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An Exploratory Research on In-service English Teachers'
Conceptualization of Cooperative Learning in Hong
Kong Primary Schools

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ABSTRACT   Cooperative learning (CL) has been a well-researched area with a substantial amount of empirical literature corroborating its positive correlation with academic achievement and social competence. Yet, some scholars argue that CL is incompatible with the Confucian heritage strongly rooted in the Eastern society. Interestingly, there is an emerging body of local empirical research supporting the positive impact of CL on language learning and motivation. These ambivalent views bring us back to the question when CL works and when it does not. This qualitative study seeks to look into local teachers' conceptualization of CL and their patterns of practice and subsequently examine if there is a relationship between practice and teachers' own conceptual understanding that could possibly explain the two contrasting outcomes. Ten primary English teachers were selected to participate in a semi-structured interview by the principle of convenience sampling. Data collected were analyzed by an inductive approach. Findings reveal a correspondence between different patterns of practice and teachers' own conceptualization of the instructional strategy.

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Introduction

Cooperative learning (CL) has been an extensively studied area in educational research with a large body of literature providing empirical support for its positive correlation with academic achievement and social competence (e.g. Roseth et al., 2008; Liao, 2006; Van Wyk, 2012). With the emphasis on a learner-centered curriculum and the incorporation of project learning in the latest primary English curriculum reform (EMB, 2004, p.93 and p. 104), the HKSAR government is clearly aware of the educational benefits brought by the pedagogy. Having originated in the West, however, some scholars argue that CL is incompatible with the Confucian heritage in the Eastern society. While the collectivistic culture of Eastern societies is considered to be a desirable factor for the implementation of CL, Chan (2014) points out that several core values of Confucianism lead to conflicting mismatches with the principle of CL, namely the hierarchical social structure , the importance of face-saving and the passive learning culture. Similarly, Sachs et al. (2006 cited in Thanh et al., 2008) report in their findings that it is challenging for Asian teachers in particular to step down from an authoritative role and move towards a facilitating role owing to their socially ascribed status. The authors also find that contrary to the face-to-face promotive interaction in CL, Asian students tend not to fully commit to a genuine and honest discussion so as to avoid direct disagreement and confrontation, which potentially makes others lose face (Sachs et al., 2006, Eva, 2003 and Chung, 1999 cited in Thanh et al., 2008, Nguyen et al., 2009; Nguyen et al., 2005). Considering such cultural differences, Nguyen et al. (2009) warn that uncritical cross-cultural pedagogical cloning possibly results in academic ineffectiveness, deterioration of the host culture, decreased research capacity of the host culture and perpetuation of "neo-colonialism", a term defined by Altbach (1977 cited in Nguyen et al., 2009) as the maintenance of colonial practice and deliberate effort by the colonizing nations to continue their influence in the formerly colonized. Interestingly, there is a

growing body of local research in the twenty-first century endorsing the positive effects of CL on literacy development and motivation (see for example Law, 2008, 2011). Given such ambivalent views on CL in a scholarly context, it brings us back to the question when CL works and when it does not. Therefore, this qualitative study seeks to look into local teachers' conceptualization of CL and their patterns of practice and subsequently examine if there is a relationship between practice and teachers' own conceptual understanding that could possibly explain the two contrasting outcomes. The research questions underlying this qualitative study include (1) What are the current patterns of CL practice in local primary schools? (2) What is generalist primary English teachers' conceptual understanding of CL? (3) If there is any relationship between practice and teachers' conceptual understanding?

<div align="center">Literature Review</div>

Underlying characteristics of CL

CL is conceptually defined as any form of group work "[where] students work together to accomplish shared learning goals" (Johnson & Johnson, 1999, p.1 cited in Slavin, 2003). Despite being theoretically straightforward, the functional definition of CL embodies the following five elements:

1. *Positive interdependence*: Positive interdependence, put in a simpler term, refers to the notion of "sink or swim together". It exists when there is a sense of mutualism in the group. Each member perceives themselves as linked to one another in a way that the success of self is dependent upon the success of others. Johnson and Johnson (1999) note that positive interdependence within a cooperative group has to be established by a common learning objective.

2. *Individual accountability*: Individual accountability occurs when every group member is held accountable for their own share of work and contributes to the collective effort.

3. *Face-to-face promotive interaction:* Face-to-face promotive interaction is characterized by a number of positive in-group attributes that promote individual as well as group success including help, assistance, encouragement, support, praise and giving feedback.

4. *Social skills*: For CL to be successful, group members have to be equipped with the necessary interpersonal and small group skills. Productive cooperation occurs when individuals are purposefully and precisely taught the communication, problem-solving, decision-making, leadership and conflict-management skills.

5. *Group processing*: Group processing concerns the reflective action members undertake to evaluate how well the group is functioning and maintaining constructive working relationships and subsequently members identify changes needed to be made for future improvement.

(Johnson & Johnson, 1999; Johnson &Johnson, 1994 cited in Hennessey & Dionigi, 2013; Li & Lam, 2013)

Theoretical perspectives on CL

In earlier work, Slavin (1995) identifies four major perspectives on CL and achievement, namely the motivational perspective, social cohesion perspective, cognitive developmental perspective and cognitive elaboration perspective.

The motivational perspective

The motivational perspective on CL argues that task motivation serves as the primary impetus of the whole mechanism. It asserts that other learning behaviors are driven by this single motivational force and hence scholars subscribing to this perspective focus their attention on the

external reward or goal structure in which students are situated (Slavin, 1995; Slavin, 2011). The cooperative incentive system has to be structured in a way that it creates a situation in which personal success comes about if and only if the entire group succeeds (Johnson & Johnson, 1994; Slavin, 1983; Slavin, 1995; Salvin, 2011) underlining positive interdependence in CL and thus members must develop an in-group interpersonal reward and punishment system in which they give or withdraw social reinforcers (e.g. help, praise and encouragement) based on group members' task-related endeavor to ensure both individual and group accomplishment. In other words, the motivational perspective emphasizes the causal relationship between an external motivational factor; that is, a group reward, and the subsequent in-group interpersonal behaviors that facilitate learning (Slavin, 2011).

The social cohesion perspective

The social cohesion perspective, also known as the social interdependence theory, is somehow similar to the motivational perspective in a sense that it takes into account the motivational factor, but unlike the motivational perspective whose emphasis is more on the extrinsic reward, it stresses the altruistic motivation created by the cohesiveness of the group among learners. It holds that students display pro-social behaviors (e.g. mutual help and assistance, exchange and share of resources, effective communication) because they can relate to the group and its members and therefore come to derive a sense of self-identity from the group membership. In essence, students help one another in the mastery of knowledge because they truly care for the group and its members and want them to succeed (Slavin, 2011). A socially cohesive group, according to Deutsch (1949 cited in Johnson & Johnson, 2005 and Tran, 2013), is marked by the psychological processes of substitutability, "the degree to which actions of one person substitutes for the actions of another person", inducibility, "the openness to being

influenced and to influencing others" and positive cathexis, "the investment of psychological

energy in objects outside of oneself" (Johnson & Johnson, 2005, p.366 cited in Tran, 2013).

The cognitive perspective

The cognitive perspective, unlike the preceding two perspectives on CL, is concerned with

"the mental processing of information rather than with motivation" (Slavin, 2011, p. 163) when

students engage in interpersonal interaction. It can be subdivided into the two most notable

perspectives, the developmental and elaboration perspectives.

Cognitive developmental perspective

The cognitive developmental perspective stems from Piaget's (1926) theory of socio-

cognitive conflict and Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivist approach. It assumes that the

reciprocal interaction among same-age peers around appropriate cooperative tasks (*emphasis

added*) will consequently lead to acquisition of knowledge for the reason that children of similar

age are prone to be working within one another's zone of proximal development, defined by

Vygostky (1978, p. 86) as "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined

by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through

problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers", and

modeling behaviors more efficaciously than working alone (Slavin, 2011; Tran, 2013).

Vygotsky (1978) further adds that knowledge acquisition begins at an interpersonal level through

which individuals assimilate and transfer the content to an intrapersonal level such that

knowledge is internalized. Similarly, Piaget (1926) believes that social-arbitrary knowledge has

to be learned through interaction that provides learners with the opportunity to construct and

reconstruct the existing knowledge in their repertoire. When individuals are confronted with new

knowledge arising from the interaction with others, they are bound to re-examine their prior

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knowledge and accommodate the new pieces of information to maintain equilibrium (also see Tran, 2013; Ashman & Gillies, 2003). In principle, it is the use of cooperative tasks that creates opportunities for discussion, argument and articulation and reception of ideas that is believed to exert an effect on academic growth (Slavin, 2011).

Cognitive elaboration perspective

The cognitive elaboration perspective, developed by O'Donnell and O'Kelly (1994) and O'Donnell (2000), highlights the importance of elaboration in relation to learning and memory. Researchers in cognitive psychology have long held the proposition that individuals must involve themselves in some kind of cognitive re-structuring and elaboration of materials, whether by adding to or re-establishing the learned knowledge, if they are to preserve the new information in their memory and link it to the knowledge already available in their mind (Wittrock, 1986 cited in Slavin, 2011 and Tran, 2013). In theory, students actively engage themselves in deeper processing of the lesson content and develop an extended understanding of concepts when they clarify and give an elaborated explanation to others and on that account learning is enhanced (Zakaria et al., 2010; McKeachie, 1999).

In spite of various perspectives on CL, Slavin (2011) points out that the above four approaches are seen as interactive, not mutually exclusive. The following path model devised by Slavin (1995 cited in Slavin, 2011 and Li & Lam, 2013) illustrates the major constituents of group interaction and depicts the functional relationship among different viewpoints on CL (see Figure 1):
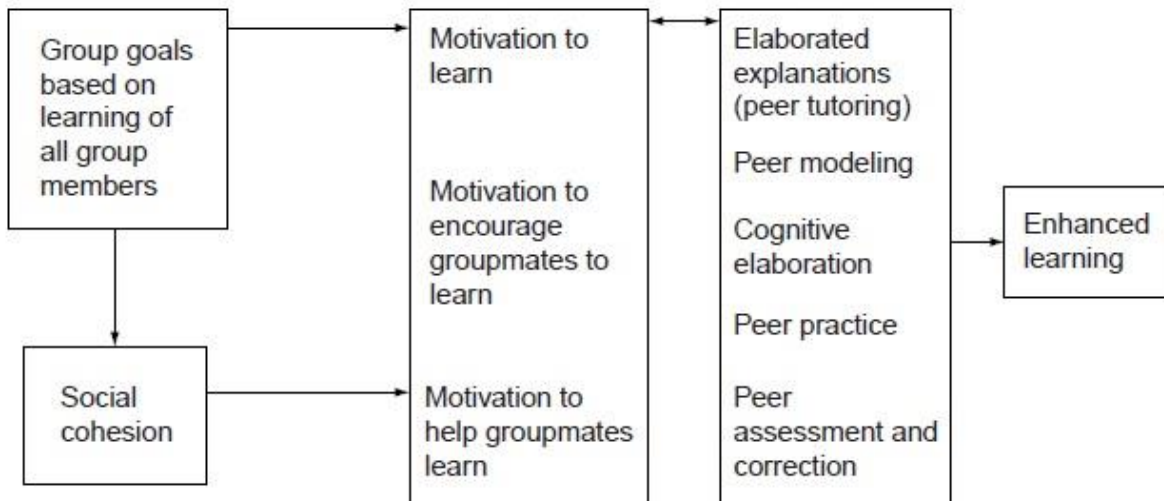
Figure 1: Slavin's (1995) path model of the four major theoretical perspectives on CL. Taken from Slavin (2011) and Li and Lam (2013)

The role of CL in modern education

The concept of CL evolves from Vygotsky's (1978) idea of peer learning in the late 1970s. While there was such a school of thoughts on student-centered learning springing up in the West back in the 1970s, CL has not taken its place in the East whose education system is widely known for intensive drilling and memorization (Biggs, 1990) until the late 1990s when a set of revolutionary educational reforms came out particularly in Hong Kong, Taiwan and Singapore (see Table 1):

Hong Kong	"In the tide of changes, everyone has to meet new challenges. Adaptability, creativity and abilities for communication, self-learning and cooperation *(emphasis added)* are now the prerequisites for anyone to succeed…" (Education Commission, 2000, p.3) "All in all…learning effectiveness of students remains not very promising; learning is still examination-driven and scant attention is paid to "learning to learn". School life is usually monotonous, students are not given comprehensive learning experiences with little room to think, explore and create…To make up for these weaknesses, we need to uproot outdated ideology and develop a new education system that is student-focused *(again*

	emphasis added)." (Education Commission, 2000, p.4)
Taiwan	"Innovative changes have been initiated to ensure equal access to education for all students, to relieve their pressure from examinations, to offer more room for school-based management, and to improve teaching quality. Many education-related regulations were overhauled to create a more liberal education environment…" (Government Information Office, 2005 cited in Phillipson & Lam, 2011, p. 2)
Singapore	"We have been moving in recent years towards an education system that is more flexible and diverse. The aim is to provide students with greater choice to meet their different interests and ways of learning. Being able to choose what and how they learn will encourage them to take greater ownership of their learning…We want to nurture young Singaporeans who ask questions and look for answers, and who are willing to think in new ways, solve new problems and create new opportunities for the future…" (Singapore Ministry of Education, 2016)

Table 1: Extracts from educational reform statements in Hong Kong, Taiwan and Singapore.

Owing to an increasing demand in the transfer of the ownership of learning from teachers to students and a radical shift from competition to cooperation in our education system and generally in the society, a constructivist model of teaching and learning becomes an irresistible trend as it views learners as an active agent of learning (Phillipson & Lam, 2011) and thereby empowers them to take responsibility for their own learning by giving them the autonomy and flexibility to work together for a common purpose through which personal attributes that define modern-day success are acquired.

Modern methods of CL

Multiple models on the pragmatic application of CL in the classroom have been developed over the years. In general, methods of CL can be classified broadly into two main categories, to wit, structured team learning and informal group learning methods.

Structured team learning

Structured team learning deals with group rewards given based on the individual learning of group members. It focuses much on individual accountability, meaning that team success is determined by the individual learning progress of members, not the group product itself and as such activities are planned in a way that it encourages members to explain and clarify concepts to one another to achieve universal understanding of learning materials, ensuring that everyone is prepared for the individual assessment administered in the later stage. A team score is computed by adding up the individual improvement score (awarded based on the extent to which students exceed or meet their past performance) and therefore each member, regardless of ability differences, contributes to the group by improving over the course of time and individual effort is equally valued (Li &Lam, 2013; Slavin, 2010).

Empirical support for structured team learning

There is a great deal of experimental research detailing the instructional effectiveness of structured team learning. In a review of forty studies of minimum four weeks' duration comparing one of the following structured team learning strategies: Student Team-Achievement Division (STAD), Teams-Games-Tournament (TGT), Team Accelerated Instruction (TAI) and Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition (CIRC) with the traditional teacher-centered approach, thirty-three studies; that is 82.5 percent, report a significant increase in learning in the structured team learning group while the remaining seven find no difference between the two (Slavin, 1991). Likewise, research evaluating STAD and CIRC finds similar positive outcomes. In Slavin and Karweit's (1984) year-long evaluation of STAD in junior and senior high school Mathematics education, the authors observe a significant advantage in the STAD groups with an effect size of +0.21 ($p<0.03$) (cited in Slavin, 2010; also see Barbato, 2000; Reid, 1992).

Stevens's et al. (1987) research on CIRC in middle school education reveals apparent positive gains in terms of reading comprehension (with an effect size of +0.35, p<0.02), reading vocabulary (with an effect size of +0.11, p<0.04) and California Achievement Test (with an effect size of +0.23, p<0.01) in the CIRC treatment group (also see Stevens & Slavin, 1995; Stevens & Durkin, 1992). Slavin (2010) explains that the success of structured team learning lies in the fact that it provides students with a solid reason to take one another's achievement seriously and the equal-opportunity scoring system (achievement is measured relative to students' previous performance) sets a realistic goal for each and every student and entices their intrinsic motivation to strive for better as compared to rewards based on comparison to others.

Informal group learning methods

Informal group learning methods entail methods that pay much attention to the interpersonal aspect of a group, emphasizing social dynamics, projects and group discussion (Li &Lam, 2013; Slavin, 2010) and hence cooperative tasks are designed in a way that it gives students the autonomy to discuss constructively, exchange ideas, coordinate themselves as a group and plan for future actions.

Empirical support for informal group learning methods

Multiple studies on the empirical employment of informal group learning methods unanimously substantiate its positive association with achievement gains, improved subject attitude and enhanced higher-order comprehension (e.g. Ghaith, 2003; Özsoy & Yildiz, 2004; Ghaith & El-Malak, 2004; Gömleksi˙z, 2007). In their summary of research, Newmann and Thompson (1987) report a fairly consistent rate of success of Learning Together and Group Investigation with a percentage of seventy-three and sixty-seven respectively. Tarhan and Sesen (2012) find in their experimental study on college Chemistry education that undergraduates in

the Jigsaw treatment group as compared to the control group demonstrate a more thorough

understanding of concepts and a more positive attitude towards and interest in the major. Carss's

(2007) research on Think-Pair-Share suggests comparable positive effects. The author discovers

an apparent increase in reading achievement particularly in terms of aspects of oral language use,

cognition, meta-cognitive awareness and development of reading comprehension strategies in the

Think-Pair-Share intervention group.

The following table summarizes the specific methods of application mentioned above (see

Table 2):

Categories	Strategies
Structured Team Learning	- Student Team-Achievement Division (STAD) - Teams-Games-Tournament (TGT) - Team Accelerated Instruction (TAI) - Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition (CIRC)
Informal Group Learning Methods	- Jigsaw II - Learning Together - Think-Pair-Share - Group Investigation

Table 2: A summary of the methods of CL application. Cited in Slavin (1991), Li &Lam (2013) and Slavin (2010)

Data collection

Participants

Ten primary English teachers, two males and eight females, were recruited in two separate

stages through convenience sampling; that is, selecting subjects that are the most accessible to

the researcher (Marshall, 1996). In the first stage, all six English teachers from Po On

Commercial Association Wan Ho Kan Primary School, the researcher's practicum host school,

were chosen to participate in a face-to-face semi-structured interview (see Appendix 1 for the
interview schedule) with each lasting for twelve to twenty-five minutes depending on the
participant. After the first stage, both the researcher and her supervisor recognized that such a
small sample size risks adequate depth and breadth and therefore an expansion in the participant
number was needed to safeguard the collection of quality data (Cleary et al., 2014). Owing to a
lack of potential participants in the host school, four additional participants were outsourced and
interviewed at an appointed time via email using the same set of interview schedule, which was
sent to the participants ahead of the interview time to allow sufficient time for preparation, in the
second stage. Equal time was spent on these outsourced teachers to guarantee the collection of
relevant data. Follow-up work was also conducted via email whenever necessary. The
demographics of the subjects is tabulated below (see Table 3):

Sample Code	General Information					Qualifications
	Sex	Age	Year(s) of teaching experience	Level of Students	School Type	
01	M	35-40	10-15	Upper Primary	Aided School	B.A. in English PGDE M.Ed. in Teaching English as a Second Language
02	F	25-30	3	Lower Primary	Aided School	B.A. in English PGDE
03	F	25-30	2 months	Lower Primary	Aided School	Bachelor of Social Work PGDE
04	F	35-40	12	Both Upper and Lower Primary (mainly lower primary in recent	Aided School	B.Soc.Sc. in Sociology PGDE

				years)		M.Ed. in Teaching English as a Second Language
05	F	35-40	10	Both Upper and Lower Primary	Aided School	B.A. in English PGDE
06	F	30-35	7	Both Upper and Lower Primary	Aided School	Bachelor of Journalism TESOL
07	M	25-30	2	Mainly Lower Primary	Aided School	B.A. in Media and Cultural Studies TESOL
08	F	40-45	14.5	Upper Primary	Aided School	B.A. in English PGDE
09	F	25-30	5	Upper Primary	Aided School	B.A. in English PGDE
10	F	25-30	Almost 2 years	Both Upper and Lower Primary	Aided School	Bachelor of Communications PGDE

Table 3: Participant profile

Procedures

Semi-structured interviews were purposefully selected as the data collection method in this study as they allow flexibility in responses, probing for more information and clarification of answers, which are especially useful in exploring a person's opinions towards a particular subject of discussion (Louise Barriball & While, 1994). The interview questions were designed with a focus on personal experiences with CL such that patterns of practice and the underlying beliefs can be deduced. Prior to the interview, each participant was clearly informed of the research objective and the handling of data and was asked to sign a consent form indicating their agreement to participate in the study. In the case of email interviews, informal consent was

sought via email with a softcopy of the consent form attached to it. Each face-to-face interview

was audio-recorded, carefully transcribed and proofread several times (see Appendix 2 for the

transcript). The transcribed raw data and email responses were then coded into conceptual

categories from which emerging themes were developed and broader patterned relationships

within data were identified. In other words, data were analyzed by a grounded theory approach

(Charmaz, 2003). Such an inductive method, according to Corbin & Strauss (1990), provides a

systematic framework that holds data collection and analysis together. Data analysis began at the

onset of the study to provide direction for the successive interviews so that possibly relevant

issues were captured as soon as they were perceived, enabling a comprehensive examination of

all the potentially satisfying avenues towards understanding (Corbin & Strauss, 1990).

<p align="center">Finding and discussion</p>

Current patterns of practice

Based on the participants'
responses, three patterns of
practice involving low,
intermediate and high levels of
cognition are observed. Such a
cognitive progression
corresponds to the cognitive
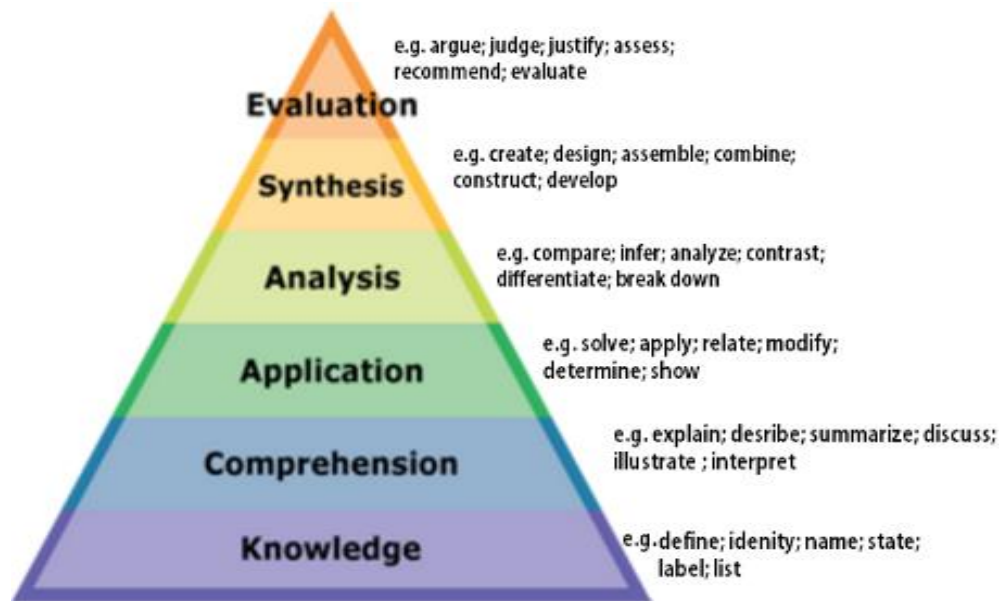domains detailed in the original
Bloom's (1956) taxonomy [1](see

Figure 2: Bloom's (1956) taxonomy

Figure 2) and hence the framework is used as a reference point for the following discussion.

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[1] The original Bloom's (1956) taxonomy is selected primarily because it well represents different cognitive levels perceived in the data. The revised version (see Krathwohl, 2002) is an expansion and reorganization of the original one.

Tasks concerning a low level of cognition (i.e. the knowledge and comprehension levels) target simply on recalling and interpretation of facts. The scope of such tasks is rather limited, primarily aiming to test whether students have successfully obtained factual and conceptual knowledge from the lesson:

> "*My practice is I give each student a single task like a worksheet and give them say like 5 to 10 minutes to think about it and put down something on the worksheet first by themselves…and then I ask them [higher ability students] to sit with their buddies, the lower ability students, and teach them how to complete the task."* (03)

> "*…I give some time for students to work on a worksheet individually and then I put them into groups of four usually to discuss their answers. It's like cross-checking the answers."* (10)

In the above responses, cooperative tasks are performed in the form worksheets. One participant even describes cooperative work as "cross-checking answers" implying that the chief purpose of group work is to assess students' understanding of the lesson content.

Practice requiring an intermediate level of cognition (i.e. the application and analysis levels) has students actually carry out certain procedures to solve a problem or necessitates students to break down materials into constituent pieces and recognize how pieces are interrelated to one another or to the whole structure (Krathwohl, 2002). The scope of such practice is comparatively broader, calling for the application of procedural knowledge. Classroom tasks of such mentioned by participants include Think-Pair-Share (01), group discussion (05) and educational games (06).

Practice of a high level of cognition (i.e. the synthesis and evaluation level) demands students to put elements together to produce original work or to make judgements based on a set of given criteria, both of which require active control and awareness of their cognitive processes, viz. their metacognitive processing (Krathwohl, 2002). Examples of such given by participants

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contain news commentaries (02), writing a recipe (04), making a flipbook (07), designing a

menu (08) and writing a poem (09).

Conceptualization of CL

Teachers' conceptualization of CL is understood in terms of the respective roles of teachers

and students. Two pairs of distinctive and somehow contrastive roles of teachers and students are

perceived in the data (see Table 4).

Role of teachers

Role of students		active	passive
	complementary	A (8)	
	unilateral		B (2)

Table 4: Teachers' conceptualization of CL
(the number in parentheses corresponds to the number of participants)

Type A−an active teacher role and a complementary student role

Type A teachers are said to take on an active role, inasmuch as they take initiatives and

make deliberate effort to ensure the success of group work, for example,

"*So in the beginning, we need to teach them [students] how to follow instruction, tell them [students]*

explicitly what we want them [students] to do." (02)

"*If it doesn't turn out great or as what I expected, I'll explain to the class, explain to them what they did*

poorly and what improvements are expected in the future. Or if they did well, then I'll highlight those

things and share with the class. Well you may say it's like a mini reflection or debriefing session." (04)

"*Teachers have to teach students how to work in groups, like how they move their chairs and desks, how*

they divide their jobs, what their responsibilities are, what level of voice they should use, what the signals

are used to tell them they have to stop their tasks and listen to the teacher." (08)

The above responses are characterized by explicit teaching of skills or some sort of routine training that prepares students for the implementation of CL suggesting that these teachers are aware that gathering socially unskilled individuals together and telling them to cooperate does not naturally guarantee that they have the ability to carry out group work effectively. Direct instruction on social skills that facilitate group communication, according to Johnson and Johnson (2003) and Slavin (1996) (cited in Gillies & Boyle, 2010), is considered as a fundamental tenet accounting for the instructional efficacy of CL.

Their cooperative tasks are also planned in a way that each member is assigned an individual role or a rotating duty to fulfill and contributes to the group according to the given role and hence a complementary relationship among students, for instance,

> *"...we assign a different role to each student... they take turn to complete part of the task based on their assigned roles" (04)*
>
> *"One thing is the division of labor that everyone gets a task and it's rotating... The duties are not fixed. Each group member gets a different job at different stages." (06)*
>
> *"And I also numbered the sentences on the script and assigned each student a number so that when they looked at the script, they knew what they were responsible for." (08)*

These responses are marked by some sort of division of labor within the group or what Slavin (1983) (cited in Slavin, 2011) terms as "task specialization" (i.e. each member is made responsible for a unique subtask within the group). Such role assignment ensures that task-related behaviors of members are appropriately interconnected, creating interdependence among members so that the shared goal is attained (Johnson & Johnson, 2003).

Type B—a passive teacher role and a unilateral student role

Type B teachers, on the other hand, play a relatively passive role in a sense that teacher-directed effort is lacking in training students for CL but instead other external means are used to foster the cooperative culture in the classroom:

> *"And sometimes I try to make it as an intergroup competition and use external incentives like a group reward for the winning group [the fastest pair who finishes the worksheet] aiming to increase the lower ability students' motivation."* (03)

Participant 03 attempts to strengthen the cooperative culture by the use of external rewards. Her reward structure, however, demonstrates some conceptual misunderstanding of the motivational perspective on CL in that rewards are given based on the end product instead of the sum total of individual learning. Slavin (1983, 1995, 2011) notes that a group reward given based on a single group product shifts the focus from learning to task completion and as such participation of the less able students may be negatively perceived as interference, which in turn significantly weakens the extrinsic motivational effect of the reward that encourages members to explain to one another and thereby causes a breakdown in positive interdependence, resulting in ill group dynamics and free-rider problems.

Their task structure, moreover, creates group dynamics in which power disequilibrium exists within the group and thus a unilateral relationship among students:

> *"I group them in a way such that there's at least a higher achiever in the group, who can somehow have some sort of control over the group and the weaker students can benefit from it."* (03)
> *"…there's at least one or two higher ability students so that at least there's someone in the group who can manage everything and they can peer-teach their groupmates."* (10)

Participants 03 and 10, to a certain extent, are ascribing power to students whom are perceived to possess a high ability by assuming that higher achievers are the one who can "have

control over" and "manage" the group and students of a low ability are the one who "benefit

from" the group process. Johnson and Johnson (1994) argue that equal opportunities should be

given to each student to develop necessary skills to perform different roles, which is articulated

as "all levels of learning" by Bain et al. (2009). Such disproportionate allocation of power

defeats the principle of positive interdependence and individual and group accountability, giving

rise to poor group interaction (Hennessey & Dionigi, 2013).

Relating practice to teachers' conceptualization of CL

In order to examine the relationship between different patterns of CL practice and teachers'

own conceptualization, the two sets of coded data are charted in a matrix with the sample codes

filled into the corresponding cells (see Table 5).

Conceptualization

		Type A (an active teacher role and a complementary student role)	Type B (a passive teacher role and a unilateral student role)
Practice	Knowledge and comprehension levels		03, 10
	Application and analysis levels	01, 05, 06	
	Synthesis and evaluation levels	02, 04,07,08, 09	

Table 5: the relationship between different patterns of CL practice and teachers' own conceptualization

As illustrated in Table 5, three orientations to the implementation of CL are found among

participants. Type A teachers are further subdivided into two groups based on the differentiation

of the cognitive levels of their practice whereas Type B teachers stand alone as one group. An

interesting pattern emerges when participants are matched with their corresponding orientations.

Both subgroups of Type A teachers employ methods that at least involve an intermediate level of

cognition while Type B teachers use methods whose scope is limited only to a low level of

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cognition. Interestingly, the former manifest a more comprehensive understanding of CL considering that they make effort to teach students how to work in groups and use "task specialization" methods to secure interdependence while the latter show a rather limited understanding of the pedagogy given their mal-structured reward system and the uneven distribution of power among group members, both of which demolish the fundamental principles underlying CL. It is therefore postulated that teachers' patterns of practice are consistent with their cognitive perception. Owing to their extensive knowledge of CL, Type A teachers are willing to experiment with a wide range of methods that attend to different cognitive levels. Type B teachers, on the other hand, are restricted by their inadequate knowledge and are likely to make random attempts within their comfort zone, which explains the lack of diversity in their practice resulting in practice whose scope is confined to a low level of cognition.

<center>Implications</center>

To generalize from this sample, classroom implementation of CL is achieved to varying extents and in varying degrees depending on the participant. Some teachers hold a surface-level understanding or even some misconceptions of CL and their practice is therefore rather "safe" and conventional characterized by the use of low cognitive demand tasks. Some, on the contrary, show some degree of emerging interest in the pedagogy. They abide by the principle of CL and are eager to try it out in their classroom. They successfully execute CL to a certain extent. Another group of teachers turns CL into their personal philosophy and such internalization empowers them to think outside the box as to how students can actually be benefited from the group process, test out different methods and exercise CL to the fullest extent.

Considering the direct impact of perception on practice, what kind of training and support is needed to promote such student-based creative thinking in order to exploit CL to its fullest? The

findings feed into teacher education and professional development. As seen from the findings above, participants identified as Type B teachers (03 and 10) whose understanding of CL is somewhat shallow are both in their initial two years of teaching and are the least experienced among all other participants (see Table 3) suggesting that the present teacher education programs do not necessarily provide teachers with hands-on experience where they can actually apply the pedagogy in a classroom context in a way that could potentially enhance their understanding of such learning (see Koutselini, 2008) and the lack of experiential knowledge significantly limits the variety of their practice as shown in the above. Tying it back to teacher training and professional development, experiential encounters with the target pedagogy in a real or simulated context with ample of meaningful educational space for internal reflection where teachers can utilize the pedagogies they learn, experience or observe in their undergraduate study are critical to beginning teacher development of specific foci such as CL (Cohen et al., 2004). Such reflective practice transforms teaching into a learning experience and encourages continuous self-evaluation and improvement through which intentionality, an attribute defined by Booth (2011, p.17) as the "constructive self-awareness in teaching" is nurtured. Intentional teachers critically contemplate the impact of their action on learners; in other words, learner-centered, are aware of the knowledge they possess, methodically select strategies supported with good evidence and strive to enhance their effectiveness over time (Booth, 2011). The scope of reflection can be expanded beyond the individual level. A supportive environment where a professional learning community is free to share resources, exchange experience and expertise, and pool ideas is pivotal to curriculum implementation. Teacher collegiality brings both experienced and novice teachers together in a functional working relationship where professional dialogues on the improvement of practice or the alternation of the organizational context that

assists improvement are stimulated (Hargreaves & Dawe, 1990). Such collective wisdom reinforces teachers' competence and confidence in managing the complexities introduced by a new curriculum or the need of restructuring an existing curriculum moving towards a coherent whole-school approach to curriculum implementation (Inger, 1993 and Little, 1987 cited in Lovern, 2010).

<div align="center">Limitations</div>

A major weakness of this study lies in its purely qualitative nature. Qualitative research usually involves a relatively small number of participants; in this case, ten only, and can therefore be hardly extended to wider population with a considerable degree of certainty as in quantitative research owing to the fact that the findings are not subjected to repetitive statistical tests (Atieno, 2009; Griffin, 2004). Another limitation of qualitative research resides in its presumed objectivity of the researcher. Interpretation of qualitative data, to a certain extent, is predisposed to the influence of the researcher's own values, interests, experiences, beliefs, political commitments and unconscious assumptions, which then undermines the objective neutrality of the research itself (Griffin, 2004). In addition, the participants of this research are sourced from multiple contexts and hence environmental factors cannot be fully eliminated.

<div align="center">Conclusion</div>

The current research finds a consistency between classroom practice of CL and teachers' own conception. Pragmatic classroom implementation of CL is directly influenced by teachers' conceptual understanding of the pedagogy. Some participants due to their rudimentary knowledge attempt to exercise CL just within their comfort zone resulting in a rather uniform practice pattern that addresses only a low level of cognitive processes. Some teachers, on the other hand, possess exhaustive understanding of the pedagogy and are hence enthusiastic to

experiment with a vast variety of methods that cater for various levels of cognition and that could potentially benefit students. The research also reveals that the former group of teachers who bear a relatively limited understanding are both in their initial two years of teaching and are found to be the least experienced among all the participants implying that the current teaching training programs do not necessarily equip beginning teachers with sufficient hands-on opportunities where they can develop specific foci such as CL. Feeding it into teacher education and professional development, it is suggested that teachers should be given ample of practice opportunities with abundant reflective space through which they develop a sense of awareness in teaching. The scope of such reflective practice, as suggested above, can be extended to an organizational level where professional dialogues among a collegial community on the improvement of practice or the enhancement of the institutional context that facilitates improvement are encouraged in order to establish coherence in curriculum implementation.

(6228 words)

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Appendix 1

Interview Schedule

A) **Contextual Information**

Date:

Duration:

Location:

B) **Personal Particulars**

Sex:

Year(s) of teaching experience:

Level of students:

C) **Questions:**

1. Have you personally tried out cooperative learning (CL) in your classroom?

   ⇨ Is it a preferred method in your teaching? Why?

      - If so, in what ways do you integrate CL in your classroom? (Go to Q.2)

      - If not, why not? (Go to Q.5)

2. How do you group your students together? Why so?

3. Can you describe one successful experience of using CL?

   ⇨ Why do you consider it as successful?

4. Can you describe another experience of using CL where you met some degree of difficulty?

   ⇨ Why do you consider it as challenging or not so successful?

   ⇨ If you were to conduct that lesson again, what changes would you make?

   ⇨ Why do you think the above changes would enhance the overall effectiveness of the lesson?

5. In your opinion, what is/are the potential challenge(s) of implementing CL in the classroom?

   ⇨ Have you personally encountered the above challenges? If so, how do you resolve that?

   ⇨ Can you suggest some other solutions to the above challenges?

6. To your own knowledge, can you briefly describe what CL is? In other words, what were you told about CL when you were working on your teaching qualification?

⇨ Is there any difference between what you learn in theory and what it really is in the classroom?

⇨ Why do you think there is such a mismatch?

7. Speaking from your own experience, do you agree that CL enhances students' learning particularly in terms of learning motivation and learning outcome?

⇨ Can give an example if you think it does have an impact on learning motivation and outcome?

⇨ If you think it does not help at all, what is/are your reason(s)?

Appendix 2

Interview Transcript (Participant 1)

A) **Contextual Information**

Date: 3rd November 2015 (Tuesday)

Duration: 25 minutes (9:25-9: 50)

Location: School Library

B) **Personal Particulars**

Sex: Male

Year(s) of teaching experience: 10-15 years

Level of students: Upper primary

C) **Questions:**

1. Have you personally tried out cooperative learning (CL) in your classroom?

   ⇨ Is it a preferred teaching method in your teaching?

(3.0) I try to most of the time. But if you ask me to what extent I implement it, I would say I don't use it every lesson. Theoretically speaking, (0.2) there's a pretty fair distribution of labor in CL. Each student is supposed to be given a unique role and then contribute to the task based on their assigned role. But (0.2), I think I I don't use it to the fullest extent. I mean there's is a shared vision, a shared goal among the group members but each student doesn't necessarily have a specific role.

Yes I do. I do prefer using CL. I like having students sit in groups and work together.

   ⇨ Why?

Why so? Umm speaking from different perspectives, I think students are more involved in the lesson based on my own personal experience. Err even though teachers may need to spend more time in preparation or like they may need to be more careful with the time management and stuff but like well again from my personal experience, I feel like the whole class atmosphere seems to be better, students' learning is enhanced and also it's easier to achieve the lesson objective. Well having said so, the weak students may not actually learn much from the class. At the very least, they feel less defeated compared to working as an individual. Yes. If you take each student as an

independent individual and measure them against a so-called standardized yardstick, there's a huge gap in terms of individual learning differences. But if you have students work as a group, it's easier for teachers to conduct their lesson.

2. How do you group your students together?

Umm (0.1) by ability actually. Well not just limited to the English subject, our school has been experimenting with CL for quite a while now. But whether every teacher implements it to the same extent, not really. Just like when you go to observe lessons by other teachers, not every one of them is doing this. After all, each teacher has his/her own personal style. But it is one of our school focused developmental areas.

⇨ Actually what do you mean by "grouped by ability"? Does it mean that students work with peers with similar ability?

No no no. There's at least one capable student in each group. It has to be heterogeneous groups.

3. Can you describe one successful experience of using CL?

Well not just one. There are plenty. Just like what you've seen in my lessons so far. What is successful to me is that at least students are able to write something down and achieve what is required err including the weak students. Of course I won't assess each student with the same apparatus. You need to cater for individual differences after all. But the baseline is the more able students can produce something with the target language item and the weak ones can fulfill the very basic requirements. Let's say your lesson aims to teach students how to use adverbs. Even if the weak students cannot make a sentence with an adverb in it, they know at the very least that adverbs are something ending in –ly. To me, that's already successful. Actually it all depends on what your lesson objectives are. I know that some teachers apply the same standard to all students despite the learning diversity. But er that's not very practical in modern classrooms in my opinion.

4. Can you describe another experience of using CL where you met some degree of difficulty?

Errr I don't really have one honestly. Maybe I'm just lucky or just too optimistic I guess (laughs) But not really. In the past, yes but that's back to the time when I wasn't using CL. When I wasn't

using CL back then, there's really some unpleasant experience. Remember I told you about not allowing students to have a chance where they basically have nothing to do? Chances are they either daydream if they're well-behaved or they will start disturbing the class. I told you about this because there was one time. That's back to the days when I just started teaching. I had a person from the Education Bureau (EDB) come over to observe my lesson and s/he made a serious criticism on this point (laughs). So yeah.

⇨   What method did you use in that lesson? Direct teaching?

Yes direct teaching and also I didn't have any group tasks for students to do. But it's hard to say really. I was teaching a really small class. There were about 8 if not 10 students in my class. How was I supposed to form groups (laughs)? And also the students' ability is very weak. I ended up using another method which which was quite similar to individual teaching. Maybe I didn't really think it through when I was designing the activity. My idea was okay I focused on one student at a time let's say two minutes and then focused on another for another two minutes. Well then at least each student had two-minute of learning time. But what s/he thought was that I was wasting each student eight-minute of time, allowing them to just idle away and do nothing at all. If I had designed some group activities, everyone would have learned the whole time.

⇨   But there's also a problem with group work. There must be someone who cares more about their learning and some just don't really care. How do you involve the less able students?

Yes very true indeed. That's why I say you need to give each student an individual role. You just can't allow the strong students to dominate the task and do everything by themselves. If not, on the surface it looks like you've actually achieved your learning goal but technically it doesn't help with students' learning. That's something I feel that teachers should bear in mind. Even if there isn't a specific role for each student, you should explicitly tell them what is expected of them. Let's say there are four questions. Well then at least each student needs to complete one. It may not err may not align well with the principle of CL but in reality it's really hard to assign a role to each student every time. Then at least you make it very clear to your students that they need to participate.

⇨ So it's all down to the teacher isn't it? The teacher really needs to intervene at some point, doesn't he?

Yes yes to a certain extent but the task design also plays a part. How do you actually see each student's contribution in the end product? It goes back to the task design. Like for example, there are four questions. How do you break down the four questions whether you're using think-pair-share or any other methods? But personally I usually use think-pair-share. Well then at least you engage the less able students in the first stage. You activate their prior knowledge and then they can go on taking part in the task. They can't rely on anyone since they must work on their very own question and then continue with the rest of the task.

⇨ Then back to the unpleasant experience you told me about. If you were to carry out the lesson again, what changes would you make?

Well I think I would form groups. Actually the person from the EDB also said that I should have done so. Even when the students were really weak, there's a certain degree of flexibility for me to cater for their needs. Well that's a long time ago. I don't even remember when (laughs). Maybe I was still new you know didn't really have much experience. After hearing from him/her, I reflected on the lesson and felt that yeah s/he was right. I really should have formed groups.

⇨ So do you think that the overall effectiveness of the lesson would have been enhanced if you had formed groups?

Yes certainly and also the class atmosphere would have been more relaxed.

⇨ More relaxed? Why so?

*Well I don't know about the others. But personally I feel that students don't really like having a teacher who does all the talking or just asks them to do exercises for the whole lesson. Well even though I know some teachers in **this** school teach in this way (laughs). But it just doesn't fit into the modern pedagogy. I'm sure that your professors in HKIED won't appreciate that if you teach in this way. Yes I agree that to a certain extent doing worksheets or exercises is the easiest way to assess whether a student has learned or not. But is it the most effective way? I doubt.*

5. In your opinion, what is/are the potential challenge(s) of implementing CL in your classroom?

Umm if there are enough capable students. Umm for example. Well I think a well-established routine is very important. Let's say the whole school adopts a cooperative approach to learning. Well maybe too ambitious just the English subject for example. If every English teacher shares the same vision, it's easier to pick it up. Let's say you really want to apply CL in your classroom but then you find out that your colleagues don't really share the same philosophy or they have their own practice which is different from yours. In this case, it's very hard to pick up a new class every year. Speaking from my own experience, I need to spend some time working with them, adjusting them to my teaching style whenever I meet a group of new students each year. There has to be a common vision. If the teachers in the team don't buy this idea in the first place, it's difficult to achieve a desirable outcome.

⇨ Have you personally encountered the above challenge where you find it really difficult to carry out CL owing to different teaching ideology?

*Ummm (2.0) I wouldn't say it's really **that** difficult. There's one thing about working in this school. It allows teachers to have a certain degree of autonomy over their lessons. Once we enter the classroom, it's pretty much down to us. We can decide how we want to conduct our activities. I know it's not the case in some schools. They have a rather standardized school-based curriculum. Some even require teachers to co-plan their lessons to an extent that every single teacher share the same teaching procedures and same learning activities.*

6. To your own knowledge, can your briefly describe what CL is? In other words, what were you told about CL when you were working on your teaching qualification?

Um when I was working on my PGDE, CL wasn't really that popular. Yeah I'm not going to tell you how long ago but you can guess (laughs). Back then, schools were still following the old curriculum, the 1997 version. I graduated in the year right before the education reform. Much emphasis was still placed on the communicative approach, which is actually quite similar to task-based learning. But it didn't really say much about cooperative learning. It was mostly class activities or individual activities. Of course at some point, there's cooperation but it's very much restricted to pair work. Group work was impossible back in the days. No teachers did that. Like for example when I was doing my internship, yes there's some pair work but it's again limited to role-play. You know in the old textbooks, there were just dialogues right. Teachers just asked students to role play, one being student A and the other being student B. Simply reading aloud.

There wasn't much room for creativity. If you were student A, you're bound to read that sentence. There's no authentic production. Well then the so-called group work in the old days was confined to role-play where there was a fixed pattern for students to follow.

7. Speaking from your own experience, do you agree that CL enhances students' learning particularly in terms of learning motivation and learning outcome?

Yes yes certainly. I'm rather on the positive side.

⇨ Can you give an example if you think it does have an impact on learning motivation and outcome?

Um like I said earlier. There're plenty of examples. But again I feel like the class atmosphere is more positive in general. And in modern classrooms, one teacher doing all the talking just doesn't work. On one hand, you'd be severely criticized if you taught in the old way (laughs); on the other, students feel excluded. They're more willing to participate if they have a say.

8. Is there anything else you want to add onto the topic?

Ummm (3.0) I think um I think you have to use it carefully indeed. You've asked a very good question. How to avoid the able more students dominating the task? I've observed many lessons where they claim to be using a cooperative approach but actually not really. You've done your literature review right? I'm sure that you're familiar with Johnson and Johnson. They may be the pioneer in the field. I don't know. There're many different perspectives on CL but theirs emphasizes social skills. I'm also a subscriber to their theory. I mean that's what students need to learn and that's basically how the society functions. You must work with people. And if you ask me how to avoid turning it into a one-man show, I'd say try to see the positives in it. If you personally deem it as something negative, your students will take it as something negative too. Let the students know that they can also benefit from this mutual relationship. Let them know that it's also for their own good if they help others. Give some incentives maybe? But having said so, you need to put yourself into your students' shoes. If you were the more able ones, you would probably get tired of sticking around with the same group of lower achievers and having to take care of them, would you? Try to shuffle the groups. Share the responsibility among the class. That's the easiest way to resolve the problem.

Interview Transcript (Participant 2)

A) **Contextual Information**

Date: 3rd November 2015 (Tuesday)

Duration: 15 minutes (14:13-14:28)

Location: Staff Conference Room

B) **Personal Particulars**

Sex: Female

Year(s) of teaching experience: 3 years

Level of students: Lower primary

C) **Questions:**

1. Have you personally tried out cooperative learning (CL) in your classroom?

   ⇨ Is it a preferred teaching method? Why?

Yes I do. I feel that CL can can cater for a range of learning abilities and the children are more engaged in the lesson.

   ⇨ In what ways do you integrate CL in your classroom?

Err usually usually there's at least one class activity which requires some sort of cooperation.

   ⇨ What kinds of activities?

There's a wide range of activities. Mostly games or I have them perform in a drama or role play.

2. How do you group your students together?

Mixed abilities. There's at least one capable student in each group. Usually in groups of twos or fours. I personally don't prefer an odd number. An even number provides more flexibility. You can do pair work or group work.

   ⇨ Why do you prefer having a range of abilities in a group?

Umm I feel that each student exerts an impact on each other in this way. Each child is unique and has his/her strength. By having them sit together and work with classmates with different abilities, we can take advantage of their strength. You know the division of labor thing.

   ⇨ Division of labor? How so?

Let's say if a student is good at writing, s/he may become the secretary in the group. If another has a relatively high level of comprehension, I'll probably assign him/her as the group leader. Well then at least there's one person knowing what to do. Like that.

⇨ Then do you mean that you specifically assign a role to each student?

Just the leader. Some may be responsible for writing down ideas. But when it comes to writing, let's say there're four people in a group, they take turn to write. As for oral presentation, the more able students produce more complex sentences and the less able ones just read aloud some basic sentences.

⇨ Can you give me an example of that?

Err you remember when we were teaching how to join multiple color words in a sentence? We asked the capable ones to make a sentence using at least three color words and join them together with a comma and "and" right? But for the weak ones, they were just required to use two color words and join them with "and" only. Like that.

3. Can you describe one successful experience of using CL?

Wow (3.0) wow I really need some time to think about that. Maybe there isn't any this year. Last year when I had students work in pairs, they needed to give a presentation in front of the class. Say reading a news report. Two to three people in a group. Two people in a group. They needed to read a small extract from the newspaper and comment on it and then come out and present it to their classmates. Some were holding the er the script and the others did the talking and yes.

⇨ Why do you consider it as successful?

Students achieved the learning goal. They understood the task. And er and everyone had something to do and contributed to the task. There wasn't any free-rider.

4. Can you describe another experience of using CL where you met some degree of difficulty?

Err I think I think it's about the class routine especially in the beginning since students may not be able to understand what teachers want them to do. So in the beginning, we need to teach them how to follow instruction, tell them explicitly what we want them to do. And also the task can't be

too challenging. If it's too complicated, students can't understand what they are required to do. They can't continue to work as a group (0.2). Like for example, the leader may dictate the task because they understand what to do but others don't.

⇨ So you agree that establishing a consistent routine would be challenging?

Yes. We need to let the students know that they have to divide the work. It's not a one-man show. And also back to the task design, you need to assign something for each student to do. Like so.

⇨ Have you personally encountered a difficult experience with CL owing to the problem with class routine? What changes would you make if you were to conduct the lesson again?

Err this questions sounds strange to me (laughs). But yes I guess especially during the first few encounters with the students. Err (2.0) I wouldn't use the same teaching materials. I would make some minor changes. Maybe polish the task a little bit? And let the student try one more time and see if they understand what they are asked to do.

⇨ What kinds of minor changes?

Err something similar. Say like I intended to teach how to use "I have". Building onto that, I might also teach how to use "I have" and "and". Anyway, something similar. Just just tell them what they did poorly last time, clarify what they are expected to achieve and elaborate on the topic I guess.

5. In your opinion, what is/are the potential challenge(s) of implementing CL in the classroom?

(laughs) er it depends on what you teach. CL isn't universally applicable to everything. Usually at the production stage like writing or presentation, it's helpful.

⇨ Can you give me an example where CL is not a suitable teaching method?

Umm (0.3) like when you're teaching vocabulary. Reading vocabulary in isolation. Not appropriate especially when students just start learning it. Once they are already familiar with the vocabulary, we can move up to the sentence level. Well then maybe there's some sort of cooperation like playing board games.

6. To your knowledge, can you briefly describe what CL is? In other words, what were you told about CL when you were working on your teaching qualification?

Not really. I didn't really hear much about that. It was mostly pair work back then. We occasionally take part in some workshops which were about CL. I feel that for some grades, maybe lower primary, they are just not ready for CL.

⇨ Why so? Why lower primary students in particular?

They don't really know much. If you group them together, say like four people in a group, it's pretty challenging for them. It's easier if you ask them to work with a partner. It's easier to handle.

7. Speaking from your own experience, do you agree that CL enhances students' learning particularly in terms of learning motivation and learning outcome?

Umm (0.1) it varies from person to person. It all depends on the child himself. Every child is different. Some like working with other people. Some like to be alone. Everyone learn best in their own way. So we need some diversity here. CL is just one of the pedagogical strategies but not the only one.

8. Is there anything else you want to add onto the topic?

Err like we need to teach the students how to work together. It's about the subject knowledge or anything like that. It's solely about interpersonal skills and cooperation. That's how the society works.

⇨ You mean team-building?

Err kind of. Maybe I'll ask them to complete something together like when they finish a task, they need to clap their hands and sit properly as an indication of task completion. Or I'll have them count from one to three and then answer the question. Everyone in the group has to do it. If not, I'm not going to call on them. Like I've tried something like I asked a question and had them discuss in their own group. When they finished discussing, the whole group needed to clap a pattern and wait for the teacher to call on them. So yeah. Even the students who were not so confident in their answer, they were more willing to answer since they shared the same answer as their groupmates. They felt more secure I think.

Interview Transcript (Participant 3)

A) Contextual Information

Date: 4th November 2015 (Wednesday)

Duration: 15:00-15:12 (12 minutes)

Location: Room 206 Group Activity Room

B) Personal Particulars

Sex: Female

Year(s) of teaching experience: 2 months

Level of students: Lower primary

C) Questions:

1. Have you personally tried out cooperative learning (CL) in your classroom?

   ⇨ Is it a preferred method in your teaching? Why?

Yes. But I wouldn't say it's a preferred teaching method. My experience with CL wasn't quite a desirable one.

   ⇨ Can you recall an experience where you felt it just wasn't effective?

Well actually not just one but multiple times. I ask the students to work on a task say a worksheet. I usually allow them to have some "me time" first meaning they have to work on it on their own and then ask them to sit in groups. But it just doesn't work. Students don't like it. They don't want to work with each other. The higher achievers don't really want to take care of the lower achievers and at the same time the lower achievers don't listen to the higher achievers. It's a mess. There are so many complaints. I'm not sure if it's a lower primary thing. I feel like my students are too young for CL. I mean they don't have the social skills to work with other people yet. And sometimes I try to make it as an intergroup competition and use external incentives like a group reward for the winning group aiming to increase the lower ability students' motivation. But it doesn't work very well either.

   ⇨ Can you tell me more about the way in which you group your students?

Umm. Mixed ability. Usually there are about 3 to 4 people in a group. I group them in a way such that there's at least a higher achiever in the group, who can somehow have some sort of control over the group and the weaker students can benefit from it.

⇨   What about the task? Do you give something different for each student to do or just everyone gets the same thing?

Err same. My practice is I give each student a single task like a worksheet and give them say like 5 to 10 minutes to think about it and put down something on the worksheet first by themselves. Usually the higher achievers can complete the task within the independent working time and then I ask them to sit with their buddies, the lower ability students, and teach them how to complete the task. Well but then I find it really difficult to cater for the learning differences. Like the task it's too easy for the more able students in a sense that they finish it too quickly but it's a bit challenging for the less able ones. I'm planning to design some extra worksheets with more challenging questions in case the higher achievers finish it too fast.

2. Speaking from your own experience, what is/are the potential challenge(s) of implementing CL in the classroom?

Well like I said earlier. I feel that my students are not ready for CL. They are too young. They don't have the necessary social skills to work with other yet in my opinion. You know children at this age have quite a big ego. They just focus on themselves. When you put them in a group, they don't know what to do and barely achieve anything. I have a student, he's a bright kid, complains to me about his buddies being too hard to teach. If you ask me, I believe that teacher-directed teaching is more appropriate for this age group and it's easier to manage. Well actually my idea of this whole buddy program, having the more able students sit in a group with the lower achievers and teach them sets out to lessen my burden as a teacher. But it doesn't turn out well.

3. To your own knowledge, can you briefly describe what CL is? In other words, what were you told about CL when you were working on your teaching qualification?

Honestly I haven't really heard of it until I was asked by a principal in a job interview (laughs). When I was working on my PGDE, there wasn't a specific topic dedicated to this pedagogy. It's more about inclusive education I would say. I guess it simply refers to having students work in mixed ability groups such that the higher ability students can reinforce their knowledge via helping the weaker groupmates and the weaker groupmates in turn benefit from such peer support.

4. Speaking from your own experience, do you agree that CL enhances students' learning particularly in terms of learning motivation and outcome?

Err I wouldn't say so. I don't know if it's just my class. The students' ability is rather on the extreme end. The brighter kids learn within a blink and they can quickly fulfill what you want them to do but the weaker ones are very very weak. They can't complete the task even when their peer tutor has repeatedly explained to them. And er and there's one case in my class recently, which catches my attention and makes me worry about the whole buddy program. I know that there is one boy in my class who has recently been laughed at by the other classmates saying that he's dumb since he's always the one being taught. And I have noticed that he starts not paying much attention in class and sometimes he's completely zoned out. Well then it makes me think that this group peer tutoring thing backfires and students may be better off if there's some sort of elite/non-elite class distinction in place in the school. Well then at least teachers find it easier to teach according to the students' ability.

5. Is there anything else you want to add onto the topic?

Err (0.3) not really. I hope it's helpful to your research.

Interview Transcript (Participant 4)

A) **Contextual Information**

Date: 9th November 2015 (Monday)

Duration: 13:15-13:35 (20 minutes)

Location: Staff Room

B) **Personal Particulars**

Sex: Female

Year(s) of teaching experience: 12 years

Level of students: both upper and lower primary but mainly lower primary in recent years

C) **Questions:**

1. Have you personally tried out cooperative learning (CL) in your classroom?

   ⇨ Is it a preferred teaching method in your teaching? Why?

Yes I've used CL in my class. Err I personally think that it's a learning process. Yes a process. You may say it's a learning skill, a strategy er mainly used when it comes to group work. I use it whenever it's appropriate. I don't really have a personal preference. Let's say when it comes to a particular stage of learning, usually writing in my case, I'll use it.

   ⇨ Can you talk about how you integrate CL in your classroom in more detail? Like how do you carry out CL in a writing class, for example?

Actually in a writing class, I mean back in the days err when we carried out CECES, it's quite similar to CL. Usually there're 4 to 5 people in a group. But for me, I always group my students into groups of fours. And then we assign a different role to each student (0.2). Some are time keepers and some are noise controllers. These two roles are usually taken up by the relatively low ability students. And yes (0.1). There're 2 other roles, say grammar checkers or spelling checkers or word searchers like finding out the spelling of a word. Er yes usually the grammar checkers and the spelling checkers are taken up by students with higher ability. That's how it works. Students have different roles but they're working on the same task, a group task. It's just that they take turn to complete part of the task based on their assigned roles. But then we found out that such a role assignment may lead to a labeling effect. Say some students are always the time keepers or the noise controllers. Then we decided, me myself for example, to swap the roles. Let's say this time, student A is the time keeper, student B is the grammar checker, student C is

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the spelling checker and student D is the noise controller. But they're going to swap their roles next time. Like that.

2. How do you group your students together?

Err actually there're 2 methods to divide students into groups. In the past, back in the days when we carried out CECES, we tried in the English Room to group students with similar ability together. Same ability grouping. But based on the situation er in our school (laughs) and also people have been more concerned about catering for learning diversity, it's mostly mixed ability grouping now. So yeah. Err I want to talk more about the situation in our school. There're more and more non-Chinese students (NCSs) enrolled into our school. Yes more NCSs. In the past, the NCSs were pretty smart. But nowadays, they aren't as smart owing to the increasing number of NCSs. So err, it's difficult to use same ability grouping. That's why we've been using mixed ability grouping. For the more able students, we may not be able to conduct some enrichment programs with them in class using CL, mostly outside the classroom.

⇨ You've mentioned that you always group your students in groups of fours. Is there any reason behind?

Actually it's for the sake of convenience. Say like the students' ability is like more balanced. In the past when I observed my colleagues' lessons, they used emm we call it a "strong-average-average-weak" method meaning there're a capable student, 2 average students and a less able student in a group. Like that. 4 people in a group. (0.2) But I find that this 4-person grouping method is more appropriate for primary 3 children. But in primary 1 or even early primary 2, I prefer having student work with a partner so that err so that they can pick up the necessary social skills to work with people more easily.

3. Can you describe one successful experience of using CL?

*Actually it's a writing class again. Emmm (0.3) yes writing class (laughs). A relatively successful experience (0.2). Say like in primary 3, there's a topic on making a fruit salad. A whole-class activity. After the demonstration, I mean **really** making a fruit salad, they can eat it, students needed to write a recipe documenting all the procedures of making a fruit salad. That's a successful lesson. 4 people in a group, the same "strong-average-average-weak" grouping method yes. I think it's also because they had a real experience. They tangibly **saw** how to make*

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a fruit salad and it made the whole thing much easier. So I think CL is a strategy but we also need other strategies say like em visual aids or some hands-on experience on top of CL to make a lesson go smoothly. Like this.

⇨ Why do you consider it as successful?

It's successful because em because we draw on their hands-on experience, draw on what they actually see. And also the topic and stuff is more interesting in their opinion, which makes the whole thing successful. But CL is a is a method or a way to achieve the purpose or to conduct the lesson.

⇨ So do you agree that it would be more challenging if students worked individually on the recipe in that lesson even if all the visual aids and hands-on experience are made available to them?

*Yes definitely. We've individual writing too but you know there're some SEN students. That's why we've class writing and group writing **before** individual writing. Well then group writing, the best way to do it is using CL like I said earlier assign different roles to each group member. Like that.*

4. Can you describe another experience of using CL where you met some degree of difficulty?

*Difficulty. Emm (0.2.) there was one time I experimented with Jigsaw reading in my class. I found that it's it's actually too demanding for our students. They have something to read right? You need to take their reading ability into consideration. And also about the class routine, it's not like you do it once, then a routine is set up and everyone gets what you want them to do. It has to be **repeatedly** and **consistently** carried out and practiced. Ehh also you can't finish everything within a single lesson, usually in a double lesson. Well then I tried it out with my primary 3 students but then they didn't have much experience with Jigsaw reading and also the reading ability varied from person to person. Or their background knowledge on the topic varied. It turned out to be quite confusing. And also the class size. There were 30 something students back then. It's hard to manage too. But again, it gets better after several trails.*

⇨ Why do you consider it as challenging or not so successful?

Not so successful because the class routine was yet to be set up and yeah it was a new skill I wanted to experiment with but they didn't have the experience of doing it. It was about animals and stuff. And also the background knowledge on the topic wasn't rich enough to support their comprehension or the reading materials were too difficult for them. In other words, everything seemed to be new to them. Then I had to figure out how it works through trails and errors.

⇨ If you were to conduct that lesson again, what changes would you make?

What changes ehh. I think I would distribute the relevant reading materials to students ahead of time and ask them to read it at home like a take-home reading assignment rather than ask them to read on the spot. And maybe use more pictures to help them relate to the topic. Like that.

5. In your opinion, what is/are the potential challenge(s) of implementing CL in the classroom?

Eh I think there're many strategies I mean under the umbrella term CL. Then eh eh I think it's to be implement school-wide. Not like say like one single teacher doesn't really exert much an effect. It has to be a whole-school approach or there's some sort of cross-subject collaboration that demands the same routine, similar skills like that. It's much easier when a routine is established.

⇨ Have you personally encountered the above challenge(s) say like a problem with class routine? How do you resolve that?

Umm I think however it turns out. We still need to give it a go. If it doesn't turn out great or as what I expected, I'll explain to the class, explain to them what they did poorly and what improvements are expected in the future. Or if they did well, then I'll highlight those things and share with the class. Well you may say it's like a mini reflection or debriefing session. Or even moving down to the group level, I feel that teachers shouldn't just focus on the end product itself in my opinion. Say like the process, discipline, the division of labor, whether there's an even distribution of labor happening or just one person doing all the work, the participation of the weak students etc. All these skills need to be taken care of and should be explained to the students.

⇨ So you mean you will explicitly teach students how to work together and give feedback based on how well or how poorly they work as a group?

Yes yes. Well they're still young and how can I say everyone has a different personality. And they need to learn from each other.

6. To your knowledge, can you briefly describe what CL is? In other words, what were you told about CL when you were working on your teaching qualification?

Ehh (0.2) what I was told was umm in my opinion CL refers to some group work. Each student carries a different role. But the role is not intended to label a certain group of students. It sets out simply to let students know that different people in the group share a responsibility. But as a group, they need to accomplish a task. And eh it also values individual participation in my opinion. Yes and ah apart from individual participation, what I think is important is that the students who are falling behind are explicitly informed of their contribution and their worth in the group. That's important. And also some students well judging from what I've seen they seem to be very bright academic-wise, but their interpersonal skills or maybe their working style is ah too autocratic, too dominating. I need to tell them that it is not supposed to work this way.

⇨ Is there any mismatch between CL in your interpretation or in theory to what it really is in reality?

Err yes at the beginning yes (0.2). For example, Jigsaw reading. It's really complicated. I'll have to go back to the handouts to see what makes it work better (laughs).

⇨ Why do you think there is such a mismatch?

I think it's the students' ability. I didn't know until the moment when I realized that they didn't have the sufficient knowledge to support this method. Or maybe in terms of time management or simply some unexpected accidents in classrooms say like conflicts among students.

7. Speaking from your own experience, do you agree that CL enhances students' learning particularly in terms of learning motivation and learning outcome?

Achieve the learning outcome, yes since students are working in groups, they get the peer support. And speaking of motivation, yes but honestly it varies from lesson to lesson. On some days they are highly motivated but on others, they aren't that motivated. But on average, I'd say

*yes (0.2). And some higher achievers, em I can tell that they are satisfied when doing group work. Well they feel that they are able to **help** others and they are very happy with leading the group. And the not-so-able students, they feel like they've achieved something with the help of others and are able to write something down or say something even just as a group product. And for the average students, they're easily ignored in my opinion but still they cooperate with the other groupmates, learning how to work with people. So yes.*

      8.   Is there anything you want to add onto the topic?

I think that's pretty much it.

Interview Transcript (Participant 5)

A) Contextual Information

Date: 12th November 2015 (Thursday)

Duration: 13:47-14:02 (15 minutes)

Location: Staff Room

B) Personal Particulars

Sex: Female

Year(s) of teaching experience: 10 years

Level of students: both upper and lower primary

C) Questions:

1. Have you personally tried out cooperative learning (CL) in your classroom?

   ⇨ Is it a preferred method in your teaching? Why?

Yes I attempt to use it basically every lesson. But I try to carry it out with different methods. Depending on the task requirement, sometimes I use heterogeneous grouping but other times I use homogeneous grouping.

Yes I would say I quite support CL and I also see the need of using it.

   ⇨ Why do you think there's such a need of using CL?

Well because everyone has their own strengths. Some are particularly good at presentation but are not so good at writing but maybe some are good at writing. Some are a better fit for the role of a leader. So through such a mutual relationship, they can learn from one another, take advantage of one another's strengths and complement others' weaknesses.

   ⇨ In what ways do you integrate CL in your classroom?

(0.3) Going back to what I said earlier, sometimes I use heterogeneous grouping but some other times I use homogeneous grouping.

   ⇨ Perhaps can you give me an example where you use a heterogeneous grouping method?

Umm heterogeneous grouping. Let's say there're 4 people in a group. Then I'll use the "strong-average-average-weak" grouping method. A strong student, 2 average students and a weak student in one group. Like that.

⇨ In your opinion, what kinds of activities does heterogeneous grouping apply to?

Umm (0.4) what kinds of activities? Err I can't think of one on the spot. Emm usually usually when it involves group discussion. Yes. (0.2) But when it comes to mixed ability grouping, I always, well depending on the task, I always give a role to each student in a group. For example, student A, s/he is not always the leader. Say if well again it depends on the task. If the task is rather challenging, I'll assign student A, the more able one, to be the leader. Well then the relatively less able one may take up a less linguistically demanding role. But for some tasks, I'll give a chance to the weak students to learn how to lead a discussion. Then in this case, given that the task is rather straightforward, student D, the less able one, becomes the leader.

⇨ What about homogeneous grouping?

Well homogeneous grouping is actually umm it means grouping students with similar ability together. Like group 1 consists of all the capable students; group 2 consists of all the average student and group 3 is made up of the less able students. Like that. I usually use this grouping method when the lesson involves a writing task especially in primary 6. Why so? I group all the students with similar ability together so as to provide them with more or less language support depending on their need. For the weak students, for instance, I'll give them more language support, maybe a work bank or maybe I'll give some guided questions to the group leader and ask him/her to try to lead the discussion. And then students in the same group will work on the same worksheet, a graded worksheet. Each group has a slightly different one.

2. Can you describe one successful experience of using CL?

A successful experience. If you ask me to describe one particular instance, I really can't think of one at the moment. However, I think there'd be some sort interaction among students themselves in such a mutual relationship. They guide one another to learn. Well CL to me umm it also arouses students' intrinsic motivation to learn. That's why I'm highly supportive of this pedagogy.

⇨ Is there one single lesson that impresses you the most?

Umm (0.3) There was one time in a primary 6 class. Well I used the homogeneous grouping method in that class. In the past when the weak students were grouped with peers of varying ability; in other words, a heterogeneous setting, they didn't talk much or didn't even want to talk. But when I started using homogeneous grouping, I gave them a lot of language support, say like work banks, different visual aids or hints. The weak group in particular became very engaged in the class.

3. Can you describe another experience of using CL where you met some degree of difficulty?

Difficulty. Well if you ask me to give one specific example, again I can't recall one. But I can give you a general picture. The biggest challenge, in my opinion, is the way you deliver your instruction to the class at the very beginning. It's actually pretty time-consuming since every student needs to be very clear that every one of them has a different role in different tasks. And yes. I'd say in terms of time, it's challenging. It takes quite a bit of time to train the students to get used to the instruction. And also before the lesson, we, teachers, have to prepared a lot of materials. What the students can do, what kinds of tasks and what guided questions for students with different ability. All these need to be taken into account. And also the task design. I usually base the discussion on the 5Ws-questions, starting from something factual and going all the way to some higher-order thinking questions, giving feedback, evaluation and all that and assign different roles to each students based on the actual questions.

⇨ Can you briefly describe some common roles in a group?

There has to be one leader. One is the writer and another is a presenter.

4. In your opinion, what is/are some other potential challenge(s) of implementing CL in the classroom?

It's actually pretty much the same as what I said earlier. It's about time and routine training. And I think there'd be some sort of cross-subject collaboration.

⇨ Cross-subject collaboration? Why so?

Well because children will receive different forms of instruction if say one subject is taught by CL and another isn't. For CL to function, the instruction must be very clear. If I do it in one way but you do it in another, children can't really get what you want them to do.

⇨ So do you agree that CL should be carried out school-wide?

Yes. A whole-school approach.

5. To your own knowledge, can you briefly describe what CL is? In other words, what were you told about CL when you were working on your teaching qualification?

Well they didn't really mention it back in the days. But to my understanding or what I was told in workshops, CL is a group of children learning in a complementary relationship. There is an interaction among them. And to facilitate to interaction, teachers need to give them some guidance. And through CL, students are able to learn from and appreciate their peers' strengths. And also there shouldn't be a power status difference. The strong students don't always guide the weak students since everyone has his/her own strengths. That's why I say it's a complementary relationship.

⇨ Is there any difference between what you learn in theory and what it really is in reality?

Umm I don't think so. When I was first introduced to CL til now, of course there have been some changes over the years. For example, when I first picked up teaching, I always assigned a fixed role to each student. Say like student A was always the leader, students B was always the writer etc. But I found that such a fixed role assignment stereotyped certain students. The leaders took pride in themselves and dominated the task and the others felt that they weren't not as capable and started not participating in the task. But then with years of experience, I now switch the roles among the group members based on the task technicality.

6. Speaking from your own experience, do you agree that CL enhances students' learning particularly in terms of learning motivation and learning outcome?

Yes back to what I said earlier. Yes.

⇨ Can you give an example if you think it does have an impact on learning motivation and outcome?

The earlier primary 6 example. That's a successful example of homogeneous grouping. But if you ask me if there's any successful experience with heterogeneous grouping, I don't really remember. But in general, well since there's a range of ability in one group, the "strong-average-average-weak" group division method, the leaders are willing to guide the less able one through the discussion. I personally also direct some particular questions to the weak students, say like I want student D to answer questions 1 and 2. The other group members also show some initiatives to help student D find out the answer through the discussion.

7. Is there anything you want to add onto the topic?

Umm not really.

Interview Transcript (Participant 6)

A) **Contextual Information**

Date: 1ˢᵗ December 2015 (Tuesday)

Duration: 15:11-15:34 (23 minutes)

Location: Staff Conference Room

B) **Personal Particulars**

Sex: Female

Year(s) of teaching experience: 7 years

Level of students: both upper and lower primary

C) **Questions:**

1. Have you personally tried out cooperative learning (CL) in your classroom?

   ⇨ Would you say that it is a preferred teaching method? Why?

Yeah. I think so. I think through this method students can learn from one another. And we group students err (0.2) according to their ability. I mean different ability groups. Normally the way I group them together is like some maybe like one or two umm higher ability students and maybe a couple of them are medium to lower ability students so that they can help one another.

   ⇨ In what ways do you integrate CL in your classroom?

Normally when they do some group work, group discussion. Yeah. And (0.3) when they play some games like in the phonics lessons.

   ⇨ Can you give me an example please?

Normally when I have the phonics lessons, it's mostly the cooperative learning or group work. Errr (0.2) normally I prepare the games that involve two or three or four students, they work together and we play a game like that. Some card games, some board games. Or sometimes they need to answer some questions. It's like some kind of games but they need to answer. And I mean as a whole group and they can earn scores for their group. In the game, it's like the question is for the whole group so they have to discuss and answer that and get points for their group.

   ⇨ You've mentioned that you group your students in a mixed ability setting? Why do you have this arrangement?

*Because if otherwise, then all the because sometimes I just try like high ability students in one group and some medium ability or low ability students in another group. Then it's like I cannot run the lesson smoothly. Because when I ask the questions from them, or when it's the class interaction time, then the high ability group they always want to answer and later on when they show, for example, if it's a writing task or they're playing some card games like that, and then we show the content at the end of the lesson, the high ability students I mean their work is very very good, very very outstanding but the one, if they are very weak students, I think it's a sense of (0.2) maybe esteem. I think it's very discouraging for them if they look at the very good work of one group and they look back at their own work even though they put maximum effort right? if there's no comparison. Sometimes, they just give up. If I mix them together, I think they can help one another, they can **learn** from one another and it can increase their self-esteem. Maybe if a low ability student in a group. Even if they contribute a little, when they see the overall result of their work, it can I think improve their self-esteem.*

2. Can you describe one successful experience or lesson of using CL?

Umm (0.3). It was not really like a formal lesson. It's more like an ECA where students have some sort of after-school enrichment classes. We were talking about numbers, you know, groups of twos, groups of fives and groups of tens. Umm (0.2), I would say it's a bit challenging cause it required some sort of mathematical ability. Err when I planned the lesson, I designed one activity on the group basis. And then one of the students, he's an SEN students and um and is a student with very very low ability. I mean at that time he was in primary 1 and he seldom um even spoke in the lesson. Answering a question, it seems that he never did that before. And then when he was working in a group, he can well even though they work in a group, I always assign them different duties so I mean not all high ability students do all the work and some lazy students just take advantage. I don't do that. I give them different tasks to do. If a low ability student cannot complete the task, the others can help and encourage him. So they can continue I mean carry on. So for that activity, I prepared some beads for them, quite a lot and you know the egg cartons, those cartons. And they need to, for example, if I ask them to put seven beads in the carton and they'd be groups of fives, students need to put five beads in one and then two in the next one cause the first has already been fully filled and if I ask the next student to put five beads, they'd put three in the second one because there're two beads already and they'd put the next

three in the third one. It's a bit difficult I would say. But then they worked in groups and the others helped because they took turn. For example, student A put in these and gave it to the next student. They needed to look at what their group members had done and put the beads accordingly. And for that SEN student, he observed what his group mate had done and when it was his turn, he successfully put the beads in the right place, which is very encouraging to see. And also each group member had to write down one sentence, say like "there're _____ beads and _____ left" as a record. That student successfully put down the correct number in the sentence, which would have been impossible if he hadn't done that activity with his classmate. Because he actually saw something and learned from his classmates.

⇨ Why do you consider it as successful?

Yeah the same thing, every time when I do some CL I get some good result, so yeah.

⇨ So you mean that your students can meet the learning objective?

Yeah yeah.

3. Can you describe another experience of using CL where you met some degree of difficulty?

Difficulty. Discipline can be a problem, sometimes. If one or two students in the group are not willing to cooperate or they are a bit playful, sometimes they can have an influence on others and the whole group starts talking and not paying attention like that. This could be a challenge. And the other one is err if you don't assign them some specific duties, some students can take advantage. They just do nothing and then put the responsibility on someone else.

⇨ How would you mediate these?

Of course when we're doing group work, I have a chance to walk around the classroom and see each group. And if I plan ahead, I know each and every step. Just don't let students do everything at a time. Set a time limit for each small step. Even though they're working in groups, teachers should be the one who has control over each group, what they are doing, where to stop them and bring them to the next step like that. (0.3) sometimes the skill of timer. Instead of giving them ten minutes for a discussion, or having a long discussion, I can break it down into two minutes or three minutes and they do it step by step. Make sure they're on track. So if any group

is left behind, they know that they have to hurry up when they see the time is running short. This is one strategy. The other one is when I group them it's not only according to their ability but according to their discipline as well.

4. In your opinion, what is/are the potential challenge(s) of implementing CL in general?

Umm (0.5). I think the same. One is the discipline. The other one is some lazy students they take advantage. And then (0.5) even for the questioning part, sometimes they just rely on one or two students to answer. Or even it happens that the teacher say you cannot answer because you did already. Those high ability students, they want to umm get some credits. They tend to answer for others even when the teacher is not asking them.

⇨ You mean task domination?

Yes.

⇨ How would you resolve that?

(0.5) One thing is the division of labor that everyone gets a task and it's rotating. For example, if one student would always like to write and they know that the others are dictating like if you carry out a group activity on a normal basis, they know that one time student A was writing, then student B or C should be writing now. Keep rotating. The duties are not fixed. Each group member gets a different job at different stages. And another challenge maybe the school umm (0.2) school vision. Some schools focus too much on discipline. And and yeah because it's very normal when you have group work or group discussion, the class is a bit noisy. It doesn't mean that they are not behaving well or (0.5) they are not learning anything. Maybe from the school's point of view, umm some schools prefer calm and quiet classrooms.

⇨ Have you personally encountered such a challenge?

*I can say that here in this school it's quite good. In my previous school, (0.2) yes sometimes. And I think umm it affects if a teacher wants to carry out such an activity, they need to think. (0.4) even the principal here in this school (laughs). Sometimes she does not like I mean the students are a bit noisy, are out of their place like that. But some other senior staff, they don't mind. They encourage. I think my viewpoint is that as long as they are **learning**, if it's a bit noisy, we can*

close some windows. It's not bothering the neighboring classrooms. That's fine as long as you're satisfied that they're learning something, talking with their classmates about the task especially when they are playing games right? All of them are talking. So yes that could be a challenge.

⇨ How would you overcome this challenge? I mean on a school level.

*(0.6) Umm One thing is to educate. Maybe like this one the school vision, talking to them and letting them know. Explain to them maybe why you consider this method as beneficial to the students. Sometimes when you **show** the outcome. Sometimes maybe the senior teachers or the principal walks around and they think that your classroom is umm very noisy all that. Just show them the outcome. Maybe after the activity, show them the **good** work they have done. Yeah just just I mean talk to them and then teach the students as well how to err how to carry out a group activity. For example, if for group discussion, sometimes it's not according to where they sit. When we do some group activities, they need to **change**, they need to **switch** their seat. So umm if you practice enough with the students and they know where to go. It's not like at that time they decide oh I'll sit here and you'll go there or like that. Just make sure that students know where their seat is, which students should turn their chair and practice with them. In previous years, when we had more students in a class, we even had a bell. When we rang the bell, students knew that they had to move to their group and start the discussion and when we rang the bell again they knew that the task had completed and they had to go back, like that.*

5. To you knowledge, what is CL?

CL cooperative learning right? Any kind of what can I say group or pair work where they learn from one another and cooperate. Is that correct? (laughs)

⇨ Were you told about CL when you were working on your teaching qualification? If, so what did they tell you?

Yeah. Just the same thing (laughs).

6. Now that you've been teaching for a while, do you think that there's any difference between CL in theory and CL in reality?

Umm (0.4). I think so especially when there're so many challenges ahead. If you learn some skills and overcome them, it's a good thing. But if you cannot, ummm then you class would be a mess (laughs).

⇨ You mean those challenges you've talked about earlier?

Yes.

7. Speaking from you own experience, do you agree that CL enhances students' learning particularly in terms of learning motivation and learning outcome?

I think so.

⇨ Why so? Can you give me an example?

*Umm (0.2) the same example, the enrichment class. Sometimes you know the very quiet students, when they have some friends working with them, it serves as a form of encouragement. And sometimes if they're not brave enough to speak **alone** or to share their viewpoint to the teacher, the teacher can see their viewpoint from the group product.*

8. Is there anything else you want to say more about this topic?

I think it's alright.

Interview Transcript (Participant 7)

A) Contextual Information

Date: 23rd November 2015 (Monday)

Duration: N/A

Location: interviewed via email

B) Personal Particulars

Sex: Male

Year(s) of teaching experience: 2 years

Level of students: mainly lower primary

C) Questions:

1. Have you personally tried out cooperative learning (CL) in your classroom?
   ⇨ Is it a preferred teaching method? Why?

Yes I do and certainly for a second language lesson, you want to maximize students' talk time if they are to get familiar with using the language. Of course you must teach lexis and the lesson focus first, but to improve the students English they need to speak it not just hear it. I favor CL as this allows student talk time to be maximized.

   ⇨ In what ways do you integrate CL in your classroom?

Well we try all sort of things: drama, games, producing a flip book.

2. How do you group your students together? Why so?

My students are grouped by ability, their reading ability to be specific. We give them like an entrance assessment prior to the start of the semester and then divide them into tables of 6-10 depending. We try to balance the number of students in each table. I have 4 tables in my class. And by the end of semester 1, we give them like a mid-term evaluation so as to monitor their progress and rearrange the tables.

3. Can you describe one successful experience of using CL?

One example of successful CL was a lesson based on verbs and beach vocabulary, as a class we read a book at the beach and then I had them match some sentences with their corresponding pictures. Students worked as a group to assign the correct sentences to each picture. Students

*had to read the sentences, work together to correctly complete the task and sequence the events. Well actually before the task, I explicitly told students what my expectations were. I wanted them to **work** with other people and I also told them that I would walk around and wanted to see everyone's contribution. When I was walking around, I was delighted to see some sort of division of labor going on. Some students were reading the sentences to their groupmates and others were placing the correct sentence next to its picture. I see CL as imperative for games and many topics. These activities reinforce teamwork and build character as well as allowing some level of peer assisted learning.*

⇨ Why would you consider it as successful?

Umm I consider this as successful because students were able to complete the task as required and the lesson objectives were met through the task.

4. Can you describe another experience of using CL where you met some degree of difficulty?

Some challenges that occur are when one student tries to dominate a group, taking charge of an activity or worksheet whilst others do nothing. An example of this was a P.4 drama lesson where I intended to have students rehearse their lines as a group. The students struggled to coordinate themselves with their lines. Well actually my P.4 class was an ECA. I have a group of 10 elite students from P.4. Typically I would demonstrate first using some storytelling and props, at that moment we were doing Noah's Ark, so I wrote a script and gave them ideas for props. Then the class was split into two groups who then had to make their own props and rehearsed before performing the short story to the other group who then gave feedback. I try to utilize CL in this ECA. I want students to coordinate themselves and prepare as a team so that their talk time is maximized. They don't learn if they don't speak. To combat the situation I should have helped the students begin the process and assigned roles to them, say like prop makers, director and actors so that students have a better idea of what they should focus on.

⇨ Why do you consider it as challenging or not so successful?

Well because we couldn't achieve much and students spent too much time trying to figure out what to do. I guess maybe they don't have much experience of working in a group in their general English classes or other classes. So it might be overwhelming to them. I don't know. I'm

a NET. I'm just responsible for the PLPR/W sessions. I don't really know what the other English teachers do in their general English classes.

5. In your opinion, what is/are the potential challenge(s) of implementing CL in your classroom?

As I've mentioned, there are some challenges in regard to the student-student interaction, some students are dominating and can prevent others from learning. Going back to what I've said earlier, supervision, clear roles in a task and staging can help. Umm and also students' ability could be a problem, whether it is language ability or their interpersonal skills. If they have poor English and are being forced to use the target language, it can stop them from joining in at all, unless they have some structured help. Having a CA or helper is a good way to mediate this issue. If they struggle with interpersonal skills, they may not do well in CL either but students tend to be more talkative with their peers so I don't think this is much of an issue. Well at least that is the case in my class.

6. To your own knowledge, can you briefly describe what CL is? In other words, what were you told about CL when you were working on your teaching qualifications?

Cooperative learning, this is where students learn more independently often in a group 2+ to achieve a goal. They may work together to complete a task or produce a work piece together. In theory this is very well, as it reduces teachers' talk time and allows students to use the target language and take some pride in their work. But in reality, it could be tricky for students depending on their ability. As I said earlier, if they don't understand much English and are forced to use the target language, it could possibly prevent them from getting involved unless individualized support is available, whether it is provided by an adult or peers.

7. Speaking from your own experience, do you agree that CL enhances students' learning particularly in terms of learning motivation and learning outcome?

Yes because it allows students to develop their ideas and have a sense of community. In regard to producing a published work such as a poster or instruction CL is a very good motivator. It brings a sense of pride to their work and so I believe it helps achieve the learning motivation outcome.

⇨ Can you give me an example where CL serves as a motivator?

I use CL as a motivator quite often. One example was a P1 lesson where students made a flip book as a table. Each student drew an object on a sheet of paper e.g. a ball, they then colored this in and then the pages were stuck together like a flip book. On the flip book were the words 'This is' so when you lifted a page you could see the student's ball picture and the writing ' a ball' the next page would have another picture perhaps the next student drew a dinosaur. When students could see how their work was produced and that they could work as a table they got very excited and wanted to do their best. They became so focused on their work and tried to choose different objects which for P1 is very impressive.

8. Is there anything else you want to add onto the topic?

Umm I think that's all. Good luck!

Interview Transcript (Participant 8)

A) **Contextual Information**

   Date: 11th December 2015 (Friday)

   Duration: N/A

   Location: interviewed via email

B) **Personal Particulars**

   Sex: Female

   Year(s) of teaching experience: 14 years and a half

   Level of students: upper primary

C) **Questions:**

   1. Have you personally tried out cooperative learning (CL) in your classroom?

Yes I think so.

   ⇨ Is it a preferred method in your teaching? Why?

Yes it is for some topics. It's very important to give input to the students first. For example, are there any language structures teachers would like the students to use during CL? How do the students incorporate what they have learnt in CL tasks? What tasks are expected to finish? How much time do they have to finish the tasks? And the most important is that if I try out cooperative learning, I always think about whether CL matches the learning objectives. In other words, the tasks that the students do should have some focus, the students should learn something from the tasks.

   ⇨ Why do you prefer CL only for some topics? In other words, why do you use it selectively?

What I mean is the situation or a specific which is valuable to use CL. In other words, it's something that would be valuable to work together or or there's some sort of room for discussion like there's one time I had students work in groups and talk about what to buy for their school picnic using the target sentence patters "I want to buy…because…" and "It's/They're…dollars". Or maybe asking students to write a creative story as a group or acting a play or brainstorming a new ending for the play etc.

⇨   In what ways do you integrate CL in your classroom?

There're multiple ways honestly. In the form a group discussion, designing something like a menu or a poster, jigsaw reading, role-play, drama, group-writing using stories though, information-gap activities etc.

2. How do you group your students together? Why so?

*Mixed abilities are **always** preferred as the students would help one another. I mean not just the strong ones helping the weak ones but also the other way round. Both more and less able students can learn in a comfortable way.*

3. Can you describe one successful experience of using CL?

I remember there was a P.4 class where I asked the students to design a menu for their restaurant in groups of four and then do a presentation in order to convince the audience to choose their restaurant. In that lesson, I first shared read the book "Hungry Troll" with the students. I chose that book on purpose because students could learn about different cuisines from that story. And then I introduced the text type "menu" to the students with the PowerPoint slides I had prepared earlier. It's quite like direct teaching. I drew their attention to the different features on a menu, like the name of the restaurant, the names of the dishes, the price, special offers if any etc. And finally they were given some time to work on their own menu. To scaffold their presentation, I also gave them a script to refer to. It's very important that students knew exactly what language structures they needed for the presentation. And I also numbered the sentences on the script and assigned each student a number so that when they looked at the script, they knew what they were responsible for.

⇨   Why do you consider it as successful?

Well I deem it as successful because there's enough scaffolding for students to complete the task as required. Because there's a script for them to look at, even the weak students could speak with confidence and the role assignment made the duty very clear. Each student knew what they were asked to do in the presentation.

4. Can you describe another experience of using CL where you met some degree of difficulty?

I once had quite a disappointing experience with a P.5 class. We were on the topic "natural disasters" and I asked them to get into groups and did a jigsaw reading activity on the topic. I distributed the reading excerpts taken from the news online and gave some time for students to read independently first in their home group. And then they got into their expert group and summarized what they had read and reported it back to the members in their home group. Students were not able to share what they had read with their peers effectively because there were too many vocabulary items that were unfamiliar to them, which severely impedes their understanding of the text materials.

⇨ If you were to conduct the lesson again, what changes would you make?

I think I would make a summary of the news article instead of asking students to summarize the articles by themselves. And maybe simplify the vocabulary so that they can comprehend the text and share with their peers.

⇨ Why do you think the above changes would enhance the overall effectiveness of the lesson?

The aim of jigsaw reading is to ask student to read different pieces of an article, like in the above lesson I asked them to read about different types of natural disasters and then share what they had read to the group. In other words, students teach their classmates about one particular part based on the knowledge acquired in the reading material. If I, as a teacher, simplify the text according to the students' ability, their reading ability to be specific, then the students can effectively get their message across, which is exactly the lesson objective.

5. In your opinion, what is/are the potential challenge(s) of implementing CL in the classroom?

Classroom management is one of the challenges. It takes time, especially at the very beginning of the term. Having said so, the time is worth spending since such a classroom routine supports a smooth rundown of a lesson. Teachers have to teach students how to work in groups, like how they move their chairs and desks, how they divide their jobs, what their responsibilities are, what level of voice they should use, what the signals are used to tell them they have to stop their tasks and listen to the teacher.

Time management could also come in tricky. Sometimes, teachers may spend too much time on giving input, leaving not enough time for the group task. Or maybe students go over the time allowance and leave no time at all for teachers to move onto the consolidation stage, which is a very important part of a lesson. To mediate this, I would always set a clear time frame for each stage before students start their task, say like I would give them 5 minutes for stage one and then I set the timer for 5 minutes. When students look at the timer, they know where they stand. If they find themselves lagging behind, they will hurry up. And when 5 minutes is up, they know they need to move onto the next stage.

6. To your knowledge, can you briefly describe what CL is? In other words, what were you told about CL when you were working on your teaching qualification?

*My understanding of CL is umm students working in small groups. But the grouping is not fixed meaning not always the same group of people working together. It depends on the task requirement. Also, each student takes up a role in the group. Each group member should have a different focus on the task based on their duty. And um in CL, students are encouraged to share their ideas with one another and their work is **always** celebrated.*

⇨ Is there any difference between what you learn in theory and what it really is in the classroom?

I would say generally the theory applies. But in some occasional cases, classroom management could be a huge issue especially if there are a lot of SEN students in a class. And also when it involves some sort of group activities, there must be a certain level of noise, which umm which may not be so umm so appropriate from the perspective of the school management. That's why it's crucial to make the rules very clear at the beginning of the semester and spend time on routine training. And also, in reality, we have to rush through the curriculum, spend time on assessments and stuff. Teachers cannot always use CL in the lesson.

7. Speaking from your own experience, do you agree that CL can enhance students' learning particularly in terms of learning motivation and learning outcome?

To a certain extent, yes only if the teachers have clearly thought through the lesson objective and planned the lesson accordingly beforehand.

⇨ Can you give me an example if you think it does have an impact on learning motivation and outcome?

Umm an example. I would still use the same example, the P. 4 one. I think in that lesson, in terms of motivation, students not just worked with one another. They also showed some interest in working together. I guess maybe because first the topic was interesting and second the task itself required some sort of imagination, like designing a menu for their own restaurant, which in my opinion worked to the strength of my children. And in terms of learning outcome, I could clearly see that the learning objective was fulfilled. Everyone knew what they were expected of and was clear about their role. And also because everyone came out as a group and there's a script for them to look at, even the weak students were brave enough to speak in front of the whole class.

8. Is there anything you want to add onto the topic?

I don't think so.

Interview Transcript (Participant 9)

A) Contextual Information

Date: 13ᵗʰ December 2015 (Sunday)

Duration: N/A

Location: interviewed via email

B) Personal Particulars

Sex: Female

Year(s) of teaching experience: 5 years

Level of students: upper primary

C) Questions:

1. Have you personally tried out cooperative learning (CL) in your classroom?

Yes.

⇨ Is it a preferred teaching method? Why?

I would say so. I say so because CL very often makes the lesson less boring and more effective.

⇨ Why do you think so?

*I feel that say like an explanation may be easier to understand if it's coming from a peer than a teacher, you know someone of the **same** age as the learner. Teachers somehow exert a higher authority in the classroom and very likely when students don't understand something, they are too timid to ask especially in a Hong Kong classroom. But ever since I put them into groups, I find that students at least are willing to speak more and have more constructive contribution to the lesson without me talking too much.*

⇨ Can you give me an example of such?

Umm (0.3) I remember in a P.5 class, I did a writing exercise with them. We were on the topic of acrostic poems. I gave each group a poster and asked them to put down a classmate's name vertically on the poster and each group had to write one line of the poem starting with the initials of the person's name and then passed their poster clockwise to another group to finish the next line and the process went on until the poem was done. Most of the groups were functioning so well that the group leaders (Each group has a group leader, but the role is not

fixed. Each student in the group gets a turn to be the leader) were asking opinions from the group and since the students are working with their classmates, someone they're more familiar with than a teacher, even the weaker students showed more initiatives to contribute to the task when the leader asked for their opinion. I'm pretty sure if I had made it a whole-class activity, in other words, a more teacher-directed one, the weaker one would have gone deadly silent (laughs).

2. How do you group your students together? Why so?

Most of the times, they're grouped by ability meaning we have a bit of everything in a group but there're also times when I find same-ability grouping easier to work with.

⇨ Easier to work with? How so?

Well like for example, if there's a writing tasking, I may prefer having students with similar ability working together since it is easier for me to adjust the teaching material to individual needs. Say like for the weaker group, I may give them some guiding questions, or more language support say like a word bank or picture-word correspondence to scaffold them to complete the task.

3. Can you describe one successful experience of using CL?

Ummm (0.3) a successful experience err I would say the same one. The one I mentioned earlier, P.5 children writing up an acrostic poem.

⇨ OK. Why do you consider it as successful?

Well because the task itself was fun. The children enjoyed the little "surprise" they got each turn. They didn't know what letter to start with until they received the poster from another group. They were very engaged in the lesson. And er and they could apply the basic literary techniques like alliteration and rhyme taught in the task and everyone was on task and knew what they were asked to do.

4. Can you describe another experience of using CL where you met some degree of difficulty?

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I remember having a P. 4 class, that was a long time ago like when I was still a green teacher,where where I intended to ask the students to come up with a new ending of a story they had been reading and act it out in front of the class and eventually the class would have to vote for the best ending. I also gave them materials to make props if they needed to. It was disastrous. Students relied on one person or two to finish the task while others were socializing. Some even perceived the preparation time as party time and played with their props. It was a mess basically.

⇨ Why do you consider it as challenging or not so successful?

Well because I could hardly carry out the task and I spent too much time on discipline and it turned out that nothing much was achieved. And er and I could tell that the responsible students had a really unpleasant experience.

⇨ If you were to conduct the lesson again, what changes would you make?

I think I would specify the roles and their corresponding duties before they actually do the task, say like I would say in this task there're 5 roles, for example, the director, 2 actors/actresses, a script writer and a prop maker and the director has to oversee everything making sure that the play goes smoothly and the actors or actresses have to do such and such etc. Well then each student has a mini task to focus on instead of just throwing a big task, act a play, at them. And also I think I would conduct a post-task peer-evaluation session. Well just to have students reflect on how well they work together and to think about what could have been done better and it also puts some pressure on the lazy students to contribute.

5. In your opinion, what is/are the potential challenge(s) of implementing CL in the classroom?

I think the biggest problem would be students not knowing how to work with one another. Say like the example I just mentioned, I had given a lot of thoughts to it after that traumatizing experience (laughs). I think working together might be something new to that group of students and might even be their first encounter with such a teaching style and that could explain why they acted that way. That's why I think getting students to work together in the beginning and making sure they know what their responsibility is could be challenging because you basically start from scratch.

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⇨ So, do you mean it's challenging in terms of routine training?

*Exactly especially in the beginning. And very often different teachers have their own routine and when a new academic year begins, much time needed to be spent on training students to adapt to **your** very own routine.*

6. To your own knowledge, can you briefly describe what CL is? In other words, what were you told about CL when you were working on your teaching qualification?

Honestly, nothing much (laughs). I wasn't working on a BEd program back then. I did PGDE. It's not until when I actually started working, do I get a bit of an idea of what CL is. Basically, CL is a more student-directed teaching strategy. Students learn through an interdependent or complementary relationship. They help one another out with their learning. And while working as a group, every member should have a duty, which allows them to contribute to their group. Right? (laughs)

⇨ Is there any difference between what you learn in theory and what is really is in the classroom?

Umm I think so. It's hard to think of a constructive role for every group member each time because in reality teachers have other non-teaching responsibilities and also sometimes students are not just in the mood of working in groups or doing anything in general, you know the post-holiday effect and in either case, it's difficult to get CL ideally done.

7. Speaking from your own experience, do you agree that CL enhances students' learning particularly in terms of learning motivation and learning outcome?

Yes it does. It entices students towards learning especially the not so capable students in my opinion. Since students are viewed as a group not an individual, very often the group product is better than the one they produce on their own and when they tangibly see what they can achieve, it does motivate them to strive for better.

⇨ Can you give me an example if you think it does have an impact on learning motivation and outcome?

Say in the previous example earlier, not only do the P.5 kids worked well with one another, they were also proactive in their learning, taking initiatives to get the task done. When the weaker

students got to see that they could write a poem, something that is of a higher technicality than traditional English composition, it surely was very encouraging to them and they worked even harder to brainstorm vocabulary that meets the literary requirements of the poem. And as for learning outcome, the lesson objective was clearly met. Students were able to incorporate the literary techniques they learned in the task well.

8. Is there anything you want to contribute to the topic?

Umm I don't think so.

Interview Transcript (Participant 10)

A) Contextual Information

Date: 19th December 2015 (Saturday)

Duration: N/A

Location: interviewed via email

B) Personal Particulars

Sex: Female

Year(s) of teaching experience: Almost 2 years

Level of students: both upper and lower primary

C) Questions:

1. Have you personally tried out cooperative learning (CL) in your classroom?

   ⇨ Is it a preferred teaching method in your teaching?

Yes I've tired but I'm not sure if I prefer using it. Probably not. It sounds great in theory but in when you really put it into practice, there're lots of issues to be careful with.

   ⇨ Why do you say so? Can you give me an example of such an issue?

Well because there're really quite a lot of problems when I try to use it (laughs). Usually, my lesson is planned in a way that I give students some input on a topic and then they complete a task as an evaluation of their learning in that lesson. And most of the time CL comes in the evaluation part. Say like I give some time for students to work on a worksheet individually and then I put them into groups of four usually to discuss their answers. It's like cross-checking the answers. And at this stage, if the weak students cannot complete the worksheet by themselves, they can kind of get help from the higher ability students. But once they get into groups, they're not on task. They're just socializing. The weak students are just not interested, not engaged and um and there're other off-task behaviors. (0.3) oh and also even when the higher ability students are mostly on task, they don't really want to help the lower ability groupmates. They kind of do their own thing. Neither group of students benefits much from group work I would say.

   ⇨ So each student gets a different task or they get the same thing?

Everyone gets the same worksheet. They do it on their own first and then they get into groups to cross-check answers like this.

⇨   How do you usually group your students together?

I mix them up. Like I say earlier the purpose of putting them in groups is usually to cross-check answers. Because of that, I try to group students up in a way that there's at least one or two higher ability students so that at least there's someone in the group who can manage everything and they can peer-teach their groupmates. So yes mixed-ability grouping.

2. In your opinion, what is/are the potential challenge(s) of implementing CL in the classroom?

Umm (0.3) I think the biggest challenge would be um the students. Like I say earlier they don't really benefit much from it. The weak students are still poorly motivated and some don't make good use of the individual time to complete the task. They just kind of expecting someone in the group to give them the answers. And um the high ability students don't really want to offer help sometimes. Very often what I see in the class when I put them into groups is like everyone does their own thing. They sit together but they aren't really working with one another. Or better in some groups I see some higher achievers tutoring their peers but it doesn't work out well either. Maybe they're still too young. They are lacking in the social skills to work with people. They don't really know what their responsibilities are. They don't know that they shouldn't rely on one person to do all the work and um and they have yet to develop the interpersonal skills needed in group communication. For example, just now I talked about the peer-tutoring thing and it's quite disastrous. They don't listen to one another and they don't wait for their turn to explain or to ask questions. I think maybe CL is more applicable to secondary students or maybe senior secondary since they've already developed the communication skills or social skills to support CL.

3. To your own knowledge, can you briefly describe what CL is? In other words, what were you told about CL when you were working on your teaching qualification?

Honestly not much (laughs). I was told something about special education when I was working on my PGDE but not really a lot about CL. I guess it's another synonym for group work judging from the word "cooperative". Is that right? (laughs) It um it refers to placing students in a heterogeneous setting so that they can get help from one another I guess.

4. Speaking from your own experience, do you agree that CL enhances students' learning particularly in terms of learning motivation and outcome?

I'm afraid not because the atmosphere of the class is just not great when I put them in groups. The lower ability students just sit and wait for the time to pass and the higher ability students don't like working in groups at all. They feel that they are being exploited and they have to take care of the weaker groupmates. There was one time when I asked students to go to their groups, one of the bright kids just shouted out "oh no teacher save me from this torture". I feel bad for her honestly. I would say I prefer a more teacher-directed teaching style because it's easier for me to give individualized support or a more focused group support for whoever falling behind after the input session and it also makes sure that students don't just idle away their lesson time and to me it seems they learn more effectively this way.

5.   Is there anything you want to add onto the topic?

Umm (0.3) I don't have much to say honestly (laughs). I hope the information is going to be useful to your research.