

## **Tensions in school-university partnership and EFL preservice teacher identity formation: A case in Mainland China**

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### **Abstract**

In this paper we discuss an ethnographic case study of the teaching practice (practicum) experience of a student teacher, Lynn, in a university partnership school in Mainland China. Drawing on Activity Theory (Engestrom, 1987, 1999, 2001), we conceptualize Lynn's practicum as boundary-crossing between two different activity systems: those of the school community and the university community. The impact of the tensions of the conflicting discourses between the school activity system and the university activity system on Lynn's professional identity formation is analysed. Clarke's (2009) model of teacher identity formation is further drawn upon to analyse how Lynn was doing her 'teacher identity work' amidst these conflicting discourses and power relations. Based on this study we propose that EFL teacher preparation is more than just a pedagogical or technological task, but a task deeply infused with conflicting cultural and ideological beliefs and practices.

### **1 Background: The ELT Curriculum Reform in China**

With increasing impact of globalization, proficiencies in information technology and English have become indispensable "global literacy skills" (Tsui & Tollefson, 2007). China has since adjusted her national EFL (English as a Foreign Language) education policies to maintain international power and status in the face of global competition. A *National English Curriculum* (NEC)<sup>1</sup> (Ministry of Education, 2001) was launched by the Ministry of Education (MOE) in 2001. The NEC aims at changing both the overemphasis on grammar and vocabulary instruction and the negligence of students' actual ability to use English. The new English curriculum thus advocates the development of students' overall abilities in language use through emphasizing their interests, life experience, and cognitive level. It also encourages learning through experience, practice, participation, collaboration and communication, and promotes "progressive" (in John Dewey's sense) teaching methods such as Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) (Ministry of Education, 2001). With the launching of the NEC, the ELT education discourse is infused with progressive concepts such as quality-oriented whole-person education, student-centred teaching, TBLT, formative assessment, multi-media technology, and modern education resources, all of which

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<sup>1</sup> The National English Curriculum (NEC) in this study refers to the edition launched in P. R. China by the Ministry of Education in 2001. A revised edition of the NEC has been announced and will be implemented in the latter half of the year 2012.

demarcate the NEC from the “traditional” ELT classroom practices which are frequently described as exam-oriented, teacher-centred, grammar-translation, spoon-feeding, talk-and-chalk, and textbook-based. The NEC has thus been called “the most influential foundation” for both primary and secondary ELT practice as its planning and implementation were directly organized by MOE with the co-effort of numerous experts, scholars and teachers through three nation-wide consultations and different piloting stages (Wang, 2007, p. 87).

Against this background of education reform, teacher education has become a site where tensions and struggles between the old and new pedagogical cultures get played out. How student teachers, who are located at the lowest hierarchy in this site (in relation to school mentors (mentors) and university supervisors (supervisors)), negotiate such tensions and construct their professional identities between the demands of the old and new ideological systems, has thus become an extremely important research question in ELT teacher education in China. In the following sections we shall discuss the theoretical resources (Activity Theory and teacher identity theories) underpinning our case study of a preservice teacher’s practicum experience. Then we shall present a thick ethnographic description of the practicum journey of Lynn. We shall conclude this study with the implications of our research for teacher identity as well as ELT teacher education theories.

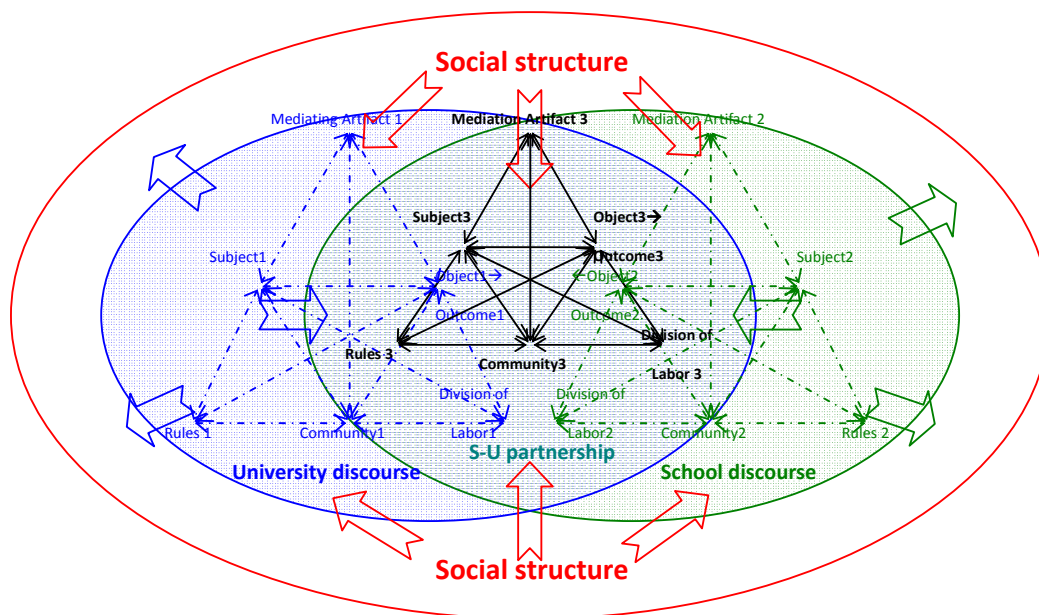
## **2 Theoretical Preamble: Teacher Identity, Activity Theory, and Ethico-politics of Teacher Identity**

The concept of identity is central to understanding the relationship between education and society (Gee, 2000). How to provide the space and resources for students to create and recreate their identities in positive, fluid, dynamic, multiple ways that empower rather than stereotype them is also a key critical education project (Lin, 2008). Teacher identity is generally understood as teachers’ “professional self” and how teachers feel or perceive themselves professionally as teachers. In teacher education, researchers have studied teacher identities from different perspectives (Beijaard, Verloop, & Vermunt, 2000; Clarke, 2008; Connelly & Clandinin, 1999; Tsui et al., 2009). Although many studies have been conducted on teacher identities, previous studies indicate that preservice teacher identity formation is better understood in school-university partnership (Clarke, 2008; Mayer, 1999; Tsui et al., 2009). However, researchers argued that previous studies on school-university partnership are relatively “methodologically weak” and lack an “explicit theoretical framework” (Edwards, Tsui, & Stimpson, 2009, p. 9). Morgan (2007) pointed out that future research on ELT identity issues should study the pedagogy context from more holistic angles by drawing on both sociocultural and poststructuralist perspectives. It is also proposed that language teacher identity research takes into consideration concepts of “values, morals, and ethics” (Clarke, 2009; Crookes, 2009; Johnston, 2003) which represents an orientation of the “most significant development” in language teacher identity research (Morgan & Clarke, 2011, p. 825). This study thus addresses the issue of EFL preservice teacher identity formation in school-university partnership from

analytical lenses of both Activity Theory (Engestrom, 1987, 1999, 2001) and critical poststructuralist identity theories. Drawing on Clarke's (2009) framework for teacher identity work based on the Foucauldian theory of ethical self-formation, this study attempts to conceptualize preservice teachers' identity work from an ethico-political perspective.

#### Learning to teach as boundary-crossing in school-university partnership activity system

Drawing on Engestrom's (1987) Activity Theory, we see learning to teach in the university preservice teacher education program as *artifact-mediated* actions motivated by the collective *object-oriented* social learning activities within the university community. The learning to teach process is embedded in the university *community* as a holistic *activity system* (Activity System 1) with the student teachers being the *subjects* of the learning activity. The relations between the *subjects* and the *community* are mediated by the *rules* within the university. Through the *division of labor* among community members, the *subjects* achieve the *object* of the activity system which is transformed into an *outcome* via the mediation of the task assignment and fulfillment within the organization of the community. Grounded in the third generation of Activity Theory (Engestrom, 2001), the practicum is conceived as an "expansive learning" experience when student teachers learn to teach in the placement school which is a community of another learning *activity system* (Activity System 2) with its own *subjects*, the middle school students, as their teaching objects during the practicum. According to Engestrom (2001), the two interacting activity systems should be regarded as a minimal unit of analysis with components in both activity systems being considered together as in a whole learning system. Due to the cultural dissonances between the university and the school as two different activity systems (Smagorinsky, Cook, Moore, Jackson, & Fry, 2004; Tsui & Law, 2007), the practicum as boundary-crossing learning activities may give rise to contradictions between the *objects* of the two activity systems: e.g., the *object* of the university activity system aims at helping the student teachers apply their university-taught theories and knowledge to the classroom practice while that of the school activity system aims at helping school students achieve better learning and examination results (Tsui & Law, 2007). Following Bloomfield (2009), the members in the school-university partnership in this study are seen as forming a new co-learning *activity system* (Activity System 3), with student teachers and their students being both the *subjects* and the *objects* of the activity system that is being negotiated and shared by all the community members (see Fig.1). If tensions and conflicts emerge during the practicum, they are likely to have arisen from the contradictions between interrelated components in the new activity system and the asymmetrical power relations between student teachers, mentors, and supervisors (Lopez-Real, Law, & Rosina, 2009; Tsui & Law, 2007). These contradictions within the school-university partnership activity system are seen as "driven forces" of change in the activity system (Engestrom, 2001; Il'enkov, 1977) which also contribute to the transformation of preservice teachers' identities.



**Fig. 1. Learning to teach as boundary-crossing in school-university partnership activity system**  
(Adapted from Engestrom, 1987, 1999, 2001)

An ethico-political framework for analysis of teacher identity work

To explore preservice teacher identity formation under dominating discourses of the school and the university, we turn to the poststructuralist approach, which views identity not as predetermined by the social structure but as negotiated, “argued for” (MacLure, 1993), and constantly worked on by social actors (Clarke, 2008, 2009; Miller Marsh, 2002; Morgan & Clarke, 2011). Inspired by the works of Foucault (Foucault, 1983, 1985, 1986, 1997), a growing number of researchers have started to seek alternative conceptualizations of teacher identities and the possible open spaces for teachers to resist the dominant normative discourses and to struggle for a channel for their voices and self-authorship (Britzman, 1994; Niesche & Haase, 2010; Zembylas, 2003). Based on Foucault’s theory of self-formation as ethics (Foucault, 1983, 1985), Clarke (2009) outlines a framework for doing teacher identity and emphasizes the ethico-political issues when teachers are encountered with various impediments on their way to exercising professional agency. Clarke’s framework consists of four ethico-political axes: (1) “*The substance of teacher identity*”---What aspects of the teachers’ selves do they utilize to constitute their teaching selves? (2) “*The authority-sources of teacher identity (mode of subjection)*”---What attitudes, beliefs, and codes of behaviors and discourses do teachers consider as authority sources informing them how to be a teacher? (3) “*The self-practices of teacher identity*”---What techniques and self-practices do teachers adopt to construct their teaching selves? and (4) “*The telos of teacher identity*”---What goals and purposes do teachers have concerning their teaching selves? What kind of teachers do they want to become? (Clarke, 2009, p. 191).

### **3 The study: Research aims and methods of inquiry**

In this study, we are concerned with studying the process of EFL preservice teacher identity formation in a school-university partnership context. The following research questions are addressed:

1. What are the interpersonal relations and tensions (if any) in school-university partnership?
2. How do these tensions affect the development of preservice teacher identities?

We have adopted an ethnographic case study approach (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2009) to investigate people's language, behaviors, artifacts, and interpersonal relationships in the sociocultural context of the school-university partnership activity system and to explore in detail Lynn's learning to teach process during which she transformed her identities over the pre-practicum, during-practicum, and post-practicum periods. Data collection lasted for nine months and it started a semester before the practicum during which the researcher<sup>2</sup> had two semi-structured interviews with Lynn, and then as a participant observer, she stayed in the school for two months conducting ethnographic data collection on day-to-day basis according to the practicum working schedule. Data collection methods included ethnographic observations (11 video-taped English lessons by Lynn, 29 hours audio-taped discussions among student teachers and mentors, and 167-page (A6 size) general observation fieldnotes), semi-structured interviews (audio-taped, 15 times, 6.5 hours), and documents (a university practicum scheme, a practicum news letter, 3 teaching reflective reports and 11 lesson plans by Lynn). The multiple data sources not only provided holistic and in-depth information about the research context and Lynn's practicum experiences but also allowed triangulation of the researcher's analysis. All data were coded and categorized in ongoing iterative cycles based on the constant comparative method (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). After data analysis, the researcher's analysis had gone through both peer review and member checking for trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Throughout this process, the researcher was self-reflective of the way her presence could have shaped the data and the stories she collated as results of a researcher's interpretations rather than as "findings" in the positivist sense.

The EFL preservice teacher education program in Guangshi University<sup>3</sup> aimed at educating highly qualified "English teachers and teaching researchers", an ambitious goal which is in accordance with the NEC teacher education objectives. Teaching Methodology was regarded as the most important course in the program as it was one

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<sup>2</sup> The researcher (first author of this paper) was once practicum coordinator between the school and the university before she left the university four years ago. Lynn was one of the student teachers in the practicum cohort. The researcher had known the mentors for seven years, but she and Lynn had not known each other before this research. The cohort had been informed by their supervisor that the researcher was neither representative of the university nor responsible for practicum assessment. This article reports part of the researcher's PhD study.

<sup>3</sup> All school and personal names in this study are pseudo names.

of the selected “quality courses” in the university. The syllabus of the course was mainly based on the “progressive” NEC concepts: the textbooks and teaching resources seemed to have kept abreast with the most updated national NEC training courses and the supervisors were main organizers and trainers of the provincial NEC training courses. A major objective of the course was to encourage student teachers to “apply the basic ELT theories to practical teaching” (quoted from the Course Syllabus 2008, original in Chinese). Therefore, the practicum in placement schools was highly valued by both supervisors and student teachers.

The placement school, Xiwang Middle School, had students whose academic scores belonged mainly to the medium to below medium level among all same grade students in the city. According to the mentors, only about fifty percent of the graduates were able to be promoted to senior middle schools. “Exam-oriented” education seemed to be well justified in the school, as the principal explained, tests were possibly the “fairest instrument” in basic education and the pursuit of scores was a “social reality”. Therefore, the students in each grade were separated into “Special Classes” (advanced-level class) and “Ordinary Classes” (lower-level class) according to their total academic scores to encourage competition among students.

Guangshi University had established partnership with the school for almost a decade. The university official document, *Teaching Practicum Scheme*, specified duties for the tripartite participants including student teachers, mentors, and supervisors. The student teachers had two main practicum tasks: teaching English as “student English teachers” and managing and educating students as “student class teachers”. The mentors were required to demonstrate, guide, observe, and comment on the student teachers’ teaching, and the supervisors were supposed to coordinate practicum arrangements between the two collaborating institutions, supervise practicum activities, observe and give feedback to student teachers’ lessons. Both supervisors and mentors were to give assessments on the student teachers’ performances at the end of the practicum.

#### **4 The Story of Lynn: Teaching practice as a site for constructing teacher identity**

##### Family background and prior education

According to Lynn’s self introduction, she was born in a rural family with illiterate parents. The unprivileged family conditions and the backwardness of education in her hometown had not only led to a hard journey in Lynn’s early education but also made her understand that “positive influences” are indispensable for the development of disadvantaged children and education seemed to become a crucial source for such “positive influences”. Lynn said she was “very motivated” to become a teacher, even though she was weak at speaking and listening due to the lack of practice in prior education. Lynn studied the university courses very diligently and managed to obtain a third-class scholarship<sup>4</sup> every year.

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<sup>4</sup> Students whose total score ranks first and second are awarded first-class and second-class scholarships respectively by the university, and third-class scholarships are awarded to those ranking from 3<sup>rd</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> out of

Bored by the traditional “spoon-feeding” ELT in her prior education, Lynn considered it necessary to make her lessons “interesting, diversified, and accessible” to the students. She found the Teaching Methodology theories and the NEC concepts indispensable for English teachers, but she also emphasized the necessity to try the theories out in practical teaching. She therefore participated actively in various teaching practices and had won a prize in a lesson design competition. Lynn said she was eager to have the practicum and she wished to have “new understanding” in classroom practice, become “more proficient” in ELT teaching, and initiate “transformations” in both her students and herself. She hoped that she could not only teach her students knowledge but also have “deep influence” on them as she emphasized repeatedly that “teaching knowledge is not the most important”, it is “educating people” that was the most significant for students because she believed that education entails “very great responsibility”. Lynn interpreted her goal of being a teacher as follows:

“I wish I could be... a teacher who can have relatively deep influence on her students...not only in terms of learning, but also in the way how they should behave and deal with social relations properly...In my opinion, it’s educating people that is the most important.”

[Mar. 21<sup>st</sup>, 2010 Semi-structured interview with Lynn 1:21:33]

To realize her practicum expectations, Lynn decided to keep an “appropriate distance” with her students and be “strict” but “friendly” with them. She hoped that her mentors would be “nice” and “willing to help and teach” and the school “would not give them too many restrictions” during the practicum.

#### Doing teaching practice under contradictions and interpersonal tensions

During the practicum, Lynn and Daisy<sup>5</sup>, took turns to act as the English teacher and class teacher of Class Five, an Ordinary Class whose students were described by the mentors as mostly “lazy and undisciplined”. According to Lynn, the English teacher mentor, Ms Poon, was an experienced teacher who was very “willing to teach”; while the class teacher mentor, Ms Mok, was not very experienced as she was assigned the class teacher role only for the first time. Lynn said Ms Mok appeared to her as an “acquainted stranger” because the mentor was not very willing to share class information with her mentees or to assign them any tasks as she seemed to be busy writing her own MA thesis.

#### *ELT in “Ordinary Classes”*

According to the head English teacher during the first mentor-mentee discussion, the major challenge for ELT in Ordinary Classes was to “eliminate zero-score papers”. Most of the students had been “scared of” English and preferred to keep silent or even sleep during lessons. With too much teaching content but limited time, teachers could not teach vocabulary in the lively ways recommended in the university Method

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around 30 students in a class.

<sup>5</sup> Daisy and Susan in this study are both Lynn’s peers in the cohort of student teachers who had practicum in the middle school.

Courses (e.g., presenting new words through interactions and multimedia with examples of word use in authentic contexts) but just asked students to copy and memorize the words themselves and then checked their word-spelling by dictations. Grammar and reading were “musts” and texts were translated and explained sentence by sentence by the teacher. The teaching of listening mainly focused on locating answers from the listening material; writing was taught only if time permitted, and speaking was basically skipped. Teaching approaches like “TBLT” advocated in the NEC and the university Method Courses were supposed to be “totally impossible” while traditional methods were said to help “facilitate” students’ understanding. According to the researcher’s observation, the mentors’ lessons were mostly teacher-dominant and full of language-point elaborations delivered in the mother tongue so that the teaching content was, in Ms Poon’s words, explained “more directly” and understood “more easily”. Note-taking was a necessary task during lessons. Multi-media equipments were seldom used and PowerPoint was regarded by the head teacher as “a waste of time”. The mentors suggested that student teachers should have a “sense of authority” so that they could “suppress” their students and guarantee classroom discipline. According to Ms Poon, Class Five were “weak in all aspects”. She hoped Lynn and Daisy could help the students “improve their scores” and “arouse their interest” in learning English. The mentor’s teaching principle was “directness”---“direct presentation, direct practice”. When observing Ms Poon’s lesson, the researcher could find very few student-teacher interactions. Most of the time, she wrote notes on the blackboard, explaining them, emphasizing repeatedly the potential “test items”, and urging students to take notes and to underline a certain word on a certain page.

*ELT: Progressive or traditional?*

From the group discussions among the cohort, it seemed that neither Lynn nor her peers appreciated the mentor’s spoon-feeding teaching which was actually what their university method courses tried to “reform” according to the NEC (Ministry of Education, 2001, p. 1). Lynn seemed to have realized the tension between the university ELT concepts and the school practice, as she said, “Ah?! Why do *they* teach that way?! Are those theories *we*’ve learned in the university useless?!...There’s kind of *tension*, I think.” Lynn and her peers all said they did not intend to imitate Ms Poon’s teaching style but preferred to follow the university teaching concepts as Lynn claimed before her first lesson, “*We*’ll use *our* theories *first* ...it’s impossible for *us* to accept all *their* teaching styles *here* and abandon what *we*’ve learned *before*”. Lynn and her peers wanted to add some communication activities into their teaching. Luckily, Ms Poon was supportive enough to allow them to try out their teaching ideas. However, even though Lynn’s first lesson appeared interesting to her students, with picture slides and competition games for vocabulary presentation and practice, she later told her peers that she could not finish teaching the most important part of the text. Besides, she was reminded by Ms Poon that she had spoken “too much English” which left the students “at a loss” about her teaching.



From the second lesson, Lynn reflected during post-lesson discussions that the students were less involved in her lessons even though she kept the university ELT ideas in the lesson designs. She wanted to have some interaction with the students, but the main problem remained that few responses were heard from them. In fact, as Lynn needed to teach many “language points” which were “must teach” content in the school, she was told by her peers that she had gradually followed Ms Poon’s style and even copied her pet phrases---“This is the test item in SMSEE<sup>6</sup>! Copy it down! Be quick!” However, after a few lessons, Lynn said she felt a bit disappointed by her teaching as she agreed with her peers that student involvement in her lessons was rather low.

“If we forget the students, I think this is a very good lesson...but what seemed imperfect is the students, they gave really slow responses, or let’s say, many of them fell asleep...”

[Sept, 17<sup>th</sup>, 2010 Susan’s comment on Lynn’s second lesson during post-lesson discussion 6:59]

“Student involvement seems still rather low...You’ve thought of various ways and I found your teaching a bit laborious...you might feel something like this, ‘Alas, how come I’ve talked so much while you still pay no attention to me?!’”

[Sep. 20<sup>th</sup>, 2010 Susan’s comment on Lynn’s fourth lesson during post-lesson discussion 16:14]

Just after a few lessons, Lynn seemed to realize that neither the university progressive ELT theories nor the school traditional teaching could help her improve her teaching. She discussed the problem with her peers and was eager to find a solution.

### *An embarrassed student class teacher*

Lynn’s work as a class teacher turned out to be uneasy, especially at the beginning. Lynn and Daisy said they did not agree with Ms Mok’s “sense of authority” which struck them as “No matter what happens, she scolds her students first!” But what upset them most seemed to be the mentor’s indifference to helping them take up the role of class teacher. For instance, Lynn told the researcher that Ms Mok had not introduced her or her partner to their students officially, nor did she tell them much about the general situation of the class. She did not allow her mentees to sit in her class-meeting as a demonstration lesson, nor did she attend the class-meeting<sup>7</sup> held by Daisy. Lynn said she had tried to organize some activities, for example, a preparation plan for the school sports day; however, without the support of the “real class teacher”, the students dared not carry out the “student class teacher’s” plans. Lynn could feel the lack of communication between her mentor and herself which troubled her very much. Without the mentor’s authorization, Lynn’s class management seemed to lack authority. Lynn said she felt “most embarrassed” when she was driven out of the classroom by the noon-rest inspector<sup>8</sup> who, without even asking the reason, regarded Lynn’s tutorial in the classroom as the source of the students’ noises.

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<sup>6</sup> “SMSEE 中考” refers to the Senior Middle School Entrance Examination, an important exam which decides whether a student can be promoted to a senior school and in which middle school s/he will be enrolled.

<sup>7</sup> In schools in mainland China, “class meetings 班會課” are important lessons for class teachers to introduce school behavioral norms and academic disciplines and organize moral education activities about. According to the university practicum scheme, mentors should give at least one demonstration lesson to their mentees.

<sup>8</sup> “Noon-rest 午休” refers to the period of time after lunch and before afternoon lessons in the school. All students staying in the school during that period must remain in the classroom and keep silent. The noon-rest inspector is a teacher in the school who is in charge of discipline issues during noon rest.

### Reflection, creative and ethical agency, and transformations in community and self

Facing contradictions in ELT teaching and tensions with the mentor and the students, Lynn reflected on her situation and seemed to gradually realize that her university teaching ideas were something out of a vacuum which could not be directly applied to the authentic classroom, as she concluded, “we didn’t really enter the classroom before, and so we would think of many many ideas without being constrained.” For Lynn, the real challenge did not seem to be the lack of progressive ELT theories or fancy teaching ideas, but the actual ELT situation in the school---the completion of a substantial volume of teaching content within a tight schedule, and an Ordinary Class whose students were too scared of and bored by learning English to be willing to participate in her lessons or give her any responses. Lynn said she decided to “have a breakthrough” in her teaching and the change, she emphasized, “should be based on the actual situation of the students”.

In order to know more about her students, Lynn tried to seek chances to “do something for them”. She emphasized that communication is valuable for knowing about her students and she decided to approach them actively instead of waiting for them to contact her. She wrote a few encouraging words on her students’ assignments, hoping that the written communication could help break the ice between her and her students. She tried to figure out ways to help the students without violating the school rules, as she said, “I can start with small things one by one...I’ll do those things which won’t be objected or criticized by people...something which is in fact helpful for the students.” Lynn managed to find an appropriate venue for her noon-rest tutorial where they could talk freely without affecting others. She invited students to talk with her what they really thought and needed. The tutorials seemed to be “attractive” as little gifts would be awarded to those who had made progress. As Lynn was eager to have some “positive influence” on the students, she tried to raise their life goal awareness. For Lynn, the noon-rest tutorials were not simply remedial teaching, but consisted of free chats with different groups on different topics concerning future life plans. Lynn said she believed in the principle that teachers should “squat” down and talk with the students “at the same height”. She told her students her own struggles along her bumpy journey to the university; for those who were unwilling to study, Lynn encouraged them to pursue their own future and do what was suitable for them. In order to encourage the students to take action, Lynn designed class-meeting activities during which students started to design and voice out their learning plans. Lynn also seemed to realize the indispensability of the mentor’s support. She therefore went to sincerely invite Ms Mok to attend her class-meeting and asked for her comments afterwards. Lynn’s sincerity seemed to have moved the mentor who, even though observed only half the class-meeting, had partially contributed to the success of the ST’s carefully designed lesson.

Based on the friendly rapport established through communications, Lynn and her students seemed to have better understanding about each other. She had clearer ideas

about the students' difficulties and interests. In her later lessons, instead of clinging to the progressive university ELT theories or imitating her mentor's traditional cramming style, Lynn said she preferred to teach the lessons according to her "own style". She tried to cover all "must teach" language points and occasionally added some meaningful elements by integrating the teaching content with what was familiar to the students; for example, extending the texts to real life incidents, presenting the text in the genre of stories, using teaching realia, producing interesting courseware with various pictures, videos, and resources from the internet. Lynn no longer insisted on "teaching English through English" but use the mother tongue to explain the key points which resulted in more feedback from the students. Lynn's later lessons were well recognized by both her peers and Ms Poon who gave her the following comments,

"The students were very cooperative... even those sitting at the back were taking notes... most of them listening to you without falling asleep<sup>9</sup>...Maybe we need to spend some time communicating with them occasionally, and I'm sure you must have spent quite some time talking with them, right?... If they accept you and adore you, they're willing to follow you. I was impressed by today's lesson because even those students at the back were motivated..."  
[Sep. 26<sup>th</sup>, 2010 Group discussion after Lynn's seventh lesson 35:06]

The students seemed to have more confidence in English learning and clearer goals in their study, which was reflected from their increased involvement in Lynn's later lessons. Lynn was no longer disappointed for not being able to apply her university theories, instead, she stressed that she had integrated the university ELT concepts into her lessons. She said she was more satisfied with her later lessons which she taught in her "own style". After Lynn wrote the encouraging words on the students' assignments, she told the researcher she found some of them copied vocabulary in neater handwriting and wrote more correct words in dictations. Some of the students who enjoyed the tutorials even made a little progress in the unit test which was recognized by other student teachers during group discussions. All these seemed to indicate that, transformations, however minor ones, had occurred in Lynn's practicum which could be evidenced in the improved relationship with her students and her mentor, the enhanced learning results in some of her students, her better understanding of how to do ELT with low-proficiency learners, and the changing of her sense of identity as a student teacher.

Lynn's practicum experiences provided an example of a student teacher's "arguing for"(MacLure, 1993) her identity and exercising her creative agency to break through the impasse imposed by the unhelpful essentialist opposition between "progressive" and "traditional" pedagogical discourses (Lin & Luk, 2002). As the story unfolds, we see that the various contradictions and tensions in the school-university partnership did not prevent Lynn from pursuing opportunities for fulfilling her own teacherly values (e.g., to have "positive influence" on the lives of her students). In fact, the

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<sup>9</sup> According to the practicum requirements, mentors are supposed to observe their mentees' lessons. In Lynn's previous lessons, even though Ms Poon sat in the classroom, many students fell asleep without giving feedback or taking notes.

contradictions seem to have become stimuli for Lynn to reflect critically on the inadequacy of both the university theories and the school mentors' teaching methods. Lynn's experiences illustrated that the inner contradictions in activity systems may become "driving forces" for innovations and transformations in the activity system (Engestrom, 2001; Il'enkov, 1977). Analyzing Lynn's story using Clarke's (2009) framework, we find that the student teacher's identity transformation seems to be primarily affected by her *telos of teacher identity*, that is, the goals of her teaching self. Lynn's *telos* (to be a "qualified teacher" with "positive influence" on students) was closely interrelated with her *substance* (love of teaching and students), *authority sources* ("teaching knowledge, educating people", translated from her words: "教書育人"), and her *self-practices* (her various efforts and techniques in improving professional knowledge, teaching methods, and interpersonal relations), all of which were influenced by but not totally determined by the university and school discourses. Lynn seemed to have negotiated her own *telos* amidst these dominating discourses.

### 5 Implications for ELT teacher education

In China's ELT teacher education, although the motto "teaching knowledge and educating people" has been long advocated in Chinese education tradition, under current "talent-oriented" social ideologies and "knowledge-driven" discourses, "teaching knowledge" is valued at different levels of education while "educating people" is neglected to a varying extent in general. The so-called "quality-education" is still basically "exam-oriented", as represented by the College Entrance Exam and various high-stake credential tests for recruitments. Such a phenomenon echoes Beijaard et al. (2000) that teachers regarded themselves more as "subject matter or didactic experts" than as "pedagogical experts"<sup>10</sup> who deal with students' moral and ethical development. In our study, Lynn's ethical and creative agencies seemed to have derived from her belief that "Educating people should be more important than teaching them knowledge". It is both her sense of responsibility to have "positive influence" on students and her practicum objective--- "to have transformations in both the students and myself" that triggered Lynn to exercise her creative agency to reflect on her teaching and reform her lessons in a culturally responsive way (Lin, 1999). Lynn's story indicates that it is necessary for ELT and teacher education to take into consideration the goal of "educating people". Lynn's praxis resonates Johnston (2003) who argues,

"Language teaching, like all other teaching, is fundamentally moral...First, teaching is rooted in relation, above all the relation between teacher and student...Second, all teaching aims to change people...the change will be for the better...Third, although 'science' in the form of research in various disciplines...can give us some points...the decisions we make as teachers...have to be based on moral rather than objective or scientific principles..." (Johnston, 2003, p. 5)

The moral and ethical nature of ELT education entails a more fundamental issue:

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<sup>10</sup> In Beijaard et al. (2000, p. 750), the authors provide a note to explain the distinction between "pedagogical experts" and "didactical experts" in their research: The former deals with issues about student moral and ethical education, while the latter is related to aspects in teaching methodology.

“What is the goal of education?” From Lynn’s struggles for voice within the dominant discourses, it can be seen that both the university teacher education program and the school ELT practice seemed to follow the “banking model” (Freire, 1972) which emphasizes the supreme status of the more knowledgeable university supervisors and the absolute “sense of authority” of the school mentors. Education in such a “banking model” is characterized by teachers “cramming” or imposing what they assumed as important into/onto their learners, restricting the students’ voice and sense of agency, and ignoring their transformation and development. After Freire (1972), we argue that education should aim at “the practice of freedom”. Student teachers and their students should have the “conscientization” to reflect on the reality critically and participate in the transformation of the world and their selves creatively. As Foucault proposes, freedom is not an “end state” but the involvement in “effecting change in the world” (Infinito, 2003, p. 157). To face the many challenges in current education reforms, we urge for “dialogic” education (Freire, 1972) in ELT and teacher education pedagogy which aims at people’s critical and creative transformation of both self and the world.

Inspired by Lynn’s practicum journey, we propose a critical and ethical pedagogy in ELT teacher education. Drawing on Foucault (1997), we argue that when (student) teachers’ pursuit of freedom is inconsistent with the normalized rules in the dominating discourses, they should have not only the capability and willingness to insist on fulfilling their enterprises but also the courage to resist the various pressure and limitations in the normalized discourses that are constantly confining them to the given models and predetermined procedures. Foucault points out that freedom results from the ethical practices on both others and ourselves. The “*care of the self*” is inextricably related to the “care of the others” (Foucault, 1986, 1997; Infinito, 2003). We have seen in this study that Lynn’s care of her (teacher) “self” was based on the care of the “other” (her students), as well as her creative and ethico-political work in ELT education throughout the practicum. This provokes us to rethink the current practice of ELT teacher preparation in China and perhaps in many parts of the world, where dominant pedagogical discourses are often passed onto students as education canons without a concurrent commitment to encouraging (student) teachers to problematize and creatively transform these normative pedagogical discourses (and practices) in light of the practical situation of students in schools. However, student teachers are often left to their own devices in this process, with teacher-educators often merely asking students to adapt the theories to their contexts. How can we help (student) teachers to adapt the different pedagogical theories in their contexts if we have not systematically studied and conceptualized the processes involved in this creative adaptive process, the conflicts and tensions encountered, and the resources needed to help (student) teachers to negotiate these conflicts and tensions and build their teacher identities in the process? Our study cannot provide all the answers to these important questions but if more case studies like this one can be done in the future in different contexts and shared among both teacher-educators and student teachers, we believe that we might be starting to gain more insight into how we can help (student) teachers in the creative process of negotiating between the conflicting

discourses/theories and contextual demands facing them when they embark on the journey of building their teacher identities.

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