

SOCIAL NETWORKS, IDENTITY AND CONTEXTS: A NARRATIVE  
ETHNOGRAPHY OF A GROUP OF COLLEGE ENGLISH (CE)  
TEACHERS' SOCIAL LEARNING PROCESS AMID THE RESEARCH  
DISCOURSE

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## **Abstract**

This research is a narrative ethnography about a group of College English (CE) teachers working at a university in China. As one of them, I, together with my CE colleagues, lived and told our stories of dealing with the increasing research demand from the workplace. I sought to explore how our workplace mediated the social process of our learning during educational change.

The research is conceptualized within the theoretical framework of community of practice and draws on social network perspective. It also adopts a poststructuralist perspective to present the dynamic socio-cultural process of how these teachers experienced and made meaning of various discourses about their teaching, researching and personal lives.

The discourses from the workplace, the social context and teachers themselves make these CE teachers' social networks and identities a site of ambivalence and struggles. Entrenched in a lower-status department, CE teachers struggled with various meanings of knowledge: the officially-valued research, the teaching-research, linguistics/western literature research, non-linguistics/western literature research, quantitative research and qualitative research. They also grappled with competing duties from both the workplace and the family.

The research delves into CE teachers' lived experiences, offering implications for

enhancing CE teachers' learning as well as international understanding of academics who might experience similar educational change. Finally, the study contributes to advancement of social learning theories, in particular, the theory of community of practice and social network theories.

## **Acknowledgement**

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## List of Abbreviations

<b>CE</b>	College English	<b>PLC</b>	Professional Learning Community
<b>CED</b>	College English Department	<b>PBRF</b>	Performance-Based Research Fund
<b>CET</b>	College English Test	<b>REF</b>	Research Excellence Framework
<b>CLT</b>	Communicative Language Teaching	<b>SFL</b>	School of Foreign Languages
<b>EFL</b>	English as a Foreign Language	<b>SLA</b>	Second Language Acquisition
<b>EM</b>	English Major	<b>SNA</b>	Social Network Analysis
<b>EMD</b>	English Major Department	<b>STE</b>	School of Teacher Education
<b>ERA</b>	Excellence in Research for Australia	<b>TESOL</b>	Teaching English to Speakers of Other languages
<b>NCEE</b>	National College Entrance Examination		

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## Prologue

This research was initiated from my experience of identity transformation as a PhD researcher. Working at a university in China as a College English (CE) teacher, a language skill training-focused teacher, I had been struggling with the new working requirement for a tertiary teacher: to produce research outputs. Looking back on my journey, I wonder how I came into the PhD field, how I had been supported or not supported by my workplace and how I had shifted between my private and professional spheres. I am not alone. CE teachers in China have been known as traditionally teaching-focused and research-insufficient. How do they cope with the educational change? How do they learn?

CE teachers form the largest tertiary teacher group in China, yet there is sporadic research about their research experiences. Less research has been done about their experiences and stories of living within their professional contexts. Far less is known from a CE teacher who as an insider tells her and other CE teachers' stories.

To write the stories, I not only returned to my workplace, a CE department (CED) of a university in China, but also to my CE teacher heritage. By this I mean something of me inherited from my past, my relationship and my value as a CE teacher. Narrative ethnography has provided a practical research approach. It understands and tells stories of a group of CE teachers. It also tells my autobiographical journey as a CE teacher and a PhD researcher struggling to make meanings of the work that I do and the interactions with this group of CE teachers. I sought to know more about myself and other CE teachers, and about my workplace and the complex interactions with the broader social and cultural contexts.

Qian Zhongshu, the greatest modern Chinese writer, says, 'to write a biography is to write an autobiography'. For this reason, he had never allowed people to write a biography of him. I am grateful that I am allowed by my participants to write their stories,

their ‘biography’ inevitably becoming my autobiography.

While the thesis is not entirely autobiographical, I am certainly part of the stories. The thesis is a snapshot of a group of teachers’ lives, and I must, to appreciate their participation and support, present them here right at the beginning. It is also to help readers to get to know these living characters.

<b>Name</b>	<b>Gender (female /male)</b>	<b>Age (young/ senior<sup>1</sup>)</b>	<b>Degree (PhD / non-PhD)</b>	<b>Department (College English Department(CED)/ English Major Department (EMD))</b>
Bing	male	young	PhD in Linguistics	CED
Chan	female	young	PhD in Linguistics	CED, teaching English majors (EM) as well

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<sup>1</sup> The criterion of young or senior teacher is described in the methodology chapter of ethnographing.

Dong	female	young	PhD in psychology	CED
Feng	female	young	PhD in western literature	EMD, previously worked in CED
Fu	female	young	PhD in Linguistics	CED, teaching EM as well
Hai	male	young	PhD in Linguistics	CED
Hong	female	senior	non-PhD	CED
Hu	male	young	non-PhD	CED
Hui	female	young	non-PhD	CED
Jia	female	young	non-PhD	CED
Jun	female	senior	non-PhD	CED
Lian	female	senior	non-PhD	CED
Jing	female	senior	non-PhD	CED
Ma	female	young	non-PhD	CED
Mei	female	young	non-PhD	CED, teaching EM as well
Meng	female	young	non-PhD	CED
Min	female	young	non-PhD	CED
Na	female	young	PhD in education	CED
Nin	female	young	non-PhD	CED
Qi	male	senior	PhD in education	the head teacher of CED
Sen	female	senior	non-PhD	CED
Tan	female	young	non-PhD	CED
Tang	female	senior	non-PhD	CED
Wang	male	young	PhD in linguistics	leader of SFL and CED
Xiao	male	young	PhD in education	CED
Xie	female	senior	non-PhD	CED
Yi	female	senior	non-PhD	CED

Lei	female	young	PhD in education from a western university	CED
Zhi	female	senior	non-PhD	CED
Zhuan	female	young	non-PhD	CED
the researcher (me)	female	young	studying PhD in education in a western university	CED

**Table 1 Snapshot of the participants (in alphabetical order)**



## Chapter I Introduction

I am an English as Foreign Language (EFL) teacher<sup>2</sup> at a university in China. The tertiary EFL teachers like me are often called College English (CE) teachers. I came to New Zealand to do PhD study because, among many reasons, a doctorate is highly demanded by my workplace. To do PhD study was a sudden decision. Like a colleague told me at the farewell party before I left to New Zealand, ‘we all talked about your sudden transformation. You seemed to be walking on the other road, and then suddenly jumped to the academic road. We are surprised’. By that road she referred to the road that has no connection with academic research. Although I had been working in the university for more than ten years, I had never been involved in any academic activities, rarely talked about research and seldom participated in workplace activities. No wonder the news of my undertaking an overseas PhD would be a surprise to them.

For me, the decision occurred to me all of a sudden. I decided to apply for PhD study only one year before I came to New Zealand. Yet it is not true to say I had never thought of doing a PhD. Some friends suggested it to me quite a few years ago. The leaders of my workplace had kept urging us. The pressure of upgrading the degree could be sensed from every aspect of my work. However, there were pulls: I had no interest in research as the theories cannot be directly applied in teaching. I was not good at doing research. I did

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<sup>2</sup> In Chinese universities, there are mainly two tracks for staff: executive and teaching. The teaching staff are usually called teachers rather than academics.

action research for my master degree in the UK, but it seemed to be of little value here. It might not even be regarded as research. Once I finished the master study, I had never continued with action research. Moreover, research was unimportant in my life. Marriage and family were my priorities. And, many colleagues did not do research either. I was not the worst.

Why did I make up my mind to apply for PhD study? There were plenty of reasons. None of them came directly from the workplace pressure. No matter how hard the leaders pushed us, anxious as I was, I was not motivated to do it. Doing research or not would not affect my life much. The impetus came from my private life. Maybe it was because I became more resilient and independent after being a mother for three years. I belong to the first 'one child' generation in China. My parents never let me live independently. Even now they would never allow me to cook as they believe I cannot. Maybe it was because I found working more relaxing than doing childcare. I was tired of spending all my time with the child. Another reason was that doing an overseas PhD would be a good opportunity for my child to learn English easily in an English speaking country. All in all, I was tired of my life at that time. I needed a change.

Since I made the decision, I had to think about how to start the research. For an EFL teacher in China, doing research in linguistics or western literature is a common choice and there are a number of experts in linguistics or western literature at my workplace. I dismissed the choice immediately. I was not interested in either. I was more interested in teacher professional development. The only person I could turn to was Yue, a professor at my workplace who studied her PhD in a prestigious overseas university and she was the

only expert researching teacher professional development. Yue was very helpful. She lent me a newly published book she bought from England, a handbook of Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) teacher education. For this, I am always grateful. The book completely changed my perception of research. I was surprised to find that most topics in the book are not about experiment and statistics. This was interesting enough for me to read on.

When I was reading, I was caught up by the issue of identity. Am I anguishing over my identity, the identity transformation into a 'researcher'? Are my colleagues like me, struggling in their identity transformation? These questions kept popping into my mind. I believed my problem could not be my problem alone. It could be a problem for my colleagues too. I felt anxious about my professional development, especially of doing research. So did my colleagues. If doing research caused anxiety to many teachers, there must be something 'wrong' and this should be studied.

I then searched 'identity' in the largest academic database in China. There was sporadic research into identity, and qualitative research on identity turned out to be less. Yue helped again. She lent me more books brought back from England. These books developed my initial conceptualization about identity. Looking back, I wonder if Yue, the sole qualitative researcher and the only professor who researched teacher professional development at my workplace, might feel lonely and long for someone to share her research interest. Yue was also the only woman professor. Among those male professors who researched either in linguistics or literature, she might hold a hope that she could share her research with more teachers. I always appreciate Yue's help. Although she

called it ‘a trifle’, I wonder without her how long I would have been trapped in my past understanding of research.

This is the story of how I started my transformation into a PhD researcher. There were years of wavering and passiveness. There were pulls and pushes between the professional and private spheres. There was pressure from the institution and support from my colleague. My story is not alone. It could happen to my colleagues and other CE teachers as well. How do they experience the ‘researcher’ identity transformation? How does their workplace support or constrain their identity construction? These questions are my immediate purposes of the research. I wanted to examine how the workplace where I and my colleagues belong mediates our learning when research has become an important part of our professional lives.

## **My workplace: TSU, SFL and CED**

Now I will show you around my workplace, TS University (TSU). I suggest that you, or any visitor of TSU take a ride on a sightseeing minibus shuttling between TSU’s north and south campuses. Most of the times, the minibuses take the students through the two campuses to catch their classes rather than for tour purpose, especially during the rush hour when students have to shift between their home schools and public teaching buildings. At home schools, students sit for their *zhuanye ke*, or major courses, the courses oriented to students of a certain discipline. At public teaching buildings, students have *gonggong ke*, or public courses. The public course, namely, is the course required for all the students regardless of their disciplines. The most common public courses in China

usually include CE, politics, physical education (PE), basic computer skills<sup>3</sup>.

You may see the buildings now and then passing, but I cannot tell you how many buildings there are. TSU occupies the largest campus in the local province with an area of approximately 5.4 square kilometres. No wonder I have no idea of the exact number of such buildings despite my many years' stay. I can only tell you the buildings where I had worked, such as Wenhui building, and buildings of No. 3, No.1, No. 8, No. 21 and No. 32. It is possible you may meet a CE teacher on the same minibus during the work time. As a public course teacher, she might be catching it for her class somewhere in campus.

The large campus of TSU in some way speaks of its academic reputation. TSU is a national key university well known for its teaching and research in a wide range of disciplines. In recent years, TSU has set research as one of its primary goals. This is in accordance with a series of profound reforms taking place in tertiary institutions in China in order to increase China's international competitiveness. Similar to other research-

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<sup>3</sup> Some public courses are required for all tertiary students, such as CE, politics and PE. Some public courses are required for students of certain disciplines. For example, mathematics might be a public course for students studying computer science, engineering, etc.

oriented universities (Lai, 2010), TSU assesses its academics' work by measurable output based on performance assessment exercises by which research funding and publications are converted into quantitative requirements. The income and eligibility for promotion are closely related to quantity of publications and research funding.

The School of Foreign Languages (SFL) is located right at the border of the two campuses. The location was chosen, partly because, as I remember a leader said, 'it is convenient for teachers either from the north campus or the south campus to come to the school'. The building was built four years ago. Like many modern and luxury structures built across Chinese universities during the last decade of economic boom, the new SFL building is designed as a semi-circle building of forty meters height. Four years ago when SFL was moving from Wenhui Building to the new place, teachers were excited: the classrooms in Wenhui building were shabby and dim. The meeting hall was small and musty. Teachers had to climb up to the ninth floor without a lift. In the new building, everything is new and grand. If it is a sunny day, you can see the whole building gleaming with its curtain wall and silver steel frames.

It is not only a grand new building SFL moved into. In the latest Chinese university rankings, SFL leaped into the Top Ten in the list of EFL education and research, far ahead of other 700 such institutes. Clicking at the introduction of SFL on its website, it is easy to read the message: a foreign language education and research institute of profound history. The introduction looks back on how SFL was founded in the 1950s and how it has been developed by a number of big names in Chinese foreign language academia. They are well known literature researchers, poets, translators, linguists and EFL educators. Their

pictures are hung along the corridors, reminding people of SFL's 'strong humanity culture and excellent academic tradition'.

SFL has plenty of reasons to be proud of its academic strength. SFL is one of the earliest institutes authorized to offer PhD education in applied linguistics and foreign literature. It is the provincial key research base for foreign linguistics and foreign languages education research, encompassing a variety of research hubs such as those for cognitive linguistics, functional linguistics, translation, Japanese study, German study, foreign language education, literature and lexicography. Its website constantly changes the headline, highlighting the latest news of academic activities, such as the call for papers for an international linguistics conference SFL is to host, the presentation of a key national research project, lectures given by visiting scholars, and so on.

SFL is the largest school in TSU with nearly two hundred and fifty staff. Most of them work in two English education departments: English Major Department (EMD), oriented to English major (EM) students, and College English Department (CED), offering CE courses to non-English major undergraduates. SFL is the largest as it serves the largest number of students: over 2,000 EM undergraduates and 15,000 CE students, plus a large number of postgraduate students. As a result, SFL has to undertake a huge teaching load, especially of CE courses to CE students. Under TSU's new performativity regulation, the minimal teaching load for a CE teacher is twelve hours of teaching per week. Therefore, at every first staff meeting of each semester, CE teachers greet each other, rather than by saying 'how are you' but asking 'how many classes are you going to teach this year?' or 'where are you arranged to teach? North campus or south campus?'

Which building?’

You may wonder why they asked about where to teach. As SFL teachers, it might be taken for granted they would work at SFL building. I was puzzled too when I first knew about CE. Many years ago, I was studying in my third year as an EM student at TSU. My teaching practice was mentored by a CE teacher. When I called my mentor, she asked me to meet her at No. 3 building. I was surprised as I had thought she was just like my EM teachers teaching us at SFL. Since then, I knew CE teachers worked in various places of the campus and the locations changed every semester.

Although its working place is not inside SFL, CED can find its place on the website of SFL, where it is located under the title of ‘Public English’, the previous name of CE. The honours of CED are highlighted: CE as National Excellent Courses and CED as National Model for CE reform. Compared to the prevailing display of SFL’s academic activities and EM education development on the website, CE news seems sporadic. It is mainly about notices for English training programs, English tests, plans for CE textbooks compiling and teaching workshops.

CED was established in the 1970s. Its late entry into SFL is in accordance with the short history of CE in China’s higher education. Since the founding of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, the principal political policy had been oriented to ‘learning from Soviet Union’, bringing great enthusiasm across the country toward Russian learning. During this time, English was rarely learnt, except by a rather small number of English majors. The Cultural Revolution since the 1960s further brought English



education to a halt as the overall higher education was suspended. In late 1970s, China ended the Cultural Revolution and began to implement the ‘Reform and Opening’ policy. Since then, CE became a compulsory course throughout colleges and universities in order to meet the urgent demand for improving English skills.

There are eighty CE teachers<sup>4</sup> in CED, teaching approximately 15,000 undergraduates during their two years English study. Accordingly, CED organizes its work in two *jiaoyanshi*, or teaching-research groups: groups of year 1 and year 2. The teaching is usually centred on mandated textbooks aiming to offer English language skills training. Each CE teacher may have four to five parallel classes to teach different students but the same content.

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<sup>4</sup> The calculation is based on the number of CE teachers at work during the fieldwork. It excludes the teachers who previously worked in CED but now worked in EMD and those who were on study or maternity leave.

## **CE and CE teachers**

Now you know who I am: a CE teacher working at CED of TSU and doing PhD study overseas. About CE and CE teachers, I need to tell you more.

CE is a compulsory course for most tertiary students in China except those who are English majors. CE teaching has been a major part of EFL education since the implementation of College English teaching guidelines in 1985 (MOE, 1985, 1999). It started during the first decade of China's implementation of 'Reform and Opening' policy when students commanded rather limited English language skills. The objective of CE since then is to provide English language skills training. It is thus considered as a basic course, the course focused on basic theories or skill teaching.

Closely related to CE are two standardized English tests: College English Test (CET) Band 4 & 6. The two tests have been implemented since 1987 on a national scale to measure the language proficiency of non-English-major college students. The result of CET 4, although not officially required, is conventionally considered as a prerequisite for graduation (Jin, 2004). As a result, the large-scale tests have produced the 'teaching-to-the-test' phenomenon by its significant backwash effect on teaching (Tang & Biggs, 1996, p. 163). Altogether, according to researchers (e.g. Cai, 2012; Huang, Chen, Xu, Li, & Fu, 2004), CE has the following characteristics:

- It is a basic tertiary course aiming to improve non-English-major students' English language skills. The teaching content is English language skill

training such as general English reading, writing, listening and speaking.

- It has been examination-oriented for nearly 30 years. CET 4 has for long time been the most important test for undergraduates as the result of the test being directly connected with students' graduation. It still remains as the most important criterion of assessing students' English ability although some key universities have begun to detach it from graduation in recent years.

- It is a compulsory course for students. Students vary in English proficiency, learning motivation and engagement.

- It is a public course serving the vast majority of students during their first two years of English learning. CE takes up over 11.7% of class hours in undergraduate study (Zhang, 2004), implying its importance in higher education. Due to its public service nature and the importance in tertiary education, CE has been under public scrutiny and heated debate. For the same reason, it is closely influenced by social and economic development.

Due to the large number of CE students, CE teachers are the largest group of tertiary

teachers. It is estimated that there are approximately 60,000 CE teachers (Zhang, 2010). Among them, according to the investigations of Jiang (2011) and Liu and Dai (2003), more than 70% are female, a typical female-dominated occupation according to Anker's (1998) gender-typed occupation. The investigations also show that most CE teachers have a master degree, yet less than 5% <sup>5</sup> are doctorate holders, signifying the weak research capacity of CE teachers.

The inactive research engagement of CE teachers has been widely reported (e.g. Bai & Hudson, 2011; Borg & Liu, 2013; Y. Xu, 2014). The survey done by Borg and Liu (2013) among 725 CE teachers across China reported moderate levels of reading and doing research. Xu (2014) carried out a survey among 104 CE teachers. She found most teachers' motivation to do research tended to be extrinsic rather than intrinsic, such as for the reason of promotion instead of personal interest or improving teaching. Such passive attitude toward research led to CE teachers' inactive engagement in doing research. As research productivity highly influences tertiary teachers' career progression, research

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<sup>5</sup> Jiang's investigation in 2011 found 0.9% of CE teachers were doctorate holders and 3.3% of CE teachers were studying toward a PhD.

practice has become a ‘bottleneck’ for many CE teachers’ professional development (Wang & Han, 2011).

A number of reasons are identified to explain CE teachers’ incompetence in research, such as the lack of research interest so that CE teachers cannot remain consistently research-engaged (Xu, 2014), heavy teaching workloads, a lack of confidence to conduct research due to the lack of research skills and interdisciplinary knowledge (Bai & Hudson, 2011). The unsupportive workplace context is also a typical problem identified by these researchers. A significant theme of these studies is that ‘many interactive personal, interpersonal, and institutional factors’ shape ‘the extent to which teachers can be research-engaged’ (Borg, 2013, p. 270). However, no studies so far have undertaken an in-depth and situated examination of how CE teachers’ personal factors interact with interpersonal and institutional contexts, leaving the lived experiences of CE teachers amid the prevailing research discourse unexplored.

The urgent need for a situated study of CE teachers’ lived experiences also attributes to the underdevelopment of language teacher professional development research in China. The research on language teacher education has not started until in the early 2000s when the first national conference of EFL teacher education and development was held (Wen & Ren, 2010). The conference and the subsequent research on EFL teacher education echo a series of EFL educational reforms in the new century. In 2000, the Chinese Ministry of Education issued *English Teaching Syllabus for English Majors and Opinions on Foreign Language Undergraduate Education Reform in the Twenty-first Century*. In 2004 and 2007, *College English Curriculum Requirement (for trial implementation)* and *College*

*English Curriculum Requirement* were implemented, bringing wide spread CE teaching reforms in colleges and universities and making the innovation of teaching ideas, teaching models and evaluation system a pressing demand. The latest *Guidance for College English Teaching* issued in 2017 suggests the reform of teaching content by incorporating English for Special Purpose (ESP) into English for General Purpose (EGP). All of these put forward challenges to EFL teachers' professional development. However, due to the short history of research in this field, there is still an apparent insufficiency in the understanding of EFL teachers' working lives. In Wen and Ren's (2010) review of research into EFL teachers development from 1999-2009, they pointed out there was a 'severe lack' of empirical study and far less research was undertaken in real professional contexts or from the perspective of teachers. The similar problem is also identified in Wang and Ma's (2015) review.

Internationally, there has seen a gradual increase in publications on Chinese EFL teacher education research. Most of these researchers, if their focus is on in-service teachers, interrogate teachers' experiences in EFL educational reforms that transform the traditional teacher-centred and product-oriented teaching to imported western teaching mode that is student-centred and process-oriented (e.g. Y. Liu, 2013; Y. Liu & Xu, 2011, 2013; Tsui, 2007). Despite the paucity of such research, these researchers have examined Chinese EFL teachers' experiences in pedagogical reforms from a variety of perspectives. Based on an ethnographic study, Ouyang (2000) wrote a story about a Chinese EFL teacher who received training in innovative pedagogy and struggled in implementing it when she went back to her rural hometown as her workplace was imbued by highly

complex ideologies, micropolitics and power relations inherent in pedagogical reform. Liu (2013) adopted ethnomethodology to study a group formed by several CE teachers and a western expert who worked together to implement a teaching reform. Liu used fine-grained tools to analyse how teachers enacted their identities through ‘talk at work’ and how their identity work was shaped by power relations. Xu and Liu (2009) undertook a narrative inquiry of a CE teacher’s experience during an assessment reform. They uncovered how this teacher enacted agency in negotiating her prior assessment experience with innovative formative assessment as well as with her workplace context. These studies display Chinese EFL teachers’ lived experiences that have been ignored for a long time. However, compared to the large number of EFL teachers in China who do TESOL activity in a largest scale worldwide (no other countries has more TESOL learners than China does), more empirical studies are needed especially in an age when fundamental educational changes are taking place and teachers’ lives are becoming increasingly complex.

In this section, I reviewed CE teaching, CE teachers and research on Chinese EFL teacher professional development. The next section, from an international perspective, seeks to understand how language teachers are involved in research.

## **Language teacher research**

Internationally, it is widely reported that engagement in research by language teachers is limited (e.g. Borg, 2007a, 2009, 2013; Lo, 2005). Borg’s (2013) study among more than 1,300 language teachers across a range of contexts worldwide found that teachers

rarely reported critical engagement with published research. Lo (2005) also reported the activity of language teacher research remained as an unproductive one. A key finding of these studies is that the majority of language teachers conceive research in direct practical terms. Tavakoli and Howard (2012) claimed that the majority of Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) teachers were sceptical about the practicality and relevance of research to their teaching practice. Teachers tended to seek in research publications direct solutions to local pedagogical problems (Borg & Liu, 2013). Similarly, Gao, Barkhuizen, and Chow (2011) discovered that language teachers in their study preferred the type of research that can offer particular teaching methods or approaches they could adopt it directly in improving their teaching.

Due to language teachers' 'linear and instrumental' (Borg & Liu, 2013 p. 270) and 'simplistic' (p. 291) conceptions of the relationship between research knowledge and teaching practice, the quality of language teacher research is often criticized. Ellis (2010, p. 189) points out that 'the methodological limitations that are evident in teacher-research may make its findings of little value to the academe'. Kiely (2008) argues there has been scarce evidence of critical practices in language teacher research articles and most of these studies are narrowly teacher-based without clear connections to the wider institutional policy. Furthermore, among teachers themselves, there is an ambiguity about understanding of research. For example, Borg (2007b) found among 208 directors of English language schools in the UK that research was understood as activities such as reading teaching magazines, attending workshops, studying new coursebooks and observing colleagues' teaching. While in another study, Borg (2008) reported the views



about research of teachers working in 33 language schools across 18 countries. Among these teachers, research was seen as a more academic activity.

All these critiques and ambivalent attitudes toward language teacher research demonstrate particular conceptions about the nature of research. Central to these discussions are the criteria used to assess the quality of research. For this, Borg (2010) is helpful, defining teacher research as

systematic inquiry, qualitative and/or quantitative, conducted by teachers in their own professional contexts, individually or collaboratively (with other teachers and/or external collaborators), which aims to enhance teachers' understanding of some aspect of their work, is made public, has the potential to contribute to better quality teaching and learning in individual classrooms, and which may also inform institutional improvement and educational policy more broadly (p. 395).

In spite of numerous studies of language teacher research, there remains a lack of situated understanding of teacher research engagement. As Borg (2010) points out, most research in this field is not done by teachers who are doing research, but rather by external experts writing about teacher research. Similarly, Rubdy (1997, p. 277) makes the point that most research comes from 'the pens of well-known specialists/ researchers' not from 'grass roots teachers'. This brings the issue of teachers' identity as researchers to the fore and calls for a situated examination of teachers' research activities in a specific context.

This section has provided a brief review of language teacher research. CE teachers are

language teachers. They are also a particular group of academics, that is, practice-oriented academics. In the next section, I turned to the international research focusing on practice-oriented academics. I wondered if CE teachers are alone in the age of globalization, if there are other tertiary teachers experiencing similar challenges that CE teachers face.

## **Practice-oriented academics**

CE teachers are not alone. Once at a coffee time, a staff member of the college of education where I undertook PhD study asked me about my research. Knowing my research is about CE teachers' research experiences, she disclosed the similar problem faced by the teacher educators here in this college: to transform from a teaching-focused school teacher to a research-oriented academic. Some teacher educators had left the job for the lack of research productivity. I was relieved to find that CE teachers are not alone in experiencing the transformation of higher education. As teaching-focused academics, CE teachers share a lot with the academics working in professional fields such as teacher education and the health profession (Boyd & Smith, 2014; Chetty & Lubben, 2010; Davey, 2013; Findlow, 2012; Sikes, 2006).

Globally, research and publishing are now taking precedence in academics' work. Universities are encouraged to promote productivity by assessing academics' performance according to various research assessment frameworks, such as Research Excellence Framework (REF) in the UK, Performance-Based Research Fund (PBRF) in New Zealand

and Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA) in Australia. Associated with the change is the increasingly problematic and complex relationship between research and teaching. It is evident that the universities, especially those research-intensive, are lost in a 'research grant mania' (Nagy, 2011, p. 304). There is a hierarchical conception of teaching and research implying that research is to create and disseminate knowledge while teaching, reduced as interpreting existing knowledge and managing students' learning, belongs to the second order (Badley, 2002). As research has become central to defining a university as well as an academic, the balance between teaching and research has been significantly reshaped. It is a question of status and prestige for an individual to publish in outstanding peer-reviewed journals, and to simply teach is no longer enough (Sikes, 2006).

The imbalanced relationship between teaching and research has put less research-intensive but more teaching-focused universities or professional fields into a dilemma. It is found that the academics working in a teaching-led university have a strong focus on teaching activities instead of publishing and research (Gale, 2011). Boyd and Smith (2014) discovered that many lecturers in the health profession lacked experiences of research activities as they were employed on the basis of their experiences in clinical practice. For these academics, there was a question: to engage with research as a scholar as required by the institutions or to what extent they need to be researcher. The predominant status of research has also generated a division among academics between those who do research and those who teach. The academic labour is graded as research active and non-active. And teaching and teaching staff are found to be negatively impacted (Harley, 2002).

In the literature about practice-oriented or research-inactive academics, some words

often appear, such as 'fragmentation', 'ambivalence', 'struggles', 'uncertainty' 'complexity' or 'divided' (e.g. Billot & Codling, 2013; Churchman, 2006; Wilson & Holligan, 2013). Clegg (2008) investigated a tertiary institution where most staff were considered as research inactive and there was common commitment to teaching and students' learning. Her participants reported deeply conflictual spaces emerging from the university itself and their identity as well. They struggled within the conflictual spaces forged by the micro-politics of discipline and department together with the broader institutional and social structures. What is identified as problematic by academics in Clegg's research includes the ways of thinking and practising pertaining to teaching and research as well as the issues related to discipline and subject. Scott, Brown, and Lunt (2004) and Neumann, Parry, and Becher (2002) specifically interrogated how academics were shaped by disciplines. They reported experiences of conflicts in relation to forms of knowledge emerging from both the organizational and epistemological sites. Even within the same discipline academics were divided in understanding the meaning of the discipline and experienced differently among those who were mainly engaged in teaching or research.

Gender experiences of academics are also highlighted. It is found that the changing tertiary environments are often less friendly to female academics. To be productive in research and be responsible for a high teaching load makes it rather hard for female academics to keep balance between work and life (Gardner, 2013; O'Meara & Bloomgarden, 2011). There are peculiar inequalities and dilemmas experienced by women academics, such as the gender division of labour especially related to teaching and

service loads.

In such circumstances, how to develop academics' research capacity becomes an important issue. This is particularly prominent with regard to practice-oriented academics who are generally regarded to be underdeveloped in research performance. It has been found that many of these academics have limited research experience and a lack of research training due to their practitioner background (Davey, 2013). In addition, time and opportunities for research are not available due to the heavy teaching loads (Maguire, 2000; Sikes, 2006). The researchers also discovered that the research orientations of faculty are largely influenced by the structure and the status of their institutions. Murray, Davison, and John (2006) and Murray (2006) argue academics' learning to do research is a complex process where not only the national and institutional factors come into play, the micro communities of practice, such as their immediate institutional setting, various affinities and disaffinities, together with individual habitus and agency, are equally influential. To this point, Rees, Baron, Boyask, and Taylor (2007) and Murray et al. (2009) call for more research into different forms of professional learning, especially the context-specific and situated mode of learning. Likewise, Davies and Petersen (2005) suggest further investigation of lived experiences of academic workers within the contemporary tertiary education change.

Combined, my personal experience, the present research in CE teachers' professional development, language teacher research and international practice-oriented academics' research experiences all invite a situated examination of CE teachers' learning amid the research discourse. I thus decided to take a socio-cultural perspective to examine CE

teachers' social learning processes. Moreover, a remark made by a leader of SFL when talking about the workplace efforts to help teachers to develop research capacity shows a sociocultural examination is not only necessary but rather urgent. The next chapter, starting from the leader's remark, takes a review of research on teacher learning from a socio-cultural perspective.

## **Chapter II A Socio-cultural Perspective on Teacher Learning**

Wang: The school has been organizing a range of activities to help teachers to improve their research capacity. You see, now there is an international academic conference held in the school. An American professor gave a series of lectures a few days ago. We have invited more visiting professors to come to give us lectures next year. They will cover a range of topics, such as cognitive linguistics, lexicology and language testing. The teachers can attend these lectures according to their research interests.

Wang, a leader of SFL, told me this when I asked him what can be done to develop CE teachers' research capacity. His remark reminded me of the received 'standard paradigm of learning' (Beckett & Hager, 2003), that is that learning happens in a formal educational setting, such as 'lectures'. It is seen as dependent on the presence of a recognized teacher, or a 'professor'. From such an expert, knowledge is transmitted to a novice. Learning is conceived as a product in the form of codified and stable knowledge. It happens in the mind of the learner as an internal psychological process and it is an asocial and ahistorical process free from the social and physical contexts where it is embedded (Lenneberg, 1967).

Wang assumed if the workplace provides the 'codified' knowledge delivered by

research experts, it is up to the teachers to choose if they would learn and if so, what to learn. However, such understanding of learning has been found insufficient to explain the complexity of teachers' professional lives. Rather, a socio-cultural perspective of learning believes that how and why teachers do what they do is extremely shaped by their prior experiences, their participation in the activities and the contexts where their working occurs (Johnson, 2006). Due to the paucity of research on Chinese EFL teacher professional development, especially that from the socio-cultural perspective, I developed my conceptualization mainly from the literature of teacher professional development research done in western countries. Moreover, since context is the primal focus of social learning theories, applying western theories to Chinese context might add to the understanding of the diversity of socio-cultural contexts, which may contribute to the advancement of the theories.

The following sections provide a review of literature about teacher learning from the social-cultural perspective, particularly focusing on those studies using a community of practice framework. In the review I sought to identify the literature gaps from the research on Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). The literature gaps, coupled with critiques of the theory of community of practice, helped me to develop a conceptual framework to examine CE teachers' learning experiences.

## **Teachers' situated learning in community of practice**

A socio-cultural perspective to learning focuses on how social and cultural processes mediate learning. It understands human learning as 'a dynamic social activity that is



situated in physical and social contexts, and distributed across persons, tools, and activities' (Johnson, 2006, p. 237). One prominent theory explicating the socio-cultural turn in human science is theories of situated cognition developed by Lave and Wenger (1991) and Wenger (1998). The process of learning is social participation in particular activities and negotiation with people in these activities. It is a process of engagement in collective activities where individuals mutually engage in pursuit of common goals and share the repertoire of practice, or communities of practice. What is learnt lies in the process of identity transformation rather than the acquisition of codified knowledge product.

The emphasis on the situatedness of learning in social contexts has broadened the understanding of learning by embracing the research focus on contexts where learning occurs. Internationally, in the research field of teacher learning and professional development, there has seen great enthusiasm in studying how schools and departments play the role as 'mediating context' (Louise Stoll, Bolam, McMahon, Wallace, & Thomas, 2006, p. 224) for teachers' working lives. Influenced by situated learning theory, many educational researchers stress the effect of interpersonal relations on teachers' professional learning. Some examined school community's role in professional learning (McLaughlin & Talbert, 1993). Many called for establishing meaningful and supportive relationships within the school workplace (Huffman, 2003; Louis & Gordon, 2006). With the increasing understanding of workplace's role in facilitating teacher learning and school improvement, a number of conceptual models have been applied in schools of western countries, such as 'professional learning community'(Fullan, 2005), 'teacher

communities of practice’(Grossman, Wineburg, & Woolworth, 2001; Little, 2002) and ‘professional communities’(Coleman & Earley, 2005).

Among these studies, much attention is given to the concept that collaborative work culture of teachers can be developed within a learning community. There have been systematic attempts to restructure the school toward facilitating teacher learning into communities of practice, or teacher professional learning communities (PLCs) (Vescio, Ross, & Adams, 2008). Within a PLC, all professional staff are involved in ‘joint planning, action and sharing their practice in an ongoing, reflective, collaborative, learning-oriented and growth-promoting way’ (Tam, 2015, p. 424). It is argued that PLCs are important contexts for improving teachers’ practices as well as students learning (Grossman et al., 2001; Vescio et al., 2008).

While there is considerable volume of literature advocating the virtue of PLCs, little is known about how to cultivate and develop effective PLCs (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006). Murphy (2015b) summarizes six characteristics defining PLCs that can function to foster teacher learning: shared leadership, shared vision, collaboration, trust, ownership, and shared responsibility. Similarly, essential characteristics stressed by Newmann (1996) include shared values and norms toward collective view about students’ learning and collaboration. Therefore, a PLC is not a mere combination of individuals with an interest in schools. Rather, it needs to be established as a community of practice with ‘mutual engagement’, ‘joint enterprise’ and ‘shared repertoire’ (Wenger, 1998, pp. 72-85). In fact, Hipp and Huffman (2010) and Hord and Tobia (2012) have found many PLCs failed to produce intended results and the transformation into a learning organization is extremely

difficult (Stoll & Louis, 2007).

For the constraints hindering the development of PLCs, McLaughlin and Talbert (2001) and Stoll et al. (2006) highlight the important role of structure as ‘the structure of the organization directs and defines the flow and pattern of human interactions in the organization’(Johnson, 1998, p. 13). Murphy (2015) concludes several aspects of structural barriers such as the hierarchical forms of schooling including time schedule and systems of dividing up work responsibilities. The structural constraints also include that schools offer ‘few opportunities’ for teachers to interact outside their classrooms and teachers’ interactions outside the classroom are ‘irregular, episodic, and rare’ (Grossman et al., 2001, p. 987). The norm of legitimacy of what counts as authentic activity for teachers’ professional interactions is also found as a major perspective affecting teachers’ engagement in PLCs. Teachers value the time spent inside classrooms with students, while the time spent outside classrooms is regarded as illegitimated (Goldstein, 2004; Smylie & Brownlee-Conyers, 1992). The conflicting conceptions held by teachers and the school toward what counts as authentic activity thus contribute to Tarnoczi’s (2006) finding that teachers have minimal involvement in defining the school’s goals and that teachers’ practices contradict with the goals set by educational legislators during the school’s transformation into a professional learning community. To this point, Achinstein (2002) suggests that to facilitate the collective understanding among teachers, the factors of conflict, contestation and negotiation should be examined.

How to build up trust and respect among teachers is an essential part of constructing an effective PLC or a professional community (Gray, Kruse, & Tarter, 2015; MacPhail,

Patton, Parker, & Tannehill, 2014). It is a pressing need for researchers on PLCs to investigate ‘what it is and what outcomes it can produce’(Hord & Sommers, 2008, p. 8).

Other researchers influenced by theories of situated learning and community of practice focus on studying departments as the immediate workplaces that significantly impact teacher learning. The department is viewed as not only a physical setting and a formal organisation, but also a social and psychological setting in which teachers construct a sense of practice, of professional efficacy and professional community (Flores, 2004). The studies of Harris (2001) and Hodkinson and Hodkinson (2005) demonstrate that departmental culture strongly influences teachers’ development and the different culture of each department in their research was significant in influencing teachers’ learning. They particularly examined departmental culture in aspects of internal collaboration and style of leadership. Similar to Hargreaves (1994), they found where teachers worked together and saw themselves as a team, the department was found improving. Besides, leadership was also identified as highly important in creating a climate of change and sustaining the development of the department.

For those researching departments as immediate contexts for teacher learning, Hodkinson and Hodkinson (2005) suggest the community of practice, like a department or a school cannot be separated out of broader contexts. The broader contexts create both opportunities and constraints for the individual members and their communities.

Whether advocating the development of PLCs or highlighting departments’ role in teacher learning, the two strands of research point to the centrality of interpersonal

relationships among teachers. This is congruent with Lave and Wenger's emphasis on people and their relationships, so to speak, a community of practice is 'a set of relations among persons, activity, and world, over time and in relation with other tangential and overlapping communities of practice' (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 98). My literature review also reveals the following issues that need further exploration:

- There is a lack of examination of the reality of conflicts at teachers' workplaces. Are there teachers who disagree with the institutionalized discourse? How would teachers' learning and knowledge generating be recognized as accepted practices in their institutions?
- Structural barriers are identified as hindering teachers' collaboration, such as time and space, division of work responsibilities, competing meanings of legitimacy. Are there other structural characteristics playing the role? How are these structural barriers developed from the wider social, cultural and historical contexts?
- If trust is important for developing teachers' collective engagement, how can trust be established or why may there be a lack of trust among teachers?
- To iterate Hodkinson and Hodkinson's (2005) suggestion, how are teachers' learning and their communities shaped by the broader social, cultural and historical contexts?

While western researchers attempt to develop collegiality and collaboration among teachers by restructuring schools into PLCs or stressing the role of department culture, teachers in China have been long time working together within a strong collectivist

tradition (Paine, Fang, & Wilson, 2003; Wong, 2010). For example, Chinese teachers are found to be very comfortable to collective work and there is a strong social cognition that collectivity enhances individual achievement (Zhang & Pang, 2016). The collegial practices in *jiaoyanzu* or *jiaoyanshi* (teacher-research group) are common for Chinese teachers. Teachers regularly have collaborative discussions about teaching and learning through *jiaoyanzu* or *jiaoyanshi*. It is the same with CED where I work, which consists of two *jiaoyanshi*. Do the problems identified in western contexts exist in Chinese context? If Chinese teachers are accustomed to collaborative working, are there conflicts within a group or community? If a community of practice is shaped by broader social and cultural contexts, how is a teacher community shaped by Chinese socio-cultural context? These questions emerged while I was reading the research on teacher learning done in the western settings. Moreover, the theory of community of practice is not unproblematic. It has received critical accounts since the concept of community of practice was proposed in the early 1990s (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). These critical accounts formed part of my conceptualization of CE teachers' workplace learning.

## **Critical perspectives toward the theory of community of practice**

Among the critics, the notion of community is often considered to be problematic. It offers limited tools for analysing power relations, conflicts, disagreement and struggles inherent in forming relationship within and across the groups. The concepts of peripheral participation and knowledge transmission between novice and expert imply that there is

an authority or centre within the group, neglecting the complex and fluid formation of various workplace organizations. Learning by legitimate peripheral participation seems to rely on the virtuous circle of cooperation and subordination. Indeed, there is growing attention to conflicts and contestation within the workplace (Barton & Tusting, 2005; Contu & Willmott, 2003; Fuller, 2007). The critical accounts also focus on the trajectories of centripetal movement. It is argued that there is a lack of discussion about opposite centrifugal movement (Engeström, 2007).

The relationship between continuity and change is another issue yet to adequately explain. Colley, James, and Diment (2007) point out that the dualisms such as individual–social and agency–structure in theories of situated learning and community of practice limit the understanding of learning and participation. They propose to take a more holistic perspective to different dynamics rising from the playing-out of learning and participation, for instance, how individuals construct and transform the workplace context.

Similarly, what attributes brought by individual to the learning process and the contexts is a concern for Billett (2007). He sees that the subject or the individual is missing within the increased emphasis on the contribution of the immediate situation. According to Billett, the individual agent is equally important to the community. As an agentic being, the individual learner' actions are shaped by his or her life history, biography and sense of identity. The learning process is mediated by both the individual and the community or situation in which both aspects are shaped by and in turn shape each other.

Some scholars see that much of writing about contexts in workplace situated learning mainly focuses on the actual workplace itself. They argue that the historical and cultural sensitivity of situated learning should be taken into consideration (Evans, Hodkinson, & Unwin, 2004; Hodkinson & Hodkinson, 2005). For this, I found Elmholdt's (2004) distinction between 'situation' and 'situatedness' helpful for my conceptualization of teachers' situated learning. He writes,

The understanding of learning as situated social practice exceeds the immediate situation. Situation refers to the surface of what goes on right here and now, whereas situatedness emphasizes how the present situation is related within a social and historical context.

Bearing in mind of 'situation' and 'situatedness' as contexts for teacher learning, I explored CE teachers' learning in relation to three aspects: their immediate working context, that is, the department as a site for teachers' interpersonal interactions, the social, cultural and historical contexts where the 'present situation is related within' and the personal aspect of identity construction. To this point, I followed Rogoff's (2003) sociocultural approach that human development 'can be understood only in light of cultural practice and circumstances of their communities---which also change'(pp. 3-4).

## **Chapter summary**

The remark from the leader is a stark reminder that the traditional notion of teacher learning still dominates the plans for teachers' professional development. A review of



teacher learning literature shows the necessity of adopting sociocultural perspective to teacher learning so that the complexity of teachers' professional lives could be understood. Much of present research in this line is located within the theories of situated learning and community of practice and done in the western settings. The researchers probe into teachers' workplace learning mainly from two aspects: restructuring the school or the department into PLCs and examining department culture for teacher learning.

The two strands of research reveal the important role that teachers' immediate workplace plays in teachers' professional development, either it be an organized PLC or a department. it is a site where teachers' professional interactions take place. These studies further demonstrate the issues yet to explain as well as the insufficiency of theories of situated learning and community of practice. Led by these issues, I developed the conceptual framework to examine CE teachers' learning with a hope to see how the theory of community of practice can be applied to Chinese context and what Chinese context could inform the theory.

## **Chapter III Reconceptualization of Teacher Learning in Community of Practice**

In the preceding chapter, I reviewed the literature about teacher learning done within the theories of situated learning and community of practice. Although most research is concerned with teachers in the western countries, it helped to develop my conceptual framework, for example, the call for attention toward the possibility of conflicts, the structure of a community and the agency of individuals. These issues were particularly pertinent to my study as collaborative teacher communities in China, known as *jiaoyanzu* or *jianyanshi* (teacher-research group), have been operating as a customary practice. If I attempted to understand CE teachers' workplace learning, I needed to examine what actually happens within CE teachers, how the teacher community of CED is shaped by the broader social and cultural contexts and how CE teachers negotiate with these contexts. Moreover, the critiques identified in Chapter II also call for reconceptualization of the theory of community of practice. For this, I developed a two-pronged framework to reconceptualise teacher learning in a teacher community: social network perspective to teacher learning and teachers' identity.

Applying a social network perspective to teacher learning helps to understand how a teacher group is constructed by teachers' interactions. Identity, on the other hand, enables examination of how teachers understand themselves in relation to the contexts which include their interpersonal interactions and broad historical, social and cultural contexts. The chapter starts from key concepts of social network theories such as social structure,

social capital and embeddedness. It then proposes a poststructuralist social network approach, followed by a review of identity theories, particularly, the socio-cultural and poststructuralist perspectives to identity.

## **A social network perspective to teacher learning**

A social network perspective focuses on the interdependent relationships among social entities and sees individuals as embedded in social relations (Granovetter, 1985). It is interested in understanding how relationships, bonds and interdependence are constructed between people, groups and institutions. A social network perspective toward a teacher community may offer a framework to articulate the interactions of the group. Particularly, it draws attention to such aspects as social structure of interactions, social capital and networks' embeddedness within the organization. In addition to introducing these dominant areas of social network research, I will also explain my decision of taking a poststructuralist perspective to social network research.

### **Social structure of interactions**

Network theories investigate 'the structure in social action'(Scott, 2000, p. 4). For example, Daly, Moolenaar, Bolivar, and Burke (2010) drew upon social network theory and methods to examine the underlying social interaction patterns within schools that affected reform efforts. They uncovered how the characteristics of social structure such as density of teachers' networks influenced the reform. Density refers to the 'extent to which all possible relations are present' (Scott, 2000, p. 32), or the completeness of a network. In

dense networks, where a high proportion of ties or members are in direct connections with each other, complex resources move more quickly than in less dense networks (Scott, 2000) and more opportunities for achieving collective goals are provided (Balkundi & Harrison, 2006). In Daly et al.'s study (2010), they found teachers tended to work more in collaboration and were more likely to access the individual and collective resources in dense networks.

Centralization, another concept describing the characteristics of social structure, is concerned with 'the overall pattern of network integration'(Jewson, 2007, p. 73). It examines how relations and communications within a network are connected with one or a few prominent actors. Network structure may range from decentralized to centralized pattern of interactions. It is found that the central position in a network is usually related to power and influence (Brass & Burkhardt, 1992). In a highly centralized network, there tends to be unitary norms of behaviours and thoughts as well as hierarchy of authority, which may enact 'surveillance and monitoring' (Jewson, 2007, p. 73) upon the members. In contrast, in a decentralized network, perceptions and perspectives are less likely to be restricted by central authority and members tend to have less sense of completeness and singularity.

Closely related to the concept of centralization is the notion of star, the individual or individuals who demonstrate control of information, resources and influence. A star may have many and frequent connections with members and usually be in the position of leadership and power. Besides the star, there are also isolates who have few links with others and occupy the position of periphery (Borgatti & Everett, 2000). The relational

position of members within a network can interpret their power, attitudes and identity.

Social network researchers also look at reciprocated relationship between actors. Reciprocity reflects the two-way nature of relationship between network members. For example, if teachers are in reciprocated relationships, they have mutual and shared understanding of norms and practices and thus more opportunities to exchange resources (Morrison, 2002; Van Maele, Moolenaar, Daly, DiPaola, & Hoy, 2015).

Within Wenger's conceptualization of community of practice, group members share the same relations to the group. The social network perspective understands that even there may exist a recognized group, its members' identification with the group varies. There is a variety of recognition with other co-members of the group. The commitment and connections with the group are diversified among the members (Marin & Wellman, 2011). Marin and Wellman (2011) further suggest that examining a group from social network perspective can enable the researcher to,

(First) think of individuals as embedded in groups to varying degrees and thus differentially subject to the opportunities, constraints and influences created by group membership. Second, it allows researchers to examine variations in group structure, determining which groups are more or less cohesive, which are clearly bounded and which are more permeable.

Therefore, a social network perspective toward a group does not see the group as pre-existing. Rather, the group is empirically defined by members' interactions.

## **Social capital**

Social capital, one of the basic concepts of social network theory, refers to ‘the resources embedded in social relations and social structure which can be mobilized when an actor wishes to increase the likelihood of success in purposive action’ (Lin, 2001, p. 24). The actor has access to particular expertise and resources through the particular position in a social network or his or her ties with others. Social capital could be ‘information, services, material goods, trust, obligations, and prosocial norms’(Small, 2009, p. 18) and expertise (Adler & Kwon, 2002).

Social capital can be examined by the concept of strength that looks into the ‘combination of the amount of time, the emotional intensity, the intimacy (mutual confiding), and the reciprocal services which characterize the tie’ (Granovetter, 1973, p. 1361). Tie strength may be weak ties that are ‘infrequent and distant’ (Hansen, 1999, p. 84), or strong ties that are frequent, intense, long-lasting, influential and affect-laden (Krackhardt, Nohria, & Eccles, 1992). In relation to teachers’ social networks, some researchers explored the resources and expertise that flow along teachers’ interactions. For example, in their study of teachers’ social networks during a mathematics reform, Coburn, Mata, and Choi (2013) portrayed how multiple kinds of resources including expertise, materials and information flew and what knowledge was shared. The social capital varied greatly in depth and strength, ranging from quick exchanges of students’ behaviours, to substantive conversations of teaching content and to in-depth problem solving information. The various resources from the interactions had to different degree

affected teachers' engagement in joint problem solving and learning with each other through interactions.

Trust as another aspect of social capital is also explored by some researchers. Moolenaar, Slegers, Karsten, and Zijlstra (2009) described how teacher trust was affected by the structure of teachers' social network in professional communities. They argue trust, the most important affective element of a community, is closely related to the values, norms and attitudes shared by group members and thus shapes and is shaped by teachers' interactions.

### **Embeddedness in organizational settings**

Embeddedness is an important concept in social network scholarship. It not just refers to individuals' actions being 'embedded in concrete, ongoing systems of social relations' (Granovetter, 1985, p. 487) but also emphasizes the embeddedness of networks themselves in a larger context (Small, 2009). Organizations may affect tie formation via arrangement of roles and work practices. In schools, teachers are organized by grade level and subject matter. Such organizational structures could influence how teachers see themselves as well as their conception of others whom they perceive as similar to or different from them. In this way, whom they may go to for developing social ties might be shaped by the organizational context (Coburn, Choi, & Mata, 2010). Anderson (2010) investigated first-year teachers' support networks with a contextual focus. She found teachers' networks were shaped by the structure and size of their schools.

Organizations may, through the configuration of time and space, facilitate development of some ties or constrain others. In the case of teachers in schools, the occupational norms of privacy have been argued as discouraging teachers' seeking out others. Such an environment may put risk on teachers if they seek out others' help in teaching and learning as this may be considered as violating norms and exposing teaching problems (Little, 1990). Small (2009) contends that organizations may influence tie formation by creating a common focus that provides individuals something to talk about. For instance, the cultural norms of a school may emphasize some shared interests and restrict the discordant ones, which may influence how teachers form relationship (Rivera, Soderstrom, & Uzzi, 2010). Organizations may also impact the resources inside networks. Social networks can vary greatly in the degree to which members are available for different kinds of resources (Small, 2009). For instance, Coburn et al. (2013) discovered that the organizational structure may have influence on teachers' social networks from three dimensions including the formation and maintenance of the networks, the resources embedded in social ties and the content of social network interactions.

### **A poststructuralist social network approach**

Focusing on structural analysis of interdependence within social units, most network research usually sets its orientation toward social structure and is constantly criticized as insufficient to fulfil 'its promise to explicate the dynamic interplay of social structures' (Kilduff & Tsai, 2003, p. 66). Researchers point out that the prominent network research understands network structure with a notion of immutability and solidity, that



there is an absence of ‘a fully adequate explanatory model for the actual formation, reproduction, and transformation of social networks themselves’(Emirbayer & Goodwin, 1994, p. 1413) and that it overwhelmingly focuses on techniques and statistical models (Granovetter, 1979). Particularly, network research tends to remove social interactions from the sphere of individual actions. Since this study is to understand teachers’ lived experiences, to affirm the humanity of my participants (Dewing, 2002), I turned to the poststructuralist approach to social network approach.

With a poststructuralist perspective, Kilduff and Tsai (2003) suggest to take into consideration of culture and history of social contexts. The relationship culture refers to ‘a relational definition of the situation’(McCall, 1970, p. 11). The core of the relationship is about how to define the relationship. Different definitions of a relationship may imply different interpersonal expectations (Bell & Healey, 1992). Hence, social relationships exist in specific social structures between people and are developed from interpersonally negotiated expectations and meanings between people. Fuhse (2009) calls for attention to be paid both to observable interactions of networks, or as Emirbayer (1997) terms, transactions, and to meaning structure of networks that is constructed through ongoing and situated interpretative work of individuals and their intersubjective expectations.

A poststructuralist social network researcher considers social ties as ephemeral and fleeting rather than of stable patterns. Therefore the culturally and socially constructed definition of social relationship not merely provides ‘blueprints’ (Fuhse, 2009, p. 60) for interpersonal expectations, rather it also means different things in different network contexts. It is important for a network researcher to explore the social situation in which

interactions emerge and change.

Agency is another aspect emphasized by the poststructuralist perspective. The active participation of individuals is a part of the ongoing perception and construction of social structure. As actors' interpretations about norms, values and behaviours change and shift, they are forming and reforming networks.

Altogether, the poststructuralist social network approach reintroduces the importance of active agent without disregarding social network research's strength in 'high degree of technical sophistication' (Emirbayer & Goodwin, 1994, p. 1411). Social networks interplay with individual actors' ongoing aspirations and efforts. There are intersubjective cognitive networks formed by actors' perceptions and beliefs, which interrelate with the networks of interactions. Organizations are seen as networks of relations always in states of flux and transformation.

A search for social network research explicitly following poststructuralist approach shows little work done in this respect and social network research on teachers is still 'in its infancy', as commented by Baker-Doyle (2015, p. 73). And I have not found such research done in relation to teachers in China either. Only a few qualitative researchers have tried to interrogate the nature of relationship and its function in contexts and communities. Coburn et al. (2013) took a longitudinal study to examine how teachers' social networks formed and changed during an organizational change. Their research portrayed how teachers' interactions changed over time. Anderson (2010), with a perception that 'agency is the dynamic face of networks' (White as cited in Emirbayer &

Goodwin, 1994, p. 1437), unravelled how teachers' support networks and the possibility residing in these networks were transformed through individual teachers' actions. These studies underscore the temporal aspect of social network as well as the co-construction between networks and agency. However, some issues remain insufficiently explored and became part of my conceptual framework. These issues are:

- If the definition of relationship is the core of a relationship, how is the relationship socially, culturally and historically defined?
- Closely related to the first question is the issue concerned with intersubjective cognitive network. How do actors negotiate their perceptions toward the relationship, norms, values and behaviours of their social networks? How do their intersubjective cognitive networks interplay with their network interactions?
- Small (2009) points out a missing question in social network research: how do people make social ties? This issue leads to such questions as what mechanism underlines the formation of social ties, especially in relation to network inequality, and how social networks develop into such a structure, for example, why some actors have smaller and less diverse networks than others.

To summarize, social network understanding to teacher learning in a group goes beyond a community as a 'symbolically constructed sense of belonging'(Jewson, 2007, p. 70). It can enable me to distinguish a richer panoply of teachers' roles and positions in a teachers' community, hence the internal structure of their social interactions. It not only

allows for the potential conflicts, inequality and struggles to be identified, but also analyses the resources and expertise within such processes. Drawing on social network perspective, I can also locate a teacher community within its wider organizational contexts. The poststructuralist perspective can further add to the understanding of teachers' interactions as a situated, contextual and dynamic process of interplay between structure and agency as well as that between the objective and the subjective.

## **Identity**

A socio-cultural perspective often conceptualizes learning in term of identity. The process of learning is a transformation of the self and the activity, a progressive movement appropriating the external and socially mediated activity into individual learners (Johnson, 2006). Wells (2000, p. 56) puts learning as 'the transformation that continuously takes place in an individual's identity and ways of participating through his/her engagement in particular instances of social activities with others'. More explicitly, Fuller (2007) points out that the question of what is learned by individuals is answered in terms of identity formation practice, echoing Wenger's view of learning as 'not merely the acquisition of a body of knowledge, but a journey of the self'(Wenger, 2011).

But, how best can I investigate the identity of teachers? I had been wrestling with the various definitions and concepts of identity. As 'the bread and butter' of the 'educational diet'(Hoffman, 1998, p. 324), the notion of identity has enjoyed wide attention in educational research and is used to mean rather different things in different contexts. A number of theoretical disciplines have touched upon the concept of identity, particularly

in philosophy, psychology, sociology, making considerable ambiguity for researchers. There seems little consensus in its definition and identity seems to have a specific definition for each researcher that studies it (Beijaard, Meijer,& Verloop, 2004; Kleinsasser, 2013). In this study, two main theoretical perspectives formed my understanding of identity: the socio-cultural and poststructuralist perspectives. The two perspectives, with different focuses, helped to crystalize my conceptualization of identity.

### **Socio-cultural perspectives**

Socio-cultural perspectives, particularly those postulated by Wenger, understand identity as developing a sense of belonging to groups of individuals in social configurations. According to Wenger (1998), ‘negotiating the meaning of our experience of membership in social communities’ is an essential part of one’s negotiating of identity which entails ‘viewing the very definition of individuality as something that is part of the practices of specific communities’ (pp. 145-146).

In Wenger’s framework, identity construction consists of a dual process of *identification* and *negotiation of meanings*. Identification with the community is based on three modes of belonging: *engagement*, *imagination*, and *alignment*. By engagement, individuals invest themselves in the community of practice as well as in relations with other members. Imagination enables one to relate oneself to the broader context beyond the local community of practice. It is ‘the production of images of the self and images of the world that transcend engagement’ (Wenger, 1998, p. 177). Alignment is a process coordinating individual’s activities within broader structures and enterprises. In this way,

the identity of a larger group becomes part of the identity of its participants.

Negotiation of meanings is the other process of identity formation. Wenger coins the concept of *economy of meanings* that a range of meanings produced by participants are subject to negotiation and the meaning negotiation is mediated by power. To be a full, legitimate member of a community of practice, one needs to be able to contribute to the economy of meanings. If an individual has no negotiability of meanings, that is, if he or she cannot use, modify and claim his/her own meanings, he/she will develop an identity of non-participation and marginality. For instance, Tsui (2007) portrayed how a Chinese EFL teacher struggled with multiple identities in the negotiation of meanings when his experience of a traditional English learner was challenged by the institutional advocacy of the imported western pedagogy. The teacher was constantly coerced to align with the institutional meaning of English teaching and to relinquish his meaning developed from his English learning experience, namely, the extensive learning of vocabulary, grammars and language structures, and finally experienced marginalization from his teaching community.

Identity transformation can form various trajectories of learning. As Wenger notes, when crossing within and across communities of practice, 'we go through a succession of forms of participation, our identities form trajectories' (1998, p. 154). Power relationship plays an important role in shaping and reshaping learning trajectories. For example, Liu and Xu (2013) examined an EFL teacher's experience in a language teaching reform where the traditional and liberal pedagogies coexisted and competed in a Chinese university department. Their participant developed an outbound trajectory of self-

exclusion from a centre position, a result shaped by asymmetrical power relations between traditional and western pedagogies and that lie in Confucius notion of hierarchy of the senior to the junior.

Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) argue that socio-cultural accounts of identity offer ‘powerful explanations of the social determination of identity’ but ‘leave little room for agency’ (pp. 712-713). For this, I found Norton’s (2013) concept of *investment* and her poststructuralist conception of identity powerful. Norton’s concept of identity, together with Darvin and Norton’s (2015) model of ideology, identity and capital, may augment the understanding of the dynamic process of teachers’ identity construction.

### **Poststructuralist perspectives**

Following the poststructuralist notion of identity as multiple, fluid, dynamic and a site of struggle (also see Aneja, 2016; Rudolph, Selvi, & Yazan, 2015), Norton (2000, 2013) particularly focuses on the interplay of identity, investment and imagined communities. According to Norton (2013), identity is defined as ‘how a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is structured across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future’ (p. 45). Investment is concerned with individuals’ imagining the future and imagining their identity related to that future world. Different from the psychological constructs of motivation considering the individual with a unitary and coherent identity and specific character traits, investment views the individual as a social being with a complex identity that is developed from social, cultural and historical contexts. The construct of investment breaks the

dichotomies that traditional perceptions of learner identity often hold, such as good or bad, engaged or unengaged. Power relations, according to Norton, play an important mediating role in the learning process. The investment of learners into their learning is inextricably related to ‘the dynamic negotiation of power in different fields, and thus investment is complex, contradictory, and in a state of flux’ (Darvin & Norton, 2015, p. 37).

Inspired by Bourdieu’s work, Darvin and Norton (2015) understand the yields of investment as economic capital, such as wealth, property, and income; or cultural capital including ‘knowledge, educational credentials, and appreciation of specific cultural forms’(p. 44); and social capital of resources linked to possession of networks. The value of these forms of capital is determined by different fields. The *field*, as Bourdieu writes, is ‘a space in which a game takes place . . . a field of objective relations between individuals or institutions who are competing for the same stake’ (Bourdieu, 1983a, p. 197). Field is a hierarchical social space where various participating social agents come into play for occupying dominant positions within the field. In such hierarchical spaces, a dominant way of thinking with a set of ideas could be developed by the political and institutional environments, known as *ideology*, which is ‘materially mediated ideational phenomena’(Blommaert, 2005, p. 164). Darvin and Norton (2015) argue ideology is a site of struggles, where dominant and marginal ideas are competing, enabling individuals to have agency to act and think in a certain way, a process simultaneously transforming the contexts. The agency, or the choice an individual can operate is stemmed from one’s particular history and view of the world, or *habitus*, ‘a system of lasting, transposable dispositions which . . . function at every moment as a matrix of perceptions, appreciations,



and actions'(Bourdieu, 1977, p. 83).

The concept of investment may well explain how one exercises agency in one's learning in the sociocultural and ideological contexts, as Kramsch (2013) comments, the notion 'accentuates the role of human agency and identity in engaging with the task at hand, in accumulating economic and symbolic capital, in having stakes in the endeavour and in persevering in that endeavour'(p.195). Adopting the notion of investment, Barkhuizen (2016) reinterpreted Tsui's study (2007). Tsui's study draws on the theory of community of practice to explore how an EFL teacher negotiated identity in his workplace where traditional pedagogy and advocated western pedagogy coexisted and leaves individual's agency undiscussed. Barkhuizen argues that it is the teacher's investment in integrating both pedagogies and ongoing professional development that led to the increase in his cultural capital and social power so that he claimed 'ownership of meanings' (Tsui. 2007, p.676).

Poststructuralist understanding of identity challenges the notion that there are categories fixed as a priori and embraces the nature of identity as contradictory, dynamic and being constantly (re)fashioned. To this point, Varghese, Motha, Park, Reeves, and Trent (2016) suggest to highlight the contradictions of teachers identity negotiation in their contexts and discourses.

That identity does not merely emerge from porous-edged categories also refers to the performative and discursively constructed aspect of identity. Identity, being the performance of self, plays out 'in our everyday discursive performances'. It is 'not

something inside us, fixed and unchanging'(Watson, 2007, p. 372), rather, is contingent on 'the ways in which individuals occupy multiple positions and therefore have a range of identities, with different ones acquiring salience in different contexts'(Rattansi & Phoenix, 2005, p. 104). Identity is an ongoing, context specific and practical project of everyday life. Drawing on the conceptualization of dynamic and fluid identity, for instance, Park (2012) examined how an East Asian woman TESOL teacher negotiated identity not only to global discourses but also with respect to practical events, such as her English teaching being challenged with incredulity from a friend. Riessman (2003) used performative approach to reanalyse the narratives she did with two participants in the 1980s. She interrogated her role as the audience who actively engaged in producing and reacting to participants' narratives, reiterating that identity is not merely spoken but enacted in the fluid and dynamic space.

The connections between teachers' identity and narratives are also highlighted in a burgeoning literature on identity. Through narrative telling, the sense of ourselves and our communities is created and maintained. As Riessman (2003, p. 7) contends, 'we become the stories through which we tell about our lives'. Humans do identity work in narratives of everyday life. Their emotions and experiences are organized into meaningful episodes where their worlds and placed are as well shaped. To this point, Pastor and De Fina (2005, p. 37) write,

It is through the process of retelling and reconstructing past experience that members of these groups make sense of social encounters and conflicts and foreground an emerging sense of their identities, a process

that in many cases implies contesting established roles and claiming social space.

The poststructuralist perspective of identity sees emotion as informing and defining identity (Zembylas, 2003). The meanings one experiences of emotion inform about oneself and the external world. As Lasky (2005) argues, emotions are closely related to belief, context, power, and culture. 'To understand who a person is, it is necessary to understand emotion' (Denzin, 1994, p. 1). Therefore, Zembylas suggests to investigate the role of emotion in teachers' identity formation and change. Likewise, Varghese et al. (2016) stress teachers' emotionality in their construction of identities. Similarly, in Song's (2016) study, Korean teachers' identity involved considerable emotional lives. As they struggled through vulnerability and emotional rules tacitly embedded in schools and Korean culture, teachers were constrained to express their anxiety and insecurity. With other researchers (e.g. Motha & Lin, 2014; Said, 2014), Song's study points to the social nature of emotions as being shaped by social forces rather than solely within an individual.

Returning to my puzzle at the beginning: conceptions toward identity may be largely varied for different researchers. Yet, Sfard and Prusak (2005, p. 14) point out there is an overarching theme shared by various types of identity research: how do human beings act and what is the mechanism underlying these actions? According to them, the leading queries in identity research are:

Why do different individuals act differently in the same situations? And why, differences notwithstanding, do different individuals' actions often

reveal a distinct family resemblance?

In relation to my study, the examination of CE teachers' identity construction thus attempted to understand how a group of CE teachers act in the same situation, so to speak, in their immediate workplace amid the research performativity discourse. Are there any divergent and shared patterns in their actions? If yes, why and how do their actions diverge or resemble? With these questions, together with issues in the preceding sections, I defined my research questions.

## **Defining research questions**

The study is broadly situated within the socio-cultural understanding of learning. Teacher learning takes place at their workplace where they are organized into a department or form a group to carry out the daily professional practices and interact with others in the practices. Their learning is contingent on the immediate working context, that is, the department and interpersonal relationship and situated within the boarder organizational, social, cultural and historical contexts.

I drew upon multiple theoretical lenses and perspectives, in a way not to take a stance on any, but to juxtapose them so that they might help me to crystalize the complexity of teachers' lives, the lives when facing the challenge of educational change, that is, research performance becomes the important part of tertiary teachers' work. I hoped to understand CE teachers' lives concerning the following question:

What is the social process of teacher learning in a CE department in the context of educational change when research performance becomes an important part of CE teachers' work?

To understand the question, I focused on two interrelated aspects of social process of teacher learning: interpersonal relationship and identity. Two specific research questions were thus examined:

- How do CE teachers interact in research activities? What are the structure and meanings of their interactions? How are their interactions embedded in the organizational and broader social contexts?

A social network perspective to teacher learning as a group may not only enable me to articulate the internal social structure of this group but also identify the social capital residing in their interactions. The social capital may be resources, expertise and trust. From a poststructuralist perspective, it is equally important to understand the dynamic process of teachers' interactions and the social and cultural meanings shaped by the broader contexts.

- How do CE teachers negotiate identity?

Individuals understand and appropriate the meanings of their social, cultural and historical environment, a process of identity negotiation. How teachers negotiate identity in educational change not merely reflects both the wider social environment and immediate interactive context, rather it is simultaneously a process of struggling and

exercising agency. Particularly relevant to my study of teachers as a group, I went back to Sfard and Prusak's question: for teachers working as a group in the same workplace context, are there any divergent and shared patterns in teachers actions? If yes, why and how do their actions diverge or resemble?

## **Chapter summary**

Anchoring in socio-cultural perspective on learning and inspired by critical remarks toward the theory of community of practice, I reconceptualized CE teachers' workplace learning from two aspects: teachers' social networks and identity. The two aspects could illuminate teachers' social learning process from the level of interpersonal relationship, the level of the community and broader contexts where interactions take place, and the personal level of identity negotiation. The conceptualization oriented my research questions as well as the process of data collection and analysis, which will be explained in the next chapter.

## **Chapter IV Ethnographying**

By ‘ethnographying’, I mean the process of my doing research to be always changing. It is not only about my changing attitudes and perspectives, and the evolving relationship with participants, as is generally suggested that an ethnographer needs to be open-minded (Brewer, 2000; Fetterman, 2010). It also means the divergent route I have been taking from my original research proposal. Moreover, it implies that my fieldwork has never stopped. I am always part of the fieldwork even I already exited that physical setting.

### **Ethnography, critical ethnography and narrative ethnography**

From the very beginning of the research, I had decided to adopt ethnography as the research strategy. The decision was stemmed from my wish to situatedly understand and present the lived experiences of CE teachers. Ethnography, according to Fetterman (1998, p. 1), is to understand ‘a group or culture’ and ‘the routine, daily life of people’. It is to capture ‘social meanings and ordinary activities’ of ‘people in naturally occurring settings’ (Brewer, 2000, p. 6). Since I hoped to understand how CE teachers experience the educational change and how they make meanings of research and their research practices, the best way, especially from the perspective of situated learning, seemed to be the one approaching from teachers’ professional activities at their workplace. Ethnography is a proper strategy that can enable me to systematically examine teachers’

own point of view about their working lives in the natural setting---their workplace.

The workplace is the one where I have been working: CED of TSU. It is my personal experience that initiated the study and it is one of my goals to understand how my colleagues experience the educational change and how our workplace affects our learning. My another goal is to obtain insights into an issue that nowadays most CE teachers face: how do they experience the increasing demand of research performance? CED of TSU stands out as a typical case that shares common characteristics of CE teachers' workplaces: TSU, a research-oriented university where research performance is an important part in the appraisal of its teachers; SFL, one of the largest foreign language education institutions in China boasting research strength in linguistics and western literature; CED, one of the biggest CE departments with numerous honours in CE teaching reforms. In this regard, the research is an instrumental case study (Stake, 2005). It is to understand the phenomenon of CE teachers' experiences during the educational change and, as noted in the preceding chapters, it is to get theoretical inferences from the case, a case that is embedded in unique Chinese social and cultural contexts and that may offer insights to the theory of community of practice. By this the research could achieve theoretical generalization (Yin, 2009).

Bearing in mind of nonjudgemental orientation suggested by Fetterman (2010), I set up steps of research plan and went into the field. Nonjudgemental orientation means I should not let my personal valuation and bias get into teachers' cultural practices. And I had been in a strong belief that a researcher should 'be separated out, neutralized, minimized, standardized and controlled' (Krieger, 1991, p. 1). I gradually found I am



impossible to be neutral. I myself am a product of that culture: I have been working in this workplace for a decade. I am a CE teacher, like my participants. I am their colleague. On the first day of my going back to the workplace, every colleague I met greeted me warmly and inquired a lot about my PhD life. How can I possibly detach myself from them? I am part of their professional landscape and I am part of their stories. So, how can I keep a 'view from nowhere'(Nagel, 1986) ?

Since I realized I cannot be neutral to what I see and what I have experienced, I decided not to take traditional ethnography trying to tell 'it like it is' and be ' true to the natural phenomena'(Brewer, 2000, p. 37). I understood there is no real reality or truth insisted by postpositivism. Rather I took a constructivism stance that realities are co-constructed in local and specific contexts (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011).

I also aligned myself with the critical understanding of the world---'virtual reality shaped by social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, and gender values' (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011, p.100) and that the research needs to identify 'oppression and inequality' in society (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000, p. 153). The stance challenged me to reconceptualize the fundamental task of the interpretation of culture. Although some scholars see that ethnography is to interpret 'the shared patterns of culture' about the 'culture-sharing group' (Creswell, 2007, pp. 78-79) and to look for 'a logical, cohesive pattern' (Fetterman, 2010, p.16), I followed some researchers' question against the 'shared' and 'cohesive' notion of culture (e.g. Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Canagarajah, 1993; Cohen et al., 2000). Culture is inextricably shaped by power relations and there are inescapable conflicts and contestations among people. For this reason, in addition to my

understanding that a teacher group does not necessarily make a community of practice, but is possibly a site of conflicts and struggles, I chose to undertake critical ethnography. According to Cohen et al. (2000, p. 153), critical ethnography has such characteristics as:

Research and thinking are mediated by power relations;

These power relations are socially and historically located;

Facts and values are inseparable;

Relationships between objects and concepts are fluid and mediated by the social relations of production;

Language is central to perception;

Certain groups in society exert more power than others;

Ideological domination is strongest when oppressed groups see their situation as inevitable, natural or necessary;

Forms of oppression mediate each other and must be considered together (e.g. race, gender, class).

Since I realized my research cannot avoid issues like legitimacy, power, domination and empowerment, I could not stop interrogating the role I played in the research. What is the power relation between my participants and me? Do I enact power over them? Vice versa, do they enact power over me? If I were not this me, what might the research be like? If I were not a PhD researcher but a common teacher, would my participants discuss PhD study with me? If I were not their colleague but an external researcher, would we talk

about our CE teaching? If I were not a woman but a man, what would be our topics? If I were not a qualitative but a quantitative researcher using questionnaires and structured interviews, what would teachers say and not say? I constantly found myself in ‘the hall of mirrors’ (Riessman, 2015) where I could see myself here and there. I could not stop asking myself: who am I? Where am I?

I am a producer, ‘the creator of the sign, the sender of the message’ (Riessman, 2015, p. 220). I am in the co-production of narratives resulting in what was said and what was unsaid. My persona---a CE teacher, a PhD candidate, a woman, a mother, forming a thinking, feeling and reacting participant observer, is deeply embedded in the research. I am in ‘how a story is told interactionally’ (Riessman, 2015, p. 222).

I am over and beyond what is said. I chose to do the research because I myself had been pondering over my own experience. I transcribed the recorded interviews, a process of translation. And I translated them into English. I studied in a college where I heard stories of teacher educators’ struggles in the research discourse here in New Zealand. This gave me insights into CE teachers’ experiences from an international perspective. Throughout the process, my personal experiences and judgment are an inextricable part of the research.

The ‘I’ issue finally, and naturally led me to narrative ethnography. I saw my inseparable role in the research process rather than produce ‘crisis of representation’, but create an opportunity to write collective stories of a teacher group by one of its own teachers. There was an irresistible surge inside me to tell their, no, our stories.

Narratives have been widely considered as one of basic ways for people to organize experience. For me, I understand narrative inquiry as an umbrella term for a variety of approaches that see stories as central to understanding teachers' experiences. Narrative inquiry is 'an extension of doing ethnography' (Slembrouck, 2015, p. 239). As Slembrouck contends, story-telling is central to 'doing research in a real-life context of engagement with real people who make sense of the complexities of the world(s) they inhabit' and it focuses on 'the contextual construction of meaning and the possibility of multiple perspectives on reality' (p. 240). To be a narrative ethnographer, I am particularly concerned with four issues: the meaning of experience, voice, research as a story and making a social change.

Narrative ethnography explores the meaning of experience. By telling events in narratives, the narrators, that is, my participants and I interpreted and explained those events and simultaneously evaluated and attached meaning to the events and the wider contexts where they took place. To this point, Polkinghorne (1988, p. 11) defines narrative as 'the primary scheme by means of which human existence is rendered meaningful'. Bruner (1990, p. 35) conceives narratives as 'organizing principles' for people to 'organize their experience in, knowledge about, and transactions with the social world'. In relation to teacher education, Goodson (1995) also emphasizes the potential of narrative research 'for advancing educational research in representing the lived experience of schooling' (p. 89).

Voice is another concern of narrative ethnography, that is, to share the experiences of particular groups. In this regard, my research foregrounded the need for a group of

teachers' voice to be heard, like how Clandinin and Connelly (1996) and McLaughlin and Tierney (1993) talk about teachers' stories. Teachers' stories allow teachers' voice to be heard. My research therefore pointed to the issue of what counts as knowledge and valued insider knowledge (Johnson & Golombek, 2002).

Another reason I combined narrative inquiry with ethnography is that ethnography itself is generally seen as story, 'a credible, rigorous, and authentic story' (Fetterman, 2010, p. 1). Ethnography is often perceived as 'a narrative account of a quest, discovery and interpretation' (Cortazzi, 2001, p. 7). Due to the story-telling feature, I was aware of the issue of performance. Many narratives bear the features of voice, expression, gestures and are performed in narrative environments---what is said, and 'about what, why, how and to whom' (Chase, 2011, p. 422). For this, I had been ethnographic sensitive by considering 'the communicative mechanisms, circumstances, purposes, strategies, and resources that shape narrative production' (Gubrium & Holstein, 2009, pp. vii-viii). As Denzin (1997) argues, the performance of a narrative and its cultural meaning is the most powerful way to uncover the meanings of lived experience.

The critical orientation of my research highlights the importance of empowerment. The research attempted to advance a public space to let the stories of marginalized people be heard. People use a range of strategies in their narrating pertaining to cultural discourses and their stories are constrained but not determined by those discourses. This helped me to identify the oppressive discourse. Chase (2011) argues, 'a worthy goal of narrative inquiry' is that the resistant narratives from people may change their attitudes and beliefs. This is one goal of my research as well. In addition, working collaboratively

with participants in narrative inquiry might, as Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) point out, helps to better the quality of participants' everyday experiences.

So far I have portrayed how my understanding of ethnography evolved. It is a process of ethnographing: from the initial attempt to give 'an accurate representation of reality' (Brewer, 2000, p. 25) to a critical imperative to discover the 'oppression and inequity' and to narrative ethnography to produce a reflexive writing of 'tales of the field' (Brewer, 2000, p. 25).

As for the how to discern the quality of such highly reflexive writing, Richardson and St. Pierre (2011) deconstruct the traditional notion of 'validity' by proposing the idea of 'crystallization'. That is, what we see depends on 'our angle of repose'. There is no single truth. Rather, we see 'how texts validate themselves' (p.963). Understanding the notion of crystallization, I sought to provide a complex, in-depth and thoroughly partial understanding of CE teachers' lived experiences. Two criteria suggested by Richardson and St. Pierre (2011) were helpful in guiding my writing. First, *substantive contribution*. My writing about CE teachers should contribute to the understanding of academics' social lives amid the research discourse, particularly those teaching-oriented academics. And it should be a credible account of a 'cultural, social, individual, or communal sense of the "real"' (p.964). To accomplish this, the strong rapport and trust between me and my participants, and my insider role enabled me to go in-depth into CE teachers' lives. *Reflexivity* is the second criterion. I sought to provide adequate self-awareness and self-exposure of my being, both as a producer and as a product of the text, such as making evident my multiple persona and the various power relations between me and participants.

In this way, readers can interpret the text and make judgements about the point of view being presented with the knowledge of how I, the researcher, knew and told the stories of the people I had studied. Riessman (2008) proposes another concern for narrative study: *consistency*. This required me, on one hand, to situate the narrative within the large social or political structure so that the consistency could be found. On the other hand, I also compared the narrative with archival material, such as official documents, and other individual's narratives. By comparing similar or different threads throughout the narratives, I sought to present the consistency of events across time.

To accomplish crystallization and the sense of the 'real', the study followed systematized steps in practice. In the following sections, I will present the process of the fieldwork which involved multiple data sources and analysis approaches.

## **Fieldwork**

As an insider of the field, my entry into the field took place easily and naturally. Knowing I would go back for doing fieldwork, Qi, the head teacher of CED, cordially asked me to choose a course to teach. During the autumn of 2014 I stayed in the field and taught a CE course for the whole semester. I did rounds of social network mapping interviews, had in-depth narrative interviews and numerous casual and small talks and searched through a range of official documents.

## **Social network mapping interviews**

To explore the configuration of the people or the social structure is the basic concept for ethnographers (Fetterman, 2010). For this, I used qualitative social network approach to map the social structure of research interactions among teachers in CED. My purpose was to understand the full relational social network among them. Full relational social network is to identify ‘key relationships among and between all of the members’ of a group (LeCompte, Schensul, Singer, Trotter II, & Cromley, 1999, p. 6). Following LeCompte et al.’s network sampling strategies, I carried out social networking mapping interviews through three nodes.

### ***The first node***

I first selected ten CE teachers by using purposeful sampling according to their age, gender and position. I had considered to select participants based on Huberman’s (1993) theoretical model of teachers’ professional life circle: career entry; stabilization; experimentation/ activism; reassessment/self-doubts; serenity and relational distance; conservation and disengagement. I later found the minimum working years of CE teachers was over five years and they were usually bracketed by the age of forty, for example, the young teachers, those under the age of forty, were required to submit a research plan every year, or to participate the annual teaching competition in TSU. CE teachers themselves as well referred to themselves and each other as young teachers or senior teachers by the age of forty. Therefore I considered the age of forty as one of strategies in participants selection: the younger teachers below forty and the senior teachers over forty.



After ten focal participants were selected, each of them--the *ego*, was asked to identify his or her ego-centric or personal research social networks by naming their research ties, or *alters* on social network maps (See Appendix II).

I gave each participant the map a week before we took the interview so that they could have time to consider their research networks. To help participants to identify their research ties, I incorporated Pahl and Spencer's (2004) three strategies to design the social network map: first, role relationship approach. The participants were asked about the people they knew in a particular context, for example the question 'who do you often attend the academic conference with?'; second, social exchange approach, the participants were asked to identify those whom they might turn to in specific situations, such as the question 'who do you turn to or discuss with if you have a problem in research'; third, affective ties approach. The teachers nominated those with whom they felt they had a special relationship, like the question 'who do you think helps you the most in your research'.

On the day of interview, each participant wrote down the names of their alters according to the closeness of their research relationship on the social network map and then took an in-depth, semi-structured interview with me. The interviews were framed around how they built up research ties with each alter they identified, how they interacted in research, why they put different alter at certain place and why they went to some ties not others. The interviews also addressed teachers' conceptions of and engagement in research because I thought different research attitudes and behaviours might impact the nature and configuration of their networks.

### *The second and third nodes*

The ten focal teachers in the first node produced a number of alters including fourteen CE teachers, among whom I selected another ten CE teachers for the second node to do social network mapping interview. This time no new CE teachers emerged from networks. I then decided to select another eleven CE teachers among those who were excluded from any networks during the first two nodes. These teachers did not produce any new CE teachers either. I thus concluded the three nodes of social network mapping interviews were sufficient for me to understand the full relational research social network among this group of teachers. Besides, According to LeCompte et al (1999), two to four nodes in a relational network study are a feasible plan. Altogether, thirty-one CE teachers participated in the study. Twenty-six of them are women, the result of more than 80% of teachers in CED being women. The interviews ranged from thirty minutes to two hours and were done in Mandarin.

### **Participant observation and narrative interviews**

My role as an insider enabled me to collect a series of institutional documents such as recruitment and promotion policies and teachers' professional development plans. As a CE teacher, I was able to participate in various professional activities including doing CE teaching and attending teachers' meetings. The long-term relationship between me and CE teachers as colleagues led to our numerous small talks and casual chatting in both professional and private occasions. These observations were recorded as fieldnotes.

The casual talks and our frequent interactions in various occasions created opportunities for narrative interviews with some participants. These interviews were unstructured and took place in less formal contexts such as coffee shops and library. And these participants were chosen by multiple strategies, for example, by opportunity. Some teacher came to me frequently for information of applying overseas PhD. She talked about her puzzles, which I saw as an opportunity to better understand teachers. Some teacher was distinguished out as an extreme case for drawing the largest personal social network, so I hoped to know more of her experience. Most participants were women, thus, I purposively chose a male teacher to have a narrative interview. Eventually, eight CE teachers did narrative interviews with me and each interview took nearly three hours.

### **After fieldwork**

In the early month of 2015, I left the field and went back to New Zealand. This did not mean the end of my ethnographic fieldwork. I have been in contact with my colleagues and involved in online activities of SFL. I have never felt detached from the field and this gives the element of continuity and change to my understanding of CE teachers' lives.

I analysed and interpreted the interview transcripts and fieldnotes in a recursive, iterative manner. Each transcript was subjected to a close, line-by-line thematic coding. I then compared these initial codes, looking for relationships and restructuring and collaging them in order to identify potential themes.

The data analysis started to understand CE teachers' conceptions of and attitudes toward research and research engagement, resulting in a set of themes such as research-teaching nexus, types of research engagement, reasons for doing or not doing research, under which the corresponding extracts from all the interviews were assembled.

Next, I mapped each of thirty-one CE teachers' social networks and started with a priori codes suggested by the literature of social networks. These codes focused, for example, on each alter's locus—as a department or school or beyond-school network member—as well as on reasons for establishing ties, reasons for attaching 'importance' or 'less importance' to particular ties, the frequency of interaction and content of interaction. Then I subcoded data to address finer categories—for instance, by designating reasons for establishing tie with greater precision, such as alter's characteristics, prior professional relationship, friendship, shared values, etc. and by identifying the specific forms of interaction content, for example, encouragement, support in teaching, doing research together. Finally, I came to a full relational network analysis of this group of teachers' interactions. By drawing sociograms, I identified the structural patterns of teachers' research interactions and how these patterns explained teachers' research practices.

As for narrative analysis, I understand interview as 'an interactional context for storytelling' (De Fina, 2009, p. 234). I had been along with the participants in their narrative performance. Kasper and Prior (2015) suggest to take into consideration of stories *in* interaction and stories *as* interaction when analysing interviews as story-telling. For example, excerpt 1 in Appendix III could be treated as a story *in* interaction, or a *big story* (Freeman, 2006). It happened in an interview when the participant took an extended

narrative turn into telling one of her significant life events. For such stories, I used thematic analysis to categorize the narrative data and organize them into themes. Excerpt 2 could be seen as a story *as* interaction between the participant and me, or a *small story* which is ‘narratives-in-interaction or more fragmentary accounts of experience in everyday talk’ (Benson, 2014, p. 155). In excerpt 2, the interviewee changed the question-answer format and roles of narrator and narratee were reallocated. The interviewee took charge of the interaction and I became the one to provide answer. The interview became an ‘interactively accomplished co-narration’ (Slembrouck, 2015, p. 242). For such stories, I used Riessman’s (2008) performative approach that foregrounds “‘who’ an utterance may be directed, ‘when’, and ‘why’, that is, for what purpose?” (p. 105). Besides incorporating the notions of *big story* and *small story*, I also followed Barkhuizen’s (2010) suggestion to examine the broader historical, political and cultural contexts of which narrator’s story is a part.

## **Ethical issues**

Due to the ethnographic and narrative nature of the research, I consider ethical issues as a primal concern. With each participant, I explained the details and the implications of my research. Each participant signed the consent form with a full understanding of the research and the content form which had been previously approved by Educational Research Human Ethics Committee (ERHEC) in my university (See Appendix I).

During the analysis and writing, I sought to protect the confidentiality of all data by adopting pseudonyms and presenting stories in aggregate forms as much as possible. I

understand the complete anonymity is impossible as teachers including myself were exposed to dense narrative work and thick-description. Therefore, I returned my writing, including the transcripts, the English translation of quotations and stories I wrote, to the narrators so that they knew how they were presented and decided if they would accept it.

As a narrative researcher and the insider of the field, I had been intensely involved in teachers' professional and private lives. The intimacy between participants and me on one hand took me into a deeper understanding of their, or our lived experiences, on the other hand it might make us highly vulnerable. I tried to keep a balanced 'ethical attitude' (Josselson, 2007) between listening to voices within the narratives and selecting voices based on my moral and political beliefs rooted from my Chinese cultural and political contexts. Richardson says about story-telling,

The story of a life is less than the actual life, because the story told is selective, partial, contextually constructed...But the story of a life is also more than the life...others seeing themselves, knowing themselves through another's life story, re-visioning their own, arriving where they started and knowing 'the place for the first time'(1997, p. 6).

## **Chapter summary**

In this chapter, I portrayed my ethnographing experience: how I evolved from a realist ethnographer who sought to be 'an impersonal conduit' to write about 'objective data' (Brewer, 2000, p. 41) to a critical and narrative ethnographer who was value-laden

and embedded in the research. I intended, with a hope of social transformation, to expose the working context of a group of CE teachers that might be imbued by ubiquitous power relations as well as to listen to and amplify teachers' voices. I followed systematic steps to design and implement the research including multiple data sources, such as documentaries, social network maps, in-depth interviews and participant observation. For these data, I adopted a number of analysis approaches including social network analysis, thematic analysis and narrative analysis.

I am aware of ethical issues of researching a group of teachers with whom I have intimacy developed from years of working together. The ethical dilemma I face as an insider as well as a critical and narrative researcher forged the writing of the next two chapters as 'selective, partial, contextually constructed' (Richardson, 1997, p. 6). To write the stories, I borrowed the notion of 'story constellation' from Craig (2007), an approach that presents teachers' stories as 'nests of boxes' (Crites, 1975) and that their narratives of experiences relate to one another. Ayers (1995) describes the relationships between and among these interacting teachers' narratives. He says, 'there is, of course, not a single story to tell, but a kaleidoscope of stories, changing, flowing, crashing against one another, each one playing, light and shadow, off the others in an infinity of ... patterns' (p. 155). My story telling in the next two chapters tries to present how

more than one plot can provide a meaningful constellation and integration for the same set of events and different plot organizations can change the meaning of the individual events as their roles are reinterpreted according to their function in a particular plot (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 142).





## **Chapter V Social Networks: Stories on and behind Maps**

Communities and networks have stories – how they started, what has happened since, what participants are trying to achieve. It is in the context of these narratives that one can appreciate what learning is taking place (or not) and what value is created (or not).

(Wenger, Trayner, & de Laat, 2011, p. 15)

CE teachers lived in their professional landscape, simultaneously living and shaping their social networks. They lived and told network stories, stories of learning taking place, of value being created. And I, as part of their networks, now retell these stories. My retelling of these stories is not just based on thirty-one teachers' social network mapping interviews. It is told by me who always interacted with these teachers as both a researcher and as a CE teacher.

The story telling in this chapter starts with me, who as a researcher sought to build up ties and rapport with her research participants. It is then followed by stories of how teachers drew or did not draw their social network maps, how they experienced being included in their colleagues' maps, and how they identified important or unimportant research ties. Finally, I tell a story of me who as a CE teacher herself did research among these CE teachers and became part of their networks. All these stories, either drawn on

the maps or told behind the maps, portray a picture of how CE teachers interacted in research activities within the web of their social relationships.

**‘It is a headache for you who deliberately try to find a place, let alone for us’**

It was 9 o’clock in the morning. I decided to go to SFL and take a stroll. My purpose was to see where and how I could publicize my information sheet. I went into SFL building. I pressed three on the lift. At the third floor, all staff offices including CED office were located.

The CED office was locked. I knocked at the door. No one answered. I should have expected this. My past experience told me it was locked most time especially now it was 10 o’clock in the morning when all the CE teachers must be working at different buildings. Passing the CED office to the end of the corridor, I saw the bulletin board outside the SFL office. Here I could post my research information sheet, I thought. I quickly dismissed the plan. There was little chance for CE teachers to see it. They seldom came here.

Along the corridor a display panel was placed with photos of teachers’ smiling faces. It was made to celebrate the upcoming Teachers’ Day. I read the red inscriptions on the board: SFL, Our Family. My photo was not in the ‘family’. I seldom submitted my photos for such activities. Sometimes I missed the notification, sometimes I just did not bother to

walk a long way to come here. There were few photos of other CE teachers either.

I got no idea of how to publicize my information sheet after wandering around the third floor. I felt a little bored. Our office was closed. No CE colleagues were here. I decided to go back home. I went into the lift with a group of students. They talked on as the lift descended, without noticing me. Certainly they could not know me. I am a CE teacher. They are EM students. CE teachers do not work here. EM students could not know us.

At the end of the day I thought of two ways to recruit my participants: to contact them individually or to go to the public teaching buildings to look for them.

The first teacher coming into my mind was Hong. She is an enthusiastic teacher, amiable and helpful. For a novice researcher who for the first time attempted to ask people to do interview, Hong should be the easiest person to talk to. Like what I had expected, she was quick to accept my invitation, although adding to say, 'I didn't actually do any research'. My first attempt succeeded. Feeling encouraged, I turned to the next teacher, Dan. I used to see her attend academic lectures often and we were quite familiar. She must be interested in my research. Somewhat out of my expectation, Dan was hesitant. She wanted to know more about the research. We spent a whole morning together. She asked me lots of questions about doing PhD overseas and my research methods, while kept saying 'I didn't do research. I have no one to associate in research'. At that night, Dan sent me a message to tell me her decision of rejecting my invitation because she 'really did not do research' and did not know what to talk in interview.

Dan's refusal worried me. If the teacher like her who seemed to be interested in research rejected my invitation for the reason of 'I did not do research and have no one to associate in research', would other teachers reject me as well? A few days later, I came to Wenhui building. A grey and old building of the 1980s, Wenhui building used to be where SFL was located and now is transformed into a public teaching building after SFL moved to its new building. Today I came here because I knew I could find some CE teachers here.

On entering the building, I heard teachers talking. It was 2:00. They must be in the staff lounge, ready to work starting from 2:30. On two long sofas five or six colleagues were seated. A tea table and a desk were placed in front of the sofas, making the small lounge rather cramped. Two students were watching the video from the computer. They did part-time work here, occasionally helping teachers to solve the computer problem during the class. I talked to the teachers about my research. To my relief, they all accepted without further asking. It was 2:20. They had to go to their classrooms. On stepping out of the door, a teacher turned back, pointing to the corner and calling to me, 'Hey, in the box over there were questionnaires from a PhD student. You may do it if you're free or take some to others'.

Now the problem of participant selection seemed solved. Then came another issue: where and when to do interview? Generally CE teachers appeared at campus only when they had classes and after class, as two CE teachers, Tan and Jun said, 'go back home'. Therefore, the participants and I usually did the interview right after their classes, the most convenient time for them. Sometimes we had to end the interview in haste when

participants suddenly realized they should hurry to catch their next class. To find a place for interviews also caused me uneasiness. We often tried to find a vacant classroom nearby. Such a classroom was not easy to find. They were often taken by other public classes or for students' activities as public teaching buildings were open to all students. If we were lucky to find one, I would cross my fingers hoping the classroom would not be for use during the time of interview. I described this as 'a headache' to Yi, a teacher in late 40s. She commented,

It is a headache for you who deliberately try to find a place for us to talk, let alone for us who are not that motivated. Who can I talk to, where and when can we talk? There are no such opportunities.

Because of 'no such opportunities', a number of participants saw the interview with me as a 'scarce occasion' for professional communication. A thirty years old teacher Hai said it was very rare for him to arrange a talk about work with a colleague as CE teachers seldom contacted with each other. Sen, a teacher in late 40s, claimed there was no one she could talk with about work including me if it was not for the sake of interview as CE teachers rarely met. Fu, a young teacher, gave more details of CE teachers' work,

Our classrooms scattered around the campus. You may be at the north campus, I may be at the south and she may be at the far east. We could only go back home after working. We don't even have an office. Yes, there is a CED office in SFL, but only a few have access to it. If we had an office, I might go there occasionally, then have more associations with

colleagues. The fact is we CE teachers have no at least one office. If there could be even a small cubicle for each of us, we may go there for meeting or any casual talk. More meetings, more communication. With more communications, we might find some common interest in research. Now we just shut ourselves in our homes, without knowing each other (about what they are doing).

Fu's comment has been confirmed by social network researchers who examine reasons for people to build up ties. The physical proximity is found to be important to promote the likelihood of communication and increase the probability of interaction (Borgatti & Cross, 2003). Proximity leads to chance meeting, like Fu remarked, 'more meetings, more communication', so that people gradually come to know each other and help to develop bonds. The dispersed working locations and the lack of a shared place physically blocked CE teachers' interactions. Although privacy and individuality as longstanding norms for teachers' work has been found to inhibit collaborative professional relationship (Little, 1990), CE teachers' work setting seems more isolated and inhibiting: they work in their classrooms that are isolated in scattered buildings in a large campus. Even for me, in Yi's words, 'who deliberately tried to find a place to talk', failed to find a common place to publicize my research and got uneasy to find proper time and place for interviews. I suspected, how often would other CE teachers communicate with others?

## **‘I can’t draw the map. I didn’t interact with anyone in research’**

Early since Dan refused to join the research, I had been worried if other teachers might refuse me for the same reason. My worry was reasonable. Although my research invitation was never rejected again, most of teachers told me they ‘actually didn’t associate with anyone in research’. A middle-aged CE teacher, Xie explained why she agreed to participate into my research,

I did consider thoroughly about my research activities after you invited me. I have no research ties, but I thought I might be a negative case for your research, so I accepted your invitation.

Although talking herself as a ‘negative case’, Xie drew a map with a few names, probably out of her wish to help my research. Lian, a fifty years old teacher, was more straightforward. She bluntly refused to draw the map although she agreed to be a participant. I still remembered my embarrassment at the encounter of this first blank map. On the day of interview, Lian took out the map I gave her a few days ago and put it aside without a glance of it, saying ‘I didn’t draw it. How can I draw it without any research activities?’ I was a little embarrassed as I had never expected a blank map. I told Lian she was identified as a research tie by some participants. She quickly dismissed it and said, ‘those are not research at all. Such activities make no sense’. Anyway, my embarrassment gradually vanished as more participants refused to draw the map and I finally got six

blank maps. I started to take these blank maps and teachers' refusals as natural and as part of my research experience as well as part of data.

Whether drawn or not, the maps produced by thirty-one participants led me to draw a sociogram (see Figure 1) showing the full relational map of CE teachers' research interactions. The sociogram drew most CE teachers as isolated members as most of them never appeared in any participant's network. Among participants, they and their alters were also involved in merely dyadic connections. None of the connections among them was particularly intense. This reveals that the group was of low density in research activities. For this, a forty years old teacher, Jun, described CE teacher group as '*yipan sansha*', or *a tray of loose sand*, saying, 'everybody is doing by herself. No one organized any activity to get us together now since Lin retired'.



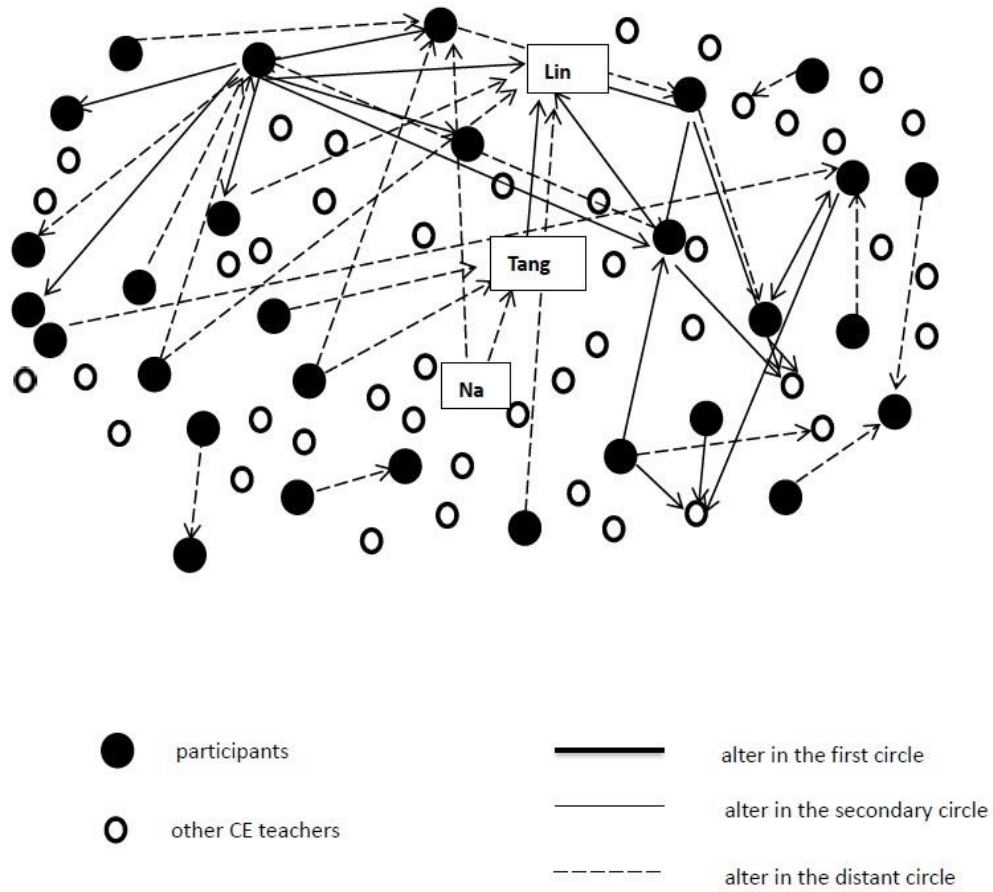


Figure 1. sociogram of full relational research social network of CE teachers

Jun mentioned Lin, who was often talked about by CE teachers during the interviews. On SFL website Lin was introduced as: a Star Teacher of the province, the first prize

winner of national teaching excellence, the leader of national CE reform, the general editor of multiple national key CE textbooks who had obtained numerous teaching awards. Lin stood out as a ‘star’ in Figure 1 as she had the most direct and indirect links with teachers. Eight participants drew her into their maps and the rest, although they did not draw Lin’s name in their maps, they had alters who were connected with Lin. For example, as Figure 1 shows, in Na’s network, she identified Tang as her research tie. And Tang identified Lin as a research tie and emphasized Lin’s leadership in organizing CE reform research activities that she, Na and other CE teachers were all involved in.

Lin was the former leader of CED. Her leadership in CE reform was recognized by many participants. Hong talked about Lin’s support in several aspects: task allocation, encouragement, opportunities for publications and conferences and funding support. Hong recalled how her online-teaching research was supported by Lin,

I’m interested in online teaching. Lin arranged me to be the administrator in charge of online teaching here in CED. She also took me to several CE conferences to share my experience in this respect. I had a publication based on my teaching reflection, for which Lin gave much advice...You know the experiment of ‘white board’ teaching? For the experiment, I needed some new appliances in my classroom. Lin was glad to hear about my idea. She encouraged me to engage more teachers into this experiment and tried to get funding to buy those appliances.

Similarly, many participants referred to their interactions with Lin in the CE reform

teaching-research, such as compiling textbooks, implementing new teaching approach, writing teaching-research papers and attending CE reform conferences. Jing was still grateful when talking about Lin's encouragement for her to improve her 'content-based' teaching approach practice,

When Lin knew my practice of the teaching approach, she thought it was interesting and kept asking me to write a paper to share with other teachers. By her push, I wrote a paper. Later, she encouraged me to make a speech on the CE conference. Because of her encouragement, I found what I did was significant and valuable. I felt my work recognized.

However, neither Hong nor Jing deemed Lin as an important research tie. They put Lin's name on the outskirts of their maps, because, as Jing said, 'these were not research by the official definition'. In fact, all the participants who recognized Lin's leadership in teaching-research activities put her at the secondary or distant circle of maps. This is illustrated by Figure 1, in which all the connections with Lin are in thin or broken lines. Not a single connection is in bold line. The participants' ambivalent attitudes toward Lin could be easily sensed. Ma came to me the next day of the interview, telling me she still felt unsure if she should have included Lin in her mapping. She asked me if the teaching-research done with Lin counted as research. I did not give her a definite answer. I myself was confused too. Would I write Lin's name if I were to draw a map? Probably not. Although I had also participated in Lin's activities, I would only draw the research ties during my PhD study.

Hai was like me. He used to be a major member of Lin's CE reform project and now was studying toward a PhD. He commented on his research experience before the PhD study as 'zero' and what he had done with Lin was not research,

The research experience before my PhD study should be said as zero, if judged by the criterion of publication. It is true I learnt a lot from working with Lin, but it is teaching- research according to the standards.

It is easy to find out the standards. The SFL documents categorize clearly between *keyan*, or scientific research and *jiaoyan*, or teaching- research. *Keyan* assesses teachers' research performance in high-level publications and research funding of certain level. *Jiaoyan* includes textbooks compiling, teaching awards, and other teaching-related research practices that are not in the form of high-level publications. *Keyan* accounts for decisive weighing in appraisal of teachers' work. A TSU document titled as *teaching and research performance criteria for promotion* states clearly the quantity of A-level publications and funding in the aspect of *keyan* in addition to a minimal requirement on the aspect of *jiaoxue*, or teaching and teaching-research.

Apparently, the participants understood the difference between *keyan* and *jiaoyan* and regarded Lin being not a leader in 'real' research activities by positioning her at the outskirts of their maps. What about the present leader, a cognitive linguistics researcher? He was identified as a research tie only by three participants. His sporadic ties with teachers, explained by a young teacher, Mei, partially attributed to his research background in cognitive linguistics, while most CE teachers were interested in teaching-

research. Some teachers said they could not understand his linguistics research and felt difficult to seek out research guidance. For example, Mei, whose research interest was action research, voiced her concern,

I know many young teachers long to get guidance and do some research, but it seems no one dares to...don't know who to ask for help or to consult. I feel here in CED we have no leader.

Some participants saw it is not because CED had no 'good researchers', but because the 'good researchers' were constantly transferred to EMD. Fu gave the example of Chen, a former CE teacher now working as a professor in EMD. She said,

You see, Chen, he is a good researcher. Because of this, he gradually transferred to EMD. It seems here in CED we only need to teach well and don't need good researchers.

That 'CE teachers only need to teach well' seems quite common throughout Chinese universities. Xia (2009) and Bai, Millwater, and Hudson (2013) found in most CE departments teaching is well managed by leaders in their departments while there lacks research leadership. Moreover, Liu and Dai (2003) discovered that in every university they investigated, the teachers with advanced degree were usually arranged to work in EM departments, while teachers without advanced degree were arranged to teach CE, confirming Fu's remark that CED 'does not need good researchers'.

But, is it true that CE teachers only need to teach well and CED does not need good

researchers? In all assessment and career promotion documents of TSU, CE teachers are treated with no difference from their tertiary colleagues. Although being called ‘public course teachers’, the title differentiating them from *zhuanryeke* teachers, or major course teachers, CE teachers are assessed by the same criteria with other academics. Although they have relatively heavier teaching load than other colleagues, they are expected to produce the same research output, a similar dilemma found in a number of investigations (e.g. Jiang, 2011; Liu & Dai, 2003). In addition, these studies found most universities used to adopt a preferential policy toward CE and other public courses teachers so that these teachers may have less research requirement for a promotion. However, in recent years, new performativity policies have replaced the preferential policy and all the academics compete under the same research requirement. Likewise, TSU has a similar policy change.

With twenty-five drawn maps and six blank maps, I wondered how I would analyse them. By quantitative social network analysis (SNA), the six teachers’ blank maps must be labelled as invalid and thus crossed out. Actually at the early stage of data analysis, I did think of ‘abandoning’ them. I was grateful I did not. What might be abandoned would not just be several sheets but also teachers’ voices and stories, the hidden stories behind the sociograms and shadowed by the grand narratives that talk about what is research and what activities count as research activities.

The story on the maps tells that the social structure of CE teachers’ research interactions is characterized as a decentralized group of low density, showing CE teachers do not interact with many others and there is no central actor through whom many ties

may run. However, Wenger et al. (2011) remind us that the social networks are shaped in the ‘context of narratives’ about ‘what counts as value for whom’ (p. 8). The official narrative of research here at the workplace is about high-level publications and funding and the narrative of teaching-research is about ‘it is not real research’ or ‘zero research experience’. Internalizing these narratives, the participants regarded themselves not engaging in ‘any research’ or as a ‘negative case’, thus they did not ‘interact with anyone’, resulting into a low-density group in research interactions. The conflicting narratives between the official definition of research and teachers’ engagement in teaching- research are further reflected in participants’ identification in consensus of Lin as a leader but rendering her with insignificance. For some participants, ‘to include Lin or not to’ even became a question. If CE teachers did not value their teaching- research ties, what if they were included by other CE teachers as a researcher? This is the story that follows.

### **‘They included me? I don’t think we did research!’**

It was the day I interviewed Hui. She wrote a name in the inner circle, then thought for a while, hesitantly put another teacher’s name on the outskirts, saying, ‘OK, just the two’. I was a little surprised to see only two names as Hui appeared in quite a few participants’ maps. After interview, I told her this on our way back home (without leaking specific teachers’ names), Hui was surprised, saying, ‘really? Why did they draw me? I don’t think we did research. We just worked together in the CE reform teaching-research’. She went on to ask if she should add them into her map as well for she previously thought only the research she did with her closest tie, a linguistics researcher in

EMD counted as research.

Hong was one of the participants who included Hui in her map but did not appear in Hui's (See Figure 2). According to Hong, both of them were interested in teaching writing and had communicated quite often in this aspect. Hong called the interactions with Hui as 'the research of how to improve teaching'. She had such research activities with other CE teachers too, for example, Sen. Hong described Sen being a teacher 'with many ideas' and a 'thoughtful person'. Hong found they shared 'a strong interest' in teaching pronunciation and thus cooperated in the joint teaching. They worked together in a survey to investigate students' pronunciation, later cooperated in joint paper writing and a conference speech.



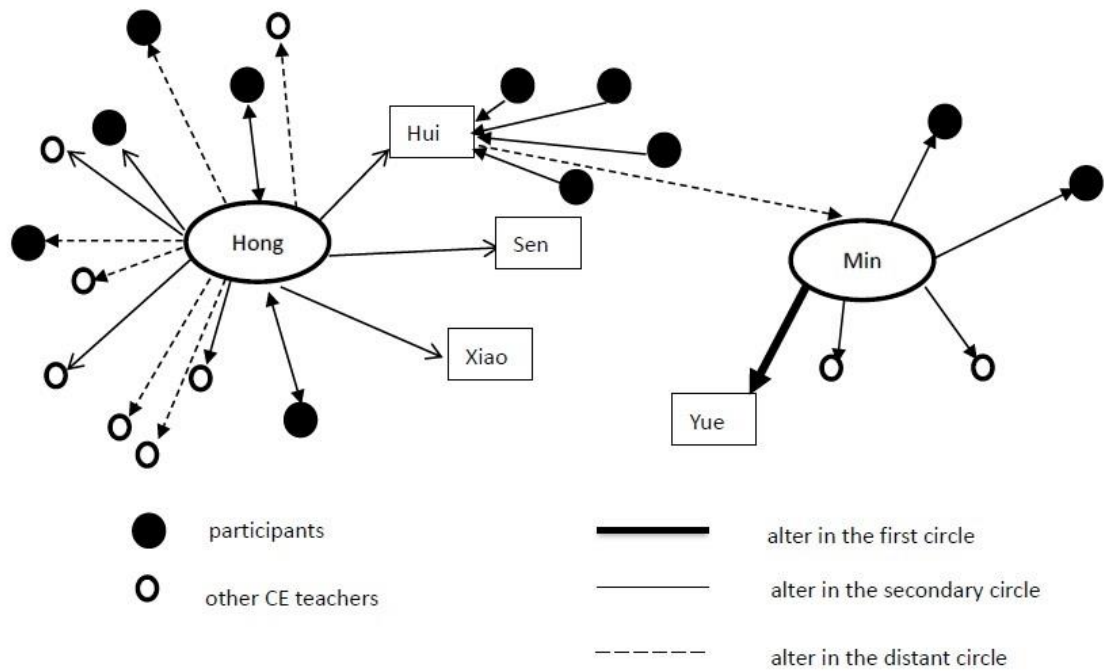


Figure 2 Personal research social networks of Hong and Min

However, Sen did not even draw the map. During the interview, Sen clearly knew Hong wrote her into her map and asked me,

You have interviewed Hong, haven't you? I guess she must have included me in her map. We had quite frequent communication in the aspect of teaching...I don't know how she feels. My feeling is that these can't be

said as real research. Actually, I always feel I'm not doing research.

Sen continued to explain her understanding of research,

By research I mean there must be theoretical advancement based on empirical data. It must be published, otherwise it can only be called kind of reflection. For me...or from the official level, research must be in the form of publications. Yes, I do reflect on my teaching, but I don't think what I did and what I reflected is research.

Feeling 'not doing research', Sen did not draw the map. Another participant, Xiao, was also identified as a research tie by Hong. Hong saw Xiao as an expert in educational technology and she often went to him for online teaching suggestions and they once wrote a book about internet-based test.

Xiao denied that his association with Hong was research activity. He did not draw Hong in his map, but did acknowledge their cooperation in educational technology. The cooperation, Xiao remarked, 'took place when we were doing teaching work'. He went on to indicate that their interactions were directed to solving practical teaching problems, rather than 'real research',

I didn't draw her name in my map not because she had less influence on me, but because these activities were related to practical teaching. The research must be published. Although we often talk about research and research may mean differently, in universities research must be in the

form of publications and funding.

Apparently, Sen and Xiao's understanding of research contradicted with Hong's. For Sen, Xiao and Hui, research was in the form of high-level publications and funding and for some teachers, like Hong, teaching-research was also a form of research. The contradictory understanding toward what is research led to their different identification of research networks. As a result, the sociogram in Figure 1 shows the low reciprocity between members and that the majority of teachers are one-way connected. Hui, Sen, Xiao and Hong's stories of including and excluding each other in their networks highlight the lack of mutual understanding in defining research and research relationship. And these stories were profoundly influenced by the workplace context that was imbued by various narratives of research.

If participants did not perceive CE colleagues as important research ties, who did they consider with significance? Were there other ties besides CE colleagues? Here comes the next story about participants' 'influential ties'.

**'I suggest you investigate EM teachers. They do research better than us'**

One of the advantages of being an insider of the field is that teachers gave me great trust and support. They often gave me advice for my research. For example, when Hong knew about my research, she 'sincerely' suggested that I investigate EM teachers because

‘they do research better than CE teachers’. Her suggestion reminded me of a senior CE teacher, Hua’s advice. Several years ago I planned to apply for a small research funding. I invited several CE colleagues into my research project, including Hua, an associate professor in CED. She suggested me, ‘you’d better invite some experts from EMD into your application. That may add to your chance of success’.

I wondered if other CE teachers would follow the suggestion when they applied for research funding. What seems certain is that my participants attached more importance to their ties with EM teachers than those with CE teachers. On eighteen out of twenty-five drawn maps, the closest ties of participants were located in EMD. These important alters shared the same characteristics: being professors or experts in linguistics or western literature. Some participants were linguistics PhD students. Their most important research ties turned out to be their supervisors working in EMD. For most non-PhD participants, they also identified those EM teachers as important ties. A case in point is Min’s network.

Min wrote five names on her map including Yue, an EM professor in the closest circle (See Figure 2). Yue was Min’s teacher before and often ‘encouraged’ Min to do research. Min described how they interacted,

We don’t meet face to face. Mostly we just communicate on phone. She often told me academic lecture information and asked me to attend...we didn’t work in any research project. Her influence mainly comes from encouragement. She occasionally called me and asked about my work, making me feel I should do research. Her push is the strongest influence I

get from her.

Like Min, most participants built up the ties with EM experts during their previous teacher-student relationship. Similarly, none of them were involved in research activities with their closest ties from EMD and they saw the encouragement from these experts as the major help. By these experts the participants felt encouraged but ‘not improved in research’. In addition, the interactions seemed to be oriented to teaching rather than research. For example, Hong described the teaching influence from one of her close ties, a professor in lexicology,

His way of teaching influenced my teaching. If I were to run a course, I would go to attend his lecture to see how he organized the class. He might have influenced my pedagogy, but without specific research impact.

Similarly, Xie portrayed how she learnt from the teaching of a professor in applied linguistics,

I was inspired by his teaching during my postgraduate study. From him, I learnt multiple ways to promote students’ learning. His influence mainly came from his teaching. I knew little of his research.

Min’s other ties were CE colleagues. Their interactions were centred on teaching and CE reform-related research. Their frequent interactions had made them good friends and they often ‘learnt from each other’. When asked why she put CE colleagues at the outskirts although they had frequent interactions, Min explained these activities were not academic

research and Yue was more influential in research,

You ask about research, don't you? Yue is a research expert and more influential in research. As for CE colleagues, they can't help me in academic research.

Yue would be the only person in my network before PhD study if I were to draw a map. When I considered applying for PhD study, I only thought of Yue who might help me. And my CE colleagues, like Min said, 'can't help me in academic research'. For this, a young teacher, Na, remarked, 'we CE teachers seem not *zhuanye*'. *Zhuanye*, in Chinese, sounds as 'major' or 'professional'. By using this word Na might mean that CE teachers were not English major teachers and not professional either.

That CE teachers seem not as *zhuanye* as EM teachers might explain why all the participants placed CE colleagues at the outskirts of their networks and most of their closest ties were located in EMD. The differentiation between CED and EMD goes far beyond the distance on maps. There are stories talking about how CE teachers and EM teachers are different. I remembered the interview with Chan.

The interview with Chan is the only one done inside the SFL building. Chan took me to a classroom and said, 'we just do it here, no one would bother us'. Remembering CE teachers having no office, I asked Chan if she owned one since she, a CE teacher, taught some EM courses. Chan told me she shared an office with other EM teachers and the office was 'not big', 'piled up with students' paperwork' and 'actually not that good'. However, Fu, a CE teacher who also taught some EM courses and had a shared office in

SFL, felt differently about the ‘not that good’ office. She said,

Even it is shared, it is a place for EM teachers to come and chat. Every teacher has a desk there and a key to the office. For CE teachers, we don’t even have an office.

Fu’s remark reminded me of the first day of going to the SFL building for my fieldwork, of that CED office’s always closed door .I am not the only one shut out. Mei described the feeling as ‘homelessness’. Jun commented on CE teachers as ‘not belonging to SFL’. Unlike EM teachers working in SFL and having a place in their offices, CE teachers had no place in SFL.

The difference in students is another aspect participants saw themselves different from EM teachers. A male young teacher, Hu explained that his lack of interest in research was partly because ‘students are different’. A young teacher, Jia further made it clear that doing research had less impact on teaching ‘especially for CE students’ because CE students’ motivations and attitudes toward English learning ‘are not comparable to EM students’. Jia’ comment is confirmed by Barkhuizen’s (2009) study which found students’ unwillingness to participate in their teachers’ research was one of constraints of CE teachers’ research engagement. In contrast, the participants considered EM students to be strongly motivated and interested in English learning and there were postgraduate research students in EMD. Therefore not surprisingly, Sen complained, ‘we have no students. Teachers in EMD have (students for doing research)’.

The story tells how participants interacted with those ‘influential’ ties located in the

other department of SFL, EMD. The story may be somewhat frustrating as the resources for doing research especially the ‘real’ research seem lacking. However, as teachers are always interacting and thus constructing a dynamic context, there are stories of change.

### **‘The interview is my first in-depth professional communication’**

I sometimes imagined how I might draw my research network. I could not think of any CE colleagues I had interacted in research. Therefore it was a surprise for me to see Mei draw me into her network. We had rarely talked or associated before as she lived in the north campus and I in the south. The only long conversation took place on the day I invited her into my research at a casual occasion. I introduced her about my research and she was interested in my overseas PhD study and asked me questions concerning her plan for PhD study.

Noticing my surprise, Mei explained,

I have few ties in research activity. It is the talk with you several days ago that reminds me of my past research enthusiasm and your experience motivated me to work for the PhD study I’m interested in.

I was also written in another young teacher, Meng’s network. Although she put me at the outskirts, I was still surprised. Meng said the interview could be a starting point for further interactions although we had not done so before. Several days later, Meng invited



me into a talk with another teacher. They two wanted to learn Nvivo with me and we spent the whole afternoon discussing their research proposals. Similarly, Fu, Jing and Hong once arranged two hours to learn Nvivo with me and I got to know other software from them. Besides, Hong described the interview with me as ‘very interesting’ because she learnt new research methods. Dan commented on network mapping interview ‘very different and new’ since what she knew about educational research was all about statistics and quantitative methods.

I could not imagine these interactions before my PhD study or even before my fieldwork. My becoming a researcher and my research done with teachers seemed to have impacted the dynamics of teachers’ networks. Na said she might have more interactions with CE teachers in the future as ‘more and more teachers are doing educational PhD research’. Although she did not draw me into her network, Na called me and other PhD teachers as ‘potential ties’.

Lei was one of the ‘potential ties’. Lei just finished her overseas doctoral research and found herself turned to for suggestions by quite a few teachers. For this, Lei remarked, ‘the research culture in CED is improving. Almost every young teacher is doing or considering doing a PhD’.

Colley et al. (2007) contend teachers’ participation in professional work interacts with the context and the actors and as the interactive process plays out, different dynamics arise. I as a researcher participated in teachers’ interactions and my experience of overseas PhD study became part of resources of research expertise.

## Chapter summary

The chapter starts from my story of establishing research ties with CE teachers, followed by the stories of how teachers reacted to my research invitation, how they drew social network maps, how they understood their roles in other teachers' networks. It ends with the story of how my participation added changes to teachers' networks.

There are stories on the maps and stories behind the maps. The stories on maps show that the social structure of CE teachers' research interactions can be characterized as a decentralized group without a core and of low density and low reciprocity. To be specific, among CE teachers, there is no research leadership or expertise and teachers have rare interactions with each other.

CE teachers' networks do not just reside in the maps. There are hidden stories. There was leadership by Lin who organized teaching-research activities and CE teachers were engaged in these activities. CE teachers had frequent interactions with their CE colleagues in teaching-research although these interactions seemed to be missing from their maps. There were a number of important research ties identified on the maps, while the hidden story tells that they actually had minimal research interactions with CE teachers.

There are stories of 'to draw or not to draw' and 'to include or exclude'. Some participants refused to draw map for the reason of having no research ties although they were involved in teaching-research. Some drew the map while claiming they 'actually' did not do research. Some included others in their networks while being excluded by

others.

There are stories of change. My research and interactions with CE teachers changed the dynamics of the interactive context. I am, together with other PhD teachers, becoming ‘potential ties’ in CE teachers’ social networks. I am also a co-producer of CE teachers’ identities. In the next chapter, I will tell the stories about how CE teachers including me constructed identities.

## **Chapter VI Identity: Becoming, Working, Being and Belonging**

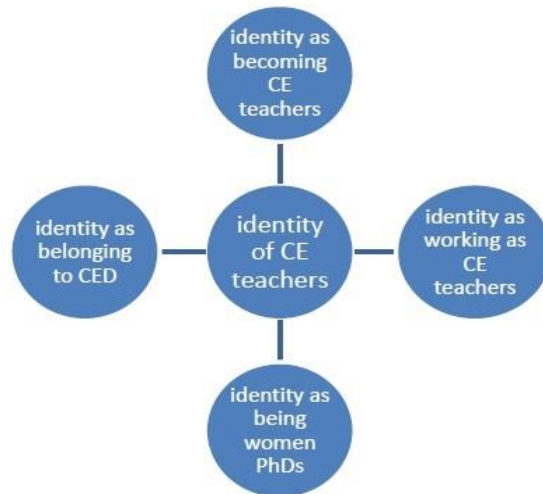
Story is the very stuff of teaching, the landscape within which we live as teachers and researchers, and within which the work of teachers can be seen.

Elbaz (1991, p. 3)

I have walked through the landscape with CE teachers. We lived and told stories not only in networks. I was implicated in the process of their identity construction, creating and maintaining a sense of ourselves and others. I, as a researcher with multiple personae, simultaneously developed interpersonal, context-based relationships with teachers. The unfolding events and interests formed 'webs of significance' (Geertz, 1973, p. 5) where CE teachers and I were a part. I was unable to predetermine our conversations neither did I know what topics the participants and I might explore. Identity work is an ongoing activity, a practical, context-specific project of everyday life (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000). I am a teacher of younger generation. When talking with me, the teacher of older generation compared my experience with hers that was embedded within the historical context of her time. Therefore, how we became CE teachers constituted part of our

identities; I taught CE during the fieldwork. My colleagues and I were involved in a new CE reform. Teaching work and CE reforms were a common topic in our interactions. Thus, the daily teaching work we participated formed part of our identities; as a PhD candidate, I was approached by many teachers for PhD study advice. With me, a woman teacher, a wife as well as a mother, many women teachers were concerned about how I handled my study and childcare as they faced the same problem. In this way, how we struggled between our being a woman and being a researcher spoke part of our identities; quite often, I was asked if I were to stay in CED or transfer to EMD after the completion of PhD study. Accordingly, the sense of belonging to CED made a part of our identities.

Therefore, my writing of teachers' stories is based on how the researcher (me) constructed meanings pertaining to 'what and how she saw, what she experienced and learned, what she shared' (Davis, 2003, p. viii). I presented the themes visually in the following diagram so that readers could 'get at' the identity of this group of CE teachers.



- Identity as becoming CE teachers: stories of how teachers became CE teachers and those of the initial professional development experiences
  - Identity as working as CE teachers: stories of CE teachers' experiences of CE teaching, especially of CE reforms and how they engaged in doing research
  - Identity as being women PhDs: Stories of women CE teachers' experiences before, during and after doing a PhD
  - Identity as belonging to CED: stories of CE teachers in, out or across the department of CED

**Figure 3 Four dimensions of CE teachers' identities**

As Figure 3 shows, the story telling in this chapter is centred on four themes: identity as becoming CE teachers, identity as working as CE teachers, identity as being women PhDs and identity as belonging to CED. The four themes offer a snapshot of CE teachers'

identities as becoming, working, being and belonging.

## **Becoming CE teachers**

Writing the title, I thought of Sen and the words she frequently spoke of, ‘that age’. I wondered why I did not ask Sen to clarify what that age was. For me or for many Chinese, we often hear ‘that age’ in films, novels or documentaries. It covers a rather vague time range. When did it start? When did it end? What is ‘this age’ then? What I am certain is I am not someone of ‘that age’. ‘That age’ has many labels such as planned economy, supply shortage, all kinds of coupons, such as coupons for rice, oil, cloth and the slogan of ‘collective interests go before individuals’. Why did Sen constantly relate herself to ‘that age’? It stood like a reminder that she is different from me and teachers of ‘this age’. Do our identities derive from ‘that age’ or ‘this age’? Liu and Hilton (2005, p. 1) say our histories ‘tell us who we are, where we came from and where we should be going’. We are as we are because of our past. The representation of our histories, of how we became CE teachers, of what our professional motivations and goals in part defines our identities.

The stories start from Sen and Lei, who entered CE profession in the late 1980s and the early 2000s. Sen called herself being a person of ‘that age’. Lei, of nearly my same age, could be said as a person of ‘this age’. Their stories, together with other CE teachers’, reveal CE teachers’ professional history ranging from the late 1980s to the 2000s.

## **Career choice or no choice?**

### *'It's state's imperative'*

Sen was born and grew up in a northeastern city of China, a city close enough to Beijing to render her with standard Mandarin accent and far enough to distinguish her from other teachers who were mostly from the southwest part of China speaking with the local accent. Sen always spoke gently and in a slow pace, leaving the impression as being tender and gentle. She entered Landa, a reputable university in China in the mid-1980s with high achievement in National College Entrance Examination (NCEE) and was the only or at best one of two students in her province accepted by Landa, as in the 1980s the university enrolment rate was extremely low, especially for the national key universities like Landa. There Sen received basic English skills training and never had any idea of what she might do after graduation as graduates only awaited the state's assignment in their final year and the skills for working were assumed to be developed from practical working. Sen recalled this sense of unknown future coming from her study,

Since we entered the university, we had no directions. We didn't know what we would do in the future...I don't know what I would do, to be a teacher or whatever. It's all allocated by the state.

Upon graduation, Sen was assigned to teach CE in SND, an agricultural college of her province even though she had never expected to be a teacher. She reflected, 'I was not sure if I would be a teacher, nor did I want to be a teacher...If I could choose, I may not



have become a teacher'. The allocation was not based on graduates' academic performance but followed the principle of 'going back to where you are from' and was in accordance with the state quotas.

Sen was strongly dissatisfied with her allocation. Agricultural colleges were generally considered as the most conservative and underdeveloped among tertiary institutions. What is worse was that English teaching was the least important course in such a specialized college. English teaching, not as an independent course, was part of a basic course department with other basic courses such as politics and math. Sen sighed, 'If I were sent to a different university, my life would be different. Judging from every aspect, the job was the worst assignment'.

With very complicated feelings, Sen accepted the job because the allocation was 'one to one' fixed. At that time, individuals were under strict state's control. Sen knew it was hardly possible to change. Two of her classmates succeeded in changing their allocations, but for Sen, then a twenty-one years old girl, living in Landa more than 2,000 kilometres away from her hometown, without any family or friends, she did not know what she could do nor could afford to do but to accept the allocation. When I asked her if she was interested in teaching at that time, she said in her always-peaceful tone,

If there were two choices such as you could be a teacher or not, I could consider this. There was no choice. It was an arrangement against your will. You might want to work somewhere else, but you couldn't. You were forced to go to this workplace. In this workplace, everything such as

your living or working conditions and your professional development were blocked. I suddenly felt all were dead ends.

Sen looked at me and continued,

I started working probably at the same age of you, 21 or 22, but in my generation jobs were allocated by the state. You couldn't say 'I don't want to go there'. You couldn't. That generation was like that. It was all by state's imperative, not a least from personal will.

When Sen was telling her story, a middle-aged, stout woman came into my mind, a woman working in a grocery in my high school. When people talked about her, they always talked about her husband, a graduate from a top university in China assigned to teach math in my school. People talked about his marrying this woman pitifully, a talented young man, allocated by the state to a small school and married to an uneducated local woman. The state's allocation of jobs for graduates was a typical pathway of entering a profession in the context of the planned economy. The state had command over most resources including human resources and could decide on how they were used and managed, like in Sen's story, the graduates were assigned according to 'state's quota'. In the 1980s, although China had started the transformation to a more market-oriented economy, the planning system was still prevalent in most enterprises especially in state-owned ones including higher education institutions and public schools (Zhao, 1994). Under such circumstances, individuals had no career choices but followed the 'state's imperative' without considering personal aspiration or motivations.

Six years younger than Sen, Qi graduated from TSU in 1994. The social and political context had gradually changed as China continued its transformation, allowing relatively more career freedom to graduates. Rather than allocate graduates to their workplaces ‘one to one’, as Qi recalled, the state allowed ‘two-way selection’ so that graduates could choose the workplace now.

Approaching graduation, Qi was confronted with two choices: rural-registered residence or urban-registered residence. Chinese society has been long time operated in a rural-urban dualism. This divides Chinese society into ‘two unequal tiers---the privileged urban and the underprivileged rural’ (Fan, 2008, p. 44). The urban-biased policies have disfavoured rural development. Accordingly, as Fan (2008) argues, rural-urban migration has been pursued by many as a means of survival.

For survival, Qi said he must obtain urban-registered residence. Born in a rural family, Qi never thought of going back. Rather than a matter of ‘likes or dislikes’, job choosing was a turning point to change his rural-registered residence. To stay in the city, Qi must pay RMB 6,000, a large sum of money at that time, for the so-called ‘fees for entering city’. When the news of applying for working in TSU was released, Qi decided to apply as working in TSU where he previously studied could exempt him from paying the fees. Qi finally chose to teach in TSU, the only choice for him,

For someone like me from such a family, I could only choose to stay in TSU if I wanted to obtain urban-registered residence. This was a good choice, otherwise I would have to go back to the rural. If I chose other

workplaces in the city, I would have to pay that money. Neither my family nor I could afford it. Without money, I could only choose TSU. So I applied, had the interview, then got the job.

Qi had never considered being a teacher. He applied for studying in TSU because TSU as a normal university offered free education, while other universities charged tuitions. He chose to teach in TSU because he could not afford to pay RMB 6,000 for urban-registered residence. Qi described his becoming a CE teacher as a ‘natural result’ instead of ‘a deliberate pursuit’ and said, ‘I had never thought of studying in a normal university or being a teacher. It just happened naturally’.

At Qi’s time of graduation in mid-1990s’, China was taking transformation from a highly planned economy to a more market-oriented economy. Individuals could have options to seek for their own jobs (Granrose, 2005). Qi could choose the workplace. He could choose to be a teacher or not. There was no more imperative command from the state like what Sen had experienced. Yet, Qi’s career choice was largely determined by his economic situation and his rural-registered residence. Qi’s reference to his background as someone from ‘such a family’ implied the underprivileged status and disadvantages of his rural background. His pathway of entering CE teaching was developed from his motivations of getting free tertiary education as well as obtaining a free ticket to migrating into the city. Teaching was not for him a matter of ‘likes or dislikes’ nor a ‘deliberate pursuit’.

*'The job is good for girls'*

Lei, a teacher in her mid-30s, is from a middle-class family in a big western city. Studying at the best local school with extraordinary academic performance, Lei had been determined to apply for a university in Beijing prestigious for its law study. She expected to work in the judicial field. She longed to go out of her city where people only cared about gossips. Beijing was the best city that could be a completely different environment for learning and broadening her horizon.

Lei got a distinctive result in NCEE in 1995 that could enable her to go to any university including her favourite one. When I asked her why she chose TSU, she blurted out, 'I didn't choose. My mom did!' On the day she submitted the university application form, Lei had a fierce dispute with her mother. Her mother asked her to go to a normal university because 'teaching is good for girls'. Lei recalled the night her mother forced her to change the decision,

It was a stormy night. I remembered it very well. It rained heavily. My mom yelled at me and dragged me to my teacher's home. She was determined to make me change the decision and insisted on seeing the application form refilled. She asked my teacher to give her a new sheet and filled it with TSU. On seeing TSU, I nearly fainted. There was nothing I could do for it (career). I felt all finished. Nothing made sense. It was not my ideal university and I didn't bother to think or care what I wanted to learn.

'Fainted' and 'not caring any more', Lei randomly chose English teaching as her major, which she later found was neither what she was interested in nor adept at. She put little efforts in learning, a way to fight against her mother's decision. Lei recounted how she studied at TSU,

Since I was enrolled, I constantly disputed with my mom. I didn't like TSU or language teaching. Language teaching was absolutely meaningless for me. I'm all OK with English study if I undertake other major, but I really have no interest in studying English as a major.

The tug of war between Lei and her mother was derived from the conflicts between her personal aspiration and filial piety to parents. Chinese culture has been profoundly influenced by Confucianism. A key value held by Confucianism is that the loyalty and reverence towards one's parents are the most important aspects of one's integrity. The loyalty to one's parents is supposed to take precedence over everything else (Hwang, 1999). Therefore when Lei's personal aspiration went against her mother's wish, she had to submit to her mother's will and was forced to choose the teaching career.

What a similar story I have with Lei! Fifteen years ago, that evening of application, I took home the application form. My parents and I discussed what universities to choose, the most important choice I had even made. I had dreamed of going to a language study university as I had strong interests in English, hoping I could become a translator. I longed to go to Beijing or Shanghai, the most developed cities that could offer opportunities for practicing English. I had been wishing I could leave my hometown to

see the outside world. Listening to my choice, my father made no reply. For the whole night he stood on the balcony smoking. The next morning came his decision: go to TSU. On hearing TSU, my heart sunk. A normal university? To be a teacher? I had never thought of being a teacher and I had to study in a university close to my hometown! 'I know you don't want to be a teacher', my father explained, 'I smoked the whole night, thinking of your future. You are a girl. Teaching is the best job for a girl. TSU is close to us. You, a girl, staying close to us is good for you'. I tried to argue. TSU was never the university I had targeted. If I chose TSU, all my dreams would be swiftly far away. However, I said nothing. Watching my father's puffy eyes, I knew his decision was final. Admitting whatever the parents did was for my good, I wrote TSU on my form, without feeling a least happy for going to 'ivory tower'.

In the field, I had interviewed many of my colleagues. When listening to their talking of how they enjoyed their teaching, how they tried every possible way to improve teaching and how their students loved them, I couldn't help feeling guilty and questioning myself: How much did I invest in my teaching? Why did I seldom enjoy my teaching? Why did I feel insufficient to establish that intimate relationship with my students? The self-doubts about whether I am a good teacher had been lingering in my mind since I worked for a couple of years. The feelings of insufficiency and self-doubts even for a time deprived me of interests in English. For several years, I rejected reading any English articles or novels, one of my previous hobbies, except reading the textbooks just to fulfil my job duty.

The interview with Lei somewhat relieved my anxiety. I found someone like me,

living in the self-doubts about her teaching ability and accompanied by the feeling of insufficiency in activating classroom atmosphere. Both Lei and I agreed a key factor of a successful language class is to create an active atmosphere to engage students into communicative activities. Lei had no 'sense of achievement', always feeling clumsy to interact with students especially when organizing communicative activities. She found herself unconsciously put on a serious look and students afraid of her. She could not figure out why she was unable to build up a friendly relationship with the students and why other colleagues were so good at organizing the class that their students fought for making a speech, while her students remained 'deadly quiet' in class.

Now Lei drew a conclusion that both of us were 'really not suitable for teaching', especially for basic language skills training. She regretted about our subjection to the parents' career choice and said, 'We should have rebelled. It might make a difference. When I looked back, I should have asserted myself'.

In CED, over 80% of teachers are females. All the younger women teachers I talked to claimed 'teaching is a good job for girls' as one of their reasons to be a teacher. I wondered how many of us, like Lei and me, gave up our dreams to live up to parents' and others' expectations for girls and spent years in self-doubts about our English teaching ability. We the younger teachers were freed from 'physical violence'(Bourdieu, 2001) of state's imperative allocation of jobs. Neither Lei nor I had the problem of rural-registered residence. We were given the application form to decide which university to enter and what career it might lead us to. Our decisions were made by ourselves and our families, not by political hegemonic forces. Yet we were subject to 'symbolic violence' deeply



embedded in social and cultural expectations for women. Chinese culture has been adhering to rigidly defined gender roles and behaviours (Antonious & Whitman, 1995) and people are socialized to behave in a gender-appropriate manner. Teaching is socially and culturally regarded as a job suitable for girls or a female-type occupation, as can be seen from our parents' wishes for their daughters. Moreover, the value of filial piety rooted in Chinese culture oriented our choices to parents' expectations at the price of our personal aspiration. As Bourdieu (2001) contends, the socialization by symbolic violence is expressed and experienced in the 'logic of feeling...or duty' or in the 'respect and devotion' (p. 39). By this way, I accepted my father's arrangement because 'whatever they do is for my good'. Lei compromised with her mother in spite of the 'fierce argument'.

### **Initial professional learning**

CE teachers' entry into CE profession took place at different historical times. So did their professional development after induction. What happened to Sen and Lei after they started working? This section represents how Sen, Lei, along with other CE teachers, experienced their initial professional learning.

#### ***'They were just afraid you may leave'***

On accepting the allocation, Sen did not intend to stay in SND long. She hoped she could have a job she liked and could go to a different university. In SND, she could not see any hope for professional development. The people, the management, the ideology

there were far lagging behind other universities.

The only way Sen could leave SND was to take postgraduate study. A master degree, rarely attained by tertiary teachers in the 1990s, might enable her to transfer to other universities. To get the approval to take postgraduate entrance examination, Sen had to undergo a series of complicated and bureaucratic procedures. ‘This was not uncommon in early 1990s’, Sen laughed, when she noticed my confusion,

Even getting married needed to be approved by officials. For example, if I were to get married, I must first have marriage application form signed by a department official, then have it signed by personnel management office.

Sen’s hope for further study was rejected. The official refused to sign on her application form. Sen continued in her always-peaceful tone,

Only after he approved, could I take the exam. Without his signature, I could never do it. Our fate was not in our own hands, but in officials’. They didn’t want you to do postgraduate study. They were just afraid you may leave after you were upgraded.

In SND, Sen met a colleague, later her husband, who held the same wish of ‘going out’. Neither of them was content with the ‘stable life’ in SND. Her husband had succeeded in obtaining postgraduate candidacy, yet his personal dossier was detained by SND for a year until his candidacy expired.

The personal dossier used to control Sen's husband is an archival system that records the performance and attitudes of every Chinese citizen. It has been an important part of workplace efforts to maintain control of its employees. Ouyang (2006) describes that everything an individual does at his/her workplace would be recorded and kept for the rest of his/her life. Consequently any 'errant' behaviour can be discouraged. In Sen's case, the authority of SND either refused to sign on her application form or detained her husband's personal dossier in order to retain its employees.

Sen's husband had to take the second examination. This time he was asked to leave completely. He finally quitted job and went for postgraduate study. Later, after being 'trapped' in SND for nine years, Sen left there and transferred to another university with her husband. She commented on their struggle for a better workplace,

Both of us longed to get out of destiny's control and to leave that place.  
The people of our generation had a very bumpy life. Many people had the same stories as ours.

Jing, another CE teacher who started working in early 1990s, is among those people. She explained her university, Nongda's prohibitive policy toward teachers' further study,

I started working in 1991 when there was a policy in Nongda that teachers were not allowed to take postgraduate study within 3 years, and allowed to do postgraduate study only in Nongda after working for 5 years. You know, Nongda had no strength in educational study for us English teachers. During those 5 years, we held no hope in study. You may

choose to be kicked out or stay there obediently and teach...I took postgraduate study in 2001, after I had worked there for more than 7 years. We were allowed to study at other university after 7 years' working. Not until then did I begin to do research, but I was like half-cooked rice now...

Jing used 'bitter' when describing the hopeless waiting and some other teacher's 'fight' against Nongda's restriction. Sitting in front of her, I felt lucky for myself. Since I started working in the 2000s, TSU had been encouraging the teachers to upgrade their degree. Both my master and PhD studies were sponsored by my workplace and the government.

I thought of Sen again. Now I realized why Sen could not help expressing her envy toward me. At our first encounter, she eagerly asked me about overseas PhD study, saying 'it's so good to be young'. When she talked about SND's prevention of her and her husband's postgraduate study, she recalled my postgraduate study in the UK financed by TSU and said, 'I do envy you. In your generation, TSU supported your overseas study. We could never imagine such a learning opportunity in our time and at my workplace'. Before we ended the interview, she again reminded me of the generation gap between us, 'I belong to that generation. What we have thought and experienced are so different'.

In 'that generation', the rigid personnel management rooted from the planned economy was still prevalent. The workplace authority exerted decisive control of personnel movement. Teachers' pursuit for professional development was regarded as an

unacceptable act of leaving the workplace and thereby was prohibited. As a result, Sen was 'trapped' for nine years and Jing 'held no hope' for postgraduate study.

***'It's always reciting, reciting and reciting'***

Without career planning for teaching, Lei started her CE teaching. She gradually found she was not the right type of person to teach language. She planned the lessons in a way she believed with 'much useful stuff' only to find students not interested and students told her they did not learn 'things' from her class. Lei felt frustrated and did not know how to teach a language,

How can I teach a language? I never know how to teach a language. How can I put the language into students' minds? I think the good way of teaching a language is to create a communicative environment for students so that they can participate, but I'm not capable of creating such an active atmosphere.

Lei even began to question the overall English education. From the early English learning at secondary schools, students were asked to repeatedly recite vocabulary and sentence patterns. They continued the same reciting after entering universities. Educated in this way as a student English teacher and teaching English later on, Lei doubted if this was what she pursued. Describing herself 'a person valuing and pursuing knowledge', Lei was curious about the world and hoped to explore it instead of 'always reciting, reciting and reciting'.

Lei remembered an English writing class she attended. The teacher was a researcher on fairy tales. In class, he often told the students about his research rather than teach them how to write. Although many students in the class did not like his teaching, he became Lei's most favourite teacher. From him, Lei got to know the meanings, metaphors, historical and cultural origins behind the seemingly innocent fairy tales and their significance for interpreting cultures. She realized her past English education was exclusively focused on language skills without any academic training. She was tired of the way English was learnt and taught. For Lei, this teacher's research was the way of 'exploring the essence of the world', while her previous English education as an English major prevented her from exploring the world. Lei could not hide her excitement when talking about that teacher,

I was amazed to find this is the way of exploring the world. He opened a door and showed me a new perspective of observing the world. This is the real academic research, a new idea, a new perspective, a new direction for my life.

With the 'new direction', Lei decided to give up the 'old way' of memorizing vocabulary and sentence patterns. Instead, to seek out what is behind the phenomenon became her new way of understanding the world. She found her interest in studying human behaviour mechanism and later took up postgraduate study in psychology after working for a few years.

Lei's insufficiency of 'exploring the world' as an English major and an English

teacher resonates with many researchers' concerns about the education of English majors in China. The education of English majors is highly focused on language skills training based on recitation and imitation and ignores the development of 'complex and challenging' critical thinking (Wen & Ren, 2010). Wen and Zhou (2006) further point out that the problem of English language education in China is that it overemphasizes the communicative function of language and neglects the intellectual function of language (Wertsch, 1985). This problem is still prominent (Ruan, 2012). As a result of the skill training-focused model, according to Yang, Zhang, and Xie (2001) and Bai and Hudson (2011), CE teachers lack disciplinary and research knowledge that is crucial to an academic's research competence.

In this section, I have told stories of CE teachers' entry into the profession and their early professional learning experiences. The stories told by teachers of different generations shed light on the tremendous change that has taken place in China during the last thirty years. The stories also unravelled the continuity of CE teachers' insufficiency in research. In the next section, I will tell the 'now' stories of how CE teachers work.

## **Working as CE teachers**

In my hand are two official documents. One is about TSU career promotion policy. It outlines the performance requirements for its staff both in teaching and research. The other is a draft of how staff's working load and salary are calculated. Scanning through the documents, I found my type. I am, together with all the teachers, placed at the *jiaoxue keyan gang*, or teaching-research position. As a basic course teacher, I, and other CE

teachers could choose the subcategory of teaching staff or teaching-and-research staff. Either, with different calculation, requires the teachers to fulfil relatively heavy teaching load and to produce certain amount of research output. The documents clearly state roles, rights and responsibilities that we are expected to play or have. Our identity, as Gee (2001) conceptualizes, partly develops from the employing institutions that authorise us an array of positions and resources. We must work through these ‘institutionalized scripts’ (Posecznick, 2013) that define a successful or effective tertiary teacher. These ‘institutionalized scripts’ are not just in prints. They could be found in various dimensions of professional knowledge landscape (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996) teachers navigate through. If the prints tell the ‘sacred stories’ (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996) of TSU and its teachers, how do we live and tell our ‘cover stories’ and ‘secret stories’? Since TSU holds CE teachers at the ‘teaching-research position’, my story telling will follow two themes: teaching and research.



## **CE teaching: experiencing reforms**

Half a year ago before I went into my fieldwork, I read some news. The news reported English would gradually retreat from the core courses of NCEE<sup>6</sup>. The news stirred up worries inside me. NCEE was the most important part of Chinese education. If English was no longer the core course, what would it mean for English teachers? What about CE teachers?

Six months later, I was ready to go back to TSU for my fieldwork. I called Qi, the head teacher. Qi told me CED was implementing a new reform. Under the reform, CED was reshuffled into several course groups. Qi then asked me which group I would like to join. I was totally unprepared for this. Another reform, again! The slogan of the last reform still echoing, we now rushed into another!

I went into the field, chose the new course group. With my colleagues I began to work

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<sup>6</sup> The core courses include Chinese, mathematics and English.

under the new regulations of the reform. We lived and told our reform stories, the stories told by ordinary teachers as well as the head teacher, the stories either about panic or embrace. Whatever the story is, reforms had been always accompanying our working lives.

***'We have no independent thinking'***

During her first ten years teaching, Sen had realized a problem of English education: many students could not communicate in English despite many years' English learning. In order to improve students' communicative competence, Sen tried to reinforce English speaking and listening training in her class although she was not required to do so either by national curriculum nor her workplace. Around 2000, there came a speech by then minister of education. In his speech, as Sen remembered, English education was criticized for being 'mute and deaf'. Soon after the speech, Sen found CE teaching throughout China began to 'take a big turn', with everybody talking about Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and criticizing the traditional Grammar-translation teaching method. This 'fashion' continued for nearly ten years. Sen then noticed 'constructivism' began to become 'a popular word'. Following the trend, CED carried out a reform. And now? Sen was confused. She did not know what she should do as more 'new items came into fashion',

What should I focus on? Listening or writing? It seems critical thinking now is getting into fashion. I may orient myself to this direction. Many people are talking about this, so I'm thinking if I should follow them.

For Sen, she felt like ‘being dragged by the nose’. She never understood the theories behind those reforms and she and other teachers just did what they were told. There had never been any chance for independent thinking. Describing herself as ‘just a follower’, Sen said, ‘CE is under the influence of officials and authorities. We just follow them. It is the experts and policy makers who decide how we teach CE’. Without independent thinking, naturally, as Sen remarked, CE teachers had a ‘congenial deficiency’ to do research. Sen could not even find someone to communicate. She said,

We have no chance for independent thinking. We don’t even have such people around us to communicate. If there are communications, they are just complaints. If we are not here for interview today, we may not probably talk about our working either.

Although having to follow, Sen tried to seek out her own way to ‘go against the tide’. She called herself being an ‘actually rebellious’ person. I wondered why she used ‘actually’. Maybe she knew her public image was ‘always gentle and soft’. Maybe she wanted to tell me she was not that ‘gentle and soft’. Amid various fashion terms, Sen endeavoured to keep ‘a cool head’. She constantly reflected on her teaching and looked at the reforms from an alternative way,

I think whatever the competence the students are to develop, it is a gradual process based on the solid foundation. The competence can’t be improved just by top-down demands. And each aspect of competence influences each other. I don’t agree with the overemphasis on a certain

aspect just because of the demand. The multiple aspects of competence should have overall development.

Sen always talked in a peaceful pace. Her emotions seemed to hide well behind her unchanged tone even when speaking of her ‘bumpy life’ in SND or ‘being dragged by the nose’. I was unable to tell if she was angry, sad or complaining, but I could feel the indifference and detachment. Such feeling might be easily felt by Qi, the head teacher, or in his words, ‘a middle-level leader’ who had been directly involved in reform management.

Qi recited a poem to describe his reform experience,

A thousand mountains without a bird,

Ten thousand miles with no trace of man.

An old man in his straw cape and hat sitting in a single boat,

Alone in the snow, fishing in the freezing and snowy river.

A Chinese poet wrote the poem two thousand years ago to portray his chilliness and loneliness on the way of exile. The poem portrayed how Qi felt when directing a reform. He could hardly find a teacher to support him. When he got some new ideas and asked teachers to work with him, he was often told, ‘I will do whatever you tell us to do. But for this, can you ask someone else?’ Qi did not think the teachers were unsupportive as they would do whatever they were assigned, but, Qi said, their support was passive. They had never been ‘really’ involved in reforms because they were used to being told what to

do.

Qi gave the example of CLT reform. It was designed by several experts and leaders after several ‘insider’ meetings. Then the acts were publicized to teachers to implement in their classes. No discussion or lectures were organized for teachers to understand, for instance, the principles and theories of CLT, why and how to organize a communicative and student-centred class. Even for Qi, he had not understood CLT until he joined an overseas training program. During the program, the teacher used cases to exemplify what CLT teaching was and how to make a CLT class. The teacher also explained the theories and rationale of CLT. For the first time since the CLT reform, Qi came to understand what a CLT class meant and the understanding brought the change to his teaching after he finished the training,

It is my thinking that changes. (Before the training) I used to stay unchanged, and I didn’t know how to do (CLT) either. If you don’t know what it is and how to do it, it’s difficult (to implement the reform). You can only follow your old ways and your own teaching.

Like Sen, Qi saw it was the lack of involvement in the reforms that led to CE teachers’ passive reaction. The feelings of indifference and passiveness felt by Sen and Qi are not uncommon among CE teachers. In Jiang’s (2011) investigation among over 400 CE teachers across the country, most CE teachers expressed antipathy toward constant reforms. The main reason, as Jiang argues, is that all those reforms are top-down demanded. Teachers are driven by external mandate not by their own motivations.

*'We all got panic'*

I picked up Mei as my participant at a casual meeting when she came to me for suggestions of applying for overseas PhD. Being a teacher in early 30s, Mei was anxious for her career development especially after the EFL policy issued in 2013.

The policy was the one that worried me before I came back: English lost its core status in NCEE. Mei had seen in recent years a heated debate of English education in China. The public was getting increasingly critical toward the heat wave of English learning. 'They said', Mei told me, 'China now ranks the second largest economy in the world, why should we learn English that hard? Why is our Chinese study subjected to English study?' Even a spokesman of the Ministry of Education laid blame on English learning enthusiasm when talking about deteriorating Chinese education. Mei's uneasiness soared when she read such news: some scholars appealed for a fundamental reform of CE or even abolishment of CE from tertiary education; some representatives submitted proposals to the National People's Congress, calling for a radical reform of EFL education.

In 2013, the policy came out as a result of the rising public criticism toward English education. The policy soon caught public's attention as NCEE was always regarded as, in Mei's words, 'a wind vane for education'. Among CE teachers the policy's effect was 'explosive'. Mei recalled,

The teachers like us below especially the teachers in 30s like me were talking about it. We all got panic. There was a strong sense of career crisis.

We had never worried about losing jobs until the policy came out.

CE teachers were not the only ones who ‘got panic’. Mei strongly felt CE students’ engagement in her English class plummeted. No matter how she prepared the lesson, the students disregarded her efforts. In EMD, more and more EM students studying as student English teachers started to transfer to other schools. Mei knew it was the policy that sent the message to students that ‘English study is no more important. There is no need to put efforts in English learning’.

The explosive policy soon pushed CED into a new round of reform. The reform was, as Mei described, ‘swiftly made’, demanding CE teachers, who usually taught English for General Purposes (EGP) courses, to run English for Special Purposes (ESP) courses. For ESP courses, Mei admitted she was at sea and was disappointed to be told by a leader that there was no training plan to prepare teachers for such a change,

He told me there is no such training program. I know many universities are starting to run ESP courses. We haven't any training for teachers. How can we teach ESP without any training?

At the time of interview, a new policy was issued, reiterating the core status of English in NCEE. Mei saw the policy in 2013 being a response to public criticism of English learning heat wave, while the new policy was adjusted to respond the voice that English education is crucial for China’s internationalization and that English education should be strengthened rather than be weakened. Mei admitted the sense of professional crisis was more or less relieved, but I could sense her frustration. She said, ‘you know, the

national policy of EFL education is always like this. What they say is what we should do'. Mei realized the shaky status of CE. She started to seriously consider her professional development. For her, doing a PhD was the best and the only choice because as a young teacher in early 30s, she had to take 'active action' toward the change. She said, 'I'm forced to take the transformation, otherwise I may lose job'.

Mei had to transform herself because she was 'a teacher in 30s'. Hong, a teacher in 50s, regretted she was going to retire and had only a few years to 'enjoy' the reform.

For Hong, the reform was an opportunity for learning and experimenting new teaching. She joined a short-term training program in the UK in 2000. There she got to know about the western teaching that was very different from the teaching in China,

Here in China, the teachers expect an absolutely correct answer from the students. While in the UK, the question is open to any solution and the teacher expect diverse answers from the students. In China, the students are required to learn strictly from an assigned textbook. In the UK, they have no textbooks! The Chinese way of teaching puts too much burden on students, causing too much pressure for them. The western teaching respects students' overall development instead of forcing students to learn.

Hong wholeheartedly embraced the western teaching. After she returned from the overseas training, she was excited to know CLT reform was underway. It was the time to practise what she had learnt into teaching,



Before I went to the UK, I had been trying to improve myself toward their (western) way of teaching, whether in my understanding of the theories or in my teaching practice. The training in the UK further reinforced my will. When I was back, it was the time to practise what I had advocated.

For every CE reform, Hong took it as an opportunity to learn new things,

I can verify what I have learnt. I can try what I've thought. I found the new approaches or ideas in every reform interesting. I can put what I've learnt into practice.

Hong was eager to teach new courses required by the ESP reform. She chose to teach academic writing, for which she had been preparing during the last few years. She regularly attended other teachers' writing classes for observation and learning. And now it was the time, she said, 'to share what I have learnt with the students'.

At the interview, I noticed Hong collect writings from the students and asked her what they were for. She told me these were feedbacks from students that may help her seek out a better teaching approach for the new course. She had four years to retire and was eager to 'grasp any chance' for learning, saying, 'I have only four years to go. I love teaching so much. What I do is to enjoy learning and teaching as much as I can'.

Whatever the story is about, indifference, panic or enthusiasm, these stories portray CE like a public putty moulded by various parties such as policy makers, experts and the public. CE, in accordance with EFL policy, always 'swings' in response to hot-button

issues, or in Sen's words, 'fashion terms'. CE teachers are little respected by multiple interested parties. They have no voice either in the policy-making or in the implementation of reforms. They have no independent thinking and are 'dragged by the nose' and 'do whatever they are told'. They are required to do, but without being told why to do. They are constantly subjected to the public scrutiny toward the status of EFL education especially at a time when China is undergoing tremendous social and economic advancement. Their professional value fluctuates with the changing policies, like in Mei's story, the policy in 2013 caused 'explosive' panic among CE teachers as well as among students. Their value bounced back with the new policy in 2014, which 'somewhat relieved' the professional crisis. This context is irrational, like Sen described, 'no one can keep a cool head'. In such an irrational context, many CE teachers reacted in a simplistic and panicky way, just to live up to the top-down standards of CE teaching and the reforms. Therefore, Qi felt 'chilly loneliness' in reforms, finding no positive support from colleagues and Mei alternated between panic and relief.

Despite 'shaky' and 'changing' context of CE, CE teachers' narratives displayed remarkable stories of 'keeping a cool head', 'learning' and 'transformation'. Sen adhered to her reflection of teaching rather than simply follow the policies; Mei negotiated an alternative way to relieve professional crisis by striving for PhD study; and Hong took reforms as opportunities for learning. In telling their stories, they took the authority of their own experiences in resistance to being positioned as 'a teacher below'.

The stories of CE reforms depicted one aspect of CE teachers' job description: teaching. The stories that followed will tell how they experienced the other aspect:

research.

### **Research: What is research?**

Research, or *keyan*, a word constantly appears at various occasions or in teachers' gossips. TSU sets its goal to be an influential research-oriented university. SFL aims to be a powerhouse of foreign languages research. We the teachers hold a teaching-research position. But what is research? According to official documents, research is closely linked to quantity and levels of publications and the national/regional research grants. For me, a doctoral candidate, research reminds me of the words such as ontology, epistemology, methodology, rigor, validity, reliability, trustworthiness. I often asked teachers what they thought research was, only to find I got increasingly puzzled. There was no consensus. Some claimed research is publications. Some saw research is to improve teaching. Some defined it as a way of exploring the world. Some equated research with 'abstruse theories'. In most cases, teachers gave no direct answers. I gradually realized my way of questioning to be problematic. There could not be a definite answer to the question of

what is research. Although research is clearly and quantitatively defined in documents, teachers brought their own preferences and visions into research understanding. Their understandings and their research stories might be parallel to, differing from or even contradicting with institutional meanings.

***‘These are just teaching-research’<sup>7</sup>***

Hong was the first teacher I invited into my social network interview. She gladly accepted the invitation and took home the network map I gave her to consider. We met casually several times at campus before the formal interview. Every time she told me, ‘I haven’t done any research. I don’t know if I’m a proper participant for you’, ‘I have no real research contacts, I actually do no research’ or ‘I suggest you interview teachers in EMD, they do research and they may give you more information’. I assured her that the research was to understand how she experienced the research and there was no ‘good or bad’ participant or ‘proper or improper information’. She then replied, ‘OK, I’m just

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<sup>7</sup> The ethnographic examination undertaken in this study found that teaching-research undertaken by CE teachers shared similarities with teacher research defined by Simon Borg (for the definition of teacher research, see p.21). In the thesis, instead of describing such research activity as teacher research, I adopted SFL’s definition of teaching-research.

afraid my data may be of no use for you because I actually didn't do research'.

After we sat down to start the network mapping interview, Hong took out a draft on which she had written a number of names. Watching her carefully copy the names to the map, I was surprised to find she had thought of dozens of names since she had repeatedly told me before she had no research ties. That afternoon, Hong spent two hours telling me how she interacted with these people. With them, she turned to for teaching suggestions, attended their classes for observations and had joint teaching. At the end of interview, she said, 'Although I have told you so much, it is not real research'.

Hong had published a few articles. She worked on them as a result of several years' 'learning, practice and reflection'. Hong knew these writings were not high-level publications, 'just of teaching-related research'. Still she did not care to work toward a high level publication,

They said the article should be published on a higher level journal if I worked harder. It was basically related to teaching, just a teaching-related article. I don't want to bother to look for a higher-level journal for it.

Hong then turned to ask me how I defined research, if writing to the public is the only form of research and if the efforts to understand the classroom or improve the teaching practice count as research. She described her puzzle,

It's not because I don't want to write, but because I'm not capable of writing for the high-level publication. I have constant reflection (of

teaching)...I pursue the process...my problem is whether I should just try to improve my understanding or to pursue the forms.

To Hong, the 'forms' referred to the scholarly writing for high-level publications. What she had done was experience-based writing directly aimed to improve 'her understanding' of classroom. Hong was not the only teacher wrestling with 'what count as research'. I remembered well of Jing's wavering behaviours during the interview.

Jing quickly accepted my invitation into the research without even knowing the research content. She had thought I was about to examine teaching experiences. When she knew it was about research experiences, she became reluctant. She was unconfident to talk about her research, and said, 'I just thought you may want to know about my teaching experience. I have a lot to share in this aspect, but as for doing research, I feel unconfident'.

Jing described herself as 'an aggressive teacher'. She loved teaching. To improve her teaching, she made constant reflections and kept learning pedagogies and theories. 'I'm a reflective teacher', Jing continued, 'but when talking about research, I'm ashamed. I'm not good at research'. She stopped for a few seconds, went on saying, 'but I don't think I have never done research. I just have no publications. I am doing something. I just don't know how to make it published'.

That something Jing had done was teaching-research, the research, as she described, 'closely related to my work and helping my teaching and my students'. Without being asked, Jing told a story of her classroom research of 'content-based teaching',

The students' expectations for English class are changing with the social development. I must work hard to catch up with their needs. Since 2009, many international students have been coming to study in TSU and many TSU students joined the international exchange programs too. Noticing the change, I wondered how I could improve my students' practical use of English. You know our English class has usually been examination-oriented. I then applied content-based teaching approach. I asked the students to search relevant information online and apply for an overseas university or an exchange program. They were very excited and told me they were really interested in doing such useful activities.

The 'content-based' teaching approach proved to be a success. Jing then invited several CE teachers into joint-teaching to implement the approach. Her purpose was to apply the approach to students from diverse discipline background. Jing's efforts finally resulted into her reports on two CE reform conferences. She portrayed how this happened,

Lin kept encouraging me to share my experiences on the conferences, saying I did a very good job. I was scared to make a public speech. She kept pushing me to do it. She made me feel my work recognized and significant... The reports received very positive feedbacks. Many teachers at the conferences praised me and asked me lots of questions.

It was easy to feel Jing's pride as she talked about her practice of new approach. Her students 'excitedly' participated in activities, the leader encouraged her to share her

experiences in public and other CE teachers ‘praised’ her. For Jing, the practice was part of her research process,

This is useful for my teaching. I’m trying different (teaching) approaches. And my trying is based on my reflection, speculation, and reading. I also observe other teachers’ classes. My teaching is not randomly done or based on nothing. For me, this is also a kind of research practice.

Abruptly, Jing changed her tone, seeming to remember her ‘shame’ in research. She blamed herself for looking for excuses,

I know the report is unqualified for A, or B-level journals. My theoretical foundation is not sound enough and my writing is not very good either. I am doing something, but still can’t make any publication. These are excuses. I shouldn’t look for excuse for myself.

Jing noticed her waver. She laughed,

If I were a big person in research, I might be assertive in advocating my definition of research. For officially-defined research, I didn’t do well, so I feel unconfident when talking with you.

What is the definition of research? Clearly Jing knew her definition was different from ‘officially-defined’ research. Why did she feel ‘unconfident’ to talk with me? I suspected if my presence in front of her created a power relation that amplified her feeling



of inferiority and even shame. I, a PhD candidate, represented the officially-valued researcher. With the PhD candidacy, I might be rendered with more ‘symbolic capital’ (Bourdieu, 1983b). The dominant meanings exert symbolic power on the dominated, such as Hong and Jing’s understanding of the teaching research. Bourdieu (2001) argues the dominated often subject to the domination by showing emotions, such as ‘shame, humiliation, timidity, anxiety, guilt---or passions and sentiments---love, admiration, respect’ (p.38). Therefore, Jing was ‘ashamed’ when talking about research, although feeling proud of her teaching. She shifted constantly between ‘feeling unconfident when talking with me’ and asserting ‘I am doing something’ and blaming herself for ‘looking for excuse’. Hong talked proudly of her classroom research, but admitted such practices as inferior by saying they were not ‘real research’.

More apparently, I felt their pride as well as their struggles for authoring their research meaning. Hong told me lots of details of her efforts to improve teaching and tried to discuss with me about ‘what is research’. Jing talked excitedly of her ‘content-based’ teaching practice and felt proud of her research being recognized by students, leaders and other CE teachers. She might advocate her understanding of research if she could be ‘a big person’. Their identities were ‘fragmented’ (Lawler, 2000) as they struggled within coexisting and competing understandings of research, that is, the one defined by the institution and the one aiming to improve practical teaching.

***‘Your proposal will be definitely failed here’***

Na was happy to receive my interview. She is my good friend and is doing PhD study

at TSU. Both researching in education, we had a lot to say especially after departing for a year. After reading my research information, Na said, 'this is what I know about the western research. They like digging individuals' in-depth stories'. I knew she knew. She was a member of a Sino-Canadian joint research program and had been working with a few Canadian researchers including a prominent professor in narrative inquiry. 'But here we don't accept such research,' continued Na, 'the researchers here prefer the big and grand research, the research that can impact policy-making'. Na then said, 'your research will absolutely be failed. Even your proposal can't get a pass'.

Na was not the first teacher pointing this out to me. The other day Qi told me the same when reading my proposal. Being a PhD student in education, Qi described my research as 'too small', 'too personal', 'too limited participants'. He asked me if I considered a bigger sample, so to speak, more CE teachers nationwide and questioned interview as my major source of data. He asked, 'how can you guarantee the reliability of what interviewees tell you? What if they don't tell you the truth?' I told him about the interactive nature of interview and the dialogic nature of my qualitative research. Qi could not understand still, and said, 'I assure you here there is no chance for your research to be approved. You will fail even in proposal stage'.

I remembered the suggestion from another teacher: 'adding some quantitative element may be better'. I had tried to explain only to find myself tongue-twisted because they would say 'it's too subjective'. Richardson (1997) in her book *Fields of Play* portrays how she struggled within the dominant culture of positivism that rejected subjectivity in the name of objectivity. Here, the rejection of subjectivity is far beyond the academia. It

has been rooted in our ideological and political contexts. Early on from the schooling, in our politics courses, we learnt that subjectivity is ‘false’. We were taught to say in the politics exams, ‘the statement is false, because it is subjective’ and ‘why is subjectivity false? Because it is against objectivity’. The principle of objectivity is written into the Constitution of the ruling party as the guidance to action. Not strangely, as Chen (2016) points out, the ruling party’s ideology has impacted tremendously on the scholarly work and teaching in all educational sectors and dominated all fields of research.

I could not blame my colleagues for not understanding me. We grow up in an objectivity-oriented political context as well as the positivism research culture. We might not think otherwise. For years before I took PhD study, I had been certain that I could not be a researcher. My mind went blank when seeing numbers and graphics. I was not a quantitative person. I was doomed to be a poor researcher. I knew little of alternative research methodology. If qualitative research was talked about, it was usually talked with contempt, such as ‘just quotations from people’s talks’. There was no access to alternative research knowledge, for instance, a teacher talked about her drop out from a statistics training course run by CED (I dropped out too!),

The research methods are not just about statistics. I want to learn other methods. There’s no such information in this respect. Maybe it’s my own fault... I didn’t try to seek for such resources.

She blamed herself for lacking understanding of alternative research methods. I wondered if I, an alternative researcher, conducted my research back in China, what the

fate of my proposal would be. There must be no chance for me to carry out my interested research.

It was impossible for me not to feel disheartened at these good-will suggestions and candid disagreement. What was my research for? Or what is research for? On the day I interviewed Qi, he turned to ask me to do a questionnaire and an interview for his PhD study about CE teachers' reform participation. He assured me that the interview would not take me much time, 'only several minutes'. Seeing the questions listed on his interview protocol, I asked him what he expected me to say, if it was 'the full telling of my experiences that may take a long time' or 'simple answer'. Qi said, 'just simple and direct answer'. Then we started. I found it hard to give a definite and simple answer to the question. How could I use simple and direct answer to describe all I felt and experienced, especially after hearing so many stories of my participants? Anyway, I fulfilled the task Qi gave me within a few minutes, yet pitifully thinking that I actually had a lot to say. I wondered how my answers might contribute to Qi's understanding of teachers' experiences. I was thinking if there were a narrative inquirer to interview me about my reform experiences, like what I did with my participants, I would feel lucky for having someone to listen to my stories, the silenced stories in Qi's research.

Na once told me about her research experiences with the Canadian researchers. Unlike Chinese educational researchers emphasizing research impact on policy-making, her western counterparts valued 'what research could bring to your participants'. By this criterion, what did Qi's research bring to me? I have forgotten what questions he asked and what I told him. It was like a several-minute homework I helped him to complete.

Nothing was left on me. Then, what did my research bring to my participants?

I remembered Mei. Although we had been colleagues for several years, we got familiar only after the first interview for network mapping (thinking we always worked in different locations, this was understandable). Since then, Mei kept contacting me for she needed someone to sort out her struggles in professional development. She took me as a reliable colleague. The interview with me was the first 'real in-depth' professional communication.

Mei had been struggling with what PhD study she should apply for. For linguistics or literature, she had easier access and had more chance to get the PhD offer. Yet she had no interest in either. For foreign language education, she was interested but found it competitive as many applicants competed for one supervisor. She was very likely to fail. Before I left the field, Mei finally made up her mind to apply for PhD study in foreign language education. She told me, 'it is you and the talks with you that encouraged me to apply for it. I know I will definitely fail, but I should follow my interest'.

During the writing, I got messages from Min. She was desperate, claiming 'teaching has no place here. Teaching is not important anywhere'. She is an enthusiastic teacher and the winner of many teaching awards. Too much teaching brought her into a severe illness and she failed in a recent promotion due to the lack of doctorate. She turned to me because, she wrote, 'I know your research is about teachers' learning. I want to tell you my stories'. At last, she added, 'you must write it in your paper!'

Like Richardson (1997), I experienced the struggles within the doubts and

discriminations from the orthodox research culture, the struggles with my 'place' (p.2). The question that had puzzled Richardson puzzled me too: to whom do we write? For policy maker? For the teachers 'like us below'? For myself? As I was reading my stories with Mei and Min, and other teachers, the feelings of pride and gratitude swelled in me. A 'small' study as it was, it had, to some degree, brought change to my participants. Mei was inspired by my research to take a profound reflection on her professional life and made an important career decision. Min regarded me as a researcher who could have her stories heard. The research did achieve the change it is supposed to make, in Riessman's (2008) term, 'amplifying' others' voices (p. 223). I am thankful for the trust the teachers had given and are giving me. The trust encourages me to write, and to discover myself. And the process of telling and writing our stories is transforming my identity: the disheartened qualitative researcher is becoming an assertive story writer.

***'The research might have no contribution to them'***

Na, a teacher in early 30s, started doing research early since working. The research was related to her teaching, rather than, as she called, the '*gao, da, shang*', or 'high, grand, superb' linguistics research done by teachers in EMD. I did not stop Na to explain why linguistics research was '*gao, da, shang*'. We both understood. In SFL, most professors, including SFL leaders, researched in linguistics. Most teachers, whether from EMD or CED, studied PhD in linguistics. SFL used to sponsor linguistics PhD research with full scholarship, while non-linguistics PhD research with half-scholarship (Now the sponsorship for any PhD study has terminated).

In 2007, Na decided to apply for PhD study. She chose linguistics as her master research was of cognitive linguistics. Many applicants made the application very competitive. This time, Na failed.

As she continued teaching, Na came to find her linguistics research insufficient to make an effective class. Being a linguistics researcher, she tended to focus more on linguistics knowledge rather than study teaching from a pedagogical perspective. She recalled her early teaching,

My early teaching was to explain the linguistic phenomenon clearly. I thought students could understand the language if I gave clear explanation. This was how I taught at the beginning, never standing at students' position.

With this thought, Na made the second attempt for PhD study. This time she chose to study in education, because she found the research of how to teach and pedagogies and educational theories were very necessary for her teaching.

Na perceived her cognitive linguistics research to be insufficient to make a successful language class. Wang, a leader of SFL, did not agree. Admitting that the dominant research in SFL was linguistics and literature, Wang argued how his cognitive linguistics research helped his teaching,

Many teachers see linguistics and literature research as irrelevant to teaching. I don't agree. My cognitive linguistics research interprets the

language structure from the cognitive perspective. This helps my teaching in a more systematic way. If you just tell students grammar rules, the students may get bored, but if you explain to them how the rules come into being, they would be more interested.

Wang's statement may follow what is held conventionally as to what language teachers need to know about language teaching: the knowledge of theoretical and applied linguistics as well as Second Language Acquisition (SLA). This knowledge has been regarded as central to the knowledge base of a language teacher. For example, in a debate on knowledge base of TESOL teacher education, Yates and Muchisky (2003) believe that the knowledge of how language is organized and how language is learnt is fundamental for a language teacher.

However, not every linguistics PhD teachers fully embraced their research. Chan and Hai were doing linguistics PhD study in SFL. Chan admitted her cognitive linguistics research had little relevance to her teaching and she 'personally' preferred the research oriented to teaching. Hai claimed he was still struggling in 'combining his linguistics research with his teaching' because teaching was 'what he did everyday'.

What might happen to the teachers undertaking non-linguistics/literature research? Now Na was in her third year of PhD study. When she did the network mapping interview, she said she had lost all the research contact with colleagues in SFL, because she 'was doing education'. Although there was a literacy research group in EMD, the same research field as Na's, she had never associated with them,



No one cares about your research. We have a literacy research group here, but it's in EMD...Why have they never asked me to join their group, to learn from each other?

I remembered Xiao, another CE teacher studying a PhD in education. He was doing an ethnographic study of teacher education. I still remembered his startle at being invited into my research. He said, 'I can't understand why you invited me. My research is totally irrelevant here'.

The other day during my research presentation, one audience asked me if the leaders in SFL would be happy about my 'critical' research. The problem had never occurred to me. Like what Na felt, 'no one cares', as my research lied in education, not in linguistics or literature. What I did was just like how Xiao described his educational research, 'irrelevant here'.

Because of the 'irrelevance' of non-linguistics/literature research, many CE teachers led such an academic life, as is described by Cai (2013): teaching English listening, speaking, reading and writing during the daytime while studying Shakespeare or Chomsky in the evening. Many a teacher I interviewed blurted out, when asked about their research activities, 'the theoretical research is too abstruse', 'I'm not a theoretical person', or 'the theoretical research is meaningless for my teaching'. For them, research might mean more of linguistics than other discipline research.

Is our non-linguistics/literature research irrelevant to EFL education? Na disagreed. She remarked, 'it seems here the non-linguistics research has no contributions to them. I

don't agree with this. It (the division) is no good for EFL education'.

So far the three stories of CE teachers' research experiences have shown that the nature of research affects and is being affected by the way in which CE teachers have to balance the different conceptions of knowledge. The understanding of knowledge includes the 'institutionalized scripts'(Posecznick, 2013) that demand high-level publications and research funding, the practical knowledge held by teachers for improving teaching, the knowledge obtained by different methodologies and what counts as the discipline knowledge in TESOL.

In TSU, CE teachers are positioned as teaching-research staff. I remembered a word describing teacher educators in the western countries: Janus-faced (Taylor, 1984). It also applies to CE teachers. On one hand, they face the heavy workload of English skills training, with the focus on practicality and techniques, especially in accordance with constant CE reforms. On the other hand, they face the university and the world of research, with the demands for publications, funding, and theoretical fruitfulness.

CE teachers are not just working staff in a university. They are women and men. They negotiate between the professional and private spheres. In the next section, I will tell the stories of how we experienced PhD study as a woman.

## **Being women PhDs**

Sitting here writing, I tried to remember when I started to feel the pressure of research.

It was ten years ago when the dean of SFL began to repeatedly urge teachers to upgrade their degree. At each annual teachers meeting, there was a ritual. A teacher was announced to have obtained PhD candidacy or finished PhD study. She was invited to stand up and show us who she was. Then came teachers' big applause. There were always whispers about who took PhD examination or who was enrolled. Ten years on, SFL's holders of doctorate have increased from a few to nearly half of its teachers. In CED, nearly one-third of teachers has or is earning doctoral degree. This is much higher than the average percentage of PhD holders among CE teachers across the country, which is less than 10% according to Wang's (2009) survey. However, compared to other schools of TSU where the majority of teachers have a doctorate, CED is lagging far behind.

Most commonly, university researchers have learnt to do research through the PhD program that supplies a credential for undertaking scholarly research. In TSU, holding a doctoral degree is one of the basic conditions for promotion. Doing PhD study has become the most pressing need for CE teachers' professional development.

In this section, I will tell CE teachers' stories from a feminist perspective. I am a female PhD researcher. From the first time I stepped into the field, I was overwhelmed by my colleagues' concerns for my being a woman doing a PhD. They cared a lot about my balancing between childcare and overseas study. In CED, most teachers are women. And most of them are below the age of 40. Seven of my eight narrative inquiry participants have experiences of doing or applying for PhD study. The struggles of being a 'proper' woman and upgrading degree were a common topic among us. And many of them came to me for suggestions about a mother doing a PhD. As a research instrument, what I, a

female PhD researcher, saw, felt and experienced can be a window to look into another aspect of CE teachers' identity: gender identity.

***'The title of female PhD is too horrible'***

Min, a teacher in her early 30s, has been my friend since we became colleagues ten years ago. She is generally recognized as a teacher with teaching excellence as well as an enthusiastic researcher. Ten years ago, I had asked her why she did not study up to PhD, as I often saw her stay up late at night for her master research and always talk excitingly about her new ideas popping out from research. I wondered why she, a university teacher with both zeal and capacity for doing research, did not undertake PhD study in spite of the pressing demand from TSU. She always answered, 'to get married is the priority'. Ten years on, I asked her the same question: why have you never considered doing a PhD? I got the similar answer: 'the title of female PhD is too horrible'. I didn't ask why. The 'horrible' title of female PhD was also one of the reasons for my not doing PhD study before I got married. In China, a woman doing a PhD is usually labelled as an aloof, unattractive, self-important careerist. There is a saying that there are three genders: male, female and female PhD, a joke describing the woman with PhD as asexual and not feminine enough. A popular nickname for female PhD students is *miejue shitai* or 'a nun of no mercy', a character of a mannish Kung Fu-fighting nun in a famous Chinese novel. They are sometimes called as 'UFOs', an acronym for 'ugly, foolish and old'.

The derision toward highly educated women does influence Chinese women's marital choice. To (2013) investigated among single Chinese professional women and found

some women with advanced degree concealed their accomplishments from potential suitors in fear that their external qualification, such as the doctorate, might be an obstacle.

*Jiade hao* or *gande hao*, or to do well or marry well? It is a question often asked in the media. I can easily give an answer now. For me, the two are not contradictory. However through ten years during my 20s, the question had been troublesome. To find a proper husband was the most important matter in my life, like Min said, ‘to get married is the priority’. I could sense the increasingly pressing demand for a doctorate. I made two attempts to prepare for PhD application. Both ended up the halfway. I always persuaded myself not to work on it, saying to myself, ‘marriage comes the first’. I even sensed the change of my parents’ attitude. They had held high expectations for my education and always pushed me to study up. Their push for my education soon stopped after I started working and swiftly turned to my marriage.

Lei’s parents were like mine. Lei finally won parents’ support for her PhD study because they saw her settled, otherwise they would ‘absolutely prevent’ her from doing it. The pressure is not only from our parents who have considerable influence over daughters’ marital lives (To, 2013). It may also come from others, even strangers. Feng, who had completed PhD study, described how a stranger showed his concern about her marriage,

I went to a photo studio to have my PhD candidate photo taken. Knowing me studying a PhD, the photographer asked if I’m married. After getting a yes answer, he felt quite relieved, saying, ‘OK then, that (doing a PhD) doesn’t matter’.

Now being married for years, I am not worried about a PhD title jeopardizing my marital chance. However, I am still sensitive of the way people talk about a female PhD. Several days ago, a friend told me he mentioned me to a girl that I was doing PhD. The girl said, 'she can't be pretty. How can a female PhD be pretty?' Na felt the same. She saw it a compliment if she was not recognized as a woman studying PhD. She said,

I don't like being seen as a pure female PhD or a pure researcher. It is a compliment for me if people don't recognize my identity as a female PhD before we talk about academic issues. I don't like the stereotype about female PhDs.

Although admitting female PhD implies 'something negative' in China, Na enjoyed her doctoral research as it was a process of self-discovery,

I myself think female PhD positively. And I have developed a different perception of myself during the process. I reflect on myself and my reflection is from a different angle. Before the PhD study, I might feel insufficient and thus unconfident. Now I see myself differently and I know how to improve myself if I'm insufficient. For my personal development, doing PhD is a highly inspiring process.

The belief that a female PhD carries on the image of being physically unattractive and aggressive and thus torpedoed women's chances of settling down tells of the patriarchal culture of Chinese society. It is found that the discriminatory treatment for the highly educated career women is still prevalent in China (To, 2013). The patriarchal culture uses

negative concepts to describe the independent and intelligent women who do not fit into traditional domestic roles that expect a woman to occupy a position lower than her husband. Such a society renders the women with advanced degree to be discriminated against in the marriage market. As marriage is still a 'must' for Chinese women, the female CE teachers' educational and professional pursuits have to be subjected to the patriarchal society where 'value of women [is] obscured or diminished, and where women are devalued through gender-based inequalities in areas such as employment, education, and social activities'(Bing & Reid, 1996, p. 187).

***'Doctorate can wait, child' growth can't wait'***

It was 9 o'clock in the morning. I just sent the six years old boy to the school and got myself seated in front of my computer, starting to work. This morning was a hassle. I was preparing the school lunch as usual, when the two children, my son and the flatmate's son got into an argument and a fight. The children's continuous and unexpected wrangles were always a headache for me, forcing me to sort out their problems and involving me into often ineffective communication with the other parents who were from different cultural and language background. Now the boy was in the school, leaving the peace to the house finally. I started to work out the plan for today: to get all the documents for the child's visa prepared, to arrange him a medical check, to cook some food for the parents' meeting in his school, to prepare Chinese New Year gifts for each child in my son's room as he got a lot from his classmates last Christmas and, my research work too! I must grasp the time for working as from 2 o'clock, I would be ready to pick up the boy. After he came back, I would supervise his Chinese writing. As a Chinese, he must not forget his

language! Then I would cook the dinner, later arrange him well in bed after a one- hour bedtime reading. When the boy fell asleep, I could continue my work. Usually I got tired and sleepy then.

This was a typical day for a single mother doing PhD overseas, full of trifles and short of tranquillity. Some teachers gave me thumbs-up, calling me a ‘hero mummy’, wondering how I handled the childcare and the research all by myself in a foreign country. Some disagreed because I did not make a good balance between my career and the child who needed both parents at such a young age. For example, Na said,

If I were to choose, I would not choose your way that sacrificed family to PhD study. I often tell other girls, if they plan to undertake PhD, that doctorate can wait, while child’s growth can’t wait.

Doing full-time PhD at TSU, Na had 12 hours teaching and some community work every week. A busy mother as she was, her principle was that her mothering would not be influenced by her work, like what she told other girls, ‘not to let the work stand in the way of children’s natural growth’ and ‘doctorate can wait, while the child’s growth can’t wait’. Every day, she squeezed two hours with the child in his homework after work. And she often had to be working on her research until midnight. Sometimes, she had to travel on business. She regretted the leave even for a week had impacted her child. When asked how she managed to balance the childcare and her work, Na did not think she did ‘enough’,

I actually spend very little time with my child. I haven’t done the real



(mothering)...like cooking for him, or laundry. I have never done these since I began my PhD work.

Na asked me why I chose to bring my child with me rather than leave him at home with his father and grandparents. My concern was similar to her principle: not to let my work interfere the mothering. I said,

For my son at such a young age, he can't leave his mom. I can't forgive myself if I miss his growth. I will regret if I'm not a part of his growth. It is said mom is the most important person for a child before the age of six. At least, I must be there before he grows older.

Listening to our talk from tape-recording, I realized Na and I were so entrenched within the discourse of 'selfless mother'. Many accounts have stressed the necessity of mother-child love and mother's responsibility for the development of a child's identity, for example, there may be damage to children's development if mothers of young children go out to work (Lawler, 2000; Sharpe, 1994). Apparently, Na and I both internalized mother-child love's supreme importance for children's growth. Children and family went before everything else in our lives. We should never let career development 'stand in the way of child's growth'. For a woman who could not make 'a good balance', she might be judged as not doing well, like how Na had disagreed with my mothering.

Na admitted she at times felt stressed and tired because she had to stay up late for her research. She tried to persuade herself to 'slow down' when she found herself constantly tell her son 'Mom is busy. Don't bother me'. And her son started to call her *nv hanzi* or a

female man. On hearing *nv hanzi*, both of us burst into laughter. It is a popular nickname describing the independent woman. Quite often, I called myself *nv hanzi* too. Does this indicate that to be a successful tertiary teacher, we have to become a female man or, a ‘honorary man’ (Thomas, 1990, cited in Bagilhole, 1993)? Do we have to adapt ourselves to the academic discourse dominated by masculine values such as ‘competition, individual achievement, striving for continuous improvement and placing of responsibility for success in one's own hands’ (Sandra Acker & Armenti, 2004, p. 4)?

Although feeling busy and tired, Na remembered it was right after her maternity leave that she made up her mind to undertake PhD study. She could not just stay at home and care for the baby all the time. She refused to become a *huanglianpo*, or ‘an old wife with wrinkled face’, and deemed it equally important for a mother to grow,

I fear I might become outdated if I stay around the child all the time. I may have nothing to talk with my child. I may have nothing new to communicate with him. It is very important for a mother to grow herself.

Had I had the same fear? Yes, I had feared my life would be consumed with caring for child and family. I devoted most of time caring for my son in his first three years, doing what a ‘*xianqi liangmu*’ (a virtuous wife and a loving mother) should do. Gradually, I found myself distanced from the professional circle. Even with colleagues, most of our talks were about childcare. I was becoming more and more conditioned to the repetitious routines and indifferent to learning. I could not bear a vision that I would go on this way for decades and that my life would seem to die in my thirties. After my son reached three,

I decided to apply for PhD study.

Another 'hero mummy' was Feng. Feng looked after her child alone when she was doing PhD in another city. When she looked back on her PhD journey, Feng was grateful for her rapid growth from the unique experience of being a single mother doing PhD. She did enjoy those years. Like the case by David et al. (1996), with mothers researching about mothers, Feng drew on the mothering experience to develop her research interest in studying mother characters in literature. She was inspired to reflect on women's career, life and identity. Feng related her experience with the female characters in literature,

Whether in traditional American or Chinese literature, the married women are portrayed only as a wife or a mother. If a woman talks about self, she will be criticized for being selfish or morally deficient. As a woman, we should be ourselves. Our roles are more than a mother caring for children. We can have our careers and do what we want.

Like Feng, I enjoyed my study. Although I often felt stressful and hard to cope, I had never regretted my decision of travelling so far to pursuit PhD study. I learnt a lot, not only the academic research skills. More importantly, I found a stronger and more independent self. But, what if a teacher coming for my suggestion? I was less certain. The other day a teacher, Hui, called me. An overseas professor was very interested in her research and cordially offered to be her PhD supervisor. The offer was a surprise. She did not expect her work to be 'so good'. Hui could not conceal her excitement at the other end of the telephone, saying, 'there are several Chinese researchers here, but the professor

only asked me if I would like to do PhD with her'. She was more hesitant, facing a hard choice: family and a five-year-old child or professional development? She needed my suggestion. During our first call, I encouraged her to take the challenge, telling her how I felt inspired during my study. Two weeks later, in our second call, I was less assured. There was a time when both my son and I fell ill. I did not want her to suffer all the loneliness, helplessness and anxiety I had experienced. Even now, if she called me again, I still do not know what suggestion to give. Professional development, family, child, how do we keep balance? How can we be a good mother and a good researcher? Now I know Hui's choice. She declined the offer.

Ireland (1993) asserts that motherhood is an essential, natural, intrinsic part of adult female identity. Our stories represented how a group of mother CE teachers experienced the conflicts and tensions between desires to be a good mother while succeeding in academic life.

At the very beginning of my PhD journey, my supervisor asked me if I had ever considered the gender issue in my research. I ignored the suggestion. Isn't it something taken for granted? No one had ever discussed this issue. There has been research about CE teachers' professional development (e.g. Barkhuizen, 2009; Borg & Liu, 2013; Liu, 2011; Liu & Xu, 2013; Xu, 2014). None of them reported the gender problem. Since I started working, I had rarely heard about that the majority of the teachers were women was related to our professional life. Being a woman, a rather private concept, seemed to be irrelevant to our public or professional sphere. In a presentation done before my fieldwork, I still tried to shun from this issue even some audience raised the concern. I

just wanted to focus my research on teachers' professional lives, with no attempt to step into their private lives.

My perception gradually changed after I got into the fieldwork. I am a wife doing PhD overseas and I am a mother doing PhD. I received lots of concerns from my female colleagues and friends. They asked me if my husband was supportive for my leave for PhD study. They wondered how I managed the childcare and my study. More often, many a teacher came to me for suggestions as they were struggling with professional development and mothering. Our interactions went back and forth between our professional and private spheres. Although the case in the case study is a 'bounded system' (Yin, 2003), as in my study, the case is a group of teachers in CED, my fieldwork went far beyond the boundary of their professional sphere.

My experience points to the centrality of gender in understanding the work lives of teachers. I failed to cut out a clear boundary of CE teachers' public sphere of professional life because women teachers suffer the 'double whammy of being required to perform a second "second shift", in the "private" sphere of the home, as well as in the "public" sphere of paid work' (Goode, 2000, p. 252). Interestingly, none of male teachers I interviewed mentioned their family life to me or talked about their balancing between PhD study and domestic responsibility. Do they encounter the struggles between family life and professional development? I do not know. My identity as a woman could be an insufficient research instrument to explore male teachers' private lives. They might be reluctant to talk about their private life in front of me. However, with the feminist perspective, the stories do reflect that gender profoundly shapes people's 'consciousness,

skills and institutions as well as in the distribution of power and privilege' (Lather, 1991, p. 71). There are gendered identities continuously shaped and contended with regard to the imbalanced power relations embedded in society.

## **Belonging to CED**

I have a younger cousin working in another university. She also teaches English, but to English majors. My parents sometimes asked me, 'why do you always teach year 1 and year 2 students? Look at her, she teaches senior students'. My parents certainly do not know I work in CED nor do they know what CED means. They do not know although we both are tertiary English teachers, we teach different courses. Working in CED, my teaching is oriented only to year 1 and year 2 students, rather than the 'advanced courses' to 'senior students'. When people asked me which school I worked in, they often added, 'CED or EMD?' I am a teacher working in CED. So every time when attending SFL teachers' meeting on Friday afternoon, I always chose to sit at the left side of the room. There my CE colleagues were seated. On the right side, EM teachers were seated. Sitting in the same room, neither CE teachers nor EM teachers would step into 'wrong' side. Without any written rule, we automatically know which group we belong to and which side we should take. There is a sense of belonging to 'us' or not belonging to 'them'. Bullough (2008) understands that the process of identification is based on 'we know who we are in part by whom and with what we identify and to whom and what we belong' (p. 56). Gee (2001, p. 106) postulates that we 'actively choose to join' an affinity group and develop an affinity-identity. Likewise, Wenger (1998) conceptualizes identity as

developing a sense of belonging to a community of practice. Feeling part of or not part of CED, a department where our daily work and interactions take place, forms another aspect of CE teachers' identity. The following three stories portray CE teachers' different identification with their department, CED.

*'Teaching CE is my destiny I can't escape'*

Sen had been working in three universities during her thirty years' teaching. Starting from the basic course department of SND, she later transferred to another university, DBD. Unlike SND, an agricultural college without an independent department for English teaching, DBD had a school of foreign languages composed by an EM department and a CE department. As Sen taught CE in SND, she stayed in the CE department of DBD. In 2000, Sen came to TSU and 'naturally' she was arranged to work in CED because she was previously from the CE department. 'This seems to be my destiny', said Sen, 'I'm connected to CE all my life'.

Sen had never liked her identity as a CE teacher. She could feel 'that something' toward the teachers working in CED from people including the students,

The feelings are unspeakable. CED and EMD are not at the same level. CE teachers and EM teachers are different. Some of my students came to tell me they attended some EM teachers' lectures. They may compare. Being CE teachers, we are deemed to be not as good as EM teachers.

Sen did not think it was her 'quality' that made her a CE teacher but the 'arrangement

of destiny'. At the start of her career, she was assigned by the state's imperative to teach CE in SND and she had to carry on with the CE teacher identity for the rest of her life,

At my graduation, I was fixed into this place. Wherever I go, I would have to be fixed with this CE identity. It's impossible to change.

Teaching CE, a public and basic course, meant no specific research field. In contrast, teachers in EMD could develop their research interest from the courses they taught such as linguistics, literature or teacher education. Sen said her problem was that she did not know what to research,

For us who teach the public course, we have neither directions nor research focus. The difference between the teachers of CED and EMD is that EM teachers can research on what they teach, such as literature, linguistics or teacher education, but for us, we are always teaching a public course.

For Sen, CE teachers had an 'innate deficiency' for doing research. Unlike teachers in EMD that had various research hubs, a range of language courses and ran language teacher education programs, CE teachers had less opportunities such as overseas training and research projects and were scarcely involved in SFL work as they had no courses or students in the school. And with CE students, Sen described the teacher-student relationship as 'distant',

It's a public course. I don't feel I have students and students don't feel



they have a teacher either. They may even not remember your name after two years' teaching.

Mei felt the same toward the students. She had taught both CE and EM students and found teaching EM students much more enjoyable as EM students had more engagement in class and held more respect for teachers. EM students 'looked at her differently' and she had a stronger sense of self-value.

As a CE teacher, Mei felt no attachment to SFL where she had 'no place'. She described the feeling toward SFL like 'a lonely star drifting in the universe'.

I had been 'drifting' too. There seemed no necessity to be involved in the school work. No office, no classroom, no students, no my business here. I even found no proper place for doing interview in the nine-story SFL building. I had believed my disconnection as a result of my passiveness, my personal problem, until I talked to many participants and realized I was not the only one, like Mei said,

It (being an outsider) may be the feeling common to all of CE teachers.

You may feel marginal and I feel I'm the marginal among the marginal.

Sen might feel more marginal. Describing herself *ribo xishan*, or the sun sinking in the west, Sen was strongly aware that her age was becoming a huge constraint. She longed to 'walk forward' and improve herself. Five years ago, at the age of forty, she decided to apply for PhD study. For the next three years, she tried every year, only to be repeatedly rejected. She finally began to realize it was her age that made it impossible,

My age makes everything impossible. I give up PhD application now as there is no chance at all. I still want to study up. If there is any chance, any chance for study, I will try my best to learn.

Now that Sen could see no more hope for 'a change' and being a CE teacher was 'a stigma' forever on her, she could only attribute it to the destiny,

I don't feel that bad about being a CE teacher. What I feel...it was not the choice made by my will. I was assigned to teach CE at the very beginning. Since then, being a CE teacher determined my career development. It is like a stigma that my life is shaped by external factor not by myself.

Unlike Sen who had been hoping to leave CED to EMD, Mei did not consider transferring to EMD. She did not care where to teach, whether in EMD or CED, as she understood that nowadays teaching was less important than research in the university and 'no one cares about how you teach'. For her, developing research capacity and doing PhD was the only way for professional development.

Wenger (1998) argues that by identification, we invest ourselves in relation of association with and differentiation from a community of practice. Sen and Mei's identification with CED is formed by how they see they are different from the teachers in EMD. In relation to EMD, Sen, Mei and 'all of CE teachers' including me, are marginalized in the workplace. Sen's identification with CED is typically based on a mode of belonging: imagination. According to Wenger (1998, p. 176), imagination, as an important component of identity, 'refers to a process of expanding our self by

transcending our time and space and creating new images of the world and ourselves'. Imagination involves our images of the past and the future, images of possibilities, images of the world and images of ourselves. Sen saw her identity of being a CE teacher as a result of the state's imperative rather than a choice from her own will. Being a CE teacher constrained her professional development and provided little chance for doing research. She understood, from both her students and herself, the unspeakable image of CE teachers as 'not as good as EM teachers'. For the 'stigma' of being a CE teacher, Sen could only attribute it to the 'arrangement of the destiny'.

Similar to Sen and Mei, most non-PhD CE teachers saw themselves as a basic course teacher. They often used expressions positioning themselves in 'imagined communities' (Wenger, 1998) of teachers, CE teachers, or basic course teachers, such as 'for CE teachers', 'as a person who holds teaching position', 'I think the priority of a teacher should be', 'for us who are teaching-oriented', 'like us basic course teachers', 'we are teachers', 'the basic ethics of a teacher is to'. Students were part of their community and constantly got mentioned in interviews. For example, Meng, a young teacher, said, 'I'm inclined to, if I can give students more support, to seek for a better teaching. That will benefit students more than publications do', or as Yi, a senior teacher, complained, 'a tertiary teacher is assessed by quantity of her publication, but not by how she helps students' learning'.

***'Someone suggested me to transfer to other school'***

It was the day I interviewed Na. On seeing her, I suggested to look for a place in

SFL. Na hesitated for a while, then said, 'Let's go to my office'. Her office was in School of Teacher Education (STE) where she was a PhD student. On the way we went to her car, Na explained, 'I don't feel like going to SFL, don't you feel it's not the place for us?' We arrived at STE. Na showed me around the school and introduced me to every PhD student we met. I then reminded her if she had submitted her photo to the photo wall in SFL. Na said she did not want to submit her photo and for a long time had seldom participated in school activities.

Na thought SFL differentiated CED and EMD too much and CE teachers were treated as unimportant. When it came to talking about the teachers who did not do research, CE teachers were always referred to. Na sometimes made a joke, calling herself 'a side dish' and said, 'It seems we are second-class teachers, not as professional as EM teachers'. She was once asked which school she worked in and further asked if it was CED or EMD,

When knowing I worked in CED, he replied, 'Oh'. You can feel that...there is difference between CED and EMD.

Because CED was regarded as unimportant and, as Na complained, 'CED does not need good teachers', CE teachers were soon transferred to EMD after finishing their PhD study. Yet not all CE teachers with a doctorate could transfer. Only those who researched in linguistics or western literature could. Na was doing PhD research in literacy. She had never been asked to 'join in to communicate' with EM teachers although there was a literacy research group in EMD. Na then remembered another teacher who did PhD research in education and remained in CED,

Even you obtained the doctoral degree, you might still stay in CED. It seems our research may make no contribution to EMD.

What Na told me was true. All the CE teachers who completed PhD study in linguistics or western literature had transferred to EMD. They were no longer CE teachers. Those who did research in other disciplines, such as education, psychology, anthropology, still worked in CED.

Although Na was unhappy with the way her research was treated and her friend suggested her to transfer to STE after finishing PhD study, she was very confident in her teaching and did not label herself as an 'inferior' CE teacher. For Na, she did not care where to teach, as she could teach well in either department. And teaching the basic course, although generally regarded as 'an easy job', was not easy. How to engage students into class and satisfy their learning needs was a common problem CE teachers faced, especially their students' English capacity was weak. Na did not consider teaching CE being just a 'task' that needed little preparation, instead she devoted much time in preparing lessons. She told me a story in her class,

Once I found a new student in my class I had never seen. He was actually a student in an advanced English class and wanted to sit in my class. He told me my class was interesting and useful for him.

For this, Na commented, 'the students know how much a teacher invests in her teaching. If I work hard, my students would know it'.

Like Na, Qi, a PhD candidate in education, stressed CE's value as serving the majority of tertiary English learners and more important than EM teaching. He said,

EM teaching is only oriented to a small number of EM students, while CE teaching serves most tertiary students from diverse disciplines. Their English learning is far more significant to our social and economic development.

***'It's a waste if you stay in CED'***

Feng was not among the participants I had initially considered. Previously working in CED, Feng now worked in EMD. When I delineated the 'boundary' of the case, I excluded those CE teachers who had transferred to EMD. A participant told Feng's story during the interview and this intrigued me to invite Feng into my study. I wondered how those teachers experienced before and after they left CED to EMD.

Five years ago, Feng was still a CE teacher, feeling 'trapped' in CE teaching full of repetition. She recalled,

I always repeated teaching the same textbook and taught four to five classes the same content every week, year after year. I felt sick of it.

It was not only the repetition that made Feng 'sick' but also the 'boring' communicative activities for practicing English speaking skills. The activities were 'empty talks' without 'content' or 'thinking'. Feng hoped to 'walk forward' and decided to take PhD research in western literature.

Now Feng returned to SFL after the completion of PhD study. She transferred to EMD and found EM students ‘apparently different’,

It’s easy for me to communicate with EM students because they have good command of English. When I taught CE, it was very hard to talk to students in English. Sometimes I had to speak Chinese to explain. With EM students, I can ask them to read, to question, to think and to discuss literature work.

Feng then asked me, ‘you will come to EMD after you finish your study, won’t you? Otherwise it is a waste to stay in CED’.

I did not give Feng a direct answer. It was too early for me to consider the problem. Nevertheless, there was one thing I was sure: I do not want to teach basic course any more, the course that focuses on languages skills training. I am not good at creating an active atmosphere for communicative activities nor like doing, in Feng’s words, ‘boring’ and ‘empty’ daily conversation practices .

Lei held the same decision. She just completed her overseas PhD study and returned to work. She was invited to teach in EMD and declined all the arrangements of teaching basic courses including CE,

I don’t want to teach basic courses any more. I’m really tired of teaching CE. I want to teach the real stuff, something with content, such as research methods, or academic writing.

Comparing with how she felt before PhD study, Lei admitted she felt ‘better’, ‘less marginal’ and ‘found her place’. She then referred to me, ‘you will feel better too after you come back’. After obtaining the doctorate, Lei said she had a ‘clearer career plan’, became ‘more assertive’, ‘more confident’ and could ‘say no firmly’ to what she did not want.

During my stay in the field, Lei organized a seminar. The seminar was about research on CE teaching from the perspective of educational psychology. Many CE teachers showed up and actively engaged in the discussion. This was out of my expectation as I had observed very few CE teachers attending the academic activities although there had been a series of international and national conferences and lectures held in SFL during that month. Most of these activities were of linguistics research. After the seminar, some teachers told me they were interested in Lei’s topic as well as the way she delivered the seminar. As for Lei, she expected to introduce a ‘relaxing’ way to promote teachers’ communication as she herself benefited a lot from such seminars when she studied overseas.

Lei looked forward to seeing more and more CE teachers finish their PhD study and come back to work, including me. With these teachers, Lei hoped to organize regular seminars for teachers to share and discuss. The seminars needed not to be formal or ‘big’, just a cosy occasion for teachers to exchange their ideas or puzzles, no matter how small these ideas might be.

Lei and I talked on about those teachers studying PhD in education. Lei clearly



understood that educational research is ‘completely different’ from linguistics or literature research done by EM teachers. For the difference, Lei did not regard it being ‘a problem’ as the research done by ‘them’ and ‘us’ lied in different disciplines,

Their research is totally different from ours, for example, they use completely different research methodology. It doesn’t matter if they are not interested in our research.

## **Chapter summary**

If identity is ‘how a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is structured across time and space’ (Norton, 2013, p.45), the identity of this group of CE teachers are examined through four particular perspectives. These analytical perspectives emerged from the lived experiences that CE teachers, including me, interacted and talked about our personal and working lives. They are differentiated as well as overlapping, demonstrating the multidimensional nature of identity as a ‘continuing site of struggle’ between conflicting identities (Norton, 2000, p. 127). They are also situational and contextual, based on the dialogic interactions between me and the participants, illustrating the relational, negotiated and contingent nature of identity. Taken together, the four perspectives open a window for us to see what could constitute the thing that is called identity of this particular group.

The first perspective represented historical and cultural settings in which CE teachers became and developed as CE teachers. It focused on the motivational and professional

past dimensions of CE teachers' identity.

The second perspective represented an institutional landscape in which CE teachers navigated through as a teacher as well as a researcher. Focusing on two dimensions of CE teachers' work: teaching and research, the perspective involved taking snapshots in time of work especially how the teachers lived through constant reforms, and of combining their individuals' stories into institutional 'sacred stories' of research.

The third perspective examined the gender aspect of identity. It focused on how women CE teachers acquired a sense of identity through actively negotiating a particular gender being or 'doing' when involved in research especially the PhD research work.

The fourth perspective looked at the collective aspect of identity: CE teachers' sense of group membership. It was directed specifically at the immediate working context of this group of teachers, the department they belonged to. It identified various ways of identification that CE teachers developed in relation to connection and allegiance with this specific community of practice, CED.

With the four perspectives, CE teachers' identity is crystalized by looking at how they constructed their own biographies and prior experiences, their job values and responsibilities, their being a woman and their group affinities. Over time, that identity is shaped and reshaped through an iterative process of interpretation and reinterpretation of the situation, the situation that is made of interactions with others, and located within socio-cultural, historical, and ideological contexts. It is in constant negotiation within 'culturally available meanings and the open-ended power-laden enactment of those

meanings in everyday situations' (Kondo, 1990, p. 24).

## **Chapter VII Teacher Learning: Networks, Identity and beyond**

Walking through the landscape where College English (CE) teachers interacted and lived, stories told and retold, I have been thinking about the questions initiating the research: how do this group of CE teachers learn? How do they learn with the people they associate, and within the context of their workplace? How do they negotiate identities?

These questions led me to write this chapter. I sought to unravel how the research social networks of teachers of College English Department (CED) and their identity negotiation illuminate their learning in ‘situation’ and ‘situatedness’ of the workplace context.

### **Social networks and CE teachers’ learning**

There are distinct contradictions between the cover stories written on CE teachers’ social network maps and the stories behind the maps. The cover stories show there was no research leadership or core within this group and CE teachers had minimal interactions in research activities. The stories behind the maps describe Lin as a leader in teaching-research activities that involved most CE teachers. The cover stories portray English Major (EM) experts as close research ties of CE teachers, while stories behind show their research transactions remained at oral encouragement level and were more oriented to teaching than research.

The contradictions are closely pertinent to the definition of research relationship. Here at CE teachers' workplace, research is defined in form of institutionally-recognized publications and research funding while teaching-research is not research. The institution's definition creates a dominant way of understanding research. Therefore, CE teachers did not recognize each other's teaching-research activities as research interactions and they understood EM experts as important research ties despite minimal interactions.

CE teachers have their definition of research. They considered teaching-research as 'another form of research' and wrote the teaching-research ties, including the leader, Lin, in the social networks. By this way, they tried to legitimize their understanding of research. The different meanings held by the institution and the teachers thus make the maps a site of struggles, the struggles for defining research. The two meanings of research also lead to sharply different size of social networks of different teachers. For instance, Hong considered teaching-research as a form of research thus drew a largest social network map, while Hui and some other CE teachers complied with the official definition of research and identified a small social network. This could partly answer Small's (2009) question of why some actors have smaller and less diverse networks than others. It may be due to the different understanding of relationship held by actors.

It is not only about different definition of research producing contrasting stories. Teachers' identification of research ties may change in different contexts. I, as a researcher, is part of their 'relational definition of the situation' (McCall, 1970, p. 11). My role of a PhD researcher is part of the interactive context that may remind CE teachers of

institutional meaning of research and thus affect their identification of research ties. Therefore, Ma came to ask me if she should add Lin in her map the next day of the interview. Hui asked me if she should also include those teaching-research ties after hearing some teachers included her in their maps. Hong repeatedly claimed she had no research ties yet drew a largest social network. These wavering behaviours suggest that my presence adds to the contradictory stories and that social networks are fleeting and ephemeral.

Now we understand that the social structure of CE teachers' research interactions is decentralized. This group is of low density in interactions and of low reciprocity in research understanding. Different meanings of research have shaped the social structure of CE teachers' interactions and provided both constraints and affordances to teachers' learning.

## **Constraints and affordances for CE teachers learning**

### ***No access to legitimate participation of research***

There is no recognized research leadership and expertise within CE teachers. Leadership and support from experienced researchers are important part of research environment (Brocato & Mavis, 2005). Numerous research has found engaging with experienced researchers in collaborative work could model process in real research contexts and promote learning of doing research (Eraut, 2004; Griffiths, Thompson, & Hryniewicz, 2010). Here at CE teachers' workplace, both seem lacking.

What also appear to be lacking are shared values and norms toward research understanding and practices, as demonstrated by the characteristics of low reciprocity. There is a salient conflict between teachers' actual research engagement and their perceptions toward what is research as well as who is researcher. Such a conflict may constrain the development of a collective view of research among CE teachers and their engagement into a joint enterprise to pursue common goals through a shared repertoire of practice.

The lack of shared understanding and norms could result into a lack of trust. CE teachers did not recognize each other as researchers or belittle each other's research value by placing CE teachers at the outskirts of their network maps. Their understanding of each other's research activities is ambivalent and even divided. They deny each other's research engagement and may even feel surprised to be considered as a research tie. Without shared attitudes and norms of research practices, as numerous researchers (e.g. Nienke M Moolenaar, Daly, & Slegers, 2011; Penuel, Fishman, Yamaguchi, & Gallagher, 2007) have suggested, it is hard to construct trust and support among teachers and therefore teachers cannot cooperate in a 'safe' environment. As trust and social interactions are interrelated and go hand in hand ( Moolenaar, Karsten, Slegers, & Daly, 2014), if CE teachers have little trust with each other in research, they may be less likely to engage in active research interactions.

The social capital like information and resources seems to be unavailable in CE teachers' research networks. Their interactions with important ties of EM experts provide minimal research resources and the interactions with CE teachers produce unrecognized

teaching-research knowledge. In addition, the lack of diversity in CE teachers' network members could make it hard for them to access diverse array of ideas and knowledge.

Taken together, CE teachers' research social networks provide them no access to legitimate participation of officially-valued research. There is no recognized leadership or expertise, limited information and resources for doing research and there are neither shared values nor trust among CE teachers.

### ***A community of practice of teaching-research***

Although there seems to be no community of practice of doing officially-valued research in CED, CE teachers do construct a community of practice of teaching-research activities. This speaks of their organization: *jiaoyanshi* or teaching research group. They had strong leadership by Lin. Most of them had mutual engagement and shared repertoire in teaching-research activities, especially those centred on CE reforms. They saw students as part of community they identified with, a community of practice with the common goal of 'satisfying students' needs'. Their dense teaching-research social networks allow them to participate in teaching-research activities, and simultaneously 'bond' (Borgatti & Lopez-Kidwel, 2011) them in teaching research learning. This is similar to Crossley's (2013) finding from the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Culture Studies. Crossley found that the working-class youths' perceptions of the social world and tastes for cultural objects were strongly shaped by their social networks. Therefore, CE teachers' perceptions toward research could be largely shaped by their dense social networks of teaching research, which means they might be less likely to align with the officially-



valued research and thus more likely to fail to reach institution's expectation.

This suggests that although the model of community of practice is widely adopted in teachers' professional development for its potential to promote collective learning, a community of practice might not produce intended results, rather it may constrain teachers' development for its strong cohesion and producing or not producing certain knowledge. Moreover, the finding shows *jiaoyanshi*, or the teaching research group, is a common practice in China and does work to organize teachers in collective teaching research activities. The problem is that under the circumstances of educational change, when confronted with new challenges for teachers and the institution, how an existing community of practice can be constructed to work for the new goal. CE teachers' interactions demonstrate that a new community of practice is rather difficult to develop as it may be constrained by teachers' prior goal, mutual engagement and shared repertoire.

### ***Identity as a site of ambivalence and struggles***

When CE teachers hesitated between to draw and not to draw, and measured the distance of ties, it is easy to sense their ambivalence toward what is research and what is a researcher. The maps are a site of ambivalence and struggles. So are teachers' identities. And there is no sole identity that is of both change and compromise, but instead it is a site of struggle among complex multiplicity and fluidity. CE teachers experience significant tensions between how to define, accommodate and resist the multiple and changing roles associated with work in academe and their personal lives.

### **Officially-valued researcher or teacher-researcher?**

CE teachers experience significant contradictions between their commitment for teaching and students rather than research publications and outputs. What lies in most CE teachers' heart is their teaching practice. They spend most time in teaching and researching collaboratively to improve classroom teaching. They locate themselves in the 'imagined community' that includes basic course teachers and students.

Although these CE teachers hold strongly to their identity as a teacher or a teacher-researcher, their identities are often threatened, ambiguous and contested especially amid the prevalent discourse of research of publications and funding. Understanding the underlying game of research, they marginalize their identity of teacher-researchers and prioritize EM experts who are perceived to be 'real' researchers. They might be a 'resonant' type summarized by Smith (2010) when investigating lecturers' reactions to the addition of research into their work. CE teachers seem to be resonant with the official definition of research and their accommodation of official research discourse seem to be untroublesome as they in consensus devalue their interactions with CE colleagues in teaching- research. Yet there are dissonant voices, another type in Smith's finding. They considered teaching-research as 'also a form of research' and claimed the research published in required journals have no relevance to the practical teaching. Some of them further appeared to be subverting research definition (Boyd & Smith, 2016) by imagining advocating her understanding of research if she was 'a big person'.

Whatever their identities fall into Smith's (2010) typology of 'resonant', 'dissonant'

or 'rejection' when facing research discourse in the higher education, identity is not fixed or static. It is contextual and situated. Apparently, my presence as a sort of representative of officially-valued researcher and the contradicting research discourses at the workplace post various contextual challenges and tensions to CE teachers' identity construction work. Their identities involve considerable ambiguity and contradictions. On one hand, they saw themselves as a less proper participant for my research by claiming they did not do any research; on the other hand, they talked a lot of their teaching-research, but further commented on these activities as not 'real' research. When rejecting these activities as not 'real' research, they defended themselves by saying they 'are doing something' even if it is not officially-defined research.

**Linguistics/ western literature researcher or non-linguistics/western literature researcher?**

The ambivalence and struggles are not only derived from the meaning of research as high-level publications and that of teaching-research. They also come from the power relation between linguistics/ western literature research and non-linguistics/western literature research. Most CE teachers, if they are to undertake PhD study, they choose to research in linguistics or western literature, a common choice of CE teachers nationwide (Cai, 2013). The alignment with the orthodox research does not come without struggle. Cai (2013) and Jiang (2011) simply mentioned CE teachers' experiences of puzzle and incompetence in combining linguistics research with language teaching. My study further discovered how CE teachers' identities were mediated by power relation when confronted with the issue of what PhD research they should take. There is a complex interplay of compliance and allegiance. Some teachers saw the linguistics research knowledge help in

their teaching, or at the first place, they chose to apply for PhD study in linguistics. Meanwhile, some of them did not think their linguistics research help much in teaching and struggled to connect the two aspects in their PhD research. Quite often, CE teachers show resistance to linguistics/western literature research. They seldom participated in linguistics-related academic activities and their interactions with EM linguistics experts were mainly teaching-oriented rather than in relation to research. They had rare research connections with their CE leader, because he was ‘doing linguistics’. Some of them challenged the conventional notion by assuming ‘only linguistics knowledge can’t make a successful language class’ and took educational PhD study by claiming ‘pedagogical research is also important’.

#### **CE teacher or EM teacher?**

I remembered CE teachers’ suggestion again, ‘you’d better investigate EM teachers’. It is not only because EM teachers do ‘real’ and ‘*gao da shang*’ research. It is also because of CE teachers’ sense of inferiority compared to EM teachers. According to social identity theory, people come to see themselves as members of one group or category in comparison with another. The ways in which individuals distinguish themselves from those of other groups are based on the processes of self-categorization and self-comparison (Hogg & Abrams, 1988). On one hand, CE teachers tended to see themselves as lower status or ‘side dish’ in relation to EMD in various aspects such as opportunities, resources and self-image. On the other hand, they accentuated their values of being a CE teacher. They saw CE teaching more important than EM teaching as it serves students of a larger population and more diversity. They valued their work because

teaching 'basic' students needs more efforts. More often, they sought to leave the group. Deaux and Martin (2003) suggest the evaluation of a group as lower status may produce weaker identification among members and they may tend to exit the group to a higher status membership. Thus, some of CE teachers tried to undertake postgraduate study to be empowered to leave the workplace. Some of them chose to ignore the membership of CED or EMD by perceiving that 'teaching is important nowhere, only research matters'. Some left the group after acquiring the advanced degree.

#### **A woman or a PhD researcher?**

CE Teachers' identities not only involve professional identity. They not only participate in the ongoing practices in the workplace and negotiate through various power relations of types of knowledge and professional group membership. Their identities also include the cultural and gender participation in workplace related social practices. They grapple with a fluid identity when juggling the gender expectations and the increasing research demand.

There is apparent subjection to the social expectations from the highly patriarchal Chinese society and to the filial piety of Chinese culture. Many women CE teachers gave up or postponed their PhD study in fear of social derision toward intelligent women with advanced degree and the disadvantage a doctorate degree may bring to their marital chance. They understood pressure from their parents as well as others. When doing PhD, they hoped to be seen as a 'proper' woman rather than be recognized as a woman PhD. Accordingly, their access to 'materials and symbolic resources, including educational and

interactional opportunities' is limited by 'systemic inequality; namely, the fact that gender, in conjunction with ethnicity, race, class, age, sexuality, or (dis)ability' (Pavlenko, 2004, p. 56).

CE teachers experience pulls and pushes with their PhD pursuit. I was sensitive about my appearance when being mentioned as a female PhD. Na accommodated the negative conception of a highly educated woman, wishing people not to recognize her as a PhD. On the other hand, they strongly felt emancipated by PhD study and viewed the study a process of self-discovery. Like Acker and Feuerverger (1997) have written, the women PhD CE teachers experience 'bifurcated consciousness' or 'segmented self' (p.136-137) when struggling to live up to contradictory demands for 'unaggressive and attractive women' and 'productive researchers'.

There are always gender expectations and understanding of a good mother that are intricately embedded in the concept of morality, as Skeggs (1997) suggests, both in morality and responsibility of caregiving. Women CE teachers have to balance the daily dilemma between children and career. The increasing research demands yield tension between academic work that requires concentration, independence and aggression and the caring, dependent nature of mothering.

Women CE teachers' stories display a sense of accommodation and a sense of resistance. On one hand, they accommodate the traditional expectations of a good mother. For example, Na set child's needs before her work and persuaded other girls not to sacrifice children's development to doctorate study. Although she had tried to squeeze

two hours to be with her son every day, she did not think she had done enough for she had never done cooking or laundry for the child. She did not agree with my mothering for the reason that I deprived my child's stay with both parents. I understood mother's important role in young children's development and shouldered the childcare alone instead of leaving it to my family. On the other hand, they show resistance. Na and I refused to stay at home only to care for the baby and decided to apply for PhD study, believing a woman should keep developing even after she becomes a mother.

There are empowerment and joy coexisting with tensions and contradiction. Feng enjoyed her development through the research and mothering. As a feminism researcher, she started to question the traditional role imposed on women and claimed that women could have their own aspirations beyond mothering. I suggested Hui to take the challenge of undertaking PhD because I myself was empowered by my PhD study.

Simultaneously and paradoxically, the tensions to live up to the demands from two 'greedy institutions'---the academy and family (Currie, Harris, & Thiele, 2000) are disempowering. The gender binaries such as an inferior and subordinated woman required by patriarchal culture versus an aggressive and successful researcher demanded by the institution, a caring mother versus a career-minded professional, remain at the centre of many women CE teachers' dilemmas. I at times found myself unable to cope with the mothering role and research responsibilities, thus was reluctant to give suggestions to Hui. Hui finally gave up the offer for her family and child although she looked forward to undertaking PhD study. Na realized she needed to 'slow down' when her son began to call her 'a female man', an indication of her reluctance to lose her femininity and become a

‘honorary man’.

### ***Multiple trajectories***

CE teachers experience identity as a conflicting site as identity is a nexus of multimembership. According to Wenger (2010), identity is negotiated across contexts and there may be various forms of identification with multiple communities ‘at once and in one body’ (p. 6). The community may be a tight-knitted department, like CED, or EMD. It may be a community of practice in which they engage in teaching research or an ‘imagined community’ of ‘public course teachers’. It might be communities of practice of linguistics/western literature research or non-linguistics/western literature research. When travelling within and across these multiple communities, CE teachers’ identification with different communities coexists, complements or conflicts with each other. Particularly, in a group like CED where there is no unitary understanding or codes for doing research, no strong core to monitor teachers’ research practice and teachers are ‘just doing by themselves’, identification processes are likely to be individuated and membership tends to be more of a product of choice. In such a decentralized, low density group, ‘a thousand flowers blossom’ , ‘heresy abounds and apostates flourish’(Jewson, 2007, p. 75). CE teachers have experienced in and out within and across communities, thus developing multiple trajectories. ,

**Teacher-researchers/ non-researchers: being marginalized and remaining in the lower status group**

When many a participant told me ‘I didn’t do any research’ or refused to draw a map,



they identified themselves as not belonging to any research network or community. However, most of them, especially those without doing PhD study, belong to the community of practice of teaching research. How to define their researcher identity? Non-researchers? To some extent, yes. They called themselves and were considered by the workplace as non-researchers. They can be also called as teacher researchers. According to Borg and Sanchez (2015), teacher research is 'systematic self-study by teachers (individually or collectively) which seeks to achieve real-world impact of some kind and is made public'(p. 1). Most CE teachers' research is oriented to informing classroom practice and shared either among CE teachers' conferences or through publications in journals or books. For example, Hong and Jing tried new approaches in order to meet the changing students' needs. Their research went beyond the reflective thinking by publicizing the results either in low-level journals or in teachers' conferences. Although their research fail to reach institutional criteria of publishing, it makes contribution to knowledge of teaching practice.

Although numerous claims have been made about the benefits of doing teacher research by language teachers (e.g. Borg, 2013; Borg & Sanchez, 2015; Burns, 1999; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999), here at CE teachers' workplace, and in the higher education context, these teacher researchers are marginal. The marginal status of these teacher researchers is partly due to the lack of access to legitimate peripheral participation that can move them from the marginal to a full member of research. As noted, CE teachers have no recognized research leadership or expertise. There are no shared norms toward research, resulting into a lack of trust and collaboration. Besides, they have heavy

teaching load and they are lack of time for research, which is considered as crucial for doing research (Shin, 2015). They do not have ‘engaged’ students for classroom research either. Norton (2000) argues the limited resources are to much extent shaped by the lower-status identity. It is CE teachers’ membership of a lower-status department that strongly shapes their access to legitimate participation of officially-defined research and offers rather limited learning resources, such as research expertise, working conditions and networks.

The marginality of these teacher researchers is also related to meaning negotiation, the other process of identity formation. Being a full, legitimate member means having the ability to contribute to the ‘economies of meaning’ (Wenger, 1998, p. 197) where the production of a range of meanings is distributed among participants. Some meanings have more currency than others because of the different power relationship between those who produce them. The inability to negotiate meanings, often a result of asymmetrical power relations, can create an identity of non-participation and marginality. The increasing research demand in the present higher education context has shifted the balance between teaching and research. For CE teachers, their meaning of commitment to teaching and students is subject to institutional meaning of research performativity. The teaching experiences they produce are considered unimportant in defining a qualified tertiary teacher. Moreover, most of them do teaching research and conceptualize the meaning of research to be informing teaching. However, their meaning of research is regarded as illegitimate. Within the workplace context, they can neither negotiate meaning of being a university teacher nor the meaning of research, thus develop identity of nonparticipation

and marginality.

Without access to legitimate participation in research nor ability to negotiate meanings, CE teachers remain as non-researchers or at most marginal teacher-researchers. According to Deaux and Martin (2003), the lower-status group members may try to accentuate their membership by changing the evaluation by which the group and its members are presented undesirable. In this way, CE teachers set students' needs as their priority and consider teaching research as necessary and helpful for their teaching.

These marginal CE teachers express a variety of emotions over the struggle within the conflicting research meanings and their status of being a CE teacher. Emotion is not only biological in nature. It is predominantly social constructed. Emotion is inextricably interconnected with individuals' interactions with belief, context, power, and culture (Lasky, 2005). To these teachers, the power of legitimate research meaning of publishing in journals is a source of devaluation. They experience a feeling of shame or culpability when they fail to reach the standards and blame themselves for not being good enough as 'work has implications for self-identity, in terms of the sense of confirmation or denial experienced in its accomplishment' (Willmott, 1997, p. 1346). Some of them felt ashamed when being invited to talk about research. Some considered themselves and CE teachers as not so proper participants as EM teachers. Such emotions of shame reveal the state of the self deemed as inferior and defective. The feeling of shame is, for these teachers, to hide but unable to get away.

Besides shame, these teachers express various forms of resigned acceptance. Sen

attributed her being a CE teacher and the inability to do research to the 'arrangement of density'. Mei disregarded the differences between working in CED or EMD by ignoring the importance of teaching and decided to only focus on research. Qi commented his career choice and development as a result of 'nature' rather than his choice.

CE teachers' emotions of shame, resigned acceptance and powerlessness are similarly prevalent among academics when facing the increasing research demand, such as the practice-oriented academics in Australia (Fortune et al., 2016), the British academics (Sutton, 2015) and the women academics in New Zealand (Grant & Elizabeth, 2015). For such emotions, Grant and Elizabeth (2015) argue, it is because these academics are unable to change or resist the institutional research discourse. These emotions are a strategy adopted for survival or a form of depoliticised passivity.

Still, these CE teachers show shifting emotions toward research. There were pleasurable feelings about self as a teacher and a teacher-researcher. These feelings mixed up with complicated, even contradictory ones, such as Jing's confidence in talking about teaching and constant blaming herself for 'not doing well' and for 'trying to look for excuse'. Such heterogeneous feelings are inextricably related to unbalanced power relations between different meanings: teachers' commitment to students and teaching being compromised to research performativity. Thus teachers experience a disjuncture or discord of identity.

If emotions are important in learning, either impeding or motivating learning (Dirkx, 2001), such a defensive and protective stance taken by CE teachers may well restrain

their learning. The closed stance, as Lasky (2005) points out, might restrain teachers from opening themselves up in a reform situation and thus inhibit their learning and trust building. When CE teachers felt ‘unconfident’, ‘improper’ or even ‘ashamed’ to participate in my research to talk about research, they closed them up and their learning was inhibited. Like Campbell (1997) writes,

[W]hen our feelings are trivialized, ignored, systematically criticized, or extremely constrained by the poverty of our expressive resources, this situation can lead to a very serious kind of dismissal—the dismissal of the significance to a person of his or her own life, in a way that reaches down deeply into what the significance of a life can be to the person whose life it is.

**PhD researchers: moving ‘up’, moving out**

Writing down PhD researchers, I saw the faces of Feng, a western literature researcher, Na, an educational researcher and Lei, who obtained doctorate from an overseas university. They are all PhD researchers. They represent three types of PhD trajectories of CE teachers: following the traditional route by doing traditional foreign language research, doing research in non-traditional foreign language fields and undertaking overseas PhD study, a new route emerging in recent years. For them, who undertake officially-valued research, they might not be as marginal as those teacher researchers. Yet they still experience in-ness and out-ness in multiple communities and develop diverse trajectories.

Feng, who may be called a traditional PhD researcher, underwent a trajectory of an individual seeking to exit the lower-status group. She is like what Tajfel (1981) describes, a member having a weak identification of the lower-status group and perceiving the permeable group boundary and finally leaving the group to the higher-status group. Feng felt 'trapped' in the 'boring' and 'empty' CE teaching. To 'walk forward', she decided to undertake PhD research in western literature.

At the workplace of SFL, if CE teachers acquire the legitimate knowledge, they can leave the lower-status CED or abandon the identity of a basic course teacher. The power of legitimate knowledge and the unequal status between CED and EMD work to mediate CE teachers' researcher identity development. Feng transferred to EMD after obtaining the doctorate and found 'teaching EM students much different and more pleasurable'. In this way, power aligns her with the traditional research knowledge as well as with the perception of unequal status of departments by regarding staying in CED as a 'waste'. The lower-status membership is an impetus driving her to move up to the higher-status group and the legitimate knowledge of traditional foreign language research empowers her to achieve this.

Lei did PhD research in an overseas university. Her research knowledge is also a kind of legitimate knowledge at the backdrop of research performativity and internationalization in higher education (Henkel, 2000). At such a backdrop the international research experience is highly valued by the higher education institution. Foucault (1977) asserts that power can be productive. By acquiring the doctorate from a western university, Lei became 'more assertive and confident'. She knew what she

wanted and could firmly say ‘no’ to what she did not want, such as teaching basic courses. She was empowered to make her research knowledge disseminated by organizing a seminar in a way CE teachers actively engaged. Instead of buying into the traditional research done by EM teachers, Lei knew clearly that educational research is different from linguistics research and expected other educational researchers, such as me and other CE teachers, to form a group to share the research after they finished the PhD study.

Na, representing those non-traditional PhD researchers, experienced a trajectory of being denied the entry into the high-status group and moving to research community outside the workplace. Compared to Feng and Lei, Na’s trajectory of moving in and out and seems more complicated. She initially aligned with the linguistics research knowledge by thinking ‘clear explanation of linguistic phenomenon is enough for teaching’ and making her first attempt to undertake linguistics PhD study. She later found ‘only linguistics knowledge can’t make a successful language class’ and decided to study toward educational PhD research.

Unlike Feng and Lei, Na’s educational research knowledge is not powerful enough for her to enter the higher-status department. Without access to the higher-status department nor ability to negotiate the meaning of language teaching research, Na alienated herself from the workplace. She seldom went to SFL or participated in school activities. She chose to be actively involved in the other community, STE, for instance, she invited me to her office and introduced me to her PhD colleagues. She even considered her friend’s suggestion to transfer to STE. Meanwhile, like those marginal teacher-researchers who remained in CED, Na accentuated her CE teacher identity by

seeing that teaching basic course is ‘actually not easy’ but ‘needs more efforts’. She took the strategy of enhancing self-evaluation of the membership, as Tajfel (1981) suggests, when the boundaries of groups are not permeable.

Na’s PhD research led her out of the workplace to other research community. Yet, her identity cannot be simply said as following an outbound trajectory. Her identity is a nexus of multimembership. She engaged in different practices in each of the communities of practice she belonged to. In CED, she remained at the centre of the community for her excellent teaching and valued her ability in teaching ‘not easy’ basic course. In SFL, her research was ignored and the CE teacher identity marginalized her as a ‘side dish’ so that she felt alienated from the workplace and more affiliated to STE. The multimembership and the different forms of participation result into ongoing tensions as well as reconciliation. On one hand, Na jokingly called herself a ‘side dish’ and was aware of the ‘inferior’ image of CE teachers in others’ eyes. On the other hand, she did not care where to teach by perceiving herself being a good teacher no matter which department she belonged to. She distanced herself from the workplace, yet devoted great deal of efforts in teaching CE.

Na’s experiences tell how the legitimate knowledge of traditional foreign languages research, that is, research of linguistics or western literature, exerts its power on CE teachers’ research learning. Acquiring the non-linguistics/western literature researcher identity does not enable the CE teachers to leave the lower-status department or to ‘contribute’ their research meanings to foreign language research. The higher-status department, EMD, is heavily guarded by the legitimate knowledge, only allowing those



who develop linguistics/western literature researcher identity into it.

These PhD teachers have experienced ‘harmonized’ and ‘well balanced’ multifaceted identities (Beijaard, Meijer & Verloop, 2004, p. 122), like Lei and Feng, and identity as conflicting ‘site of struggle’(MacLure, 1993), as in the case of most CE teachers. The multiple trajectories are a result of the interplay between teachers’ group identity of being a lower-status member and their various researcher identities, such as teacher researcher, traditional PhD researcher, non-traditional PhD researcher and western PhD researcher. And power relations play an important role in mediating the interplay.

In this interplay, the group identity of being a member of CED shape CE teachers’ researcher identity in two aspects. Firstly, CE teacher identity creates resources for developing certain researcher identity by shaping research social networks in which CE teachers could participate and by generating the social supports available to the teachers. The basic course instruction-focused nature of CE teacher identity connects them as teaching research ties with each other. Each CE teacher shapes and is shaped by their social networks that are mainly for teaching research participation. Their social investments into the networks are dominated by teaching-research and the social ties with other CE teachers bond them to teaching research engagement. These social resources provide opportunities for developing teacher-researcher identity while constraining the other identity development. Secondly, the lower-status CE teacher identity may work as an impetus for some teachers to leave the group by taking on a particular researcher identity.

On the other hand, the different researcher identities CE teachers develop influence their identification with the CE teacher identity. Those marginal teacher-researchers valued their CE teacher identity by emphasising the importance of teaching and their commitment to teaching rather than to research. The traditional and western PhD researchers eventually left the group and abandoned their CE teacher identity. The non-traditional PhD researchers turned to perceive the value of CE teacher identity after being denied the entry into the higher-status group.

In this section, I discussed how the contradictory stories on and behind CE teachers' social network maps reflect different meanings of research at the workplace. CE teachers' immediate workplace, CED, is a decentralized group without recognized research leadership and of low density and low reciprocity in research interactions. Such a working context provides both constrains and affordances for CE teachers' learning: there is no access to legitimate participation of research, there is a community of practice of doing teaching-research which may constrain teachers' development of officially-valued research, it is a site where CE teachers negotiate identities with ambivalence and struggles and it allows multiple trajectories for teachers' identity development.

What is evident in the discussion is that power relations of different research meanings and membership of departments shape CE teachers' research social networks. In the next section, I will explore how such social networks and the community of CED are embedded in its organization and the boarder historical, cultural and social contexts.

## **Social networks embedded in the institutional organization**

CE teachers establish their research ties not randomly. Rather, they set up research ties with those whom they work with and those perceived with expertise either in teaching or research. Their research interactions are based on the workplace, which is, as McLaughlin (1993) conceives, not only a physical setting, a formal organization, but also a social and psychological setting in which teachers participate routinely and that shapes the size, quality, nature and meanings of teachers' networks (Small, 2009). There are disparities in organizational arrangement of courses and departments, for example, teaching CE, is seen as different from teaching EM. This may influence how teachers build trust, think of others and share information and other resources. There are institutional rules, values and norms, such as what is research and what is not research, guiding its teachers' practices and personal connections. All of these have shaped CE teachers' research social networks in such aspects as size, composition and nature of social networks.

### ***Teaching a public course***

CE teachers constantly refer to themselves as 'a teacher of public course' or 'a teacher of basic course'. A distinct nature of CE is that it is a course of public service oriented to general tertiary students rather than to any specific school or discipline. Therefore, CE teachers have no stable working place. They work in various public teaching buildings. As they teach students outside SFL, they do not own an assessable office, or a shared place in SFL either. Such a dispersed and isolated working environment reduce the chance

of interactions by preventing them from casual, or even intentional meetings.

CE teachers in SFL are not the only teachers experiencing the lack of collegial collaboration in research. In Borg and Liu (2013)'s study, CE teachers across the country reported a lack of collaborative and collegial discussion about research in their CE departments and many of them did not communicate about research activities with their colleagues. In their study the competitive promotion system was found to be a constraining factor. In my study, however, few teachers talked about competition between them. Instead, most of them complained about the isolated working environment and the lack of a shared place. And I myself also felt keenly of the trouble of meeting with teachers. By focusing on the local, concrete and contextualized, the ethnographic study enabled me to systematically study CE teachers' point of view of professional learning in its natural setting. Through the situated examination, the study adds to the understanding of CE teachers' work by discovering that it is the isolated working environment that partly constrains CE teachers' interactions. The importance of space and time in professional community development has been suggested by a number of researchers. They propose that the schools need to transform their structures to provide opportunities for teachers to meet including regular time schedule and physical proximity (e.g. Gray et al., 2015; Murphy, 2015a). Here in CED, the lack of shared space and time is a prominent constraint of CE teachers' research interactions.

Teaching CE not just influences interaction opportunity. It affects the nature of CE teachers' interactions. CE teachers are teaching-focused. It is the ideas to be applied in classroom that are demanded by teachers and students. The nature of their job requires

that they be familiar with teaching and students. CE teachers' efforts to improve teaching by reflecting on action and experience are typically practitioner research. According to Richardson (1994), practitioner research as practical inquiry aims to improve the practice. The practical knowledge obtained from the teaching-research is bounded by the situation or context it arises and deals with 'how to do things, the right place and time to do them, or how to see and interpret events related to one's actions' (Fenstermacher, 1994, p. 12). This knowledge may not be capable of public expression of writing, especially in articles of prestigious, refereed journals. CE teachers' research activities, according to McIntyre (2005), are natural for teachers whose fundamental practical activity is teaching and teachers usually look for ideas to enhance pedagogy. Their professional interactions naturally are oriented to informing teaching by doing teaching-research, because as Widdon (1985) argues, in such a working context 'tacit knowledge and anecdotal information are perceived to be far more useful than theory' (p.86).

It is not uncommon to see CE teachers' counterparts in worldwide academia---practitioner-academics who value and undertake practitioner research in order to improve their practice, such as the nursing and allied health lecturers in Smith and Boyd's (2012) study and teacher educators who value the scholarship of teaching and learning and teaching prominence and maintain a personal commitment to teaching(e.g. Chalmers, 2011; Huber, 2001; Young, 2006). In Yuan's (2015) study, the teacher educators in Hong Kong were apt to undertake classroom-based research and write practical papers. Likewise, Barkhuizen's (2009) investigation among CE teachers reported that CE teachers' research focus and aim were dominantly concerned with students and teaching.

Not surprisingly, in my study, CE teachers' social network transactions were centred at teaching research activities. They interacted with CE colleagues in teaching research and their interactions with EM experts were also teaching-oriented.

### ***CED as a lower-status department***

CE teachers are officially called public course teachers. They also attach labels to themselves, such as 'a side-dish', 'the homeless', 'not so professional or academic'. The labels and many stories have alluded to the perception that CED is a lower-status department in research. Such a perception appears to come from unequal arrangement of expertise and resources that have profoundly affected CE teachers' research social networks.

Expertise is one of reasons for people to establish ties (Coburn et al., 2010). People tend to establish ties with those perceived with expertise. When drawing their research social network maps, CE teachers unanimously reached an agreement that there was no recognized research expertise or leadership in CED. There are abundant research resources in SFL, such as the research professors and numerous research hubs. However these resources are all located in EMD. If there are 'good' researchers in CED, they will be transferred to EMD. It is not strange that CE teachers and CE departments are generally disfavoured in such a manner. Liu and Dai (2003) found in every university investigated, the teachers with advanced degree were usually arranged to work in EM departments, while teachers without advanced degree were arranged to teach CE. Such working arrangements thus make it hard for CE teachers to seek for and develop research

expertise.

The unequal arrangement of expertise by the institution can also create the cognitive sense like what Meyer and Rowan (1977, p. 341) define as ‘classifications built into society as reciprocated typifications and interpretations’. The categories have been created, although not by mandates, between CED and EMD, that ‘CE teachers just need to teach well’ and ‘CED seems to have no need for good researchers’. Such ‘cognitive institutions’ can shape how teachers perceive their circumstances (Small, 2009, p. 16). If teachers understand ‘CE teachers just need to teach well’, their motivations of doing or doing certain type of research could be affected. And this perception can further influence how they conceive one another as researchers or non-researchers, for instance, CE teachers are resources for good teaching and ‘not academic’ for research.

CE teachers’ social networks are closely related to their membership of CED, a lower-status public course teaching group. For this, Bourdieu (1983b) states the actual or potential resources linked to a network, are to a certain degree shaped by membership of a group. He writes,

Social capital is the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition—or in other words, to membership in a group— which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectivity-owned capital, a “credential” which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word (pp. 190-

191).

### ***Teaching- research versus officially-valued research***

Whether written in official mandates or drawn in CE teachers' research network maps, two types of research meanings stand clearly in contrast: officially-valued research and teaching-research. The different positions of the two meanings can shape the 'possibility or the impossibility of observing the establishment of linkages that express and sustain the existence of networks (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, pp. 113-114). Indeed, it has affected CE teachers' research networks in various aspects such as size, composition, interaction goals and expectations.

Among CE teachers' social network maps, there were blank maps. There were maps drawn only to 'help' my study. More often, teachers hesitated to place the names on their maps, saying they had very few research ties. Most of their networks were of small size with limited ties. Although the interviews discover most of them, including those who did not draw maps, did actively engage in teaching-research activity, they incorporated the institutional meaning of teaching-research being 'not research'. This is why they excluded ties with whom they interacted in teaching-research activities. Some disregarded all the ties and rejected to draw the map because they were 'just involved in teaching-related research'. And some included few CE colleagues in their networks because the interactions 'took place when we are doing teaching work'.

In the same manner, the power relation between the two types of research contributes to the unbalanced composition of ties in CE teachers' networks. EM experts represent the



expertise in officially-valued research. Therefore, they were placed at the important inner circle of networks although their interactions with CE teachers were minimal. CE teachers, including the leader, Lin, are not legitimate researchers or research leader. Thus, they were marginalized into outskirts of networks even though the interactions among them were frequent and effective in improving teaching.

In this section, I have discussed how CE teachers' social networks are embedded in their organization where CE teachers are arranged to teach a public course. I also examined how power relations of different types of knowledge and unequal status of departments influence CE teachers' attitudes, beliefs and perception toward research and thus shape their social networks in relation to network size, nature and structure.

Power relations are not static. They are shifting and changing, and developed in a historical, cultural and social context. In the next section, I will examine how CE teachers' workplace, CED, is developed in historical, cultural and social contexts. It is a cultural community made of 'groups of people who have some common and continuing organization, values, understanding, history and practices' (Rogoff, 2003, p. 80).

## **A cultural community of CED**

CE teachers' research interactions are contingent on their working in a teaching-focused, lower-status department and related to unequal status of types of research. If professional relationships are crucial to teachers' learning and we must strive to improve the conditions to enhance teachers' professional interactions, I have to work out how the

lower-status community of CED has developed and how the contests have been historically and culturally shaped. My intention is in line with Singh (2016) who sees a problem evident in dominant network studies is that they represent networks as an ahistorical, acultural and universal form of social structure. It is true that CED is not simply a collection of teachers sharing the same characteristics of teaching CE. Rather, it is a community historically, culturally and socially constructed.

### **A historically constituted group**

CE teachers are not coming from nowhere, but from their past. Their workplace is 'historically constituted between persons engaged in sociocultural constructed activity' (Chaiklin & Lave, 1993, p. 17). They might have come into CE during the time of late planned economy, a time stressing individuals' submission to collective and national imperatives. They might have become a teacher by nation's allocation, or for the purpose of obtaining a free ticket for urban residence. For quite a long time they were required to 'stay there only to teach obediently'. They were not allowed to behave otherwise, for example, to pursue advanced degree and to fulfil career development. And their teaching, even for the teachers of younger generation, has been focused on 'repeatedly' recitation and imitation of language skills.

CE teachers enter the profession with a gendered history. Teaching, with 'domestic and maternal imagery' (Acker & Dillabough, 2007, p. 301), is entrenched in discourse of being a 'good job for girls'. Therefore, all the younger women CE participants referred to this as one of their reasons for entering teaching profession or followed their parents' will

to study in a normal university. CE teaching has been found to be a female-dominated occupation that more than 70% of CE teachers are female (Borg & Liu, 2013; Jiang, 2011). In Jiang's (2011) research, time compatibility and job stability are the most important factors for women CE teachers to enter the profession as the two factors serve the best for women teachers' domestic role. The social expectation for what a proper girl should do is so strong that most women teachers internally accept CE teaching as a 'good job'. In some cases, it may cause fierce clashes between individuals and the society, like Lei's constant disputes with her mother or it may exert its power through 'symbolic violence' that subjected me to the 'feeling of duty' to follow my parents' wish.

If professional identity is 'a work history-based constellation of teachers' perceptions of themselves as a professional actors' (Vähäsantanen, 2015, p. 3), I am struck to find few research done with CE teachers had ever probed into their professional history (e.g. Bai, Millwater, & Hudson, 2013; Barkhuizen, 2009; Borg & Liu, 2013; Jiang, 2011; Xu, 2014). Jiang (2011) examined CE teachers' motivations for choosing CE profession. She drew on Lortie's (1975) conceptualization of five reasons for becoming teachers: working with people, or young people; being of service; continuing an involvement within an educational setting; material benefits and security; and time compatibility. A lack of examination of broader sociocultural contexts in her research or in all present research misses an important aspect of CE teachers' identities: they came from a historical context of planned economy. In such a context, teachers entered the profession not from their personal choices but by hegemonic external forces, such as state's allocation or urban-rural dualism. The broader sociocultural context also cornered their professional

development only in ‘staying there obediently’.

CED is constituted by CE teachers’ historical activities. CE has historically occupied a lowly status as a ‘simple, low status, linguistic tool course’ (Cai, 2013). It is ‘simple’ as it entered the higher education to ‘help students build up solid foundation of language skills’ (MOE, 1985, 1999) and it had been oriented to teaching basic English grammar and vocabulary. The time it entered the higher education in late 1970s was a time when students had rather limited command of English due to the long-term suspension of English education during the Cultural Revolution. From the beginning, CE teachers’ students have been considered as ‘non English majors’, ‘poor English learners’, ‘basic’, ‘unengaged’ and ‘easy to teach’. The association with lower-status English learners thus creates such images of CE teachers as ‘not as good as EM teachers’ and ‘not *zhuanye* or professional’.

CE’s entry into the higher education is the result of an urgent demand for English education since China ended the Cultural Revolution and started its ‘opening’ reform. It is part of national language education rather than of academic discipline. Therefore the entry and development of CE have been closely related to political, economic and social forces. Since the founding of People’s Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, the foreign language education policies have taken constant shifts according to the political agenda and socio-economic climate, the shifts as well resulting into the changes of status and role of English as a course in China. As Adamson (2004) writes,

The English language curriculum has reflected the vagaries of the socio-

political climate in China. The curriculum has served as a mechanism for the state to appropriate English to serve its different aspirations, be they revolutionary or economic in orientation. The (often sudden) shifts in state priorities have required curriculum developers to be nimble footed in ensuring the political correctness of the resources (p. 195).

To serve the economic development need after the ‘revolutionary aspiration’ in late 1970s, CE entered the higher education. For the same reason, CE has been undergoing constant reforms since its establishment. It is understandable that some teachers described CE teaching as pursuing ‘fashion’ and felt subjected to constant reforms. As teachers of a course under centralizing patterns of government control, especially within the deep-rooted hierarchical social system of China, CE teachers have to be ‘dragged by the nose’ and be the ‘teachers below’. They are less regarded by multiple shareholders, including the policy makers, elite experts, university and school managers, the public and even the students. Occupying such a marginal status in higher education, they may fare less well in aspects of conditions of work, access to resources and influence in policy-making.

Since reforms are common part of CE teachers’ work, to research how to improve teaching is thus natural and necessary for CE teachers who try to ‘satisfy students’ needs during the rapidly changing society’. Therefore, most teachers’ research is centred on CE reforms. For example, Hong, Sen, Ling, Lian, just name a few, all described how they did classroom-based research during the CLT reform. Hong, Mei, Qi talked about their plans for the new reform. Moreover, reforms and the relevant teaching-research have earned cultural capital for CED. CED was awarded by the Ministry of Education for its reform

achievement and its reform honours were displayed on SFL website. However, the cultural capital produced by teaching research around reforms is apparently not enough to legitimize these teachers to be a researcher. Rather, it may reinforce the categorization that ‘CE teachers just need to teach well’.

As noted, CED has been historically a lowly status department in Chinese universities for its late entry, orientation to basic language skills training and to ‘unengaged’ students and strong dependence on national language policies. Its lowly status has continued into the new century. In the context of higher education, CED is not the only department of lowly status. Internationally, there are certain courses located in higher education institutions occupying the lowly status in their institutions, such as teacher education, nurse education or community work training (e.g. Boyd & Smith, 2016; Findlow, 2012; Labaree, 2005; Maguire, 2000; Sikes, 2006). All of them are rendered with low status in their institutions for their late arrival to the higher education, working with a practical or ‘training’ element, heavy teaching or training load, serving a low status clientele (e.g. children for teachers, low proficient English learners for CE teachers), being more oriented to public service. There are many metaphors describing the marginal place of academics of these courses, such as ‘life on the margins’ (Labaree, 2005) (Labaree, 2005), ‘outside the ivory tower’ (Maguire, 2000), ‘political putty’ and ‘serving too many masters’ (Sindelar & Rosenberg, 2000). These metaphors are just like how CE teachers described themselves, ‘side-dish’, ‘homeless’, ‘dragged by the nose’. The higher education is like what Maguire (2000, p. 162) points out, ‘highly differentiated and internally divided’.

CE teachers not only occupy a lowly status in higher education. Most of them are women and CED is a feminised group. They not only live in a divided higher education but also in conflicting spheres of family and work.

### **A feminized group**

CED is dominantly a women teachers group. Most women CE teachers in SFL, like nationwide CE women teachers, chose CE profession for its advantage of ‘balancing between career and family’ (Jiang, 2011). They have been keeping the balancing in mind. Their struggles to balance are so hard because they, and other women academics across the world, live in a working context where the academic careers are traditionally organized according to the male life pattern (Metcalf, Woodhams, Gaio Santos, & Cabral-Cardoso, 2008). And the increasing demand for research productivity and performance is accentuating the masculine values. They have to comply with the behaviours of competition, individualism, achievement, ruthlessness, being single-minded and aggressive (Alemán, 2008).

In working hard to meet personal, professional and institutional demands, women CE teachers, are fixed in their feminized roles. There is a significant theme of ‘marriage plot’ in women CE teachers’ stories. The ‘marriage plot’, according to Aisenberg and Harrington (1988), expects that women’s proper sphere is the private or domestic one and women’s role is to provide support to a significant male. Women CE teachers’ life decisions in relation to the marriage plot are an inextricable part of their PhD researcher identity construction. Before they were settled or established a stable relationship, most

women CE teachers postponed or abandoned the pursuit for PhD study. There existed a fear that they might be discriminated against in the marriage market due to the negative perceptions of female PhD (In fact, none of the women CE teachers in my study went for PhD study before they were settled). After setting up a family and having a child, they were expected to be a good mother that entails caring and responsibilities for children. Childcare was placed before everything else including professional development. The expectations came from both others and themselves. For example, Na not only required herself but also persuaded other women including me to prioritize childcare to PhD study as ‘doctorate can wait, while children’s growth can’t’.

Women CE teachers, like other women academics living in the educational change toward research performativity, for instance, those in Raddon’s (2002) study, position themselves to contradictory discourses of being a good researcher and the responsible mother and experience internal conflicts. They felt guilty or criticized others for not balancing well between childcare and PhD study and for not doing the right mothering. They put the childcare and family at the first place and had to give up study opportunity. They worked hard to meet institutional demand, while worried about becoming a ‘female man’. Simultaneously, mother CE teachers positioned themselves to the quest for an independent woman. They refused to be solely occupied by childcare and pursued the growth of a mother.

What is the potential for these women teachers, in this increasingly masculinity-laden working context? To become ‘*nv hanzi* or female men’ or ‘honorary men’ (Thomas, 1990, cited in Bagilhole, 1993)? Or to seek for potential for learning defined by the gender that



provides ‘a series of biological, social and cultural conditions for legitimacy’ (Tanggaard, 2006, p. 222)? The potential might consist of both resources and constraints for learning. Some of CE teachers postponed or gave up PhD study to adjust to the social expectations for a less intelligent woman. Their legitimate access to advanced education is constrained by social derision toward female PhDs. They struggled in the dilemma between PhD study and childcare. Some gave up the study opportunity. Some sacrificed health and some lived in the guilt. On the other hand, the gender binary may create resources for learning. It drives the women teachers to look into themselves of being a woman and leads them to academic research from a feminist perspective. Thus, Feng, a mother PhD researched mother characters in literature and questioned the dominant writing of women’s domestic roles of being a wife or a mother. I examined women academics’ gender identity, the perspective emerging from my interactions with women colleagues rather than from my research planning. However, women academics’ situation in the highly patriarchal Chinese society is no less difficult than the western women academics who see ‘continuity and change’ in their gendered universities (Acker, Webber, & Smyth, 2016). What is true is that the changing higher education context is posing new challenges to the realms of family and the private, making the situation more difficult and leaving little space for work-family balance.

CED is a lower-status, feminized department. It is also located in a field where an array of players comes to play. The players are not just departments, school and university. They also include academics in disciplines. In the next section, I will discuss how this group of CE teachers lives in a conflicting research field.

## **Located in a conflicting research field**

CED, a teaching-focused department, seems to ‘only need to teach well’, especially when compared with the other department, EMD. Yet this department is located in the university conceptualized by Bourdieu (1988, p. 14) as a field of struggles ‘to determine the conditions and the criteria of legitimate membership and legitimate hierarchy’. The hierarchy is not just about different status of departments and courses. There is differentiation of types of knowledge that ‘determine which properties are pertinent, effective, and liable to function as capital’. Bourdieu (1983a) talks about the definition of a writer. He says, ‘it is true that every literary field is the site of a struggle over the definition of the writer’ (p. 42). In this section I will explore what makes a researcher a researcher at CE teachers’ workplace.

Most CE teachers are not considered as researcher. The knowledge they generate in teaching-research is not legitimate research knowledge and their participation in teaching-research learning is defined illegitimate research. They are like participants in Santoro and Snead’s (2013) study and a teacher educator in Yuan’s research (2015) who called themselves ‘not an academic’, because they all understood that an academic or a researcher is to do impractical and abstract research and classroom-based research and practical papers are not valued by their universities. Most CE teachers’ choice is like many other practice-oriented academics in the world, such as American academics’ risking the promotion by prioritizing the scholarship of teaching and learning (Huber, 2001) and Australian universities teachers’ pursuit of excellence in teaching rather than

high-quality publications (Santoro & Snead, 2013). They called themselves ‘a teacher’, ‘someone holding the teaching position’, just as most practice-oriented academics prefer to be called teaching academics or prac-ademic (Clegg, 2008). Their research preference is similar to ELT teachers worldwide who highly value research oriented to practical application of research in teaching (Borg, 2009) and who seek for solutions for local pedagogical problems from research (Borg & Liu, 2013).

The tertiary institutions value the scholarly writing for prestigious journals and research funding. Thus such research can provide academics capital in various aspects, such as promotion and recognition as a ‘real’ academic. Classroom-based teaching-research is not recognized research. If knowledge is constructed through social activities that are situated in historical, social and cultural contexts, so are power relations of types of knowledge. There has seen a shift of power relation between teaching and research. Teaching related activities had been the only legitimate activities for CE teachers and they were required to ‘stay there obediently to teach’. Research with the emphasis on quantity of publications and research grants has overtaken teaching in higher education only in recent years (Lai, 2010) and was previously unimportant, even illegitimate during a particular historical time when teachers were under rigid personnel control during the planned-economy age.

The unequal power relation between the two types of research is seen in international academia. Practitioner research has for most of time been excluded from academic community for its assumed lack of intellectual rigor and it has been a tradition to consider certain modes of thinking as more rigorous and more intellectual (Goodson, 1995).

Practical problems that practitioners confront is the ‘swamp’ overlooked by ‘high hard ground’ where problems are solved according to the standard of rigor but without relevance to practical problems. There is always a dilemma of ‘rigor or relevance’ for professional practitioners (Schön, 1995). To this point, there have been appeals for the legitimacy of knowledge generated by teachers about their practices, the ‘actionable knowledge’ (Borg, 2009; Schön, 1995; Zeichner, 2010), reflecting the struggles that practitioner research knowledge takes to win its position in academia.

At CE teachers’ workplace, a teacher-researcher is not a researcher. It seems even within the officially-defined research discourse, so to speak, PhD research, there are certain extent legitimized and delegitimized practices and stances. And this makes certain researchers less appropriate than some others.

As a qualitative researcher, I encountered the doubts and challenges from the positivism-minded teachers and other PhD researchers. I was considered as not a rightful researcher. I may even face the failure in carrying out the research. I am a lonely qualitative researcher in my workplace. So are other qualitative researchers in China. Chen Xiangming, the first Chinese scholar who introduced qualitative research into China in the 1990s, talked about her experiences of doing and teaching qualitative research. Qualitative research is often criticized as being subjective, impressionistic and unsystematic and her students are often affronted by attacks from the speculative and positivist researchers (Chen, 2016). Moreover, findings from qualitative research are seldom adopted by government agencies who prefer to accept ‘big data’ from a large representative sample. Chen (2016) further unravelled that under the bureaucratic

administrative system in China where government at all levels control most of the allocation of research funds, there is a strong preference in quantitative research, while qualitative research projects receive little funding.

Because of its short history in China and the strong preference in positivist research, the training of qualitative research and its dissemination in China are considered with ambivalence. Chen (2016) pointed out that the unsupportive environment for qualitative research has negatively impacted academics' research and professional development. This sounds familiar. Some of my participants anguished over the access to qualitative research knowledge and found no such knowledge provided. Some of them suggested me to add quantitative element. Because of the lack of understanding and dissemination of qualitative research knowledge, CE teachers can easily consider my research as less appropriate.

In the global context, there have been paradigm wars among positivists, interpretivists, and critical theorists (Gage, 1989) and the endeavours for the legitimacy of non-traditional post-positivist methodology have driven the growth and acceptance of qualitative research. My experience tells that China remains peripheral in the international context of doing qualitative research (Hsiung, 2015). Compared to their western counterparts, although who are still positioned at the 'bottom of the pyramid' (Lester & O'Reilly, 2015, p. 631), Chinese qualitative researchers' situation seems harsher. When western practice-oriented academics are embracing increasingly flexible, innovative and popular approach to social research (Jordan & Wood, 2015), such as narrative research, self-study, action research (e.g. Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Zeichner, 1999), the similar

practice-oriented CE teachers are still entrenched in the landscape where only positivism research knowledge is available and accepted.

What counts as discipline knowledge of foreign language education makes the field more complicated. Disciplines are intellectual as well as social structures (Stehr & Weingart, 2000) and the boundaries of academic disciplines are drawn in social-historical contexts. According to Lists of Disciplines and Specialties of Master and Doctor Degree-awarding in China (MOE, 1997), there is a three-level specialty setting of discipline including first-level, second-level and third-level disciplines. Two second-level disciplines are related to English language teaching: English Language and Literature, and Foreign linguistics and Applied Linguistics. Based on this discipline structure, research in linguistics and western literature has been considered as orthodox in foreign language education. According to Xin (2006, p. 17), there has been a ‘Linguistics Complex’ in foreign language academia in China. A case in point is PhD programs in the discipline of foreign linguistics and applied linguistics. Xin (2006) conducted a survey in China and found that the PhD programs in this discipline ranged from syntax, psycholinguistics, second language acquisition, pragmatics, language test, sociolinguistics, translation, corpus study, etc. None of them was directly focused on EFL education. No wonder, Cai (2013) found most CE teachers’ postgraduate research lied in the fields of literature or linguistics.

Historically, TESOL profession has been engaged in application of linguistics with language teaching purposes (Canagarajah, 2016). Freeman and Johnson (2004) point out the centrality of SLA and linguistics in the knowledge base for language teaching is a

result of historical rather than a functional reality. Linguists and applied linguists have occupied the dominant status in TESOL research. They argue that the knowledge and research findings generated by linguistics and applied linguistics are central to TESOL education (e.g. Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1997; Michael, McIntosh, & Stevens, 1964; Spolsky, 1979; Stubbs, 1986). The modernist values held in applied linguistics have strongly influenced TESOL's professional discourse in its formation, such as the assumption that language system is separated from history, society, and politics and that students' successful acquisition is dependent upon introduction of grammatical properties (Canagarajah, 2016). Therefore, it is not strange to hear a SFL leader's talking about his cognitive linguistics research that it 'can help him better explain the linguistics phenomenon to students'. Besides, Chinese universities usually organize English language teachers within single disciplines, either linguistics or literature and there are strong disciplinary boundaries dividing areas of knowledge (Han & Wu, 2015).

However, Freeman and Johnson (2004) argue that language teaching is neither defined by single source of discipline knowledge of SLA or by applied linguistics. The study of what language is and how it is learnt does not necessarily translate into knowing how to teach. According to Freeman and Johnson, TESOL draws on research in various disciplines, such as psychology, various schools of linguistics, sociology and anthropology. Similarly, TESOL International Association made their position in 2003 that the field of Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) is 'a unique distinct academic and professional discipline with unique linguistic, cultural, and pedagogical dimensions that requires specialized education and training'. The

development in TESOL research has seen a call for richer discourses and practices to be constructed in TESOL profession. In his review of TESOL research history, Canagarajah (2016, p. 30) summarizes the following trends in TESOL research,

- from product to process and practice
- from cognitive to social and ecological
- from prepackaged methods to situated pedagogies and language socialization
- from studying controlled classrooms and experimental settings to everyday contexts and ecologies
- from the homogeneous to variation and inclusive plurality
- from knowledge or skills to identities, beliefs, and ideologies
- from objective to personal and reflexive
- from the generalized and global to specific and local

Echoing the TESOL research trends, TESOL International Association acknowledges that the last decade of research has contributed to new views of the nature of language and the uniqueness of English as a second language learning. The Association stresses that language learning is socially mediated, self-organizing and continually emerging and the cognitive perspectives of language as a mental code is not enough for TESOL understanding (TESOL International Association, 2014). To this point, many researchers have been calling to redraw the boundaries and reclaim the relevance of TESOL research by including diverse fields and theoretical discourses (e.g. Borg, 2006; Canagarajah, 2016; Johnson, 2006; Johnson, 2015; Kubanyiova & Feryok, 2015).



While international TESOL research is becoming more diversified and inclusive, the non-linguistics/western literature PhD researchers here in SFL are still experiencing exclusion from the mainstream research. By making inclusion and exclusion, disciplines reinforce their social status and Chinese tertiary EFL teachers' professional communication is found to be largely controlled by disciplinary divisions (Han & Wu, 2015). Thus linguistics research was referred to as '*gao da shang*', or high, grand, superb, and other research, such as educational research was 'irrelevant here'.

To sum up, CED has been historically and culturally a teaching focused, feminized department of lowly status. It has developed its cultural practices and traditions that shape its individuals' research participation of teaching-research and interactions and limited access to research opportunities and resources. Moreover, CE teachers live in a multi-dimensional, hierarchical social space or field that is made up of not only the differentiated departments and courses but also academic profession, disciplines, and university as the work site. It is an organized site where various participating social actors compete within as Bourdieu conceptualizes, 'force and struggle' (2000, p. 41, cited in Pileggi & Patton, 2003) in defining legitimate membership in research. It is located in a field where 'the locus of struggle is to determine the conditions and the criteria of legitimate membership and legitimate hierarchy' (Bourdieu, 1988, p. 14).

## **Continuity and change**

Whether choosing who to interact in research activity or negotiating various discourses in their professional and personal lives, CE teachers are enacting agency. They

act to make decisions and choices, take stances, make sense of and feel about the change and the contexts. The multiple trajectories they have developed are not merely shaped by power relations. They are the result of the interplay of agency and structure, a process that CE teachers bring into their personal biographies, beliefs and values. They are not powerless passers-by in the social world (Gonzales, 2015). They are agents of change, 'either serve hegemonic interests or challenge existing power relations' (Weedon, 1989, p. 25). They make continuity as well as change.

CE teachers exert a range of investment into multiple imagined communities or imagined identities. There is a community of teacher-researchers, the membership of which does not promise much cultural capital such as institutional recognition or promotion. Most CE teachers made little investment in identifying themselves as a teacher-researcher when drawing the maps. They denied their teaching-research engagement to be legitimate research activities, a way simultaneously reinforcing the institutional meaning that teaching-research is not research and CE teachers are not researchers.

For CE teachers, there is an imagined community of EMD. Becoming an EM teacher means 'better' students, teaching courses of 'real stuff' and respect from others. The cultural capital encourages some CE teachers to make investment in leaving CED, whether it be a failure in Sen's case or a success in Feng's case. In this way, the ideology here at the workplace is reinforced that CED is a lower-status department and EMD is a higher-status department.

CE teachers' marginalization of teacher researchers and acts to leave CED suggest the dominant and hegemonic way of thinking that teaching research is not research and CED is a lower-status department. This further produces 'inclusion and exclusion' and privileges 'ideas, people, and relations'(Darvin & Norton, 2015, p. 44). Paradoxically, CE teachers act to legitimate themselves as a teacher researcher. They included teaching-research ties in their networks, claiming 'teaching research is also a form of research' and seeing their research beneficial to students' learning. This, to some extent, restructures the working context by making ideology a site of competing meanings, where there are not only dominant institutional meaning but also teachers' meaning.

Norton (2013) argues that by making investment, individuals can obtain cultural capital and increase their social power. This is especially evident in educational PhD researchers. Lei distanced herself from linguistics researchers by seeing 'their research is completely different from us' and imagined a community of practice formed by all educational researchers to do 'our' research. The social power enabling her to challenge the orthodox linguistics research meaning is gained from the increased cultural capital by her investment in doing overseas PhD study. Similarly, the cultural capital gained from my overseas PhD study enabled me to create social capital through my interactions with CE teachers, a way changing the dynamics of the social networks thus transforming the context.

When negotiating identities, CE teachers struggle not only within competing meanings but also with their habitus. With habitus, a 'system of durable, transposable dispositions'(Bourdieu, 1977, p. 72), CE teachers act and invest according to what is

reasonable and possible and a tendency to think and act. They are positioned in different ways by their age, professional history and gender, as Lasky (2005) conceptualizes, agency is embedded within the interaction between people, tools and social circumstances. This explains why CE teachers experience the situation in very different ways.

CE teachers' investment to the imagined identity is contingent on their age and professional history. For older teachers, the strict personnel management rooted from the planned economy left little space for their agency. To accept the allocated job or to work in TSU was the only choice for Sen and Qi. Their fate was, in Sen's words, 'not in their own hands' but in 'officials'. Therefore, they could only 'stay there obediently' and 'held no hope'. For younger teachers, take Lei as an example, although being forced by her mother's will to become a CE teacher, Lei altered the professional interest to psychology by taking postgraduate study after working several years. Her successful alteration, compared with Sen and Ling, took place in accordance with China's transformation into a more market-oriented economy in which individuals have more freedom.

Another significant contrast between younger and senior teachers is that for younger teachers, age is an impetus for their striving to act toward educational change. Mei decided to apply for PhD study because she was a teacher 'only in 30s'. Her action was not uncommon among younger teachers for, in Mei's words, 'as a teacher in 30s, we have to react'. Therefore most younger teachers considered to invest in PhD study. In contrast, the teachers in seniority consider age as a major constraint for professional development, as in the case of Sen who perceived that her failure in PhD application was mainly due to

her age. For this, she had to accept her inability to develop researcher identity and to leave CED, and gave up investment in her imagined identity.

If Sen's stay in CED is a passive acceptance of inability to develop PhD researcher identity because of her age, Hong's stay in CED is an active choice of hers. Being a senior teacher, Hong saw age as a major reason for her active engagement in teaching-research because she 'had only a few years left to enjoy teaching'.

Sen and Hong's contrasting perceptions toward age and their investment point to another aspect of teachers' habitus: professional history. Sen's entry into CE teaching is by 'state's imperative' and 'not a least' from her will. Her detachment from CE teacher identity is partly due to her resistance against arrangement by external forces, the forces also prohibiting her from taking postgraduate study. A sense of inability to control her life and her life being held in 'others' hands' thus leads to Sen's acceptance of her CE career as a 'the arrangement of destiny' and an 'unlucky choice in reincarnation'. Similarly, the teachers who had experienced China's transition from planned economy to market-oriented economy more or less expressed the resigned acceptance of their CE teacher identity, such as Jing's description of herself as a 'half-cooked rice' and Qi's conception of his career as a result of 'nature' rather than his personal choice.

Prevailing notions of what it means to be a woman PhD also position women CE teachers in certain way of investment. The cultural capital from doing PhD research is limited, even negative for women. Doing PhD imposes derision on women PhDs and 'stands in child's growth'. Although there are voices of empowerment from women PhD

teachers who see the process of PhD study as self-exploration, it seems the gender expectations for a woman in the socio-cultural context of China context is so strong that the structure is hard to challenge.

Writing here, I am thinking to what extent CE teachers can enact agency. Is it because teachers, as a leader of SFL once said in a teachers' meeting, do not 'work hard enough'? If we detach teachers' actions from their histories and biographic traits, it might seem that many teachers in CED do not support institutional value of research or make investment. Such an explanation for teachers' choices could be narrow and individually centred, like some researchers' claim (e.g. Ahearn, 2001; Eteläpelto, Vähäsantanen, Hökkä, & Paloniemi, 2013) that individuals have freedom to act according to their desires regardless of social context. The socio-cultural perspective helps us to understand how teachers' actions are anchored in historicized understanding and experiences that offer individuals some approaches that work more appropriate or legitimate than others. To this point, numerous researchers have discussed that academics' agency is inextricable with their professional and personal histories, such as McNeely Cobham and Patton (2015) and Gonzales (2015). Here in SFL, for teachers like 'half-cooked rice' and 'sinking sun in the west', who experienced the prohibition of research training and the aging issue, giving up investment to studying upward PhD and focusing on teaching might be a natural and proper strategy. For younger teachers, who have been gradually accepting the addition of research into their work and urged by the institution to obtain doctorate since their early career, striving toward institutional requirements seems natural or a comparatively more realistic approach.

On the other hand, teachers' actions are transforming the context. As CE teachers are increasingly involved in PhD research, they are becoming research resources and expertise and their alternative research knowledge is being disseminated. Unlike the apprenticeship-like expert-to-novice knowledge transmission model (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998), here it is the younger teachers that mostly transmit new research knowledge. For instance, Hong considered the interview with me as an opportunity of learning new research method. So did Dan who claimed my research method was quite different from what she had known before. Lei organized a seminar to introduce a new way for research discussion and her non-traditional research knowledge. To this point, I agree with what Fuller (2007) problematizes about Wenger's conceptualization of novice-expert. The concept of novice and expert is not stable or uniform. It needs to be understood with a contextual and temporal sense. The older teachers who have developed rich teaching expertise might be a novice in research and the younger teachers might be more expert in some aspects than their older and experienced colleagues. In addition, the concept of novice and expert is shaped by power relations. The individual who acquires the legitimate knowledge might be considered to be more expert than the one whose knowledge and experiences are illegitimated. As power relation of different types of knowledge is constantly changing, so to speak, the imbalance between teaching and research at different historical context, the relationship between novice and expert as well as the knowledge transmission between them is far from static and one-way transmission.

## Chapter summary

I want to go back to my puzzle when setting out the research: how do this group of CE teachers learn? As Lave (1993) suggested, it is not problematic that learning occurs. What is problematic is about what is learnt. When we talk about learning, we must begin with what is not knowledge. So what is not knowledge at CE teachers' workplace?

Teaching related knowledge is not knowledge, especially amid the research discourse where the scholarly writing for prestigious journals and research funding is considered as knowledge. This is one of reasons that most CE teachers are considered as a failure to learn.

CE teachers' failure to learn is a sociocultural production. They have been traditionally teaching-focused. CE has undergone constant reforms, making teaching research essential for these teaching-focused teachers. The professional interactions among them bond them together in producing teaching-related knowledge, simultaneously making alternative knowledge production and transmission less possible.

The sociocultural contexts for CE teachers' learning include their working in a low-status department. Being members of such a group, they only have access to teaching-research participation and expertise, yet have limited access to academic research resources and participation. Such a department is historically and culturally developed. It has been historically a low-status department for its late entry and public service orientation. It is also located in a conflicting field shaped by various meanings of research,



universities, higher education and discipline, where various power relations come into play.

The access to academic research participation is further restricted by most of their gender identity of being a woman. The social derision toward highly-educated women, together with morality and responsibility that a woman is expected for the childcare, makes rather limited opportunities for PhD study for these women teachers.

Under such circumstances, teachers have to appropriate various meanings, a process of identity construction where agency interplays with power relations. They develop multiple trajectories. The trajectories are the result of mediation by various asymmetrical power relations between departments as well as those between different research meanings. They are also developed from individual teachers' habitus, such as age, gender and professional history.

Again, I think of Lave's another question: what is new knowledge invented in practice? Teachers' networking is changing as some of them develop into researchers. The dynamic nature of networking makes it possible for new knowledge to be produced and transmitted. Accordingly, continuity and change are taking place.

## **Chapter VIII Conclusion**

### **Toward CE teachers' learning**

Revisiting Wang's reply at the beginning of chapter two, I found he or the leader of SFL shared a similar perception with CE teachers in Bai and Hudson's (2011) study: to invite renowned scholars to give lectures. The findings emerging from my study may interrogate this perception: if SFL has been striving to support CE teachers' learning to do research, why do teachers show little interest in attending those lectures? Bai and Hudson argue that CE teachers need to raise their research consciousness, but how?

The study portrays a rather complex picture of CE teachers' lives. To easily say CE teachers are not research-conscious is not enough. To simply say CE teachers do not learn ignores the issue of what counts as knowledge. Research is understood in diverse ways among CE teachers from informing classroom teaching to scholarly writing in prestigious journals. The study highlights the inconsistency between research definition espoused by CE teachers and that valued by the workplace. If teachers' teaching experiences and efforts in teaching-related activities are devalued, they would probably develop into marginalization and disengagement. If the tertiary institutions, including TSU, could take into consideration of CE teachers' practice orientation and their meaning of research,

these teaching-focused academics might feel these aspects of their academic activities valued. This can help to promote teachers' efforts in improving their teaching and students' learning and this is an important part of providing quality teaching in higher education.

On the other hand, teaching- research is not mere reflection, but 'must become public' (Freeman, 1996, p. 105, also see Borg, 2015). The present universities have an exclusive emphasis on scholarly writing and publication on certain level of journals, which may confine the impact of research result to a small audience. There can be a diversity of communication forms and alternative opportunities to publicize knowledge. If the diversified forms of publicizing and research 'texts' are encouraged, teachers' research knowledge could be more accepted and teachers may be motivated to actively engage in classroom research. Moreover, the teaching-research activities can advance the pedagogical knowledge of CE. This is of primal importance to innovating CE in accordance with the changing social and economic needs of China.

Teaching-research should be systematic. If knowledge produced by teachers with the aim of enhancing classroom practice is to be recognized as a new form of scholarship, it has to be appropriately rigorous research. This means teachers need to be familiar with the content knowledge and basic and advanced research skills. Apparently, there is a widely-spread misconception toward non-positivism research not only in SFL but among general EFL teachers that quantitative and statistical methods are considered with legitimacy (Borg, 2009). The tertiary institutions could be more inclusive of research methods, resulting into a variety of alternative research being legitimated and encouraged. With the

breakdown of barriers between quantitative and qualitative methodologies, practice-oriented CE teachers can examine their practice through alternative scholarship of research, such as action research and self-study instead of understanding research only with traditional conception of being ‘objective’, ‘generalizable’ or ‘quantifiable’. At the same time, the access to the knowledge of different research approaches could be provided so that teachers can recognize and appreciate the values of different methodologies. The inclusion of diverse research methods could not only promote teachers’ engagement in research. More importantly, TESOL research in China could advance both theoretically and methodologically, thus further help to develop TESOL education. This is of significant importance to China’s social and economic development.

There also sees a lack of multidisciplinary knowledge and research training of CE teachers. Similarly, Bai and Hudson (2011) identified a prevalent lack of interdisciplinary knowledge among CE teachers, especially the knowledge of education science, pedagogic theories, educational research theories and methods. On one hand, it is because of the dominant status of linguistics/ western literature research in Chinese foreign language academia that excludes the non-traditional research. To solve this problem, some researchers (e.g. Cai, 2013; Xin, 2006) have been appealing for the disciplinary status of TESOL in China to legitimize relevant research. If the top-down reform of disciplinary structure is a long way to go, foreign language education institutions could start to embrace their teachers’ non-traditional research and provide opportunities for disseminating and exchanging such knowledge. For example, Han and Wu (2015) reported a case of disciplinary innovation of English language education in a Chinese

university. The innovation engaged the teachers in transdisciplinary dialogue by relocating the staff offices and integrating multiple disciplines such as literature, linguistics, and language education into new curriculum. Such an innovation became a source of transformative energy to promote learning cultures and develop teachers' identities. At the institutional level, this case could be set as a model to break down the traditional disciplinary boundaries of foreign language education in China.

The research echoes a number of researchers' appeal for the reform of skill-focused training model of pre-service education of EFL teachers (e.g. Bai & Hudson, 2011; Barkhuizen, 2009). If CE teachers are to engage in research, the requisite knowledge and skills to do research are needed and could be incorporated into the preparation of EFL academics so that their unbalanced and skill-focused knowledge structure can be geared toward improving their research competence.

Like other research on CE teachers (e.g. Borg, 2013), my study identified a lack of collaborative and collegial interactions in research activities. On one hand, as noted above, the tertiary institutions are suggested to be sensitive to CE teachers' practice orientation and value their teaching research meaning. This could help to develop consistent understanding of research among teachers. A shared and collective understanding of research can help build trust and promote collaborations among teachers. On the other hand, it is necessary for the institutions like SFL to reform their organizational structure. For example, a shared space can be provided for CE teachers to meet and interact. More importantly, the barrier between CE departments and EM departments needs to be broken down. A practical solution is that CE teachers and EM teachers are not to be fixed in their

respective departments. Rather, they can exchange the teaching. This can promote communication between CE and EM teachers, give CE teachers opportunities to explore research interests in different courses and mobilize the resources. Moreover, the inclusion of CE teachers into EM teaching can develop their sense of belongingness to the workplace and reduce their marginalization. By creating positive group climate, such as the dedication to work, frequent interactions and cooperation, research productivity could be facilitated.

To develop research leadership among CE teachers is another prominent issue. Strong research leadership seems to be missing not only in my study but also among CE departments nationwide (see Bai et al., 2013; Borg & Liu, 2013). According to Bland et al. (2005), a research leader is a highly regarded scholar, research-oriented, capable of managing people and resources, assertive and participative. Leadership is inextricably related to direction and values (Kok & McDonald, 2015). While the institutional meaning of research and teachers' teaching-research meaning coexist and compete, there seems no consistent and clear direction and values, making it hard to develop research leadership among CE teachers.

This highlights a clear and consistent definition of academics' roles in professional fields. If CE teachers are employed as skill-training focused academics and have been traditionally involved in relatively heavy teaching, there needs a broader understanding of academic roles. Leadership, teachers' collaboration and meanings are interrelated. If research is required as a prescriptive activity without considering teachers' experiences and meanings, establishment of leadership and positive collegial interactions is likely to

fail.

A clear and consistent definition of academics' roles can also help develop research social networks and research-engaged communities which are an important part of institutional support to facilitate teachers' research development. Engaging in vibrant networks and communities, teachers can work together both in and outside of the institution, impromptu and formal, and explore issues of common interests. However, as the study shows, without a clearly defined meaning of research and the consistent definition of academics' role, the establishment of effective social networks and communities would be rather difficult due to the lack of a common goal and shared value. In some cases, as shown in my study, frequent networks do not produce intended learning. Instead, they may constrain the teachers in learning in a conventional way, so to speak, teaching research rather than the academic research.

In addition to recognizing teachers' meaning and reforming the organizational structure, a boarder view of teacher learning is necessary if SFL, as well as other similar institutions, hopes to cultivate CE teachers' research capacity. Teachers are historically, socially and culturally constructed products. They are not only professionals but also a woman, or a man living in their private sphere. The gender responsibilities play an essential role in their investment to or not to live up to institutional expectations. They also have varying ages and professional histories. Without considering these aspects of teachers' identities, the mandatory demand of research performance is very likely to fail to produce intended result.

At the individual level, CE teachers could be more open-minded to challenges. Reform as a mediating system not only brings conflicts against teachers' prior experiences but also creates opportunities to learn. For example, CE reforms might be opportunities to experiment new courses and approaches and thus make it necessary to carry out research. Seeking for social capital from emerging researchers, such as PhD teachers, is a way to access alternative research knowledge. Workplace is not the only place to provide access for learning. Teachers can make good use of massive online resources and improve their discipline knowledge base and research skills. More importantly, as revealed from the study, teachers might realize that individual's agency can to some extent transform the structure and workplace dynamics. By doing rigorous practice-oriented research, CE teachers can produce and disseminate their meanings and be empowered to negotiate the meaning.

To sum up, CE teachers' learning is a dynamic system where multiple shareholders come into play including policy makers, institution and individuals. Various meanings are negotiated within the various parties and with the broader social and cultural context. There needs joint efforts and a holistic understanding of human development, otherwise CE teachers' learning can only be constantly a site of conflicts and struggles. The finding of the study echoes Borg and Liu's (2013) call for the 'situated understandings of teacher research engagement' in 'a particular context' (p. 271) and it contributes to the development of 'an evidence base which can inform policy and initiatives aimed at promoting research engagement by teachers in ELT' (Borg, 2007a, p. 733).



## **Contributions of the research**

### **Conceptual contributions**

The research is broadly situated within socio-cultural perspective of learning. Particularly, it follows the situated learning theory and the theory of community of practice to examine how teachers learn in a social group, that is, the immediate working context of a department. The theory of community of practice particularly enables me to investigate how teachers negotiated their membership in multiple social groups and how they developed different trajectories as a result of negotiation with various meanings.

The conceptual framework of the research is developed from the western learning theories and it is applied to a teacher group located in Chinese context. The different cultural contexts rendered new perspective to western theories. Although the sociocultural approach and the theory of community of practice are developed from the legacy of Vygotsky whose conceptualization is based on the collectivist-oriented social context of the Soviet Union, these theories are mainly applied in the western settings. The examination of the collectivist-oriented Chinese context might add to the understanding of the western theories.

One of the conceptual contributions of the research is that it does not take this group of teachers as pre-existing or a group necessarily organized by common goals, shared values and behaviours. It adopts social network perspective to understand what was actually going on within these teachers. The social network perspective proves to be

powerful to articulate the social structure of the group and the concept of social capital helps me to discover types and quality of resources available to teachers. Rather than simply claim a group of teachers working together as a group with mutual understanding and joint efforts, social network perspective identifies the power relations and explains how these power relations shaped the group's social structure and the legitimate access for participation.

A prominent concept of community of practice is that it examines learning as a process of membership negotiation. Yet how the community border is defined is left underexamined, such as the exclusiveness or inclusiveness of a community. A community may 'simultaneously construct insider and outsider status' (Achinstein, 2002, p. 426). Conceptualizing a teacher group from social network perspective makes it visible of how teachers understood insider and outsider status, including people, such as CE teachers and EM experts, and meanings, such as teaching-research and officially-valued research. Therefore, even in a clearly organized teacher group like CED, social network perspective identifies different but overlapping borders, such as CE teachers, EM teachers, a community of practice of teaching research, an imagined community of officially-valued research. Furthermore, the identification of multiple and overlapping community borders makes it possible to articulate how members negotiate multiple memberships, how they perceive the insider and outsider status and how they expand the border and reshape the bounds of thought. Although Wenger is aware of possibilities of crossing multiple communities of practice, for example, he argues we keep 'passing boundaries-catching, as we peek into foreign chambers, glimpses of other realities and meanings;

touching, as we pass by outlandish arrangements, objects of distant values; learning, as we coordinate our actions across boundaries, to live with decisions we have not made' (1998, p. 165), it is the social network perspective that offers conceptual tools to illuminate the mechanism of how power relations shape the boundaries of communities and mediate members' boundary crossing.

The research goes beyond the conventional social network analysis by taking a poststructuralist perspective. It looks deeper than the mere network sociogram into individuals' lived experiences including their emotions and agency. It shows teachers' social networks as constraints that individuals cooperate to build and maintain as well as represents the dynamic interplay of micro-processes that operate at the level of cognition and interpersonal interaction. Furthermore, the poststructuralist focus on cultural meanings, temporal and contextual features of social networks augments the understanding of teacher learning as a dynamic socio-cultural process.

Conceptualized with the combination of community of practice and social network perspective, the research provides a multi-level analysis of teacher learning: the learning process on personal, interpersonal, and community levels. It is the interpersonal interactions that construct a sense of belonging or not belonging to a community and it is the community that shapes certain pattern of interpersonal interactions and social capital. The examination of identity displays not only how individuals appropriate and negotiate meanings but also how individuals transform the dynamics and structure of interpersonal relationship and community. Moreover, the construction of identity also reveals the wider historical, social and cultural transformation, together with the other two levels of analysis,

depicting the picture of teacher learning as a holistic and dynamic socio-cultural process.

The multiple lenses, namely, the socio-cultural and poststructuralist perspectives of identity, also allow the examination of agentive, performative, situated and multifaceted dimensions of identity. Rather than a constant entity, teachers' identity is performed and recreated in the negotiation with a wide range of socio-cultural and ideological meanings as well as in everyday context, such as the interaction with the researcher and the daily professional work. The adoption of multiple theoretical lenses echoes the call to demystify the stereotypical identities imposed on teachers, especially those perceived as marginal (Kumaravadivelu, 2003) and enables them to construct multiple selves by providing multiple identity options.

### **Theoretical contributions**

The conceptual combination of the theory of community of practice and poststructuralist social network perspective does develop the theory of community of practice and social network theory. The study presents a group that shares little commonality with the community of practice conceptualized by Wenger. CED is a group without an authority or a master. There is no legitimate peripheral access to research participation. There is no centripetal trajectory of members moving from the peripheral to the centre as CED has no research centre. Instead, its members developed multiple outbound trajectories, may it be successful or not. Based on the findings, together with other critics of the theories, the research interrogates the theory of community of practice from three aspects: the notion of community, conflicts and trajectory.

The notion of community is full of ambiguity. The focus of the study, CED, might be a community, a site where CE teachers are connected with participation, belonging and social relations. This tight-knit group is like the one in Lave and Wenger's book, or defined as a community from a narrow perspective (Hodkinson & Hodkinson, 2004) which is relevant to this group of teachers' everyday working. From a broad perspective, according to Hodkinson and Hodkinson, the community can be captured as social activities that a group of teachers participate, such as professional activities. It can also be understood as 'the intersubjective relation among coparticipants' (Lave, 1993, p. 17), the way by which CE teachers conceived the different communities, such as marginal teacher researchers and the 'real' researchers. Whatever the community is defined, it is not constructed as the one with sense of shared commitment highlighted by Wenger. Within the community of a teacher group, there might be various boundaries of inclusion and exclusion. These boundaries may be clearly defined, such as different departments. They are sometimes ambiguous and fleeting, as is seen from CE teachers' ambivalence in drawing the boundary of research activities.

The research suggests a community of practice needs to be regarded with temporal and contextual sensitivity. CED, a *jiaoyanshi*, a typical teaching research group located in the collectivist-oriented China, might be a community of practice with 'mutual engagement', 'joint enterprise' and 'shared repertoire'. However, such a community of practice did not produce intended learning toward academic research. Instead, it constrained such learning by bonding CE teachers in teaching-research learning. Therefore, how a community of practice evolves with the changing broader context needs

to be considered if a social group is conceptualized as a community of practice.

Unlike the perception that learning takes place within members of joint efforts and mutual engagement, conflicts may create context for learning. Members can embrace or challenge the differences and the divergent beliefs and actions may lead to various learning trajectories. The active engagement in conflicts could create a dialogue of difference, a process that individuals come to identify the nature of their different beliefs and actions. The recognition of diversity in values and goals rather than consensus might help build a fuller conception of community of practice.

Conflicts can transform context. How communities of practice are transformed is underexamined by Lave and Wenger, as their theory implies a stable and predictable cycle of learning trajectory from a newcomer to an old-timer (Fuller, 2007). The research uncovers that even within a group imbued by various power relations, individuals bring their meanings into negotiation. For example, although CE teachers' teaching-research meaning is perceived as marginal, by claiming teaching-research is 'also a form of research', teachers restructured the ideological context by making it a site of conflicts. When some teachers became the experts in educational research, they started to challenge the orthodox linguistics research and disseminate their educational research knowledge, a way transforming the context that can be no more dominated by traditional research. As Jewson (2007) points out, the diverse experiences brought into the community by members when they traverse multiple communities and develop identities across various borders can be sources for innovation. And a community of weak density without strong cohesion, like CED, might be more likely to produce more opportunities for innovation.

Conflicts could also lead to multiple trajectories. CED is a group without research authority or expert. Its members develop various trajectories ranging from staying marginal or peripheral to centrifugal movement of exiting. To this point, the study has provided strong empirical evidence of how these trajectories are shaped by power relations between different types of knowledge and unequal status of groups.

Now I looked back to literature of social network research of teachers' professional development. Similar to previous research (e.g. Friedkin & Johnsen, 1990; McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Cook, 2001), CE teachers' research social networks are influenced by the principle of homophily. It may be *status homophily*, as they worked in the same department and taught the same courses. It may be *value homophily*, such as the attitudes toward different types of research, abilities and aspiration of doing research (Lazarsfeld & Merton, 1954). For example, some teachers established ties with CE colleagues for the mutual orientation of improving teaching. Some excluded teacher-researchers due to different perceptions toward the definition of research. Expertise (Coburn et al., 2010) and collegial trust (Van Maele et al., 2015) are also found to affect CE teachers' research networks. Yet, the finding of the study suggests that the existing concepts of homophily and expertise cannot fully explain the formation of social networks. Both concepts need to be understood with a critical perspective that takes into consideration of power relations.

The critical perspective also partly explains how certain social structure of a social network comes into being. Similar to Yeung's (2005) finding that the different meaning of relationship may contribute to certain leadership structure and group density, the structure of CE teachers' full relational research network is shaped by officially-valued

meaning of research. For instance, Lin was the leader of teaching research activities, but was placed at the marginal place, resulting into a decentralized structure of the group. Most teachers had frequent interactions with their CE colleagues in teaching-research, but were perceived as unimportant ties, resulting into a group of low density in research interactions. Therefore, based on the findings of this study, I tend to align with Bourdieu and Wacquant's (1992) argument that it is the field positions that actors occupy shape the possibility of the presence or absence of social ties.

### **Methodological contribution**

The study combines narrative inquiry and social network method to examine teacher interaction and identity. Using narrative inquiry, the study presents how social meanings emerge from the social structure---the structure of social ties through stories. This is in alignment with Abell's (2004) goal to go against variable centred explanations and understands social life through narrative process. As Wenger et al. (2011) argue, meanings are not always defined in advance. What a network is doing and what counts as the definition of relationship cannot be predicted. This necessitates the exploration of social structure in the context of narratives.

On the other hand, social network methods display how social structures are reproduced in teachers' narratives. The social network mapping provides an arena for CE teachers to perform their identity in which the social inequality of meanings and status worked their way into personal narratives. Individual-centred narrative method may make it difficult to capture how teachers develop dynamic and dialectical relationship, while



social network methods make it possible to show how the individual and the collective develop in participation of practice.

Another innovation of method is the incorporation of personal network approach and full relational network approach. The research started from personal network approach, examining teachers' networks from the ground up without assuming a preexisting community and interpersonal relations and allowing an in-depth investigation of each teacher's social ties. The full relational analysis further provided an overall description of teachers' interactions and presented a complete picture of teachers' interactive context. This adds another dimension to present teacher social network research which mostly focuses on personal social networks (e.g. Coburn et al., 2010; Coburn et al., 2013; Van Maele et al., 2015).

The use of both personal network approach and full relational approach also offers an innovative way of participant selection. The participants were selected purposively on one hand according to the general criteria of gender, age and career stage. At the same time, they were named by their colleagues with researcher's minimal intervention, a bottom-up way ensuring both trustworthiness and rigor of the research.

The combination of social network method and ethnography places teacher interactions in a richly-observed context not only of mapping interviews but more of various professional activities and private occasions. The ethnographic study reveals the subtleties of interactions under certain social structure and portrayed the context where social relationship unfolds, numerous contingencies and fascinating exceptions emerge,

demonstrating the complex interweaving of social networks, individuals' agency and organizational context.

The research lays a strong emphasis on reflexivity of researcher. It recognizes the researcher as an active agent in the production of social networks and narratives, presenting a dynamic space between the researcher and the researched where their interactions including interviews are alive and fluid. In this way, multiple voices, experiences and knowledge are represented. There is a broad swath of voices of this group of teachers: non-PhD researchers, educational PhD researchers, linguistics/western literature researchers, overseas PhD researchers, CE teachers and women. All these voices are created by the researcher's co-construction with the participants, which not only enables the discovery of insider perspective of CE teachers, more importantly, it does transform the context and brings positive impact on the participants.

## **Chapter summary**

To support CE teachers' learning to live up to institutional demand of doing research, inviting scholars and organizing lectures are not enough. A supportive workplace context is needed. To achieve this, it is necessary for the workplace to take into consideration of teachers' practice orientation and value teachers' meaning of teaching-research. A clearly defined meaning of research can also help build up trust and develop leadership, collaborative professional relationship and social networks. Besides, if the workplace is more inclusive of multidisciplinary knowledge and alternative research methodologies, potential could be created for teachers' cross-boundary learning and their learning to do

rigorous and relevant research. In addition, the barriers between CE and EM departments need to be broken down to mobilize the resources and to reduce the marginalization of CE teachers. Moreover, it is necessary to recognize that CE teachers' agency is dependent on professional history and biographic traits. Without considering these factors, the top-down demand may not produce intended result. Lastly, CE teachers need to be open-minded to new challenges and believe that their actions can transform the context.

The research makes contributions to the conceptualization of teacher learning by incorporating the theory of community of practice and social network perspective. Such conceptualization helps develop the theory of community of practice as well as social network theories. The innovative combination of social network methods, narrative inquiry and ethnography further enables a deeper understanding of teachers' lives from interpersonal, personal and contextual levels.

## Epilogue

It is the start of the year of 2017, two years after I left the field. Now and then I heard from CE teachers. Hui went back to work after a one-year overseas academic visit. She said she had done a lot of research work during her visit, collecting a huge bulk of data and keeping analysing data. And she found research interest in a new field. All her research work came to a halt as soon as she went back to work. She was very busy: heavy teaching load, course management and preparing for teaching inspections. She moaned she had never had time for research since she went back. Occasionally, I saw her post some pictures online, saying ‘today I finally can sit here for the whole morning and read’. Min was going for a one-year overseas visit. She was happy, saying ‘I can leave teaching and enjoy solitude for reading and study now’. Mei, who made up her mind to apply for PhD study in foreign language education at the time of my leaving, had to give up the attempt. Yue, the only supervisor in foreign language education research, left SFL to another city. Mei must stay in TSU for her PhD study, because she had a young child to look after. The most feasible option for her now was to apply for PhD study in literature. Mei said with a tone of acceptance, ‘I’m not interested in literature study, but what can I do? I don’t care about my interest any more, as long as I can obtain a doctoral degree’.

These were not all the stories I heard. I knew a couple of CE teachers finished their overseas educational PhD study and went back to work now. I did not know what they experienced after they returned. I guessed they must have changed somewhat the

dynamics of CE teachers' research social networks, because just a few days another two teachers asked me for advice on overseas PhD application.

I noticed some change brought by internet this year. There appeared online training courses of qualitative research. One of them is especially oriented to CE teachers where, to my surprise, I saw a few names of my colleagues among the registers. I was happy because some teachers started to be aware of alternative methodology and tried to seek for resources. I believe I would be more affirmed to answer the questions they had asked me: 'how do you ensure the credibility of what participants tell you' and 'what is the significance of your research if it's so small and personal'. Even a small pebble thrown into the pond can make ripples. Even teachers question and doubt about my research, it is a way of learning, not just for them but also for me.

I met a CE teacher in New Zealand too. She works at a college in a north eastern city. She told me a different story of her workplace: unlike CE teachers in SFL seen as a 'side dish', at her workplace, CE teachers are 'more important' than EM teachers as EM education is 'very weak' and there is no research tradition or strength of her workplace. What about these CE teachers' experiences? I wonder. The future research could take such an institute as a case so that a broader picture of CE teachers' lives can be presented.

My story continues. For a long time, I, as a PhD student in a western university, had been engrossed with the western theories and studies, taking for granted that they would work in Chinese context. I haven't realized my identity being at the border: a researcher trained in the west and a researcher examining Chinese context, until my supervisor asked

me questions: why do you do the research? What is your research for? Where are you from? I suddenly realized I lost my balance between the two identities. I could not be the only one. When more and more teachers finish their overseas PhD study, how do they live their stories of researching and working in China? How do they keep balance between their two identities? At this thought, I cannot help hoping to go back to work. Although now I have to end the story-telling of this thesis, my mind is starting to play with the idea of new stories: stories of westernized Chinese researchers.

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## **Appendices**

### **Appendix I Letter of approval from the University Of Canterbury Educational Research Human Ethics Committee**





HUMAN ETHICS COMMITTEE

Secretary, Lynda Griffioen  
Email: [human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz)

Ref: 2014/28/ERHEC

30 June 2014

Wei Zeng  
School of Teacher Education  
UNIVERSITY OF CANTERBURY

Dear [REDACTED]

Thank you for providing the revised documents in support of your application to the Educational Research Human Ethics Committee. I am very pleased to inform you that your research proposal "Learning as identity negotiation: an ethnographic study of teacher learning in the workplace of a university department of ELT in China" has been granted ethical approval.

Please note that this approval is subject to the incorporation of the amendments you have provided in your emails of 3 and 16 June 2014.

Should circumstances relevant to this current application change you are required to reapply for ethical approval.

If you have any questions regarding this approval, please let me know.

We wish you well for your research.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Nicola Surtees'.

Nicola Surtees  
**Chair**  
**Educational Research Human Ethics Committee**

*"Please note that Ethical Approval and/or Clearance relates only to the ethical elements of the relationship between the researcher, research participants and other stakeholders. The granting of approval or clearance by the Ethical Clearance Committee should not be interpreted as comment on the methodology, legality, value or any other matters relating to this research."*

## Appendix II Social network map

您好，

首先感谢您对本次调查的支持。这项调查的目的在于了解您从事科研相关活动的社会网络。请在下图内，以自己为中心，写出和你在科研活动方面有往来的人。

个人信息：

性别：

年龄：

从事大学英语工作年限：

画图注意事项：

1. 科研方面关系越密切的或者你认为最重要的，写在离自己最近的圈里，反之亦然；
2. 可以将名字写在两圈交接的线上；
3. 与你在科研活动往来的人包括但不限于您的同事（大外部，外语学院，学校），老师，朋友，家人，等等；

4. 图中的圈不一定要全部填满，如果不够，可以自己多画；
5. 在画图的时候，以下问题可以帮助你确定所谓“科研有往来的人”：
  - 谁对你科研态度或行为影响最大？
  - 你平时和谁在科研方面有往来？
  - 如果你有科研方面的问题，比如有科研的某个想法，有问题，找谁请教或讨论
    - 如果申请项目，你找谁合作？
    - 科研资料书籍，你和谁借或者交换？
    - 科研信息方面，比如某个学术活动的举行，某个学术会议的召开，某个杂志的投稿,学术讲座等等，你有的话，和谁分享？或者你会找谁了解相关的信息？
  - 你会和谁分享科研路上的喜怒哀乐？



## About mapping

The mapping is conducted as a part of PhD research programme to examine how CE teachers practise and learn in the context of pressing research demand.

The research project has been approved by ERHEC of University of Canterbury. The mappings are entirely confidential. All the results will be reported in pseudonyms and in the way that individuals cannot be identified.

Thank you for contributing your time and thought to this research.

Your basic information:

gender :

age :

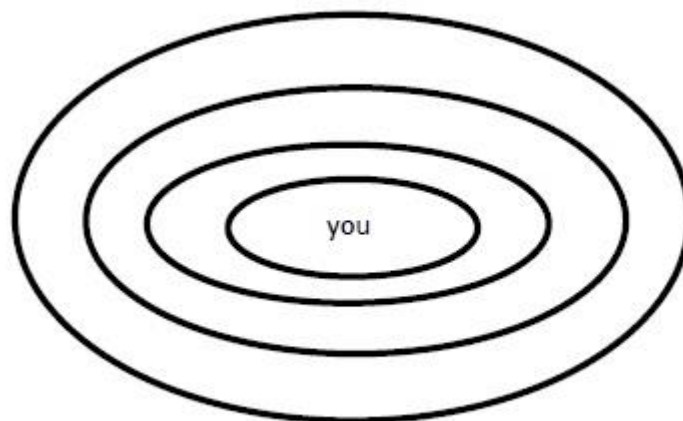
working years as a CE teacher:

How to draw the map:

1. Please write down the names of the people who you associate with in your research activity. Supposing you are at the centre of the concentric circle, put the names of the people in terms of the 'importance' of research relationship in an appropriate place in relation to the centre.
2. You may put the names straddling across two rings.
3. The people you associate with include but are not limited to your colleagues (department, school, and university), family or friends, etc.
4. You may not have to fill out all the circles, and you may add more circles if necessary.

5. The following questions may help you identify the people you associate with in research relationships:

- Who influences your research attitude or behaviour?
- Who do you turn to or discuss with if you have problems or ideas in doing research?
- Who do you choose to cooperate with if you apply for a research project?
- Who do you exchange research resources with? For example, who will you like to share if you know a useful website or a good book and vice visa?
- Who do you exchange research information with? For example, the information about academic conference, courses, lectures activities or publications. Who do you turn to if you want to know this information?
- Who do you like to share with of happiness and unhappiness of doing research?





## Appendix III Excerpts of interview

### *Excerpt 1*

T1: a CE teacher

I: interviewer

T1: 但是就是说科研这块我还是比较惭愧，我觉得我在在这块我还是做得不太好，然后也怕，其实有点怕。因为我们当时毕业的时候是 91 年，91 年当时我们在农大这边他的一个主要的政策就是要留住老师，所以呢就规定我们三年不准考研，五年只能考本校的研，就本校，我们当时农大这边没什么专业可供我们选，所以在进来的 5 年以内，我们是对自己学业方面的进展是不报什么希望的。要么你就走人，要么你就乖乖上课就行了，上好你那几节课就行。

I: 安排这样的—个限制是

T1: 当时其实包括那个李文干的那些都是这样，可能……反正就还是有了很多挫折，还是经历了很多困难的才能去读研呢什么的，包括自己也是，最开始我读师大这边的。当时是报的教育嘛，因为我读的英语，报的教育，所以反正还是挺艰难的，就因为你没有想的就是说他对你的要求至少在三五年以内就是这样子咯，就上好自己的课了。所以说可能我就……我们在这方面，加上也没有人来教你，引导你。本科也没有什么学术的训练，然后这三五年也不是很那种，所以你能真正的进行学做科研，或者看别人怎么做科研，就是我上研究生之后的事情了。我上研究生的时候是 2002 年，都已经满七年，就是我到这已经满七年，可以报外校的了，就是这

样子，所以说到那会才开始学。但是那会觉得有点半生不熟的就是夹生饭那种嘛。

T1: I'm ashamed to talk about my research. I know I didn't do research very well. I'm also scared to, yes, I'm scared to do it. I graduated in 1991. At that time, Nongda had a policy to retain its teachers. It prohibited us from doing postgraduate study within the first three years of working and we were only allowed to do it in Nongda during the first five years. Nongda had no research fields for us to choose. Therefore for the first five years, I held no hope in my academic study. You may choose to leave or stay there obediently to teach. You just needed to teach.

I: Such prohibition is to...

T1: In fact, at that time Li Wen (another teacher) did something...anyway there were many troubles. We experienced a lot of difficulties to undertake postgraduate study including myself. I studied my postgraduate study in TSU and my research field was education as I was an English teacher. Anyway, there were lots of difficulties. You can't imagine it (Nongda) required you to stay there for three to five years just to teach. So I might...there is no one to teach and guide you in research. There was no research training in our undergraduate study. And for the next three to five years, there was no chance either. My first real research experience started from my postgraduate study when it was 2002. I had been working for more than seven years. I was allowed to study outside Nongda after working seven years. Not until then did I start to learn to do research, but I was like half-cooked rice then.

***Excerpt 2***

T2: a CE teacher

I: interviewer

T2: 我跟你有点不同的是我不会这样做。

I: 你是说不会？

T2: 我不会因为读博不平衡家庭。

I: 就是说要么我带孩子走，要么孩子就在这里。

T2: 我也不会这个样子，因为我始终觉得小孩，小孩的基础，我劝我那些师妹就是说我们可读博可以等待，就是我拿学位可以等待，但是小孩成长不能等待。我尽量就是说以不影响孩子的原则去。然后我可能明天马上就要交个什么东西，我今天还是会抽一个小时或者两个小时陪孩子。这是我自己的一个所谓的一个原则嘛...

I: 恩，但是，可能不一样，因为我是在国外一个人带小孩，有时候我就觉得我的情绪会影响到他，我会发火，有时候觉得挺可怜的，毕竟人家也是独身一人跟着我飘扬过海，然后我觉得挺愧疚的。

T2: 你当时把他带去的主要原因是什么？是想让他去感受文化，还是说因为没人带，还是说你想在他身边。

I: 因为确实想带他，小孩那么小，都离不开母亲啊。还是就是我觉得就是也是

几方面都想平衡都想做得很好，我又想发展自己，但是我觉得孩子那么小我不能错过他的经历，错过他的成长。尤其在六岁之前不是说妈妈的角色是最重要的嘛。我就觉得起码我六岁以前我一定要陪着他。

T2 : I would not go overseas to do PhD study as you do.

I: You wouldn't?

T2: I will not break family balance for doing a PhD.

I: You mean I either take away my child or leave him at home.

T2: No, I wouldn't. I always feel it's fundamental for a child...I told the other PhD girls that we may wait for a doctorate. The doctorate can wait, but child's growth can't. I try not to affect my child. If I have to submit something tomorrow, I will still squeeze one or two hours with my child. This is my principle...

I: But it might be different when you look after a child alone in a foreign country. Sometimes I felt my mood might have influenced the child. I might lose temper. And I would feel guilty for this when I thought of him leaving his home country and accompanying me in a foreign country.

T2: Why did you decide to take him with you to New Zealand? To let him experience different culture or to keep him with you?

I: I do want to look after him. He is so young and can't leave his mother. I do want

to do well in every aspect and keep a balance. I want to develop myself, but I don't want to miss his growth when he is at such a young age, especially before the age of six. It is said before the age of six, the mother plays the primary role for a child. I must be with him at least before he reaches six.

## **Appendix IV Samples of codes**

### *A personal social network*

#### *inner circle*

teachers from EMD

characteristics  
interaction frequency  
influence  
content

#### *second circle*

CE colleagues

characteristics  
reasons for interaction  
content  
influence

#### *other circles*



located outside of SFL

- characteristics
- reasons for interaction
- content
- influence

*The story of a teacher*

*CE as a public course*

- allocated to teach CE
  - unlucky destiny's arrangement
- EM and CE are different
  - teaching different courses
  - more opportunity in EMD
  - few research projects for CE teachers
  - students looking at EM and CE teachers differently

*confusion*

- no direction
- about doing PhD study
  - a doctorate is prerequisite for promotion
  - no hope to study PhD
  - long to improve herself

*research engagement*

- not doing real research
- publication for promotion

lack of knowledge of doing research

*frequent changing mandates*

focusing on CLT

constructivism

critical thinking

mandates from officials and experts

no individual thinking

reform in CED

## Appendix V Pictures of TSU



SFL Building



A travelling minibus

