



Teachers' Understanding of the Purposes of Group Work and Their Relationship with Practice

Jessica Chan

St. Antony's College

Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Education

Trinity Term 2014

Acknowledgements

I owe a whole-hearted and unspeakable debt of gratitude to my supervisor, Prof. Anne Edwards, whose unreserved support and extraordinary patience are worthy of admiration. Her untiring dedication to my thesis and superlative professionalism have tremendously inspired the dubious, ‘chattiless’ mind.

All flaws are of my making (Edwards, 1995:595).

While completing my D.Phil. is far from an achievement, the learning curve will make me stronger for what is yet to come.

Abstract

Group work is commonly recommended as a student-centred instructional strategy which may enhance learning. Research in this area has predominantly used controlled interventions focusing on unproductive teacher assistance or specific strategies of doing group work to be applied by teachers. On the other hand, teachers' own understanding and uses of group work in classrooms have been under-researched. Drawing on cultural-historical theory, this study scrutinises how and why teachers use group work, and how their enacted understanding is related to the broader contexts of teaching.

The present study consists of four teachers of English in two secondary schools in Hong Kong to discern their rationales for and implementation of group work. The analysis delves into the dynamics within the activity of teaching, which comprise the interrelations between teachers' biographies, their purposes for group work in classrooms and what was expected from these teachers within the school practices.

The Vygotskian perspective taken by this study entailed an inquiry into the teachers' intentional actions in everyday teaching. Each teacher was interviewed at the outset and end of the school-based fieldwork for their learning backgrounds and beliefs about teaching. In between these interviews each of them was observed in 15 lessons involving group work and undertook five to six stimulated recall (SR) interviews. These lesson video-recordings provided the stimuli for the SR interviews for probing the teacher's pedagogic decisions while orchestrating students in small groups.

The data was analysed by deploying concepts from cultural-historical theory, particularly two organising frameworks developed within the approach. One is a pedagogic sequence proposed by Edwards (1995; in press) as a descriptor to categorise the teachers' purposes for and actions in group work. The other is an adaptation of Hedegaard's (2012) planes of analysis for identifying the various motives and demands in the multi-layered setting of teaching where group work was located.

Group work as a pedagogic tool displayed the intra- and interpersonal dynamics in the activity of teaching. The findings indicate that the teachers' historically-constructed identities as learners of English oriented their intentions for group work and beliefs about teaching the subject. How the schools mediated societal expectations on teaching and learning had a considerable bearing on the teachers enacting their understanding. These institutional objectives and demands in practices created sets of opportunities for group work in the classrooms. The analysis thence was sited at the interface between the teachers' personal pedagogies and the multi-faceted social structure reflected in how education policy was mediated differently in different school contexts. The implications for teacher development are discussed.

(Word count: 65,856)

Table of contents

List of figures and tables

Chapter 1 Introduction and research background

1.1	Gaps from past research.....	1
1.2	Lessons from personal experiences.....	7
1.3	Theoretical approach.....	9
1.4	Research questions.....	12
1.5	Outline of the thesis.....	13

Chapter 2 Literature review

2.1	The practice of teaching.....	17
2.1.1	The cultural-historical perspective on the practice of teaching.....	17
2.1.2	Teacher knowledge, professional lives and performance.....	29
2.2	Teacher identity.....	36
2.3	Teachers' espoused and enacted theories.....	45
2.4	Group work.....	50

Chapter 3 Research design and methods

3.1	Research objectives, design and schedule.....	64
3.1.1	Research aims.....	64
3.1.2	Design and rationales.....	65
3.1.3	Analytical framework.....	68

3.1.4	Research schedule.....	72
3.2	Piloting.....	73
3.2.1	Pilot I.....	73
3.2.2	Pilot II.....	74
3.2.3	Insights from piloting.....	75
3.3	Main study and research context.....	77
3.3.1	Multiple case study.....	77
3.3.2	Sampling.....	78
3.3.3	School contexts and teacher participants.....	81
3.3.4	Introducing the study to the participants.....	83
3.3.5	Research methods, procedures and data collection.....	84
i	Initial interview.....	87
ii	Pre-lesson interview and observation.....	88
iii	Selection of stimuli and stimulated recall interview.....	90
iv	Round-up interview.....	93
3.3.6	Ethical concerns.....	96
3.4	Implications of the research design.....	98
3.4.1	Data management and translation.....	98
3.4.2	Data analysis.....	100
3.4.3	Possible constraints.....	103

Chapter 4 Individual profiles of the teachers

4.1	Joan.....	108
4.1.1	Example lesson.....	109
4.1.2	Identity.....	110

4.1.3	Purposes of group work.....	112
i	Communicative competence.....	113
ii	Learner agency.....	114
iii	Assessment to support learning.....	116
iv	Examination success.....	117
4.1.4	Enactment.....	118
i	Contradictions and demands.....	119
ii	Negotiating practice through group work.....	122
4.1.5	Conclusion.....	125
4.2	Andy.....	125
4.2.1	Example lesson.....	126
4.2.2	Identity.....	128
4.2.3	Purposes of group work.....	130
i	Academic achievement and subject knowledge.....	130
ii	Assessments for and of learning.....	133
4.2.4	Enactment.....	134
i	Contradictions and demands.....	135
ii	Negotiating practice through group work.....	139
4.2.5	Conclusion.....	141
4.3	Mabel.....	142
4.3.1	Example lesson.....	143
4.3.2	Identity.....	144
4.3.3	Purposes of group work.....	146
i	Curriculum delivery.....	146
ii	Keeping students in lessons.....	148

4.3.4	Enactment.....	151
i	A non-stimulating school practice.....	151
ii	A non-agentic teacher.....	153
4.3.5	Conclusion.....	156
4.4	Rosy.....	157
4.4.1	Example lesson.....	158
4.4.2	Identity.....	160
4.4.3	Purposes of group work.....	162
i	Task completion to boost pupils' sense of accomplishing.....	162
ii	Keeping students in lessons.....	164
4.4.4	Enactment.....	166
i	A lack of self-confidence.....	167
ii	A fresh start through group work.....	169
4.4.5	Conclusion.....	173
4.5	Chapter summary.....	173

Chapter 5 Cultural-historical dynamics in teaching and group work

5.1	The society level.....	177
5.2	The institution level.....	188
5.2.1	East School.....	188
5.2.2	West School.....	192
5.3	The classroom level.....	199
5.3.1	Creating space for learners.....	200
5.3.2	Being a professional dealing with demands.....	203
5.4	Chapter summary.....	206

Chapter 6 Discussion and conclusion

6.1	Answering the research questions.....	209
6.1.1	What do teachers understand about the purposes of group work?.....	210
6.1.2	How does this understanding relate to their own learning experiences and beliefs about teaching?.....	214
6.1.3	How is their understanding enacted in classrooms?.....	218
6.1.4	What do their approaches to group work reveal about school priorities?.....	224
6.2	Contribution to knowledge and reflection.....	227
6.2.1	Theoretical insights.....	227
6.2.2	Methodological and ethical reflections.....	232
6.3	Directions for future research.....	236
6.4	Epilogue.....	241
References.....		243
Appendix A Initial interview questions.....		262
Appendix B Pre-lesson interview questions.....		264
Appendix C Students' feedback form.....		265
Appendix D Interview schedule for a stimulated recall interview.....		266
Appendix E Questions for round-up interviews.....		267
Appendix F Teacher's consent form.....		269
Appendix G Letter for parents.....		270

List of figures and tables

Figures

Figure 2A: Planes of analysis of the dynamic relations in learning and development

Figure 2B: Pedagogy of group work in classroom

Figure 3A: Adapted model for the study of group work

Figure 3B: Categorisation of group work in classroom

Figure 3C: Data collection flow

Figure 5A: Multi-level mediation in enactment of group work

Tables

Table 3.1: The research schedule

Table 3.2: Composition of sampling

Table 3.3: Data summary measured by time

Chapter 1 – Introduction and research background

This study is about teachers and some of the dimensions that make up teaching as a value-laden activity. These dimensions are accessed through discussions of the implementation of group work by four teachers in the teaching of English in two Hong Kong secondary schools. Framed by Vygotskian cultural-historical theory, the present study examines how and why teachers use group work as a pedagogic tool. Adopting this frame the study uncovers how group work is enacted in classrooms in order to serve what purposes. It also considers the relevance of these pedagogies to both the teachers' past learning experiences and to the current broader context of teaching. Designed as an in-depth account of what practitioners do, this thesis lays out how teachers' learning trajectories, professional knowledge and ways of acting are entangled with the sociocultural dynamic in which group work is situated.

This chapter is divided into five sections. The first section will identify some of the gaps in research about group work in order to determine what needs to be ascertained. The second section will summarise my research and teaching experiences which have inspired the present study. The section that follows will briefly introduce how this study predicates itself on the epistemological and theoretical perspectives. These three sections will then be drawn together to introduce the research questions. The remaining chapters of the thesis will be outlined in the fifth section.

1.1 Gaps from past research

Over the last few decades group work has undergone an epic journey, both theoretically in research and practically in classrooms. Research has tried to exploit a wide range of well-defined areas within the topic, from the benefits of group work to approaches to grouping. As the field began to thrive the foci of many studies shifted to conditions for productive group work. These foci, to nominate a few, include group composition (Webb, Nemer, Chizhik & Sugrue, 1998), task complexity (Kirschner, Paas & Kirschner, 2011), teacher instructional behaviour (Webb *et al.*, 2014), group talk (Twiner, Littleton, Coffin & Whitelock, 2014), assessment (van Aalst, 2013) and computer-supported collaborative learning (Winne, Hadwin & Perry, 2013). Although past and recent research about group work seems to have exhausted the researchable, the smooth or successful transfer of these ideas to the classroom is not without challenges.

One element of this problem lies in how teachers interpret and draw on the research-based knowledge that is available. In her evaluation of training teachers for using groups, Brody cited examples of teachers resisting group work because the approaches in many workshops contradicted their beliefs. She commented, ‘any school-level decision to import these particular approaches of cooperative learning for this faculty to learn and implement without accounting for the faculty’s practical knowledge and beliefs would be asking for problems and resistance from the start’ (Brody, 1998:27). Indeed, no matter how research findings are disseminated to schools or practitioners, if teachers are not convinced about the need to alter their pedagogy or are not motivated to take advantage of the known, the benefits of learning in groups will not be realised.

This challenge means that teachers, and their beliefs about teaching and learning, need to be in the spotlight. Whatever is discussed in research regarding group work, in practice the teacher is the agent responsible for coordinating every component in the classroom. For example, recent research on the role of the teacher in group work stresses the significance of teacher interventions on group talk (Gillies, 2014). In some teacher training, effort is made to equip teachers with skills for using groups.

Nevertheless, systematic and prolonged training can still result in distinctive variations in teachers' understanding of and expertise in cooperative learning (Rolheiser & Anderson, 2004). This phenomenon is unsurprising, if one considers that teachers have their own repertoires in teaching and very well-defined knowledge and skills (Windschitl, 2002). These forms of knowledge can be situational and context-dependent which can regulate how teachers use group work.

Building on these arguments, if teachers are expected to get hold of and skillfully execute strategies for group work, the kinds of training and support provided need to be based on an understanding of teachers' views about teaching and their reasons for using certain pedagogic toolkits. This understanding of teachers is crucial because of their classroom responsibilities. Research in this area cannot afford to undervalue 'how important it is to start where the teacher is, and provide [...] support for cooperative groupwork from the point that makes the most sense for the teacher' (Brody, 1998:44). Seeing teachers as active agents who are able to reflect on their implementation of group work requires an open and non-judgmental perspective in researching these individuals and their mindsets. This stance is based on the notion that empirical or educational research 'should not be limited to evaluating existing practices and

identifying those which seem to be the most generally effective' (Edwards, 2002:158).

How teachers anticipate and make sense of group work in the ways they find suitable in their classrooms is therefore worth exploring.

Taking a different view from this stance, the general trend in research on group work has tried to distinguish the effective strategies from others. For example, work has been done on correlating the impact of unhelpful interventions hampering group performance (Chiu, 2004; Webb *et al.*, 2014), or measuring group effectiveness as a result of certain interventional strategies (Gillies, 2014). These kinds of study tend to judge or evaluate outcomes based on prescribed standards and definitions. This knowledge of how group work should be conducted is primarily generated by quasi-experimental studies, leaving a gap to be filled in order to help these ideas transform teaching in classrooms.

To narrow this gap, the basic step is to ask why teachers act in certain ways. This question is of paramount relevance to broadening the discourse of group work because initiatives of pedagogic innovation 'may be altered quite dramatically due to teachers' beliefs' (Brody, 1998:45). If applications of research findings on group work need to be adjusted to fit teachers' needs or constraints, understanding their pedagogic knowledge of and rationales for group work will contribute to bridging the gap between what is known and backed up by research and its deployment to improve learning in classrooms.

Refining the scrutiny of group work by connecting it with teachers' pedagogic knowledge and decisions can pinpoint the gap between research and practice, and thence lead to what needs to be filled. Belief as a concept is thought to be attached to how teachers make sense of pedagogic innovation (Brody, 1998; Ketelaar, Koopman,

Den Brok, Beijaard & Boshuizen, 2014). Turning ideas into actions, teachers' behaviour in the classroom is 'a result of beliefs filtered by experience' (Pajares, 1992:312). Following this argument, behaviour in group work is an outcome of not only pedagogic beliefs but also teachers' decision-making. After implementing cooperative learning in a study, the feedback from experienced teachers made the point that 'decision-making [...] is a negotiated process which accounts for the teacher's reasons for why she is doing what she is doing' (Brody, 1998:34). In this process, beliefs play a key role when teachers organise their knowledge, make decisions and give shape to their behaviour (Pajares, 1992). Based on these arguments, belief is a variable in examining teachers' actions and decision-making, and may be a possible reason for some teachers' reluctance to use groups (Galton, Hargreaves & Pell, 2009).

Individual characteristics in affecting teachers' knowledge and decisions also include the persons' past. Pedagogic intention is closely related to personal experiences outside the classroom (Fang, 1996). In particular, teachers' histories and biographies have a significant impact on how teachers deal with everyday teaching (Fisher, 2012; Sammons, Day, Kington, Gu, Stobart & Smees, 2007) and should be taken into consideration when schools adopt innovative teaching (Brody, 1998). These findings suggest the possible relationship between teachers' histories and their methodologies of group work. Teachers' personal views and past experiences are encompassed in what Banks, Leach and Moon (1999) termed 'personal subject constructs'. These personal subject constructs coordinate three distinct aspects of teachers' professional knowledge: school knowledge, subject knowledge and pedagogic knowledge. Incorporating these views into the previous discussion of the knowledge of and rationale for group work is

likely to indicate that to some extent group work pedagogy is affected by the teacher's own history. This argument may also account for those gaps between research and applications, and the resulting variations in how group work is conducted.

As an alternative to quasi-experimental research carrying pre-set standards, some studies reported teachers' voices on group work but overlooked how individual attributes can possibly impact the way group work is done. Abrami, Poulsen and Chambers (2004) distinguished Canadian teachers who had claimed using group work from those who had not, by comparing their expectancy beliefs about cooperative learning but the study did not throw light on the qualitative influences of teachers' characteristics on their methodologies of group work. Solely relying on questionnaire method meant that all the data from the teachers was self-reported. There was no evidence to triangulate whether or how group work took place, as a result how beliefs had mediated decisions or actions could not be validated. In a more recent study Wyatt (2010) described an in-service teacher's self-efficacy and increasing practical knowledge of group work. Although Wyatt's work combined various forms of data in order to come up with the argument that the teacher's efficacy is hindered by contextual limitations, how the teacher's biography affected his changes is not known. The rationale for using group work in this case is also unclear. There may be several reasons according to the background of the study. It might be the teacher satisfying the course requirement of a bachelor degree programme by undertaking an action research project. It could also be encouraging pupil interaction; completing the school syllabus; or all of these possibilities. In brief, although studies like these give voice to teachers' views and do not impose judgements or standards on how group work should be organised, they

tend to focus on perceived efficacy and discount the inner dynamic of what teachers know and do, and who they are. The ‘black box’ image of the interrelation between teachers’ knowledge, actions and characteristics remains.

Apart from teachers’ professional knowledge and personal factors, the extent to which practical conditions influence teachers’ pedagogy of group work deserves some attention. It has been argued that the effectiveness of group work is dependent on factors external to the teacher, such as students’ ability level (Webb *et al.* 1998), type of verbal exchanges in group work (Blatchford, Baines, Rubie-Davies, Bassett & Chowne, 2006; Chiu, 2008) and school culture (Rolheiser & Anderson, 2004). These factors are in sync with Shulman’s knowledge of learners (Shulman, 1999) and other subsequent expansions of Shulman’s analysis to teachers’ knowledge about the school (Banks *et al.*, 1999). A teacher’s decision-making about group work is informed by these aspects of knowledge because ‘decision points are specified jointly by the intention motivating the act and the structure of the medium or environment in which the act occurs’ (Bruner, 2006:23). Taking Bruner’s view, decision-making about group work entails teachers’ purposes when teaching the subjects, their pedagogic beliefs and their knowledge of classroom contexts where group work takes place.

1.2 Lessons from personal experiences

My interest in group work stems from my experiences as a schoolteacher. What fascinated me about teaching was interaction with pupils in the classroom. The common notion is that assigning collaborative tasks for students to work in small groups can bolster interaction and self-regulated learning. However, on many occasions my lessons

involving group work convinced me that this pedagogic method requires much knowledge and superb skills from the teacher, and I came to see it to be more challenging than whole-class teaching. At times I felt uncertain about balancing teacher guidance and learner autonomy in groups. I also found it very difficult to foster student interdependence, undertake monitoring and assess learning progress. All these aspects of teaching require the teacher to make snap decisions and intervene in a timely manner to ensure that the groups are progressing. Needless to say, creating an interactive classroom to enhance students' motivation, cognitive and social skills could be very challenging, risky and time-consuming. My lesson learnt from some disastrous group work resonated with this remark by Brody, 'cooperative learning requires teachers to make many more decisions than they had before, and they are more conscious of the discrepancies between their intent, what they want to see happen in the class, and what actually occurs' (Brody, 1998:40).

These doubts took me to my master's course researching about the role of the teacher in small groups. That study sought to find out the relationship between teachers' instructional strategies in group work and students' group ability level. The teachers in that small-scale project claimed they had adjusted their instructions in response to students' ability levels; whereas the analyses showed the otherwise. This discrepancy between what the teachers interpreted and how they carried out group work led me to query the relevance of the wealth of research knowledge in this area to what teachers tried to do in their classrooms, especially when every classroom or every teacher is seen as unique.

The teachers' ostensible pedagogic knowledge and overt classroom behaviour captured my interest and suggested the need to ascertain what teachers know about group work and their *de facto* rationales for using this approach. I took a step back and critically reflected on the nature and the purposes of having small groups in the classroom, and more interestingly, how these are defined by the teacher if the success of group work depends on the way the teacher organises it. These are the fundamental questions I wished to pursue as a researcher and being 'open to teachers' views of their role, [...] their understandings of cooperative learning and their resolutions of the dilemmas of practice' (Brody, 1998:33).

1.3 Theoretical approach

My interest arose from my personal experiences and the preliminary survey of some research in the field of group work guided me to see group work as a fluid concept with disparate meanings or implications for different teachers. How group work is used can vary greatly and can be mediated according to teachers' purposes, beliefs and histories. This flexible and open attitude has driven my preliminary direction of digging into how and why teachers use group work in their classrooms.

As implied in 1.1, my skepticism about imposing outcomes generated from controlled interventions on normal classrooms oriented the present study to an interpretive approach as the best way of representing my epistemological stance.

The call for redefining group work as understood by teachers argues for the need to capture this pedagogic method in its extended meaning in context and move beyond defining it by measurable variables (Turner & Meyer, 2000). Taking it a step further,

group work can be interpreted as a cultural phenomenon which is an externalisation of teachers' inner experiences (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). This epistemological premise, together with its implications for examining how people make sense of and co-construct phenomena, has led me to adopt cultural-historical theory as a means to conceptualise the interrelations between pedagogy and teachers' individual attributes.

The Vygotskian tradition of explaining human consciousness and its externalisation from a developmental angle helps theorise my hypothesised link between teachers' pedagogic knowledge, beliefs and their ways of doing group work. This study, formulated by the elementary assumption that group work is a pedagogic method that can be employed to assist learners, is also perfectly compatible with the Vygotskian views of learning on motivated use of tool and the concept of the zone of proximal development (ZPD). Investigating the relationship between teachers as autonomous mediators of what needs to be known and their knowledge and uses of group work can be conceptualised as how teachers externalise their professional knowledge through using group work strategies as a tool in socially-constructed settings. Employing this tool in classrooms involves using strategies to structure the lessons. These strategies can vary considerably. The same teacher can use group work (a tool) for a student-led mathematics competition with little teacher intervention in a lesson; whereas in another lesson group work may confine students to a set of fixed solutions to a calculus problem, guided heavily by the teacher. In both sessions group work is used as a tool but it has different purposes and is carried out using different strategies to serve different purposes.

Adopting this theoretical lens to probe into teachers' pedagogic understanding can bring a new perspective to research about group work. The variations in how teachers use group work can be theorised as everyday teaching being 'shaped by complex cultural tools' (Wertsch, del Rio & Alvarez, 1995:28). The Vygotskian view is that tool use in the form of action is a basic unit of analysis, and use of tools can reveal the meaning of the tool with reference to the actor's motivation. One advantage of seeing group work strategies as tools in teaching is to acknowledge that teachers organise group work according to what they know and find appropriate to the situation, i.e. the use of group work as a tool has its meaning in relation to the teacher's motivation. Examining group work in this way opens a door to an investigation of teachers' *bona fide* pedagogy and the corresponding decision-making processes. The teachers in the present study did not follow protocols aiming at assessing group productivity. Instead the study is designed to map out the personal, historical and contextual influences on teachers' motivation for and knowledge of group work.

Epistemological assumptions in the field of group learning and the teacher's role have been arguably dominated by studies seeing teachers as 'capable of manipulating their students' achievement motivation through the use of rewards'; consequently, their aims are 'to evaluate the benefits of peer collaboration in purely intellectual terms, e.g., via individual achievement testing' (Forman & McPhail, 1993:218). Whilst these studies have contributed to what we know about group work and classroom learning, this criticism points to the difference between the stance taken in the present study about the role of the teacher and those which failed to take teachers' beliefs and purposes into account.

This study is grounded in the argument that teachers and their group work pedagogy as the objects of inquiry should be understood alongside what the teachers understand and do. If the knowledge of and rationales for group work displayed in teachers' actions are social (Wertsch, 1985), it is also necessary to address individual variations and their social relations. This epistemological lens is theoretically formulated by the concepts in the cultural-historical school of thought. This line of thinking shows a recursive dynamic between individual and social, which allows the researcher to explore teachers' understanding about group work in both internalisation and externalisation forms through the teachers interacting with the social world. This theoretical approach makes examining 'simultaneously how learners interpret and act on their worlds, and the opportunities afforded them for those interpretations and actions' (Edwards, 2005:59) possible. By substituting teachers for learners in that statement, how teachers interpret and apply group work within the diverse contextual possibilities can be explicated.

1.4 Research questions

This study reported here endeavoured to examine the under-researched area of teachers' knowledge and uses of group work initially through three research questions:

1. What do teachers understand about the purposes of group work?
2. How does this understanding relate to their own learning experiences and beliefs about teaching?
3. How is their understanding enacted in classrooms?

Positioning teachers as active mediators of group work, this study also attempted to address the argument that 'further work is needed to understand how teachers as acting

subjects within the school system prioritise goals and develop the orientations that influence the actions they take within the classroom’ (Fisher, 2012:315). To this end, pursuing these research questions through teachers’ narration and enactment of group work in classroom situations helped unearth the rationales for or the dynamic between their pedagogic intentions and actions.

The initial focal point of interest was the link, if any, between teachers’ beliefs, biographies and their purposes for and actions in group work. However, an additional dimension emerged as the study progressed to the data analysis stage and could not be ignored. In order to tackle this theme and achieve a more coherent and robust analysis, an extra research question was added to this study after the data was collected. It is introduced here as a signpost to the discussion of the findings in chapters 5 and 6:

4. What do their approaches to group work reveal about school priorities?

This additional question did not drive the design of the study but gradually became more important when the analysis needed to connect the teachers to their school environments.

1.5 Outline of the thesis

Chapter 2 reviews the literature relevant to the original three research questions. First a discussion of the broad term ‘practice of teaching’ sets the scene for researching teachers and teaching. This section is divided into two sub-sections. The first one explains the cultural-historical perspective on the practice of teaching, and is followed by the other sub-section on teacher knowledge, professional lives and professionalism. The second section of the chapter addresses teacher identity and agency in teaching.

The next section describes the concepts of belief, teacher's espoused and enacted theories and their relationships. The development of research about group work and the Vygotskian views associated with this pedagogic approach are synthesised in the fourth section. The literature review chapter also rehearses two frameworks informed by the cultural-historical perspective as a prelude to data analysis. One is a multi-level model developed by Hedegaard. Adopting this model is to establish a lens through which to consider and compare teachers' motivated actions with school and policy directions. The second framework is Edwards's modelling of a pedagogic sequence based on Vygotskian theories of learning. The sequence, composed of four quadrants, helps identify and label how and why teachers employ group work.

Chapter 3 reports the methodology by detailing the research design and research methods used. It starts with an overview of the design, a revisiting of the two models discussed in the previous chapter and the time frame of the fieldwork and data management. Having outlined this work flow, the piloting stage which informed the practical preparations for making this study feasible is reported. I then explain the rationales for designing this research as a set of case studies. The sampling of schools and participants and the research contexts are presented. Details about the procedures of data collection and the schedule of how the data was collected are given. Research ethics are addressed before reporting the steps for data management and the initial attempts at data coding. I then justify the need for re-approaching the data using the two theoretically-based models introduced in chapter 2 and explain the analytic process. The chapter ends with a discussion of the possible challenges resulting from this research design and the counteractive measures.

Chapter 4 comprises the individual profiles of the four teacher participants. In each case I start by describing a lesson exemplar involving group work to give a flavour of the teacher's style in the classroom. Next, based on the teacher's recall, his or her historical identity in relation to the subject of English is portrayed. Illustrated by the interview data the salient features of group work and what mattered to the teacher are teased out. Analysing how these motives were enacted through group work helps establish the relationship between the teacher's professional identity and pedagogy. Studying the rationales for group work also potentially brings out the interplay between teacher agency and the school expectations in English teaching. Edwards's quadrant model is primarily the conceptual lens for the analyses of the purposes and execution of group work at the person level.

Chapter 5 looks across these four cases together to map out the cultural-historical dynamics in teaching and group work. The chapter provides a contextualising of the study within policymaking in the Hong Kong society. It becomes clear that motivated actions in group work can be considered as a prism through which one is able to analyse the dialectic between the teachers' decision-making and the demands prevalent in the schools as institutions. Teachers' agency in dealing with those demands while holding fast to their pedagogic beliefs is discerned. Adopting Hedegaard's model, the chapter discusses three planes of analysis – society, the institution and the activity setting of the classroom to examine the interrelations and the many meanings of these relations, all reflected by how group work was used as a pedagogic tool.

Chapter 6 pulls together the analyses provided in the previous two finding chapters in order to directly address each research question. After answering these four questions, I

discuss the contribution of the study to the theoretical and practical knowledge in the field, including current discussions of professionalism, teacher development, espoused and enacted theories and the purposes of group work. While presenting these implications, I evaluate the methodological strengths and limitations arising from the research design. Lastly, the thesis closes with a consideration of future directions for research that might be stimulated by the present study.

Chapter 2 – Literature review

This chapter will introduce and define the key theoretical concepts which have informed the thesis. The review of literature is guided by the three initial research questions in order to draw a coherent thread through the available research. The first section, an examination of the practice of teaching, is divided into two sub-sections. I set off by locating this study in a theoretical grounding in the cultural-historical perspective on teaching and learning. Attention will be given to scrutinising the framework and concepts which have oriented the study. The second sub-section is a review of other but relevant studies of teachers' knowledge, professional lives and development. Researching teachers' backgrounds and past experiences leads to the next section of the chapter, which is about literature on teacher identity and agency. After reviewing studies of practice, teachers' knowledge and identity, in the third section I will survey some previous work on espoused and enacted theories to explore the connection or disconnection between the two. The fourth section synthesises research on group work, the site in which the present exploration of teachers' practices is embedded. There the focus is on the role of the teacher in group work.

2.1 The practice of teaching

2.1.1 The cultural-historical perspective on the practice of teaching

This sub-section aims at defining the practice of teaching through the lens of the cultural-historical tradition, which I have taken as my theoretical stance. Cultural-historical theory is derived from the ideas of Vygotsky, whose aim was to develop a psychology which could be used to help people shape the world they lived in. The

dialectic of person and practice through the processes of externalisation is a core concept in his work.

The cultural-historical approach emphasises that learning and development is a result of an individual's engagement in the social world through which the individual shapes and is shaped by constant participation in cultural activities. Describing teaching as helping a learner to engage in this way means that teaching can be interpreted as a cultural product (Bruner, 1996) and a mindful, agentic and social activity. According to these arguments the primary function of teaching is to create opportunities and environments where teachers can mediate what is culturally valued and assist students' engagement in situations where they can learn (Edwards, 2010b). These situations frequently involve organising tools and resources so that teachers can assist learners with meaningful actions in activities. This view can be seen to place learners at the centre of conceptualisations of teaching, with the teacher in the role of a resource manager or facilitator working around the learners in a sensitive and responsive way and guiding them towards purposeful engagement with tools that are valued in society.

The mediation of the knowledge that matters in a practice, such as learning English, through careful organisation of the resources and conversations which both support and challenge, is perhaps the most significant responsibility for the teacher, hence a crucial concept to grasp when studying teaching and learning within the cultural-historical framing. How and why conceptual tools and material resources are used also need to be mediated by the teacher. A learner uses tools, such as rules of grammar or a dictionary, to work on object such as an English task. Tools and interactive participation are central features in promoting learning in Vygotskian theory (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996).

Thus, to study learning is to examine how tools are used and to work on objects (Edwards, 2005).

Teaching, therefore involves mediation which aims at moving the learner forward through their own learning and development. Daniels summarised the role of teachers as mediating students' learning and their participation in the social world through skillful use of appropriate tools (Daniels, 2001). As I have begun to indicate, tools can be in different forms such as material artifacts, conceptual tools and the language that arises in human interaction (Cole, 1996). For example, in a mathematics lesson a teacher introduces division (conceptual tool) by using a cake (material object used as a tool) and by assigning collaborative tasks to primary school pupils in small groups (interaction where language is developed as a tool). Importantly, Cole added that materiality and conceptualisation are intertwined in how tools are used in activities (Cole, 1996). The purpose of tool use within an activity thus provides both the teacher and the researcher with insights into how a learner is making sense. By the same token, in the present study teachers' use of group work as a tool offers the researcher with insights into how the teacher is making sense.

Mediation is also central to the idea of the ZPD (Vygotsky, 1978) and the support available to a learner. Although the ZPD was initially developed as a way of assessing how quickly a child might learn with adult help, the pedagogic aspects of the help have been highlighted by most interpreters. Consequently there is a widespread awareness that mediation involves a reciprocity between the needs of the learner and the support provided by a teacher (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988); with mediation and the ZPD being seen as a situation when a more capable other assists the learner to attain a higher level

of mental functioning than the learner would otherwise do without the assistance. The child's everyday knowledge is mediated or transformed into scientific concepts through formal instructions in schooling (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996). Again Vygotsky viewed the learner as an active, unique and outward-looking mind (Edwards & Protheroe, 2003), thus everyday knowledge varies considerably between individuals in ways which call for a learner-centred approach in moving them from their everyday situated understanding to mastery of more robust and publicly validated concepts.

Mediation from the teacher centres on tool use, recognising the materiality and conceptual nature of tools which can include language. As we shall see in 2.4 of this chapter, group work provides the pedagogic space in which a teacher can facilitate students' use of cultural tools and to externalise their new understanding while engaging in activities that require them to grasp the purpose of the tool the teacher has introduced them to. The cultural-historical line is that as a result, the students become repositioned within classroom activities, such as writing English essays, and contribute to those activities as they externalise their new understanding.

The cultural-historical approach sees teaching and the context of teaching as inseparable. Teaching takes place in value-laden social situations which change over time. The development of a specific context is accumulated by past events. Teaching is situated in this historical-cultural setting, shaping and shaped by a set of events, expectations, values and goals. Examining practice, how teachers position themselves and take actions in classrooms is central to the present study. There has been a sustained focus on studying learning and learners in this way (Edwards, 2005; van Huizen, van Oers & Wubbels, 2005). There is therefore much to be learnt from studies of how people

position themselves and navigate their way through activities in practices if we are to understand how teachers enact their beliefs and understanding.

Dreier's work on how people negotiate their way through practices is particularly useful, reminding us that we need a strong conceptualisation of practice before we begin to understand what happens when people operate in activities within them, 'to comprehend individual action and psychological processes as partial phenomena in relation to a social practice. [...] Individual subjectivity is a partial personal aspect of a social practice,' (Dreier, 1999:6). In the present study one focus is how teachers' learning experiences interact with the practices of the schools which contextualise their teaching and give shape to how they organise the activity of group work. The thesis also recognises that activities take place in practices which place demands on those who work in them (Hedegaard, 2012). The implication is that activities can reflect the demands within practices.

Practices are collective, goal-oriented and historical-culturally situated. Activities are situated in and shaped by the historical conditions that produced the practice (Edwards, 2010a; Stetsenko, 2005). Yet the dialectic between person and practice means that teachers and learners can shape practices through their interpretations of and actions within activities. In short, practice, motive, actions, activity and pedagogic knowledge are all interwoven in the practice of teaching. Consequently, according to this view, historically-accumulated institutional practices can be reshaped by motivated actions of individuals in activities.

Barnes, though not a researcher adopting cultural-historical theory, takes a similar line on individual and collective motives in practices, proposing that it is important to explore what motivates people to ‘enact the practices they do, how and when they do; and their aims, their lived experience and their inherited knowledge’ (Barnes 2001:22). Barnes’s example of riding performance in a cavalry is a good explanation of the significance of individual action within a practice, demonstrating clearly that his view of practice is not simply a habitual routine of collective execution in the formation of shared practice (Barnes, 2001). His example illustrates the mindful, coordinated and creative role of each individual in a team of riders in a cavalry when he highlighted that practice does not equal to a ‘summation of habits at the individual level’ (Barnes 2001:23). His claim is supported by Edwards’s discussion of practice where she argued that a collective activity does not necessarily mean shared motives on the part of the participants acting in it (Edwards, 2010a).

Their arguments direct our attention to the motive of individuals and the motives inherent in the institutional practices they inhabit. The motives of person and practice do not necessarily coincide. As a result practice becomes an interesting arena of study alongside the person, allowing us to see whether their motives are different or even conflicting. Within the domain of practice participants may be agentic and active, and they do not merely inhabit practice but act in and on it (Edwards, 2010a). For this reason the relationship of practice and participants is interdependent rather than unidirectional.

In Vygotskian theory motive is shaped by a person’s identity and interpretation of practice. The agency and identities of participants largely mediate their actions and

activities within practices as externalisation. The insights from Holland and her colleagues are particularly helpful here (Holland, Skinner, Lachicotte & Cain, 1998) as they consistently pointed to how individuals navigate practices and are taken forward by their own intentions and the senses of who they are or would like to be. In the present study one focus will be the tensions that arise if teachers' identities and intentions are in conflict with the prevailing motives in the practices they inhabit. Johannsdottir (2010) made a similar observation, arguing that attention should be given to individual teachers reflecting on or questioning practices, and recognising that their critique could be a sign of the need for changes in practices. This sensitivity to the relationship between individual and practice has long been recognised within the Vygotskian legacy. It is seen in Vygotsky's own discussion of crises as crucial moments within child development and has been applied to practice, most notably in Engeström's work (Engeström, 2007).

Schneuwly's earlier work summarised the relevance of conflict to potential development. He argued what teaching should be in Vygotskian sense and suggested that in the case of discrepancy or contradiction in motive, conflict resolution indicates development (Schneuwly, 1994). In a similar vein, as this study will indicate, lack of contradictions and irresolvable contradictions may impede development.

The 'wholeness approach' developed by Hedegaard (2004; 2012) for examining children's learning through participating in the institutions of home and school can be usefully adopted for studying how teachers enact their own beliefs about English teaching within the practices of schooling. Her framework of planes of analysis, shown

in Figure 2A, encompasses practices, activity settings and activities, and with the inclusion of individuals' actions within activities.

Setting	Process	Dynamic
Society	Tradition	Societal needs / conditions
Institution	Practice	Value motives / objectives
Activity setting	Potential social situation of development	Motivation / demands
Person	Activity	Motive / intentions

Figure 2A – Planes of analysis of the dynamic relations in learning and development (after Hedegaard, 2012)

There are four levels of analytic focus in this framework. The first and broadest is society where what she termed 'tradition', formed by societal needs and conditions, takes place. The institution level lies below society in the representation in 2A. Here we find practice and objectives of the institution. In the case of present study the practices are those of the schools in which the enquiry is situated. These practices consist of a number of activity settings where teachers and learners engage in activities and group work in classrooms. These activities can contain any number of possible object motives for participants. Here Hedegaard (2012:16) showed her debt to Leont'ev and his notion of motive:

[...] in society a man finds not simply external conditions to which he must accommodate his activity, but that these same social conditions carry in themselves motives and goals of his activity, his means and methods, in a word, society produces the activity of the individuals forming it. (Leont'ev, 1978:51)

Activities in these settings offer potential social situations of development to learners. Learners are likely to interpret the activity and the demands that it makes on them differently, depending on what the learners bring to it. By taking this view, not every activity will always be one when learning happens. Students need to engage with the learning potential within an activity, recognise its demands and work with them in this process so as to master the concepts. In conjunction with the Vygotskian approaches to pedagogy, this study draws to an extent on the work of Leont'ev on object and object motive (Leont'ev, 1978). Leont'ev explained his idea of object and object motive as follows:

The main thing that distinguishes one activity from another, however, is the difference of their objects. It is exactly the object of an activity that gives it a determined direction. According to the terminology I have proposed, the object of an activity is its true motive. (Leont'ev, 1978:62)

The idea of object of activity is particularly relevant when examining actions in activities in practices as it allows us to question the purpose of the broad question, the purpose of activities within practices and how they are interpreted by actors.

The next analytic layer of Hedegaard's model deals with the person. Here light is thrown on the individual and the motivated actions of both teachers and learners as they take part in activities and try to take forward their intentions.

These four levels of potential analysis offer an all-inclusive lens for conceptualising how a person's action, i.e. how a teacher acts in group work in the classroom, is nested in practice, and how action and motive intermingle with the wider social and cultural world. As a result, discrepancy and alignment between motives at the different potential

levels of analysis can be systematically observed. Such an approach embodies the essence of cultural-historical theory, because ‘exploration into the functioning, contradictions, and transformations between the societal and individual forms of life [...] became the focus of investigation in the cultural-historical school of psychology’ (Stetsenko, 2005:73).

Hedegaard’s multi-layered framework helps to organise the complex meanings and their relationship in which teaching is located. van Huizen *et al.* (2005) called our attention to the importance of analyses at the macro, meso and micro levels in the study of teacher education. They proposed that situations at the micro classroom level are embedded in the meso and macro levels of schooling and society. Furthermore, meaning making and interaction at the micro level is somehow pre-determined by the motive established at the meso and macro levels (van Huizen *et al.*, 2005). Teaching is nested in multiple structures in which the meaning of teaching interacts with these wider levels and their inherent demands. In particular, school practice creates the conditions for teachers to appropriate social meanings and their motives (van Huizen *et al.*, 2005). This claim pinpoints the need to connect teachers’ motives and mediated actions to the specific school practices and the collective motives within the societal tradition where schooling takes place. I suggest that Hedegaard’s framework goes a long way towards providing a cohesive theoretical lens for such an analysis.

Motive is a core concept for Hedegaard. Inspired by Leont’ev’s work, motive can be seen as the ‘motivational force of the general activity’ (Glassman, 1996:323). It also refers to the ‘relationships that organise a person’s action in the situations in which they are acting’ (Chaiklin, 2012:212). An individual’s motive, i.e. dynamic, can be

understood by looking into the process aspect offered in Hedegaard's model.

Importantly, motive is a non-static concept and is highly contextualised. When situation or institution changes, so does the motive because it is re-contextualised (Daniels, 2012).

This idea of changing motives points to the importance of looking at the multiple layers set out in Figure 2A. The model is, at the very least, useful in examining 'a system of motives in relation to a practice' (Chaiklin, 2012:221). Moreover, it is a helpful heuristic for conceptualising the difference in motives that may arise between, for example, a teacher's object motive in the classroom and the objective that shapes the school practice. All these arguments imply that motive has to be understood in a particular setting played out in specific process, as well as its connection with other settings.

The cultural-historical ideas surveyed in this sub-section need to be mapped with the key concepts pursued by the research questions. If group work is a tool that teachers use to act on and change their object of activity, for example, children's trajectories as learners of English, then we need to access what the object of activity is for each teacher when they deploy group work as a pedagogic tool. We also need to identify the object of activity and how and why the tool of group work is used by placing them within an analysis of the motives and processes of the multiple social structures of the school practices. The answers to these questions will display the set of values and teachers' thinking about group work, and how they are interrelated to the broader context.

The question of ‘how learners interpret and act on their worlds’ (Edwards, 2005:59) is also applicable to teachers. Like learners, teachers act on their worlds in teaching, shaping the practices while also themselves being shaped by external demands. Hence, how teachers interpret group work and act with it as a pedagogic tool will be a central concern in this study, which is reflected in research question 1. The conditions in the context that afford them such interpretations and actions, together with the ‘wholeness approach’ proposed by Hedegaard (2004; 2012) highlight the rich and interwoven aspects within questions 2 and 3. Those conditions are interpersonal in activity settings as well as intrapersonal, for instance, involving past learning experiences and the construction of specific identities as teachers.

Dreier (1999) argued that the individual processes that mark people’s participation in practices are part of those practices. Studying how teachers work alongside students as participants in group work within classrooms will allow access to the school practices and meanings that extend beyond the classrooms and individuals. These extensive meanings, at the meso and macro levels proposed by van Huizen *et al.* (2005), can include school culture or societal and parental expectations. These meanings were not within the original scope of the study but were later addressed by the extra research question (see 1.4).

The present study endeavours to critically explore these complicated social dynamics by examining how teachers make sense of the present conditions as they externalise their own understanding of the purposes of group work. Teachers’ pedagogy is itself embedded in institutional practices, which may or may not be conducive to enacting the meanings teachers ascribe to group work as a pedagogic tool. Departing, for the

moment from the cultural-historical perspective, the next sub-section reviews some other research on the practice of teaching and locates the topic on alternative ground.

2.1.2 Teacher knowledge, professional lives and performance

In his examination of knowledge in teaching, Shulman's labelling of pedagogic content knowledge (PCK) as part of his early mapping of what teachers need to know in order to help children learn has attracted considerable interest. According to Shulman successful teaching is when 'teaching ends with new comprehension by both the teacher and the student' (1987:7). This statement highlights the inseparable dynamics between teaching and learning. In transforming existing understanding into new comprehension, the knowledge base a teacher should possess ranges from content knowledge of the subject to the knowledge of learners and values of education (Shulman, 1986; 1987). PCK blends a teacher's understanding of content, pedagogy, and the beliefs through which the teacher is able to organise, represent and impart a particular topic (subject knowledge) in the form of instructions adaptive to the interests and abilities of learners (knowledge of learners and their characteristics) (Shulman, 1987).

Good teaching, according to Shulman, involves teachers in grounding their choices and decisions in pedagogic knowledge to achieve pedagogic reasoning (Shulman, 1987; Shulman & Shulman, 2004). However, criticisms of PCK argue that teacher knowledge should not be regarded as a stable concept because teachers will develop very different knowledge depending on their views on the dynamics of teaching and learning of the subject (Meredith, 1995; Abell, 2008) and these views may change over time. For example, Ainley and Luntley (2007) observed that experienced teachers used 'attention-

dependent knowledge' to make judgements and adjustments based on their interpreting the context and activity going on in the classroom. What teachers know and learn is nested and can be captured in where the knowledge is applied. Knowledge and accessing teacher knowledge, must therefore take place in practice where teachers' work lies (Ball, 2000). The present study follows this advice by unpacking teachers' knowledgeable uses of group work within the activity of teaching that co-exist with the broader aims of the schools and the school system.

Other studies trying to define teacher knowledge incorporate a variety of aspects of teachers' decisions and actions within a school environment. The idea of 'the subjective educational theory' proposed by Kelchtermans (1993) is based on his view that a teacher's personal system, combining teaching knowledge and beliefs, changes constantly. The interpretive and constructivist approaches taken in his work consequently include teachers' career stories in an attempt to reconstruct the content of their theories because 'it changes with new experiences' and 'is bounded by the reflective capacity of the teacher' (Kelchtermans, 1993:451). His, he argued, is an integrated approach to studying teachers' professional knowledge (Kelchtermans, 2009).

This focus on what the teacher brings to the practice of teaching is a theme in a large number of studies. For example, a few researchers concluded that PCK of teaching numeracy is seen as the composition of knowledge of the subject, knowledge of pupils and knowledge of numeracy teaching approaches (Askew, Brown, Rhodes, Wiliam & Johnson, 1997). The research team's concept of PCK is one component out of a holistic and interactive model consisting of teacher's beliefs, teacher's practices and pupil responses (Askew *et al.*, 1997). Their study also included interviews with headteachers

to probe the contexts in which the domains of PCK and teacher's beliefs operate.

Putnam and Borko (2000) similarly took a situative perspective on knowledge and teaching in an attempt to refute the idea that teaching is simply a neutral application of knowledge in the classroom. They claimed that the process of integrating what is learnt outside classroom into one's teaching is not simple or straightforward.

The notion that personal factors play a key role in practice is particularly supported by studies about teachers' lives and professional development. In an investigation of how professional lives relate to student achievement, Langer (2000) identified three types of teachers in two types of schools and reported a specific type of successful teacher despite working in non-supportive schools. These 'beating-the-odds teachers' are sensitive, committed to and proactive in their professional arenas, and transformed the classrooms by what they had learnt (Langer, 2000). Hodkinson and Hodkinson (2004) also observed significant differences in individuals' dispositions towards learning and career development, though the case teachers were of similar age and were working in the same school. Sammons *et al.* (2007) also pointed out individual differences in how teachers responded to the matrices of influences from personal biography, identity and school context when they showed a varying degree of commitment, resilience and ways of coping in times of stress.

Intertwined with personal characteristics, examinations of teachers' lives and development also indicate the power of context. Langer's (2000) longitudinal study of school culture and student performance found six characteristics which differentiate outstanding schools from typical ones. For example, 'creating activities that provide teachers with agency' (Langer, 2000:422) is one of the six, when teachers are given a

sense of ownership and responsibility by engaging them in decision-making at various levels of school affairs. Based on these features of effective schools, she argued for improving the sociocultural setting to facilitate teaching. Such a finding is reinforced by an earlier study of how the organisational quality of schools affects teachers' commitment to teaching (Fraser, Draper & Taylor, 1998). Clarke and Hollingsworth (2002) similarly proposed an interconnected model of professional growth recognising both personal and situated domains, suggesting that school should be a place which is conducive to change. Korthagen (2004) made an extra point, that when teachers report a lack of school support for professional development, context may limit good teachers' teaching. Sammons *et al.* (2007) took a slightly more contentious line by arguing that continuing professional development (CPD) should clearly address and link the needs of teachers to contexts, rather than the other way round.

The interweaving of personal and contextual factors seems to be a widely accepted stance in discussions of the practice of teaching. The topic of teacher stress throws light on this point. Research has reported teachers' intense levels of stress and burnout due to demands made by school practices as well as personal qualities (Huberman & Vandenberghe, 1999). In Woods's sociological analyses (1999), he used the term 'non-accommodation' to describe teachers' unsuccessful adaptation to practices and the conflicts that induced stress and burnout. Non-accommodation is marked by two sources of stress: personal characteristics such as self-worth and feeling of competence, and contexts like school neighbourhood and the general teacher culture (Woods, 1999). This kind of study highlights the teacher-school interrelations inherent in the practice of teaching. Using quantitative analyses, Sammons *et al.* (2007) found that an individual's

sense of vulnerability in teaching is dependent on school management, morale and CPD. They also identified the role of school culture in affecting teachers' senses of effectiveness and professional lives. Gu and Day (2007), collaborators with Sammons, similarly summarised how internal values (personal domain), contexts and conditions (situated and professional domain) influence teachers' capacity to grow with and resolve conflicts.

It is clear that disagreement between personal and institutional views on learning and teaching can lead to conflicts for teachers as they navigate the different demands they place on themselves and encounter in the workplace. If, as Kelchtermans suggested, 'dilemma and political struggles are fundamental to experiences of teaching' (Kelchtermans, 2009:270), it is necessary to review the influences of school and its management on the practice of teaching.

Under the education landscape of the last two or so decades, it is argued that school values and priorities are often driven by parents and the market (Ball, 1993), creating a teaching culture of survival oriented to market demands and exchange value (Bernstein, 2000). Bernstein (2000) was deeply critical of practice which is driven by markets or emphasises short-term, extrinsic and vocational goals instead of an exploration of knowledge. Top-down management, characterised by a few non-elected managers in the hierarchy of schools (Bernstein, 2000), is common in the execution of marketised education. This kind of school management separates managers from teachers when performance takes over practice (Ball, 1993). Woods (1999) illustrated this problem in school management and teaching through a former headteacher who felt his role was

depersonalised when working within a top-down structure. At a personal level, this performance culture intensifies the vulnerability of teachers (Kelchtermans, 2009).

Evetts's concept of new professionalism within the era of new public service management (Evetts, 2009; 2011), which differentiates organisational and occupational professionalism is, to some extent, applicable to how a school is run. According to her, organisational professionalism is characterised by hierarchical and managerial control which is motivated by set targets and performance. This form of professionalism implies that freedom of decision-making for practitioners is limited. The other type of professionalism, occupational ideal, is a discourse based upon collegial and practitioners' professional standards governed by a professional association or professional ethics. Practitioners are trusted and operate with control over their work. Evetts's division depicts the overwhelming and increasingly popular management culture in shaping education and the practice of teaching where organisational control is taking over occupational ideal.

The impacts of this kind of school management are largely found to be detrimental to practice and teacher development. Reduced teacher autonomy is frequently a significantly negative impact, complemented by close monitoring and low morale amongst teachers (Avis, 2003). Hall and Schulz (2003) illustrated the tensions in schools based on a comparison of England and Canada. They reported how centrally imposed rules and curricula restricted teachers' judgements and decisions in their classrooms. Teachers had to follow specific demands both in quantity and quality as indication of performance (Hall & Schulz, 2003).

In terms of pedagogy, evaluating teachers' performance by standardised test scores encourages the 'teach-to-test' approach (Day, 2002) because teachers are held accountable for students' achievement test results (Hall & Schulz, 2003).

Psychologically, externally imposed performance categories are likely to harm teacher agency (Day, 2002; Hall & Schulz, 2003) and motivation (Day, 2002). Within the organisation, teachers being restrained by performance indicators creates tensions between managers and teachers (Ball, 1993). The resulting poor mutual trust can hamper the idea exchange and innovation necessary for school improvement (Avis, 2003). Conceptually this style of performance management also gives rise to new definitions of professionalism. In line with Evetts's arguments, Day (2002) distinguished two kinds of teacher professional identity in the era of reform – one instrumental measured by helping students to pass tests; the other oriented to their moral values and all-round education. Avis (2003) described conforming to targets as a shared vision and mission in an institution in ways which also align with Evetts's account of new professionalism. Avis's analysis suggested an emerging tendency of a centralised standard of being professional, where what being a professional is becomes a standard to be met, rather than a set of knowledge-based beliefs and values. In its extreme version of this interpretation personal dedication may be viewed as resistance or opposition (Bernstein, 2000).

Criticism of reform initiatives which have produced new forms of professionalism suggests a disconnected relationship between policy, management and teaching. Under marketisation, when knowledge is viewed as money, the role of management is to distribute resources according to efficiency and accountability defined by managers to

satisfy its product value in the market (Bernstein, 2000). Some argued that policy agendas have failed to envisage or comprehend the complexities of classrooms where teachers' commitment, identity and effectiveness lie (Day, 2002). Avis (2003) echoed this notion by opposing the use of performance targets to set the terrain of performativity. Their argument is that, despite top-down policy pressures, performance targets and reform effects are mediated by teacher beliefs and school practices (Avis, 2003; Day, 2002). In view of the external pressure, most researchers urge for more teacher autonomy. In addition to instructional practices, Ingersoll (1996) proposed that teacher autonomy should extend to behavioural, social and normative aspects of school policy. His argument is that the increased power of teachers is likely to decrease principal-teacher and teacher-student conflicts, creating a cooperative environment within the school which will in turn benefit performance.

Based on these studies, two general claims can be made. First, the practice of teaching is located in a wide spectrum of issues ranging from individual to institutional, social and political levels which go beyond the classroom where group work is implemented. Consequently, an integral part of this research should be dedicated to connecting the enactment of group work with the broader environments where teaching takes place. Second, the practice of teaching is a fluid and dynamic concept interrelated to and mediated by both internal and external forces.

2.2 Teacher identity

The ideas of identity and agency are important in the present study because of their considerable bearing on the dialectic of person and practice that is inherent in the

research questions. The possible link between teachers' histories as learners, teaching beliefs and their pedagogy is one strand in the analysis. If identity building is, at least in part, seen as story-telling or creating a self-narrative (Sfard & Prusak, 2005), the story will throw light on how one's identity can be a mediating resource when taking purposeful actions in activities such as teaching English through group work.

Some authors have suggested that identity provides a lens to examine aspects of teaching (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009) and is a way to understand teacher knowledge (Goodson & Numan, 2002). On this note Sfard and Prusak made the helpful point that 'why one needs [the concept of] identity depends on the researcher's questions' (Sfard & Prusak, 2005:14). In the present study the concepts of identity and agency are relevant because the second research question addresses teachers' 'experiences' and 'beliefs', two elements in the construction of identity and guiding principles for the exercise of agency. The crucial difference between identity and agency is that the latter arises in situations where one feels one can be effective (Edwards, 2010a) and can propel oneself forward. One's identity therefore may be that of someone who values language fluency, but one may lack the necessary agency to overcome a situation in a school setting where fluency is not valued.

By identity I mean a person's sense of who they are. Following the line of argument set out by G.H. Mead, this sense is learnt over the lifespan in interactions with others (Edwards, 2007). In time one's identity, for example, 'I am someone who loves the English language' shapes how one approaches events such as guiding and motivating students in learning English. The Mead line as made clear by Holland *et al.* (1998) has been particularly influential across the cultural-historical field in pointing to how one's

identity mediates one's actions in activities, 'the identities we gained within figured worlds are thus specifically historical developments, grown through continued participation in the positions defined by the social organisation of those worlds' activity' (Holland *et al.*, 1998:41). Here identity as a concept is historically and socially formed, and with a sense of situatedness. Identity not just shapes but is also shaped by one's participation in the figured world. If educational values 'guide teachers' action' and 'inform a particular, educational way of seeing and understanding' (Biesta, 2009:189), investigating teachers' values, ideology and work as meaningful actions will reveal their identities (Penuel & Wertsch, 1995), suggesting that actions, values and identity are at the very least related.

The argument that one's identity and capacity for agency within an activity mediate one's actions in the activity also connects the individual to the 'broader sociocultural milieu' (Wertsch, Tulviste & Hagstrom, 1993). Leont'ev saw self as an ongoing leading activity contributing to activities and changes in the social world, when this process also depends on cultural resources and the accessibility to these resources (Stetsenko & Arieviditch, 2004). According to Holland and Lachicotte the Vygotskian view is that identity is a higher-order psychological function reflecting the 'culturally imagined and personally valued social position' (Holland & Lachicotte, 2007:116). Examining identity and individuals' beliefs about English teaching as they are played out in pedagogy involves accessing the social meaning of the practices in which the activities of teaching are situated, and the personal senses made by teachers as they interpret the purposes of the activities and respond to those interpretations. Maclure's study of teachers' identities, though not overtly from a cultural-historical perspective, helps

illuminate ‘the situated’ and ‘the personal sense’ here. According to her, people use their identity to make sense of themselves ‘in relation to the contexts in which they operate’ (Maclure, 1993:312). Moreover, she proposed that context and teachers’ work have a two-way relationship – the context influences teachers’ work and lives; reciprocally their identities contribute to constructing the context (Maclure, 1993). These arguments are compatible with the Vygotskian view of the dialectic between person and practice in the sense that the actions that make up a teacher’s pedagogy are mediated by teacher identity and what is possible in the practices in which those actions are taken.

Practice is frequently linked to self (Stetsenko & Arieviditch, 2004). One way of looking at the relationship between identity and practice is offered by Goodson and Numan (2002), who suggested that the teacher is practice. This claim has some similarities with the views of Holland *et al.* (1998). Holland and her colleagues as cultural-anthropologists viewed ‘self’ as practice, i.e. self is both constituting and constituted by practice. Taking these arguments, one of the foci of the present study is to investigate how identity, seen as beliefs about oneself and being a subject teacher, mediate a teacher’s purposes for and organisation of group work; and equally how school practice affects a teacher’s pedagogy and professional identity.

Teacher identity and agency, according to these notions, can give a rich base for researching teaching, connecting teacher accounts of what matters for them as actors in settings with what Goodson and Numan called ‘histories of context’ (Goodson & Numan, 2002:273). In short, including attention to identity and agency when studying

individuals in actions in activities within practices is a study of social and historical development as well as a study of individuals.

Both within and beyond the cultural-historical research community, teacher identity is widely thought to be a complex construction. Some, as I have already mentioned, think that identity and work are inseparable (Fraser *et al.*, 1998); others suggest that the sense of self is formed by cultural, sociological, historical and psychological influences (Cooper & Olson, 1996). Maclure (1993) reported on teachers' identities in England by interweaving personal lifestyle, political orientation, school community, pedagogy and curriculum. One way of understanding the complexion is offered by Reynolds (1996), who has urged us to consider the 'cultural scripts' and workplace landscapes that shape teacher identity and the power teachers may have in modifying usual practices.

Reynolds's view is quite close to the cultural-historical stance taken in the present study, which recognises the need to seek the dialectic that signifies the exercise of agency as practitioners work on activities as well as being shaped by them, i.e. sustain some control over their identities as they engage in and with institutional practices.

The literature on teacher identity tends to agree on the notion that identity is fluid (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Day, Kington, Stobart & Sammons 2006; Sachs, 2005) and identity construction is an ongoing process (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Stetsenko & Arieviditch, 2004). The cultural-historical tradition frequently views identity as a social product, arising in social practices and to some extent, denoting what is valued in those practices (Holland & Lachicotte, 2007). Of course, as these authors have also observed, identity can also arise in resistance to what is valued in practices.

Echoing Mead, these arguments see identity as a 'composition of a personal conduct of

life and life-trajectory', which results from a person relating and configuring participation in practices (Dreier, 1999:22). The term 'trajectory' according to Dreier, marks the temporal aspects of identity, reflecting the historical elements in its continual development.

Other researchers emphasise how identity and its relationship with other external, situational factors can affect teachers as they negotiate and act in and on practices. Following Bourdieu they focus their analyses on the constant interactions 'between different forms of capital' such as cultural, social, economic and emotional conditions and examine cognitive and psychological strategies (Ecclestone, Biesta & Hughes, 2010:9). For example, Hodkinson and Hodkinson (2004) compared how two teachers' use of their cultural capital is a result of personal disposition, policy intervention and their perceptions of those policy initiatives. Within these analyses aspects of teacher identity and personal interpretation of practice provide references for understanding how teaching is negotiated to take forward intentions.

The situational and contextual nature of identity pursued in the studies discussed so far suggests that identity is malleable or even potentially unstable. Beijaard, Verloop and Vermunt (2000) found that teachers' perceptions of their professional identity shifted from subject experts towards didactical and pedagogical experts during the course of their careers as they became more experienced. The VITAE project in England supported this instability claim when it identified two types of unstable teacher identity, namely the unstable positive and unstable negative identities as a result of tensions between agency and structures of the schooling system (Day *et al.*, 2006).

The fluidity of identity also means there may be multiple identities which are in conflict with each other. One example is the ‘subversive identities’ identified by Maclure (1993) when she found that teachers denied part of their professional identities by disdainfully stereotyping teachers as a group. Conflicts within and across contexts can also give rise to multiple identification (Cooper & Olson, 1996; Dreier, 1999; Holland & Lachicotte, 2007). According to Lachicotte, whether people have multiple identities depends on their participation in social practices: ‘self’ varies in different contexts where a variety of interactions and activities take place (Lachicotte, 2009). These phenomena need not be seen as negative signs of weak identity; instead they may indeed have positive effects. Dreier, for example, has suggested that they have the potential of inducing change or development (Dreier, 1999).

Once again I turn to the arguments made by Lachicotte. In his 2009 paper he argued for the need to reconstruct ‘history-in-person’ as a part of social history. This ‘history-in-person’, a concept originally proposed by Holland and her colleagues (Holland *et al.*, 1998:18), can be seen as personal trajectory in which the person’s specific and situated actions are part of the social practices he or she inhabits. Based on these claims, identity formation occurs through a person’s participation in social practice and the consequent contribution to the practice. The dialectic of person and social remains analytically crucial, but Lachicotte reminded us of the importance of the historical formation of the identities we bring to the practices that we enter.

Addressing the questions of how and why teachers use group work takes us to the idea of agency. Agency, as already indicated, is ‘the ability to give direction to one’s life’ (Biesta, 2008:20). On the other hand, agency is also influenced by the actions and

positions of others (Biesta, 2008) or social structures (Ecclestone *et al.*, 2010). Agency allows the reorientation or repositioning of a person in the structure or practice he or she participates in (Biesta, 2008). If learning, culture and agency have an interdependent relationship (Hodkinson, Biesta & James, 2007), the same applies to teaching, culture and agency.

Agency denotes a forward-looking and proactive sense making of publicly held meanings which may lead to transformation, change or development. From a Vygotskian standpoint, agency is a decisive element in how identity mediates actions in activities taking forward a person's intentions (Holland *et al.*, 1998; Holland & Lachicotte, 2007). On this note agency can be defined, in part at least, as 'fulfillment of [...] identities, their reconstruction where necessary; and managing critical incidents and trends which may threaten them or which need to be managed' (Day *et al.*, 2006:611). In Dreier's terms, trajectories are taken forward by people acting agentially in their participation in a social practice, trying to make sense or make an impact with their actions (Dreier, 1999). At the same time agentic actions, being part of participation in practices, shape the ongoing development of social structures (Hodkinson *et al.*, 2007).

According to Beauchamp and Thomas, agency actualises identity in teaching (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). Agentic teaching requires a degree of freedom of movement when Edwards and D'Arcy argued that agentic teachers are 'empowered to work responsively in classrooms and such agency is created and sustained in the social practices of the schools in which they work in' (Edwards & D'Arcy, 2004:149). These arguments draw our attention beyond identity to the power of school conditions that can

facilitate or inhibit teachers exercising their agency. Past research has shown that the impact of professional identity on agency is affected by school management, morale and CPD (Sammons *et al.*, 2007). This emphasis of school conditions to empower teacher agency is echoed by Parkison (2008), who suggested school systems using ‘psychic capital’ such as recognition and respect to repair teachers’ loss of agency. Although the concept of agency denotes a sense of self-directness, exercising agency ‘is not simply a natural artifact of people’s invariant self-consciousness, but an achievement of different degrees in practice’ (Holland *et al.*, 1998:192). Whether school practice is conducive to the exercise of agency will be a focus in this study.

Reduced teacher agency as a result of school or education policy has been discussed extensively in previous studies. As the review of literature in 2.1.2 has already synthesised, educational reforms imposing rules and targets have restricted pedagogic freedom and agency (Biesta, 2009) or have produced ‘institutionalised particular identities’ (Bernstein, 2000:66) which hamper innovation. This type of professional identity is similar to Sachs’s ‘entrepreneurial identity’ (2005:10) when both of these terms depict the sense of externally-defined teacher identity as a result of education reforms reducing pedagogic autonomy. Entrepreneurial identity is constituted by a competitive, individualistic and externally-regulated culture, making teachers accountable to school managers, policymakers or customers (Sachs, 2005). These characteristics resemble Evetts’s definition of organisational professionalism (Evetts, 2013). These kinds of teacher identity, formed by managerial control and performance demands, can be detrimental to agency in teaching. Lingard (2009) proposed strengthening pedagogy in teachers’ professional identity in response to the government

agendas on curriculum and assessment. His approach to strengthening pedagogy is actually an advocacy of enhancing or safeguarding teacher agency.

Agency can help people in persisting even when conditions are adverse and agency is to some extent constrained. As we have already seen, this is a view of agency that Day *et al.* adopted in their broader discussion of teacher resilience. They explained agency as ‘the extent to which people can live with contradictions and tensions’ and ‘the strategies adopted by teachers to deal with any arising tensions’ (Day *et al.*, 2006:611). Agency can be observed in tensions, or precisely in how teachers react to contradictions in practices. Using the cultural-historical terms, conflicts within contexts may allow agency to be revealed through actors’ actions and tool use (Edwards, 2010a).

From the literature reviewed, a teacher’s past experiences, agency, identity and context are all intertwined and mediate his or her own pedagogy in the classroom. Thus making this complicated relationship explicit is of prime significance for this study. Seeing the dialectic of person and practice in terms of the relationship between teachers’ identity and agency, and the affordances of practices is a key to exploring how group work is understood and enacted. In summary, identity and agency are concepts that are central to the analyses of each teacher’s biography, and are traced when unpacking how and why teachers use group work in their classrooms.

2.3 Teachers’ espoused and enacted theories

The examination of teachers’ understanding of group work and how they translate this understanding into enactment in classrooms requires a review of literature on teachers’ espoused and enacted theories. Studies have indicated that teachers’ beliefs and

pedagogic orientation have a direct impact on teaching behaviour (Askew *et al.*, 1997; Aguirre & Speer, 2000; Brody, 1998; Fang, 1996). Nonetheless, investigations of the link between what teachers know and do have generated varied results. While some studies have reported teachers' instructional approaches consistent with their theoretical orientations (Johnson, 1992; Kang & Wallace, 2005); others have found that teachers' actions in the classroom do not align with what they claim to believe to be important (Askew *et al.*, 1997; Ernest, 1989; Kang 2008; Polly & Hannafin, 2011). Some researchers have proposed that contextual factors may account for the inconsistency of the relationship between espoused and enacted theories of teaching (Fang, 1996; Polly & Hannafin, 2011). These divergent findings may also be the outcomes of using different constructs or non-standardised definitions of the construct to operationalise teachers' espoused theories.

A vast body of literature uses beliefs as a way in to researching teachers' espoused theories of what is good professional practice. Belief can be a confusing concept. In his extensive review of previous studies Pajares argued that a precondition for studying teachers' beliefs is to conceptualise and define belief well (Pajares, 1992). Adopting Ernest's approach to belief Aguirre and Speer defined beliefs as 'personal philosophies, consisting of conceptions, values and ideologies' (Aguirre & Speer, 2000:332). Generally belief is viewed as a static concept (Askew *et al.*, 1997; Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002; Pajares, 1992) and 'based on evaluation and judgement' (Pajares, 1992:313). Conversely, Fang (1996) described beliefs as situational so they are hard to transfer to different classrooms.

Descriptions of the formation and function of belief can provide some clarification. Belief, according to Pajares, helps individuals to identify their positions within the social systems they encounter, giving them personal meaning and creating their senses of self (Pajares, 1992). Belief also contains a sociocultural aspect when it directs the individuals to find relevance in the process of forming social groups and systems (Pajares, 1992). The concept is, according to this view, personal as well as cultural. Belief, as representing a person's principles, can be explained as an internal system guiding one's behaviour outwardly. For example, belief shapes how a teacher interprets and reacts to classroom events (Johnson, 1994). This flow is reversible. Belief, like teacher identity, is also shaped by cultural influences (Johnson, 1994) such as the context of teaching and education policy (Fang, 1996). Here the external forces go inward. This means that there is a potentially dialectical relationship between belief and the environment.

These perspectives on beliefs shed light on the importance of the broader environments in which they are embedded. The importance of context is also, I suggest, pertinent to how beliefs inform actions. Belief enactment is contextualised, reflecting what Skott (2009) described as the inseparability of context and practice. Consequently, examining practices in which beliefs can or cannot be enacted is crucial when studying espoused and enacted theories (Pajares, 1992; Skott, 2009). Since enacting beliefs can only take place in context, 'practices that represent great departures from teachers' educational beliefs may pose particular contradictions and dilemmas for teachers' (Brody, 1998:45). This argument addresses the phenomenon of teachers' beliefs contradicting with school practices. When enactment is restricted, tensions within the context should be attended

to as teachers continuously negotiate their teaching in the affordances of practices (Skott, 2009). For instance, external rules such as a pre-determined curriculum and mandated assessment systems may prevent teachers from enacting their ideal pedagogy (Johnson, 1994; Kang & Wallace, 2005).

When teachers accommodate local possibilities in their own teaching, beliefs and actions are adjusted according to how teachers interpret the teaching contexts (Ernest, 1989; Kang & Wallace, 2005). This argument places teachers in an active position in assessing and evaluating the dynamics between their espoused beliefs and what is possible. As Leatham (2006) observed, teachers are sensible and complex agents who can make pedagogic decisions serving different beliefs and contexts. Within this implicit negotiation, Ball (2000) proposed that the bridging of context and pedagogy is about integrating knowledge with practice, and knowledge should not be taken out from where it is expected to be applied. Considering all these arguments, an appreciation of the context where a teacher's beliefs and instructional goals are situated is indispensable to the analysis of how these beliefs are enacted (Ball, 2000; Kang & Wallace, 2005).

The belief-practice relationship is not one-way with context entirely shaping enactment. Personal factors, such as agency and beliefs, can play a key role in influencing pedagogic behaviour, despite the power of context. Skott (2009) analysed belief enactment using the concept of community of practice and concluded that school context does not wholly shape a teacher's identity and pedagogy. Pre-service training, which contributed to part of the three communities of practice examined in that case, impacted on how the teacher structured his teaching (Skott, 2009). Personal learning experiences can also affect how teachers perceive themselves as practitioners and shape

their own beliefs (Johnson, 1994). Teachers' views of the subject they are teaching also matter. For example, science teachers' epistemological beliefs in relation to the specific subject they teach are found to be generally consistent with their behaviour in classrooms and the lab activities they organise (Kang & Wallace, 2005). In a similar vein, teachers' conceptions of mathematics explain the differences in instructional approaches (Thompson, 1984). The dynamics between teachers' espoused and enacted theories of pedagogy should be viewed as interdependent or a circular process. While beliefs may direct teaching goals and actions in classrooms (Aguirre & Speer, 2000); changes in practice can lead to changes in teachers' beliefs (Askew *et al.*, 1997). Clarke and Hollingsworth (2002:951) introduced the 'interconnected model of professional growth'. They argued that change in belief and practice is not a linear process but mediated by reflection in and on enactment.

Teachers' espoused theories are intricate constructs which incur a few methodological challenges. First, teacher participants in empirical studies may have difficulties in articulating their beliefs (Leatham, 2006) because beliefs are usually implicit or regarded as a person's tacit knowledge. Second, there may be problems with the introspective nature of self-reported data when interviewees are prompted to reconstruct past events in interviews (Fang, 1996). Interpreting this kind of data can be problematic. What teachers say and how the researchers interpret what is said is not a one-to-one relationship since these two entities may not correspond to each other (Leatham, 2006). To tackle this challenge Aguirre and Speer (2000) identified two types of belief. Professed beliefs are what teachers describe and articulate as having, regardless of whether or not these beliefs are consistent with their behaviour observed. Attributed

beliefs are identified by researchers as reflected by observing teachers' behaviour. In this way both the teacher's and the researcher's perspectives are given attention while being treated separately. Other researchers suggest examining beliefs through teachers' narrations, intentions and actions (Johnson, 1994; Pajares, 1992). Multiple data sources from different situations (Leatham, 2006) or narrative methods (Fang, 1996) should be adopted.

Caution should be taken when making assumptions about the link between teachers' espoused theories and enactment. Ball (2000) mentioned a common fallacy that teachers, having knowledge, can use it in their teaching. Leatham (2006) also questioned researchers' assumption of teaching as a direct consequence of teachers' beliefs about the subject. Ball's and Leatham's scepticism is compatible with the central argument in the present study that the environments in which teachers apply their knowledge and beliefs need to be considered alongside the primary focus on what teachers know and do in relation to the deployment of group work.

2.4 Group work

The enormous amount of research on group work over the last 20 years or so means that this review needs to take a tightly focused pathway through it. This section will start with an overview of some contemporary studies of group work in classrooms. It will then move on to interaction dynamics which are a key to effective group work. These discussions will be followed by drawing on some Vygotskian work to examine the connections between student learning and pedagogic intentions and actions of teachers.

With this examination I will introduce a framework intended for the analyses of teachers' group work pedagogy.

In the field of studying children working together in small groups, collaborative learning, cooperative learning and group work are the most frequently used terms and at times are used interchangeably. In her review of various studies in order to summarise the conditions for successful groups, Cohen defined cooperative learning as 'students working together in a group small enough that everyone can participate on a collective task that has been clearly assigned' (Cohen, 1994:3), highlighting task and the less dominant role of the teacher due to 'delegation of authority' (Cohen, 1994:3). She admitted that the concept is broadly defined because it includes collaborative learning, cooperative learning and group work. A similar definition is adopted by Webb and Palincsar (1996:841) when they defined a group as 'persons engaged in a common task who are interdependent in the performance of that task and interact in its pursuit.' The notion of group interdependence is supported by Brody and Davidson, who defined cooperative learning as 'a method of instruction that organises students to work in groups towards a common goal or outcome, or share a common problem or task in such a way that they can only succeed in completing the work through behaviour that demonstrates interdependence while holding individual contributions and efforts accountable' (Brody & Davidson, 1998:8). These definitions stress peer interaction alongside group task or product, although Slavin (2004) argued that group productivity is different from learning.

The distinction between output from group work and the learning that occurs when working in a group runs through other studies of group work. These two elements can,

for example, be found in Galton and Williamson's study of groups in primary schools. They classified grouping arrangements into four major types in which two involved pupils producing a joint outcome within the same group while the others emphasised interaction as a means to learning (Galton & Williamson, 1992). Dillenbourg focused on learning and described collaborative learning as 'a situation in which particular forms of interaction among people are expected to occur, which would trigger learning mechanisms, but there is no guarantee that the expected interactions will actually occur' (Dillenbourg, 1999:5). The attempts to differentiate the terms and make a connection with learning continue, for instance, 'although certain forms of cooperative learning can occur without collaboration, collaborative learning is generally assumed to subsume cooperation' (Webb & Palincsar, 1996:848). Taking all these perspectives into account, group work seems to be a relatively neutral or diluting term to denote the method of assigning students to work in small groups in classroom. One element in the study will be to explore what teachers think group work is.

The mass of research on students learning in groups has been summarised by a number of UK-based researchers. Galton and Williamson made a primary distinction by outlining the major differences between research in the US and the UK, and saw them as complementary (Galton & Williamson, 1992). According to these authors, research studies in the US are predominantly comparisons of outcomes obtained from contrived grouping and non-grouping conditions; on the other hand, the processes attributed to those results are emphasised in the UK. Kutnick (1994) continued such differentiation with a chronicle of research development about classroom groups in the two camps. According to him, the US mostly employs experimental design for hypothesis testing;

whereas researchers in the UK tend to investigate what happens in groups such as teaching style and task, using observation and case study data. He also concluded that studies in the UK were often commissioned by the government, so the several early studies on grouping were national projects carried out in different catchment areas. Mercer (1995) added a third category to these two lines of enquiry. The characteristic of this line is its survey of learning processes and features of verbal exchanges looking at how pupils use talk to make their thinking explicit and open.

Distinguishing research about group work in this way may serve as a pointer in reviewing the vast array of studies in the field. First, results obtained from controlled experiments yield some favourable effects produced by group work, among them are students' academic attainment (Kutnick, Ota & Berdondini, 2008; Slavin, 1996; Slavin, Hurley & Chamberlain, 2003), attitudinal change (Johnson & Johnson, 1999) and social skills (Bromley & Modlo, 1997). Specifically, group work enhances learning motivation (Slavin, 2004). This is especially the case for low-achievers (Firkins, Forey & Sengupta, 2007). It is generally applicable to a variety of school subjects including mathematics and science (Ding, Li, Piccolo, & Kulm, 2007; Goos, Galbraith & Renshaw, 2002; Reznitskaya *et al.*, 2009) as well as languages (Bromley & Modlo, 1997; Chinn, Anderson & Waggoner, 2001), validating its high versatility fitting a range of teaching purposes and lesson content.

Some quasi-experimental research has tried to operationalise and measure specific group behaviour in affecting students' understanding of subject knowledge or cognitive development. Training students' metacognitive skills for group work promotes their reasoning when solving mathematical problems (Goos *et al.*, 2002; Kramarski &

Mevarech, 2003). These higher-order skills include receiving peer help that is timely, relevant and elaborated (Webb, 1992); explaining problem-solving strategies and giving details of thinking (Webb *et al.*, 2009) such as clarifying or elaborating ideas when responding (Barron, 2000); and justification and evaluation to identify correct solutions to the problem (Chiu, 2008). Other studies conversely showed that high-achieving students may learn better when working individually than collectively due to poor interaction skills in groups (Barron, 2003; Webb, Nemer & Zuniga, 2002). These results highlighted the importance of interaction quality and its relationship with group productivity.

In order to understand how group work can help improve subject performance much has also been done to link verbal interaction pattern to effective problem-solving or subsequent learning outcomes. Basically these studies can be reduced into two streams – pupil-pupil and teacher-pupil interaction. For pupil-pupil exchanges, training programmes such as emphasising the use of thought-provoking questions have been shown to facilitate cognitive and metacognitive processes in group dynamics (King, 2008). Through this questioning approach students show better understanding of the problem, provide more elaborated responses and generate analogies while working on a science task (Gillies, Nichols, Burgh & Haynes, 2014). Some researchers also found that students' high levels of engagement with each others' ideas and offering detailed explanations of ideas significantly correlate with mathematic achievement (Webb *et al.*, 2014). In a similar vein, studies of teacher-pupil interaction investigate the relationship between teachers' instructional behaviour and students' discourses in small groups. For instance, a cooperative learning intervention in Australia showed how teachers' use of

questions and learning-regulated strategies prompted student talk at a higher cognitive and metacognitive order compared to the control groups (Gillies, 2008; Gillies & Khan, 2009). In America, teachers' probing questions in groups are a strong predictor of students' explaining behaviour when solving a maths problem, and most effective when students' initial solutions are attended to in teachers' instructions (Webb *et al.*, 2009).

Research in the UK has reported ineffective uses of groups in natural classroom settings. One study found that interactive work in groups is minimal in primary classrooms, leading to an absence of pupil interaction though sitting in small groups (Baines, Blatchford & Kutnick, 2003). The numbers of students in a group in primary schools tend to be larger than in secondary schools (Baines *et al.*, 2003), meaning that students in bigger group size have fewer opportunities to participate. Interestingly, grouping in the core national curriculum subjects of English and mathematics is the least popular strategy (Baines *et al.*, 2003) and teacher talk tends to dominate when teachers interact with groups (Harwood, 1989; Skidmore, Perez-Parent & Arnfield, 2003). The limited nature of group work in primary schools in the UK was also confirmed by Galton and his colleagues when they employed the original observational methods of the ORACLE project two decades later to find that, despite an increase in interaction with groups, the most common question type teachers asked continued to be factual or closed-type (Galton, Hargreaves, Comber, Wall & Pell, 1999). In other cases their instructions consist mainly of task supervision, which suppresses students' thinking and sharing of ideas (Harwood, 1995).

The National Oracy Project reflected the interest in group work found in ORACLE at the time. The initiative was implemented in 1987, covered over 30 local authorities with

the agenda of utilising classroom talk to bolster school pupils' literacy (Keiner, 1992). Its emphasis on 'learning through talk' advocated a wider use of grouping and effective teacher talk in the English classrooms. The later SPRinG project, based on a social pedagogic approach to be integrated into daily classrooms, was also interventionist and provided pedagogic materials and training to teachers to structure group work. Students in the experimental groups outperformed their control counterparts in science attainments (Baines, Blatchford & Chowne, 2007), demonstrated more desirable discussion behaviour and functioned at a higher cognitive level (Baines, Rubie-Davies & Blatchford, 2009; Galton *et al.*, 2009). The programme was replicated in Scottish classrooms which successfully promoted students' collaborative dialogues, and with positive feedback of the project from the teachers (Christie, Tolmie, Thurston, Howe & Topping, 2009). Another intervention in England, Thinking Together, identifies 'exploratory talk' which features joint, open sharing and justification of ideas as productive pupil dialogues in group work (Mercer, 1995; 2008). Exploratory talk has been tested in fostering pupils' mathematical reasoning (Mercer & Sams, 2006). Through these projects both teachers and students are taught strategies of talk to boost group interaction quality. These promising results not only encourage teachers to adopt more group work in day-to-day classrooms but also mutual thinking and learning in a socially-constructed setting.

The insight from this fascinating pool of research across countries, subjects, student levels, methods used and results is the significance of the role of the teacher. Studies have established a clear link between teacher intervention to guide pupil talk and higher academic achievement (Baines, Blatchford & Kutnick, 2008; Stevens, 2008). As a

learner-centred approach, teacher help and instruction in group work should be minimal and necessary (Corden, 1992; Howe *et al.*, 2007), and directed towards pooling students' cognitive and metacognitive resources (Prinsen, Terwel, Volman & Fakkert, 2008; Yarrow & Topping, 2001). Accurate monitoring of group processes (Chiu, 2004) and orchestrating students' interaction (Alexander, 2008) are equally important. All these pedagogic strategies are of course, very much in sync with the Vygotskian perspective which emphasises mediation and assisted performance of learner by adult.

One of the Vygotskian ideas that is most discussed in the education literature is probably the ZPD. Describing the ZPD Vygotsky (1978:86) explained:

It is the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers.

Vygotsky was clear here that he was discussing developmental levels which include higher mental functioning alongside levels of conceptual understanding (Chaiklin, 2003). Nonetheless, as Chaiklin argued, the ZPD has frequently been employed as a framework for teaching in classrooms, where it is viewed as creating a learning zone focused on children's conceptual development and independent use of increasingly powerful conceptual tools. Moll, for example, has held this view of the ZPD suggesting that its ideal outcome is independent performance by the child before he becomes competent in it (Moll, 1990). Hence, drawing on the latter conception of the ZPD, teaching is often defined as offering assistance towards achieving the performance independently (Gallimore & Tharp, 1990) in which the assistance should be based on the child's knowledge and performance, not upon a predefined script set by the teacher

(Tharp, 1993). This study recognises the importance of Chaiklin's distinction between conceptual development and the development of higher mental functions such as memory, but will be taking the narrower view of the ZPD as a learning zone to reflect the ways the teachers in the study interpreted learning.

Mediation is a central concept in the process of assisted performance in the ZPD. As Kozulin put it, 'the mediator selects, changes, amplifies, and interprets objects and processes to the child' (Kozulin, 1998:60). The teacher as the mediator therefore plays a key role in creating the learning zone and assisting the child to make sense of his learning within the ZPD. Tharp and Gallimore described what happens as socially mediated activity which includes teacher-child interaction and dialogues (Tharp & Gallimore, 1991). These actions are also socially situated, requiring the teacher to recognise and work with the child's everyday understanding to connect it to scientific concepts as an objective of instruction (Daniels, 2008). Despite being helped and guided, the child is seen as an active participant working with the teacher in the conversations in which mediation occurs (Kumpulainen & Wray, 2002) and setting his own learning goals to be supported by the teacher (Forman & McPhail, 1993). It is noteworthy that though mediating with more powerful understanding, the role of the adult or teacher is not to control the task but help children to shape their own meanings through the use of appropriate materials and tools (Moll & Greenberg, 1990; Thompson, 2013).

In this respect group work is one means to provide assistance or mediation, since it is generally associated with interaction, collaboration and a learner-centred way of instructional approach. According to Gallimore and Tharp (1990), nonsupervisory assistance offered by peers is a fundamental characteristic of cooperative learning

which should be provided at every level of schooling. Their argument reflects their Vygotskian view of the purpose of group work when ‘joint productive activity will produce the assistance that will increase the competence of supervisees. All those who participate [...] will be assisted, will develop a new intersubjectivity, and will advance in the development of capacities to assist’ (Gallimore & Tharp, 1990:189). In particular, group work distinctively favours the use of dialogues, travelling between what Vygotsky regarded as the social and psychological planes of mental functions which are also symbolic in the path of assisted performance (Tharp & Gallimore, 1991).

According to Tharp and Gallimore, successful group work as a means to assisted performance facilitates a child’s use of the language as a tool which carries conceptual knowledge while interacting with classmates. In this way the child begins to acquire mastery of concepts by using them in a safe environment where mistakes and getting stuck are acceptable as part of the route to mastery and an expanded learning capacity (Claxton, 2007). When group work stimulates peer interaction the expectation is that individuals’ mental resources are pooled together. Both the dynamics and the outcome are social. Contributing to and simultaneously receiving this assistance, the child’s understanding of the problem is shaped and he is prepared for independent performance at the next level of learning beyond group work. Borrowing Moll’s words (1990:9), the child is ‘taking over the activity, making it their [his] own.’

However, simply describing language and mediation as I have done so far is a little imprecise. Participants’ defining the activity, shared understanding and goal-directed actions are all indicative of and central to a Vygotskian pedagogy involving group work (Forman & McPhail, 1993). A number of studies have helped illuminate a more precise

way of explaining what happens in the learning zone. Tudge (1990) compared the impacts on the level of children's thinking as a result of students pairing with a more competent, less competent or equally competent peer. He concluded that simply creating a setting for a potential ZPD is not enough, instead it is more important to attend to children's interaction dynamics than to the composition of the pair.

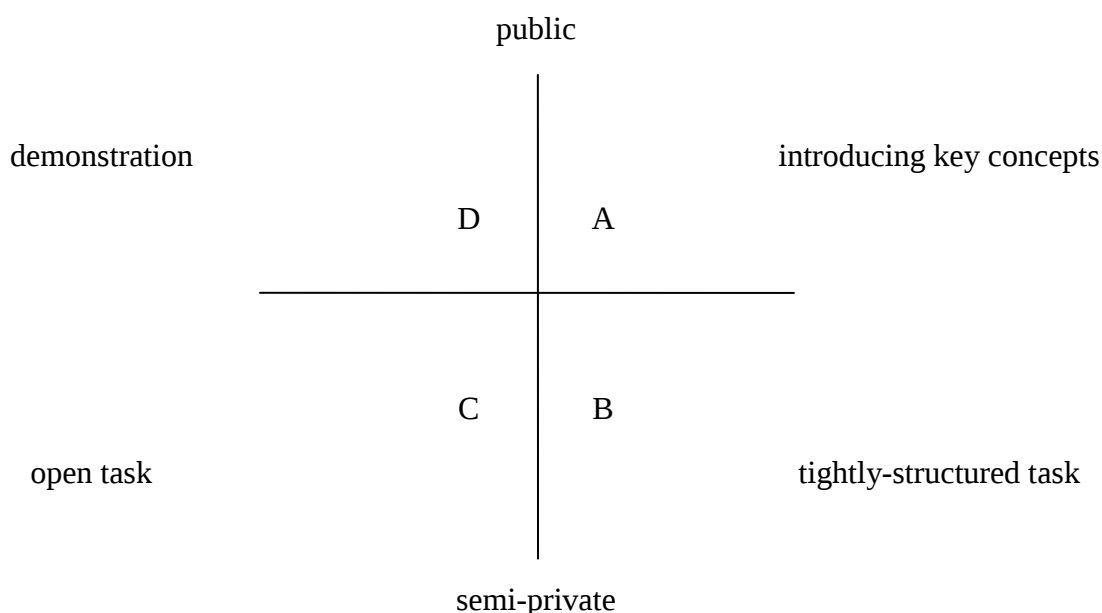
Smagorinsky and Fly (1993) also studied interactions, this time in the kind of teacher talk as 'instructional scaffold'. They found that teacher support in the form of questioning made a difference and that teachers relying on top-down instructions without helping students to develop their means of literary analysis and interpretation did not help independent performance. On the contrary, teachers guiding groups to elaborate their responses and interpretations and generating questions based on students' responses, were teachers who positively affected subsequent student talk in groups (Smagorinsky & Fly, 1994).

The core concepts in the Vygotskian approach to learning are highly applicable to analysing the pedagogic functions of group work because they are about the learning of a child as well as the role of the more expert other. The pathways through the ZPD proposed by Gallimore and Tharp (1990) explicate the development of learning from dependence, i.e. assisted, to independence, i.e. internalised. They discuss four stages of the ZPD, starting off in the intermental zone with 'assistance provided by more capable others' in Stage 1 to progress towards self assistance in Stage 2 (Gallimore & Tharp, 1990:185). Becoming completely self-directed through internalisation takes place in Stage 3 with automatised performance evident in the move to the intramenatal zone. Finally deautomatisation can lead to recursive learning and returning to the intermental

zone for another cycle of new mastery or refreshing existing understanding in Stage 4. This cycle signals a lifelong process in human development. These progressive stages in the ZPD epitomise the Vygotskian view, that learning takes place in both the social and psychological planes, moving between intermental and intramental zones. According to this framing, teachers should be sensitive to this movement and adjust assistance to where the learner is (Thompson, 2013).

A similar attention to the move from intermental to intramental is found in a pedagogic heuristic for analysing the purposes of group work in schools. Edwards (1994) identified three pedagogic phased structures in managing group work in classrooms. Initially, the introduction of key concepts by the teacher dominates Stage 1, in which learners can work alongside more capable others. In Stage 2 learners make sense of the new concepts and merge them with existing knowledge by participating in student-led activity. Entering this semi-private zone means that learning is non-threatening so that students are free to try, test their understanding and make mistakes. This stage resembles the self assistance stage in Gallimore and Tharp's pathways. Stage 3 is characterised by independent performance when students demonstrate their mastery of new concepts in the public zone after managing it in the semi-private space. This pedagogic heuristic has been further refined in Figure 2B, which draws on Edwards (1995; in press):

Figure 2B – Pedagogy of group work in classroom (after Edwards, 1995; in press)



The pedagogic sequence starts in quadrant A. In this quadrant the teacher plays a dominant role by giving explicit assistance and instructions. Group work occurs in quadrants B and C when the control of learning is gradually delegated to learners. In quadrant B students in groupings are engaged in closed-type of tasks designed by the teacher, for example, practising a specific sentence pattern by generating numerous examples of that syntactic structure. In quadrant C the task is open-ended when students may collaborate to draft a speech for a ceremony which should include the target sentence pattern, or plan and execute a debate using the strongest forms of argumentation they can produce. Both B and C are within the semi-private zone, that is, it is not a place for public performance where summative assessments are made. Importantly, students are free to try out ways of responding to the tasks, and work towards mastering the new concepts or skills, supported by formative assessment and feedback from the teacher. Working on a group basis also reduces the risks incurred in

the process of acquiring new understanding. Eventually in quadrant D learners are unassisted and showcase their mastery when they are able to demonstrate the newly learnt in the public domain.

Empirically this model is also exemplified, implicitly at least, by three-stage lessons in English, maths and science in a study about within-class grouping in secondary classrooms in the UK. A summary of 20 teachers' grouping styles concluded that those teachers usually started with whole-class teaching, though they did not use the Edwards' model this is quadrant A, followed by work using small groups (quadrant B or/and C) before going back to whole-class teaching for evaluation or consolidation, i.e. quadrant D or back to A (Kutnick, Blatchford, Clark, MacIntyre & Baines, 2005). Although that study did not differentiate the type of group tasks, it illustrated the sequence outlined in Figure 2B by capturing the routines in those lessons structured by grouping. Edwards's pedagogic quadrant model is developed primarily out of Vygotsky's distinction between the social, public or inter-mental sphere of activity and the semi-private sphere where learners try to appropriate public knowledge and incorporate it into the intramental plane. Her model also echoes the Vygotskian legacy with its attention to students using concepts, or externalisation. Externalisation particularly features in quadrant C when the learner uses conceptual tools to solve problems. Consequently agency for learning increases as students proceed through the quadrants, acquiring increased mastery of the ideas introduced by the teacher. Vygotskian theories of learning offer a theoretical lens to help make sense of teachers' uses of group work, at the same time analyse how teachers guide their students to navigate through mediation and assisted performance.

Chapter 3 – Research design and methods

In this chapter I explain how the research was designed to address the three original research questions:

1. What do teachers understand about the purposes of group work?
2. How does this understanding relate to their own learning experiences and beliefs about teaching?
3. How is their understanding enacted in classrooms?

Grounded on the data collected an extra question was added at a later stage of the study. This question did not guide the design and data collection but for ease of reference it is included here:

4. What do their approaches to group work reveal about school priorities?

The discussion will begin with the objectives, the design and the schedule in general. Two frameworks introduced in the previous chapter will be reiterated for clarity in this chapter. I then describe the piloting, sampling, research contexts, methods and data collection procedures. Finally the processes of data analysis and the methodological challenges will be addressed.

3.1 Research objectives, design and schedule

3.1.1 Research aims

Chapter 1 argues that the link between teachers' knowledge, decision-making, personal characteristics and group work has been under-examined. The present study aimed at

revealing what teachers understand about the purposes of group work, how this knowledge is mediated by their professional identities and is then externalised in their actions in classrooms. The intention was that teachers' own explanations of the reasoning behind group work might give insights into their motivations for using it. From this starting point the study set out to be an exploration of teachers as active participants in their understanding of group work and enactment of these pedagogies. At the same time the study recognises that people also interact with and are shaped by the contexts in which they work. Examining how and why teachers employ group work as a tool was intended to close the gap between research-based findings about effective group work and how those findings are transferred into classrooms mediated by the teacher's own understanding.

3.1.2 Design and rationales

The epistemological position I have held is premised in the notion that teaching is a social and dialectical activity. It occurs when people interact with their cultures, and this interaction involves the persons' senses of who they are. Through this research I have sought to understand a phenomenon which is embedded in a sociocultural environment full of complexities. Together with the open-ended nature of the research questions, these claims have led to a naturalistic inquiry which aimed at uncovering a detailed, thick description of a person in the activity of teaching as reflected in pedagogy at the conceptual level and in what the teacher does. This focus of individuality means that this study did not intend to generalise its findings but was oriented to a complete and thorough picture of the dynamic between teachers' views and their uses of group work in everyday teaching.

The research design and data collection process can be reduced into two major stages, the piloting and the main study. Each of these stages had different and clear objectives. The piloting was further divided into two phases. Before forming the research questions, Pilot I was tried out in two primary schools to test the feasibility of researching group work in authentic classrooms. With the objectives of enhancing my observation skills and operating technical equipment, Pilot II took place in two secondary schools. Proceeding from these two pilots, the main study stage lasted nine months during which the data were collected from four teachers of English in another two secondary schools. In sum the piloting and the main study involved six different schools.

The Banks *et al.* amalgam about the knowledge employed by teachers (Banks *et al.*, 1999) which was mentioned in chapter 1, informed a set of constructs related to group work as an object of enquiry at the early stage of the research design. The interconnected model that they proposed, encompassing the many aspects of knowledge of teaching in a coherent, overlapping manner was the initial lens through which I examined teachers and group work in the classrooms during the piloting. When formulating the study, teachers' espoused theories about teaching and learning and their enacted styles of group work were seen to be representing their views on the subject, learners, curriculum, school environment and personal beliefs about teaching.

The argument in this amalgam is compatible with the Vygotskian perspective of this study. The sociocultural tools (curriculum, school values etc.) may be internalised and thus mediate a teacher's personal construction of the subject being taught; at the same time this personal subject construct is formed by aspects of the teacher's identity. It is this amalgam that is externalised in one's actions when implementing group work.

Hence, the holistic model proposed by Banks *et al.* guided me to attend to other vital and inseparable elements of teachers' professional knowledge in addition to group work when designing the research. For example, attention was given to the formation of the teacher's personal subject construct when contriving the interview schedules.

Nonetheless, this model was adopted for research design but not data analysis. This was partly because using other analytic resources to go through the data would increase internal validity of this study. If the data collected based largely on Banks *et al.*'s model were in tune with other theoretical frameworks used for the analyses, it would indicate the strong explanatory power of this study. Another reason was that this amalgam was not totally helpful in terms of analysis. I found some of the resources offered by the cultural-historical theory to be more suitable at that stage of the study. Details will be explained in 3.4.2.

This epistemological and theoretical stance, with the focus on what teachers know and do, has led me to design this research as case study for four reasons. First, as the complexity of classroom phenomena such as group work is not easily detached from its teaching context, case study allows these complexities to be explored (Stake, 2005). Second, my research is an empirical study about teachers, pedagogic knowledge and teaching behaviour. Once a teacher and now a researcher, I believe the best place to study teaching is in everyday classrooms where the phenomenon can be understood in context (Robson, 2002). Case study, emphasising real people in real situations (Sharan, 1998), fits this philosophical position. At the same time, minimising the researcher's control in the field also means higher feasibility for carrying out fieldwork. Third, multiple methods can be employed in case study, which enabled me to follow teachers

and the uses of group work over time while being sensitive to their actions and interpretations of those actions. Lastly, it is hoped that the foundation laid by this case study will be valuable to future research, especially because teachers' own voices on their rationales for group work in day-to-day classroom settings have been under-researched. The array of teachers' purposes may inspire further studies using hypothesis-testing or contrastive methodologies.

Since this study looks at what teachers do in group work and why they do it, it is logical to classify a single teacher as a case. As mentioned in chapter 1, personal experiences and views about teaching can vary tremendously. These variations need to be analysed by individual as a unit, at least initially. This classification echoed the Vygotskian stance taken in the study. There social meaning is seen as a consequence of both intermental and intramental activities in which human mind is placed as the central agent. The mental activity of each individual is unique, having arisen from interactions with specific historical and sociocultural conditions at the interpersonal level (Bruner, 1997). Chapter 1 states that in this study teachers are believed to be agents in the activity of managing group work: their pedagogy is a result of the interaction between the individual teacher and the affordances situated in the layers of context reviewed in chapter 2. This collective case study (Stake, 1994) consisted of four teachers which produced four different cases from two schools. An advantage of this composition is that it allowed comparisons across individual cases at both the person and the school level.

3.1.3 Analytical framework

The cultural-historical lens taken in this study became increasingly relevant as the study progressed. One evidence of its growing value was that it allowed me to see how activities such as teaching using group work and the actions associated with them are located in broader institutional practices and purposeful societal expectations. Here Hedegaard's work turned out to be influential as the analysis unfolded. Her approach to researching children's learning and development (Hedegaard, 2004; 2005), as spelt out in the previous chapter, highlights the interrelated dynamics of the motives represented by policies created in a culturally-infused society, the shaping of institutional practice, the enacting of activities and persons' actions. Although Hedegaard examines children's learning, Edwards (2010a), for example, has used the framework to illustrate how an individual worker is engaged in knowledge practices in becoming a professional.

Adapted for the present study, Hedegaard's model allowed the analysis to disentangle the activity setting where group work takes place from the larger context of teaching while retaining their interrelatedness. The classroom is the site where the motives of a teacher intersect with those of the school and the wider society and play out in the teacher's actions in group work. Hedegaard's model is repeated here and adjusted to the context of the present study about teachers' purposes for and implementation of group work.

Setting	Process	Dynamic
Society – Hong Kong	Tradition	Societal needs / conditions
Institution – school	Practice	Value motives / objectives
Activity setting – classroom	Potential social situation of development	Motivation / demands
Person – teacher	Activity	Motive / intentions

Figure 3A – Adapted model for the study of group work (after Hedegaard, 2012)

In addition to analytically attending to motives in the actions of an individual, another advantage of Hedegaard's framework (2004; 2005; 2012) is that motives and actions can be contextualised in the multiple sociocultural layers at the same time. Ultimately adopting this framework for data analysis helped foreground the purposes in the activities within the teachers' pedagogies of group work. I was then able to place them in relation to the teachers' accounts of the motives shaping Hong Kong education policies and those of the schools. These accounts of motives and activities involving the multiple planes of analysis also permitted a comparison between the schools at the institution level.

The second Vygotsky-based resource I used was the pedagogic quadrants proposed by Edwards (1995; in press) which have been discussed in 2.4. Drawing on Vygotskian learning theory this resource offered a descriptor which could be deployed to classify and interpret teachers' uses of group work. This analytical model is illustrated in Figure 3B.

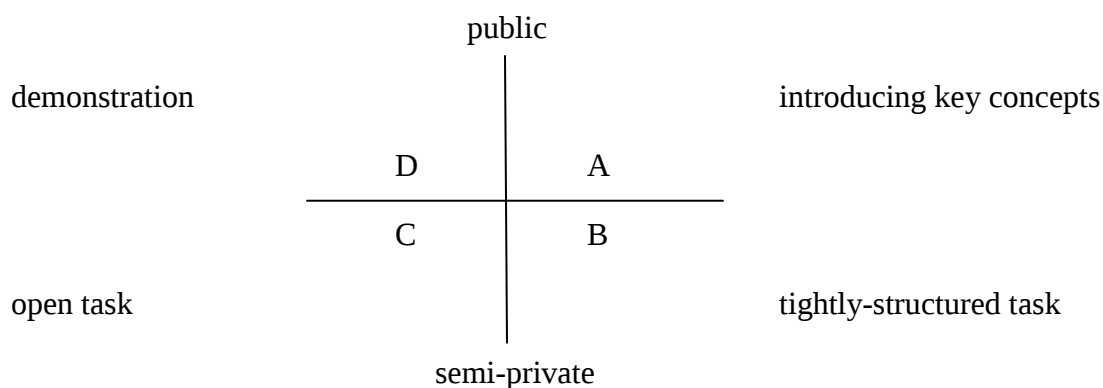


Figure 3B – Categorisation of group work in classroom (after Edwards, 1995; in press)

As explained in section 2.4, Edwards (1995; in press) suggested that a typical teaching sequence starts in quadrant A where introduction of key concepts by the teacher happens and teacher-pupil interaction is public. After the initial exposure to the teaching objectives, quadrant B signals a switch from the public space to a semi-private domain where class activity is organised with students working in small groups. Coursework in B is structured by closed tasks with little space for error but allow students to work with the ideas introduced in quadrant A. The sequence then moves on to C, which is characterised by collaborative, open-ended tasks. The space for students' control or ways to internalise the concepts and tool use progressively increases once entering B and C. Eventually the sequence proceeds to quadrant D where pupils demonstrate a grasp of the concepts or skills for summative assessment. As presented here the model appears linear and inflexible. However, it can be adapted to trace how learners move recursively through a cycle of learning, i.e. a cycle might be A B C B A B C D (Edwards & Mackenzie, 2008).

The degree of student agency and learner's control gradually builds up from quadrant A to D as learning evolves from assisted to unassisted performance. For the analyses of the data in this study, group work pedagogy was determined by the degree of pupil engagement and the task structure. This framework provided a set of labels with which I could describe the group work teachers enacted and discussed.

3.1.4 Research schedule

The study commenced in October 2009. Table 3.1 summarises the milestones over the duration of piloting and fieldwork for the main study, as well as the preliminary trial of data sorting which was shortly abandoned due to unresolved technical problems. This part will be explained in details in 3.4.2.

Time	Progress of the study
January 2010	Pilot I – lesson observations + interviews of two primary schoolteachers (see 3.2.1)
September	• sampling for participants as the four cases (see 3.3.2)
October – November	Pilot II – lesson recordings of four English teachers in two secondary schools (see 3.2.2) • transcription of all teacher talk in groups
November – June 2011	Main study (data collection) – commenced in East School for Case 1 and 2 and then West School for Case 3 and 4 (see 3.3.3) • interviews + lesson observations (see 3.3.4 and 3.3.5)
July	• transcription of all Case 1 interviews (see 3.4.1) Preliminary data analysis – categorisation of Case 1 data (see 3.4.2) • develop coding scheme and descriptors

October	• coding scheme abandoned Restarting data analysis – • transcription of all Case 2 interviews (see 3.4.1) • Case 1 and 2 data sorting (see 3.4.2)
January 2012	• translation of four interviews from Case 3 and 4 (see 3.4.1) • Case 3 and 4 data sorting
February 2012 – July 2014	• continual analysis and thesis writing (see 3.4.2)

Table 3.1 – The research schedule

3.2 Piloting

3.2.1 Pilot I

Before finalising the research questions I undertook a week-long pilot study with small but clear and attainable goals in order to inform myself about the feasibility of studying group work in Hong Kong classrooms. Through visiting local schools I hoped to have a glimpse of lesson styles in primary classrooms so as to generate some direction at the onset of this study.

The voluntary participants were two teachers from different primary schools. One of them was a male who had taught Chinese Language for ten years; the other was a female teacher who had taught Visual Arts for four years at the time when this small-scale pilot took place. I observed seven lessons in three different classes with students' ages ranging from seven to 11. Using naturalistic observation with an adaptation of Sylva *et al.*'s target child method (Sylva, Hurry, Mirelman, Burrell & Riley, 1999), notes were taken every minute depicting the teacher's behaviour in each of the lessons which lasted 33 minutes on average. In particular, what the teachers did, how the

lessons were structured and some prevailing or noticeable student reactions were recorded in these handwritten notes.

On the same day after the observations, these notes were tidied up, word-processed and sent to the respective teacher. The teacher participants and I wrote comments on these factual fieldnotes separately. The teachers' comments were collected two days afterwards, mainly to clarify and evaluate some of their actions. There was also contextual information of the specific lessons. The fieldnotes and the feedback from both the researcher and the teachers were used to draft the interview schedules. The foci in the two interviews included classroom interaction and teacher questioning. The questions were structured, with a twist of one or two questions for the respective teaching style. Each of the two one-off interviews was about 30 minutes long. The interviews were not recorded but notes were taken on the spot.

3.2.2 Pilot II

The second pilot was conducted shortly before the main study commenced. It involved four teachers of English in two different secondary schools in Hong Kong. None of the teachers in Pilot II were participants in the main study. Three of the pilot participants were female and non-native English speakers and the only male participant was a native-English speaker. The range of years of teaching experience amongst these four teachers was wide. And the two schools were very different in terms of their overall students' academic attainment. For each of these teachers I observed two lessons in which group work took place so altogether eight lessons were observed in Pilot II. Students were aged between 12 and 16.

During the observations brief notes about the lesson structures were taken. The time when students were working in small groups was video-recorded. With the recordings of the teacher-student conversations during the group work time I was able to transcribe all the teacher talk so that some instructional features could already be identified at that stage. Placing myself in these eight different lessons had familiarised me with the exact issues I had to adjust to once entering other classrooms during the main data collection.

3.2.3 Insights from piloting

It was very helpful to have two pilot studies which took place at good timing. The first one was before I fully embarked upon the research questions and the second just before the data collection for the main study. The two pilots helped me to refine this study conceptually and operationally, and prepared me for the subsequent longitudinal fieldwork.

In Pilot I, my objective of observing authentic teaching in primary classrooms in Hong Kong was achieved. Several pointers were gathered from the seven lesson observations and the two interviews. First, learning in small groups was yet to be widely adopted in Hong Kong primary schools, suggesting that finding primary schools where group work could be studied might be difficult. This judgement was later confirmed by the literature search. It showed that research concerning Hong Kong schools in this area was rare. I recognised that sampling of schools would have to be driven by whether or not group work was taking place there. Besides, when learning in practice ‘seeing is informed by a highly specialised knowledge system, and to see in this manner, one has to learn what there is to see’ (Saljo, 2009:205). This advice was taken seriously when considering my

role as observer and researcher. Given my own background of teaching in secondary schools, choosing the secondary level was a more sensible option. My 'specialised knowledge' of the system would be an advantage when co-operating with the participants, deciding 'what there is to see' and analysing the data (Saljo, 2009:205). Third, enactment of espoused theory can be restricted by teachers' self-efficacy and perceived pedagogic skills. Both teachers in Pilot I said that although they were aware of the possible effects of group work in primary classrooms, they did not feel confident about supporting pupils by using certain strategies.

The goals of Pilot II were twofold. First I would have hands-on experience of dealing with the multiple dynamics in at least four different classrooms. Ultimately I observed seven different classes in the two secondary schools for this pilot. Altogether these eight lesson observations were done in three different levels in the secondary schooling system, giving a good mix in terms of pedagogic style, learner characteristic, physical setting and class culture. These dynamics were then considered before the main data collection. Moreover, I was able to experiment with the essential technical side such as recording talk in lessons. Over the eight lessons various methods of how the recording might be done and my physical position in the classrooms were tested out. For example, in one lesson in order to capture teacher talk I followed the teacher to different groups when students were working on a task. In another two lessons I focused on one or two student groups only. As a result Pilot II prepared me well for the techniques which were transferrable to the main fieldwork sites. Mistakes which happened in this pilot were good lessons for the subsequent intensive data collection for the main study. In fact in the last two lessons of this pilot I decided on the best way to record group work and

teacher behaviour. When I recorded the first lesson in the main study my work ran very smoothly. Apart from operating the technical devices, I also practised other skills such as noting down background details and dealing with any *ad hoc* happenings *in situ*. Equally important was learning to manage the recordings and fieldnotes after each observation. After these two pilot studies I was technically ready. The piloting with an 8-month gap for planning and improvement between the two small studies proved to be extremely helpful when I progressed straight from Pilot II to the main fieldwork.

3.3 Main study and research context

3.3.1 Multiple case study

The design of the research was determined by the problem and not the methodology (Flyvbjerg, 2006). The aim of finding any links between teachers' purposes and identities and pedagogy of group work adopting cultural-historical theory implied that case study was an appropriate approach (see 3.1.2). It enabled me 'to carefully examine [teaching] in the context of human practices, and to attend to the what, where, who and when' (Saljo, 2009:206). With the multiple exemplars obtained by following four participants each over several months the findings provided trustworthy and contextual knowledge of the phenomena and a series of events (Stake, 2005). Having three to four cases was to show their differences in at least one dimension (Flyvbjerg, 2006), which would increase the rigour of this research. As mentioned in 3.1.2, each teacher was a discrete case because each was seen as an agent in the dynamic of professional knowledge, identity, motives and actions in group work in the activity of teaching. Although when brought together they presented a collective case, they were primarily

viewed as instrumental cases (Stake, 2005), since it was my aim to gain an insight into the interconnected teaching activity which could also form the basis for any further investigations out of this topic.

3.3.2 Sampling

Teachers' knowledge of and actions in group work are entwined with other constructs such as school context and curriculum subject. Sampling in this study was initially at three levels: subject, school and teacher. Each of these was carefully considered before and in the midst of the fieldwork.

My teaching experience and general observations of the secondary curriculum in Hong Kong convinced me that group work is relatively more popular in the classroom of a few subjects, namely English Language, Liberal Studies and Civil or Religious Education. Eventually the scope of sampling for this study was limited to English Language¹ for four reasons. First, the adequacy of data was critical to make this research feasible. A high number of lessons out of most students' timetables in almost all mainstream schools in Hong Kong are allocated to English Language because it is a core subject of the curriculum. Selecting this subject over the others would realistically increase the amount and frequency of group work in lessons spreading over the planned fieldwork schedule. Second, the compulsory introduction of Liberal Studies to the senior secondary curriculum was controversial when this research was being designed. The first student cohort would sit the public exam of this subject in the year following the fieldwork. This circumstance would add unnecessary complications and

¹ Considering the context of local public schools in Hong Kong the sampled subject should be English as second language though there is also English Literature, which is a separate and optional subject in the curriculum.

uncertainties to the research content and scope because there had been noises in Hong Kong complaining about the high stress and the confusing guidance for the provision of Liberal Studies. This subject was ruled out from my sampling because of these unstable conditions. Third, subject sampling through English Language was practically more efficient than choosing other subjects. English as the medium of instruction in teaching could save time from translating some data and therefore minimise the potential inefficiency arising from translation. As a result this would facilitate data management and presentation, both written and oral, especially it turned out that half of the participants spoke in English in every interview. Lastly, my experience of teaching the subject in Hong Kong was an advantage for the fieldwork. Other than my solid understanding of the curriculum, I would be familiar with the many different lesson structures; and outside the classroom I would be sensitive when interacting with the teacher participants as an empathetic researcher. Establishing a rapport with them was pivotal to the creation of a local or mutual setting to foster the sharing of their tacit knowledge (Gertler, 2003). These skills would add to my own confidence in accomplishing the lengthy and possibly erratic process of data collection.

Since my methodological aim was to gain a close-up of teachers, their purposes and behaviour in relation to group work without intending to make generalisations, employing volunteer sampling could be justified. If the schools and teachers were motivated and open to participation, the data generated would be likely to be rich and with great depth. At this point the implication from Pilot I proved to be relevant. I had learnt there that the use of group work in Hong Kong schools could vary hugely, yet the feasibility of this study largely depended on whether group work was taking place. This

became the guiding principle of my sampling strategy. When identifying the participating schools, a purposive sample of a few secondary schools having the ethos of student-centred approaches or innovative teaching was targeted. Utilising my professional network more than ten secondary schools in Hong Kong were approached. After much effort on coordination and sending out formal documents, eventually I managed to secure two participating schools.

The first one, East School, was where I previously worked before becoming a research student. The headteacher gave a green light to the participation but I was told to invite the teachers, meaning that the teacher participants were not assigned by the school. Within its English department four teachers were selected, two of whom were thought to be more suitable by the headteacher. However these two teachers refused to participate, but the other two agreed to help. Under the principle of voluntary participation the decision was to recruit the latter two teachers. These two participants were both open and enthusiastic about group work. The other school, West School, was secured via a vice-headteacher who was also in charge of the English department there. He said that he wanted to improve English teaching in his school through their commitment in some university-school partnership projects, however, as we shall see this purpose was not evident to the two participating teachers. The two teachers in West School were recommended by this vice-headteacher and seemed to have little choice about agreeing. In our first meeting the vice-headteacher mentioned that he was hoping they would experiment with group work while being involved in this study. His comments suggested that probably group work had not been a usual practice there,

nonetheless his intention signalled his strong interest in the topic and support from the senior management was valuable to sustaining the fieldwork.

In short, the sampling comprised four teachers of English and their students from two secondary schools in Hong Kong. How students were sampled is detailed in 3.3.4.

Having two teachers from each school was to reduce the degree of variability that might arise if I worked with four schools. In addition, gaining access to and maintaining relationship with two schools would be more manageable than with four. Table 3.2 displays the composition of the sampling. Pseudonyms are used in all references in this thesis.

Name of school	East School		West School	
Name of teacher	Joan	Andy	Mabel	Rosy
Years of teaching experience at the time of participation	10	3	6	1

Table 3.2 – Composition of sampling

3.3.3 School contexts and teacher participants

East School is under the Direct Subsidy Scheme (a DSS school) in the Hong Kong education system. Having this status the school enjoys a relatively high degree of autonomy. Although the major source of funding is from the government, DSS schools are permitted to charge tuition fees. As a bilingual school² with generous additional resources from the school sponsoring body, the campus, facilities and deployment of

² Any bilingual school policy in Hong Kong refers to Chinese and English. DSS schools have the freedom to decide their medium of instruction.

native-English speaking teachers in East School are above average compared to most publicly-funded schools. The teacher-student ratio is slightly higher than other local schools as well. This school stresses academic performance at GCSE level and it had achieved outstanding results in the past two decades. This success became its ‘selling point’ to attract student intake and for school image.

West School is a low-band school³ so it is academically less competitive in the education system. It is fully funded by the government and cannot charge school fees. Formerly as a vocational school, it had adopted the standard curriculum for only a few years when participating in this research. The curriculum was offered alongside its provision of a few applied or vocational modules. Chinese is the medium of instruction in the school and a substantial part of the student body was newly-arrived immigrants from mainland China. West School was small in scale. Its average class size was distinctively smaller than many other secondary schools in Hong Kong. Very few students went on to further education after leaving school. The majority either did not meet the required academic standards or they did not aspire to post-secondary education. Pupil drop out, discipline problems and attendance rate were of concern to West School.

Both schools are co-educational and located in the urban areas in Hong Kong but there were notable differences at the time of my fieldwork. According to the basic information on campuses and facilities disclosed in the school reports, East School had more resources than West School. East School also had more staff and pupils registered during the data collection period. As a DSS school it had more freedom in pupil

³ The Hong Kong public school system classifies secondary-1 students by academic achievement. Low-band schools, though not the policy’s intent, is a widely-accepted tag attached to schools having the largest proportion of student intake from the low academic band.

admissions; whereas West School was obliged to retain a higher percentage of its admissions quota for the centralised school allocation system for primary school leavers.

Joan and Andy had been teaching in East School since they finished university. Joan was the most experienced amongst the four participants. It was her tenth year in teaching during the fieldwork. She was deputy head of the English department and was responsible for the school's English drama club. Andy was in his mid-twenties and initiated the English debate team in East School. Both teachers had a master's degree in subjects related to English teaching or linguistics on top of their first degree in English (Joan) and English language education (Andy).

Mabel had taught in two other schools before I worked with her in West School. She had six years of teaching experience. As a translation graduate she also taught Religious Studies as well as English Language in that academic year. Mabel got a master's degree in education specialising in English. She was the house supervisor and was in charge of the drama club in West School. Rosy was the youngest and least experienced of the four teacher participants. It was her second year of teaching. She majored in English language education and took geography as a minor in university. Rosy was thinking of pursuing a higher degree but was discouraged by the vice-headteacher at that time.

3.3.4 Introducing the study to the participants

No one would doubt that teaching is an incredibly demanding job. The scenario was particularly gruelling in Hong Kong because secondary education was undergoing a massive reform during the time when the study took place. School authorities, teachers and students were exerting enormous effort on transitioning to the new syllabi.

When negotiating access to the field my flexibility and intention to see authentic teaching were highlighted so as to encourage teachers and schools to participate. I presented myself as a cooperative and empathetic researcher who understood the tough aspects of English teaching. Since participation would include recurring lesson observations, whenever I communicated with the teachers the consistent message was that they were strongly encouraged to adhere to their teaching content, schedules and classroom routines. This was seen as a win-win. In this way the lessons observed could reflect their pedagogy as normally as possible which would strengthen research rigour. Also, teachers would feel more motivated to participate, and thus reducing the possibility of dropping out once the fieldwork has started. The teachers were in the position to decide which of their classes would be observed, as they knew best about the situations in the field and the suitability of the students for taking part. In short, lesson observations involving which year group, lesson content and timetabling were all decided by the teachers as long as they were using group work. On the whole their preferences and the research design were well suited, except on a very few occasions when I had to pace the lesson observations with one teacher in order to ensure an appropriate time buffer in between them.

3.3.5 Research methods, procedures and data collection

A mixed-method approach combining interview, observation and stimulated recall (SR) interview were the instruments for the data collection. From the overall design to the interview questions, the principles guiding the method choice and its application were the research questions and the cultural-historical lens taken in this study. Table 3.3 lists the total observation and interview time to show the wealth of the data collected using

these methods. For each case there were 15 lesson observations, one initial interview, one round-up interview and at least five SR interviews.⁴

	Lesson time observed	Initial + round- up interviews	SR interviews
Joan	17.08 h (1025 m)	1.9 h (114 m)	3.9 h (235.5 m)
Andy	10.5 h (630 m)	2.15 h (129.5 m)	4 h (238 m)
Mabel	11.6 h (700 m)	2 h (121 m)	4.38 h (263 m)
Rosy	11.8 h (710 m)	1.5 h (94 m)	4.1 h (250 m)

Table 3.3 – Data summary measured by time (h = hour; m = actual minutes in total)

For research questions 1 and 2, teachers' learning experiences, pedagogic knowledge and views about group work were obtained by interview as it gathers 'information having direct bearing on the research objectives' (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011:411). This research method met my aim of seeing teachers as active agents in employing group work in classrooms and making their voices heard (see 1.1). Through interviews the variations inherent in teachers' intentions for and views about group work could be elicited. At the same time group work provided an access to what they thought about pedagogy in general.

Observation enabled me to capture teachers' enactment of group work in classrooms as 'knowledge is always mediated or specified through some form of human activity' (Bruner, 2006:22). Observing teaching in real contexts was a means to obtain some access to their technical, 'know-how' knowledge (Haldin-Herrgard, 2000). Lesson

⁴ Due to time constraints Andy had six SR interviews while each of the other teachers had five.

observations were not to be analysed as the focused data set but used as prompts to be presented to the participants in the SR interviews. This design was to alleviate any difficulty in articulating what they were doing or being limited in their narratives of the internalised tacitness in their teaching (Haldin-Herrgard, 2000). It was also useful to start conversations about actual teaching in the classrooms with observations because tacit knowledge can only be ‘displayed and manifested in what we do’ (Tsoukas, 2003:410).

Supplementing the interviews with observations was to enhance the validity of this study. The teachers’ accounts of pedagogy could be validated by what was observed in their lessons and the school contexts. These observations could verify the teachers’ verbal data from the interviews and thus minimised the reliance on the teachers’ self-reports of what had happened (Yinger, 1986). Moreover, familiarity with what was happening in the classrooms allowed me to tailor the interviews to specific events and to recognise what the teachers meant when they discussed topics such as poor student behaviour.

The multiple methods also made up a powerful methodological design in line with the cultural-historical approaches to research. Observing how teachers acted in group work, using it as a tool fulfilled the Vygotskian notion of studying people in an activity and use of tools. The evidence gathered from the teachers’ actions in the classrooms as activity settings facilitated them in talking through their pedagogic thinking in the interviews. In this way the inferences drawn later would not rely on either what was seen by me or the teachers’ own recalls of what they had done in the past. As criticised in 1.1, some previous research which included teachers’ voices relied on self-reported

data and without evidence to ground the events being investigated. Neither did these studies attend to teachers' justifications for their decisions during group work.

The interviews carried specific objectives and were conducted at intervals and in a cycle of observations. Procedures for how the data was collected for each case are presented in the following sub-sections.

i) Initial interview

Before the commencement of lesson observations each of the teacher participants had an initial interview. In addition to collecting the teachers' general views about group work, the aim was to gain some necessary and background information such as their past learning experiences, their views on the subject and students' learning (Appendix A). The four initial interviews, one for each case, lasted between 45 minutes and one hour. It was in a standardised, open-ended format with wording and sequence of the questions determined in advance to increase the completeness and comparability of responses across the four cases; meanwhile the open-ended style could retain the exclusiveness and distinctiveness of every interviewee (Fontana & Frey, 1998). I began with a few questions seeking the teachers' overall views about teaching. Using this way-in their own history of English learning, present views on the subject, the curriculum and students' learning were explored. Eventually the teachers talked about their purposes for group work and illustrated these purposes by recalling past examples. The initial interviews were an important source of data giving me the access to an early, general image of the teachers as well as the autobiographical details which might be related to their pedagogic beliefs and actions in activities.

ii) Pre-lesson interview and observation

Following the initial interview the period of recurring observation began. Each of the four teachers had 15 lesson observations and spread across months in each school. These observations could be in any classes the teachers taught in that academic year, the choice of lesson was theirs as I wanted them to feel comfortable while I was in the classroom.

In all cases the teacher was interviewed for about three minutes immediately prior to each observed lesson. My goal was to collect the teacher's plan and expectations for that lesson, such as the exact objectives, lesson structure and other relevant information specific to the day, for example, group assignment and time allocation etc. In brief, these short, pre-lesson interviews were to collect the teachers' pre-lesson thoughts and were audio-recorded. At the same time the information outlined the lessons I would be observing straight away. Although the questions for pre-lesson interviews were standardised, the structure was informal because my purpose was to capture the unique, everyday circumstances (Appendix B).

Videorecording provided the evidence of classroom interaction and the way group work was organised through teacher instructions. I adopted focused observation (Angrosino & Mays de Perez, 2003) and used videorecordings to concentrate primarily on the teacher during group work to capture the strategies used. These lesson observations were simultaneously supplemented by written fieldnotes to include other aspects of the lessons, the students and the classrooms that videos might fail to capture. As already

explained, these observation notes and videos were not intended for detailed analyses. Instead they were to form the basis of the SR interviews.

In every lesson observation, on entering the classroom to minimise the obtrusiveness I took a corner seat and took some handwritten notes documenting the teacher's behaviour and class responses. The descriptions were annotated by my comments to provide the situational cues that helped set the scene of the lesson and later select the video extracts for the SR interview. I did not use a laptop for note-taking to avoid audible typing while observing. Another advantage of not using any tablets was that I had to transform the handwritten notes into word-processed in my computer afterwards. These revision processes were beneficial to my organising the data and noticing what needed to be picked up for the SR interview with sound judgements.

The entire group work process in every lesson observation was video-recorded. In lieu of using a tripod which would have made the recording too noticeable, I was carrying and operating a hand-held video-camera, zooming in and out to document the teacher's instructions within small groups and to the whole class. Physically I fixed myself at a corner at the back of the classroom in the whole course of the lesson. Regardless of the distance the teacher talk could be recorded in excellent quality by an audio receiver device mounted on the video-camera, and with a tiny portable microphone attached to the teacher's body. After the group work time any follow-up scenes such as the teacher's feedback or students' presentations of the group task were also recorded to complete the flow of the lesson activity.

Every time the observed lesson ended a few students in that class were invited to fill in a simple form for their feedback on that lesson (Appendix C). The short form had only three questions asking about their views on teacher intervention in group work and what they learnt from the group activity. Students could also raise their concerns over any influences of the video-recording on their behaviour. These forms were filled in by and collected from the selected students within a few minutes after each lesson observation. These pupil participants could write in either language though the form was written in English. I explained the questions in Cantonese when they had doubts. This process did not involve the teacher. Neither did he or she know what the students had written. Basically students who looked motivated or those who interacted with the teacher keenly in that specific lesson were invited. Moreover, the feedback forms asked for their names. By this I avoided collecting opinions from the same batch of pupils repeatedly so at times the passive ones were also chosen to comment on the lesson. Lastly a copy of the teaching materials such as handouts or powerpoint files were obtained from the teacher for archive and as a supplementary source of data. These materials were valuable in reminding me the lesson content and helped me to make sense of the video or interview data whenever the teacher referred to them.

iii) Selection of stimuli and stimulated recall interview

The videos from all the 60 lesson observations, together with the audio-recorded pre-lesson interviews were vital resources for the SR interviews. These SR interviews in a semi-structured format were to elicit the teachers' decision-making, their rationales for specific actions and how they adjusted their teaching in the lessons etc. These SR

interviews provided in-depth discussions of their pedagogy helping me address the research questions.

After every lesson observation many steps were taken for each tailored SR interview. First, the fieldnotes and students' feedback were tidied up and word-processed. Next the pre-lesson interview, the lesson recording and the lesson handout were examined, repeatedly and in great depth. Based on careful examinations of these data collected from the observation, several short excerpts out of each lesson video were picked. Each video excerpt was marked by a few questions to be discussed in the subsequent SR interview. All these post-observation procedures were done within two days after each lesson visit so that what was observed representing the specific aspects of the lesson was in fresh memory status. I followed these same procedures for all the 60 lesson observations over the entire fieldwork period.

The interview questions were in two major types. One type consisted of some standard, fixed questions. These open-ended questions were generic and versatile and were repeatedly asked to all the teachers in all recall sessions (Appendix D). Another question type for these SR interviews was drafted particularly for the individual interviewee referring to a specific lesson scenario. These special questions aimed at covering some matters of particular interest arising in the lessons and were situation-specific. While I was reviewing the lesson videos to prepare for the SR interviews, each question, whether the standard or the special one, was purposely linked to every chosen clip.

The selected video clips about group work became the cues shown to the teachers in their SR interviews. Selection criteria for the extracts were dependent on three dimensions. First, all fieldnotes, pre-lesson interviews, lesson materials or handouts and pupils' feedback gave direction to the exploratory scan and analysis of the observed pedagogy. For instance, during lesson observations some interesting phenomena were jotted down in my fieldnotes so that they would be brought up in the SR interviews. Second, literature about SR interview techniques, group work and knowledge of teaching systematically informed this selection process to ensure that weighty stimuli were included. Third, the research questions consistently reminded me of my principal foci on the teachers and their pedagogy. The selected clips usually drove the queries to how group work was organised in a particular way, student reactions or teachers' adjustment etc. It is noteworthy that this selection process went more smoothly with more decisive judgements after a few lessons of the respective teacher were observed. My confidence grew after the first SR interview of each case because the teachers were open and very patient when discussing their teaching.

In each case, an SR interview lasted about an hour was conducted after every three observed lessons. In other words, after the initial interview for the teacher's biography there were altogether five SR interviews for a total of 15 lesson observations from each teacher. This same pattern ran in all cases except once when a teacher participant could only afford the time to discuss one lesson in an SR interview. We made it up later so there were six stimulated recalls for this case. In each SR interview the three most recent observed lessons were reviewed. After an SR interview another cycle of three lesson observations resumed. The advantage was that the teachers would not be

exhausted by a series of intensive lesson observations. Likewise it would be tedious if the teachers were interviewed after every lesson observed. Reflections in SR interviews would be sharper and clearer if they were discussing three rather than five lessons. Eventually this pattern was proven to work well and each SR interview for three observed lessons lasted about one hour yielding some rich and well-grounded data.

Whenever an SR interview began, I specified the exact lesson, its date and what topic of the lesson the teacher and I were going to discuss. Then using a laptop, each of the chosen episodes was played to the interviewee and followed by the prepared questions connected with that episode. Spontaneous responses or follow-up, unprepared questions frequently happened, creating a conversational atmosphere in these semi-structured interviews. Though once a teacher, I was acutely cautious not to assume anything or judge their teaching, for reasons of being respectful to the participants and acknowledging that ‘teachers do reveal their implicit beliefs in a non-judgemental context’ (Brody, 1998:37). Presenting myself as wholly supportive and non-dominating was to encourage the interviewees to share more freely and comfortably. The teachers were also told that they could watch any unselected episodes if they preferred, but no one requested that option. At the end of each SR interview I invited the teacher to raise anything about the three lessons which had not been covered in our discussion. This invitation was important because it was the teachers’ voiced explanations and justifications for their own actions that were valued in the study.

iv) Round-up interview

After finishing all the lesson observations and stimulated recalls, I had a round-up interview with each teacher. The objectives were threefold. First it was an opportunity to pick up topics which had not been touched upon yet were emerging as important. After successive months of observations and SR interviews in each case, some interesting patterns or themes arose. This was a positive and effective outcome due to the fact that a lot of our time had been spent on video-watching and discussing the lessons. This round-up interview became necessary to wrap everything up not only for the teachers but also me as an observer. Second, the teachers could give a conclusive review of their rationales for and beliefs about group work, for instance, whether their understanding had changed or not since participating in this research. Third it was a chance for the teachers to reflect on their strategies in English teaching, their role as a teacher and the impact of participating in the project and working with me.

Like the format of the previous interviews the round-up was semi-structured. There were 12 standard questions, plus a few tailor-made ones for each case-study teacher (Appendix E). To prepare for each round-up interview, I listened to all of the teacher's SR interviews to draft the extra, exclusive questions. In this way I could summarise and evaluate the whole data collection process of each interviewee, as well as discover the hidden features or implications to be addressed in our final meeting. The time of these interviews lasted from 45 minutes to an hour and a quarter. Figure 3C chronicles the flow of data collection from each case teacher.

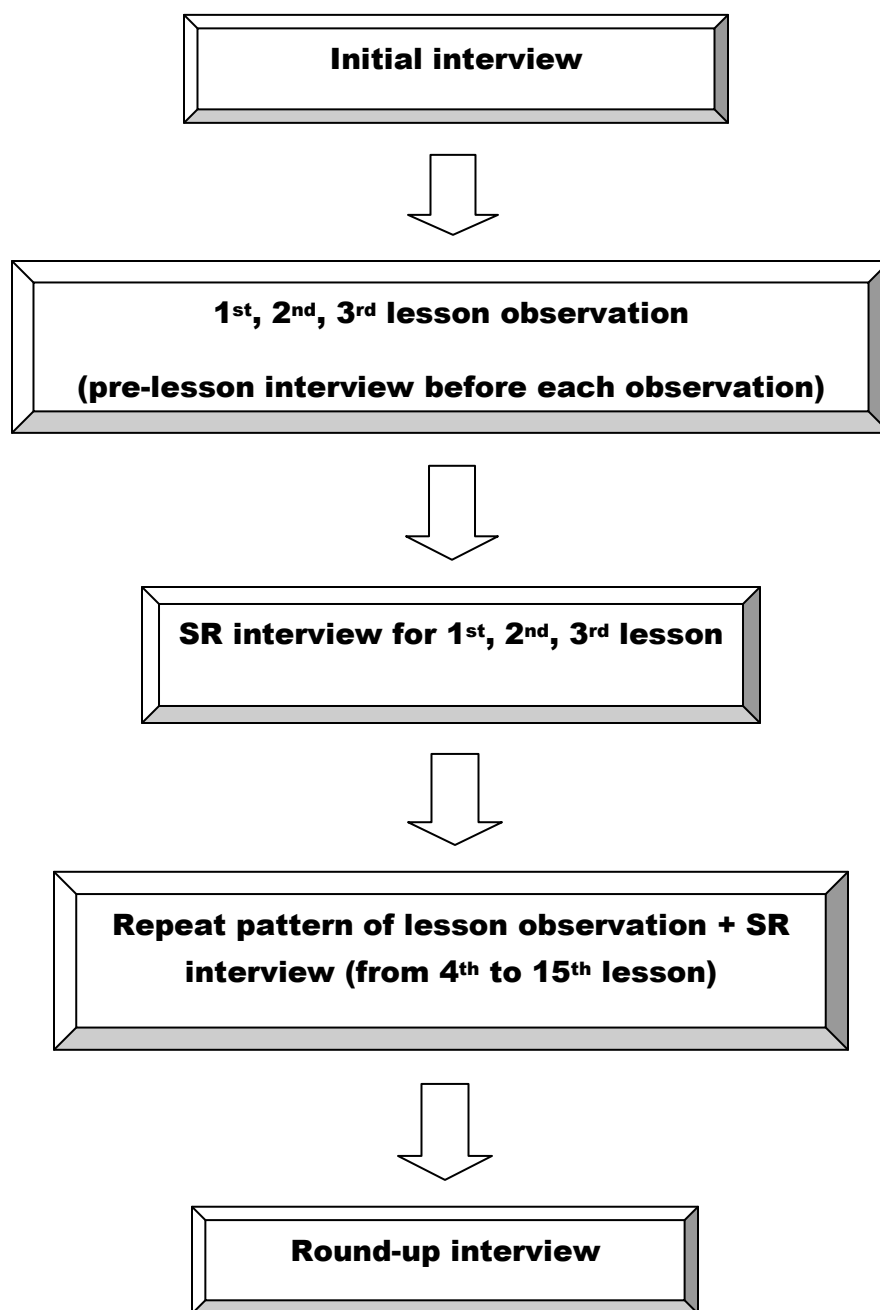


Figure 3C – Data collection flow

All the interviews, i.e. the initial, pre-lesson, SR and round-up were digitally audio-recorded, with date and time noted at the beginning of every session so that they corresponded with the respective lesson observations or fieldnotes for systematic

archive. All the interview questions were set and asked verbally in English regardless of the language the interviewees chose to speak. In this regard both teachers from East School spoke in English in all of their interviews; whereas the other two teacher participants in West School chose to use Cantonese every time except for their pre-lesson interviews. Whatever the verbal medium was all the meetings were conducted in a casual, conversational and inviting manner to encourage open sharing from the interviewees.

3.3.6 Ethical concerns

Before confirming the teacher participants a lot of preparatory work was done. Firstly a detailed, explanatory summary listing the procedures of how data would be collected was sent to the four potential teachers and the two school leaders. This summary contained essential information such as the objectives of this research, how data would be collected and my role as a researcher. Participants were encouraged to give any opinions or ask any questions before and whilst they taking part. Next, meetings were held on the school premises with the headteacher (East School) and the vice-headteacher (West School), and then the teachers once they were identified. Shortly after these meetings the four teachers agreed to be participants by signing the consent forms (Appendix F).

Once the teachers agreed to participate, several careful steps were taken to ensure sufficient communication and opportunity for clarification had there been any confusions. I also had many telephone or email contacts with the teachers before the commencement of data collection so that all the participants, including their students,

understood clearly what their participation would involve. Parents' letters explaining the research and seeking consent from the pupils were sent to the teachers (Appendix G). They then made the letters available to their students. As the data collection focused on the teachers, parents were assured that pupils would not receive different treatments from their peers due to this research, and any students could choose to opt out from the study. The decision about opt-out consent for them was justifiable because teachers were the focus participants. Throughout months of my lesson visits no students requested to opt out. Starting from the first lesson observation I had constantly checked with the teachers about students' reactions to my presence but no concerns were ever raised. Furthermore, the feedback forms collected from students after every lesson observation were a cautious measure to detect if they were affected by the video-recordings. There had not been any issues regarding this. Amazingly sometimes students expressed that they welcomed my visit.

Abiding by the BERA ethical guidelines, both the teachers and students were informed of the right to withdraw from the research any time for any or no reason (BERA, 2011). All possible measures were taken to limit my intrusion once entering the classrooms. The research questions were not disclosed to the teachers. As this study was conducted in natural settings with no intervention, no detriment arose from participation. No Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) disclosure or similar document was needed as the researcher has qualified teacher status in Hong Kong.

The participants were assured that the videos and other relevant materials would be kept strictly confidential. Access to the full data set was restricted to myself only and it was made clear that the use of the data would be for the purpose of this research (BERA,

2011). The participants were also guaranteed anonymity in any written reports. Two months after finishing the fieldwork a brief feedback report on the observations of group work there was sent upon the request of one school.

3.4 Implications of the research design

3.4.1 Data management and translation

A considerable amount of data for the analyses was generated from the interviews with the teacher participants in the field. Out of all these interviews, half of the data set was in spoken English and the other half in Cantonese. Data management started with transcription. Except for the very short pre-lesson interviews capturing the teachers' lesson planning and expectations, the data set to be analysed was composed of all the other in-depth interviews, i.e. initial, SR and round-up interviews.

Processing interview data from the two teachers in East School was relatively simple. Since they spoke entirely in English whenever they talked to me, their interview data was transcribed straight from the audio-recordings into word-processed documents. There were seven transcripts as seven separate documents for Joan – one initial, five SR and one round-up interviews. There were eight transcripts for Andy as he had six SR interviews. The other two teachers in West School used Cantonese in their interviews so their data needed to be translated. Their initial and round-up interviews were translated into English, and transcribed as word-processed documents. That means there were four interview transcripts in English for these two teachers. With the themes developed for analysing the two cases in East Schools, I repeatedly listened to the audio SR interviews from West School. I categorised their talk according to the themes and marked the time

sequence. At a later stage I listened to all of their SR interviews again and looked for extra themes which were unique to these two cases. All the relevant extracts were presented in the finding chapters when they were translated into English.

I did the translation in the best way I could. Most of the speech content was straightforward so the translation, albeit time-consuming, was not much of an issue. However, special attention was paid to some colloquial words the teachers used. Whenever this happened, English-English dictionaries were consulted for the closest expressions. For special expressions I consulted a few native English speakers for accuracy check. The translated scripts and excerpts were read by my supervisor. After passing my confirmation examination, in which I presented some translated data from the Cantonese-speaking teachers, both native-speaking examiners agreed that further transcription might not be the priority. As a result, these ten SR interviews were not transcribed in full but the original audio data were, time after time, listened to and systematically marked by numerous notes. During the lengthy process of data analysis, I recurrently went back to the data, both the transcribed and the audio files, and simultaneously fine-tuned the translation as well as the thematic categorisation.

Since this qualitative study had been undertaken over a long period of time, this process has virtually enhanced its reliability almost by default. The original interview data obtained from the four teachers were examined over and over again at different timescales throughout the thesis-writing process. The audio data from West School had been re-examined the last time just four months before this thesis was completed. Each time gap between revisiting the data was months but every time the judgements or conclusions were largely identical, though sharpened and refined. It can be said that the

arguments made were further strengthened. These repeated processes boosted the creditability of the claims made by the data analyses, and not least the internal reliability of this study.

3.4.2 Data analysis

With this vast and rich interview data, at the beginning I attempted to analyse it by employing detailed categorisation and coding. I started with Joan as the first case and came up with a list of themes deduced from the data. Guided by the three original research questions these themes were reduced into a preliminary coding scheme. The broad differentiations were actions in the classroom and purposes of group work. Under these two concepts there were many sub-themes. Examples included catering for students' needs, assessment and constraints of group work. The coding scheme was continuously refined, with an aim of developing an inclusive, analytical and hierarchical framework. However, when more data from the same case was examined the categorisation became increasingly problematic. There were recurring difficulties with interpretations and generating discrete categories from such rich and complex data. The target of a well-defined and multi-level coding scheme which could best represent what was grounded in the data seemed inappropriate and implausible. After serious discussions with my supervisor, the decision was to abandon the coding method which was obviously not ideal to reflect the intricate and interrelated nature of the data, connecting as it did, the teachers' own motivations for group work but also how they were restricted by external constraints situated in institutional practices. Although the first analysis attempt was unsuccessful, the effort was not really wasted and guided my

processing of the data thereafter. Through the intensive coding I developed some basic but core ideas, and a sense of interrelatedness of several themes.

I then re-examined the first case. The thematic headings had already been located and annotated by relevant excerpts from the transcribed data. This classification led me to make a few initial arguments based on the data. Meanwhile Joan's interview transcripts were also sent to my supervisor. After her running through them, together we looked into two analytic frameworks and had some critical discussions about applying the frameworks to the arguments I had made. On this basis those initial arguments were refined to come up with a template of headings under which I could potentially apply to the data collected on each teacher. Beginning with the transcription and the abandoned coding method, an enormous amount of time was spent on analysing the first case. The entire process was proven to be valuable because my analysis grew with confidence and rigour on the basis of knowing the data more thoroughly. Upon this finding I continued to Andy, the second case. A similar cycle took place in which my supervisor read some of this teacher's interview transcripts, followed by more critical discussions between us. Eventually we became more confident in the power of those analytic heuristics. For the remaining two cases my supervisor read the transcribed scripts and I proceeded with the analyses. The two frameworks from Hedegaard and Edwards (see 2.1.1 and 2.4) proved to be useful resources during the analysis. For instance, the core concepts of motives (see Figure 2A, 3A) and assessment (see Figure 2B, 3B) proposed in the models were helpful in making sense of the data.

Hedegaard's framing with its focus on motives was adopted to conceptualise the complex linkages between teachers' externalisation of their understanding of group

work integrating their interpretations of how the schools mediated societal priorities. In particular, the Vygotskian emphasis on the dialectic between process and setting in children's learning and development that Hedegaard gave was extended to the present study of teachers and group work within specific school practices. Hedegaard's framework therefore facilitated a coherent and cross-layered analysis of the data adopting the cultural-historical perspective. Based on her 'wholeness approach' (Hedegaard, 2012:10), I attempted to analyse teachers' beliefs about and enactment of group work by studying their motives embodied in actions while using group work as a tool in the activity of teaching. This interpretation of actions in activities could then be linked contextually to other planes of analysis – beyond the classroom (i.e. the activity setting) to include the school (i.e. the institution) and the education system (i.e. society).

For the analysis of group work strictly as a pedagogic tool, the quadrant sequence proposed by Edwards (1995; in press; Edwards & Mackenzie, 2008) provided a logical and systematic descriptor for the analysis of how and why group work was used in lessons. It distinguished the teachers' differing organisation of group work and the derived degree of pupil agency (Figure 2B, 3B). Moreover, separating the analyses arising from this descriptor from those based on Hedegaard's framework enabled me to compare and contrast motives and the type of activity between the individual and institution. For example, a teacher's purpose (person) such as developing students' interests in English (motive) through an open-ended task such as poem appreciation in groups (quadrant C) may be in opposition to the school's expectation (institution) of student performance (value motive) by administering testing (practice, quadrant D)

which assesses students' demonstration of pre-defined answers and not the creative, appropriated meanings of the poems.

These theoretical concepts and analytic labels guided me to embark on a brand new process of data sorting, which became thematically arranged. Together with some basic ideas I gained from the coding trial, more headings and themes were generated by applying the two Vygotskian models while tackling the three original research questions. Based on these many headings I drafted two findings chapters of the thesis. Nonetheless at that stage these chapters were lengthy, unfocused and remained simply a sorting of a massive amount of data.

Overtime I undertook a more conceptually-informed analysis under the headings, and gradually reduced and blended the data already sorted. This process of analysing the data became an iteration between the thematically sorted data and the analytic concepts outlined in chapter 2 as well as the two models explained in this chapter. This process of iteration took more than a year, during which I extended my reading of the literature while also working with the data. Ideas were tested by discussing with my supervisor, who had worked from the earliest data sorting for understanding the evidence gathered in this study. Aiming at concision and precision, the two findings chapters present the most salient themes illustrated by some representative excerpts from the data. The analytic concepts also substantiated the arguments thence generated.

3.4.3 Possible constraints

The study faced several challenges, including sampling, validity and reliability of the data, which are all addressed in turn.

The first challenge was sampling. Volunteer sampling might be seen as posing threats to the representativeness and generalisability power of this study. However, this study did not intend to generalise or represent the ‘undifferentiated population’ (Cohen *et al.*, 2011:155). Hence, it is argued that volunteer sampling was appropriate for a detailed account of teachers and group work in classrooms located within school practices, where sustained teacher commitment to the study was the priority. It would also be a contribution if the findings provoked an interest in the relationship between teachers’ knowledge, professional identity and group work using other methodologies or theories, and the sampling did not harm this claim. Besides, the ‘maximum variation cases’ (Flyvbjerg, 2006:230) in this sampling allowed various circumstances and common themes to be gathered from the four cases from two different organisations.

The validity I was aiming at was to do justice to the participants’ accounts and encapsulate their constant negotiations of social meanings. Validity here depended on the instruments for data collection, in this case the stimuli and the participants’ responses in the SR interviews. Long before conducting the first SR interview this method was critically evaluated by looking into the relevant literature so precautions were taken. There were two ways to tackle the potential challenge induced by the video stimuli. First, a variety of data and sources were collected during the observations. The fieldnotes, pre-lesson interviews and pupils’ feedback were carefully considered when selecting the stimuli. These data provided triangulation by data source (Leatham, 2006), and gave a balanced reference to base the selection criteria. Second, in a naturalistic case study ‘the most advanced form of understanding is achieved when researchers place themselves within the context being studied’ (Flyvbjerg, 2006:236). Reviewing

the video data was based on research-based knowledge about group work, pedagogy and learning theories. This pool of knowledge, and the researcher's experiences as a practitioner, were interwoven to give some degree of confidence in determining the lesson scenarios worthy of discussion. Similar to other SR studies, the validity of this research is also dependent on the type of the verbal data generated from the teachers. While it might not be possible to completely differentiate 'the recalled' from 'the constructed' (Yinger, 1986:270) in the sense that the constructed report might not represent the original event accurately, my presence in the original events, i.e. in every observed lesson and the fieldnotes taken could again, verify the teachers' recalls to a large extent. Observing their behaviour also helped strengthen the validity and reliability of what had been claimed by the teachers (Johnson 1994; Pajares, 1992). When analysing the teachers' accounts, their beliefs could be compared as two separate types. 'Professed beliefs' are what they articulated in interviews and 'attributed beliefs' are what was observed by the researcher (Aguirre & Speer, 2000:333).

It might be possible that the probing materials or the questions asked had an impact on the respondents. During the SR processes the teachers were reminded that they could watch any unselected episodes of the lessons. By doing so the message was that the researcher was not taking a dominating role and the interviewees were encouraged to initiate a discussion if they found anything else relevant. All the SR interviews were semi-structured and my participation was driven by the aims of the study. I presented myself as an open and active listener seeking to understand the teachers' pedagogy in a non-evaluative manner (Vesterinen, Toom & Patrikainen, 2010). During the course of the interviews, I was strongly aware of avoiding leading questions, making assumptions

or judgements on the ground of the teachers' behaviour or their verbal responses. The attitude that it was the teachers' views and their professional knowledge that were valued was reinforced throughout the fieldwork.

It is noteworthy that the video clips for SR interviews were treated as data facilitators (Lyle, 2003), which means that it was the reflections and rationales given by the teachers that was the essential data, regardless of how they were prompted. Teachers' professional beliefs and knowledge are a relatively static concept (Askew *et al.*, 1997) and thus posed minimal threats to the accuracy of the recalls. In other words, whether the verbal responses in the recalls were an accurate report of the original events did not significantly affect the foci of this research. Additionally, the data of teachers' espoused theories was also collected in the initial and round-up interviews when no video stimuli were shown. In this respect data triangulation in this study was achieved, especially if the same themes were consistently observed in different interviews. All in all, in studying classroom interaction SR is 'a valuable tool when accompanied by carefully structured recall designs' (Lyle, 2003). The possible constraints were taken into consideration at the outset of the research design.

I was also aware that my presence could possibly be a stimulus to the teachers' actions and pedagogic reflections. For the three more experienced teachers, their views were concluded as consistent all the way through their participation. This consistency was also observed in the round-up interviews when one of the purposes was for the teachers to reflect on their participation in this study. Consequently, I doubted that the study significantly changed what the two teachers in East School did in the classrooms. Neither did it sound to have a lasting impact on the teaching of the more experienced

teacher in West School. However, the vice-headteacher there perceived this study as a step of encouraging pedagogic innovation in his English department and the least experienced teacher participant did mention a change in her use of group work when the study progressed. This study did not set off as an intervention and I had taken all possible measures to offset my impact on the participants before and during data collection (see 3.3.5). Nevertheless it seemed inevitable that my regular presence and the discourse of group work would be a disruption. While I tried to minimise it all what I could do was to acknowledge it and work responsibly with the participants in the field.

After detailing the methodological design, data collection and analysis processes and the possible constraints, the findings will be presented in the next two chapters. Chapter 4 consists of four individual profiles when the teachers' accounts were examined to identify their own motives reflected in group work, and how their intentions were enacted. These intentions were also discussed in connection with their identities as learners and teachers of English. The four cases are each presented under the same set of headings, leading to a focus on a specific aspect of the analyses. The description will start with an example lesson. This lesson exemplar was sampled according to the respective teacher's evaluation in the round-up interview (see Question 9 in Appendix E). The analyses will be illustrated by interview excerpts. Drawing all the teacher profiles together in chapter 5, I will attempt a cross-case analysis to link the teachers' pedagogies to the school motives and the wider education milieu. In this way I hoped that the richness of the evidence could be made the most of and woven together.

Chapter 4 – Individual profiles of the teachers

This chapter analyses the four teacher participants in four separate sections and focuses primarily on their purposes and actions in the activity setting of the classrooms with reference to Hedegaard's planes of analysis (Figure 2A and 3A). When presenting each case there will be five sub-sections in an attempt to show the interrelation between teachers' pedagogic intentions, biographies and organisation of group work. The first sub-section in each analysis starts with a lesson exemplar to set the scene of how group work was structured in the classrooms. Then the teacher's background as a learner of English, which partially constructed the identity as a teacher of English is portrayed in order to approach research question 2. Through drawing on the interview excerpts the teacher's purposes for group work (research question 1) can be identified, while bringing out what mattered to the teacher when teaching (research question 2) in the third sub-section. In sub-section four analysing the implementation of group work reveals how the teacher's beliefs about English teaching were enacted in the classroom (research question 3). Edwards's pedagogic quadrants (Figure 2B and 3B) will be referred to for conceptualising the various pedagogies of group work. Evetts's concept of professionalism (2009, 2011) will also point to the extent to which the teachers' occupational values clashed or aligned with the forms of professionalism expected by the schools. The final sub-section gives a summary of each profile.

4.1 Joan

Joan had been teaching English in East School for ten years since finishing university. She was the deputy head of the English department. In the academic year when the

fieldwork was conducted, she was teaching one junior class (Year 8) and another at GCSE level (Year 11). Joan mentioned that she enjoyed teaching the former class more than the Year 11 because of the tensions she felt from the school and her senior students.

The school's orientation towards boosting students' academic success in high-stakes examinations was evidenced in the two East School teachers' accounts. After years of extraordinary effort targeted at the HKCEE⁵, recruitment of high-band students was buoyant. Unsurprisingly, students' examination results became a powerful indicator of teacher performance in East School. Teaching and learning was very much driven by examinations to what was seen as the school's benefit.

4.1.1 Example lesson

There were in total 15 lesson observations for Joan's five SR interviews. She granted me access to both of the two classes she was teaching.

The topic for the Year 8 lesson in this exemplar was if-conditionals. Joan linked this grammar topic to superstitions as a theme. She started in the teacher-led quadrant A (Figure 2B and 3B) by elaborating the usage of conditionals with some examples and told the class to write some notes. Then, progressing from this public zone, she explained very clearly a quadrant B task for group work. Upon this students were divided into quartets and given a handout on which to write their ideas. A leader was appointed for each group. During the ten-minute discussion time Joan tried to stimulate learners' interest when interacting with them. She gave positive feedback to what the students said in groups, as well as prompts and suggestions. The task was quite open in

⁵ The Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination, before the reform introduced in 2012, was equivalent to GCSE in England.

the sense that a variety of ideas falling into the ‘if’ and ‘superstition’ categories were generated. Certain groups sought help actively. Many students spoke in Cantonese to the teacher and among themselves. Despite this every group stayed on-task. After ten minutes each group shared their ideas with the class and Joan invited different pupils to speak.

Joan thought the lesson went better than she had expected and was pleased with the interesting ideas produced by the students. In hindsight she identified three salient features of her pedagogy in this lesson. First, she was aware of the tension because students were pressed for time by the teacher to finish the group task, and thus her instructions pressurised them towards task completion. The second feature was student engagement. Joan had deliberately appointed the less motivated pupils as group leaders because she wanted everyone to have an opportunity to try and perform. Third, Joan felt that students worked harmoniously and their verbal exchanges helped relationship building so she did not mind if they spoke in Cantonese.

This group work fell in quadrant B of Edwards’s pedagogic sequence (Figure 2B and 3B) because the close-type task confined the Year 8 students to making sentences with if-conditionals. With little space for error they were trying out the concepts introduced by Joan in quadrant A. This group activity in the semi-private zone also featured Joan’s formative feedback. Students were expected to generate as many sentences as possible. In other observed lessons, Joan also organised several quadrant C activities especially with her Year 11, for example, a debate about an environmental issue.

4.1.2 Identity

The concept of professional identity, as discussed in 2.2, is important in understanding the teachers' beliefs about and actions in group work and teaching more generally. In particular, the study sought to discover the impact of 'history-in-person' (Holland *et al.*, 1998:18) on how the teachers act in and on their activities of English teaching. The initial interviews collected data about the teachers' past experiences of learning the subject, integrating Lachicotte's claim about the historical construction of identities (Lachicotte, 2009). This sub-section explores the multiple aspects of Joan's identity – as a learner, user and teacher of English before analysing what impacts that identity had on her classroom teaching.

Joan went to elementary school in Mainland China and migrated to Hong Kong at the age of 13. Her identity as an English learner was constructed by two teachers introducing her to everyday English, the immigration and her desire to communicate with people:

Extract J1 (II)⁶

Very fortunately my first English teacher was excellent...⁷, really good at English songs, dramas. She was a Shanghaiese teacher. She encouraged us to enjoy learning English... And I didn't have a lot of exposure at that time except my mum's best friend... I remember she read newspaper with me and the first newspaper was about a playground... I realised it's important to learn English.

Extract J2 (II)

Then I think English is very useful because since I came to Hong Kong... immigrant... I know I need to survive in Hong Kong and English seemed to be the

⁶ These extracts originate in the initial interview (II), the round-up interview (RI) or the stimulated recall interview (SR) with the number indicating which exact session.

⁷ The three dots used in any interview excerpts indicate the skipping of some less relevant content to make the presentation of the data more succinct.

most challenging subject to me.

Extract J3 (II)

And I like chatting with different kinds of people, communication. Actually I don't... particular like the English culture but just like 'oh English is so important... can help me communicate, express my ideas' so I have the intrinsic motivation.

These motivations contributed to Joan's real interest in learning the subject and communication. She became a confident user of English from adolescence. Her language competence could also be seen from her multilingual skills.⁸ Over the nine months working together all of our interviews were conducted in English and Joan was completely comfortable with it. Apart from being reflective about her teaching, she frequently initiated other topics about English teaching outside of my questions. All these evidenced her strong identity as a teacher of English, and that the primary purpose of teaching the subject was oriented to assisting learners to connect with the outside world. As we shall see later, Joan's teaching motives, consistent with her views about the subject and identity, included interactive lesson activities, employing intra- and interpersonal elements through using group work.

4.1.3 Purposes of group work

This sub-section addresses research question 1 directly and also the teachers' beliefs about teaching as covered by question 2. These beliefs or 'personal philosophies' (Aguirre & Speer, 2000:332) gave the teachers meaning and a sense of self in relation to their positions in the social system of the schools (Pajares, 1992). Since beliefs can

⁸ Joan is a native speaker of Shanghaiese and Mandarin though she has predominantly used Cantonese and also English since living in Hong Kong.

inform actions, examining the teachers' pedagogic decisions through their actions in group work sheds light on what mattered to them in teaching and how their beliefs were enacted. Joan's purposes for group work and her pedagogic beliefs could be summarised into four aspects. All except one reflected her motives of promoting student mastery of the language and agentic learning.

i) Communicative competence

Compatible with her confident identity of and passion for the subject, Joan wanted to develop students' communicative competence through using English in group work.

Here she commented on her Year 11:

Extract J4 (SR2)

The last group, their language is not 100% grammatically accurate... But you see they are arguing something very authentic. That is what I like most.

Extract J5 (II)

You [students] are going to discuss something and come up with some suggestions... kind of authentic interaction. Authentic communication is part of learning English. They really start using what they have learnt or their skills, try to achieve some tasks... It is an authentic task. At least students can learn from each other.

Her rationale for group work was to foster natural conversations as a way to help students shape their own meaning (Moll & Greenberg, 1990) while constructing a socially situated setting. To Joan, English learning took place in a social arena when students 'start using what they have learnt', i.e. externalisation was both a fundamental condition and an objective. The repeated use of 'authentic' in her interviews indicated

that she valued communication and wanted to balance that purpose with the demands for examination success:

Extract J6 (RI)

I still believe... when they [students] learn English they can communicate with people. It's not just for exams. It's only one or two important exams maybe. But finally in their future they think 'oh I learn this word I can use it to get some messages, understand something else.'

Driven by her past learning experiences and an early interest in communication, Joan's motive was to develop students' language skills and expand it to a personal and conceptual level so that students could use the language as a tool to 'understand something else' as she put it. Joan thought that higher order cognitive processing, i.e. going beyond rote learning, also justified the use of groups:

Extract J7 (RI)

And the value of group work... think about the meaning of group work again... why different people sit together? Putting minds together. They are organising their ideas. It's very high-ranking skill. And then they ask good questions to each other.

Communicative competence and enhancing mental functions as purposes of group work were what mattered to Joan in her purposeful activity of teaching.

ii) Learner agency

Joan appreciated that communicative competence and learner agency are complementary. Only by active and agentic participation could students learn to be proficient users of English, 'I expect maybe more students who would like to stand out, be brave and speak.' She saw group work as a space for student engagement as a result

of her delegation of autonomy. Joan was therefore working towards a shift from the teacher-led quadrant A to the self-regulated quadrants B and C in Edwards's pedagogic sequence (1995; in press), in which her role was to mediate and facilitate students towards independent performance in Vygotskian terms (Gallimore & Tharp, 1990):

Extract J8 (RI)

'What do you think? What do you want to do? Are you doing the right thing?' I think um... students should take responsibilities of their own learning, their own progress... They should look for their direction. It's students' opinions that are valued. It's not my opinions. It's what they think about the world, what they think about some issues so I shouldn't give them the direct answers. Just to arouse them!

Joan wanted students to take over learning and make it their own (Moll, 1990). Group work provided a relatively stress-free environment characterised by peer support in quadrants B and C without constant public assessment as individuals:

Extract J9 (SR4)

I think group work sometimes is a... moderator... Let the atmosphere of the lesson more relaxing. Students have their own chat [in English] even not related to the topic. It's building relationship among students.

'Building relationship' was a joint outcome of her motive of facilitating interpersonal communication. More importantly, Joan believed that learning should be a purposeful activity by engaging in interactive and meaningful tasks building on students' everyday knowledge:

Extract J10 (RI)

Students must have a purpose on learning English, not just for passing exams. For example when I provide the reading articles, they should be very meaningful articles, something insightful and... bringing enlightenment to students. They learn something

*instead of answering all the *M.C. questions to kill their interests. For the discussion topics they should be very controversial or debatable, arguable. Not the stupid questions, the meaningless questions. But make sure students are able to express their ideas.*

*M.C. questions = multiple-choice questions

Joan's unambiguous opinions on the kind of teaching materials and activities were examples of her goal-directed pedagogy, a way to stimulate students to define their personal purposes in English learning instead of being simply driven by examinations.

iii) Assessment to support learning

Students could externalise their understanding in quadrants B and C, an intramental, semi-private zone open for social dialogues (Edwards, 1995; in press). This process allowed the teacher to assess and mediate their learning more accurately because students' mistakes could be safely exposed:

Extract J11 (RI)

For the weak students they don't want to show their mistakes so if the students who are willing to speak I should not stop them. They are using their language. So group work... they should know 'oh don't worry about this.' Learning to learn. Don't be shy or embarrassed about your mistakes.

Extract J12 (RI)

*Of course I can know more about their individual needs... Vocabulary and language... their English level. You know some students asked me 'how can I say this? How can I say that?' It's for their language and... (*R: Do you think they were more willing to ask you questions in a group?) Of course, of course (R: Than in front of the class?) Yes. (R: And it is a good thing?) Yes.*

*R = researcher

‘It’s for their language’ manifested Joan’s priority towards personalised learning trajectories, which was consistent with her own approach and identity as an English learner. Her mediation as a teacher was informed by assessing students’ participation in the low-risk quadrants B and C working on authentic language materials. When dealing with students’ mistakes Joan’s purpose resembled Claxton’s ‘potentiating milieu’, when he argued that students being stretched and stuck in difficulties is beneficial to expanding learning capacity (Claxton, 2007:125). Joan’s motive of supporting learning was also visible in the value she placed on formative assessment over summative aspects.

iv) Examination success

Despite intrinsic motivation and a personal sense of English learning as her professional ideal, Joan felt she had to drill the senior students for ‘one or two important examinations’ to fulfill her role as expected by others (also see extract J6):

Extract J13 (RI)

I was looking for some teaching materials [for Year 11], some past papers from the Hong Kong A-level. They are going to start the summer tutorial lessons... This is the most important period for preparing [for the public exam] so I think I will squeeze them.

Obviously, except for examination success Joan’s purposes for group work and teaching beliefs were mediated by her strong identity and agency in English, i.e. characterised by an interest in and valuing of communication.

On the other hand, dynamics and demands embedded in the context of teaching also shape how teachers enact what matter to them. Evetts’s distinction between

occupational and organisational professionalism suggested that organisational versions of being a professional are characterised by hierarchical control, ‘standardised procedures and target-setting’ (Evetts, 2013:11). In the case of East School these performance categories were represented by the rules of drilling exercises and a strong testing culture. Like the study reported by Hall and Schulz (2003), successful teaching in East School, i.e. being a professional teacher, was defined by boosting students’ test scores. Nonetheless, Joan’s thoughtfully expressed valuing of communicative competence, higher-order thinking and learner agency in English teaching reflected an autonomous, de-centralised orientation in her pedagogy and a strong occupational identity (Evetts, 2011; 2013). Enacting her pedagogic motives in a context where her occupational interacted with the organisational professionalism led to some of the contradictions Joan faced in teaching.

4.1.4 Enactment

Examining how teachers translated their espoused intentions into actions in classrooms for research question 3 drew attention to the dialectic between individuals and practices. The concept of practice is characterised as the embodiment of collectively held and historically accumulated knowledge and beliefs at the level of institution (Edwards, 2010a). It is the process carrying value motives of an institution (Hedegaard, 2008a; 2012).

Seeing how teachers’ motives were enacted in group work has revealed itself as a site where teachers’ identities and what mattered to them in teaching interacted with practices. In the case of Joan, tensions emerged as a result of a clash in purposes of

teaching English between the teacher and the school, which led to contradictions for her. How Joan negotiated the pedagogic demands and found ways to work through these contradictions were also visible in her accounts of group work.

It is necessary to clarify that the term ‘contradiction’ is to denote the divergent dynamics across the various levels of possible planes of analysis in Hedegaard’s model (see Figure 2A and 3A). Contradiction here is a description of the non-alignments between what was expected from these teachers by the dominant practice of East School and the education system, and what the teachers prioritised in teaching. It is not the same concept or manifestation as used in Engeström’s activity system (Engeström & Sannino, 2011).

i) Contradictions and demands

Succeeding in public examinations had become entrenched in East School over the previous two decades because of its objective of being a high-performing school. Studying in such a school stressed learning for examinations. This organisational culture did not entirely fit with what Joan believed in professionally. She recognised the need for examination success, but thought that such an emphasis underplayed the importance of communicative competence:

Extract J14 (RI)

If they [students] learn a word and when they try to speak to a person who understands them they say ‘oh I use this word and you understand?’ It’s appreciation... positive reinforcement so they must use their English... not grammar exercise... exam paper... this is the value of group work. Communication... but it’s quite different from our education system now. (R: Why?) Because our system is to train the question-answering skills.

Extract J15 (SR4)

*Maybe they [Year 11] know they are being drilled to be the exam machine. Not starting from me, starting from last year. *[Teacher's name] has started drilling them already. It's all about exams. They need to survive the exams.*

*'Teacher's name' was the school's deputy headteacher who had been the Year 11's English teacher before Joan.

Joan acknowledged the gap between her view of the meaning of English teaching and that of the school. Positioning herself in this clash, Joan was explicit about her reluctance to follow the teach-to-test approach:

Extract J16 (SR4)

For [the Year 11], actually I don't want to teach them next year. I don't like to train them into exam machine. This is not my type, my cup of tea.

As we shall see in chapter 5, when what was meant by societal needs is elaborated, the school had a particular interpretation of public expectations which was driven by its need to sustain student recruitment through outstanding examination results. This priority, in line with that of the students' parents, shaped students' motivation for English and approaches to learning. Joan's preference for authentic dialogues on real subjects built on the notion of a 'potentiating environment' (Claxton, 2007:125) was very much in tension with these pressures. As a result, enacting her pedagogic intentions was hard when students did not appreciate the learning space Joan tried to expand:

Extract J17 (RI)

The students' attitude about learning, maybe some senior form students they have been trained to be an exam machine, doing papers, working alone. They feel

ashamed of asking others for help, discuss openly. It's the atmosphere. They didn't want to participate?

Extract J18 (SR4)

I was in a dilemma... should I sacrifice two lessons, just ask them to bring some ideas [in groups]? I want to involve everyone. OK maybe I give them a reading exercise. The quiz, [then] they value 'oh we are doing something right'. They don't really treasure this [group work] opportunity.

As discussed in 4.1.3 Joan's activities in quadrants B and C aimed at facilitating students' communicative competence, learner agency and formative assessment. These would not conflict with her peripheral intention of examination preparation, as she did sometimes build in drilling exercises as quadrant B work. However, these actions could not satisfy the school's insistent demands for coaching for examinations and summative assessment, i.e. teaching that was located in quadrant A, followed by drills and then quadrant D. Joan was clearly frustrated by her department due to frequent assessments and performance taking over developing communicative competence:

Extract J19 (II)

We [the department] squeeze a lot of... grammatical items into their [students'] little mind. And they find... they cannot use them. Sometimes it's just for passing exams, passing quizzes. And then we find that oh they are not very motivated. And then we provide more quizzes to pressurise them, to read for the purpose of passing the quiz. So actually now... we set a lot of quizzes.

Extract J20 (II)

(R: You have to assess based on the performance in the groups?) That's right! That's right! We base on the written report and the final presentation... So the criteria, the rubrics [are] about evaluating their group projects. How can we value their cooperation, their sense of responsibility?

This conflict became inevitable when group work was a means serving different ends for the school and the teacher. For the former it appeared to be seen as an end product and providing a record of students' progress against some set learning targets; for the latter it was a tool to encourage learners' participation in a continual sense.

The contradictions Joan faced stemmed from the conflicting occupational and the organisational values nested in the teaching of English in East School. The school defined professional work by examination preparation and outcomes. This objective and the resulting demands frustrated Joan, whose pedagogic intentions were oriented to communicative competence and learner agency through engaging in authentic language or everyday knowledge in Vygotskian term. The dilemma revealed itself in the dialectic of Joan's pedagogic beliefs and the priorities of the school as she continued to carry out group work, while shaping it to fit some parts of what the school demanded. Such a finding is supported by existing literature which suggests that teachers are constantly negotiating their teaching taking the affordances of practice into considerations (Ball, 2000; Skott, 2009).

ii) Negotiating practice through group work

Being an experienced and agentic teacher who had clear and serious motives in English teaching, Joan dealt with her challenges proactively. How she faced the contradictions and mediated the demands could be observed in her adjusted actions in group work.

Joan tried to assure the students that her belief in communicative competence was beneficial and vital to English learning. She wanted them to appreciate a more active learning mode and its value to the syllabus. When asked why she had shown the

question of a sample examination paper before a drama activity by group she said, ‘I just want to relate what they are doing now. It is not something meaningless. It’s not a waste of time.’ To uphold her pedagogic belief, Joan integrated the elements of authenticity and level of interest into training for examination skills to satisfy the school’s and the students’ expectations:

Extract J21 (II)

For the oral lessons now I show them [Year 11] something interesting. Some hot issues like transsexual or maybe same-sex marriage. They know about it and then now I use the A-level paper to stimulate them... students play different roles, [each] read an article and they share the different ideas. And then oh they have something to discuss in their presentations – something really meaningful.

Joan’s agency in teaching was seen in her sustaining motives, though negotiated to some extent in her lessons. She sometimes refused to follow the examination requirements strictly because she thought they had little relevance in the competences or skills she valued. Group work became the resources for her to work through the contradictions by accommodating the school demands while maintaining her beliefs about English teaching. Joan counteracted the exam-oriented approach by structuring student-led activities. Here she was explaining a whole-class drama, a heavily language-based and interactive activity, ‘because they were in the mode of paper, drilling papers, reading tests. Sometimes [let them] have fun in a different style.’ The expanded learning space in quadrant C helped promote students externalising their English and meaning-making at the personal level. Joan also guided students to produce a final product for summative assessment required by the school, and designed the scaffolding in the way that reflected her motives of English learning. For instance, in extract J22

she was evaluating a brainstorming group activity to assist pupils' individual compositions, an output required by the school:

Extract J22 (SR3)

I think the discussion questions are well set. Quite meaningful compared with other topics. (R: Does it facilitate students in engaging themselves?) Yes. And before that the video I chose was good. It's stimulating and inspirational.

Caught between the external demands and personal pedagogic intentions, group work enabled Joan to engage students to be active participants in their learning to perform in summative assessments. She also learnt to have confidence in learners' autonomy and their own capacity to learn:

Extract J23 (RI)

Now I find that... how to say... for group work we need to trust students. We need to trust students that they are learning. They want to have some freedom or autonomy, learn by themselves within ten or fifteen minutes.

Joan upheld her own definition of deep learning and defended her understanding of good English pedagogy against her knowledge of the school's direction:

Extract J24 (RI)

Maybe after one or two years, if I teach Year 8 again if they are accustomed to this style [group work]; the whole class becomes more harmonious. The students are more willing to learn, to take initiative to learn, to speak, to ask questions, I think this is some success right? Not just one year or two years. It takes time. This is something our school should think about.

Joan's urge for empowering learners was an explicit call for change in East School, which could be viewed as a drive for development as a result of resolving contradictions

in practice (Johannsdottir, 2010). However, the interviews suggested that the drive was largely one way, with Joan sustaining her professional identity and beliefs as she negotiated with the school practice.

4.1.5 Conclusion

Joan's rationales for group work, which carried her beliefs about teaching, included cultivating students' communicative competence, learner agency and formative assessment. These motives in English teaching and her strong professional identity were closely related to her historically formed identity as an English learner. Using the terms of cultural-historical theory, her identity in English shaped her intentions in teaching the subject and guided how she navigated in the activity of teaching. Yet her actions and preferred pedagogy in this activity were somewhat restricted due to a clash with the school priorities.

In this case group work as a pedagogic tool mirrored the complicated interplay between individual and practice. The activity of group work revealed Joan's purposes when teaching and how these purposes were mediated by the demands of the school-led practice (Barnes, 2001; Edwards, 2010a) and the expectations from her students.

As an agentic teacher of English Joan was able to resolve the contradictions through the way she used group work. She retained the authentic and interactive elements by designing group tasks for students to collaborate in quadrants B and C. These processes were structured to prepare them to move to quadrant D for the final products and summative assessments where the school expectations lay.

4.2 **Andy**

Andy was 26 years old and in his fourth year of teaching in East School. When taking part in this study he was teaching two classes – one junior (Year 7) and one senior at GCSE level (Year 10). Andy founded the English Debate team and was in the discipline and guidance committee in this school.

Since joining East School straight after university, Andy had been teaching junior classes only. It was his first year teaching students at senior level and traditionally East School resourced the GCSE classes generously. As Joan's contradictions indicated, teaching and learning at GCSE and A-levels alluded to meeting performance targets in East School. These expectations had led to a high accountability culture, evaluating teacher performance by students' test scores. The data from Andy seemed to reinforce these interpretations of the school practice.

4.2.1 Example lesson

The 15 lesson observations with Andy comprised a good mix of both of his classes. In one observed lesson the Year 7 students were discussing their group term projects, one kind of outputs in quadrant D for summative assessment set by the school's English panel. The students had been working towards the projects for about three months. It was a Friday afternoon and the submission deadline fell in the next week. Andy had clear lesson objectives for helping his students to complete the projects. He wanted students to finalise everything, when he could also check their progress and give feedback.

On entering the classroom Andy complained to the Year 7 about their noise level. Without further delay and assisted by powerpoint slides, he operated briefly in quadrant

Andy clearly instructed the class in preparation for the group activity. He explained everything in English, then code-mixed with a little Cantonese and answered students' questions before they worked in groups.

Like the other observed lessons in Andy's classrooms, the Year 7 class was on task and orderly. In groups of five, students had ten minutes to work on their term projects. Andy set up a timer and checked with different groups. There were a lot of teacher-student dialogues within each group. Andy gave feedback and frequently reminded students to speak in English except in one very weak group. He posed a lot of wh-questions to help students to fix their schedules and improve their work. He also tried to direct the student talk to encourage collective contributions by involving every group member. When the discussion time ended, Andy invited three groups to report to the class. He recognised all of the effort and probed the class to suggest more specific strategies to meet the tight project timeframe.

In the SR interview Andy shared his mixed feelings about the lesson. He was happy about meeting his objectives, that through group work he and the children had done a final check before finishing the projects. He attributed the students' extending group work to other responsibilities outside lesson time to the effective three-month-long project schedule. He was also pleased with his adaptability due to unexpected events. On the other hand he was disappointed by one group which had accomplished almost nothing for months. He was also dissatisfied with students not speaking English amongst themselves as much as he had hoped. He mentioned learners' differences in their capacity for elaboration so he adjusted his expectations. For the strong groups he

wanted them to communicate in English in addition to fine-tuning the projects; whereas for weaker students the priority was task completion so he relaxed the oral rule.

This lesson fell into quadrant C of Edwards's pedagogic cycle (Figure 2B and 3B), in which pupils were engaged in an open-ended task designed for self-regulation strategies and formative feedback in the intramental plane of social learning. In this quadrant students could apply their skills and concepts, and explore the potential of their conceptual tools in their attempts to meet the task requirements. The discussion primarily relied on pupil initiative, though Andy guided heavily in groups whom he thought were lagging behind.

4.2.2 Identity

Andy came to like the subject because of two enthusiastic teachers when he was studying in school. The first one had taught him for four years:

Extract A1 (II)

He was hilarious...his English is great and I really admired him. He always shared his experience with us... He made learning English so easy and... In his class I was just comfortable. I felt I could master the language... He played badminton [and] football with me. You know teachers seldom do that... Even after years when I talked to him he really cared about me so I was touched when I was in [Year 7], by this guy.

Later he switched to a lower-band school for A-levels which he found dispiriting. There he started to engage in English debate with another teacher who repaired his self-esteem:

Extract A2 (II)

I was a band-1 student and I held a lot of pride in myself. I was really down when I went to the band-3 school so I kind of hid myself. Then I met this NET. She started the debating team with me. I was the captain... In A-levels we got the first runner up

in a Hong Kong-wide competition so it gave me a sense of achievement. And of course she always showed a lot of debating skills and also English, maybe philosophies which I kind of appreciate and admire. I got even more interested in it because [of] a sense of achievement... Yea, the confidence.

Both of Andy's teachers were NETs, Native English-speaking Teachers. Studying with NETs might be the reason for his learning through daily-life activities, 'I watched a lot of English movies, TV programmes. I tried to mimic what they said'; 'my teacher brought us out to the theatre'; and immersion tours during holidays:

Extract A3 (II)

In [Year 9] I went to Los Angeles for two months... I played basketball... football with them. Then I mimicked the intonation, the way they speak English. When I came back I really got some American accent for a few months... and then in [GSCE] ... I went to Canada. And I always went to a café. I talked to a lot of people there... I kind of got Canadian accent.

These learning experiences, both in and out of school, shaped Andy's identity as an intrinsically-motivated learner of English. He reported a lot of fun associated with these histories. On the other hand he also drilled himself to succeed in examinations though he despised them:

Extract A4 (II)

After [Year 7] I got interested in this subject. I really learnt hard. I used some traditional ways like doing grammar exercise books. Oh I could finish one grammar book in a month. You can't imagine I was really hardworking.

Extract A5 (II)

*And interestingly... *HKCEE and A-level didn't help me... I did a lot of past papers, 20 years. Yea, I found them really boring, and I just didn't care if I made mistake*

because I didn't think it's English. That's rubbish!

*HKCEE = Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination, equivalent to GCSE in England

Andy's English learning trajectory was constructed by an array of real-life activities and examination drill to get through the system. His early, deep-rooted interest in the subject shaped his passion for English and an ambition to become a teacher. He studied English Language education in a teacher training institute. From a young boy to an advanced learner and then a teacher, Andy displayed a real love of the subject. He was a confident speaker of English, as evidenced by his captaincy in English debate and all of our communication during my fieldwork. Once he mentioned how language proficiency affected a teacher's agility in group work, 'it affects a lot, a teacher's English standard! If I am not confident in my speaking probably I'm not going to use group work at all! Because group work is spontaneous.' Andy's confidence and interest in language competence developed into a strong identity as an English teacher. These beliefs formed some coherent pedagogic motives in his teaching. He believed in learning English through usage and active participation, and expected hard work from students.

4.2.3 Purposes of group work

As explained in chapter 1, the questions of how and why group work was used were an attempt to investigate the relationship between teachers' pedagogic purposes, personal characteristics and behaviour. For the case of Andy, his purposes for English teaching were oriented to two major dimensions, within which we can see the mediation by his identity and learning trajectory.

i) Academic achievement and subject knowledge

In extract A6 we saw Andy's dual foci on the long term value of learning English for its own sake and the more immediate pressure of passing the examinations:

Extract A6 (SR3)

I always believe that hey..., learning is a kind of process... to pave the way for your future. That's number one but I always believe that the second main reason is for the examination.

These co-existing purposes reflected very much how he learnt the subject when he was young. As a teacher he felt responsible for equipping students to clear the hurdles placed in the system:

Extract A7 (RI)

They [Year 10] are going to the public exam... so I have to prepare them for those big exams. Otherwise they will get bad marks and lose their future.

In addition to passing examinations his intrinsic interest in the subject appeared to impact his pedagogic belief, that active participation from the early stages was crucial to mastering a language:

Extract A8 (SR5)

I can see that students now... they can't speak. They are lack of confidence. Because they just accept, receive, listen. They don't talk. That's why I have more group discussion... It's because they [Year 7] are young I need to give them more. When they are in [GCSE] they don't want to speak in front of the whole class... so I want to start them early.

Andy did not do a trade-off between examination grades and what he thought subject knowledge was. He brought both elements together and his group tasks carried specific

and clear objectives to improve student performance and help them grasp the concepts. For instance, he wanted students to generate ideas for a writing task and criticising a text:

Extract A9 (SR4)

I wanted them to get as many ideas as they can, so I rearranged the groups so they had more examples, from different classmates... Yea, number one is their understanding of [the] terms. I don't care if the classmates help them or I help them or God gave them the message.

Andy's motive was developing students' language skills, however assisted, as a way to finally achieve independent performance in quadrant D. If the groups did not perform to his expectation, he felt discontented, 'I was disappointed that I had emphasised eye contact and stuff like that. They haven't got the skills yet.' In the same way as he appropriated English learning in the past, students' language competence and examination skills were matters of concern to Andy as a teacher:

Extract A10 (SR5)

I want them at least to have some basic skills on, you know... getting marks, like speaking loudly and clearly, sit tight and look at each other attentively. Pretend to be attentive. (R: So the assessor could tick on the assessment form?) Yea, exactly.

Extract A5 showed that Andy had separated examination practice from English learning when he was in school. Alongside English debate and other everyday language activities, he drilled himself to pass the examinations. These foci on examinations and a real interest in the subject in his own history were also evident in his pedagogic intentions, 'I always say that English is not for exams... English is... a part of the

exam... the exam includes English but English is more important for... daily use.'

Examinations and learning English for its sake were his intentions in teaching, and his assessments served both purposes.

ii) Assessments for and of learning

With those parallel motives, group work also revealed Andy's different purposes for assessment. When learners were able to test their understanding in quadrant B and C activities, Andy could mediate their learning, whether for examinations or subject matter, based on his monitoring of their externalisation:

Extract A11 (II)

Yea, group work can allow me or force me to step back a little bit and listen to the students. And also I can assess the students as well, how they speak.

The function was often formative in order to foster students' self-regulation, 'it's for us, for the students and also for me to check their progress.'

Andy had reported how much he valued a personal interest being taken in him by his two influential teachers, and in turn wanted to see his students as individuals. Again group work played to that intention. Seeing students working in the low-risk quadrants B and C increased his knowledge of learners (Shulman,1987):

Extract A12 (RI)

Positive things? I get to know... their personality, English standard, their progress, they are happy or not... so, yea, I get to know them individually that's the greatest part. For [Year 10] whenever I assess their group work I focus on their spoken English, probably according to the criteria of the public exam... But for [Year 7] I assess them by what I assess [Year 10], and also by checking their work progress, and also if they are happy with group work or not.

Group work was an assessment tool for Andy to work with pupils' everyday understanding (Daniels, 2008). He used this tool to formatively gauge how they were working in quadrants B and C so that he could support and challenge them as learners and in the meanwhile, help them to meet the standard for summative assessment (see also extract A10). These dual functions of assessment allowed him to sustain his intention of active participation in the subject while satisfying a system of testing which had also impacted his own history.

4.2.4 Enactment

Group work as a pedagogic tool exhibited the interplay between individual and the practice of teaching. Although Andy presented an image of working efficiently with others' expectations, he was also, in the interviews at least, a critic of the demands made by the school and the broader societal viewpoints. These contradictions arose due to his intention that learning English should be for its intrinsic value and that motive should not be subordinated to English for examinations. Andy explicitly stated that societal expectations and the school rules limited his pedagogic autonomy and his capacity to enact what mattered to him in teaching. The indifferent learning attitude of the students also frustrated him.

Andy's occupational values consisted in his own love of English and dislike of too much testing. He did not completely accept the professional standards defined by the school (Evetts, 2011; 2013), which prioritised coaching for examinations. For Andy, the clash between him and the school were not so much in terms of students' learning

outcomes, but in ways of achieving those outcomes. Under this circumstance, he had to compromise his actions in ways which were visible in group work.

i) Contradictions and demands

Having a strong identity and his own intentions in teaching the subject, Andy regularly highlighted the school's performance targets that had made him feel constrained:

Extract A13 (II)

I have to teach them for example grammar. I have to check their grammar books then I spend a lot of time. I don't have time for group discussion... Because I have to follow the schedule... after this week I have to finish UT [uniformed test], a test! Then next week we cannot do that [group discussion] because we have to do the test. We have to do the composition and we can do another group discussion maybe in another week. Then the week after next we cannot do that because we have to do newspaper cutting! You see what I mean? (R: So it's the school's schedule. It's the requirement from the department.) Just what I said it's the school curriculum, then the requirement from the department.

Andy's outcry was due to too many set tasks and summative assessments which, to his mind, downplayed the intrinsic value of the subject and deep learning. This kind of institutional priorities was also at odds with his biography as a keen learner immersing himself in a variety of English activities. He was fully aware of the conflict but felt helpless to improve the *status quo*. He could, like Joan, find some ways of rule-bending, but also like Joan, he was unable to make an impact on the wider school practice and the priorities embedded in it. Passing examinations was part of Andy's own learning experiences, still he was frustrated in teaching which suggested how forceful he felt the school demands were:

Extract A14 (SR6)

Yea it [the lesson] achieved my purpose on practising the exams but... I don't really like that and I just explained that the exam is a mess. Everything is too difficult for the students... At the end of the story, of the whole year I feel sorry for them. Some other teachers they just drill on the exam. They gave them [students] a lot of exam topics. At the end the students perform really well in the exam but my students they just... I try not to do that. (R: Until you have to?) Yea... just one to two weeks before the exam I do practice with them.

These frustrations led Andy to despise the school control that impeded his pedagogic autonomy, but at the same time he was strengthening his own motives, despite saying that he was changing his views:

Extract A15 (II)

Although I know that it's textbook English, I cannot change! I have to teach it. I hate the book. I hate using books. I want to use online materials, newspaper, articles from magazines. But I can't because I have to finish the damn grammar books, the damn grammar items, you know, present tense! (R: You cover them?) Yea definitely! If I don't what will happen? Parents will complain. Teachers will complain. 'You haven't taught my son. I have bought a book you haven't used it. You waste my money', something like that. That's why I said English teaching in Hong Kong is bad because I cannot change. It affects my teaching. (R: The culture in your school is something you cannot change?) No, I cannot change the culture that's why I can change my personal view only.

This complaint exemplified how occupational professionalism disagreed with organisational values. 'Changing [his] personal view' might lead to 'institutionalised particular identities' (Bernstein, 2000). In this case, instead of adopting a new identity Andy wanted to defend his beliefs about good English teaching. Within the limited pedagogic freedom he had tried to replace some set texts with authentic materials but was reprimanded by the senior management:

Extract A16 (II)

*They don't care! ...what the panel told me was 'OK. Whatever you do, you want to do something extra? You watch movies, TV programmes, these are extras... it's fine but you have to *meet the quota first!' That was what I was told... Last year I was blamed heavily in the panel meeting! My class didn't borrow enough books from the [school] library. And I told the panel that... I met the quota of the movie or book reviews because I asked them to borrow from elsewhere or the books they like.*

*Andy was referring to the specific amount and type of assignments for students set by the panel head.

His personal dedication was interpreted as resistance to institutional targets (Bernstein, 2000), thence Andy's actions in pedagogy did not fully represent his own learning experiences or what he believed in. This was an example of how school practice could mediate what the teacher did in the classroom, even when a teacher held strong contrary views. Andy expressed his distance from what he could not control:

Extract A17 (II)

Curriculum, it depends on how the schools apply... I had a curriculum when I was in [Year 7] but my teacher taught us in a different way. (R: Seems without curriculum.) Yea! Yea! We just read a lot of things. A lot of books and we watched a lot of movies and we talked a lot. We learnt English from the movies, books, reading materials. We didn't specifically 'today I'm going to teach you present tense' or something like that but now we have to do that! ... (R: It seems to me that the way you learnt English, you did not do the same thing with your students now.) Exactly! Yea, I feel bad about it actually. You're right! And it affects me a little bit. I tried...

This conflict was experienced at a personal level. Andy had some strong intentions in English teaching but the school rules were overwhelming. His students in East School also experienced these heavy school demands but lacked Andy's agency in English learning. They appeared to retreat into patterns of avoidance:

Extract A18 (II)

Especially the senior-form students... if they speak English more or less they make some mistakes then they feel ashamed of themselves. Then they don't want to use the language! What I am saying is they [junior students] are not trying at all nowadays! Either they just use Cantonese... or they don't care.

Joan shared the same frustrations about these unmotivated students (see extracts J17 and J18 in 4.1.4). Andy showed a strong agency when learning the subject. This personal history was in sharp contrast to his students' avoidance and indifference to English. The discrepancy and his expectations on students explained his intense frustration:

Extract A19 (SR3)

I planned this lesson quite well I guess, quite thoroughly. I thought about it. But I think this lesson was really bad! The outcome... disappointing. Number one they didn't speak in English at all. They spoke to me, to their group mates in Cantonese. Number two they didn't prepare! ...I asked them to go home and read their own writings... I trusted them but I trusted them wrongly.

Extract A20 (II)

On the internet and outside the classroom they just use Cantonese. It seems that it's quite difficult to cultivate learning habit. That's why particularly in English it's so difficult... Maybe because nowadays they don't talk to people much... English is a language. Actually every language you have to use it. Especially you have to speak it up then you can learn it. And then you get interested in it, then you learn it and then you get more interested... That's how I learnt but nowadays students... they don't speak! Then they can only learn English in my lessons.

His high expectations, built upon his love of the subject made Andy at times thwarted in enacting his motives. His agency as an English teacher often met with little response from some of his students. Andy was, in Vygotskian terms, sometimes unable to

externalise his understanding of what good teaching was because of a lack of receptivity in this dialectic which led to his high degree of frustration:

Extract A21 (SR3)

I've never seen such students. They are not noisy. They are not naughty in my class but they DON'T UNDERSTAND ANYTHING... Really bad! You can't imagine Jessica... they don't talk. They're not willing to... Their English is bad. They don't want to speak... so... kind of give them up.

Despite some frustrations, Andy's strong identity and agency as an English teacher did 'respond to both the imaginary and embodied' (Holland *et al.*, 1998:192) practices by utilising the expanded space in group work.

ii) Negotiating practice through group work

Alongside his dissent from the school's strong emphasis on examinations, Andy employed group work as a tool to overcome the divergence between the school demands and his pedagogic intentions.

One negotiation strategy was integrating authenticity into coaching for examinations. In this way Andy was able to operate within the school practice with some autonomy while satisfying the school demands for summative assessments:

Extract A22 (SR3)

I think the [examination] requirements are quite necessary for even daily group discussion so I think it's OK, for the two purposes I can achieve. I just gave them feedback based on the exam criteria.

Extract A23 (II)

I believe that English should be authentic so I try to relate the ten compositions to some real-life situations. I give them newspapers... online materials to refer to. If I need to finish group discussions with my students I always set some life-related topics. For example, do you think you have too much homework in Hong Kong? ... Even in [Year 7] I know my class is weak. I spent a lot of time on preparing them, discuss a real-life example rather than some really simple and kind of stupid topics.

His strategy was similar to Joan's when she retained the element of authenticity in her mediation of the set tasks (see extracts J10 in 4.1.3; J21 and J22 in 4.1.4). The low-risk zone in the quadrant model, i.e. B and C, became the site for the teachers' negotiation. The performance targets in quadrant D set by the school could be accomplished via B and C tasks designed by Andy:

Extract A24 (SR3)

The group discussion is not just for group discussion. They need to write, as a product of the discussion... The first piece they didn't do very well so I prepared this discussion for them to pave the way to write the second argumentative writing.

Group work enabled Andy to cater for individual needs. He relaxed the 'English-only' rule and gave more guidance in the semi-private zone of B and C activities to sustain the participation of weaker pupils:

Extract A25 (SR3)

I was trying to listen. I gave him [student] a question... the chance to speak in Cantonese so finally I could understand [him] a bit... Much better actually. I thought it was OK so I just explained to him in English.

His occupational ideal (Evetts, 2013) of good subject knowledge was seen in how he responded to students' poor performance. Andy did not compromise by lowering his expectations, instead he adjusted to secure learner participation:

Extract A26 (SR3)

I thought it would be you know, less English, more dumb students asking silly questions but I didn't know they were so bad! That's why I planned several lessons for this class actually. I know it was going to be demanding so I'm going to give them more lessons to talk... so every time they need to bring back something to show what they have found so I can check their progress.

Group work was therefore somewhere he could exercise his professional agency and sustain some control over his identity as an English teacher:

Extract A27 (RI)

Other teachers think 'oh in group discussion students would just talk about shopping and movies. They would just waste the time.' But I believe once you set up a routine or they know your standard or requirement, they will do it! May be in the future I will do more group work because... I have learnt a lot in group work right? From your interviews, from my self-reflection... Yea, I have improved in this field... If I have sharpened this sword why don't I use it, right?

Andy felt pleased with his participation in this study and treated it as professional development. By putting his intentions forward and negotiating with the school practice, he was able to do justice to himself.

4.2.5 Conclusion

The many long quotes in this profile vividly portrayed Andy's identity as a competent user of English. His teaching motives reflected in group work included academic performance, good subject knowledge and assessments mainly for learning while complementing training for examinations. In particular, learning through active participation and passing examinations were brought into the activity setting by the teacher's personal history of English learning.

However, these purposes were not totally compatible with the school's interpretation of how to obtain good examination grades. Andy's case epitomised how a teacher's pedagogy is nested in the institutional and social contexts, and how a teacher's professional priorities can be mediated by performance categories defined by forces external to the classroom.

'The constraints are overpowering, yet not hermetically sealed' (Holland *et al.*, 1998:18). A 'reformed subjectivity' (Holland *et al.*, 1998:18) was constructed when Andy supported learning with authentic teaching materials in quadrants B and C to meet the school demands for set tasks and summative assessments in quadrant D. Like Joan, Andy sustained his agency in English teaching by deploying the pedagogic space within group work. On one hand group work displayed quite clearly the nature of Andy's frustration at the demands of East School; on the other it offered a room for his agentic actions to fulfil his strong identity as an English teacher (Day *et al.*, 2006).

4.3 Mabel

Mabel had six years of teaching experience and had previously taught in two other schools. West School was her third school and she had been teaching there for 3.5 years when the fieldwork was undertaken. She gave me access to observing only one out of her three classes, explaining that the other two classes were too weak. She was more comfortable with the observed class because she had taught those students over the last two years and reported a good relationship with them. In this low-band school many students were low-achievers academically or had behavioural problems. In every observed lesson Mabel code-mixed, and frequently spoke entirely in Cantonese when

she interacted with the groups. She said the class I observed was the best behaved in the school and showed a lot of potential. Except in the pre-lesson interviews, each of which lasting about two minutes, Mabel used Cantonese in all other interviews and occasionally supplemented our talk with some English words.

4.3.1 Example lesson

All the 15 lesson observations of Mabel took place in the same Year 9 class. In this example lesson, Mabel wanted students to produce as many ideas as possible for the content of a composition. In the first activity, students, in quartets, had to brainstorm the functions of a mobile phone. With their basic ideas written on the board, Mabel quickly went over those ideas with the whole class and ignored some of their grammatical mistakes. Next, she instructed students for the second task using some prompts and examples on a powerpoint. Each group was given a big piece of paper to draw a mind map about the pros and cons of students bringing mobile phones to school. Fifteen minutes later, two representatives from every group had to briefly present to the class. During both discussion tasks close guidance from the teacher was available. Mabel displayed a template of the mind map with many hints about the essay topic, and with some English expressions illustrated by the Chinese equivalents. Mabel instructed the Year 9 in Cantonese within the groups and to the whole class. During group discussion she pressed them about the remaining time and the format of a presentation.

During the course of this English lesson early in the school day, four latecomers arrived at different times. Some of them brought breakfasts and two started eating. Many students went off-task in the first activity. After this ‘warm-up’ exercise they

concentrated better on the mind map task. When the presenters were reporting their group outcomes, more to the teacher who was next to them rather than talking to the class, their fellow students did not pay attention either.

In retrospect, Mabel stated that her lesson objective was to help students to generate and organise the ideas logically for the subsequent writing task. Her guidance and teaching materials were targeted at the weaker pupils to prevent them from giving up. She was satisfied with students' performance because of what she saw as their increased participation and collaboration. She thought the mind map also promoted group interdependence.

Like this example lesson almost all of Mabel's group work fell into quadrant B, in which the closed-type of tasks were structured towards tightly-defined outcomes such as filling in language gaps or sentence making. In every observed lesson Mabel had clear lesson objectives such as learning a specific grammar item or preparing for a writing task. The substantive concepts or skills were introduced to the Year 9 step-by-step. For each task she had prepared many examples or guiding questions to facilitate task accomplishment and student engagement. These quadrant B tasks encouraged some level of learner control but the space was not designed for students to test their knowledge at a higher or less-structured level.

4.3.2 Identity

Exploring the teacher's identity in relation to English helped make sense of her purposes for and actions in group work. Mabel's learning history constituted neither a strong sense of the importance of English, nor a strong interest in the subject. Her

motivation for English was rooted in parental pressure initially, then in peer rivalry and was reinforced by an intimidating teacher:

Extract M1 (II)

I think not until I got to uni I started to like it [the subject] ... I myself wasn't very motivated about my study. My mum forced me. Starting from a very young age she expected me to study in university one day. I could only force myself to achieve that. At that time I had no idea about my future career or life goals... In general you had to achieve well academically. If you failed English you would result in a total failure so I had to improve in all subjects.

The self-pride she developed added to the parental pressure when Mabel grew older.

Yet she remained extrinsically motivated in English and in her studies in general:

Extract M2 (II)

I did not want to lose face. Since I was very young my mum drilled me a lot on academic achievements so I was always in the top ten in class. When you had such a track record you couldn't afford to fail when you entered secondary school. I had no choice but to keep being a hardworking student. The first thing was not to let my parents down; second was I also wanted to maintain my image and pride.

The competitive atmosphere in school exacerbated her extrinsic orientation:

Extract M3 (II)

About English I viewed my fellow student as a rival and so I kept performing well. But I couldn't outperform her haha. Starting from [Year 10] I changed to a new school, a higher-band school. I knew that students were brilliant there so I told myself to work harder... And I met an English teacher whose teaching style I did not agree with but she pushed us to study hard so I valued English more. It was also because of her I chose to study translation [in university].

Recalling her early years Mabel repeatedly used the Cantonese verbs equivalent to ‘force’ and ‘push’. These pushes and forces summarised her trajectory of English learning:

Extract M4 (II)

I became more interested [in English] when I grew older [in university]. When you were forced by someone you wouldn't like it as much haha.

For years in school Mabel did not enjoy the subject and before she went to university there were no signs of a genuine interest. With these past experiences and pressure of external forces it was not surprising that she did not develop a strong identity in relation to English. Mabel felt she was ‘forced’, so English to her was not associated with personal interest but hard work. This ‘history-in-person’ (Holland *et al.*, 1998) mediated her actions as a teacher when she wanted her English lessons to be fun for students, and English teaching meant diligent curriculum coverage.

4.3.3 Purposes of group work

Mabel said that she had rarely used group work prior to this study. She viewed the curriculum as a text to be imparted and thought delivering it was her main duty. What mattered to her in teaching were maintaining students on the register and keeping them occupied in the classrooms. These motives seemed to be in accordance with the school priorities.

i) Curriculum delivery

Mabel's discussion of pedagogy and lesson outcomes emphasised how much of the curriculum the teacher delivered, rather than how students might be supported as learners:

Extract M5 (SR1)

For this good class yes you can use group discussion to facilitate teaching and learning but the problem is it took up so much time. Actually I could have taught all the three sentence patterns in a row within a single lesson.

Extract M6 (II)

I don't use it [group work] not because it is not good... The schedule is too tight. ...if that is all on me it'll be much faster... It's about effectiveness. When something has a finite set of answers if they work on their own quickly and I can check the answers with them in a short time that is the most efficient and fastest way to cover what needs to be taught in the lessons.

Mabel preferred a teacher-centred style – 'all on me', a didactic mode in quadrant A which could serve her purpose of curriculum coverage. She evaluated lesson effectiveness by how much the teacher has done. 'Much faster', 'quickly', 'in a short time' and 'fastest' exposed her motive of getting through the curriculum. She failed to elaborate the major differences between elementary and advanced stages of English learning but focused on what was listed in the curricula:

Extract M7 (II)

Actually in primary school they should have learnt what is covered in the curriculum from secondary one to three. Just when they came to junior secondary they re-learn it... If you look at the English curriculum in primary and second levels the grammar items are the same. In the senior level they are the same stuff... It was all covered previously.

Her purpose of transmitting the curriculum to students was apparent, and to the extent that learning was detached from teaching. How students internalised subject matter and made sense of their learning did not seem to be her major concern. It is noteworthy that though driven by the curriculum Mabel's motive was not related to improving students' academic performance. In fact in all of the interviews Mabel briefly mentioned something about testing just twice but she never discussed how she connected it with her teaching. Neither did she link the learning objectives to examinations in any of the lessons observed. Her historic extrinsic motivation for English, though containing an element of competing in examinations, did not direct her navigation within the priorities of the practice in West School.

ii) Keeping students in lessons

In most of the observed lessons Mabel performed some teaching in quadrant A before progressing to B. The depth of learning or students' understanding was not much mentioned when recounting her decisions in group work. Instead, students were kept occupied with some feeling of engagement to get through the tasks that made up the curriculum. Once I asked why she had not corrected the wrong English phrases written by students on the blackboard she replied:

Extract M8 (SR4)

They were able to express the ideas though there were grammatical mistakes. My focus was not on those mistakes but to get ideas from everybody.

Perhaps Mabel's purpose was to engage students in the lessons but learners' competence in English did not seem to be the focus of her group activities. Although

Joan and Andy had similar type of group tasks when they wanted students to generate ideas, both of them emphasised subject knowledge and other aspects of learning such as agency and higher-order thinking (see extracts J7, J10, A9). Mabel demonstrated a different motive behind this kind of tasks. As an English teacher she gave little attention to language accuracy and usage. Mabel's relative indifference to students' understanding or subject knowledge was also in contrast to Joan's communicative approach when she excused the mistakes in students' oral as a form of externalisation (see J4 in 4.1.3).

Without a strong interest in English in her own identity, group work in Mabel's lessons was a pastime when the Year 9 could compete for little prizes, rather than a tool to support learning or students making personal sense within the subject:

Extract M9 (SR1)

(R: Why do you use easy tasks in group work?) Because the weak ones can gain some points. They'll be happy if they join the game. If you had told the class too early... um... they wouldn't have been intrigued. I wanted to motivate them, something to attract them.

Extract M10 (RI)

My style is... I prefer whole-class teaching. It's not that I don't want to use group work. The fact is there is too much to teach. (R: You mean the curriculum?) Yea. I've tried using group work in several lessons, the setting was like a game. But it took an entire lesson for fun and the game, leaving little time for me to perform teaching. I worried that the time was wasted. Sometimes it's difficult to calm the students down after the exciting bit.

The action of amusing students might be attributed to the teacher's past experiences with English. Mabel was 'forced' to study hard and did not enjoy the subject. As a

teacher she set some group tasks involving little elements of English or skill building just to occupy students in lessons with ‘some fun’. For example, in her recall of a drawing task to introduce a poem Mabel explained, ‘I wanted to have two groups drawing the same place so that they could compare each others’ pictures, make some fun and feel happy.’ She justified her pedagogic strategy by trying to move the unmotivated pupils, ‘their behaviour in the lesson would tell you that “I am giving up English”’. Indeed, as reported in the example lesson, classroom discipline had been an issue within West School:

Extract M11 (II)

Um... to me as a teacher particularly in this school I want to teach them how to be a good person... knowledge comes as the next pursuit... First they have to behave in a classroom... something basic such as not being selfish, respecting and not distracting others in lessons etc. There have been times when you have to be strict with them. Sometimes you may turn a blind eye to their behaviour but it'd make a bigger impact on their future.

Contrary to her proclaiming of good behaviour, the blind eye was evident in her toleration of late arrivals and eating in the lesson (see 4.3.1), as well as in other circumstances (see M14 in 4.3.4). Despite saying that knowledge was important, Mabel did not motivate her students through subject knowledge, but by attempting to instil good learning habits. This attitude was how she managed her own study in the past when ‘keen on English’ meant diligence and doing the right thing in the classroom. Her notion of ‘force’ and good habits seemed more important than helping students to develop an interest in the subject:

Extract M12 (II)

We pick some students with potential and persuade them repeatedly. I keep moaning to them and let them understand what they should do in the lessons, hoping they'll change their values so that they'll be keener on English.

Students having fun, diluting language errors and an espoused, albeit not always enacted, priority for proper behaviour were to ensure the smooth running of a classroom. Mabel's teaching motives were keeping students in the classroom, for example by tolerating lateness and eating, and delivering the curriculum. Her group work did not challenge students' learning, not even for this Year 9 class whom she thought had the best potential.

4.3.4 Enactment

Mabel was teaching in a school that made few demands on her. She therefore had a high degree of pedagogic autonomy and did not need to exercise strong agency in order to assert her professional beliefs in the ways that both Joan and Andy felt compelled to do. Without a dialectic arising from the demands of school practice her participation in the activity of teaching tended to appear complacent. Mabel's actions in group work manifested her relatively weak identity and agency as a teacher of English, which meant that she was not placing demands on herself in the way that both Joan and Andy did. Echoing the apparent school priorities of attendance and curriculum coverage, she seemed happy to deliver the curriculum, while ensuring that the students did not cause public disruptions.

i) A non-stimulating school practice

Unlike Joan and Andy, the two teachers in West School mentioned very little about the school in any of their interviews. They made no comments about the school policy or demands the school placed on them. Certainly the teachers expressed their frustrations at work, but nothing was, according to them, related to the school practice or pressure from the school authorities:

Extract M13 (RI)

I sometimes use group work in that class, but not often. When you have to train their skills you have to go fast because there isn't enough time. (R: You always mention not enough time, there's too much to do. Is the problem related to the curriculum or the school?) It's not about the school, it's the curriculum.

Many students in West School were from the low band, meaning that they were not academically motivated. As described in chapter 3, the school had been a vocational school until a few years before this study (see 3.3.3). The challenges often found when undergoing this kind of transition in the education system suggested that the school was trying to maintain the normal functioning of school life, such as curriculum coverage, and was not yet seeing academic achievement overtly as a priority.

In the interviews Mabel repeatedly used a Chinese character which is equivalent to 'force' in English. When explaining how she reacted to English teaching in West School she replied, 'I think we have the belief that although the students do not want to learn now, we need to force them to complete the tasks.' Occupying students with tasks regardless of learning outcomes was to ensure some 'busyness' in school. Mabel's teaching went with this ostensible institutional motive. In Mabel's case, so long as students completed tasks, other rule-breaking behaviour could be excused:

Extract M14 (SR4)

I didn't care when they used the electronic dictionary, or mobile phones or whatever [in lessons]. Actually mobile phones are prohibited by the school rule but if they were checking the vocabulary I let them do so.

Although Mabel told me her Year 9 was one of the best classes in school, many of them were low achievers and truancy was not uncommon:

Extract M15 (SR4)

Since I've been teaching them for three years I know their ability very well. But there is something I can't help. If you told [student's name] ten things and he could get one out of the ten, you'd be very satisfied... Those who were always absent could actually have been forced to improve... Sometimes I feel I am helpless. After all they are really lazy.

Mabel's accounts showed that she placed few demands on her students, except for attendance and finishing some tasks in lessons. No evidence in Mabel's interviews suggested any school demands on her teaching. Inferring from this seeming lack of demands on pedagogy, she and the school might have little expectation for students' learning in English. Under this circumstance, Mabel's group work was not geared towards problem-solving or mastery of key concepts that could aid learning.

ii) A non-agentic teacher

Mabel confessed that she had never imagined herself becoming a teacher until the daunting job market hit her career planning. As she was a translation graduate, I asked why she did not teach Chinese. Mabel replied, 'the path is easier if you choose to be an English teacher... the need for English teaching is greater.' Reflecting how she learnt

the subject in the past, Mabel was not intrinsically keen on being an English teacher. This weak professional identity did not motivate her to take advantage of the pedagogic freedom in the non-demanding environment presented by the practice at school level. Throughout all of the interviews Mabel showed an interest in English only once. It was when she briefly recalled her study of syntax in university. Indeed Mabel did not feel herself an articulate or confident English speaker. Except for the two-minute pre-lesson interviews, in all of our in-depth interviews she spoke purely in Cantonese, even though every one of my questions was asked in English. She stuck to Cantonese when I kept using English in spontaneous follow-ups to her statements. Unlike Joan or Andy, Mabel was not driven by a sense of the importance of her subject. This weak identity in English was evidenced in her relatively limited understanding of the language and pedagogy:

Extract M16 (II)

They [students] always say 'I don't understand'. I found this interesting. How could you understand or not understand? It's not like Maths. I'm not teaching something that requires logical thinking. This word denotes this meaning. It's nothing you understand or not. It's whether you know or not. When I teach grammar, it's like when you say this you use it this way but still they said they did not understand. It's difficult for me.

Despite her firsthand experience as a second-language learner, Mabel did not appreciate the cognitive and linguistic difficulties when mastering English as a skill. Her historical lack of interest in the subject might have contributed to her PCK and an inability to understand 'what makes the learning of specific topics easy or difficult' (Shulman, 1986:9). This explained why she found it hard to make the subject teachable to her

students. Using Vygotskian terms, her mediation of their social situation of development was detached from the children's levels of conceptual understanding (Chaiklin, 2003).

Mabel's concept of group work could involve minimal or no language elements, for instance, in some lesson observations the Year 9 did some drawings or actions on a team basis without real cognitive challenges oriented to developing 'a new intersubjectivity' (Gallimore & Tharp, 1990:189) or the competence of the assisted. Her low expectation for the learners reflected her weak agency in English teaching, 'I didn't have much expectation in other aspects... In my lesson if they learn the bare minimum I expected, I'm satisfied.' After the Year 9 got used to group work, her expectation remained low:

Extract M17 (SR5)

I don't care. I'm not asking them to write an essay. If they jotted down the notes and could say something, that would be OK... (R: I wonder if they wrote much on this worksheet especially their English is not good.) No, they didn't. (R: And they were not focused.) Perhaps the lesson just began so that was a warm-up. But I think they could achieve something when they discussed, so I think it wasn't a problem.

During the lesson observation the class discipline contextualising her comments in M17 was loose. Students ended up writing very little on their worksheets. Mabel accepted that because she thought they were on-task. Unlike Joan and Andy, who expressed their frustration when students did not appreciate the opportunity of active engagement in English learning, Mabel seemed indifferent to her students' low motivation and performance. To find an explanation one might turn to James's simple algorithm, where self-esteem equals success over pretensions (James, 1950). Perhaps her pretensions

(expectations for the Year 9 class) were lowered through continuous evidence of her lack of success with them. In this way she could protect her self-esteem by keeping the equation in balance.

In the round-up interview Mabel reiterated her preference for the didactical approach in quadrant A. She acknowledged the students' positive changes after a series of quadrant B activities, but without more ambitious intentions for English teaching she did not value those learning outcomes as highly as her pace of going through the curriculum:

Extract M18 (RI)

If it were not for your research I wouldn't have used group work in this class. I would have continued with individual work. And my teaching would have been faster with more texts covered. Now my progress is slower. However there is something positive. I think after using group work this class got some inspirations. They gained something from it. But it was slow and little... I think the effectiveness is low.

After a series of repeated observations and interviews, Mabel adhered to her own motive of curriculum delivery in a teacher-centred style and did not seem to appreciate the more open space for learning (see also extracts M5 and M6). Her struggle to make sense of group work and students' mastery of English as a subject projected an image of a non-agentic teacher.

4.3.5 Conclusion

West School was surviving transition in its institutional purpose by posing minimal constraints on teaching. This kind of practice creates some pedagogic freedom that can benefit teaching and learning, but it seems that much may depend on the teacher's professional agency. In this case Mabel's apparent compliance with curriculum

coverage as a teaching goal, accompanied by her historical identity as an English learner, meant that she was not agentic in the activity of English teaching. There was a lack of dialectic between the teacher and the practice of the institution. This lack of demand from the school was not replaced by the teacher instigating more ambitious intentions in her participation in teaching.

The purposes and actions in Mabel's group work in many ways personified the teacher's past learning experiences and her unexpected entry to the profession. She did not develop a strong sense of English in her identity, neither as a learner nor a teacher. Although Mabel talked of 'forcing' or 'pushing' the unmotivated, she actually did very little of that. Instead, she tended to lower her expectations for the students and followed the curriculum quite rigidly.

4.4 Rosy

Rosy was in her second year of teaching in West School after graduating from university. In our first meeting she regarded herself as inexperienced and was eager to improve her teaching. She perceived participating in this study as a learning opportunity and was hoping to gain some practical advice. The 15 lesson observations were composed of her Year 8 and Year 9 classes with pupils aged between 13 and 15, but some students were older because of being held back due to poor performance. The attendance rate in both classes fluctuated seriously. At its extreme, in one observed lesson there were only four pupils. With the school's apparent pursuits of student enrolment and stability, the biggest challenge to Rosy was poor discipline in the lessons. She remained enthusiastic and very patient with her students, though at times she felt

uneasy when reflecting on this problem out of the classroom. Except for the very short pre-lesson interviews which lasted around two minutes each, Rosy used Cantonese in all the other interviews.

4.4.1 Example lesson

Rosy continued this lesson from a series of previous lessons with the Year 8 class. The series had begun with vocabulary, then the structure of a letter of advice and eventually in this lesson, students had to present their work orally. Right before the lesson Rosy said she hoped that students could expand their vocabulary, retrieve information correctly from the handouts and suggest some solutions. There were 15 pupils, of whom two arrived late. The students could choose their own pairings and were free to sit anywhere in the classroom. A few chose to work on their own and some others did not participate whatsoever. Rosy distributed each pair or single two example letters about teen problems. With these examples students had to write the problems and feelings on a handout, as well as some advice based on their own understanding. Finally one student from each pair had to briefly present either problem with a piece of advice.

Rosy originally allocated eight minutes for the paired discussion which was to be followed by the presentations. In the course of this task some students worked on the handouts and sought help actively. Rosy was very responsive and intervened upon their requests. Some pupils, mainly boys, did not attempt the task at all. Rosy was lenient as usual. A few of them did not follow her instructions and throughout the 70-minute period they were talking loudly, shouting, listening to music or eating. Rosy remained very inviting and encouraging. Eventually the paired work took 15 minutes, during

which a few pupils refused to do anything and some others were not cooperating despite sitting in pairs. Rosy was busy supporting those who were on-task; whereas less attention was given to others who were not trying. Two students were totally ignored since they were sleeping. In the later part of the lesson when the motivated students were preparing for their presentations, and with a colleague arriving to co-teach Rosy gave remedial assistance to the boys who had been off-task. In total six students presented and Rosy expressed her strong approval of their attempts. She recapped the keywords, tried to read aloud with the class but met with poor response. Before the lesson was over, all students voted for the best presenter.

When reflecting on this doubled-period Rosy was surprised by those who had presented. Before the lesson she expected it would be only one or two presenters, also because it was their first time having students to openly speak in English. She attributed the success of this lesson to her adequate scaffolding in previous lessons and to her thoughtful design of the tasks. On the other hand she was aware of the low level of cooperation among the Year 8. Except for appearing keen, Rosy thought in this regard what she could do was limited. She justified this view by saying that as long as some students looked serious and completed the task, the idling ones might observe or learn from their fellow classmates. Furthermore, Rosy was flexible with the extra time to sustain the activity and accepted students' low quality output if they were willing to try.

Like this lesson, every group or paired task in all the observed lessons fell into quadrant B, in which students started to map their understanding with the key concepts. These activities were tightly constructed and broken down into a few simple sub-tasks, each of which gradually progressed towards the end products. Rosy also designed some tasks

specially for the least able, such as matching word cards or arranging shuffled paper slips to form sentences. These tasks were also within the B quadrant because the intended task outcomes were very well-defined.

4.4.2 Identity

Rosy recalled, ‘I quite disliked English when I was young.’ This direct statement was symptomatic of her weak identity in the subject she then came to teach. When asked if she had wondered about the purpose of learning English in school, she responded, ‘because I had to get a good mark, good results. And all the tests.’ Rosy became an English teacher not because of her passion for the subject, ‘actually I didn’t really like English much’, but largely due to parental influence and the prospects that English proficiency gives. Both of her parents were schoolteachers and her mother taught English, who also influenced Rosy’s career choice:

Extract R1 (II)

Both positive and negative. The negative side is she criticised me a lot when I was small. That made me a bit unhappy so at times I gave up [English] a little. On the positive side I became an English teacher because of her. I saw her success, her satisfaction... so I knew I could do it... it was also because of the better career path... it’s easier to find a job. Language teachers are more competitive and I chose English.

The way Rosy was taught also illuminated her lack of a passion for the subject, ‘our learning style was really boring. It was all about drills.’ When in school she learnt the language through studying it as an academic subject, rather than a living language. In her descriptions of her own learning approach, there was no sign of the communicative function of English:

Extract R2 (II)

My teachers drilled us. ...I was dull so I didn't resist. Probably it was due to the school culture. I didn't learn English in an authentic way. I didn't learn from daily life but through studying grammar books and other exercise books... Largely grammar exercise. Repetition, practising a form repeatedly. Memorising vocabulary by dictation... I think it's extremely useful because I am an English teacher haha.

Although Rosy described herself as 'an English teacher' and was employed in that role, the sense of English in her identity looked weaker than her intentions as a teacher more generally. Indeed it was her interest in teaching that made her enjoy English more:

Extract R3 (II)

When I was in university I tried teaching English. Someone really learnt from me... I found something interesting when I was looking for teaching materials. Then I started to like English... Actually I like it more and more now. I think it's about a sense of achievement. When you know more you are more motivated to learn more; the better you can handle it the more you are willing to learn. The problem with our students is that they can't handle it right at the start. Now they avoid it... I want to let them know it's not that hard. In fact your teacher's English wasn't good but it's getting better.

Rosy's history as a learner of English consisted of parental influence and her motivation for academic performance, which suggested her weak identity in relation to the subject. Her interest in English grew because she had taught. In all of our interactions, Rosy appeared to be more enthusiastic about teaching than the subject *per se*. Like Mabel, she rarely used English in our conversations. Apart from sharing her past experiences as a submissive pupil, Rosy did not discuss anything about the language in the subsequent interviews. These actions suggested that other aspects of teaching, but not the subject, were driving her identity construction and development as a teacher.

4.4.3 Purposes of group work

The line taken in this thesis is that examining how group work is organised in classrooms offers access to what matters to the teachers in the practices of teaching. In the case of Rosy, her primary concern was students doing something in the lessons. The weaker identity in English led Rosy to focus less on subject knowledge; whereas the stronger component of being a teacher meant that she oriented to other motives such as developing students' sense of achievement and keeping the classroom in order. This comparative emphasis between these two motives was more apparent in the early stage of her employing group work.

i) Task completion to boost pupils' sense of accomplishing

Without a strong interest in the subject, instead of helping students to master the language Rosy tried to ensure them a flavor of success through, prior to the fieldwork, working on some quadrant A tasks related to English. She outlined her intentions as a teacher quite clearly in our first interview:

Extract R4 (II)

My students are... low-achievers. Their target is not the public exam or to get high marks but still through learning English, as process, I really want them to gain some sense of achievement... it [doing grammar exercise] all repeats, repeats and repeats. I think my students like this kind of mechanical practice too. (R: Why?) Because they can handle it! They don't have to know the exact meaning of the words but they can still get the marks haha. They can follow the rules, the first sentence and then they just repeat... They can finish the exercises without thinking. (R: Without thinking?! Do you think they learnt?) I don't think they learn... I think they do learn the rules but not the meaning of the words and the meaning of the rules. They cannot get the usage but the form only, just like... when I was in secondary school.

‘Just like when she was in school’, Rosy transferred the same learning approach to her participation as an English teacher (see also R2). But unlike her own motivation when she was young, her ‘low-achieving’ students did not aim at ‘getting high marks’.

Apparently her motive was not performance in the subject but task completion:

Extract R5 (II)

For [Year 8] I want to use group work in the form of competition so that they are motivated to complete the task at least... Perhaps their focus is the prize, not English learning haha. It doesn't matter. At least they have the motivation to try, to finish something first.

Like her quadrant A tasks, group work was to lure students into a task. Rosy's strong sense of being a general teacher could be seen from her motive of engaging the students and helping them to build a sense of achievement:

Extract R6 (II)

To me a good teacher should prepare for the lessons, find some information they [students] like and help them to achieve so that they can learn under a relaxing and motivating environment.

Once group work was underway Rosy observed how it helped to attract the students:

Extract R7 (SR3)

Those less able or unmotivated usually just copied when we did worksheets, actually they didn't understand. With group work... in fact I was quite happy to see they were willing to do it and participate... at least they achieved a bit. At least they learnt something very basic.

This intention of students being occupied and underplaying English was consistent and recurrent. Her pedagogy, prior to my arrival, was a sequence starting from quadrant A

and moving to copy-and-paste tasks as some evidence of students reproducing what she had presented. But these activities were so heavily constrained that they could not be said to demonstrate understanding. Neither were they designed to assist individuals to develop their ZPD or independent performance. After a series of lessons involving group work and the SR interviews, Rosy realised her inadequate knowledge of the learners as a result of her skipping quadrant B and the formative assessment that went with it:

Extract R8 (SR4)

The two very weak students surprised me a lot. They couldn't even match the affirmative and negative. I had a deeper reflection. It makes me wonder what on earth I have been doing to them.

Extract R9 (RI)

I did find that some students were worse than I had expected, their ability. This is something I didn't notice in individual work normally. In whole-class style I seldom walked to them and observed what they were doing.

The motive of task completion blinded Rosy to students' actual level of development. Through completing some tasks she thought students could build a sense of achievement. Not until she undertook group work did she come to realise that being a teacher was more than finishing some lesson tasks. Her reliance on task completion was actually a means for her to follow another motive of keeping the classroom under control.

ii) Keeping students in lessons

Like Mabel, whose motives aligned with the school's seeming objective of a smooth functioning, Rosy relied on quadrant A and subsequently, B tasks to manage the chaotic classrooms. Her purpose was that these tasks, though with little intentions of developing a potentiating environment (Claxton, 2007) or a capacity in learning, could divert the restless students from misbehaving in lessons. Group work, once it was underway, proved to be more engaging than those copy-and-paste tasks Rosy used in the past, 'copying and pasting is not helpful to them but pairwork. I feel they are more interested... During individual tasks they sleep or sit idle.'

Keeping order in the classrooms was a top priority to Rosy. In the interviews she frequently went into detail about students going off-task or ignoring her instructions, and their low motivation. She told me students throwing tantrums was a common problem in West School and her lessons:

Extract R10 (SR4)

It depends. If they lost their temper I'd prefer they sleep. I'd rather they sleep than causing trouble. But if they slept they couldn't learn... The problem [sleeping in lessons] is really serious.

Her comparatively stronger identity as a teacher with a weaker sense of English as a subject, led Rosy to interpret teaching in terms of relationships with students, 'I think in this school, teacher-student relationships are very important because if you don't have a good relationship with them, they won't listen to you.' The motive of maintaining classroom discipline meant Rosy avoided conflicts, which in turn could enforce task completion:

Extract R11 (SR3)

The boy took his mobile out, showed me photos of his puppy. It wasn't related to the task but I wasn't strict, like 'put away your mobile or I'll confiscate it'. I didn't do it that way. Instead I chatted with him a bit and said 'OK, you should put it away quick.' Then I explained to them again what needed to be done and hoped they would continue... It depends on their mood. I used this method so conflicts could be avoided. They may be more willing to cooperate and continue the task.

Extract R12 (II)

Um... Build relationships, try to praise them more and I'm trying to set some rules. For example they have to finish their work before leaving the classroom. That's what I am trying to do.

Her weak identity in English, again, diluted the significance of subject knowledge when

Rosy focused on other aspects through group work:

Extract R13 (SR3)

[student's name] could ask other classmates. This is also our original idea of doing pairwork... I think two people learning together is better in terms of fun and effectiveness... When I saw they had pairwork I felt happy... I think kids nowadays they tend to be self-centred. Cooperation is an important skill.

How Rosy made sense of teaching was probably an example of the dynamic between her identity and the school context (Maclure, 1993). Her identity as a teacher did not contain a strong English element, which accounted for her intentions of helping students to build a sense of accomplishment through finishing some low-level tasks. At the same time student's misbehaviour also directed Rosy to prioritise keeping an orderly classroom over passing the control of learning to pupils.

4.4.4 Enactment

How the teachers enacted what mattered to them through using group work as a tool reflected the interplay between the individual and the school practice. The data from Mabel and Rosy suggested little pressure in West School in terms of teaching English. Together with Rosy's lack of passion for the subject, it meant that her agency as an English teacher was not called forth in this dynamic. The biggest demand on Rosy's teaching was from the disruptive pupils because discipline in the classrooms dominated her talk in every interview.

In some ways one might see Rosy as a learner, only in her second year of teaching so she was learning to navigate the practice of teaching as well as shaping her identity as a teacher. Participating in this study became an opportunity for her to try other teaching skills and methods. Rosy relied less on quadrant A tasks by venturing into quadrant B work so that her students could potentially participate in English lessons and meanwhile externalise their levels of understanding when attempting the closed tasks. Her increasing comments on student engagement as the study progressed provided evidence for how she was exploring and gaining a better understanding of pedagogy.

i) A lack of self-confidence

Starting her second year of teaching Rosy regarded herself inexperienced. In our second interview she expressed a poor self-image, 'perhaps I am too fresh... I know I am incapable'.

Once a gentle and obedient child who worked hard to fulfill her mother's expectations in English learning, Rosy's trajectory did not equip her with an authoritative role or bearing strong motives in teaching. This lack of confidence in teaching was visible in

her worries about managing student behaviour. When she first tried using group work, students' reluctance was overwhelming and undermining any sense of her agency:

Extract R14 (SR2)

I told them to get into pairs but they didn't move. Even I assigned them the partners they weren't in pairs. At last I told them to group freely. I had to roll up my sleeves and pull them together... they refused to group with someone then... I compromised ... Hopeless. They simply rejected it. It's also my problem. I have no ways to make them feel they have to do what I want them to.

Extract R15 (SR3)

I wasted a lot of time just to ask them to do something which required only one second! Here's something I can't achieve within the functions of group work... I can't even move them! ...they needed me to push them, to sit together or simply ignore me... I had to urge them vigorously then they moved... it's the problem with authority. I gave instructions but they wouldn't follow at once.

The discipline issue was serious and at times very demanding for Rosy. In some lessons the classroom evolved into a state of anarchy. This conflicted with her motive of keeping students on-task. Rosy lamented her declining professional dignity which was a sign of poor self-confidence:

Extract R16 (SR5)

It depends if they would try... no choice... in fact the problem now is I am hopeless. They refused to work and I am hopeless!

Extract R17 (SR4)

Actually I have been unhappy in their lessons lately. The problem [sleeping in lessons] is really serious... I have a sense of failure... Once I handled a boy's misbehaviour. Luckily it was co-teaching. Another teacher was there so I took the boy out to talk with him. A good girl became angry at me, 'you're wasting our time!'

(R: She was angry with the boy?) She was angry with me! I felt so sad... I don't know what I am hanging around with them. I always fuss about asking them to take away their mobile phones but initially it was me who wasn't strict... but if I keep quiet I feel uncomfortable. It's like letting them do whatever they like. I am not angry with her but I feel I am a failure.

In every interview, the challenges of handling students and her resultant struggles dominated a vast proportion, if not all, of her talk. Almost nothing was about academic or other demands from the school. Rosy never connected her teaching to anything about examinations, a nerve-wracking objective which pressurised numerous teachers in Hong Kong, but there was no evidence suggesting that this was the case in West School. The data from Mabel also supports this claim.

ii) A fresh start through group work

There were elements in Rosy's identity which made the analysis less straightforward than the other three teachers. Rosy externalised an identity of being a teacher in general, more than someone who taught English. Unlike Mabel in the same school, Rosy was not non-agentic in pedagogy because she developed stronger intentions after going into group work for this study. However, neither was she completely agentic. Unlike Joan and Andy, who proactively negotiated school demands with their occupational values, Rosy was somehow semi-agentic. She did not exercise her agency or take advantage of the room for pedagogic freedom at West School. Her more agentic motives were stimulated by participating in this study. This positive change was evident in her more elaborated responses to the dynamic of teaching and learning.

When the school made no explicit expectations on teaching, Rosy lacked a frame of reference to learn how to cope with the challenges she met:

Extract R18 (SR2)

Um... actually I'm not sure what I should do. It's difficult to balance, whether I should waste the whole lesson to handle it [a discipline problem] or I should build the routine first.

There was no dialectic between the school practice and the teacher, which might have otherwise created the social situation of development for this inexperienced teacher. Rosy was thence learning to enhance her participation in the activity of teaching by responding to the difficult students and taking part in this research. She asked me to give her some advice on teaching, though I had clarified my role in our first two meetings. This request indicated that she was looking for some directions for being a teacher. Since identity construction is seen as an ongoing process (Stetsenko & Arievidt, 2004), Rosy's identity as an English teacher was probably still being formed. The lack of school demands led her to configure her participation in practice to other aspects such as classroom discipline and relationship with students. The notion of temporal and continual development of identity could be applied to her case (Dreier, 1999).

Rosy was keen on improving her teaching. She was reflective and self-critical when evaluating her lessons, at least when being probed in the interviews:

Extract R19 (SR2)

I think this was an unsuccessful lesson because they did not attempt pairwork, did not discuss the answers. I think because I didn't design the worksheet well. I anticipated wrongly the words they knew.

Before taking part in this study Rosy conformed to the school motive of keeping students in lessons by task completion (see extracts R4, R5 and R12). Without a strong agency in English she did not design higher-order tasks or aim at fostering deep learning. Using group work was some sort of experiment for her. It took Rosy and her students some time to adapt to it so that the space for learner exploration was opened up. The data suggested that Rosy gradually oriented towards pupil engagement and testing their understanding in quadrant B, and not simply task completion. However, to achieve that she had to, at times, challenge students' low motivation which she found strenuous. Nevertheless, Rosy grasped this learning opportunity and was patient with helping the unmotivated students. In the course of lesson observations, she gradually analysed lesson dynamic and student performance in greater detail. She was also developing some stronger intentions:

Extract R20 (SR3)

Yes I was quite happy actually. If you looked at the first few lessons they didn't cooperate. However in these two lessons they stayed on task more often. They could sit together, at least. Because of this I expected a bit more. I tried to do more.

Extract R21 (RI)

How to do group work, for example is it word matching or conversation? Actually during group work I have been trying out which teaching methods fit my students... it's also an achievement that I understood their acceptance limit... In group work what they had to do is at a higher level. Processing. ...I know more about which

students like to learn in what styles. Their ability, their mode of learning. This is what I found from group work.

Through the student-led activities in quadrant B Rosy learnt to assess how the ‘low-achievers’ tried to make sense of new concepts. This process, whether the students worked collaboratively or not, prompted Rosy to mediate learning based on more accurate monitoring of their understanding. Teachers find themselves better observers and assessors of students as a result of using groups (Brody, 1998), here Rosy was not an exception.

With the open space made available by the quadrant B tasks, Rosy discovered how to resolve some conflicts in the classroom, and meanwhile gained her self-confidence:

Extract R22 (SR4)

Sometimes it [group work] frees me to handle discipline problems because... During group work I think they're learning with other classmates... meanwhile I could handle discipline problems... It's not like 'I'm doing a worksheet alone but you are scolding someone else.'

Extract R23 (SR5)

Actually group work is easier to encourage others to work, especially those who are not on track. They [the better ones] are still working on their own. Now I can use the time gap to help the slow groups... Their feedback told me group work made them sleep less. Actually I'm quite surprised they are more and more willing to try... I think they're... happier, it's less boring... If not group work my teaching style tends to let them just copy what I explain in lessons.

The temporal order of Rosy's SR interview excerpts in this sub-section illustrated her growing intentions in teaching. She valued these lesson observations and reflections,

and treated them as input to sharpen her pedagogic skills. Rosy seized this opportunity of implementing group work and was committed to looking for pathways of being a professional.

4.4.5 Conclusion

Rosy's trajectory of becoming a teacher had more and different dimensions from the other three teachers. She had a greater interest in teaching than the subject she taught. Her weak identity *vis-à-vis* English might explain why she focused on task completion in her early stage of teaching. Without explicit demands from the school, her initial purpose, like Mabel's, was to maintain a disciplined classroom but without a strong emphasis on learning.

Rosy's agency did not depend on the already-existed pedagogic autonomy but on taking part in this study, which moderately compensated for the lack of dialectic from the school. This changing sense of agency became her *modus operandi* of navigating the activity of teaching. Group work and her candidness in the interviews allowed Rosy to be a beginning teacher, try things out, learn and think more pedagogically. She found new insights and developed stronger intentions over the course of the lesson observations. Rosy's trajectory demonstrated the social situation of development of an inexperienced teacher who was looking for the dialectic to activate her capacity for exercising agency.

4.5 **Chapter summary**

Through group work as lens in this chapter I examined what mattered to the four teachers in teaching, the enactment of these purposes and how their backgrounds were

linked with these actions and intentions situated in the classrooms. In particular, the three original research questions have been attempted by displaying the dynamic at the person level and to some extent, the interaction of these individuals with the institutions which became notable in the various activity settings where their group work took place.

Regarding research questions 1 and 2, the teachers' uses of group work manifested their pedagogic motives and the relationship with the respective persons' historical development in the subject, which also shaped their professional identities. We have seen how Joan's and Andy's passion for English impacted their priorities of developing students' competence in the subject. To Joan and Andy this competence should contain an interest in the subject alongside performance in high-stakes testing. Assessment and learners' participation were also core purposes in their pedagogy. These purposeful views contrasted with curriculum coverage and task completion observed from Mabel's and Rosy's behaviour and recalls. Their pedagogy reflected a priority of keeping students in classrooms and finishing some work. When Mabel and Rosy were young both of them learnt English under parental pressure. These experiences might have been transferred to their roles as teachers, when they were less concerned with making the subject teachable to their students other than following the curriculum.

Although professional identity was a key in determining what mattered to the four teachers, their purposes and enacting these purposes were also context-dependent, a dynamic aspect addressed, at least in part, by research question 3. The dialectic between individual and the different demands in institutional practices became critical.

Professional agency could be seen when the teachers adjusted their teaching in order to meet the demands while putting their intentions forward. This was what we saw from

Joan and Andy who sustained their identities as English teachers and at the same time fulfilled the school expectations. They reconciled the contradictions by actualising their pedagogic beliefs in quadrant B and C tasks to prepare for student performance in quadrant D required by East School. In West School there was more pedagogic freedom due to low level of institutional demands. However, Mabel and Rosy (before group work) operated with the minimal expectations and without exercising strong professional agency. Rosy's identity as an English teacher was being constructed and through group work her latent agency was activated, which directed her to have more ambitious intentions in the classrooms.

These findings regarding the three research questions portrayed the four teachers on a case-by-case basis. The analyses based on their accounts cast additional and remarkable light on the practices they inhabited and the wider environments in which those practices were located. These broader perspectives where group work and the teachers were embedded in will be discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 5 – Cultural-historical dynamics in teaching and group work

Drawing on the analyses of the teachers' motives at the person level and their actions in the classrooms, this chapter looks across the four teachers to connect their understanding and activities to the macro settings at the school and society level. The present study set out initially to explore how teachers' beliefs and decision-making played out in how and why they organised group work. Interestingly, as the analyses of the four cases progressed it became clear that the meanings the teachers ascribed to group work revealed the extended dynamics that underlay the motivated actions of these teachers. As a result, group work also offered a window into the interrelations between the actors and their multi-layered social situations.

In chapter 4 I have shown that the professional identities the teachers brought when they entered particular social settings interacted with the demands they faced within the school practices. These demands, where they existed, created different kinds of dialectic, depending on the teachers' intentions about English teaching and the institutional objectives of the schools.

In this chapter I go beyond the individual identities and what mattered to each of them in teaching and seek to decipher how tradition and social changes were shaping the environments in which the teachers operated the activity of teaching through using group work as a pedagogic tool. This analysis will tease out the dynamics and demands to be found in the macro context in which the intentions and understanding of these four teachers are enacted. Hedegaard's heuristic (Hedegaard, 2012; see Figure 2A and 3A) is

deployed to conceptualise the arguments. Aiming at an explication of the motives evident in the several planes of analysis from society to the classrooms, this chapter will start with presenting the societal influences which have created teaching in Hong Kong as a cultural product (Bruner, 1996). Moving down from the society plane, I will address the school objectives and those in the English departments at the institution level. Finally the motivations situated in the classrooms at the activity setting level will be interpreted.

5.1 The society level

In this analysis society is used in a rather exclusive way to concentrate on two major streams – long term cultural values and changing policy directives. They will be discussed separately in order to identify some of the complexities and contradictions that existed between them.

For many years Education has been ‘the single largest expenditure item of the Government’s budget – taking up over one-fifth of the annual total Government expenditure’ (Hong Kong, Education Commission, 2004:6). This statement still reflects the situation a decade later, with Education continuing to take the biggest percentage share of recurrent government expenditure in the 2014-15 budget (Hong Kong, Financial Services and the Treasury Bureau, 2014). Being a Chinese society by majority, traditionally Hong Kong people value education greatly. Such a long-held view was reinforced by an elite education system in the past when secondary education was a privilege for the wealthy or the academically able until 1978, when the nine years’ universal, free and compulsory education providing six-year primary plus three-year

junior secondary level was introduced (Hong Kong, Government Secretariat, 1981). The value placed on academic success was further strengthened in the structuring of secondary education as it developed. Students at upper primary level were categorised under a five-band system exclusively based on academic achievement for the sake of secondary school allocation.⁹ Such policy confirmed the entrenched cultural notion of education as highly stratified. This categorisation brought advantages to system administrators as allocation to schools is conveniently and convincingly prescribed by test scores obtained from assessments which inevitably became high stakes. The accentuation of academic ability also paid dividends in reputation terms. Hong Kong students have constantly performed outstandingly in international assessments such as PISA (OECD, 2014)¹⁰ and the TIMSS mathematics tests, despite their modest home study resources compared to other participating countries (Mullis, Martin, Foy & Arora, 2012).¹¹ Nonetheless, these impressive achievements do not translate into a strong interest in learning or high academic self-concepts amongst Hong Kong students. Leung (2002), for example, reported their lack of confidence and interest in mathematics. This paradox implies that cultural factors and the norm of extrinsic motivation pertain quite strongly to the academic success of Hong Kong's youth.

Categorising school pupils according to test scores has had its implications for schools. This policy encouraged them to attract high-band pupils in order to build the critical mass of achieving students which would attract more of the same. Consequently, student achievement has been referenced, for a long time, as a *de facto* yardstick to

⁹ Since late 1990s the system was reduced from five bands to three.

¹⁰ Hong Kong ranked third in mathematics, and second in both reading and science in PISA 2012 results.

¹¹ Hong Kong ranked third in fourth graders' mathematics achievement and fourth in eighth graders'; and 21st in Home Resources for Learning in TIMSS 2011.

classify schools in Hong Kong's education system. The labelling has been extended to all local schools which are stratified by the largest proportion of the band of secondary-one student intakes, i.e. the beginning of secondary education at age 12. Securing a place in many top band-one secondary schools has long been incredibly competitive.¹² The band of a school also determines its status with implications for students' self-esteem and expectations. Salili and Lai studied the effects of learning context on Hong Kong students. They found that in the better-band schools pupils were more motivated in English learning and scored higher in both performance and mastery goal orientations; whereas students from the lower bands had lower self-efficacy and less positive learning attitudes (Salili & Lai, 2003). The teacher biographies in chapter 4 also supported this overview of the impacts of banding, 'from [Year 10] I [Mabel] changed to a new school, a higher-band school so I needed to work even harder,' (extract M3); 'I [Andy] was a band-one student and I held a lot of pride in myself so I was really down when I went to the band-three school' (extract A2). In a schooling system where academic ability is extremely valued, sending children to band-one schools is one of the most crucial aspirations for many Hong Kong parents (Tam & Chen, 2013; OECD, 2013; Zhao, 2013).¹³

Construing this overview using the terminology in Hedegaard's model, at the society level one can see there is an established tradition of academic achievement with a policy of banding students. These cultural values and past policies have concomitantly shaped

¹² Getting into these famous Hong Kong schools could be more competitive than Oxford University. The acceptance rate of the former type of schools was around 5%-13% (Apple Daily, 2013); whereas the latter stood at 18.6% for undergraduate admissions in 2012 (Oxford University, 2014).

¹³ Hong Kong ranked high in 'Parental expectations for their child's future' in PISA 2012 – second in 'Parents expect the child to work as managers or professionals at age 30'; and fifth in 'Parents expect the child to complete a university degree' (OECD, 2013).

family expectations to interpret the purpose of education as examination success. It then became the motive of many students, especially when attainment in high-stakes testing is an issue of immense public concern. Examination success is conventionally seen as an indicator of school and teacher performance, and thus the best selling point to attract the most academically-able students to a particular school. This mechanism means the need for good examination results also shapes the objectives and institutional practices of many schools.

The implications of these cultural pursuits are that students are also enmeshed in sets of practices and motives which elevate the importance of examinations. Learning for examinations has been a very strong if not the strongest, motivation for many Hong Kong school pupils, with an impact on what and why they learn. Research has shown that Hong Kong students, from both good and poor school bands, rate performance goals higher than mastery goals in learning motivation (Salili & Lai, 2003). Hau and Ho (2010) echoed this finding and proposed that high family expectations and the competitive education system are responsible for such phenomena amongst Chinese students in Hong Kong. Within East School Andy's and Joan's views also agreed with these findings:

Extract E1 – Andy (SR3)

Yea, examination. I don't tell my students that is for the exam but it's the reality, right? If they get high marks they get high motivation.

Extract E2 – Joan (II)

Students haven't met the immediate need of using English in their office or for their future studies. They just want to pass the exam.

When academic achievement is an obligation and of paramount importance for most young people, those who are less academically motivated are left with little direction for other aspects of personal advancement:

Extract E3 – Mabel (II)

Their biggest problem is they have no goals, especially the students here. It's not only in this subject but due to the language barrier they particularly resist learning English.

The evidence from the school allocation system, Hong Kong students' learning orientations and international assessment results suggested that academic achievement as a pre-eminent societal need measured by high-stakes testing has shaped the education landscape in Hong Kong. The government has been well aware of the impacts of high-stakes testing on school practices. In 1990 the Education Commission Report observed, 'overassessment has a negative effect on teaching and learning. [...] Overassessment may also have a negative effect on the attitude of students, if they are too frequently pressured into preparing for tests' (Hong Kong, Education Commission, 1990:66), indicating that Hong Kong's intense focus on examination success has prevailed from at least the 1980s. Notwithstanding the Report's concerns, a decade later such a societal priority remained unchanged. The 2000 Reform Proposal lamented the deeply-etched mindset of the public, 'despite the huge resources put into education and the heavy workload endured by teachers, [...] learning is still examination-driven' (Hong Kong, Education Commission, 2000:4). The Commission's comment is echoed by Kember and Watkins (2010), who added that both students and teachers are encouraged to

concentrate on examination syllabi under the elite education systems in East Asia, including Hong Kong.

Although the authors of the 1990 Education Commission Report drew the attention of policymakers to the long-existing phenomenon of an overemphasis on academic and examination performance, little attention was given to reforming the system. The Commission proposed a formative component in the assessment mechanism but not a real change, ‘at this stage we recommend that the replacement of the public examination at Secondary 5 level by the new form of assessment should not be pursued’ (Hong Kong, Education Commission, 1990:72). An overarching policy was finally introduced in the proposal in 2000, ‘to replace the existing two examinations by a new examination is not purely for the purpose of reducing the frequency of examinations, but to create more room for students to enrich themselves effectively in the prime time of their lives’ (Hong Kong, Education Commission, 2000:93). This education reform took many years to be implemented step by step. In spite of numerous doubts and controversies, from the 2012 cohort onwards students completing secondary education will take one public examination serving both as a qualification and university-entry application. Furthermore, the reform introduced a lot of initiatives such as the inclusion of school-based assessment (SBA) in the public examinations and Liberal Studies in the core curriculum to promote critical thinking. The policy motto ‘Learning to learn’ implies that examinations should be less dominating. Here a contradiction emerges. Based on the new policy directive, while high-stakes testing is meant to be downplayed, the banding of students determined by academic performance is retained (Hong Kong Education Bureau, 2014). Examination success will remain to be unavoidably central to

school practices, students' motivation and public attention, and very possibly for some years unless the deeply-rooted traditional values are to be shaken.

Guided by the research questions about the purposes and implementation of group work, it was not the original aim of the present study to scrutinise the impacts of examinations on teachers and students. Neither did it attempt to collect their views on high-stakes testing. Nevertheless, the highly selective education system and the cultural emphases on testing became evident when analysing the motives in group work and the demands that were placed on the teachers. The voices of the students and the general public were therefore ventriloquised by these teachers as they recounted their challenges and pressures from students and the schools having various levels of motivation.

The pressure has been particularly intense in the case of English, the sampled subject in this study. As explained in chapter 3, this subject is in the core curriculum and is normally allocated the most lesson time in school timetabling (see 3.3.2). Language proficiency has always been under the spotlight in policymaking, resources allocation, university and school selection criteria, and employment in Hong Kong. The importance of language ability is instilled into children from an early age, as Joan explained, 'somehow students know the importance of English. It's the main subject. They have to pass it in order to get promoted.' Although in West School, English enhancement was not Rosy's motive, she acknowledged the long-term benefits it might bring to her students:

Extract E4 – Rosy (II)

(R: Why do students have to know and learn English?) Because they have to deal with their public exam. Also... I think English is kind of a basic skill in Hong Kong.

If they don't have the knowledge or the competence of English they can barely survive if they want a better job.

In order to fulfill the societal expectation of a good command of English, many otherwise unmotivated English learners in Hong Kong tried their utmost to meet the minimum standard, because passing the English examinations is the benchmark for future prospects. Indeed these possibilities serve as extrinsic incentives for students. We have seen how Mabel and Rosy, who did not enjoy learning English submitted to the system and worked hard to overcome the hurdle of proficiency in English. Andy, who was passionate about English and complained about the language in the examinations had also drilled himself in doing past papers (see extract A5). The prevalence of extrinsic motivation driving English learning is vocalised in his comments, ‘the learning context of English in Hong Kong is quite weak. Just in the classroom the students and the teacher use English [but not outside].’ The stress of passing the English examination is especially intense because the system is very competitive:

Extract E5 – Joan (RI)

I scold them [students] when they gave up. I told them, ‘do you know... it’s very unfair. The world is cruel to you. You take the same exam... with other EMI students but they study all the subjects in English.’¹⁴ Is it fair? So what can you do? Your life is doomed!’

Joan’s complaint illustrated the exceptionally tough situation faced by many Hong Kong students in the CMI stream when Chinese is adopted as the medium of instruction to teach all subjects. Not only did she blame her students’ attitude towards English, she

¹⁴A policy in Hong Kong streams all public secondary schools by medium of instruction. EMI schools, all in the high band, use English in all academic subjects except Chinese, as well as in schools’ formal communications.

was also accusing the system because CMI students do not have as much exposure to English as do EMI students (receiving English as the mediation of instruction), but all of them take an identical examination under the current syllabus.

The societal conditions of pursuing academic performance and good ability in English are pronounced themes arising from the teachers' interviews. Joan summarised the distinctive curriculum focus as interpreted by many Hong Kong teachers, 'our system is to train the question-answering skills' (see extract J14). In this social climate, teaching and learning in the subject of English is driven by a set amount and type of work in almost every Hong Kong school:

Extract E6 – Andy (II)

English teaching in Hong Kong, sorry to say that it's quite bad! It's also because of the curriculum and the culture and everything... everything is so packed. It seems that we expect our students to do a lot of things. Not just English but with so many other things. The students just cannot stand... we have lost the focus. And many teachers in Hong Kong, not just my colleagues but also my friends in other schools... We always try to meet the quota. We have to mark oh, ten compositions then we just ask our students to do ten compositions. And we just finish marking and correcting the correction and that's it! The reason why it's so bad is that even if you see these problems you cannot change because you are bounded by the curriculum, by the school, by life basically.

Frequent assessments as a means to succeed in the system incur a high volume of marking for English teachers in many other schools like East School. Drills to equip students for high-stakes tests is a popular practice in many secondary schools in Hong Kong, just as Andy explained: 'that's the skills I want them to learn. That's the skill they need for the exam as well.' Over-assessment in quadrant D in Edwards's sequence

(Edwards, 1995; in press) limits the room for students to explore various ways of enquiry fostered by engaging themselves in group work in B and C quadrants:

Extract E7 – Andy (II)

I didn't let them enjoy group work and I just did some really formal group discussions with my students for SBA.

SBA is one paper in the English Language speaking examination. It was initiated as part of the education reform to include a formative module in the public examinations.

Students are assessed by their teachers in school at multiple attempts for the HKCEE¹⁵ and A-levels. The data suggested that school practices might not comply with the policy's intent of turning these assessments into less high-stakes. In many schools SBA is regarded as an extra public examination and coaching for it persists in day-to-day teaching. The 'reform' may be interpreted as simply a change in assessment format and without a real attitudinal change in these school practices.

The prevailing societal motive of academic achievement has substantially affected activities and practices in many facets of education in Hong Kong. When Andy was attributing little group work to a tight teaching schedule, he pinpointed a major social phenomenon, 'yea, I have to mark. Students have to go to tutorial centres for examination tips.' Brushing up examination skills and mastering the syllabi by receiving private tutoring outside formal schooling have been thriving to a staggering extent in Hong Kong. A recent study has reported that over half of the Grade 9 students and approximately 72% of the Grade 12 students in a sample of Hong Kong students

¹⁵ The Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination, before the reform introduced in 2012, was equivalent to GCSE in England.

received some forms of tutoring, with English as the most common subject (Bray, Zhan, Lykins, Wang & Kwo, 2014). A similar study found that the most popular reason for upper secondary students receiving supplementary tutoring is examination preparation (Bray & Kwok, 2003). A profit-making tutorial school chain in Hong Kong was listed in the stock market in 2011 (Tsoi, 2013). During the peak season, many popular lectures featuring ‘A-list tutors’ are oversubscribed and broadcasted in other locations outside of the overcrowded classrooms. The expanding market of private tutoring is a product of the competitive education system and cultural beliefs (Bray & Kwok, 2003; Sharma, 2012). Affected by this very high pressure and social atmosphere, in cognate school practices teachers are expected to heavily assist students to obtain good grades. Joan explained that she had to somehow respond to this expectation:

Extract E8 – Joan (RI)

My plan is that I need to videotape [students’] group discussion and show it to them. This is what I learnt from a student who went to the tutorial centre. They didn’t have chance to practise oral. They even just watched a video of their ‘star tutor’ but the tutor got a lot of sample discussions. This is level one, level two, level three.

The videos demonstrated the respective standards in the oral examination to attain ‘level two’, i.e. the passing benchmark or ‘level three’ which is a grade higher.

This overview of the historical and cultural momentum at the society level in Hedegaard’s model has shown that academic achievement, primarily measured by examination success, is an unshakeable element in the education scene in Hong Kong. This longitudinal development in education shapes and is shaped by the current education system, which has inherited past policies and societal needs. The

overemphasis on examinations within the society has had customary effects on how schools interpret what is needed of them and how they position themselves.

5.2 The institution level

The societal view on the purpose of education as academic achievement has had a profound impact on how schools have mediated the policies on assessment enshrined in the documents just discussed. In this section I examine the value motives and practices of the two quite different schools, within which the activities of group work of the four teachers took place.

5.2.1 East School

East School had been ambitious in boosting its students' HKCEE results in order to attract more potential pupils from the high band. Joan explained the parental influence on the school and on her:

Extract E9 – Joan (RI)

Our school is quite... traditional, parent... How to say... parents-driven? (R: That suppressed teachers' teaching?) Suppress teachers yea.

The school's value motive was in line with how academic achievement was valued in Hong Kong society, and had been so for some time. The banding system, combined with parents' ambitions for their children, made shifts in school-level priorities and the introduction of more experimental forms of pedagogy extremely difficult in East School. Lacking data from the school's leadership, I am unwilling to speculate beyond my

evidence base. Nonetheless, Joan's comments did point to a major source of pressure on East School and its decision on priorities.

The analysis of how the two teachers enacted their intentions in English teaching in chapter 4 has already thrown some light on the school pursuits. The value motives in East School were, for example, evidenced in the many rules for teacher performance and students' output. All those rules underpinned a practice of coaching for examinations:

Extract E10 – Andy (RI)

Actually I don't care [about your camera in my lessons]. You know I had a lesson observation before and they [the school leaders] gave me marks and assessment. I was summoned to the [vice-headteacher's] office to talk about my performance.

Extract E11 – Joan (II)

Students' difficulty will be they are handling too much at the same time. They're dealing with other subjects, other projects. Book reports, homework. Or maybe all the teachers in school want to squeeze too many things... from students. Maximise.

Extract E12 – Joan (RI – repeating extract J17)

Maybe some senior form students they have been trained to be an exam machine, doing papers, working alone. They feel ashamed of asking others for help, discuss openly. It's the atmosphere.

The school policy included compulsory after-school tutorials when all HKCEE and A-level candidates had top-up lessons with their subject teachers. These extra lessons took place six afternoons a week and in every term break. Such an intensive pattern of lengthy school hours left the senior students no time for other commitments, and

obviously departed from the policy intention to provide a broader and less exam-driven education to Hong Kong students:

Extract E13 – Joan (SR5)

They [Joan's students] finish their tutorial at six-thirty, even seven o'clock. It's very difficult to get them. No way. Too tired!

In chapter 4 I discussed how the school policies caused contradictions for Joan and Andy because the school rules overrode their own beliefs of how English should be taught (see section i in 4.1.4 and 4.2.4). Andy had been reprimanded by his panel head for not following the rules in a strict sense over the materials his students used (see A16 in 4.2.4). These school demands also frustrated Joan who was the deputy head in her department. Both teachers in East School expressed their frustrations, exemplifying the clash between organisational and occupational professionalism in Evetts's terms (2011; 2013):

Extract E14 – Joan (RI)

This is what I am going to tell him [the headteacher] tomorrow. I don't have much to say because he won't change, right? He adds on, top down! (R: What are you going to tell him?) I would say this year is another new experience for me. After ten years, work after a decade. And 'Mr. X you know our students are changing? The teachers are changing. How much do you trust the teachers?'

Parental expectations of the school and the retaining of the banding system, despite policy concerns about over-testing, left little room for encouraging pedagogic flexibility at the school level. The reluctance to deviate from the long-established practice, as already discussed, led to frustration for Joan and Andy, who were eager to promote

deep understanding in their pupils. Their pedagogic autonomy, backed up by their knowledge of the subject and the learners, was inhibited by the school's top-down decisions:

Extract E15 – Andy (II)

Sometimes I can't understand the administration... If you just do one composition ten times, try to get deep with your students, you can't. You can't. Because under the system you'll be blamed! How can you say that you've done ten compositions? (R: So the curriculum and the scheme is everything?) Yea, exactly, even educational purpose is there. It's obviously there you cannot say that. You cannot state that. The teachers may say 'you have only done one composition' and nobody would take the risk. You may be blamed. You may... you may get fired. Yup! You have to do things in a way that is set.

Andy's outcry (see also A13, A15 and A17 in 4.2.4) was due to the school-imposed performance categories, both in quantity and quality, stifling his pedagogy to support deep learning. This tension between school demands and reduced teacher autonomy has been widely discussed in research (Avis, 2003; Day, 2002; Hall & Schulz, 2003).

The rules of the English department in East School were firm. Its objective of examination success drove a practice of frequent summative assessments to monitor students' progress. Joan explained how she inserted these assessments into day-to-day coursework for students, 'for the school I need to get some marks. For record, part of... daily mark. Sigh...' Andy was more explicit about how the institutional control restrained his autonomy:

Extract E16 – Andy (II)

I refer curriculum as the school curriculum and also the government curriculum so I have to teach what the government requires me and also the school requires me... I can't spend time with them [students] after school. And in class it's difficult because

I have to cover ten compositions. Ten books, they have to borrow eighteen books. I have to do the news clipping with them, SBA, stuffs like that.

Again Edwards's quadrant model (1995; in press) has offered a way of describing how the school's orientation to examinations pushed the teachers to move from quadrant A to drills and then specific outputs in D. This process aimed at student performance and less on learning.

The motive of outstanding test results in East School, inscribed within its low-risk strategies favouring an exam-driven practice, reinforced the societal value of attainment in examinations and thus incurred demands on teachers. Joan and Andy acknowledged the importance of examinations but resented limiting their pedagogic freedom, especially in the ways of obtaining good grades. This conflict between the school practice and the teachers arose also because both teachers had a strong identity in relation to English and were agentic about how the subject should be taught.

5.2.2 West School

Having switched from being a vocational school to what is termed in Hong Kong, a grammar or non-vocational school a few years before my fieldwork, West School seemed to be facing an uneasy transition. Student intake was from a low band, meaning that, overall, students were not motivated in academic subjects. This might not have been a big problem had West School remained a vocational school, but with the change of school type it entered the competitive and mainstream school system. A gap between societal expectations for examination success and the grades that these students obtained emerged from this transition. Instead of trying to close this gap rapidly, West

School appeared to be surviving the transition by ensuring some stability: getting students into classrooms and providing the curriculum. There were no evident demands for teaching and learning which could be discernible out of the teachers' interviews. There were signs that, conversely, the school was steadily moving towards functioning as a grammar school because small measures such as team teaching were introduced. This kind of practice suggested that the school's immediate objective was stable transition through implementing slow planned pedagogic changes.

West School did not have an academic history like East School and was not responding overtly to the societal need for academic achievement. There was no mention of parental influences in any of the interviews with Mabel and Rosy. In fact, parents sounded an unknown quantity to the two teachers and there was no discussion of involving parents to help with students' reluctance to learn.

Problems related to students' misbehaviour and attitudes to learning were, in contrast, a repeated topic in the interviews with the two teachers in West School. Rosy felt impotent with some of these low-band students, 'hopeless. It doesn't help if you blame them. Perhaps it's their ability or family background which you may not know.' The low level of motivation to learn, according to the two teachers, was representative of the general student body in their school. Mabel recounted the situation of a year group she did not teach, 'Rosy's class is already very good. In Class B you can't teach at all.' Her comment was verified by my observations. Some students did not look to care much about what they were being instructed, even with my presence in their lessons. Being late, eating or sleeping in lessons, or skipping lessons, going off-task and other discipline problems were common and reported in the example lessons (see 4.3.1 and

4.4.1), despite the fact that these lessons were chosen by the respective teachers as effective. Describing what she had called ‘lazy students’ Mabel was empathetic with Rosy:

Extract E17 – Mabel (RI)

In Rosy’s Year 8, I could tell which students would do it and who would ignore you. I totally understand it. In Year 9 I appreciate her persistence though there were only a few students or the group was so small. They refused to do anything or continued sleeping. I totally understand this.

As shown in the previous chapter, poor attendance in West School was a serious issue. I was once in Rosy’s lesson when there were only four students (see 4.4). Mabel explained the difficulty of helping those who were frequently absent:

Extract E18 – Mabel (SR2)

[Student’s name] had been absent from school for days. She had missed the previous lessons. I assisted her [during group work] because she just came back.

Student attendance rates and poor performance created pressure for the school. Compared to the average Hong Kong students who outperformed their counterparts in international assessments, many pupils in West School might find success in high-stakes testing beyond their reach, and thus they lacked academic goals. Mabel confirmed this view of little academic orientation, ‘most of the students lack motivation. In fact not only in English, they are not motivated in other subjects as well.’ She had also made a similar point, telling me about their resistance to English in our first interview (see E3 in this chapter).

From the school perspective, adopting the curriculum endorsed by the public system entailed accepting the societal expectations. The most far-reaching implication included raising students' academic standard, which could be translated into higher test scores as discussed in 5.1. Since pursuing this goal would likely provoke an unsettled transition, the value motive of this school seemed to orient to delivering the curriculum to the academically unmotivated:

Extract E19 – Rosy (II)

Especially the standard of our students is indeed low. I think we should adapt to their need. What we are doing is to help them to catch up with the curriculum. We don't want them lagging far behind the normal standard. At the same time we have to brush up what they have missed in the past.

'Catch up with the curriculum' revealed how West School positioned itself under the stratified schooling system and the resultant student intake as the school's critical mass. As analysed in chapter 4, what mattered to Mabel and Rosy were curriculum coverage and task completion. There seemed to be no school demands on their teaching that were obvious to them.

Within this school motive, the two teachers had a relatively high degree of freedom (see 4.3.4 and 4.4.4). They did not report the school interference that frustrated Joan and Andy. Mabel specifically clarified that her constraint came from the curriculum, 'it's not about the school' (see M13 in 4.3.4). Rosy tried to engage students in group work after taking part in this study and her pressure was from the students, not the school, 'for our students in this school, it's very difficult to make them work. It's something very difficult.' Neither did the teachers link their teaching to examinations or other

formal assessments. These points supported the claim that their intention was not examination performance, which equally did not seem to be the school's objective.

West School tended to be dealing with the discrepancy between social expectations and the unmotivated pupils by establishing a practice which would maintain stability and school survival. In brief, its priorities were student enrolment and provision of the curriculum.

By sustaining stability and following the curriculum as a way to mediate the societal expectations, West School avoided the risk of setting more ambitious goals. Not only did it pose minimal demands on teachers (see section i in 4.3.4), it also worked on supporting them in various ways to manage the unruly students. The school helped teachers to run a calm classroom by implementing team teaching, mentoring and peer lesson observation:

Extract E20 – Mabel (SR5)

Usually in co-teaching one is responsible for talking and the other is to assist. Rosy is very helpful... once I said something she would synchronise.

Extract E21 – Rosy (RI)

Our students' ability is low. Sometimes they don't listen when you talk to the whole class. They only do in small groups. Having two teachers will make it faster.

Extract E22 – Rosy (SR4)

(R: You just mentioned your mentor was observing the lesson. Mabel is your mentor?) Yes, she is. (R: Is it the system in your school?) Yes, since I am new here there's a teacher helping me... I just came last year. Actually she is not my mentor now but last year. This year we're having peer observation so I invited her to observe me.

Supporting teachers in classroom management was to ensure the school operated as normal in a practical sense. One possible interpretation to untangle the school objective is that the school was taking a long-term approach to its existing circumstances, so managing the transition into the competitive banding system would, over time, become seen to be a reasonable expectation.

Making few pedagogic demands and assisting teachers to deal with pupil behaviour created a different school culture from that found at East School. Unlike the narratives given by Joan and Andy, the morale and work relationships among teachers in West School sounded congenial. Both schools adopted lesson observations but they bore different purposes. In East School it was an appraisal of teacher performance. In West School, at least within the English department, observations were conducted as collegial learning opportunities and teachers were able to choose their own observers. The school delegated pedagogic decision-making to teachers and created a harmonious atmosphere. Mabel was empathetic with Rosy (see extract E17). Rosy also appreciated another colleague for teaching a group of her students who had been separated from the class over a period of time due to a vocational scheme:

Extract E23 – Rosy (SR4)

I was happy with today's lesson as I didn't expect the girls would read English aloud and present to the class. That was a surprise. I think [teacher's name] had taught them well while they were away.

These resources created a supportive school environment which mediated Rosy's conflict with her students, and consequently 'buffered [its] negative impact on [her] work engagement' (Bakker, Hakanen, Demerouti & Xanthopoulou, 2007:280). One

way of reading the situation at West School was that because there were low expectations from the school, space opened up for teachers to try different strategies including group work in order to maintain student enrolment as a priority over examination grades. The two schools therefore had different motives and ways of mediation within an overall framing of a competitive education system.

The discrepancy between the two schools, which were both operating under the same cultural frame, can be presented analytically in the following way. The data from Mabel and Rosy led to the argument that West School made minimal demands on pedagogy. There was, for instance, no discussion on school-level monitoring of teacher performance that so marked West School in their interviews. Out of the running for any recognition of its academic excellence and due to the labelling as low-band, West School granted pedagogic autonomy to teachers which enabled them to find ways of keeping students in class and completing some tasks. Rosy and Mabel therefore did not indicate any school pressure and had control over teaching material and lesson format; whereas Joan and Andy in the interviews clearly distinguished which lesson activities were to satisfy what school rules.

This contrast lent support to the argument that West School did not react to the societal conditions in the same way as East School did. The latter mediated the societal expectations through an established practice that had long held examination success as a foremost motive. The former operated in the same system by keeping student numbers on the school register and covering a curriculum, though its motive was also shaped by how teachers were able to cope with students' misbehaviour. One consequence was that, while there was evidence of a dialectic between the intentions of the two teachers at

East School and the demands of the school practice that they inhabited, a similar dialectic was not evident in West School. As a result West School teachers were more able to act as Evetts' occupational professionals, should they choose to, than as organisational ones (Evetts 2011; 2013). On the contrary, occupational professionalism in East School was experienced as limited by Joan and Andy. These concepts are not as clearly divided as they might be in Evetts's form because of the variations between the two pairs of teachers in terms of their identities and agency in the subject they taught. Degrees of freedom in making professional judgements should not be the only criterion for assessing professionalism.

5.3 The classroom level

This section, focusing upon the activity setting level in Hedegaard's model, will map out the teachers' motivations manifested in their actions when using group work as a tool within the activities of teaching. The societal tradition and how the teachers interpreted the different mediations of the two schools had a considerable bearing on their motives and actions in the classrooms.

The present study has shed light on teachers' intentions in relation to group work and how those intentions were played out in two very different contexts within the broad framing of the Hong Kong school system. As already clarified in the previous chapters, when I started the study I had not expected group work to be a site where school priorities were so clearly visible in the decisions made by the teachers. The analysis of the actions at the level of the activity setting in Hedegaard's model (Figure 2A and 3A)

displayed how the teachers participated in the figured world of the school practices (Holland *et al.*, 1998) assimilating their personal systems of identity and agency.

Interestingly, the higher-performing school and the more subject-oriented teachers created a dialectic, so that the agency of the teachers as active promoters of their subject led to negotiations with the school demands on them. In the lower-band school, where the participants reflected in their own histories that they were less engaged with English, minimal school demands on teaching led to a practice that was not conducive to exercising professional agency. The two teachers employed group work as a method of classroom control and curriculum coverage. Although much decision-making at the classroom level was passed on to them, the teachers did not react agentially.

5.3.1 Creating space for learners

All the four teachers recognised the potential of group work for the motivations they wanted to achieve in the classrooms, but those motivations varied. The difference reflected both their individual priorities as teachers and the dominant priorities in the practices in which their group work was located. The two teachers in East School, mediated by their view of English as a resource to be used, moved between quadrant B and C activities based on their assessment of how students appropriated the tasks. The intense pursuit of examinations by the school practice, however, meant that some students were resistant to what they saw as time-consuming (also see J18 in 4.1.4):

Extract E24 – Joan (SR1)

‘I [students] just want to do very well in my exam paper’ ...they think maybe it’s [English] just for oral presentation or group discussion [in speaking exams], not for real, authentic communication.

Extract E25 – Andy (SR5)

Actually I did some group discussion with [the senior class]. Because the thing I don't like is exam-based, exam-oriented. They are interested in that though. (R: In what? Speaking?) Exam! Whenever I say 'OK let's do the examination' they speak! Whenever I asked them to discuss something really good or I think it's interesting, they don't do it.

As teachers having a strong identity in English, Joan and Andy responded to the 'A to D' school approach by inserting and opening up B and C quadrants to help students to construct their own meaning in the realm of learning the subject. Using Hedegaard's terms, such motivation in the activity setting was also underpinned by positioning themselves as facilitators aiding in the student-led learning zone:

Extract E26 – Andy (SR3)

I should be an outsider listening to them, give them comments. I shouldn't be there helping them too much... unless it's a very difficult group discussion.

Extract E27 – Joan (II)

In the group discussion I never interrupt but after the discussion, I would say 'Oh, you contribute more this time. I really like that. Would you like to say more next time?' And I give some individual advice.

The teachers' motives for formative assessment and counteracting the 'teach-to-test' approach were consonant with the new directives of the education reform outlined in 5.1.

Joan and Andy discussed all the four quadrants in details in their talk; whereas the interviews with the other two teachers in West School were confined to only A and B. All the group tasks in their lesson observations were within quadrant B with some

degree of learner control. Mabel and Rosy did not show any motivation to move into quadrant C which would challenge the students to use English as a tool for solving more open problems. As analysed in the teachers' profiles, no evidence suggested that their teaching was motivated by high-stakes testing (see 4.3.3 and extract R4). Public examinations were unconsidered in how they interpreted teaching and the school practice. Mabel and Rosy, before the latter's use of group work, aimed only at going through the curriculum. Indeed Mabel continued to see group work as constricting what she saw as her duty to cover the curriculum:

Extract E28 – Mabel (RI)

Now my progress is slower... the effectiveness is low... Last year in this class I covered one more chapter than the other class did. And I could have done a few more extra-curriculum reading.

Before starting to get to grips with group work, Rosy worked towards task completion, 'if not group work my teaching style tends to let them just copy what I explain in lessons,' (see R23 in 4.4.4). This focus on doing the task was not accompanied by assessment, be it for or of learning (see R9 in 4.4.3). Teaching English but having a weak identity in English, the two teachers participated in the non-demanding school practice by delivering the curriculum and occupying their students with some low-level tasks. Although their quadrant B tasks opened up some space for the learners, they were content with students' on-task behaviour if the tasks were simply attempted and did not exploit the pedagogic autonomy to move around within the quadrant model to guide students to explore the subject more flexibly.

The policy initiatives discussed in 5.1 argued for the need to move away from the teach-to-test method, i.e. the ‘A to D’ style, to put more weight on formative assessment and other aspects of learning characterising B and C work. However, the multi-level analyses here suggested that such a move was difficult to make for both the highly motivated teachers of English and those who were less concerned with the subject. These initiatives as part of the reform depend on a complicated interaction between teachers and how schools mediate the policies.

5.3.2 Being a professional dealing with demands

An interesting dimension of this study is the multifaceted social situation of development, which allows us to see the dialectic between the individual and the social revealed by the teachers’ actions when conducting group work within institutional practices. The concepts of identity and agency are highly relevant in analysing what mattered to the teachers in teaching. Nonetheless, the power of school contexts mediated their enactment of those motives.

Chapter 4 has presented separately each teacher’s identity as a teacher of English. The four teachers could be paired up according to their attitudes towards the subject and being a professional. Joan and Andy had been passionate about English since they were young. They enjoyed learning the subject and felt competent in it. Bringing their historically-formed identities into the activity settings, mediating students’ learning at a deep level through active engagement was their foremost intention. Joan and Andy worked with students towards internalisation of subject knowledge before reaching independent or unassisted performance (Gallimore & Tharp, 1990). With this motive

they imparted subject knowledge in wide-ranging forms and types of task. This pedagogic skill involved recognising and connecting students' everyday concepts with the scientific ones in English learning (Daniels, 2008). Joan and Andy were putting these intentions forward, at the same time negotiating and accommodating the school demands in their group work. In West School Mabel and Rosy had very different stories about their own English learning. They did not enjoy the subject until studying in university but even so, no observations and data evinced their real love of English. Neither did they appear interested in the subject they taught outside teaching. These aspects of their identities were related to their low-level motivations in English teaching at the activity setting level. Their purposeful actions in group work did not aim at developing learners' conceptual tools to engage in English. Joan and Andy's beating-the-odds pedagogic appropriations demonstrated their agency and being a professional when they were eagerly dealing with the contradictions (Day *et al.*, 2006; Langer, 2000). Rosy, albeit being less subject-oriented, developed increased agency and more pedagogic motivations after using group work in lieu of merely responding to the demands of pupil misbehaviour.

In addition to professional identity, one's teaching repertoire is profoundly shaped by the social milieu and the school practice, or strictly speaking, by the school's mediation of societal expectations. The strong identities and intentions in English teaching observed in Joan and Andy, when they interacted with the school practice, caused contradictions. We have seen how Joan and Andy structured quadrant B and C activities to assist students to produce the outputs specified by the school. Their pedagogic decisions at the classroom level, as seen in how and why they used group work, were

heavily mediated to accommodate the school requirements of coaching for examinations. Conversely, as West School had yet to highlight the pressure of examination performance, it mediated societal expectations by keeping students enrolled and in touch with the curriculum. These comparatively lightweight school priorities did not impinge on how the two teachers interpreted the demands made on them in the classrooms with the unmotivated students. Mabel and Rosy were relatively complacent about the academic *status quo*, though the teachers' motives also contributed to this less academic-oriented school practice. In East School the demands for students' attainment in examinations on Joan and Andy were from the leadership. In West School the vacuum left by the leadership's priority of school stability meant that the teachers, especially Rosy, responded to the demands from disruptive students.

Professional identity, when met with demands from the institutional level, created a dialectic contingent upon the extent to which these teachers exercised their agency. Group work revealed the dialectic between the two teachers and the practice in East School when we saw how Joan and Andy agentially adjusted their teaching to resolve the conflict between the school's and their motives. Mabel and Rosy, who lacked professional agency in their own roles as English teachers, did not strive for going beyond the school priorities of student attendance and stability during a time of transition. Neither did they deploy the pedagogic freedom to respond to the societal value of academic performance. A gap emerged between the tradition of student achievement and the teachers' intentions inherited in the classroom settings. This lack of dialectic in the practice in West School also highlighted the lack of tensions in pedagogy which might hinder professional development (Smith & Tushman, 2005).

5.4 Chapter summary

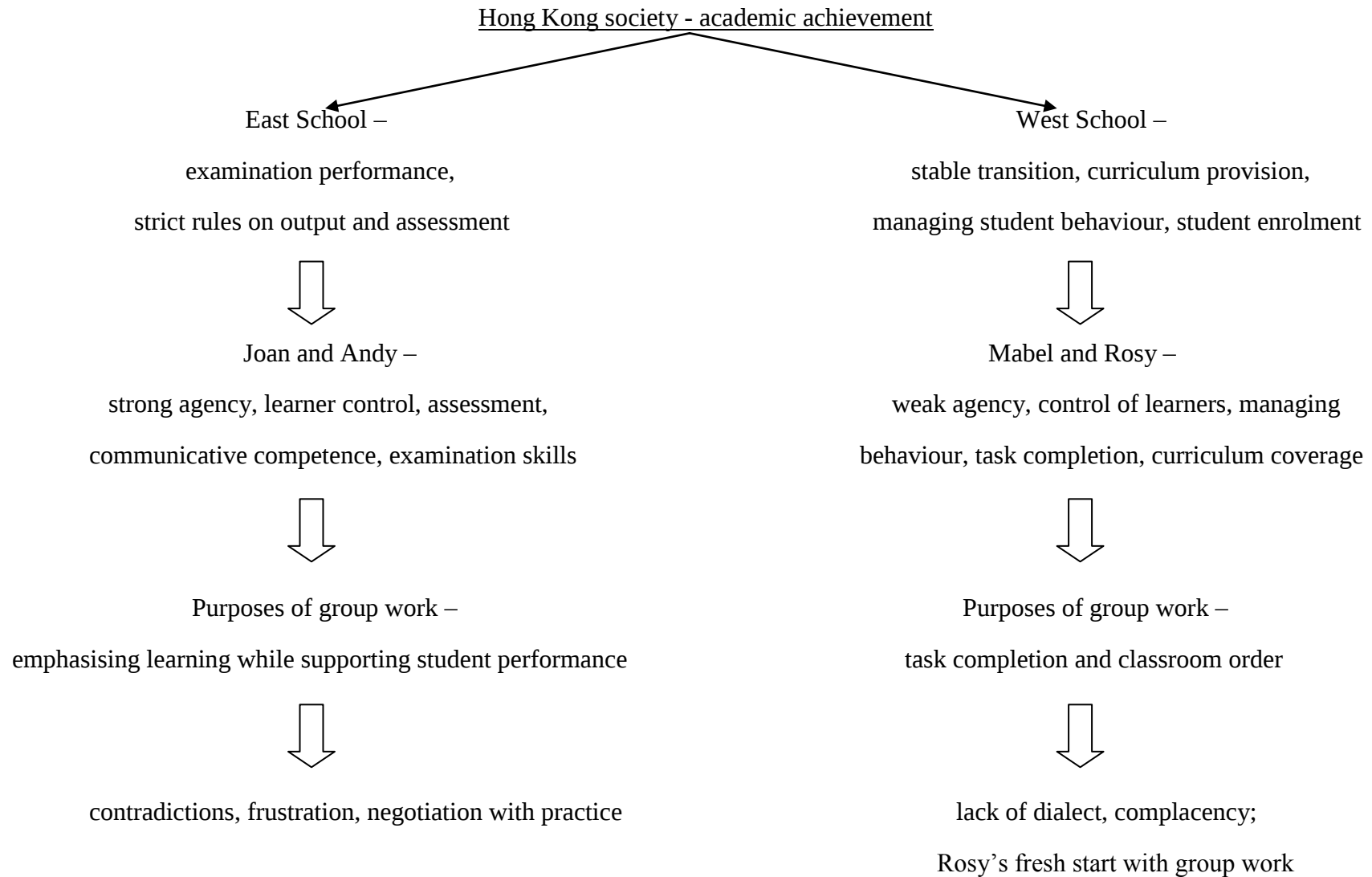
How teachers conducted and discussed about group work provided enormous insights into the demands in the societal and institutional planes of analysis and in particular, how the teachers responded to and mediated those demands. Their actions at the activity setting level were a result of the interplay between individual purposes and the figured worlds of the schools, which were in turn shaped by how the historically-accumulated institutional practices mediated societal expectations. In this chapter I have drawn on Hedegaard's work (2012) to examine the motives at the levels of society, school and classroom. Analysing the teachers' beliefs and enactments in the previous chapter called for a scrutiny of the intricate web of the social dimensions in which these activities were located. Consequently group work has operated, in the present chapter, as a prism through which to examine some of the tensions being faced by the schools and practitioners.

These multi-level analyses displayed the dialectic between each layer within the system. There was a paradox of professionalism in East School because organisational objectives defined practitioners' work and performance targets. The school managers replaced the teachers' control of work interactions, preventing the exercise of a professional ethic (Evetts, 2013). The dominant practice of East school and what mattered to the teachers strengthened the call for improving the setting alongside changing teachers in education reform (Langer, 2000).

These analyses based on Hedegaard's model and Edwards's pedagogic sequence also allowed the theorisation of the specific discrepancies and alignments of motives

amongst the four teachers in the two schools. This chapter explicated how the two schools, with quite disparate histories, mediated the identical cultural tradition differently, and meanwhile how the practices were further shaped by the individual teacher agency and identity. Group work situated in the activity setting revealed how individuals interacted with practices. Figure 5A sketches out the teacher-school dynamics elucidated in this chapter.

Figure 5A – Multi-level mediation in enactment of group work



Chapter 6 – Discussion and conclusion

This study set out to investigate teachers' understanding of group work in teaching and its relation to what they do in classrooms, through the lens of cultural-historical theory. While scrutinising whether there was a connection or disconnection, group work was seen as a value-laden activity and became a site in which to inquire into what mattered to the teachers, their beliefs about the subject and the broader societal climate of schooling. Accordingly, the study developed into an attempt to explore how the individuals made sense of English teaching and how that understanding was applied as they navigated the school practices. This chapter will summarise the findings and tease out the implications for the making of professional teachers.

The chapter is divided into four sections. The first section will answer the four research questions directly. The focus will be the significance of intrapersonal and historical subjectivity, and its dynamics with institutional practice and expectations in which teaching as an activity occurs. Next, the discussion will continue by evaluating the contribution of this study to the theoretical frameworks, approaches to teacher development and group work, as well as raising some methodological issues. The third section will offer the insights for future endeavours. The chapter will conclude by some final reflections.

6.1 Answering the research questions

This study originally set out with three questions (see 1.4) which had guided the research design and the plan for fieldwork. As the analysis was underway it became

clear that adding the fourth question would help to coherently link the arguments.

Hence, there will be four sub-sections within 6.1, each addressing one research question.

6.1.1 What do teachers understand about the purposes of group work?

For all the four teachers group work was to mediate students' participation in the classroom as a social setting in which students could, to very varying degrees, exercise the use of English. Group work therefore provided insights into the intentions of these teachers and their knowledge about teaching. Their shared purpose for group work was to promote students' engaging in English as a useful resource, but there were different levels of expectations of learner performance. All the four teachers acknowledged the opportunity group work offered for active student involvement in quadrant B where students could, potentially, begin to externalise new understanding (Edwards, 1995; in press). In the case of two of the teachers this externalisation was strengthened in quadrant C when students were learning to master new concepts by solving less structured problems. Within this semi-private zone, students had some control over their learning, enabling them to test their conceptual understanding with resources managed by their teacher in quadrant B and in more open-ended ways in quadrant C. These resources could be mental or material or both. In the interviews all the four teachers indicated that learning would be the most effective when students in groups propelled themselves towards meeting the lesson objectives or demonstrated a grasp of the concepts with peer assistance but as little teacher intervention as possible. This common purpose of group interdependence, or nonsupervisory assistance, taken as developing a new intersubjectivity in Vygotskian terms (Gallimore & Tharp, 1990), could be found

across all the four teachers, for example when they expected the stronger students to help the less able peers.

Students experimenting in their approaches to English usage in B and C quadrants in group work called for the teachers' formative assessment; though their assessments were to serve different teaching motives, as shown in chapters 4 and 5. In the interviews, for example, the four teachers elaborated how they had adjusted the content, lesson activities and pace according to group progress. Their general intention was to create safe environments in which students could expose their mistakes or display misunderstandings, allowing the teachers to further mediate learning or assist task completion with increased knowledge of their learners.

The two pairs of teachers, each with their own intentions for teaching and interpretations of the school expectations and affordances of the practices, reflected more differences in the views and uses of group work than were held in common across the pairs. These differences appeared linked with their disparate beliefs about English, the purposes of teaching it and the demands made on them by the school practices.

For Joan and Andy, the importance of mastering English as a tool and developing communicative competence were at the core of their teaching. Almost all of their group work was to engage students to speak and use 'authentic English', as they called it.

Through taking part in this process, students could externalise their developing language ability and at the same time improve their oral proficiency. Teacher-pupil and pupil-pupil interactions observed in the classrooms were usually in English, despite a few episodic exceptions. While encouraging learner agency in group work, formative

assessment became a purposeful strategy of complementing students' externalisation and taking control. As a result, these two teachers moved between quadrants B and C within the semi-private zone they represented, depending on students' progress. Moreover, both teachers also acknowledged others' expectations of their role regarding students' academic attainment within the Hong Kong examination system, and thus some of their group work was designed for training for examination skills and summative assessments. For whatever purposes, they adhered to the importance of subject knowledge, though at times its relevance was divided into the communicative aspect and an emphasis on exam-driven knowledge.

The weaker English usage in Mabel's and Rosy's group work and the less focus on independent performance in stage 3 of the ZPD pathways (Gallimore & Tharp, 1990) suggested that for these two teachers English learning was a matter of students receiving the curriculum but without a strong intention for internalisation and subsequent externalisation by the learners. The purposes of group work were reduced to two major motives for Mabel and Rosy – delivering the curriculum and task completion, and keeping students in lessons as a shared purpose (see 4.3.3 and 4.4.3).

Unlike the other pair of teachers who valued the communicative aspect of English, group work in Mabel's and Rosy's lessons was not principally designed as an opportunity for students to practise communication skills. For example, in no interviews did they evaluate students' oral performance. During group work no one, including Mabel and Rosy themselves, spoke in English. These two teachers, who were less enthusiastic about promoting English as a subject, were also less concerned about accuracy or a good command of the language, whether for themselves or their students.

With the motive of keeping students in the classroom, group work was to occupy students and to ensure they finished some tangible work regardless of the low level of cognitive challenges those tasks demanded or the quality of student outputs. Rosy also evinced these purposes before she found a new interest in teaching the subject by coming to grips with group work. All the observed activities in Mabel's and Rosy's lessons were limited to quadrant B work, and without any indication of moving onwards to quadrant C which would let their students attempt open-ended problems. Neither did the teachers relate their lesson content to summative assessment in quadrant D, either to the classes in the lessons or the SR interviews with me. Although generally their teaching touched on subject knowledge, they showed a dependency on the curriculum. Mabel's and Rosy's group work revealed no obvious purpose with respect to students' independent performance or passing examinations. This disconnection between group work and student performance in examinations was in sharp contrast to Joan and Andy.

Group tasks and the purposes they might serve had a robust relationship for all of the teachers which could be observed in their actions. They all structured group work by task and set pedagogic goals for each task, but the purposes behind these goals differed. In many lessons with Joan and Andy in East School, group tasks, for example brainstorming, were to guide students to produce some later evidence of learning such as compositions to meet the school's demand for summative assessments. They assessed learning by how and how much students had achieved through taking part in those tasks. In West School, Mabel and Rosy used tasks to occupy students in lessons in order to control behaviour. Their emphasis on students being on-task and getting those tasks done within lesson time confirmed their prioritising task completion over learning.

They focused more on whether the tasks were done but less on how they were done. Mabel accepted low quality work so long as her worksheets for the groups were filled with some answers. Rosy's concern was about making students 'cooperative' in her lessons through occupying them with some hands-on and manageable tasks. In brief, task was a means to different ends for the four teachers. For Joan and Andy, students were to internalise and externalise understanding through engaging themselves in tasks; whereas group tasks were a pastime aimed at keeping class order in Mabel's and Rosy's teaching. Though English learning was an overt purpose, it was not prioritised as highly compared to its place for the other two teachers.

6.1.2 How does this understanding relate to their own learning experiences and beliefs about teaching?

The learning trajectories of these four teachers and their views on the subject connected with what they believed about teaching and their purposes for group work. The analyses revealed how 'history-in-person' mediated how they interpreted group work in the activity of teaching (Holland *et al.*, 1998). Their identities as learners and teachers of English have proven to be tightly interwoven with what mattered to them as they taught (Johnson 1994).

Personal learning experiences clearly shaped the teachers' attitudes towards the subject and their motives in English teaching. The two pairs of teachers showed quite significant differences in what they saw as purposes of English and their ideal pedagogy directed by those personally valued positions (Holland & Lachicotte, 2007). Joan and Andy were passionate about English since studying it in school and proved themselves

to be competent users of the language both inside and outside classroom. From an early age they valued English for its own sake and, particularly in the case of Andy, for passing examinations. This enthusiasm for English led them to base their teaching and group work on fostering students' communicative competence and connecting the subject with everyday understanding. For instance, Joan's senior class debated current affairs so that they could use English in an interactive style, linking their lessons to real-life experiences. Joan's and Andy's eloquent views of the subject could also explain their beliefs about students constructing personal meanings in learning. They increased the learner's sense of control and ownership of the subject by highlighting the relevance of communicative competence to personal advancement. For this reason, their motive was oriented towards students speaking in English freely while attempting group tasks which involved higher-order thinking. They also indicated that this interactive externalisation could counteract the pressure of learning for examinations, even though examination success was part of their spectrum of motives.

The trajectories of Mabel and Rosy presented a contrasting story to that of Joan and Andy. Parental influences and the pressure about doing well in school summarised their historical formation of identity as learners of English. In the interviews they shared the struggles they had when studying the subject in school. These past experiences meant that they did not develop an intrinsic interest or a sense of personal agency in English learning when they were young. Neither did they show enthusiasm for English in the lessons observed or in the interviews. If identity is seen as beliefs about oneself, their weak identities in English proficiency had transferred to their beliefs about teaching. As teachers Mabel and Rosy were indifferent to promoting subject knowledge or

developing students' interest in it. Instead, going through the curriculum and task completion were the major motives found in the group work they designed. These motives went some way to preclude their connecting the subject to learners at a personal level: they were not encouraging student identity formation in relation to English. The element of personal relatedness was minimal in their motivation for English when they were in school. Unsurprisingly, it was not their aim to help students to develop a personal meaning *vis-à-vis* English.

These findings for all the four teachers suggested that the person's historical trajectory and the identity constructed long before becoming a teacher can leave a legacy in one's teaching beliefs, which may then play out in one's understanding of the purposes of group work. Examining the teachers' views on English and their learning experiences gave support to Wardekker's recent argument that, identity construction in schools should be taken as part of a relational discourse between the teacher, students, position in school and the subject taught (Wardekker, 2013). The analyses also echoed the notion that teacher identity and agency are intertwined, and agency can be defined as actualising one's identity (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). The two teachers who had a strong identity as teachers of English, though they found it hard to convince others in the school of the value of their own beliefs, enacted what they thought to be important in English teaching through the pedagogic space created by group work. Joan and Andy sustained control over their identities and took their intentions forward despite the discrepancy between their motives, the school priorities and the students' resistance to the open learning style. They used group work to promote self-regulated learning and good subject knowledge, and negotiated their actions to also satisfy the school's

demands for specific assessable products in quadrant D. Their group work in quadrants B and C flexibly switching between task types reflected how the two teachers exercised their professional agency – defending their strong beliefs while conciliating the conflicting motives in English teaching. Joan's and Andy's purposes within the semi-private zone labelled B and C also spoke of their past learning strategies and identities, showing that they were keen on linking the subject to daily life and finding personal values in English learning.

In a similar vein, personal history and identity in the subject spilled over into Mabel's and Rosy's participation in the activity of English teaching and their interpretations of group work. Unlike Joan and Andy, considerable pedagogic freedom was delegated to them. However, these teachers in West School did not take advantage of this autonomy by devising more agentic pedagogic intentions. Instead their understanding of the purposes of group work revealed the motives of curriculum delivery and keeping the unmotivated students in classrooms. These motives were stronger in Mabel, who insisted on her teacher-centred approach but were less entrenched in Rosy, who was happy with the fresh insights gained after implementing group work for a period of time. Both of them appeared to have developed as generic teachers who dealt with discipline in classrooms rather than English teachers who endeavoured to nurture students' interest in the subject. This identity characteristic and their weaker agency in teaching English could be traced, at least in part, back to their indifferent attitudes towards the subject when studying in school. Comparing the two pairs of teachers in the two schools supported the notion that identity and agency are inextricable. Echoing Day *et al.* (2006), teacher identities in these cases were fulfilled by various degree of agency,

when identity also provided a good reference to agency on how the teachers directed their teaching (Biesta, 2008).

Nonetheless, identity formation should be construed as bi-directional. The cultural-historical perspective conceptualises identity as a social product (Holland & Lachicotte, 2007) in a way that teacher identity not only constitutes beliefs about teaching but at the same time is constituted by school practice. Looking into institutional value motives and how teachers interpret those motives will provide critical reference to the dynamic of professional identity and agency in their actions in activities within practices.

6.1.3 How is their understanding enacted in classrooms?

One premise of this study is that engagement in social practices produces subjectivity and agency (Stetsenko & Arievitch, 2004). While history-in-person is crucial and how one positions oneself is mediated by identity, externalisation of identity is an outcome of how the person interacts with practice. The argument is that identity has a reciprocal relationship with the sociocultural milieu, both shaping and being shaped by it, making the dialectic of person and practice recursive and complex. Consequently, exploring this dialectic becomes relevant when considering how teachers' beliefs and understanding are enacted in group work.

The idea of demands in practices is a key in demystifying how the teachers in this study navigated practices employing their professional identities. Identifying what mattered to the teachers lay at the core of research questions 1 and 2. How what mattered to them mediated their approaches to group work was addressed by research question 3, where it became clear that what mattered to them as teachers led them to work on and around the

demands they recognised while teaching. In doing so they gave evidence of the dialectic between the teachers as individuals and the practices they inhabited. Throughout the analyses the accounts of group work have reflected whether or not the teachers' motives and those to be found in the schools were aligned. The activity setting in Hedegaard's 2012 framework (see Figure 2A and 3A) became a site for the interplay of the persons' intentions as English teachers and the demands they encountered in the practices of their schools. Conceptualising group work as a pedagogic tool allowed an analysis of how the teachers enacted their beliefs in classrooms, which were to varying degrees shaped by their responses to those demands in the school contexts.

Joan and Andy were sensible of the contextual constraints and the resulting demands on them as teachers, and constantly adjusted their pedagogic decisions to fit with the affordances available (Leatham, 2006). The analyses in this study have revealed that East School was in favour of a teach-to-test approach and posed rigid rules about the type and amount of students' coursework, which interfered with the teachers' autonomy. For instance, the school had a set list of books that Andy's students had to read; Joan had to submit scores for the school's assessment records of student performance. In the interviews both teachers detailed the school demands for coaching students for the high-stakes tests. They also felt that the students and their parents expected the same from the teachers. Joan and Andy, who had strong beliefs in what English teaching should be, were faced with demands that were misaligned with these beliefs and their past learning experiences. The clash created contradictions for them (see 4.1.4 and 4.2.4). This finding is perhaps a contribution to the debate about inconsistency between beliefs and

enactment amongst teachers, when some research reported the complex belief-practice relationship (Johnson, 1994; Skott, 2009).

Joan and Andy responded to ‘what they found in the context of a historical, socially and culturally construed form of [practice]’ (Holland *et al.*, 1998:39) and took what mattered to them into how they negotiated group work as part of their pedagogic repertoires. This ability to positively manage the contradictions and tensions not only fulfilled their identities but also evidenced their agency, which can be defined by ‘the extent to which people can live with contradictions’ (Day *et al.*, 2006:611). At the activity setting in which their group work was located, both teachers insisted that English should remain a tool for communication with wider implications beyond examination grades. Joan and Andy sustained their pedagogy in quadrants B and C for students to gain some control in exploring the subject matter whilst paving the way for the products and assessments required by the school.

On the other hand, institutional demands as recognised by Mabel and Rosy in West School were minimal. In no interviews did they talk about any school rules or expectations for their teaching. Unlike Joan and Andy, who attributed their compromises to the many specific demands from the school in order to boost students’ test scores, assessing student performance in quadrant D or examinations was never discussed in Mabel’s and Rosy’s reflections. The absence of this topic was consistent in all our conversations.

The low level of demands from the school in English teaching met with Mabel’s and Rosy’s low level of agency and their identities as teachers of English. There was a lack

of dialectic between the teachers and the explicit expectations of the school. The cultural-historical perspective on learning regards the dialectic between person and practice as pivotal to the development of identity. Adopting this view, the lack of dialectic is of relevance to the formation of Mabel and Rosy as professionals. Mabel regularly reiterated a preference for her teacher-centred style and justified her view by saying how it enabled her to move rapidly through the curriculum, something she saw as cardinal to her role as a teacher. Rosy, who was less experienced, was still seeking directions for teaching and identity construction. Not until taking part in this study did she have strong pedagogic intentions in the classrooms. Their teaching motives and foci on task completion mirrored an image of two non-agentic teachers of English. However, the growing agency visible in her purposes for group work reorientated Rosy towards being an English teacher, and she began to reposition herself in the school's social structure (Biesta, 2008).

How these two teachers enacted their understanding of group work suggested that fewer school demands create a greater capacity for teacher agency but exercising this agency also depends on what kind of teacher one is. From Mabel and Rosy there are two strands to tease out. First, their agency was not rooted in an identity as a competent user of English and strong beliefs about the importance of English for its own sake. They reported that from the beginning of their careers they were more interested in teaching in general than teaching English. The other strand is that lack of school demands for pedagogy did not call forth responses which might have shaped identities as English teachers. We have seen how Rosy grasped the opportunity of using group work and started to extend her realm of English teaching. These points are compelling because

not only did they give rise to some ambiguity in the interpretation of the findings, but also have implications for how we consider the creation of teachers once they start teaching.

This ambiguity is less apparent if we consider the interactive nature of demand. One might argue that institutional demands existed, but the teachers did not recognise or react to them. On this note, what the individual brings to the dialectic is crucial. As identity mediates one's participation in the figured world of practice (Holland *et al.*, 1998), teachers will recognise, interpret and respond to what matters to them in the context of teaching. Rosy did respond to features she interpreted as demands, such as managing pupil behaviour and group work. Her actions corroborated the argument that the school made limited demands on her as an English teacher. The reciprocal nature of dialectic also means that the demands and affordances of practices will shape those interpretations, responses and therefore identity.

Instead of school expectations, what was mentioned as a major issue by the teachers in West School was maintaining an orderly classroom. Both Mabel and Rosy explicitly stated that they prioritised students obeying instructions, staying on-task and finishing coursework over English learning. Both of them also explained to me that if students followed what was said in the lessons, they would excuse minor misbehaviour. This 'professed belief' (Aguirre & Speer, 2000:333) was verified by my observations, when I found that students' rule-breaking behaviour and refusal to participate in groups happened in almost every lesson. Their group work was designed and adjusted to be manageable for students in order to maintain class discipline; whereas learner performance in the subject or how English should be taught was not a top priority.

The concepts of demand and dialectic also allow a fine-grained analysis of the differences between the two teachers in West School. No evidence could be gathered from Mabel regarding her recognition of any demands in relation to her teaching. This lack of dialectic raised the question whether she was developing professionally. On the other hand, the dialectic between teacher and practice for Rosy was the challenge presented by pupils' misbehaviour. During the study, Rosy began to discern the teacher-pupil dynamic in greater depth and attributed students' on-task behaviour to her thoughtful planning or execution of group work. This positive change indicated that professionally Rosy was still being formed. Identity construction as a continual and ongoing process is what might be expected from such a relative newcomer to the profession (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Dreier, 1999; Stetsenko & Arieviditch, 2004). Rosy was the youngest amongst the teacher participants, had just over a year of teaching experience and appeared to be still developing her professional identity. However, history-in-person was retained when she oriented herself towards being a generic teacher who responded to the demands of managing class discipline; whereas her identity as an English teacher was weaker. Her agency seemed to grow through her participation in the study, which she probably also interpreted as a demand. Her development of a slightly different 'self' or identity could be explained by having participated in a separate event within the same context (Lachicotte, 2009), i.e. taking part in this research provoked her repositioning within teaching.

The array of motive orientations (Hedegaard & Edwards, 2014) of the four teachers was construed as what they brought into practices. Their different identities in relation to English and professional agency shaped what mattered to them. How these personal

factors intermingled with institutional objectives and what the teachers recognised as demands got played out in group work. Joan's and Andy's motive orientation was teaching English as a tool for communication and group work in quadrants B and C could serve this purpose. Their primary motive collided with the focus on examination success in quadrant D pursued by the school and the society. Exercising agency in English teaching was visible in how the two teachers negotiated the demands by expanding the learning space in quadrants B and C. Through group work students could apply and learn to use English as a tool while also preparing themselves for testing or the learning outputs favoured by the school. The motive orientation of Mabel and Rosy reflected the school's concerns with curriculum coverage and student attendance; and because of these minimal demands Mabel and Rosy had more pedagogic freedom than Joan and Andy. This alignment of motives did not prompt the teachers to exercise their agency to any degree. Their inability to leverage the pedagogic space or create self-imposed demands was likely to be related to their weak identity as subject teachers.

It is noteworthy that interpretation of demand is a function of the person's identity and position. In particular, a similar situation can be interpreted differently by teachers in the same school context. Rosy recognised student misbehaviour as 'the demands of the situation' (Zittoun, 2014:234) but Mabel did not. This holistic approach of motive, identity, demand and agency taken out of research questions 2 and 3 allowed an in-depth analysis of the complexity of how teachers enacted what they understood.

6.1.4 What do their approaches to group work reveal about school priorities?

The institutional conditions became so potent a theme when trying to make sense of the functioning of the teachers in the multi-layered education milieu, and thus the fourth research question was added. As the participants gave rationales for their decisions they revealed that group work was not simply a matter of applying knowledge and beliefs as they planned and enacted group activities. Given the interdependence of person and practice in professional work (Edwards, 2010a), unpacking demands and motives at the levels of person and activity setting has led the analyses to the institution level in which the school priorities co-defined practice.

Group work reflected not only the teachers' motives but also how they took forward and negotiated their intentions with what the schools prioritised. As we have seen, their appropriation of school objectives evidenced whether and how the teachers exercised agency in English teaching. The demands of frequent summative assessments and examination drills placed on Joan and Andy suggested that East School prioritised student achievement in testing. The students' orientation to passing examinations rather than engaging with the subject *per se* was likely to have arisen as a historical priority of the school. Examinations and the pressure from the school management was a deeply felt topic whenever Joan and Andy talked about their dilemmas. On the contrary, academic achievement or mandated coursework had little relevance to Mabel's and Rosy's purposes for and actions in group work. The absence of school priorities as a topic or without relating their teaching to the school practice in the teachers' interviews created an analytical challenge. Their emphasis on classroom discipline, together with a few measures such as team teaching and mentoring in their department, suggested that

West School prioritised stability and the smooth functioning of an educational establishment under the public system.

The negotiation and alignment of motives made by the four teachers revealed how the two schools mediated the identical societal condition of academic achievement in a different manner. Prioritising examination success reflected East School's objectives to attract other academically able students and position itself as a high-performing school. The four quadrants of Edwards's model permeated Joan's and Andy's interviews because the teachers had to satisfy the school demands for quadrant D work via B and C activities. In West School, Mabel's and Rosy's discussions of their lessons represented moves only between quadrants A and B. While this is just speculation, West School and the teachers might have interpreted academic attainment and the associated high-stakes testing as being out of reach for those low-band students. Its history as a vocational school might have also driven its priority to a smooth transition. Had this question been identified at the outset, it might have been possible to verify this speculation.

The disparate priorities and mediations of the two schools have lent support to the claim that part of the meaning making and actions at the micro (teacher) level was to an extent pre-determined by the social conditions of schooling (van Huizen *et al.*, 2005). Building upon this argument, it appears that the motives of the meso (school) level had more direct impacts than the macro (society) level in shaping the actions at the micro level within the overall social system (van Huizen *et al.*, 2005). In brief, school mediation of the macro situation produced a more powerful dialectic, framing how the teachers made sense of practices and enacted their motives.

6.2 Contribution to knowledge and reflection

This section will present the potential contribution of this study to the existing body of knowledge in the following areas: cultural-historical theory, professionalism, enacting knowledge of teaching and group work. These discussions will be followed by a reflection on some methodological issues.

6.2.1 Theoretical insights

Explicating the relationship between teachers, group work and school priorities has tested the utility of Hedegaard's cultural-historical heuristic. Initially this model was devised to explain children's motive orientations and their consequent reactions to the different demands of home and school when starting school. This model, which allows Hedegaard to examine the home-school transitions in detail, has been used to frame the present study about teachers and their pedagogy in practices since 'individual orientation of the teacher is embedded within the activity in dynamic relation to the institutional and societal context' (Fisher, 2012:312). Stratified by setting and process yet in an interrelated manner, Hedegaard's model offered a powerful theoretical lens to make visible the intricate dynamic between institutional priorities and the teachers as they employed group work.

Conceptualising the classroom as an activity setting allowed an analysis of how the teachers responded to demands or a lack of demands from the school. The cultural-historical underpinning of the framework means that the lens illuminates how motives and actions constructed by people's identities mediate the interaction of agency and demands. Seeing group work as a tool in the activity of teaching made these interactions

visible, turning it into a site where how teachers took forward their intentions and resolved their contradictions could be studied in detail. If what we need is ‘a theory about the social structure of practice as a set of inter-related and diverse, local social contexts of action’ (Dreier, 1999:7), Hedegaard’s framework provided a systematic and strong theoretical basis for identifying pedagogic actions and their social contexts.

Applying Edwards’s pedagogic sequence generated even more fine-grained analysis of motives attached to group work. This model is a cycle of didactics backed up by Vygotskian concepts of learning and development which can be used flexibly. For example, an adaptation reported the non-linear movement on the trajectory of informal learning (Edwards & Mackenzie, 2008). In classrooms the non-linear movement happened when teachers moved from quadrant A directly to C, then back to B and then on to D (Edwards, in press). The quadrant model articulated the diverse foci and pedagogic approaches observed in the four teachers. For instance, Joan and Andy utilising quadrants B and C was at odds with the school demands which encouraged teaching that jumped from A directly to D. The ‘A to D’ move is actually a teach-to-test approach frequently associated with the implications of education reform when teachers are held accountable for student performance. The examples in West School also illustrated the utility of this model on sequencing when the two teachers aimed at quadrant B without an intention of propelling students towards D.

The role of demand and dialectic in the formation of the two teachers in West School is of great significance in the cultural-historical notion of development. The extent to which the apparent lack of demands, or at least the teachers’ lack of perception of demands from the school, left a vacuum to be filled in the dialectic of person and

practice was an interesting finding. Student misbehaviour and participating in the present study filled the gap in the case of Rosy because she interpreted these as demands and responded to them. Her realisation of using group work to attract students to stay on-task was an indication of her development as a teacher. The analysis of Mabel was opaque because she did not tend to recognise any demands. Neither did she impose demands on herself. It might be that this complacency pertained to her weak sense of being an English teacher. She had formed a stable identity which involved her having comparatively low expectations of pupils' behaviour and motivation for learning. One would therefore doubt if development was happening in Mabel's case.

The interplay between identity, motive and demand underlined in this study unpacked the complexity of the formation of a teacher. These findings have raised a question about what make teachers as they are. If demand and a sense of agency on the part of the teacher activate the dialectic, lack of demand, particularly if associated with low levels of professional agency, may impede professional development. This argument is thought-provoking but making a stronger claim is beyond the scope of this study.

Although it is in line with Zittoun's view that a mismatch between demand of a situation and a person's motive may induce creativity (Zittoun, 2014), one conclusion is that more attention should be drawn to the absence of demand and dialectic.

The analyses also challenged aspects of Evetts's concept of professionalism in knowledge-based work. This concept was used to describe the clash of motives between the two teachers and East School. In Evetts's definition, occupational and organisational ideals are analytically separated, and without attention to a possible overlap between these categories encompassing variations within each of these two forms. The discourse

of occupational professionalism stated as ‘autonomy and discretionary judgement’ and ‘the development of strong occupational identities’ (Evetts, 2013:10) has, I suggest, failed to address individual variations. Personal characteristics such as agency and identity brought into workplaces, as evidenced in all the teachers in this study, variedly mediated their professional judgements and hence, different ‘assessment by practitioners in complex cases’ (Evetts, 2013:10). By the same token, organisational discourse can vary when teaching is not defined by ‘standardised work procedures and practices, consistent with managerialist control’ (Evetts, 2009:248) as in West School where standardised pedagogy was not found and the institution did not induce occupational ambitions. In this case an organisational ideal did not dominate occupational professionalism but quite the reverse, organisational control was minimal.

The present study has also attempted to contribute to the existing literature on the relationship between teachers’ espoused and enacted theories. One element of the contribution is its use of an alternative theoretical grounding from those adopted in other studies in this area. The notion that teachers’ knowledge is a function of their views on teaching and learning of the subject (Abell, 2008; Meredith, 1995) is perhaps an overstatement, given the evidence gathered in this study. The teachers’ knowledge, based on their accounts of group work, was dependent on their past experiences with the subject as well as the practices they inhabited. The intersections of the person’s history, agency and institutional conditions concluded that a situative view of teachers applying knowledge in the classroom (Putnam & Borko, 2000) will strengthen our understanding of the unpredictable relationship between espoused and enacted theories. This argument echoed the integration of PCK into a multi-directional model describing

mathematics teachers' beliefs which also consisted of policies and school practices (Askew *et al.*, 1997).

This study, taking an interest in group work as a point of departure, can enrich the debate on this pedagogic method despite the wealth of research already undertaken in this area. Echoing past research, this thesis highlighted the role of the teacher in managing groups to assist learning. However, the findings of this non-interventional study have articulated how and why teachers used group work, and how their uses of group work were mediated by the teachers' identities and school priorities. These fundamental questions have received much less attention in a sea of studies about group work or collaborative learning. To this end this research has contributed to the field by taking a fresh perspective and by placing the investigation of group work as a complicated terrain between teachers and the practices they inhabit.

The analyses displayed the multi-faceted nature of group work with some surprising insights. While many previous studies, carrying pre-defined objectives of group work, measured the kinds of talk in order to enhance interaction quality (Baines *et al.*, 2009; Gillies *et al.*, 2014; Webb *et al.*, 2014), the findings here have presented some very practical purposes identified by practising teachers. One of these purposes was about widening the learning space to counteract examination drills; another was to infuse some fun into lessons to help getting through the curriculum. Expectations placed on teachers should not be overlooked. In the case of Joan and Andy, group work could be structured to meet product and assessment demands; whereas for Rosy and Mabel, it was a means of maintaining some kind of classroom control, however limited. It is hoped that the discussion of how teachers use group work and to achieve what ends

under what contexts will contribute to future research by going beyond identifying ‘the effective ways of doing group work’. The present study has attested that teachers’ intentions and agency in teaching the subject and school demands all have a considerable bearing on ‘why group work’ and ‘how to do group work’ in classrooms. As I have argued in chapter 1, the voices of teachers should have more weight in defining the meaning of effective group work for them.

6.2.2 Methodological and ethical reflections

This section will present some of the methodological issues that have arisen at various stages of the research process. These areas include the choice of the topic, research methods, tacit knowledge and research ethics.

Identifying group work as the preliminary object of inquiry for this thesis has proven to be advantageous for a number of reasons. Departing from an interest in researching about group work, the inquiry into this well-known teaching approach in a real-world setting with as minimal intrusion as possible has turned out to be a rich arena. Due to the flexibility and freedom of movement it offered teachers, group work has taken the original research foci to a new horizon where it ended up as an interesting exploration of the dynamic between pedagogy, professional identity, motive and school practice.

SR interviews were an effective method for scrutinising how the teachers made sense of teaching, allowing an analysis of their motivated actions in group work. Methodological choices as a result of adopting the cultural-historical perspective were limited to the kinds of repeated rich descriptions of actions in activities in activity settings undertaken by Hedegaard (1999; 2004; 2005; 2008b) or to providing opportunities for participants

to reflect on their actions. I went for the latter and aimed at ensuring attention to what was actually happening in the classrooms by deploying SR interviews. This method has not been used widely in cultural-historical studies, but has been borrowed from work on understanding teacher decision-making (Yinger, 1986). The advantages of using SR interviews were threefold. First, video clips provided unarguable evidence of lesson events. These stimuli minimised any mistakes the teachers might have otherwise made when recalling events during the post-lesson interviews (Ulewicz & Beatty, 2001). Second, the lesson episodes efficiently and effectively cued the teachers to explain the rationales behind their pedagogic decisions. Assisted by the footage, the probing of their purposes was accomplished by only a few straightforward questions repeatedly asked, plus some spontaneous questions in the interviews which were all driven by the aims of research (Vesterinen *et al.*, 2010). The advantage was that the teachers could elaborate on and evaluate their teaching, or recap their thoughts in an unrestricted manner. Third, SR interview is reported as an effective method to cue the sharing of implicit ideas (Yinger, 1986). Teachers might be uneasy about accentuating and communicating their own thinking to the interviewer, especially in relation to decisions or behavioural patterns in the classroom which seemed inadvertent. Overall, the deployment of SR interviews for this study fulfilled the emphasis on process and development in sociocultural research (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996).

The use of SR interviews also contributed to the study of tacit knowledge. Teachers' actions and decisions are loaded with pedagogic knowledge. These aspects of knowledge and the cognitive process are often so implicit that they became tacit or unconscious, and thus unarticulated and hidden. This problem may be more serious

among experienced teachers, who have already established their teaching repertoires and habitual classroom routines. Some researchers proposed that face-to-face interaction (Haldin-Herrgard, 2000) and the joint language or common ground shared by the interviewer and interviewee can facilitate sharing of tacit knowledge (Gertler, 2003; Haldin-Herrgard, 2000). The use of SR interviews in this study met these facilitative criteria which in some ways helped make the tacit thinking explicit. Considering that tacit knowledge is often specific to organisational or social culture (Gertler, 2003), the interviews, supplemented by observations, prompted reflective discussions on teaching in classrooms that is by nature situational. Using group work as the topic of interest into the SR interviews was particularly effective and powerful because ‘the language associated with cooperative learning gives teachers an increased sense of power in regard to interpreting and understanding learning, enabling them to describe their previous tacit knowledge more intelligently and forcibly to themselves’ (Brody, 1998:40). In short, the teachers’ accounts of their intentions and actions were elicited at a reflective and deep level through being stimulated by the lesson videos and talking about group work.

In addition to the process of data collection, the fourth question was an outcome of the rich data generated by the SR interviews and observations. Although the interviews were designed to elicit teachers’ accounts of their own pedagogy, the unexpected themes relating to school priorities brought something worthwhile to the understanding of teaching within specific school contexts. It added further insights to the answers and implications of the three primary research questions.

One reflection on improving the study applies to how the data was collected. The form to collect students' feedback right after each observed lesson could have been revised because students in West School often needed guidance. Those guiding questions should have been in both Chinese and English so that those students would find it easier to voice their opinion. Another more profound refinement would have been to have collected data on the school priorities from the senior leadership. This perspective would have bolstered a more thorough inquiry into the extra research question.

Ethical guidelines published by BERA were strictly adhered to throughout the research process even though the fieldwork was carried out outside Britain. 'Additional regulations and cultural sensitivities of the host jurisdiction' (BERA, 2011:5) were observed, which were largely informed by the qualified teacher status the researcher held and the relevant teaching experiences in Hong Kong. My role had been constantly reflected on throughout the study. My experiences as a teacher was an advantage, especially in terms of familiarising myself with the school environments, orchestrating the fieldwork *in situ* and communicating with the stakeholders. I sympathised with the heavy workload of the teachers so they were given much freedom whenever possible such as scheduling our meetings and the content and structure of the lesson observations. At the same time I was strongly aware of my role as a researcher, particularly when dealing with the data and how I presented myself while interacting with the teachers. For example, I pressed the teachers on elaborating certain pedagogic decisions despite their assumptions that I might naturally comprehend those instinctive actions. Many times these follow-up questions opened up discussions of other interesting topics about their pedagogic views.

In spite of the original plan of reducing intrusion, there were impacts on the field due to my presence. The more frequent use of group work and the interviews might have brought the participants unforeseen understanding when their ‘skilled performance is punctuated in new ways through social interaction’ (Tsoukas, 2003:410). When the deputy headteacher introduced me to Mabel and Rosy in West School, he mentioned that he was expecting to find out if group work would be suitable for their students, and requested me to give him some feedback afterwards. Indeed, the discourse on group work provoked some thoughts to the teachers, especially for Rosy, whose realisation has been analysed. She perceived using and talking about group work as professional development, and was pleased with the serendipitous changes. Being more experienced Andy shared a similar feeling in his last interview. His views about group work and those from Joan and Mabel, were consistent during the course of the fieldwork (see 3.4.3). A long-term impact on Mabel due to this study was unlikely though she said she had rarely used group work (see 4.3.3). Although the teachers were told to design and implement group work in the way they desired, their reflections on taking part in this study have been acknowledged during the fieldwork and throughout the analyses.

6.3 Directions for future research

This study threw light on teachers and the dialectic of person and practice from the perspective of the practitioners. The analyses revealed the extent to which teachers referenced their own learning experiences and identities when working with students, what demands they recognised and how they prioritised what mattered to them in the practices of teaching. Consequently, the findings have provided some pointers to the way forward in scrutinising potential social situations of development for teachers,

proposing that the practice aspect of the dialectic deserves a closer and more detailed investigation.

A stronger recognition of institutions and the demands they made on teachers is necessary. One weakness of this study is that because this focus emerged during the process of analysis it was not possible to gather data on the demands from the perspective of senior leadership teams in the two schools. It would be a substantive aspect for future study to identify school demands and where those demands arise as perceived by school leaders. An inclusion of views from this analytic plane would create a more comprehensive picture of the dialectic. Beijaard *et al.* made a similar point in their review of research on teachers' professional identity. They proposed that data obtained from teachers can be best complemented by obtaining data about the teachers' contexts such as school documents and students' work (Beijaard, Meijer & Verloop, 2004). The present study is very much in sympathy with their argument, because context is implicated in the shaping of the practitioner as a professional through the dialectic of agency and practice.

Upon identifying what the demands are and how they have originated, a future study may then move on to how schools mediate the demands or how they align with societal expectations. For instance, it would be revealing to have a more focused comparison between the two schools in this study, seeking how they mediated the same societal needs and policy demands, and the resultant capacity for teachers exercising their agency derived from those mediations.

Connecting what matter to teachers with school demands can inform what kind of CPD is most appropriate for different teachers. This implication is twofold. First, ascertaining teachers' motives and the meanings they ascribe to professional development is a precondition of encouraging pedagogic change or innovation. This claim strengthens the argument made by Sammons *et al.* (2007), that CPD has to consider the needs of teachers. Although it was not the intent of this study to exhort practitioners to enthuse about group work, one could see how the teachers' reactions differed. For example, Mabel was not convinced about the benefits to her Year 9 after using group work. This reluctance would be unsurprising if her own motives of teaching were elicited. Second, the study suggests that it is not sufficient to simply target individuals. Effective CPD also needs to take the institution into account so as to aid teachers to negotiate what they learn with demands in practices. Andy's frustration exemplified how professional dedication can be undervalued if the motives of the person and practice are not aligned (see 4.2.4). Research also shows that teachers feel restricted at work when professional development lacks school support (Korthagen, 2004). This body of evidence strengthens the call that CPD has to operate at both the person and the institution level so that teachers are better equipped to transform practices by externalising what they have learnt.

How education policy creates demands for different types of school is, I suggest, worth pursuing. Hedegaard's model (Figure 2A and 3A) calls for attention to national policy and institutional priorities by acknowledging that there can be demands at each plane of analysis (Hedegaard, 2014. pers. comm. with Edwards). Insights into a phenomenon

situated in the level of activity setting are likely to be sharpened if an inquiry is conducted at every level within the model.

In this study, the activity setting was a productive terrain for the analyses of how teachers enacted their understanding of group work and, with sufficient agency, negotiated their actions with school priorities; but the study would have been richer if it had been possible to explore the demands across all four levels. A few initiatives of the education reform in Hong Kong were proclaiming a tendency towards foregrounding learning over performance (see 5.1). This trend was compatible with the motives of the two teachers in East School who wanted to make examinations less high-stakes but this was at odds with the school's orientation. Investigating the policy directions more thoroughly and how they are mediated by schools will help explain the paradox, for example, by discovering if different policies contradict themselves or make conflicting demands on schools and teachers.

Taking the person as the plane of analysis, more light can be cast on how one's identity and historical involvement in an activity mediate one's navigation in the figured world of practice. One area that arose in the analysis was the extent to which each teacher transferred experiences from their own trajectories as learners into how they operated in teaching. As presented in 5.3, the teachers who had the strongest identities in English were more likely to construct motives and react to demands related to English; whereas teachers who had weaker identities in the subject tended to be generic teachers and shifted the focus of subject knowledge to other aspects such as students having fun or behaving in lessons. Since this study conceptualised group work as a pedagogic tool employed in classrooms, the four teachers' personal experiences of group work when

they were students were not examined in any detail. Including the extent to which this approach was associated with their own learning and identity formation would have perhaps strengthened the insights into the impacts of their learning histories on the uses of group work as teachers. While caution is taken to avoid generalising from case study, these individual differences in the interactions between identity and agency and what mattered in one's teaching give some pointers to unravelling professional work lives.

The thesis has also pointed to how elements in the dialectic underpin the formation of a teacher, thus the interrelationship of these elements has evolved as an area of interest. The study began by looking at how early experiences informed teachers' motives, and how these motives were translated into teaching in classrooms. However, teacher development should be taken as a continual, ongoing process over a teacher's professional lifespan (Beijaard *et al.*, 2004). The findings suggested that what teachers do in teaching is more complicated. Teachers are being constantly formed throughout their professional lives because school priorities have a tremendous impact on their identities and views about teaching (Sammons *et al.*, 2007).

This notion of what being a teacher is within the potential social situations of development has considerable implications for teacher education. What Schneuwly proposed about teaching and learning from the Vygotskian legacy is of relevance. His argument of 'putting under tension the internal/external system, the two poles of the contradiction that creates the movement of development' (Schneuwly, 1994:286) is highly applicable to researching teachers' careers. Contradiction or tension forms the basis of development of teachers or a sense of who they are. Out of contradictions there arose two agentic teachers in East School; the tension between classroom discipline

(external) and being an effective teacher (internal) lessened when Rosy's identity as an English teacher grew with managing group work. These findings of what make teachers as they are challenge the view that teachers and professional identity are largely formed during pre-service training. The concepts of dialectic, demand and contradiction constituting this study drew attention to the fluid and continual nature of being a teacher – someone who may be constantly shaped by the need to respond to demands.

6.4 Epilogue

This final chapter of the thesis has synthesised the findings to answer the four research questions, and methodological and ethical issues have been evaluated. These analyses have produced some directions for the way ahead in a range of areas such as cultural-historical theory, group work, teacher knowledge or professional development. The endpoint of this study is a long way from where it initially set off and the journey has yielded some interesting insights. The simple thesis title does not fully capture the fascinating realisations along the analytic journey. Out of the concepts of identity, agency, motive and demand which underpinned this thesis, there emerged a fundamental and inspiring question – what kind of teacher is being formed? In particular, the social situation of development and the dialectic within it have much to offer in our understanding of human development. Whilst generalisation based on case study is not feasible, this thought-provoking question does have wide relevance.

Last but not least, let me borrow Kincheloe's words on the essentiality of teachers' knowledge about qualitative inquiry and Edwards's take on responsible research. If '[to] develop a detailed understanding of these social dynamics and their relationship to the

role and purposes of schooling’ is what is expected from ‘critical teacher researchers’ (Kincheloe, 2003:205); and if responsible interpretive research ‘can be very good at shedding light on the problem, teasing out the complexities and pointing towards how it might be tackled by practitioners in policy and pedagogy’ (Edwards, 2002:161), I hope this study and its implications have met these ends. These closing remarks matter because just like the four teacher participants, my identity as a researcher is fulfilled in my actions in constructing this thesis and the meanings made of them.

References

- Abell, S. (2008). Twenty years later: Does pedagogical content knowledge remain a useful idea? *International Journal of Science Education*, 30, 1405-1416.
- Abrami, P., Poulsen, C., & Chambers, B. (2004). Teacher motivation to implement an educational innovation: Factors differentiating users and non-users of cooperative learning. *Educational Psychology*, 24(2), 201-216.
- Aguirre, J. & Speer, N. (2000). Examining the relationship between beliefs and goals in teacher practice. *Journal of Mathematical Behavior*, 18(3), 327-356.
- Ainley, J. & Luntley, M. (2007). Towards an articulation of expert classroom practice. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 23, 1127-1138.
- Alexander, R. (2008). Culture, dialogue and learning: Notes on an emerging pedagogy. In N. Mercer & S. Hodgkinson (Eds.), *Exploring talk in school*, pp. 91-114. London: Sage.
- Angrosino, M. & Mays de Perez, K. (2003). Rethinking observation: From method to context. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *Collecting and interpreting qualitative materials* (2nd ed.), pp. 107-154. London: Sage.
- Apple Daily. (2013). 減派下競爭家長瞄準着數區 為入英中搶攻沙田. [Online]. 24 January. Available from: <http://hk.apple.nextmedia.com/news/art/20130124/18144766> [Accessed 11 April 2014]
- Askew, M., Brown, M., Rhodes, V., Wiliam, D., & Johnson, D. (1997). *Effective teachers of numeracy: Report of a study carried out for the Teacher Training Agency*. London: King's College London.
- Avis, J. (2003). Re-thinking trust in a performative culture: The case of education. *Journal of Education Policy*, 18(3), 315-332.
- Baines, E., Blatchford, P., & Chowne, A. (2007). Improving the effectiveness of collaborative group work in primary schools: Effects on science attainment. *British Educational Research Journal*, 33(5), 663-680.
- Baines, E., Blatchford, P., & Kutnick, P. (2003). Changes in grouping practices over primary and secondary school. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 39, 9-34.

- Baines, E., Blatchford, P., & Kutnick, P. (2008). Pupil grouping for learning: Developing a social pedagogy of the classroom. In R. Gillies, A. Ashman, & J. Terwel (Eds.), *The teachers' role in implementing cooperative learning in the classroom*, pp. 56-72. New York: Springer.
- Baines, E., Rubie-Davies, C., & Blatchford, P. (2009). Improving pupil group work interaction and dialogue in primary classrooms: Results from a year-long intervention study. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 39(1), 95-117.
- Bakker, A., Hakanen, J., Demerouti, E., & Xanthopoulou, D. (2007). Job resources boost work engagement, particularly when job demands are high. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 99(2), 274-284.
- Ball, D. (2000). Bridging practices: Intertwining content and pedagogy in teaching and learning to teach. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 51, 241-247.
- Ball, S. (1993). Education policy, power relations and teachers' work. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 41(2), 106-121.
- Banks, F., Leach, J., & Moon, B. (1999). New understandings of teachers' pedagogic knowledge. In J. Leach & B. Moon (Eds.), *Learners and pedagogy*, pp. 89-110. London: Paul Chapman.
- Barnes, B. (2001). Practice as collective action. In T. Schatzki, K. Cetina, & E. von Savigny (Eds.), *The practice turn in contemporary theory*, pp. 17-28. London: Routledge.
- Barron, B. (2000). Achieving coordination in collaborative problem-solving groups. *Journal of the Learning Sciences*, 9(4), 403-436.
- Beauchamp, C. & Thomas, L. (2009). Understanding teacher identity: An overview of issues in the literature and implications for teacher education. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 39(2), 175-189.
- Beijaard, D., Meijer, P., & Verloop, N. (2004). Reconsidering research on teachers' professional identity. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 20, 107-128.
- Beijaard, D., Verloop, N., & Vermunt, J. (2000). Teachers' perceptions of professional identity: An exploratory study from a personal knowledge perspective. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 16, 749-764.
- BERA (2011). *Ethical guidelines for educational research*. [Online]. Available from: <http://www.bera.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/BERA-Ethical-Guidelines-2011.pdf> [Downloaded 21 September 2014]

- Bernstein, B. (2000). *Pedagogy, symbolic control and identity: Theory, research, critique*. Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Biesta, G. (2008). Learning lives: Learning, identity and agency in the life-course: Full research report. *ESRC End of Award Report, RES-139-25-0111*. Swindon: ESRC.
- Biesta, G. (2009). Values and ideals in teachers' professional judgement. In S. Gewirtz, P. Mahony, I. Hextall, & A. Cribb (Eds.), *Changing teacher professionalism: International trends, challenges and ways forward*, pp. 184-193. London: Routledge.
- Blatchford, P., Baines, E., Rubie-Davies, C., Bassett, P., & Chowne, A. (2006). The effect of a new approach to group work on pupil-pupil and teacher-pupil interactions. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 98(4), 750-765.
- Bray, M. & Kwok, P. (2003). Demand for private supplementary tutoring: Conceptual considerations, and socio-economic patterns in Hong Kong. *Economics of Education Review*, 22, 611-620.
- Bray, M., Zhan, S., Lykins, C., Wang, D., & Kwo, O. (2014). Differentiated demand for private supplementary tutoring: Patterns and implications in Hong Kong secondary education. *Economics of Education Review*, 38, 24-37.
- Brody, C. (1998). The significance of teacher beliefs for professional development and cooperative learning. In C. Brody & N. Davidson (Eds.), *Professional development for cooperative learning: Issues and approaches*, pp. 25-48. New York: State University of New York, Albany.
- Brody, C. & Davidson, N. (1998). Introduction: Professional development and cooperative learning. In C. Brody & N. Davidson (Eds.), *Professional development for cooperative learning: Issues and approaches*, pp. 3-24. New York: State University of New York, Albany.
- Bromley, K. & Modlo, M. (1997). Using cooperative learning to improve reading and writing in language arts. *Reading and Writing Quarterly*, 13(1), 21-35.
- Bruner, J. (1996). *The culture of education*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Bruner, J. (1997). Celebrating divergence: Piaget and Vygotsky. *Human Development*, 40, 63-73.
- Bruner, J. (2006). *In search of pedagogy volume II: The selected works of Jerome S. Bruner*. London: Routledge.
- Burrell, G. & Morgan, G. (1979). *Sociological paradigms and organisational analysis: Elements of the sociology of corporate life*. Hants: Gower.

- Chaiklin, S. (2003). The zone of proximal development in Vygotsky's analysis of learning and instruction. In A. Kozulin, B. Gindis, V. Ageyev, & S. Miller (Eds.), *Vygotsky's educational theory in cultural context*, pp. 39-64. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Chaiklin, S. (2012). A conceptual perspective for investigating motive in cultural-historical theory. In M. Hedegaard, A. Edwards, & M. Fleer (Eds.), *Motives in children's development: Cultural-historical approaches*, pp. 209-224. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Chinn, C., Anderson, R., & Waggoner, M. (2001). Patterns of discourse in two kinds of literature discussion. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 36(4), 378-411.
- Chiu, M. (2004). Adapting teacher interventions to student needs during cooperative learning: How to improve student problem solving and time on-task. *American Educational Research Journal*, 41(2), 365-399.
- Chiu, M. (2008). Flowing toward correct contributions during group problem solving: A statistical discourse analysis. *Journal of the Learning Sciences*, 17(3), 415-463.
- Christie, D., Tolmie, A., Thurston, A., Howe, C., & Topping, K. (2009). Supporting group work in Scottish primary classrooms: Improving the quality of collaborative dialogue. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 39(1), 141-156.
- Clarke, D. & Hollingsworth, H. (2002). Elaborating a model of teacher professional growth. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 18, 947-967.
- Claxton, G. (2007). Expanding young people's capacity to learn. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 55(2), 115-134.
- Cohen, E. (1994). Restructuring the classroom: Conditions for productive small groups. *Review of Educational Research*, 64(1), 1-35.
- Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2011). *Research methods in education* (7th ed.). Oxford: Routledge.
- Cole, M. (1996). *Cultural psychology*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Cooper, K. & Olson, M. (1996). The multiple 'I's' of teacher identity. In M. Kompf, W. Bond, D. Dworet, & R. Boak (Eds.), *Changing research and practice: Teachers' professionalism, identities and knowledge*, pp. 78-89. London: Falmer Press.
- Corden, R. (1992). The role of the teacher. In K. Norman (Ed.), *Thinking voices: The work of the National Oracy Project*, pp. 172-185. London: Hodder & Stoughton.

- Daniels, H. (2001). *Vygotsky and pedagogy*. London: Routledge.
- Daniels, H. (2008). *Vygotsky and research*. London: Routledge.
- Daniels, H. (2012). Changing situations and motives. In M. Hedegaard, A. Edwards, & M. Fleer (Eds.), *Motives in children's development: Cultural-historical approaches*, pp. 191-208. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Day, C. (2002). School reform and transitions in teacher professionalism and identity. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 37, 677-692.
- Day, C., Kington, A., Stobart, G., & Sammons, P. (2006). The personal and professional selves of teachers: Stable and unstable identities. *British Educational Research Journal*, 32(4), 601-616.
- Dillenbourg, P. (1999). What do you mean by 'collaborative learning'? In P. Dillenbourg (Ed.), *Collaborative-learning: Cognitive and computational approaches*, pp. 1-15. Oxford: Elsevier.
- Ding, M., Li, X., Piccolo, D., & Kulm, G. (2007). Teacher interventions in cooperative-learning mathematics classes. *Journal of Educational Research*, 100(3), 162-175.
- Dreier, O. (1999). Personal trajectories of participation across contexts of social practice. *Outlines*, 1, 5-32.
- Ecclestone, K., Biesta, G., & Hughes, M. (2010). Transitions in the lifecourse: The role of identity, agency and structure. In K. Ecclestone, G. Biesta, & M. Hughes (Eds.), *Transitions and learning through the lifecourse*, pp. 1-15. London: Routledge.
- Edwards, A. (1994). The curricular applications of classroom groups. In P. Kutnick & C. Rogers (Eds.), *Groups in schools*, pp. 177-194. London: Cassell.
- Edwards, A. (1995). Teacher education: Partnerships in pedagogy. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 11(6), 595-610.
- Edwards, A. (2002). Responsible research: Ways of being a researcher. *British Educational Research Journal*, 28(2), 157-168.
- Edwards, A. (2005). Let's get beyond community and practice: The many meanings of learning by participating. *The Curriculum Journal*, 16(1), 49-65.
- Edwards, A. (2007). An interesting resemblance: Vygotsky, Mead, and American pragmatism. In H. Daniels, M. Cole, & J. Wertsch (Eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Vygotsky*, pp. 77-100. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Edwards, A. (2010a). *Being an expert professional practitioner: The relational turn in expertise*. New York: Springer.
- Edwards, A. (2010b). How can Vygotsky and his legacy help us to understand and develop teacher education? In V. Ellis, A. Edwards, & P. Smagorinsky (Eds.), *Cultural-historical perspectives on teacher education and development*, pp. 63-77. London: Routledge.
- Edwards, A. (in press). Designing tasks which engage learners with knowledge. In I. Thompson (Ed.), *Task design, subject pedagogy and student engagement*. London: Routledge.
- Edwards, A. & D'arcy, C. (2004). Relational agency and disposition in sociocultural accounts of learning to teach. *Educational Review*, 56(2), 147-155.
- Edwards, A. & Mackenzie, L. (2008). Identity shifts in informal learning trajectories. In B. van Oers, W. Wardekker, E. Elbers, & R. van der Veer (Eds.), *The transformation of learning: Advances in cultural-historical activity theory*, pp. 163-181. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Edwards, A. & Protheroe, L. (2003). Learning to see in classrooms: What are student teachers learning about teaching and learning while learning to teach in schools? *British Educational Research Journal*, 29(2), 227-242.
- Engeström, Y. (2007). Putting Vygotsky to work: The Change Laboratory as an application of double stimulation. In H. Daniels, M. Cole, J. Wertsch (Eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Vygotsky*, pp.363-382. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Engeström, Y. & Sannino, A. (2011). Discursive manifestations of contradictions in organizational change efforts: A methodological framework. *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 24(3), 368-387.
- Ernest, P. (1989). The knowledge, beliefs and attitudes of the mathematics teacher: A model. *Journal of Education for Teaching*, 15(1), 13-33.
- Evetts, J. (2009). New professionalism and new public management: Changes, continuities and consequences. *Comparative Sociology*, 8, 247-266.
- Evetts, J. (2011). A new professionalism? Challenges and opportunities. *Current Sociology*, 59(4), 406-422.
- Evetts, J. (2013). Professionalism: Value and ideology. *Current Sociology Review*, 0(0), 1-19.
- Fang, Z. (1996). A review of research on teacher beliefs and practices. *Educational Research*, 38(1), 47-65.

- Firkins, A., Forey, G., & Sengupta, S. (2007). Teaching writing to low proficiency EFL students. *ELT Journal*, 61(4), 341-352.
- Fisher, R. (2012). Teaching writing: A situated dynamic. *British Educational Research Journal*, 38(2), 299-317.
- Flyvbjerg, B. (2006). Five misunderstandings about case-study research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 12(2), 219-245.
- Fontana, A. & Frey, J. (1998). Interviewing: The art of science. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *Collecting and interpreting qualitative materials*, pp. 48-89. London: Sage.
- Forman, E. & McPhail, J. (1993). Vygotskian perspective on children's collaborative problem-solving activities. In E. Forman, N. Minick, & C. Stone (Eds.), *Context for learning: Sociocultural dynamics in children's development*, pp. 213-229. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Fraser, H., Draper, J., & Taylor, W. (1998). The quality of teachers' professional lives: Teachers and job satisfaction. *Evaluation and Research in Education*, 12(2), 61-71.
- Gallimore, R. & Tharp, R. (1990). Teaching mind in society: Teaching, schooling, and literate discourse. In L. Moll (Ed.), *Vygotsky and education: Instructional implications and applications of sociohistorical psychology*, pp. 175-205. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Galton, M., Hargreaves, L., Comber, C., Wall, D., & Pell, T. (1999). Changes in patterns of teacher interaction in primary classrooms: 1976-96. *British Educational Research Journal*, 25(1), 23-37.
- Galton, M., Hargreaves, L., & Pell, T. (2009). Group work and whole-class teaching with 11- to 14-year-olds compared. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 39(1), 119-140.
- Galton, M. & Williamson, J. (1992). *Group work in the primary classroom*. London: Routledge.
- Gertler, M. (2003). Tacit knowledge and the economic geography of context, or the undefinable tacitness of being (there). *Journal of Economic Geography*, 3, 75-99.
- Gillies, R. (2008). Teachers' and students' verbal behaviours during cooperative learning. In R. Gillies, A. Ashman, & J. Terwel (Eds.), *The teachers' role in implementing cooperative learning in the classroom*, pp. 238-257. New York: Springer.
- Gillies, R. (2014). Developments in classroom-based talk. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 63, 63-68.

- Gillies, R. & Khan, A. (2009). Promoting reasoned argumentation, problem-solving and learning during small-group work. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 39(1), 7-27.
- Gillies, R., Nichols, K., Burgh, G., & Haynes, M. (2014). Primary students' scientific reasoning and discourse during cooperative inquiry-based science activities. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 63, 127-140.
- Glassman, M. (1996). Understanding Vygotsky's motive and goal: An exploration of the work of A.N. Leontiev. *Human Development*, 39, 309-327.
- Goodson, I. & Numan, U. (2002). Teacher's life worlds, agency and policy contexts. *Teachers and Teaching*, 8(3), 269-277.
- Goos, M., Galbraith, P., & Renshaw, P. (2002). Socially mediated metacognition: Creating collaborative zones of proximal development in small group problem solving. *Educational Studies in Mathematics*, 49, 193-223.
- Gu, Q. & Day, C. (2007). Teachers resilience: A necessary condition for effectiveness. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 23, 1302-1316.
- Haldin-Herrgard, T. (2000). Difficulties in diffusion of tacit knowledge in organizations. *Journal of Intellectual Capital*, 1(4), 357-365.
- Hall, C. & Schulz, R. (2003). Tensions in teaching and teacher education: Professionalism and professionalisation in England and Canada. *Compare*, 33(3), 369-383.
- Harwood, D. (1989). The nature of teacher-pupil interaction in the active tutorial work approach: Using interaction analysis to evaluate student-centred approaches. *British Educational Research Journal*, 15(2), 177-194.
- Harwood, D. (1995). The pedagogy of the World Studies 8-13 Project: The influence of the presence/absence of the teacher upon primary children's collaborative group work. *British Educational Research Journal*, 21(5), 587-611.
- Hau, K. & Ho, I. (2010). Chinese students' motivation and achievement. In M. Bond (Ed.), *Oxford Handbook of Chinese Psychology*, pp. 187-204. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hedegaard, M. (1999). The influence of societal knowledge traditions on children's thinking and conceptual development. In M. Hedegaard & J. Lompscher (Eds.), *Learning activity and development*, pp. 22-50. Aarhus: Aarhus University Press.
- Hedegaard, M. (2004). Cultural-historical approach to learning in classrooms. *Outlines*, 6, 21-34.

- Hedegaard, M. (2005). Strategies for dealing with conflicts in value positions between home and school: Influences on ethnic minority students' development of motives and identity. *Culture and Psychology*, 11(2), 187-205.
- Hedegaard, M. (2008a). A cultural-historical theory of children's development. In M. Hedegaard, M. Fleer, J. Bang, & P. Hviid (Eds.), *Studying children: A cultural-historical approach*, pp. 10-29. Bucks: Open University Press.
- Hedegaard, M. (2008b). Children's learning through participation in institutional practice: A model from the perspective of cultural-historical psychology. In B. van Oers, W. Wardekker, E. Elbers, & R. van der Veer (Eds.), *The transformation of learning: Advances in cultural-historical activity theory*, pp. 294-318. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Hedegaard, M. (2012). The dynamics aspects in children's learning and development. In M. Hedegaard, A. Edwards, & M. Fleer (Eds.), *Motives in children's development: Cultural-historical approaches*, pp. 9-27. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hedegaard, M. (2014). Professor, University of Copenhagen. Conversation with Edwards, A., 2 July. Personal communication.
- Hedegaard, M. & Chaiklin, S. (2005). *Radical-local teaching and learning: A cultural-historical approach*. Aarhus: Aarhus University Press.
- Hedegaard, M. & Edwards, A. (2014). Transitions and children's learning. *Learning, Culture and Social Interaction*, 3, 185-187.
- Hodkinson, P., Biesta, G., & James, D. (2007). Understanding learning cultures. *Educational Review*, 59(4), 415-427.
- Hodkinson, P. & Hodkinson, H. (2004). The significance of individuals' dispositions in workplace learning: A case study of two teachers. *Journal of Education and Work*, 17(2), 167-182.
- Holland, D. & Lachicotte, W. (2007). Vygotsky, Mead, and the new sociocultural studies of identity. In H. Daniels, M. Cole, & J. Wertsch (Eds.), *The Cambridge companion to Vygotsky*, pp. 101-135. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Holland, D., Skinner, D., Lachicotte, W., & Cain, C. (1998). *Identity and agency in cultural worlds*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Hong Kong, Education Bureau (2014). *General information on secondary school places allocation system*. [Online]. Available from: <http://www.edb.gov.hk/en/edu-system/primary-secondary/spa-systems/secondary-spa/general-info/index.html> [Accessed 12 April 2014]

- Hong Kong, Education Commission (1990). *Report No 4: The curriculum and behavioural problems in schools*. [Online]. Available from: http://www.edb.gov.hk/attachment/en/about-edb/publications-stat/major-reports/ecr4_e.pdf [Downloaded 12 January 2013]
- Hong Kong, Education Commission (2000). *Reform proposals for the education system in Hong Kong*. [Online]. Available from: <http://www.e-c.edu.hk/eng/reform/annex/Edu-reform-eng.pdf> [Downloaded 16 January 2013]
- Hong Kong, Education Commission (2004). *Education statistics*. [Online]. Available from: http://www.e-c.edu.hk/eng/reform/edu_stat_eng.pdf [Accessed 8 September 2014]
- Hong Kong, Financial Services and the Treasury Bureau (2014). *The 2014-15 Budget*. [Online]. Available from: http://www.budget.gov.hk/2014/eng/pdf/e_budgetspeech2014-15.pdf [Accessed 8 September 2014]
- Hong Kong, Government Secretariat (1981). *The Hong Kong education system*. [Online]. Available from: http://www.edb.gov.hk/attachment/en/about-edb/publications-stat/major-reports/edsys_e.pdf [Downloaded 31 March 2014]
- Howe, C., Tolmie, A., Thurston, A., Topping, K., Christie, D., Livingston, K., Jessiman, E., & Donaldson, C. (2007). Group work in elementary science: Towards organisational principles for supporting pupil learning. *Learning and Instruction*, 17, 549-563.
- Huberman, M. & Vandenberghe, R. (1999). Introduction: Burnout and the teaching profession. In R. Vandenberghe & M. Huberman (Eds.), *Understanding and preventing teacher burnout: A sourcebook of international research and practice*, pp. 1-11. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ingersoll, R. (1996). Teachers' decision-making power and school conflict. *Sociology of Education*, 69, 159-176.
- James, W. (1950). *The principles of psychology, Vol. 1*. New York: Dover.
- Johannsdottir, T. (2010). Deviations from the conventional: Contradictions as sources of change in teacher education. In V. Ellis, A. Edwards, & P. Smagorinsky (Eds.), *Cultural-historical perspectives on teacher education and development*, pp.163-179. London: Routledge.
- Johnson, K. (1992). The relationship between teachers' beliefs and practices during literacy instruction for non-native speakers of English. *Journal of Literacy Research*, 24(1), 83-108.
- Johnson, K. (1994). The emerging beliefs and instructional practices of preservice English as a second language teachers. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 10(4), 439-452.

- Johnson, D. & Johnson, R. (1999). Making cooperative learning work. *Theory into Practice*, 38(2), 67-73.
- John-Steiner, V. & Mahn, H. (1996). Sociocultural approaches to learning and development: A Vygotskian framework. *Educational Psychologist*, 31, 191-206.
- Kang, N. (2008). Learning to teach science: Personal epistemologies, teaching goals, and practices of teaching. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 24, 478-498.
- Kang, N. & Wallace, C. (2005). Secondary science teachers' use of laboratory activities: Linking epistemological beliefs, goals, and practices. *Science Education*, 89(1), 140-165.
- Keiner, J. (1992). A brief history of the origins of the National Oracy Project. In K. Norman (Eds.), *Thinking voices: The work of the National Oracy Project*, pp. 247-255. London: Hodder & Stoughton.
- Kelchtermans, G. (1993). Getting the story, understanding the lives: From career stories to teachers' professional development. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 9, 443-456.
- Kelchtermans, G. (2009). Who I am in how I teacher is the message: Self-understanding, vulnerability and reflection. *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice*, 15, 257-272.
- Kember, D. & Watkins, D. (2010). Approaches to learning and teaching by the Chinese. In M. Bond (Ed.), *Oxford Handbook of Chinese Psychology*, pp. 169-186. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Ketelaar, E., Koopman, M., Den Brok, P., Beijaard, D., & Boshuizen, H. (2014). Teachers' learning experiences in relation to their ownership, sense-making and agency. *Teachers and teaching: Theory and Practice*, 20(3), 314-337.
- Kincheloe, J. (2003). *Teachers as researchers: Qualitative inquiry as a path to empowerment*. London: Routledge.
- King, A. (2008). Structuring peer interaction to promote higher-order thinking and complex learning in cooperative groups. In R. Gillies, A. Ashman, & J. Terwel (Eds.), *The teachers' role in implementing cooperative learning in the classroom*, pp. 73-91. New York: Springer.
- Kirschner, F., Paas, F., & Kirschner, P. (2011). Task complexity as a driver for collaborative learning efficiency: The collective working-memory effect. *Applied Cognitive Psychology*, 25, 615-624.
- Korthagen, F. (2004). In search of the essence of a good teacher: Towards a more holistic approach in teacher education. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 20, 77-97.

- Kozulin, A. (1998). *Psychological tools: A sociocultural approach to education*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Kramarski, B. & Mevarech, Z. (2003). Enhancing mathematical reasoning in the classroom: The effects of cooperative learning and metacognitive training. *American Educational Research Journal*, 40(1), 281-310.
- Kumpulainen, K. & Wray, D. (2002). *Classroom interaction and social learning: From theory to practice*. London: Routledge.
- Kutnick, P. (1994). Use and effectiveness of groups in classrooms: Towards a pedagogy. In P. Kutnick & C. Rogers (Eds.), *Groups in schools*, pp. 13-33. London: Cassell.
- Kutnick, P., Blatchford, P., Clark, H., MacIntyre, H., & Baines, E. (2005). Teachers' understandings of the relationship between within-class (pupil) grouping and learning in secondary schools. *Educational Research*, 47(1), 1-24.
- Kutnick, P., Ota, C., & Berdondini, L. (2008). Improving the effects of group working in classrooms with young school-aged children: Facilitating attainment, interaction and classroom activity. *Learning and Instruction*, 18, 83-95.
- Lachicotte, W. (2009). Identity, agency and social practice. In H. Daniels, H. Lauder, & J. Porter (Eds.), *Educational theories, cultures and learning: A critical perspective*, pp. 223-236. London: Routledge.
- Langer, J. (2000). Excellence in English in middle and high school: How teachers' professional lives support student achievement. *American Educational Research Journal*, 37(2), 397-439.
- Leatham, K. (2006). Viewing mathematics teachers' beliefs as sensible systems. *Journal of Mathematics Teacher Education*, 9, 91-102.
- Leont'ev, A.N. (1978). *Activity, Consciousness, and Personality*. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall.
- Leung, F. (2002). Behind the high achievement of East Asian students. *Educational research and evaluation*, 8(1), 87-108.
- Lingard, B. (2009). Pedagogizing teacher professional identities. In S. Gewirtz, P. Mahony, I. Hextall, & A. Cribb (Eds.), *Changing teacher professionalism: International trends, challenges and ways forward*, pp. 81-93. London: Routledge.
- Lyle, J. (2003). Stimulated recall: A report on its use in naturalistic research. *British Educational Research Journal*, 29(6), 861-878.

- Maclure, M. (1993). Arguing for your self: Identity as an organising principle in teachers' jobs and lives. *British Educational Research Journal*, 19(4), 311-322.
- Mercer, N. (1995). *The guided construction of knowledge: Talk amongst teachers and learners*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Mercer, N. (2008). Talk and development of reasoning and understanding. *Human Development*, 51, 90-100.
- Mercer, N. & Sams, C. (2006). Teaching children how to use language to solve maths problems. *Language and Education*, 20(6), 507-528.
- Meredith, A. (1995). Terry's learning: Some limitations of Shulman's pedagogical content knowledge. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 25(2), 175-187.
- Moll, L. (1990). Introduction. In L. Moll (Ed.), *Vygotsky and education: Instructional implications and applications of sociohistorical psychology*, pp. 1-27. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Moll, L. & Greenberg, J. (1990). Creating zones of possibilities: Combining social contexts for instruction. In L. Moll (Ed.), *Vygotsky and education: Instructional implications and applications of sociohistorical psychology*, pp. 319-348. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Mullis, I.V.S., Martin, M.O., Foy, P., & Arora, A. (2012). *TIMSS 2011 International Results in Mathematics*. [Online]. Chestnut Hill: TIMSS & PIRLS International Study Centre. Available from: <http://timss.bc.edu/timss2011/international-results-mathematics.html> [Accessed 11 April 2014]
- OECD (2013). *PISA 2012 results: Ready to learn: Students' engagement, drive and self-beliefs (vol III)*. [Online]. Available from: <http://www.oecd.org/pisa/keyfindings/pisa-2012-results-volume-iii.htm> [Accessed 11 April 2014]
- OECD (2014). *PISA 2012 results: What students know and can do – student performance in mathematics, reading and science (volume I, revised edition, February)*. [Online]. Available from: <http://www.oecd.org/pisa/keyfindings/pisa-2012-results-volume-I.pdf> [Downloaded 11 April 2014]
- Oxford University (2014). *Admissions Statistics*. [Online]. Available from: <http://www.ox.ac.uk/about/facts-and-figures/admissions-statistics> [Accessed 21 September 2014]
- Pajares, M. (1992). Teachers' beliefs and educational research: Cleaning up a messy construct. *Review of Educational Research*, 62(3), 307-332.

- Parkison, P. (2008). Space for performing teacher identity: Through the lens of Kafka and Hegel. *Teachers and Teaching*, 14(1), 51-60.
- Penuel, W. & Wertsch, J. (1995). Vygotsky and identity formation: A sociocultural approach. *Educational Psychologist*, 30(2), 83-92.
- Polly, D. & Hannafin, M. (2011). Examining how learner-centered professional development influences teachers' espoused and enacted practices. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 104(2), 120-130.
- Prinsen, F., Terwel, J., Volman, M., & Fakkert, M. (2008). Feedback and reflection to promote student participation in computer supported collaborative learning: A multiple case study. In R. Gillies, A. Ashman, & J. Terwel (Eds.), *The teachers' role in implementing cooperative learning in the classroom*, pp. 132-162. New York: Springer.
- Putnam, R. & Borko, H. (2000). What do new views of knowledge and thinking have to say about research on teacher learning? *Educational Researcher*, 29(1), 4-15.
- Reynolds, C. (1996). Cultural scripts for teachers: Identities and their relation to workplace landscapes. In M. Kompf, W. Bond, D. Dworet, & R. Boak (Eds.), *Changing research and practice: Teachers' professionalism, identities and knowledge*, pp. 69-77. London: Falmer Press.
- Reznitskaya, A., Kuo, L., Clark, A., Miller, B., Jadallah, M., Anderson, R., & Nguyen-Jahiel, K. (2009). Collaborative reasoning: A dialogic approach to group discussions. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 39(1), 29-48.
- Robson, C. (2002). *Real world research: A resource for social scientists and practitioner-researchers* (2nd ed.). Oxford: Blackwell.
- Rolheiser, C. & Anderson, S. (2004). Practices in teacher education and cooperative learning at the University of Toronto. In E. Cohen, C. Brody, & M. Sapon-Shevin (Eds.), *Teaching cooperative learning: The challenge for teacher education*, pp.13-30. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Sachs, J. (2005). Teacher education and the development of professional identity: Learning to be a teacher. In P. Denicolo & M. Kompf (Eds.), *Connecting policy and practice: Challenges for teaching and learning in schools and universities*, pp. 5-21. London: Routledge.
- Salili, F. & Lai, M. (2003). Learning and motivation of Chinese students in Hong Kong: A longitudinal study of contextual influences on students' achievement orientation and performance. *Psychology in the Schools*, 40(1), 51-70.

- Saljo, R. (2009). Learning, theories of learning, and units of analysis in research. *Educational Psychologist*, 44(3), 202-208.
- Sammons, P., Day, C., Kington, A., Gu, Q., Stobart, G., & Smees, R. (2007). Exploring variations in teachers' work, lives and their effects on pupils: Key findings and implications from a longitudinal mixed-method study. *British Educational Research Journal*, 33(5), 681-701.
- Schneuwly, B. (1994). Contradiction and development: Vygotsky and paedology. *European Journal of Psychology of Education*, 9, 281-291.
- Sfard, A. & Prusak, A. (2005). Telling identities: In search of an analytic tool for investigating learning as a culturally shaped activity. *Educational Researcher*, 34(4), 14-22.
- Sharan, M. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study: Applications in education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Sharma, Y. (2012). Meet the 'tutor kings and queens' [Online]. *BBC*, 27 November. Available from: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-20085558> [Accessed 12 April 2014]
- Shulman, L. (1986). Those who understand: Knowledge growth in teaching. *Educational Researcher*, 15(4), 4-14.
- Shulman, L. (1987). Knowledge and teaching: Foundations of the new reform. *Harvard Educational Review*, 57(1), 1-22.
- Shulman, L. (1999). Knowledge and teaching: Foundations of the new reform. In J. Leach & B. Moon (Eds.), *Learners and pedagogy*, pp. 61-77. London: Paul Chapman.
- Shulman, L. & Shulman, J. (2004). How and what teachers learn: A shifting perspective. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 36(2), 257-271.
- Skidmore, D., Perez-Parent, M., & Arnfield, S. (2003). Teacher-pupil dialogue in the guided reading session. *Reading*, 37(2), 47-53.
- Skott, J. (2009). Contextualising the notion of 'belief enactment'. *Journal of Mathematics Teacher Education*, 12(1), 27-46.
- Slavin, R. (1996). Research on cooperative learning and achievement: What we know, what we need to know. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 21, 43-69.
- Slavin, R. (2004). When and why does cooperative learning increase achievement? Theoretical and empirical perspectives. In H. Daniels & A. Edwards (Eds.), *The RoutledgeFalmer reader in psychology of education*, pp. 271-293. London: RoutledgeFalmer.

- Slavin, R., Hurley, E., & Chamberlain, A. (2003). Cooperative learning and achievement: Theory and research. In W. Reynolds & G. Miller, (Eds.), *Handbook of psychology: Educational Psychology*, pp. 177-198. New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons.
- Smagorinsky, P. & Fly, P. (1993). The social environment of the classroom: A Vygotskian perspective on small group process. *Communication Education*, 42(2), 159-171.
- Smagorinsky, P. & Fly, P. (1994). A new perspective on why small groups do and don't work. *The English Journal*, 83(3), 54-58.
- Smith, W. & Tushman, M. (2005). Managing strategic contradictions: A top management model for managing innovation streams. *Organization Science*, 16(5), 522-536.
- Stake, R. (1994). Case studies. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research*, pp. 236-247. London: Sage.
- Stake, R. (2005). Qualitative case studies. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (3rd ed.), pp. 443-464. London: Sage.
- Stetsenko, A. (2005). Activity as object-related: Resolving the dichotomy of individual and collective planes of activity. *Mind, Culture, and Activity*, 12(1), 70-88.
- Stetsenko, A. & Arieviditch, I. (2004). The self in cultural-historical activity theory: Reclaiming the unity of social and individual dimensions of human development. *Theory and Psychology*, 14(4), 475-503.
- Stevens, R. (2008). Cooperative learning and literacy instruction in middle level education. In R. Gillies, A. Ashman, & J. Terwel (Eds.), *The teachers' role in implementing cooperative learning in the classroom*, pp. 92-109. New York: Springer.
- Sylva, K., Hurry, J., Mirelman, H., Burrell, A., & Riley, J. (1999). Evaluation of a focused literacy teaching programme in reception and Year 1 classes: Classroom observations. *British Educational Research Journal*, 25(5), 617-635.
- Tam, J. & Chen, A. (2013). Happiness and disappointment over secondary school allocations. [Online]. *South China Morning Post*, 10 July. Available from: <http://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/article/1278986/happiness-and-disappointment-over-secondary-school-allocations> [Accessed 11 April 2014]
- Tharp, R. (1993). Institutional and social context of educational practice and reform. In E. Forman, N. Minick, & A. Stone (Eds.), *Contexts for learning: Sociocultural dynamics in children's development*, pp. 269-282. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Tharp, R. & Gallimore, R. (1988). *Rousing minds to life: Teaching, learning and schooling in social context*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Tharp, R. & Gallimore, R. (1991). The instructional conversation: Teaching and learning in social activity. *NCRCDSLL Research reports, Centre for research on education, diversity and excellence*. Berkeley: UC Berkeley.
- Thompson, A. (1984). The relationship of teachers' conceptions of mathematics and mathematics teaching to instructional practice. *Educational Studies in Mathematics*, 15, 105-127.
- Thompson, I. (2013). The mediation of learning in the zone of proximal development through a co-constructed writing activity. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 47(3), 247-276.
- Tsoi, G. (2013). In Hong Kong, the tutor as celebrity. [Online]. *The New York Times*, 18 August. Available from: <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/08/19/world/asia/In-Hong-Kong-the-Tutor-as-Celebrity.html?pagewanted=all> [Accessed 12 April 2014]
- Tsoukas, H. (2003). Do we really understand tacit knowledge? In M. Easterby-Smith & M. Lyles (Eds.), *Handbook of organizational learning and knowledge management*, pp. 410-427. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Tudge, J. (1990). Vygotsky, the zone of proximal development, and peer collaboration: Implications for classroom practice. In L. Moll (Ed.), *Vygotsky and education: Instructional implications and applications of sociohistorical psychology*, pp. 155-172. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Turner, J. & Meyer, D. (2000). Studying and understanding the instructional contexts of classrooms: Using our past to forge our future. *Educational Psychologist*, 35(2), 69-85.
- Twiner, A., Littleton, K., Coffin, C., & Whitelock, D. (2014). Meaning making as an interactional accomplishment: A temporal analysis of intentionality and improvisation in classroom dialogue. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 63, 94-106.
- Ulewicz, M. & Beatty, A. (2001). *The power of video technology in international comparative research in education*. Washington D.C.: National Academy Press.
- van Aalst, J. (2013). Assessment in collaborative learning. In C. Hmelo-Silver, C. Chinn, C. Chan, & A. O'Donnell (Eds.), *The international handbook of collaborative learning*, pp. 280-296. New York: Routledge.
- van Huizen, P., van Oers, B., & Wubbels, T. (2005). A Vygotskian perspective on teacher education. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 37(3), 267-290.
- Vesterinen, O., Toom, A., & Patrikainen, S. (2010). The stimulated recall method and ICTs in research on the reasoning of teachers. *International Journal of Research and Method in Education*, 33(2), 183-197.

- Vygotsky, L.S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Wardekker, W. (2010). Afterword: CHAT and good teacher education. In V. Ellis, A. Edwards, & P. Smagorinsky (Eds.), *Cultural-historical perspectives on teacher education and development*, pp. 241-248. London: Routledge.
- Wardekker, W. (2013). Teacher identity and dialogue: A comment on van Rijswijk, Akkerman & Koster. *International Journal for Dialogical Science*, 7(1), 61-65.
- Webb, N. (1992). Testing a theoretical model of student interaction and learning in small groups. In R. Hertz-Lazarowitz & N. Miller (Eds.), *Interaction in cooperative groups: The theoretical anatomy of group learning*, pp. 102-119. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Webb, N., Franke, M., De, T., Chan, A., Freund, D., Shein, P., & Melkonian, D. (2009). 'Explain to your partner': Teachers' instructional practices and students' dialogue in small groups. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 39(1), 49-70.
- Webb, N., Franke, M., Ing, M., Wong, J., Fernandez, C., Shin, N., & Turrou, A. (2014). Engaging with others' mathematical ideas: Interrelationships among student participation, teachers' instructional practices, and learning. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 63, 79-93.
- Webb, N., Nemer, K., Chizhik, A., & Sugrue, B. (1998). Equity Issues in collaborative group assessment: Group composition and performance. *American Educational Research Journal*, 35(4), 607-651.
- Webb, N., Nemer, K., & Zuniga, S. (2002). Short circuits or superconductors? Effects of group composition on high-achieving students' science assessment performance. *American Educational Research Journal*, 39(4), 943-989.
- Webb, N. & Palincsar, A. (1996). Group processes in the classroom. In D. Berliner & R. Calfee (Eds.), *Handbook of educational psychology*, pp. 841-873. New York: Macmillan.
- Wertsch, J. (1985). *Vygotsky and the social formation of mind*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Wertsch, J., del Rio, P., & Alvarez, A. (1995). Sociocultural studies: History, action, and mediation. In J. Wertsch, P. del Rio, & A. Alvarez (Eds.), *Sociocultural studies of mind*, pp. 1-34. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Wertsch, J., Tulviste, P., & Hagstrom, F. (1993). A sociocultural approach to agency. In E. Forman, N. Minick, & C. Stone (Eds.), *Contexts for learning: Sociocultural dynamics in children's development*, pp. 336-356. New York: Oxford University Press.

- Windschitl, M. (2002). Framing constructivism in practice as the negotiation of dilemmas: An analysis of the conceptual, pedagogical, cultural, and political challenges facing teachers. *Review of Educational Research*, 72(2), 131-175.
- Winne, P., Hadwin, A., & Perry, N. (2013). Metacognition and computer-supported collaborative learning. In C. Hmelo-Silver, C. Chinn, C. Chan, & A. O'Donnell (Eds.), *The international handbook of collaborative learning*, pp. 462-479. New York: Routledge.
- Woods, P. (1999). Intensification and stress in teaching. In R. Vandenberghe & M. Huberman (Eds.), *Understanding and preventing teacher burnout: A sourcebook of international research and practice*, pp. 115-138. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Wyatt, M. (2010). An English teacher's developing self-efficacy beliefs in using groupwork. *System*, 38, 603-613.
- Yarrow, F. & Topping, K. (2001). Collaborative writing: The effects of metacognitive prompting and structured peer interaction. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 71, 261-282.
- Yinger, R. (1986). Examining thought in action: A theoretical and methodological critique of research on interactive teaching. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 2(3), 263-282.
- Zhao, S. (2013). Competition to enter St. Paul's Co-educational College heats up. [Online]. *South China Morning Post*, 10 November. Available from: <http://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/article/1352166/competition-enter-st-pauls-co-educational-college-heats> [Accessed 11 April 2014]
- Zittoun, T. (2014). Transitions as dynamic processes – A commentary. *Learning, Culture and Social Interaction*, 3, 232-236.

Appendix A – Initial interview questions

** note the date, time, interviewee in the recording

** make the interview more conversational

Initial interview (approx. 45-60 minutes)

- seek teacher's views about group work and learning
- build teachers' profile
- examine teachers' professional knowledge base and the related constructs argued in literature

1. How long have you been teaching? How long in this school?	T's background
2. How would you describe yourself as a teacher? What is your own personal philosophy of what makes a good teacher?	how is T positioning herself in the practice of teaching
3. What are you trying to do as a teacher?	motives
4. Tell me about English teaching in particular – what do you think is special about it?	pedagogic knowledge
5. What do you think how children here react to it and engage with it?	school knowledge
6. How did you learn English and come to like it as a subject?	T's background / past experience
7. How does your personal view on English relate to your teaching of this as a subject in school? Can you give some examples?	relate school knowledge to personal subject construct
8. What is your opinion about the English curriculum and students' learning of this subject?	curriculum, knowledge of learners
9. What does the term 'group work' mean to you in your practice- can you give me some examples of how you use it (in lessons)?	purposes of group work

*(Only ask this question if the previous two questions have not produced what I need) 10. Can you give some examples to illustrate the different ways you use group work in teaching?	
11. What do you think are the advantages of group work to you as a teacher? And to pupils as learners? Are there differences among learners that make you adjust how you do group work with them?	linking G.W. to knowledge of learners
12. What are some of the difficulties associated with doing group work?	

Appendix B – Pre-lesson interview questions

** Teachers' plans / expectations for the lesson

** note date, time in recording

Pre-observation interview (approx. 2-3 minutes)

- seek teacher's planning for group work
- pedagogic knowledge and lesson objectives

1. What are the teaching objectives of this lesson?	PCK
2. What is the arrangement for group work today (e.g. grouping, time, task, structure etc.)? What are you hoping the children will get from it?	contextual, specific information

Appendix C – Students' feedback form

Students' comments

(brief written comments to be collected shortly after the lesson)

- provide supplementary reference for selecting video episodes for the SR interview

Teacher: (Lesson)

Date:

* Student's name:

1	Has the recording in any way affected you in this lesson? If so, how?
2	What do you think the teacher was trying to do when talking to your group? Can you give an example?
3	Think back to the group work in this lesson. What did you get from it today? What do you learn / understand?

Appendix D – Interview schedule for a stimulated recall interview

Stimulated recall interview (max. 30 minutes for each observed lesson)

- teacher's reflection on the use of group work
- explore the link between specific actions and teaching purposes

a) Standard questions

1. Can you take me through what was going on here?	elicit the recall
2. What were you trying to do here?	making sense of pedagogic decision / teaching behaviour
3. Did you think the group was doing what you had expected? What kinds of adjustments did you make? And why?	relating to teaching objective
4. What was shaping your decisions and actions in this lesson? Anything unexpected happened? (Any improvisation / dynamics experienced?)	explore contextual factors
5. How would you comment on the use of group work in this lesson?	self-reflection
6. Thank you. I have finished all my questions. Is there anything you would like to raise?	invite T's initiation

b) Examples of lesson-specific questions

1. Instead of group you used pair in this lesson. Why was it so?
2. What was that student asking you about? Why did you not go to him?
3. Why did you stop them? Why did you always mention 'in the examination' to students in their speaking practice?
4. You code-switched during teaching, sometimes English sometimes Cantonese. What made you switch the medium?
5. Why did you let them choose their members this time (instead of your usual way of grouping)?
6. You told me about the unstable turn out rate of students in this class. Does it affect your teaching in general or group work in particular?
7. Why did some students work individually on the word search task?
8. Why did you mention 'cooperation' or 'team work' in this lesson but not so much in other observed lessons?

Appendix E – Questions for round-up interviews

Round-up interview (approx. 45 – 75 minutes)

- pulling up everything to explore themes
- a summary about intentions and uses of group work throughout the fieldwork period (have their views changed?)
- the conditions and constraints about the use of group work
- reflect on teaching and my role
- pick up things I couldn't ask before (e.g. formative assessment / catering students' ability / selection of materials for group tasks)

a) Standard questions

1. Have the interviews and reviews been helpful to you?	warm up
2. What does 'group work' mean to you in your practice? Has your understanding changed? How?	seek pedagogical understanding
3. What do you want to achieve (specifically) through using group work in your lessons?	pedagogical intentions
4. What do you consider when preparing for group work in your lessons?	contextual factors
5. What were the positive things when you were with the groups? And what have been the challenges or frustrations?	Reflections
6. To what extent do you think your use of group work achieved what you had aimed at?	evaluating the effectiveness of GW
7. How important if at all is group work for your assessment of pupil progress?	formative assessment
8. How do you use these assessments to shape your intervention with the pupils?	Differentiation

9. Can you give me one example of successful use of group work in your teaching? What were your aims? What did the students do? What did you do? What made it work? <i>Give a specific example by saying:</i> <i>e.g. in lesson X I think you were trying to engage the students by What do you think about this?</i>	examine the conditions of good GW
10. Based on your views, can you share one example of group work that didn't go on what you had hoped? What were the problems and constraints? <i>e.g. once in an interview you mentioned.... How does this difficulty relate to your strategy in GW?</i>	account for failure
11. How do you deal with these challenges?	solutions, adaptations
12. In your opinion, has the participation of this research changed your view about teaching or the role as a teacher in general?	general reflection for reference

b) Examples of interviewee-specific questions

1. Why did you usually group students based on their seating?
2. Once you mentioned you enjoyed the role as a facilitator. What does that mean?
3. Do you think, in general group work is not a usual or common teaching strategy in HK classrooms? Why do you think so?
4. Do you think there are some different styles when you teach other classes? Do you use more or less group work when teaching other classes?
5. You were in Mabel's lessons when she had group work and sometimes Tom was helping you in your lessons. Does co-teaching have any impacts on your group work?

Appendix F – Teacher's consent form

UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD
Central University Research Ethics Committee



Consent to participation and filming of a research participant

Name of Research Project: Teachers' understanding of the purposes of group work

CUREC Number: SSD/CURECIA/10-032

Principal Investigator: Jessica Chan

I confirm that the purpose of my participation and recording in this research project has been fully explained to me.

I understand that the recordings and other relevant materials will be kept strictly confidential. No authorised access will be permitted and the data collected will be used only for the purpose of this research. In any written reports or publications arising from the research my identity and my school will be concealed.

I understand that I may withdraw my consent at any time during my participation in the research project and that I do not have to give a reason for my decision. I acknowledge that such withdrawal of my consent will not prejudice my participation in this research project.

Signed..... (Participant)

Print Name..... (Participant)

Witnessed by..... (Researcher)

Print name..... (Researcher)

Date.....

Appendix G – Letter for parents

致 貴家長

小組學習研究

本校英文科 XXX 老師已同意參與一項關於小組學習之研究計劃，於近月將有研究員於英文課進行拍攝。此安排並不影響任何課堂活動。所有片段將作教師專業發展及大學研究用途，並會保密處理。

若貴子弟不願於課堂中被攝，請填妥回條並於 10 月 15 日前交回英文科老師。如有任何疑問歡迎與 X 老師或陳小姐 (jessica.chan@education.ox.ac.uk) 聯絡。

本人得悉有關課堂研究 並不同意 _____ (學生姓名) 被拍攝。

家長 / 監護人姓名: _____ 簽署: _____

二零一零年 月 日

Group work in the classroom

- Your child's English teacher, Miss Joan W. has agreed to take part in a study looking at how teachers implement group work in the classroom. A researcher will come and videotape her English lessons in recent months.
- This arrangement will not affect any lesson activities. You child will not receive different treatment from other students as a result of taking part / opting out. All video clips are confidential and will be used only for research purposes.
- If you do not want your child to take part, please fill in the form below and return it to your child's English teacher as soon as possible. Should you have any enquiry please send an email to jessica.chan@education.ox.ac.uk.

I do not give permission for _____ (name of child) to take part in the above study.

Name of parent / guardian: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____