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## TEACHER COGNITION AND LANGUAGE POLICY: SPEECH THREAD

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### **Abstract:**

This paper introduces the notion of Speech Thread in English language learning. English language learning and teaching is now a vortex of ever-evolving *ad hoc* principles without any fundamental policy decisions. TESOL international association white paper on Principle Based Approach for English Language Teaching Policies and Practices identified a set of standards for quality English language teaching. The white paper recognizes the contextual constraints in developing language policies and ELT programmes. This paper takes into account the consequence of all those factors that often cause a gap between pedagogic policy and classroom practice. This paper reviews the notion of teacher cognition i.e. the cognitive construct of a teacher ; what teachers think, know, and believe and the relationships of these cognitive constructs to what teachers do in the language teaching classroom. Instead of working on *ad hoc* principles of pedagogic significance. The language policy makers should work on Speech Thread.

**Keywords:** speech thread, English, language, pedagogy etc

I use the term *Speech Thread* here to refer to cognitive shaping of a language classroom practices in the province of student-teacher interactional strategies and instructional pathways under the influence of behavioral and cognitive fusion. The term *teacher cognition* here refers to the popular definition by Simon Borg, ‘the unobservable cognitive dimension of teaching – what teachers know, believe, and think’.

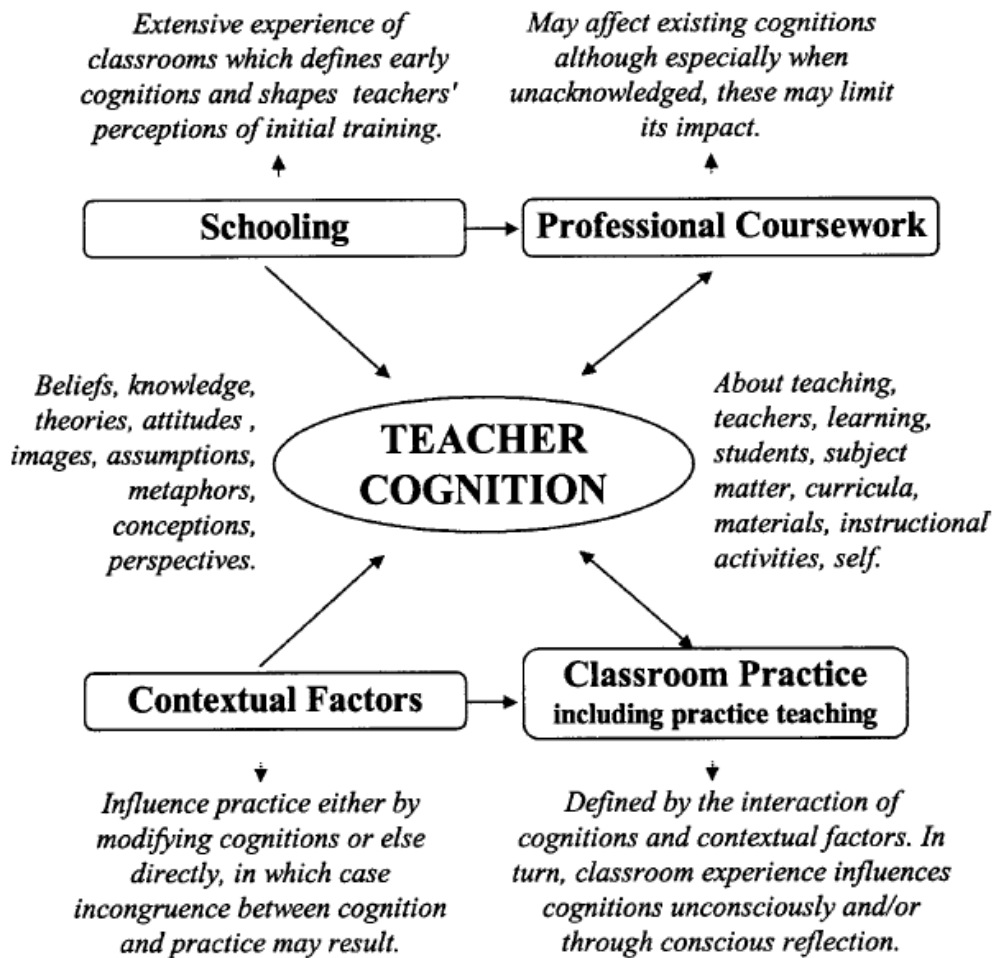
Since the introduction of *Scaffolding Instruction* by Jerome Bruner and Vygotsky’s concept of the zone of proximal development (ZPD), the mainstream educational research in the last 25 years has recognized the impact of teacher cognition on teachers’ professional lives, and this has generated a substantial body of research. There has been a new wave of reviews undertaken over this subject matter (Calderhead 1996; Carter 1990; Clark & Peterson 1986; Fenstermacher 1994; Richardson 1996; Verloop, Van Driel, & Meijer 2001)<sup>1</sup> and the assumptions on which it is based are now largely uncontested: teachers are active, thinking decision-makers who make instructional choices by drawing on complex, practically-oriented, personalized, and context-sensitive networks of knowledge, thoughts, and beliefs.

Simon Borg took four key questions in explaining teacher cognition research practice:

- \_ what do teachers have cognitions about?
- \_ how do these cognitions develop?
- \_ how do they interact with teacher learning?
- \_ how do they interact with classroom practice?

Figure 1 (Borg 1997) summarises the answers to these questions.

### Teacher cognition in language teaching



**Figure 1** Teacher cognition, schooling, professional education, and classroom practice (Borg 1997)

Borg takes into consideration all the variables of cognition shaping and concludes that teachers have a complex network of cognitions about all aspects of their work. Their various psychological constructs form what I call here as teacher cognition. The diagram also outlines relationships suggested by mainstream educational research among teacher cognition, teacher

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learning (both through schooling and professional education), and classroom practice. In brief, there is ample evidence that teachers' experiences as learners can inform cognitions about teaching and learning which continue to exert an influence on teachers throughout their career (e.g., Holt Reynolds 1992); there is also evidence to suggest that although professional preparation does shape trainees' cognitions, programmes which ignore trainee teachers' prior beliefs may be less effective at influencing these (e.g., Kettle & Sellars 1996; Weinstein 1990); and research has also shown that teacher cognitions and practices are mutually informing, with contextual factors playing an important role in determining the extent to which teachers are able to implement instruction congruent with their cognitions (e.g., Beach 1994; Tabachnick & Zeichner 1986).

Figure 1 represents a schematic conceptualization of teaching within which teacher cognition plays a pivotal role in teachers' lives. It is within this framework, grounded in an analysis of mainstream educational research, that language teacher cognition must be made a part of ELT policies. Three domains are important with reference to teacher cognition in curricular shape and delivery mechanism: (1) cognition and prior language learning experience, (2) cognition and teacher education, and (3) cognition and classroom practice. Recently there have been some grammars based on cognitive aspects of language learning e.g. *what is Linguistics? An Echo of Its Branches* and *Cognitive Grammar for Teachers*. While the study of teacher cognition has established itself on the research agenda in the field of language teaching and provided valuable insight into the mental lives of language teachers, a clear sense of unity is lacking in the work and there are several major issues in language teaching which have yet to be explored from the perspective of teacher cognition. Policymakers should always take into account diverse contexts of teacher cognition before developing locally appropriate language policies and practices.

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