenomenon. The 26 participants were selected from the Advanced Course of Teacher Education (Commerce), In-service Course of Teacher Training (Technical), and Postgraduate Diploma in Education (Technology) courses in the Hong Kong Institute of Education. The participants taught one to two business subjects in secondary schools, were between 20 and 30 years old, and had two to 10 years of teaching experience. More than half were women.

### *Interviews*

Interviewing is the most common means of conducting a qualitative inquiry. This study used one-on-one interviews conducted in the participants' mother tongue, Cantonese. I used semistructured interview questions to frame the study and provide opportunities for participants to give their views on teaching strategies. The following questions were asked: What business subjects are you teaching? How do you teach these subjects to develop your students' competence? Why do you teach like that? and Is it your usual way of teaching? Why or why not? Do you use any other ways? These questions were designed to encourage the interviewees to reflect on and speak about their experiences. Follow-up questions such as What is meant by ...? Why is it important? and Would you give me some concrete examples? were asked to expand their responses. Each interview was transcribed and sent to the interviewee for proofreading and editing.

### *Data Analysis*

I divided the data analysis into mechanical and conceptual stages. The mechanical stage involved using a computer to increase the efficiency and accuracy of handling large amounts of qualitative data. The conceptual analysis stage included open, axial, and selective codings to refine the categories and develop themes. Figure 1 illustrates the analytical process.

In the initial step of conceptual analysis, open coding, I looked for teaching strategies contained in the data by listening to the tapes and reading the transcriptions line by line. This line-by-line coding enabled me to gain a full view of the data (Charmaz, 1983; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). I grouped any data about teaching strategies in a category file with a provisional name. Similar and varied meanings were sorted, transferred, and coded through studying the data thoroughly. At this stage I paid special attention to gaining an accurate understanding of what the data meant by considering the overall meaning and the context of the data. For example, "illustrating the accounting examples" (R9) and "providing many examples" (R15) have the same meaning as quoting

Transcribed data

Procedure 1	Strategy category files (extracted):						
Open coding	Using worksheet	Questioning	Creating good atmosphere	Attend exhibitions	Giving candies	By listening to the tapes and reading the transcriptions line by line, any data pertaining to teaching strategies are grouped into a category file with a provisional name.	
(Categorizing the data)	Simulation	Inviting guest speakers	Underlining text	Chatting with students	Presentation		
	Praising	Group discussion	Illustrating accounting examples	Using newspaper	Case study		
	Role-play	Using CD-ROMs	Providing many examples	Joking	Copying text		
	Game	Quiz and test	Visits	Competition	Voluntary work		
	Searching Internet	Project work	Checking with dictionary	Doing exercises	Peer assessment		
Procedure 2	Modeling: illustrating, using worksheet, doing exercises, checking with dictionary.	Real-world exposure: inviting guest speakers, attending exhibitions, visits, doing voluntary work.	Direct copying: underlining text, copying text.	Group activities: Group discussion, presentation, debate, game, competition, project.	IT-mediated teaching: Using CD-ROMs, search Internet.	Personal touch: chatting, creating good atmosphere, giving candies, praising, joking.	The strategy categories are pooled and related to each other. Hence subcategories of a category are developed.
Procedure 3	Transmission: Modeling, direct copying of text.	Personal: Chatting, building good relationship.	Interactive: Group discussion and presentation.	Situational: Real-world exposure, case study.		Categories and subcategories are refined and integrated into the core categories that describe and explain the overall picture.	

Remarks. Techniques used throughout the coding include (a) step back regularly to reflect on the situation being analyzed, (b) consider the categories as provisional until support can be found from the actual data, and (c) follow the research procedures to read data realistically so that biases can be broken through (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Figure 1. Procedures for analyzing data.

examples to illustrate certain teaching points and were therefore both categorized in a provisional category file *illustrating*.

In the second step, axial coding, the strategy categories were further coded using a limited set of codes, which is called focused coding by Charmaz (1983). At this point the focus was not on labeling, but on analyzing the categories. I shifted the scripts (data) forward and backward among various categories and

subcategories. Properties of each category were identified to define the category, describe its characteristics, and demonstrate the conditions under which it developed. For example, *illustrating* and *doing exercises* were separately categorized in the open coding, but were subsumed as subcategories of the same category file *modeling*, because the in-depth analysis of axial coding showed that they were both sequential procedures of this. I created the new category name *modeling* to reflect this strategy accurately.

In the final step, selective coding, I integrated categories and subcategories into a few core categories that could help me understand and explain the overall picture (Robson, 2002). This was a process of conceptualizing the teaching strategies and was central to the analysis. All the categories and their subcategories were conceptualized into a few core categories by asking these important questions: What are the teachers' beliefs regarding teaching? What is the nature of the teaching strategies they used? Why do teachers use them? What key role do teachers play in using the teaching strategies? What are the justifications for using the teaching strategies? What outcomes do teachers want to achieve? The final core categories were identified from the answers to these questions. I identified these final core categories as four distinct approaches and chose names that conveyed their meanings. For example, any categories that enabled teachers and students to put theory into practice in authentic situations or contexts were centralized in a core category named *situational*.

In addition, as shown in Figure 1, I carefully used certain techniques to ensure that all the categories were drawn from the data throughout the three coding steps. In the data presentation, I aimed to keep (a) a clear analytic process, (b) a conceptual level with adequate and true description, (c) a specification of relationships among categories, and (d) a specification of variations and broader conditions (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). An expert team audited the analytical records to ensure that the findings were grounded in the experience of the interviewees.

### Results

Four distinct teaching approaches were drawn from the data based on the teaching strategies described by the teachers. They were (a) transmission, (b) personal, (c) interactive, and (d) situational. The features of each approach including teachers' beliefs, the nature and purposes of the specific teaching strategies used, the role of the teacher in using the teaching strategies, and the justifications and outcomes of the strategies used were illustrated by suitable examples (Yu, 2003). However, the illustrative examples in this article are limited to the most typical, which are self-explanatory. The order of these four identified approaches is not intended to suggest that some are more useful than others. Rather, they are presented to illustrate a teaching paradigm shift from teacher-centered to student-centered, which facilitates the discussion below.

#### *Transmission Approach*

The transmission approach covers teachers' use of direct instructions in business lessons. Teachers using this approach believe that teaching and learning is a process of knowledge transmission. The faster the teaching pace, the more

knowledge they can transfer to the students. Most teachers express the opinion that direct teaching is efficient in completing the teaching syllabus.

R12. teachers are required to teach knowledge whereas the students are there to learn.

R14. Teaching in a direct way is very fast.... You can quickly complete the syllabus.

Teachers use modeling, questioning, direct copying of texts, and doing past examination papers as major strategies. Modeling is a common strategy used in accounting lessons due to the mechanical nature of the subject. In modeling, teachers illustrate the teaching content, ask questions, and have students reinforce their learning by doing exercises.

R24. Accounting is rather standardized. There is only one way to answer a question.... Therefore teaching accounting is rather direct.

R9. Illustrating by putting accounting examples on the chalkboard and then asking some questions ... Assigning exercises straight after teaching ... requires more practice.

For teachers, questioning is crucial in direct teaching as it not only plays a primary role in checking the progress of learning but also stimulates students to think more deeply.

R17. ask questions frequently ... check what stage they have reached and how far they can follow.

R8. ask questions in between different teaching points ... aim at stimulating their thinking. They may be true and false questions followed by a "why" type of question.

Moreover, teachers underlined and wrote down key points for students and asked them to copy vocabulary to make sure that they understood the textbook content. Teachers believed that underlining text was part of their teaching duties.

R14. I ask them to open their textbook ... underline the key points ... sometimes ask them to write down extra information in the textbook ... because this will help them to remember.

R19 ... ask them to copy vocabulary.

R11. I think it's my responsibility to tell them the main points.

Teachers consolidate students' learning by setting past examination papers when they finish teaching a topic. Some clearly stated that accommodating the examination-oriented culture was their major reason for using direct teaching strategies even though they knew these strategies stifled students' learning.

R12. I ask students to do relevant past examination questions after teaching a topic, and let them know the required standard. I have to make sure that they can pass the examination with good results because of the pressure from the school authority.

R14. Really, it's for the examinations. It's definitely examination-oriented.... I've already adapted to this system, this mentality.

R7. We spend a lot of time doing past examination papers. I must emphasize that we must do this in this school ... I don't think it is a good teaching method.... Knowledge is not for memorizing but for applying in various situations.

### *Personal Approach*

In the personal approach, teachers are concerned with students' acquisition of knowledge and their joy of learning in a personal way. Teachers are well aware of their essential role in students' learning and are eager to build a good relationship with them and to create a harmonious learning atmosphere.

R25. I hope he is happy in the process of learning ... hoping that their interest in business subjects can also be enhanced.

R12. Teaching effectiveness depends on how good the relationship is between you and the students and the ways in which you help them.

R18. Approaching them is very helpful in teaching and learning.

R4. Allowing students to express themselves confidently and to dare to learn more.

Teachers are eager to foster students' confidence by using warm and encouraging actions. Using this approach they take students as the starting point because they believe that good teaching depends on a good understanding of the students. Teachers spend extra time, effort, and even money (buying gifts) to gain a closer relationship with their students and encourage them to ask questions about the areas they do not understand. They highly respect students as individual learners who need extra care.

R23. I will meet students regularly ... in groups of two or three.... get to know more about them ... ask their feelings about my lessons ... this might give me suggestions for improving my teaching.

R3. It's important to maintain a good teacher-student relationship in and out of the classroom.

R4. praise them whenever I find they have done well. I'm actually building up their confidence.

R12. I give my students a bookmark with my written encouragement ... they became emboldened after reading my words.

R18. encourage them to answer questions by giving them candy.

R18. always telling jokes or talking about some funny, lively things. Let them discover something through laughter.

Teachers aim to arouse students' learning interest despite the fact that some of these strategies are time-consuming.

R4. Arousing their interest in learning

R12. It's very effective even if you think this is a waste of time.

### *Interactive Approach*

The interactive approach focuses on students' social and intellectual interactions in the process of teaching and learning. Teachers strongly believe that interactive strategies enable students to build confidence, develop an interest in learning, and gain benefits from collaborative work and peer support in constructing knowledge.

R20. It's very limited if they always depend on teachers.

R9. I hope they can build up their confidence through interaction.

R7. They are in the same age group, which makes it easier for them to communicate and recognize what they don't understand

R16. Students comment about each other, listen to others' comments, and learn from different groups. At a subconscious level, they get to know their limitations and the level they have achieved.



Teachers use group discussion and presentation as a key strategy in this approach. Students discuss questions in groups, and the groups then present their findings to the whole class. Students are encouraged to learn from each other. Besides group discussions and presentations, teachers use games and competitions to promote interaction and active learning.

R1. I always use group discussion ... assigning three questions to each group and asking each group to present their findings on any one of the questions after 5 or 10 minutes' discussion.

R2. I would arrange more games and competitions if it were possible.... They like activities instead of passive learning.

R15. always use competition and play with students, such as guessing the meaning of words ... They are willing to answer as they can score points.

However, there are some problems in classroom management, especially with a large class size. Together with insufficient interpersonal skills of students and time constraints, this accounts for much of the teachers' reluctance to use the interactive strategies.

R24. They get the chance to talk and to become inattentive.

R8. It's difficult to maintain order in group discussion because there are 40 students in a class.

R14. they feel shy and not willing to do.

Some teachers provide close guidance and supervision to students although this may not completely solve the problems, but it does create a better learning environment for the groups.

R20. I form cooperative groups by putting competent and less competent students together. In a team, the more competent students can help the less competent ones.

R9. ask them to sit in a circle the first time ... stand up in front of the class. After they adapt to the presentation mode ... add their own supplemental comments and challenge each other.

Although it is sometimes difficult to use interactive strategies in business lessons, the students' positive responses encourage teachers to use them more often.

R3. In the process, what they have learned is not just the words but also the in-depth meaning. They participate, analyze, and verbalize the findings by themselves instead of being told them by someone.

R10. Actually, the outcome is very effective. They've already learned. I know they really understand because it's the result of their discussion.

R21. The group discussion leaves a strong impression, especially those parts that are taught by their peers.

#### *Situational Approach*

The fourth teaching approach is the situational approach: teachers link their teaching closely to real life because they believe that successful teaching depends on putting theory into practice. This not only fosters better understanding of business knowledge, but also motivates the students and increases their interest in learning. Maintaining a high-level, long-term interest in studying business subjects is the focal point of using this approach.

R3. There is no model answer in business subjects.... Decisions may change according to the time, location, and human factors. I want them to experience it ... to arouse their interest in learning.

R12. You have a better understanding if you gain practical experience ... you have new ideas or are more reflective.

R26. Students are only motivated when things are relevant to and helpful in their daily life.

Generally, teachers link theory to the real world by quoting real-life examples, talking about current issues, and referring to real situations.

R9. Use some real-life examples to ask them why the company went bankrupt; let them think about it.

R12. I discuss the hot business issues when teaching about the issuing of shares.

R7. Talk about interesting things with them, something they can easily catch onto. For example, Playstation; both the students and I like it very much. I ask them why the company does not issue a final version but issues one version then another ... What benefits does it bring to the company?

Apart from the occasional use of everyday examples, teachers mainly use case studies, newspaper articles, simulations and role play, projects, peer assessments, real-world exposure, and IT-mediated teaching as strategies in the situational approach.

R8. give them cases to study.

R9. read newspapers with them once a week.

R12. It is a simulated issue and they need to think imaginatively about how they would act.

R6. in a role play, to strengthen their understanding.

R12. Students can learn how to apply their knowledge in a situation by doing project work.

R1. I took them to an environmental engineering exhibition.... let them have more exposure.

R3. I took them to visit a toy factory.

R11. invite a friend to teach the use of a Letter of Credit in my class.

R21. I make use of the Internet and educational software packages.... Let them learn the software on their own.

In the situational approach, teachers find that students can perform much better than expected when they offer them more such opportunities.

R15. The situation is very encouraging but I always underestimate their competence.... They are quite outstanding once I set them off.

R25. They are eager to participate in the classroom activities.

R4. This can develop their creativity.

The four identified approaches to teaching used by the teachers to develop the business students' competence are summarized in Table 1.

According to the justifications that the teachers in this study gave for using their teaching strategies (see Table 1), their formulations of teaching strategies were influenced by a number of factors in the various approaches. Evidence of their formulations of teaching strategies can be found in the extracted scripts in Table 2.

Table 1  
Summary of Varied Approaches Used by Business Teachers

<i>Approach</i>	<i>Transmission</i>	<i>Personal</i>	<i>Interactive</i>	<i>Situational</i>
Teachers' teaching belief	Teaching is a knowledge transmission	Teaching is facilitating students' acquisition of knowledge	Teaching is enabling students to construct knowledge through social and intellectual interactions	Teaching is putting knowledge (theory) into practice
Teaching strategies the teachers used	Modeling, questioning, direct copying of texts, and doing past examination papers	Chatting with students, building good teacher-student relationship, praising, giving rewards, and joking	Group discussions and presentations, games, competitions, and debates	Case studies, newspaper articles, simulation and role-play, project work, real-world exposure, and IT-mediated teaching
Teacher's role in using the teaching strategies	To deliver the content and instruct students	To understand students and build a good relationship with them	To engage and guide students in group activities	To facilitate students' acquisition and application of knowledge
Justifications of using the teaching strategies	Taking responsibility for knowledge transmission, completing the syllabus, subject nature of accounting, stimulating students' thinking, achieving good examination results, having pressure from school, accommodating examination-oriented culture, following school norms	Increasing students' happiness and learning interest, enhancing students' learning ability	Gaining peer support, strengthening students' confidence, enhancing students' independent learning	Increasing students' adaptability, motivating students' interest in learning, helping students to gain a better understanding
Students' learning outcomes	Replicated subject knowledge in examinations	Aroused learning interest	Very effective and left strong impression	Very encouraging and developed students' creativity

### *Discussion*

#### *Teaching Strategies of the Four Identified Approaches*

The four identified approaches to teaching focus on varied ways of teaching and learning. The transmission approach focuses on using direct teaching strategies. Researchers also refer to it as direct instruction, in which the teacher is actively engaged in bringing the desired teaching content directly to the whole class. Teachers aim to complete the topics listed in the teaching and examination syllabi as efficiently and effectively as possible because they believe that transfer of knowledge is their responsibility. Therefore, committing to transfer knowledge effectively and efficiently becomes their ultimate goal in teaching. Hence they are eager to transmit knowledge to their students by using modeling, questioning, direct copying of texts, and doing past examination papers to increase students' understanding so that they can continue the teaching quickly. Moreover, teachers believe that obtaining good examination results is not only an indicator of the students' competence, but also of the effectiveness of their knowledge transmission, that is, their teaching effectiveness. With the expectations of, and pressure exerted by, the school, students, and an examination-oriented culture, achieving good examination results became the teachers' measure of success when developing students' competence

**Table 2**  
**Evidences of Teachers' Formulation of Teaching Strategies**

<i>Approach</i>	<i>Justifications for using the teaching strategies</i>	<i>Extracted scripts</i>
Transmission	Taking responsibility for knowledge transmission, completing the syllabus, subject nature of accounting, stimulating students' thinking, achieving good examination results, having pressure from school, accommodating examination-oriented culture, following school norms.	R11. help them to remember ... it's my responsibility. R14. can quickly complete the syllabus. R24. accounting is rather standardized. R8. stimulating their (students') thinking. R12. make sure they (students) can pass the examination with good results. R12. pressure from the school authority. R14. definitely examination oriented ... adapted to this system, this mentality. R7. we must do this (doing past exam papers) in this school.
Personal	Increasing students' happiness and learning interest, empowering students' learning ability.	R25. He is happy ... their interest in business subjects ... be enhanced. R4. Allowing students ... daring to learn more.
Interactive	Gaining peer support, strengthening students' confidence, enhancing students' independent learning.	R20. very limited if they (students) always depend on teachers. R7. easier for them to communicate and recognize what they don't understand. R9. build up their confidence. R16. they (students) get to know their limitations and the level they have achieved.
Situational	Increasing students' adaptability, motivating students' learning interest, helping students to get a better understanding.	R3. there is no model answer ... I want them to experience it ... to arouse their interest R26. only motivated when things are relevant and helpful to their (students') life. R12. have a better understanding if you gained practical experience.

in this transmission approach. Therefore, teachers spend much time aiming for their students to gain good academic results by doing past examination papers with them, even though they know that this may stifle their learning in other respects.

According to Muijs and Reynolds (2001), direct instruction is the best way to teach rules, procedures, and basic skills to younger students and is particularly effective with students who are low academic achievers. In addition, direct instruction allows teachers to monitor the whole class, vary activities, and react quickly to students' responses, because students mainly work at the same pace and do the same activities (Brophy & Good, 1986). With no more than the bare essentials of a blackboard, desks, and chairs in most Hong Kong classrooms, as well as having 35-45 students in a small classroom (approximately 650 sq. ft.), teachers have little alternative but to adopt didactic methods (O'Donoghue & Dimmock, 1998). However, direct instruction is not the most effective method when the content is more complex or open-ended (Joyce & Weil, 1996). Bonner (1999) claims that the complicated learning objectives of accounting cannot be achieved by direct teaching methods; on the contrary, such a direct transmission approach results in task-based performance and often in surface knowledge. This transmission approach is inevitably a teacher-

centered teaching approach, and teachers should weigh its benefits against its costs.

In the personal approach, teachers show concern for students' acquisition of knowledge by providing personal and professional support in and outside the business classes. The teaching strategies used emphasize students' interaction with each other and/or personal contact with teachers. Although the teachers in this study did not use many of these methods and simply achieved a closer personal relationship with students, the students were happier, and this was beneficial in increasing their learning. The teachers were able to interact with the students, build good relationships with them, be aware of their personal feelings, check their learning progress, and increase their interest and willingness to learn. The interaction between teachers and students is a prerequisite for the exchange of students' views with teachers, which is certainly beneficial for students' learning. It is a student-oriented approach that seems to be warmer than the other three approaches. Teachers who used the strategies in this approach were willing to spend extra time, effort, and even money (buying gifts for students) to help their students. These teachers play a special role, being like parents and friends to students, which is a sign of a good teacher in Chinese culture (Cortazzi & Lixian, 2001).

The interactive approach incorporates teaching strategies that can provide opportunities for students to exchange and challenge ideas among themselves. The teachers who used this approach encouraged students to construct knowledge through social interactions. For example, group discussions and presentations allow students to present their own views, see each other's point of view, solve problems in groups, and develop their social skills. Teachers use simple games and competitions to keep students actively participating in the lesson and address teaching points. Debates are used to deal with more demanding and challenging learning tasks. All these strategies are more likely to be effective for the teaching of higher-level cognitive tasks; they are fun and allow students to construct knowledge through a variety of interactions. Knowledge is collectively shared among learners through actively "searching for truth, in the process of their dialogic interaction" (Cobb & Yackel, 1996, p. 37). This approach is also student-oriented.

However, students often find it difficult to share time and materials, to listen and communicate their ideas to others effectively, and to participate in groups owing to shyness or uncooperativeness (Cheng, 1996; Muijs & Reynolds, 2001). The teachers mentioned similar problems in this study, but solved them by offering guidance and using cooperative groups. It is true that effective group work requires careful guidance and supervision (Johnson & Johnson, 2000; Muijs & Reynolds; Slavin, 1993). It seems that the teachers were able to tackle the facilitating problems effectively.

The teaching strategies used in the situational approach go far beyond the classroom context and incorporate social and cultural influences on learning. Teachers stress the importance of learning in context, which is relation-oriented. In fact case studies have been widely used in business courses for many years, because no matter whether the cases are taken from real practice or are artificially constructed, they are often actual descriptions of problems in the field. Reading newspapers can stimulate students to think about the lesson

content in a real context. Simulations and role-plays attempt to model real-life situations. Students who take part in project work with peer assessment often have to solve real problems. Real-world exposure involves experiential learning that includes a broad spectrum of work in the business and industry sectors. IT-mediated teaching helps students to gain experience with the tools of the real work environment. Whatever the situation or the context, it typically involves using one of several possible alternative strategies or actions to solve the problem. Students need to work together, using both the teaching content and additional resources, which means applying their knowledge in new qualitative ways.

However, it was often difficult to find an appropriate situation to present a problem or conflict that fitted the teaching objectives and content. The teachers also mentioned that limited time, facilities, and personnel restricted the use of these activities. Nonetheless, they are potentially useful tools for effective teaching and learning as long as teachers make the effort to overcome the difficulties. On the other hand, such strategies may sometimes lead to low academic achievement if the task is too simple and there is no opportunity to construct and reflect on deeper meaning (Brown, 1998; McKeachie, 1999). This depends on whether teachers are able to lead students to assimilate the new information based on their prior knowledge and to engage in higher-order thinking instead of rote learning of superficial information (Brown). Teachers should, therefore, present the situation clearly to students, taking into consideration their past experience. They should also encourage students to ask questions about the problem, develop hypotheses about the causes of the problem, gather evidence to support their arguments, draw conclusions, and make recommendations for solving the problem (McKeachie). Teachers should carefully handle all the briefing, conducting, and debriefing steps (Gagnon & Collay, 2001). Moreover, teachers should not provide the possible strategies or solutions, but should facilitate the process of information-gathering through written and oral expression (Brown).

The four identified approaches reflect an integrated use of both the teacher-centered and student-centered approaches by the business teachers. The teachers who used the transmission approach focused on knowledge transfer and students' replication of knowledge. The teachers who used the remaining three approaches, personal, interactive, and situational, paid more attention to strengthening students' learning ability and assumed that knowledge was collectively constructed, experienced, and shared among others rather than solely transmitted by teachers. These three approaches take students as the departure point of teaching. As a result, the teaching strategies used by the business teachers in this study were multifaceted and supported their students in developing competence.

#### *Formulation of Teaching Strategies*

The formulation of teaching strategies is influenced by a number of factors, according to the justifications given by the teachers in this study. Those who used the transmission approach were influenced by their transmission role, teaching efficiency, the subject content (accounting), stimulation, academic achievement, the examination-oriented culture, and school pressure and norms in making their choices. The study confirms that these teachers accept

transmission of knowledge as a norm of teaching and treat it as a traditional practice without questioning it because they were taught in the same way. One teacher said, "I'm used to this examination-oriented system as I was brought up here in Hong Kong. If I put an end to this system, I'm actually questioning my own education. That would be ridiculous." This statement reflects that transmission is not only a norm in classroom teaching, but that it also forms a static culture that is widely accepted by some teachers in Hong Kong, even though they are aware of its drawbacks. In addition, achieving good examination results is critical in Chinese culture. Teachers who use the transmission approach would undoubtedly shoulder any examination-related responsibilities such as completing the teaching syllabus efficiently and meeting school norms on doing past examination papers and do all they could to succeed in them. They felt they could not ignore this social norm in formulating their teaching strategies.

However, students may pass the examination from knowledge, but may not be able to demonstrate competence without having action and experience (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 1994). Enriching practical experience is the basis for developing competence; indeed, Dall'Alba and Sandberg (1996) consider that the term *learning* should be redefined to include practice. Therefore, teachers who chose to adopt the remaining three approaches would put students' needs regarding the acquisition of knowledge before any other factors when choosing their teaching strategies. These include students' happiness, interest and motivation, peer support, and independent learning, as well as thorough understanding, adaptability, and knowledge transfer to authentic business environments. What happens in the classroom depends on the direct involvement of teacher and students (Palmer, 1998); the students' needs should be given high priority in the formulation of teaching strategies. The teachers did mention this as an essential factor in formulating teaching strategies in the remaining three approaches. This kind of genuine respect between teachers and students is beneficial to their mutual understanding throughout the teaching and learning process. More important, the interaction and situational approaches serve to inject a sense of reality and practicality into business studies. Students are given opportunities to work together and apply the knowledge and skills acquired in business subjects to respond to simulated business scenarios or real business contexts. These two approaches acknowledge the embedding of competence in both social relationships and contexts in which they can enrich practice and enhance learning, which should be encouraged in formulating teaching strategies in business classes.

The findings show that the business teachers' formulation of teaching strategies is influenced by two main factors: the weight of tradition and students' needs regarding the acquisition of knowledge. These factors do not accord with the findings on curriculum materials (textbooks) and parents' expectations identified by Herbel-Eisenmann et al. (2006). However, the findings deepen our understanding of how teachers formulate their teaching strategies in varied approaches and how their teaching practices confront the practical limitations to achieving the ideal.

### Conclusion and Recommendations

In this study, the four identified teaching approaches—transmission, personal, interactive, and situational—showed that teachers focus on various aspects in formulating their teaching strategies in business lessons. The strategies of modeling, questioning, doing past examination papers, and direct copying of text used by teachers in the transmission approach focus on the acquisition of performance-based competence, which is teacher-centered. The personal approach fosters interaction between teacher and students to promote students' knowledge-seeking. The group discussions, presentations, games, competitions, and debates in the interactive approach are strategies to create interactions among students for constructing knowledge. They create a social environment for students to develop professional attributes and critical thinking ability that will eventually contribute to their acquiring generic and higher-order forms of understanding. The situational approach involves case studies, reading newspapers, simulations, role-play, projects, peer assessments, real-world exposure, and IT-mediated teaching that provide a learning context for students to transform knowledge, explore business and technology further, and develop transferable knowledge and skills. In turn, students can achieve a more comprehensive understanding. In this study, all the identified teaching approaches were mutually supported for business teaching. However, the business teachers were driven by two main influential factors in their use of teaching strategies. Those who used the transmission approach were influenced by the traditional expectations of knowledge-transmission in business teaching, although they were aware of the limitations of the approach in business pedagogy. Those who used the remaining three teaching approaches tended to use students' needs as their departure point for strategy formulation.

As Dall'alba and Sandberg (1996) comment, no single strategy can develop something as complex as students' competence. The teaching strategies identified in this study are equally important in developing students' competence, but they are used in a specific teaching context by the business teachers. I suggest that teachers need to increase their awareness of the approaches they use in classroom practice and formulate the most effective teaching strategies while considering all the possible influential factors in the teaching context. This requires that teachers' autonomy of professional judgment about methods of competence development be increased through the mutual understanding and support of other stakeholders in the field.

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#### Note

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