Communication is key: an examination of the development of communication key skills in vocational education in China

Zhong Hua, Ann Harris
University of Huddersfield, United Kingdom

Abstract

Crucial to learning from the past and anticipating the future is how we communicate. What stories that we have been told? What lessons have we learned and shared? In vocational education, communication has sometimes seemed marginalised, ostensibly labelled a 'key' or 'core' skill, it has formed part of a set of skills to be learned alongside or integrated within a wider skill set. In the last ten years, China has emerged on the world stage as a dynamic economy and a developing society, and with that the recognition that what China says and does will impact on all our global futures. Education and especially vocational education has been at the forefront of China's recent development. The research on which this paper is based explores the introduction of key skills communication into Chinese vocational education, an initiative established in 1999 when the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party and the National State Council identified the need for 'key skills', and reinforced this need by subsequent research in China suggesting that communication is an important component of vocational education (Ye and Li, 2007) and that the ability to communicate effectively is instrumental to success and career development (Tong and Zhong, 2008). Based on case studies within vocational colleges, the paper investigates what communication key skills mean in a Chinese context and asks what lessons can be learned from the past for the future while questioning the transferability of notions of communication. It analyses how motivation might affect learner success; the relationship of pedagogy to curriculum; and the impact of student-centred learning. Finally, it suggests how communication through sustainability literacies might be key to longer-term development.

Introduction

This section explores the background to the research which includes the introduction of 'key skills' in China and the place of communication as a 'key' skill (Tong and Zhong, 2008). As a result of economic reform and its 'open door' policy, China has been in a state of rapid development for the last two decades. According to Wen (2008), China is ranked third in the world for its imports and exports and has an international corporate presence. The transition triggered by globalisation and information communications technology, as in many western countries, is affecting not only economic structures but also influencing society and culture. It has compelled China's education sectors to shift direction especially with respect to vocational education since the skills level of employees has increasingly concerned Chinese and international employers (Chen, 2001). However, although the development of 'key skills' is essentially a political imperative to enhance workforce potential, in contemporary China, the ability to communicate effectively, as elsewhere, is also associated with individual success and career development (Tong and Zhong, 2008). So, the National Vocational Qualification Appraisal Experts' Committee for Key Skills, when designating 'key skills', included the 'skills of communication', defining them as: 'Vital social and methodological competence[s] for daily life and professional development.' (Occupational Skills Test Authority, 2007, p3). Within this paper, the notion of 'communication key skills' will be interrogated and analysed with a focus on, firstly, how to specify 'communication key skills', and, secondly, on the significance of student-centred learning for promoting them. Back in

the 1950s, the notion of student-centred learning had its Chinese advocate, Tao, but his ideas were criticised as 'anti-Marxist education thought' (Li, 2005, p7). Because of this, student-centred learning was considered 'politically deviant' and shunned. Both 'key skills' and student-centred learning therefore remained largely unexplored in the context of Chinese vocational education until recent developments.

To facilitate the introduction of key skills, a new model of course design 'Objective-Tasks-Preparation-Action-Evaluation' (OTPAE) was established (Tong and Zhong, 2008). Underlying the OTPAE model was the supposition that skills' acquisition depends on students' learning experiences (Li, 2008) and, in relation to communication, social, interactive activities. This, however, presented a challenge to both Chinese teachers and students, since it was contrary to traditional, didactic methods. While Harkin, Turner and Dawn (2000) point out skills, 'cannot be developed through didactic pedagogy' (p6), traditional Chinese education emphasises 'knowledge acquisition' (Gu, 2003) and learning that is 'classroom, teacher and textbook-centred' (Wang, 2002, p73). There has been growing debate, however, in western countries, around both 'key skills' and competence-based education. Some literature criticises both as being fundamentally flawed (Lum, 1999; Mulder, Weigel and Collins, 2007). According to Hyland (1997), a competence model has no 'rationally justifiable philosophical foundation,' (p491) and cannot promote learning since it has 'technicist and managerialist assumptions' (p492) of performance. This paper in raising questions about the concept of 'key skills' in general and communications' key skills in particular explores the significance of their development within a Chinese context and also indicates the individual, social and political implications of this.

Literature Review

Gao and Bao (2004) identified the primary purpose and historical mission of Chinese vocational education as cultivating graduates with high level skills and competences. Competence and skills' development are seen as routes to educational reform in China and a vehicle for change. However, a recurring criticism of competence-based education concerns its alleged utilitarian tendencies. Qing (2008) criticises an emphasis on vocational criteria to the detriment of general knowledge although other researchers such as Zhang (2008) dispute the two are as diametrically opposed as Qing assumes. Wang and Cheng (2000) have also pointed out that higher vocational education should enhance not only applied skills but also theoretical understanding and both be seen as complementary. This is significant since some writers define communication as competence (Chen, 2001; Tong and Zhong, 2008); while others define communication as 'skills'. The concept of 'competence' has been controversial especially with regard to 'communication' where it has been criticised for 'terminological confusion' (Winterton, Deist and Stringfellow, 2005, p.12). In the 1980s, the UK Further Education Unit (FEU) defined competence as the 'possession and development of sufficient skills… [for] successful performance in life roles' (FEU, 1984, p3) although Hyland (1997) claims competence 'cannot accommodate the ethical and epistemological bases of professional practice' (Hyland, 1997, p492). Lum (1999) also suggests competence incorporates 'profoundly naive assumptions about language,' and a 'disregard for the metaphysical complexity of human action' (Lum, 1999, pp416-7). However, despite the many criticisms of the competence model, it has some significance for Chinese education since it focuses on the process of learning and thus links theory and practice. Also, from a bureaucratic perspective, 'outcomes', clearly specified and assessed, are attractive because they appear to identify a standard. The American model, however, which defines competence as a 'composite of skills, knowledge, attitudes or traits… [and] a set of inputs that influence

behaviour' (Grzeda, 2005, p533), refers to 'independent variables', in contrast to the UK's 'dependent outcomes' (Grzeda, 2005), and this broader approach is appealing to some, including Wen and Ma (2007) who endorse its combination of skills, knowledge and cognition.

Much of the literature on competence-based education identifies communication as measurable skills with behavioural and performance aspects. However, simply defining communication as skills may narrow its focus since 'performance' should be considered not only as a 'complex output of a variety of psychological processes' but also as 'a cooperative' and 'socially-situated' endeavour (Fussell and Kreuz, 1998, p3). Several studies have highlighted the significance of social skills for effective communication performance. Hargie et al. (1994) identified communication as 'a set of goal-directed, inter-related, situational-appropriate social behaviours which can be learned and which are under the control of the individual' (p2). The requirement to be 'situational appropriate' emphasises the importance of context and interactivity in communication. Price (1996) delineates communication as:

  Activity in which symbolic content is not merely transmitted but exchanged between human agents, who interact within a shared situational and/or discourse context.   (p399)

This could, of course, be through information communications technology, but, regardless, it is a 'dynamic social process' (Gerbner (1993, p15) which stresses not just the interactive aspect of communication but also its fluidity and unpredictability. Communication is seen also as an affective process that occurs as 'bodily experiences, expressions and feelings-physiological responses to a stimulus, rather than thoughts' (Kiely and Armistead, 2004, p27) and which focuses on personality and cultural context.

This section has discussed the concepts of 'communication' and of competence. It has examined the communication process, emphasising the complexity of the social, cognitive and affective issues associated with it. Communication abilities are, as Emanuel (2007) has pointed out, 'the vehicle that allows us to recall the past, think in the present, and plan for the future' (p2). They tell our stories, allowing us to articulate our lives and plan our futures. Communication 'key skills' should permit students to develop their understanding of the world, and encourage participation within it, socially and politically. Evidence suggests socialisation and social interaction are 'key' to the 'communication skills' agenda, and that the personal, social and political ramifications of it will potentially be central in engendering and promoting global and sustainability discourse in China.

Methodology

The research on which this paper is based evaluated the development of a new 'communication key skills' curriculum and pedagogy in China and aimed:
1. To explore teachers' and students' understanding of communication 'key skills';
2. To investigate the effectiveness of student-centred learning in promoting Chinese students' communication abilities and
3. To consider the implications of the development and implementation of this communications' curriculum and student-centred pedagogy in the Chinese context.

Three vocational education colleges in Beijing (B, R and S) initiated the new programme, and nine teachers from across the three colleges participated in the implementation process and were members of a focus group. Student data were gathered by class observation and interviews during the course. Through case studies, the research explored the introduction in China of a new pedagogy and the implications of a new curriculum. Influenced by

phenomenology and the notion of 'illuminative evaluation' (Parlett and Hamilton, 1972), it analysed in depth the experience and perspectives of participating teachers and students.

Findings and discussion

In China, the introduction of the new communications' course was considered challenging, for example, one teacher asserted that:

> It takes too much effort to adapt to the position of change; both the students and I have to try to get used to our new roles. It is too difficult to guide the students in their practical action. I find it is much easier just to talk to them. I cannot change my role overnight. It will take a long time. (Teacher Anm, College B)

Both the teacher and her students were used to traditional transmissive approaches with students being 'containers' ready to be 'filled' by the teachers (Freire, 2002, p72). The students could not immediately adapt and be participative learners. This acknowledgement is significant because teachers recognised the complexity of change. Communication, it was felt, related to students' motivation and self-awareness and 'intention, control and awareness' (Hargie et al., 1994, p16). One exercise in College B involved the evaluation by students of a classroom activity:

> (The activity) includes participation in the learning activities and social practices. The assessment should be integrative, three-dimensional, in-depth and concrete so as to help the students' competence build step by step. (Teacher Jam, B)

Here Teacher Jam demonstrates awareness that communications' teaching and learning are linked to social engagement and should be assessed accordingly. She shows an understanding of strategies for student-centred learning and outcomes-based assessment as well as identifying a task intended to motivate students. Similarly, Teacher Anm had a 'car sale workshop' because she thought it would appeal to students: 'I have to know my students well, know what interests them.' She had embraced the 'importance of the emotional and personal side of learning' (Light and Cox, 2001 p74), identifying relevant learning activities. As a result, student response was positive. For example, one student said: 'I think the course is very practical; it improves my participation in learning' (Tang, B). Another mentioned: 'The car dealing workshop is the one that impressed me most' (Qing, B). The message here represents an important conceptual change. Anm recognised that teachers have to understand their students and identify activities that will interest them and address their learning needs. She felt that this had changed her students from 'naughty boys' into 'good students'. However, when designing activities, teachers had to spend more time on developing learning resources. The teachers in College B indicated how challenging this was.

As suggested earlier, the development of communication abilities depends on the extent to which an individual is involved in social interactive communication processes. Some researchers have identified that, during interactive learning, students can gain an enhanced perception of themselves and of their identity (Price, 1996). Evidence from this study indicates that communication is closely linked with individual motivation, beliefs and attitudes. One student explained:

> Skilled communication can mediate interpersonal relationships. It can make people feel better. It happens everywhere, all the time. For example, we have lunch in our canteen very often. Before, I just handed over my card and told the staff what I wanted. Now I like to say 'hello' with a smile on my face. The staff members look happier to serve me. It is small thing, but it brought me a good feeling. (Lan, B)

This minor incident suggests the development of social awareness, as well as relevant knowledge. Another thought the value of the course lay in it being outside the textbook:

When you take part in that situation, you can feel something; you can get a better understanding of the concepts and knowledge involved, more than you could get from a textbook. (Feng, B)

Feng could 'feel something' as well as having a 'better understanding', indicating affectual change and individual internalisation. Teacher Xum elucidated:

Students have to gain understanding from their own practices; their own perceptions, their own feelings. It was not like before, when the teacher did everything. (Teacher Xum, B)

Teachers now realised that understanding is generated through engagement and interactive learning. One stated this very clearly:

The aim of teaching, ultimately, is non-teaching. It is to lead student learning through their doing. In fact, it is this that enables them to learn how to learn. To teach students in communication through their communicative activities – that is the way of student-centred learning. It's killing two birds with one stone. It is the best way to achieve the goals of education. (Teacher Gom, B)

It is clear here that the implementation of student-centred learning in the communications course has led teachers to view students in a different light. They have started to realise that interaction encourages learners to develop their communication behaviours and attitudes. From the teachers' point of view, the focus is now on how students learn, and how to design experiences that stimulate students' interest and engender active learning. There were a number of examples in College B where this was done successfully.

It can be inferred, therefore, from this study that student-centred learning should facilitate activities that encourage meaningful and productive experiences, and that teachers need to pay attention to the students' construction of social meaning and the relevance of context. Communication cannot be thought of simply as a 'skill', to be learnt by rote to performance standard. Some students in College R did, however, viewed communications' 'key skills' as 'employability skills', anticipating that development would improve their prospects:

We must develop our capacity to behave interactively. Learning the knowledge is not enough. We must also learn how to communicate it to other people in the workplace. Equipped with these things, we could occupy an invincible position in society. (Hong, R)

This student used the phrase 'invincible position' to describe how important he considers the role communication abilities play in his life. In the current Chinese socio-economic climate, he linked his future to their enhancement. Another student emphasised this:

Since communication skills are about how to deal competently with others, they are very important. I believe that my excellent communication skills could help me to show better performance to my boss in future. (Li, R)

These students think that proficiency in 'communication key skills' will benefit them personally and professionally. Indeed, the second respondent indicated through his 'excellent' communication skills that he has already internalised this notion. For those attending College R who might previously have thought themselves 'failures' because they did not attend university, the course has improved self-confidence. A third student pointed out:

I feel much better than before. As Teacher Xiao said, we should be brave in facing up to reality, to those challenges as solid as the Tai mountain. . . Now, I look forward to presenting in public, at the front of the class. (Jiamei, R)

The message conveyed here emphasises self-esteem and the enhancement of confidence, as well as contextual skills. Jian further explained:

One class which was focused on appearance and euphemism made a great impression on me. . . I mean the skills can be used directly in life. (Jian, R)

The circumstances, under which such skills are developed, particularly in China, are critical. Traditionally, the Chinese educated children in social skills through such activities as music,

handwriting, painting and game-playing. This was in accordance with the belief that the environment, rituals and activities have a great power to mould individual behaviour. Contemporary society, however, is eroding this familial process, and education therefore is beginning to be seen in China as an alternative for the development of social mores and ethics as well as enhancement of knowledge and understanding.

Students in College R expanded on the benefits of the new communications' course. Typical of this was the respondent who said:

> Communication skills are not only the skills to use language as a means of communicating with others. They also help you to perceive others. The same discourse, in another's conversation, can often have many different interpretations. (Hong, R)

Evidence here supports the idea of the complexity and social interactive nature of communication processes. It also, however, acknowledges difference in a way that may have wider implications for social and political discourse in China. Ling explained:

> Participation in communication should include two important factors: one is practice, the other is active thinking. …... we have to consider seriously the topic that the teacher has provided – that is, make our thinking logical and objective. (Ling, R)

She recognised the complexity of communication. Another student, Tan, further commented:

> This course … is an indirect, tacit knowledge… a kind of life experience… it enables us to understand others well and get along better with them, allowing us to express our thoughts and feelings accurately and properly. This helps us achieve our purposes successfully.

This again emphasises that communication is closely linked with individual and social attitudes and values (Hyland, 1999).

As Becvar (1974) has contended, collaborative learning helps students develop effective communication. Evidence in this study concurs with that and with Harkin et al. (2000), who highlight the social-education value of collaborative learning. Engagement and openness are new developments for Chinese students and could be a means by which more creative and sustainable thinking is engendered. A student in College S explained:

> The most significant benefit for me is that the course aims to promote our competence rather than to memorise conventional rules and regulations. I can get a real experience of communication which makes me feel much more confident now. (Lili, S)

The importance of interaction with others was a dominant topic throughout interviews:

> The teaching model is not like the traditional one. We learn through practice actively in the group. It is not as stiff as a poker. I do like this model very much.   (Ming, S)

Students perceived the importance of collaborative learning and thought that it helped them to understand how to co-operate. These were very positive outcomes of the communications' course in College S. Teacher Wu commented: 'Now, we are organised in dynamic groups, students sit face-to-face.' He suggested that there is learning community. He also determined that reflection and evaluation could promote 'context interaction' (Burke and Dunn, 2006) and organised a 'job' interview which students evaluated:

> Wu: Ok! Now, could you please comment on S4's performance? From an employers' point of view firstly? (He nodded his head to members of group two).
> S7: I thought her performance was quite good. She could keep smiling while she answered the questions. Her manner was very proper throughout the whole interview process.
> S8: Additionally, she kept eye contact with the interviewers; that's very important.
> S6: Yes! I agree.
> S11: But, I think her response to the question of 'What was your best achievement during your study' was not satisfactory. You see, you told us you had some part-time work experience during college years; however, you didn't mention anything about your work

experience but instead gave an example how you arranged a duty schedule for your class mates to clean your classroom. I think the interviewer who asked this question wanted to know some details of your performance in your part-time job but you didn't catch her meaning. (During S11 speaking, S4 nodded her head and kept writing notes)

Here, firstly, evaluation allows learners to 'clarify and take ownership of the need to learn as defined by the intended learning outcomes' (Race, 2005, p95). Secondly, it indicates that collaborative learning provides an opportunity to 'reflect on what happened during the task with the other group members' (Prichard et al., 2006, p123). Students indicated the merits of the performance as well as criticising it, and the teacher reinforced students' judgements. Nicol and Dick (2006) point out this process helps students, both observed and observers, to construct meaning and understanding from 'feedback messages' (p210). Lili explained: 'This course is different; it is examined by our classmates and our teachers. It stresses practicality, the real abilities . . . used in communication. This is especially important for communication abilities' development in China because the objective of the assessment here is not solely to score a student's performance but to engage students and teachers 'in critical consideration of their subjective relation to knowledge by positioning them as knowing subjects' which involves them in 'drawing on and challenging their experiences, understandings, values and identities' (Burke and Dunn, 2006, p221). This contrasts with the traditional Chinese examination regime that focuses on testing textbook knowledge. Teacher Wu explained:

> The assessment has changed. It is not only about the method but also the content. Students' performances were evaluated in groups; they have to show what they can do after study. The students comment and learn from each other. (Teacher Wu, S)

It is notable that the teacher designated assessment as not only a 'method' but also 'content' and part of the learning process, suggesting that teachers and students identified outcomes' assessment in China as not only a product of learning but also a means to learn. During the class observation of an interview simulation, one student commented:

> Teacher, I think this task should have been given to us last week; we could have prepared more details. . . Like our résumés. (Teacher Wu nodded his head).

What happened here deserves comment. The student offered his suggestion to the teacher in the middle of the class. Chinese students are usually trained to obey their teachers without question (Gu, 2008); however, this student explained:

> This course is taught in a very different way, the teacher going to us, not like before when teachers looked far away from us. He looked very flexible and very close to us. (Cheng, S)

This implies a more distributed power or shared responsibility for learning, a relatively radical phenomenon in China, by which there is a mutuality rather than dominance.

> Effective learning is about whether the students can gain real understanding. The teachers have to modify their angle to think and encourage the students. The more they participate; that is, do, the more they will understand. This is their reward. (Teacher Wu, S)

Students felt that they were not only more confident in speaking publicly but also more aware of how they interacted with others. In addition, they enjoyed opportunities to evaluate and reflect on their own and peers' performances. They liked this course because they had a new, closer relationship with their teachers. The teacher was considered to be a team member, and students were no longer afraid to challenge his/her authority in class.

Conclusions
The following summarises how Chinese teachers' and students' understanding of key skills communication developed during the implementation of the new course and suggests that this might have wider significance not just for employability and vocational education but also for change more widely in China. It draws attention to the focus on student-centred learning and its effectiveness in promoting communication abilities, and, finally, it highlights the implications in China of these research findings educational, socially and politically.

Teachers' and students' understanding of communication key skills
Both teachers and students recognised the significance of communication abilities and identified them as what could be termed 'key skills'. It was acknowledged that, as a consequence of China's rapid social economic development, employers needed more complex communicative competence, and both teachers and students saw this as multifaceted and requiring diverse experiences in different contexts. Traditional didactic teaching, it was felt, did not offer this potential. Analysis of the concept of communications' key skills that emerged from the case studies identified not only employability skills but also cognitive abilities. Students thought that the acquisition of competence would help them to be more flexible and adaptable, and to integrate more effectively into social and professional communities, potentially generating more varied and sustainable discourse. They exercised and heard their voices for the first time in an environment which, it was believed, also encouraged affective and personal development. This has resonance in China and accords with Wang (2006) who highlighted the link between individual communication abilities and self-realisation, motivation and values. The complexity of these 'key skills' should be highlighted, however, when introduced more widely into Chinese vocational education. This would prevent the whole concept from being perceived as a set of simple practical skills, and vocational education being narrowed to mere mechanistic training programmes. It would also reinforce the potential of communication to offer alternative solutions and address the challenges socially and politically of sustainability through recognition of the scope of communication within the change agenda.

The effectiveness of student-centred learning in promoting communication abilities
Evidence from the case studies showed that the teachers and students valued the use of student-centred learning in the new communications' course. It increased student participation in class, and, as the course progressed, students perceived that they developed more confidence and a greater willingness to become involved in interactive and reflective learning. They gained understanding: 'You can feel something; you can get a better understanding of the concepts and knowledge involved'. Another explained: 'I can get a real experience of communication which makes me feel much more confident now'. Collaborative interaction was also valued. Students felt confident within small groups, and this enabled them 'to understand others well and get along better with them'. Students spoke of overcoming shyness, more assertiveness, increased confidence and responsiveness to others. They were better able to consider people's feelings and perceived this as beneficial, not just for interpersonal relationships, but also for their future professional lives. These results corroborate findings which conclude that interactive group learning promotes flexibility and adaptability both of which are significant to the sustainability agenda. Also of interest is the fact that students perceived the assessment process as part of the learning process. They found that formative assessment helped them to achieve their learning objectives, often through sharing knowledge and giving feedback to each other. The case studies showed that, where this was working well, assessment was integrated with learning

outcomes, and promoted understanding of context and of the competences required. However, effective integration of competence, context and assessment depended on pedagogical design and management, emphasising the significance of the role of the teacher. This research has demonstrated the scope and potential for Chinese students, supported in a suitable learning environment, to learn in a new way despite prior experience of teacher transmission and textbook tyranny. They perceived it as a potentially democratising process in which they could even question the approach of the teacher; while teachers for their part would welcome this and not see it as an indication of dereliction of duty. The effectiveness of this communications' key skills initiative revealed a different way of thinking: critical, evaluative and exploratory.

The implications of the research findings

This research has explored the experience and significance of the implementation of the new communication course in three Chinese colleges. This has major implications for the development of communication abilities, key skills and the progress of students in Chinese vocational education. It has explored the complex, social and integrative nature of communication abilities as revealed in the attitudes of those taking part, highlighting that a successful communication performance, as identified by many researchers, integrates various factors: cognitive and affective in a specific social context (Hargie et al. 1994). The students not only linked 'communication key skills' with the demands of the new employment market but with their own attitudes and motivation. Moreover, students perceived themselves as more open and more positive about communication, believing that not only had they become more employable, but also more flexible and adaptable through raised self-awareness and attention to others. They were more willing critically to question and evaluate circumstances and experiences which is key to political awareness and sustainability literacy. There was recognition that communication could be seen as part of socialisation processes, and of psychological, cognitive and emotional skills' development (Fussell and Kreuz, 1998), and that these are not simple demonstrable outcomes. Chinese teachers learned to perceive the communication process as an integrative one which involves knowledge, motivation, values and attitudes. The results of this research also demonstrate that student-centred learning could play a significant role in promoting students' communication abilities in China. Firstly, they perceived that their self-esteem and confidence had been boosted through student-centred learning. Secondly, they perceived that their participation was higher than before, and linked this with learning activities and collaboration. Thirdly, students had more understanding of the meaning of 'cooperation'. In a competitive examination system where individual success is all, a shift towards collaboration and cooperation is significant not only in the workplace but also socially and politically since it highlights responsibility. Embedding student-centred learning within a framework that still evokes traditional behavioural assumptions of 'key skills' may not at first sight seem particularly radical, however, in China, it is fundamental. The Chinese government, like others, emphasises the need for skills that are supposed to create a responsive, adaptable, creative and versatile workforce, but, since this is only likely to be achieved through collaborative communication and student-centred learning, it creates the potential for very different citizens to emerge and a discourse for the future to surface.

References
Becvar, R.J. (1974) *Skills for Effective Communication*, New York: John Wiley.
Burke, P.J. (2002) *Accessing education effectively widening participation,* Stoke: Trentham.
Burke, P.J. and Dunn, S. (2006) Communicating science: exploring reflexive pedagogical approaches, *Teaching in Higher Education* **11** (2) pp 219-231.

Chen, Y. (2001) The National Skills Development Strategy, In *Towards Global Vocational Competence Leadership*, Beijing: Great Wall Publishing.

Emanuel, R. (2007) Communication: Humanities Core Discipline, *American Communication Journal* **9** (2) pp 1-12.

FEU (1984) *Towards a Competence-Based System*, London: Further Education Unit.

Freire, P. (2002) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed,* New York: Continuum.

Fussell, S. R. and Kreuz, R. J. (1998) *Social and Cognitive Approaches to Interpersonal Communication*, Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Gao, L. and Bao, J. (2004) *Zoom in Core: Higher Vocational Education curriculum development and establishment*, Beijing: Higher Education Press.

Gerbner, G. (1993) A Generalized Graphic Model of communication, In Corner, J. and Hawthorn, J. (Eds) *Communication Studies*, London: Edward Arnold.

Grzeda, M.M. (2005) In competence we trust? Addressing Conceptual Ambiguity, *Journal of Management Development* **24** (6) pp 530-545.

Gu, J. M. (2008) *The Possibility of the Implementation of Heuristic [education] in China Higher Education*, China Higher Education **15** pp 23-25.

Gu, S. Z. (2003) Implementation of educational reformation, *Journal of Education Research* **24** (8) pp55-60.

Hargie, O. Saunders, C. and Dickson, D (1994) *Social Skills in Interpersonal Communication,* London: Routledge.

Harkin, J., Turner, G. and Dawn, T. (2000) *Teaching Young Adults: A Handbook for Teachers in Post-compulsory Education,* London: Routledge.

Hyland, T. (1997) Reconsidering Competence, *Journal of Philosophy of Education* **31** (3) pp 491-503.

Kiely, J. A. and Armistead, C.G. (2004) Exploring the Future Roles and Capabilities of Customer Service Professionals, *Managing Service Quality* **14** (1) pp 26-29.

Li, G. (2005) Great People's Educationalist to an Advocator who had Faith in the Omnipotent of Education: Re-evaluation of TaoXingZhi, *Journal of NanJing Xiao Zhuang,* **21** (4) p 1-14.

Li, Z. L. (2008) The Problems Teachers and Students Encountered During The Implementation of the Activity Curriculum, *Friend of Science Amateurs* **1** (B) pp 125-127.

Light, G. and Cox, R. (2001) *Learning and Teaching in HE*, London: Paul Chapman.

Lum, G. (1999) Where's the Competence in Competence-Based Education and Training? *Journal of Philosophy of Education* **33** (3) pp 403-418.

Mulder, M., Weigel, T. and Collins, K. (2007) The Concept of Competence in the Development of VET, *Journal of Vocational Education and Training* **59** (1) pp 67-88.

Nicol, D.J. and Macfarlane-Dick, D. (2006) Formative assessment and self-regulated learning: a model and seven principles, *Studies in Higher Education* **31** (2) pp 199-218.

Occupational Skills Test Authority (2007) *Professional Key Skills Criteria*, Beijing: The People's Publisher.

Parlett, M. and Hamilton, D. (1972) *Evaluation as illumination,* Edinburgh: Occasional Paper 9, Centre for Research in the Educational Sciences, University of Edinburgh.

Price, S. (1996) *Communication Studies,* Edinburgh: Longman.

Prichard, J.S., Lewis, A., Bizo, R. and Stratford, R.J. (2006) The Educational Impact of Team Skills Training, *British Journal of Educational Psychology,* **76** (1) pp 119-140.

Qing, S. D. (2008) General Knowledge Education: The Direction of Higher Education Reformation, *China Education Newspaper,* 19/09/2008.

Race, P. (2005) *Making Learning Happen: a Guide,* London: Sage.

Tong, S.D. and Zhong, H. (2008) *Training Handbook of Communication Skills*, Beijing: People's Press.

Wang, C.X. and Cheng, Y. (2000) The Debate of "The Two Es" and the Training of Tertiary Qualified Personnel, *Journal of Hubei University*, **27** (4**)** pp 6-8.

Wang, T.Q. (2006) In Zhong, H. (Ed.) *Key Skills of Communication*, Beijing: Colleges.

Wang, W.M. (2002) Reform Traditional Education and develop innovation programme, *Journal of Higher Education Research* **25** (4) pp 73-74.

Wen, H.J. and Ma, X.L. (2007) *Forward the Higher Quality of Teaching,* http://www.hpe.sh.cn/ShowNews.asp? ArticleID=11057 [accessed 27/9/07] pp 1-16.

Wen, J.B. (2008) *Government Work Report*, China Youth Newspaper, 30/03/2008 p1.

Winterton, J., Deist, F.D.L. and Stringfellow, E. (2005) Typology of Knowledge, Skills and Competences:www.ecotec.com\europeaniventory\publications\ [Accessed 12/10/07] pp1-79.

Ye, C.Y. and Li, H.K. (2007) *Vocational Activities Based Teaching and Practice,* ZheJiang: ZheJiang Science Technology Publishing.

Zhang, J. (2008) Four Orientations of Vocational Education Development, *China Higher Education Research* **180** (8) pp 74-75.