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School Culture: Teachers' Beliefs, Behaviours, and Instructional Practices

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Abstract: This mixed-methods research project documents the school culture of Hope University's Language Institute and reveals the reciprocal relationship between the school culture and the instructional practices of the English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers in this particular institute. Altogether, 62 EFL teachers agreed to complete a questionnaire. Of these, 14 participated in semi-structured interviews and classroom observations; 2 agreed to be interviewed but did not allow their classrooms to be observed. Quantitative data demonstrated strong correlations among eight social organizational variables of a school culture. Qualitative data further revealed the influences of a school culture on these teacher participants' instructional practices.

Introduction

School cultures are unique and distinctive. They are created and re-created by people considered members of a context; i.e., teachers, students, parents, and communities, among many others. Deal and Peterson (1999) defined that school cultures as a collection of “traditions and rituals that have been built up over time as teachers, students, parents, and administrators work together and deal with crises and accomplishments” (p. 4).

School cultures are influential. They shape and re-shape what people do, think, and feel (Beaudoin & Taylor, 2004; Cooper, 1988; Craig, 2009; Deal & Peterson, 1999, 2009; Guise, 2009; Hongboontri, 2003; Hongboontri & Chaokongjakra, 2011; Jurasait-Harbinson & Rex, 2010; Kleinsasser, 1993, 2013; Lieberman, 1988, 1990; Maslowski, 2001; McLaughlin, 1993; Muhammad, 2009; Rosenholtz, 1991; Sato & Kleinsasser, 2004; Schien, 2010). Rosenholtz's (1991) quantitative and qualitative study of elementary school teachers in America convincingly demonstrated how school cultures molded these teachers. With data gathered from 1,213 completed questionnaires and 74 interviews, Rosenholtz identified two types of school cultures; i.e., nonroutine/certain and routine/uncertain. In the nonroutine/certain environment, teachers worked collaboratively, were involved in goal setting, and had opportunities for professional development. These, in turn, maximized students' academic growth. In contrast, teachers in the routine/uncertain environment worked in isolation, had little (or almost no) involvement in school goal setting, and had fewer opportunities for professional development. Students' performances were, as a consequence, minimized.

The influences of school cultures on teachers have also been extensively covered in the field of foreign language (FL) education. Kleinsasser's (1993) findings of his triangulated study with 37 FL teachers in five school districts in America emphasized the power of school cultures. Similar to Rosenholtz (1991), Kleinsasser found two types of school cultures: nonroutine/certain

and routine/uncertain. The nonroutine/certain culture promoted, Kleinsasser explained further, collaboration within a community. In other words, his participating FL teachers collaborated not only with their colleagues in the FL department but they also worked with teachers from other subject disciplines, students, parents, administrators, and communities. Through collaboration, these FL teachers could create a successful learning environment where their students had the opportunity to use the second language for communication. On the contrary, in the routine/uncertain culture where collaboration was scarce (or almost nonexistent), the FL teachers not only individually planned their own instructions but also pursued different goals of teaching and learning. Classroom instructions were mostly text driven and focused largely on grammar; students had little (or almost no) opportunity to use the second language for communication.

Several years later, two doctoral students of Kleinsasser similarly investigated the school cultures in two different learning contexts (Japan and Thailand). Their findings echoed those of Kleinsasser (1993) despite their differences in the study contexts and the nature of the research participants. Sato's (2000) triangulated study of 19 English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers in one high school in Japan revealed the presence of a routine/uncertain school culture. In this particular high school, collaboration was scant; these participating teachers worked in isolation. Their instructions followed the content in the textbooks to prepare students for the exams. Interaction between teachers and students and among students themselves was limited; seatwork exercises and rote-learning activities were oftentimes implemented in EFL classrooms. (See also Kleinsasser & Sato, 2007 and Sato & Kleinsasser, 2004 for more details.) Hongboontri (2003) went into one Thai university to document its school culture. By triangulating his gathered data, Hongboontri identified the existence of a routine/uncertain culture within this particular university. These teachers admitted that they rarely collaborated with other teachers; they had no shared goals, and their learning opportunities were meager. Because of these factors, their instructions not only adhered to the assigned textbooks but also mainly emphasized discrete grammar points. Classroom interaction was rare as students were oftentimes individually involved with their grammar-oriented seatwork exercises. Hence, students' opportunity to use English for communication was nonexistent. (See also Hongboontri, 2006a, 2006b, 2007, 2008.)

Studies of Kleinsasser (1993), Sato (2000 [also Kleinsasser & Sato, 2007 and Sato & Kleinsasser, 2004]), and Hongboontri (2003) offered some insights into the influential roles of school cultures on FL and EFL teachers. Nevertheless, more studies are still needed to understand the complexities of school cultures and their reciprocal relationship with FL and EFL teachers' beliefs, behaviors, and instructional practices. Kleinsasser and Sato's (2007) quotation was worth mentioning despite its length.

With these ideas of practice and professional development in mind we need to encourage further study of participants, contexts, professional development. We also need to make sure that future studies qualify terms that adequately and adroitly situate people, places, and their participant(s) in practice. Such ideas proffer further inquiry. What practices promote enduring language learning environments? What practices constrain enduring language learning environments? How many authentic contexts are there? How can authentic contexts be categorized, if at all? What are the practices of administrators, teachers, students, parents, and other community members in one context? How do such practices interact, evolve, devolve, or remain constant? These and other issues require our attention at the dawn of the 21st century. We have only started scratching the surface. (p. 140)

In response to Kleinsasser and Sato's (2007) call, this research study sought answers to two research questions. (1) What pattern of school cultures is practiced at *Hope University's* Language Institute? (2) What effects do school cultures have on EFL teachers at *Hope University's* Language Institute in terms of their instructional practices? This research was grounded upon two distinct theoretical notions on school cultures (Rosenholtz, 1991) and social organization (Thompson, 2010).

Conceptual Framework

Teachers are shaped by school cultures that they themselves might possibly have helped shape. Rosenholtz (1991) asserted, "Teachers, like members of most organizations, shape their beliefs and actions largely in conformance with the structures, policies, and traditions of the workaday world around them" (pp. 2-3). Thus, what teachers decide to do or not to do in their classrooms could be determined by teachers' association with their school cultures such as school policies, school traditions, school structures, and teacher interactions, among others (Bidwell & Kasarda, 1980; Hargreaves, 1994).

Thus, to better understand school cultures and the reciprocal relationships between school cultures and teachers' beliefs, behaviors, and instructional practices, teachers' perceptions of their social organizations need to be examined. Rosenholtz (1991) suggested; "To understand schools, we must understand them as teachers do, that is, we must attempt to construe how schools appear to teachers who inhabit them" (p. 3). More important, teachers' shared understandings of their school cultures need to be garnered and uncovered. Citing Berger and Luckmann (1966), Rosenholtz contended;

People come to define their workday realities through a set of shared assumption about appropriate attitudes and behaviors constructed within them. Meanings of work are exchanged, negotiated, and modified through the communications people have with, or the observations they make of, others. Thus teachers learn through everyday interactions how to name and classify things, and in that process learn how they are expected to behave with reference to those things. (p. 3)

The social organization of schools comprises of nine social organizational variables including: (1) teacher certainty, (2) teacher cohesiveness, (3) teacher collaboration, (4) teacher complaints, (5) teacher evaluation, (6) faculty goal setting, (7) managing student behavior, (8) parent involvement, and (9) teacher learning opportunities. (See Table I for their definitions.) These social organizational variables are, Rosenholtz (1991) argued, "not characteristics of individual teachers but that teachers have helped to shape; social organizations that then have consequences for teachers' perceptions and behaviors" (p. 4). Teachers' perceptions of these variables on the whole portray teachers' understandings of their organizations; that is, how they "define the nature of their work, their sentiments toward their work, [*and*] the substance of their work" (Italics added, Rosenholtz, p. 3).

Hence, it suffices to argue that the correlations among these social organizational variables along with teachers' shared definitions of the variables as such help define school cultures. In addition, they sufficiently help sketch teachers' patterns of beliefs and behaviors in schools and depict the reciprocity between school cultures and teachers' beliefs, behaviors, and instructional practices. Similarly, Thompson (2010) maintained,

[This] allows us to search in two distinctions, in the individual and in his environment, for sources of diversity and uniformity. To the extent that individuals bring similar aspirations, beliefs, and standards into situations appearing to offer similar opportunities and constraints, we can expect to find similarities or patterns in the ensuing action. We now need to explore the extent to which categories of individuals are similarly programmed, and situations in complex organizations are similarly structured. (p. 102)

Social Organizational Variables	Definitions
Teacher certainty	This variable focuses on teachers' certainty of their instructional practices and the relationship between school cultures and teachers' instructional practices.
Teacher cohesiveness	This variable investigates teachers' sense of belonging by measuring the degree to which teachers feel they are part of their organization.
Teacher collaboration	This variable reveals teachers' perceptions toward shared work and explores how collaboration is promoted or deferred within a school culture while further measuring the extent to which teachers are willing to work together to improve and solve instructional problems.
Teacher complaints	This variable examines which types of teaching related activities and extracurricular activities with which teachers are dissatisfied.
Teacher evaluation	This variable uncovers teachers' feelings toward the ways they are being monitored and evaluated.
Faculty goal setting	This variable measures the extent to which teachers are involved in their organization's goal setting.
Managing student behavior	This variable reveals teachers' overall consistency in enforcing the rules for student conduct on students in their organization.
Parent involvement*	This variable examines the extent to which parents are involved in their children's learning.
Teacher learning opportunities	This variable measures the degree to which teachers are given opportunities to improve themselves. Also it examines the extent to which a school facilitates or hinders teachers' professional development.

*It needs to be noted here that as the current study aimed to study school cultures at the tertiary level of education, parent involvement variable was then excluded. This is because at the tertiary level of education, parent involvement in the teaching and learning process is often minimized (or usually absent).

Table I: Social rganizational variables and their definitions

To understand what organizations do and how organizations behave, there is a need to, Thompson (2010) maintained, understand how individuals within organizations act or behave. This is because human action emerges, Thompson further argued, from his/her interaction of “(1) the individual, who brings *aspirations, standards, and knowledge on beliefs about causation*; and (2) the situation, which presents *opportunities and constraints*. Interaction of the individual and

the situation is mediated by his perceptions or cognitions” (Italics original, Thompson, 2010, pp. 101-102).

Mode of Inquiry

Following the theoretical notions of a mixed-methods research paradigm (e.g., Dörnyei, 2008; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010), the researchers of the present study employed four data collection strategies to gather data. They were: (1) a questionnaire, (2) semi-structured interviews, (3) classroom observations, and (4) written documents and artifacts.

The questionnaire

The questionnaire had 102 five-Likert Scale items (adapted from Hongboontri 2005; Kleinsasser, 1993; and Rosenholtz, 1991). Before its actual use, the questionnaire was piloted on a group of 10 university EFL teachers from *Trust University* (a pseudonym). Responses from the returned questionnaires were entered into SPSS to calculate for the reliability. The questionnaire has the reliability of 0.977. (Preferably, the reliability should be, as Bryman & Carmer [1990] suggested, at or over 0.70.)

Semi-structured interviews

The researchers closely followed Spradley’s (1979) notions of ethnographic interview and originally developed 35 interview questions. These questions were tested with two university EFL teachers and were then re-written, reworded, and rearranged. Finally, 24 open-ended questions were used for the interviews. Each interview lasted approximately one hour depending on the informant’s responses. With permission from the teacher participants, all interviews and field-notes were recorded and taken. These were later transcribed for further analyses.

Classroom observations

Each teacher who agreed to classroom observations was observed at least three times (Adler & Adler, 1994; Delamont, 2002; Denzin & Lincoln, 2010; Merriam, 1991). During classroom observations, field-notes were kept and recorded in a classroom observation protocol adopted from Hongboontri (2005).

Written documents and artifacts

Throughout the duration of the data collection process (one academic year 2011-2012), written documents and artifacts (e.g., course syllabi, teaching materials, and pictures) were collected.

Participants and Data Collection Participation

Altogether 62 EFL teachers from three campuses of *Hope University's* Language Institute volunteered to complete a questionnaire. (The Language Institute of *Hope University* has three campuses. The two main campuses are situated in Bangkok and in the outskirts of Bangkok; the other campus is in the northern part of Thailand.) Of these 62, 14 (12 Thais, one American, and one Irish) participated in both interviews and classroom observations; 2 Thais agreed to be interviewed but dissented to classroom observations. (See Table II for further details.)

Name	Study Degree	Major	Data Collection Procedures			
			Interviews	Classroom Observations		
				1 st	2 nd	3 rd
Andy	Ed.D.	Professional Development	✓	✓	✓	✓
Anna	MA	TESOL	✓	✓	✓	✓
Debra	MA	Applied Linguistics	✓	✓	✓	✓
Garry*	MA	International Policy Studies	✓	✓	✓	✓
Joseph**	MA	TEFL	✓	✓	✓	✓
Kate	MA	Applied Linguistics	✓	✓	✓	✓
Kathy**	MA	Applied Linguistics and Economics	✓	✓	✓	✓
Nancy	Ms.Ed.	TESOL	✓	✓	✓	✓
Natalie	M.Ed.	TESOL	✓	✓	✓	✓
Ned**	MA	Applied Linguistics	✓	✓	✓	✓
Patty	Ph.D.	English Language Teaching	✓	✓	✓	✓
Rene	Ph.D.	Applied Linguistics	✓			
Sean*	BA	English and Music	✓	✓	✓	✓
Suzanne	MA	TESOL	✓	✓	✓	✓
Vivian	M.Ed.	Instructional and Curricular Studies	✓	✓	✓	✓
Wendy	MA	Applied Linguistics	✓			

Note: *Both Garry and Sean were native English speaking teachers (NESTs). Garry was from America and Sean came from Ireland.

** Joseph, Kathy, and Ned taught at other campus of *Hope University's* Language Institute.

Table 2: Teachers' participation in the data collection

Ethical Considerations

Eisner and Peshkin (1990) emphasized the necessity for a researcher to assure his/her research participants of their rights and their privacy. Mindful of this, the researchers of the present study first sent a letter to the Director of *Hope University's* Language Institute requesting permission to conduct a study. Once permission was granted, the researchers sent a letter along with a participant consent form to each individual teacher informing the teachers of the research study, the data collection methods used in the study, and their rights either to participate and to

withdraw from the study at any time or not to participate at all. More importantly, the letter ensured the teachers that their confidentiality and privacy would at all times be protected.

Data Analysis

Responses from the completed and returned questionnaires were tallied, tabulated, and entered into the SPSS program for correlation evaluation. Transcripts (and field-notes) from interviews and classroom observation field-notes were analyzed with Strauss and Corbin's (1998) open and axial coding techniques. With the ideas of open coding, interview and classroom observation data were first read and re-read to identify similarities and differences between responses and observation field-notes. These responses and field-notes were then labeled and grouped to form tentative categories. Following the concepts of axial coding techniques, these tentative categories were re-organized moving from more general ones to create more related and meaningful groups of data. In other words, data were put back together by making connections between categories and sub-categories in light of conditions, contexts, action/interactional strategies, and consequences.

Moreover, the researchers, adhering to the notions of triangulation (Kane, Sandretto, & Heath, 2002; Mathison, 1988; Metz, 2000), put the statistical data, the interviews, the classroom observations, and the written documents and artifacts together in terms of consistency, inconsistency, or contradictory within these three data sets. Through this process, better insights into the culture of *Hope University's* Language Institute and its reciprocity in this particular context would eventually emerge.

Results

The statistical calculation of the 62 completed and returned questionnaires demonstrated strong correlations among all eight social organizational variables. These strong correlations indicated the parallel movement of the variables (Brown, 2005; Hatch & Farhady, 1982). What this meant was, for example, the more these teacher participants collaborated in teacher evaluation and faculty goal setting, the more these teachers would be certain with their instructional practices. Not only that, the higher teacher collaboration could also open more avenues for teacher professional development. On the contrary, the less these teachers interacted with one another; the less they shared information and exchanged assistance; the less they improved themselves and their teaching. As a consequence, these teacher participants became uncertain with their instructional practices. Worse yet, as these teachers had little (or almost no) involvement in faculty goal setting, they felt marginalized and that they did not belong to their own working context. (See Table III for more details.)

The strong correlations among these eight social organizational variables prompted the necessity for further and closer investigation into how these teacher participants described teacher collaboration within their Institute, how much they were involved in their Institute's goal setting process, and how they perceived their learning opportunities within this particular workplace, among many others. An analysis of our qualitative data (interviews, classroom observations, and written documents and artifacts) would allow us to offer and enhance a more complete picture of the pattern of the workplace culture and its reciprocity with these teacher participants' beliefs, behaviors, and instructional practices.

	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Mean	S.D.
1	.624**	.578**	.673**	.679**	.682**	.657**	.650**	56.6129	13.47780
2		.884**	.751**	.913**	.929**	.697**	.891**	49.9032	16.74369
3			.659**	.806**	.832**	.622**	.882**	51.5806	18.98969
4				.737**	.786**	.521**	.700**	14.5323	4.12794
5					.939**	.722**	.893**	19.0806	7.91823
6						.725**	.920**	34.1935	13.60429
7							.690**	26.5161	5.34312
8								34.1774	13.80369

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Notes: 1 = teacher certainty 2 = teacher cohesiveness
 3 = teacher collaboration 4 = teacher complaints
 5 = teacher evaluation 6 = faculty goal setting
 7 = managing student behavior 8 = teacher learning opportunities
 S.D. = standard deviation

Table 3: Correlations, means, and standard deviations for social organizational variables

The Culture of *Hope University's* Language Institute and Teachers' Beliefs, Behaviors, and Instructional Practices

In this section, our analysis of the qualitative data garnered from interviews, classroom observations, and written documents and artifacts offered deeper insights into the reciprocal relationships between the Language Institute's culture and its teachers' beliefs, behaviors, and instructional practices in terms of the eight social organizational variables. Such insights offered a more informed portrait of the Language Institute's culture and its influences on the teachers.

School Culture and Teacher Collaboration

When asked to describe their working cultures in this organization, the teachers in Bangkok campuses expressively admitted that they scarcely collaborated with their colleagues. Even though the Language Institute promoted co-teaching policy, especially between native and non-native English speaking teachers, most teachers still preferred to work either individually or balkanizedly. One native English speaking teacher (NEST), *Sean*, who had been teaching in this Institute for about one and a half years, rather isolated himself and desired to work individually. He noticed that his workplace was formed with different cliques. As a consequence, he perceived working in teams in this organization as a failure. *Sean* said;

I work with my colleagues as little as possible. I'm quite individualistic. We kind of formulate teams and groups, but the end of the day, I still think the teachers are so largely single. I don't like working in teams. I find it irritating. I find it quite hard to negotiate things in the way that I would like. I either dominate or else I let other

people do it their way. Reaching compromise is a really tough thing to do with a group of people. That's the honest answer. I think accentually many teachers are quite solitary adults. I wouldn't say that we have a close functioning working or systematic way of working together. We find it hard to work together. (*Sean*)

When *Sean* needed help with his instruction, he opted for the Internet. What he shared with the colleagues he was close with was limited to student difficulties or organizational management.

I don't like to admit that I have challenges in my class. It's very rarely that I approach anybody directly for advice. I use the Internet a lot to look at lesson plans from different institutions and then compare them with the way I do. However, if I'm frustrated with the class, I'll vent my frustration out with the group of teachers that I'm quite close to. Things like, 'Oh! My God, what's going on with these students? What's going on with the exam? It's too difficult for them.' (*Sean*)

Sean's practice of individualism affected his teaching in various ways. Observations in his classroom showed that his teaching was oftentimes unorganized. *Sean* implemented a number of classroom activities in his teaching. Nonetheless, these activities had neither clear purposes nor instructions. Students most of the time appeared confused and barely participated in *Sean's* activities. *Sean* dominated his classrooms by asking and answering his own questions and running those activities himself. He often drilled students with vocabulary that popped-up during class or unfamiliar vocabulary; he rarely gave comments to students' presentations. His classes eventually remained puzzling.

During an interview, *Rene*, a novice Thai EFL teacher, described how lack of teacher collaboration within the Institute had affected her teaching. As a new teacher, she received neither guidance nor assistance from her colleagues. As a consequence, she had vague ideas particularly on how to approach the assigned curriculum and the textbook. *Rene* lamented,

When I first started four months ago, I had no idea of whom to go to when I had teaching problems. I was alone at the crossroads. The Institute gave me three sections to teach and 'This is the book; go and teach'. That's it. No one shared me what to do. I was even more confused when I found that some teachers used the book and some didn't. Some skipped those chapters in the book and supplemented a lot. I thought we were meant to follow the book. Everybody seemed to be confused. This might be because we were changing the curriculum. I, however, didn't care much how the curriculum had changed. But I DID care how I should start my teaching. (*Rene*)

Teacher isolation was witnessed not only in the Bangkok campuses, but was also ubiquitous in the Institute's northern campus. This campus had three Thai EFL teachers. Two (*Ned* and *Joseph*) formed a group and singled out another teacher (*Kathy*) who had been recruited only a few months before the commencement of this research study. *Ned* and *Joseph* got on well together as they shared not only similar teaching goals but also perceptions of their students. For example, both *Ned* and *Joseph* focused on preparing students for examinations. They covered every content and grammar point in the in-house textbook as they would be in quizzes and exams. They considered their students as low-proficient and had low expectations of students. The goals of language teaching and learning of the newly recruited teacher, *Kathy*, were different from those of *Ned* and *Joseph*. Her goals were to foster communicative competence within these students. With such goals, she had high expectations of her students. She assigned students a number of outside-classroom activities for self-study such as watching

English-soundtrack films or having conversations with native English speakers. These teachers' different goals of teaching and learning caused conflicts among them and finally closed the door for teacher collaboration. During an interview, *Ned* described his exchange of assistance and teaching materials with *Joseph* this way. "We shared teaching problems, teaching materials, exchange tips, and so on." *Ned*, however, admitted a division between him and *Kathy*. As such, the division was generated by, *Ned* complained, *Kathy*'s "attitude problems.

She's very demanding and pushy. Students have been complaining about her. She gave students loads and loads of assignments. We told her in the meeting to cut some; she wasn't very happy and showed her dissatisfaction. (*Ned*)

Ned had as little contact with *Kathy* as possible. At worst, he even considered leaving his job.

Her demanding attitude just got me. I don't quite talk to her. I completely separate myself from her. I only work with her if necessary. Successfully, she has managed to kill the environment. I have been thinking about leaving the job. (*Ned*)

Kathy's high expectations of the students once concerned *Joseph*. Having been assigned to mentor these two teachers, *Joseph* told *Kathy* to lower her expectations and to lessen her assignments. *Kathy*, however, insisted on keeping those expectations. *Joseph* recalled, "*Kathy* had too high expectations of her students. I told her to lower her expectations as these students are weak students. For example, if she assigned 20 assignments, I told her to lower that. But she didn't. She gave all those 20 assignments. It didn't work." Since then, *Joseph* distanced himself from *Kathy* and rarely offered her any advice. "I don't tell her directly that what she planned is not gonna work. I let her do whatever she planned. Her students would eventually tell her that this is not working."

Kathy was aware of her two colleagues' cold shoulder toward her and withdrew herself from the group. Only of necessity, she worked with them. She explained,

I'm new here. I'm still getting to know the students. I asked these experienced teachers for some advice. I also asked for their opinions on classroom activities I had prepared. They gave me advice on certain things such as students' English competency levels, or the number of assignments. From time to time, I borrow their teaching materials. Sometimes, they let me look at the teaching materials they are using. Occasionally, I offer to share some of my teaching materials and make some suggestions concerning the teaching. But they are usually ignored. For the sharing and exchanging of the teaching tips or problems per se, we never share. We most of the time prepare our lessons, some do the marking, or some do their research.

(*Kathy*)

The practice of the majority of teacher participants was balkanization. Several teacher participants noted that teachers in the Institute balkanized into groups for two main purposes. On the one hand, a few teacher participants divided themselves into small subgroups. Within their groups they shared and exchanged ideas on teaching materials, teaching tips, and teaching problems. Four recently recruited teachers (at the time, this study was conducted.) - *Debra*, *Kate*, *Nancy*, and *Natalie* explained their reasons for forming their own teacher group.

I am close with the other three teachers in my group. We are sort of a team. We work well together. We often share teaching materials and teaching problems; we exchange tips and suggestions. (*Debra*)

My everyday conversation with other teachers in the Institute would not really concern any academic issue. I mean we talk about general stuff. I work with these teachers when assigned to. However, with the other three teachers, we exchange

help. I sometimes go to them and ask for help; they sometimes come to me and ask for my help. We share and exchange teaching materials and lesson plans; we help edit each other work. (*Kate*)

With the three teachers that I am quite close with; I share with them everything from teaching materials, teaching tips, teaching difficulties, and student problems. With other teachers, I sit back, listen, and keep my opinions to myself. (*Nancy*)

I form quite a special bond with the three teachers at the Institute. Any teaching problems that I cannot solve myself, I would share them with these three. Working with friends is also different from working with others. The close-knit relationship between friends helps us work efficiently. This might be because we normally have lunch together and talk to each other off-work. It's pretty easy to contact and keep in touch. Importantly, you could be straightforward and be very honest to your friends when you disagree on anything. But sometimes you couldn't do the same with others. (*Natalie*)

Working and sharing and exchanging assistance with the members in their group, these four teachers reflected, created a stronger bond among them.

I sometimes struggle to come up with ideas of how to teach or explain some topics. I often seek help from my gang – *Debra*, *Kate*, and *Natalie*. This semester I and *Natalie* are teaching the same subject. She often prepares games, activities, handouts, and a lot of supplementary. She often shares these with me. (*Nancy*)

Although there are supplementary worksheets provided for us in our common room, I create my own worksheets for different courses. I usually tell my friends that I have those worksheets and often ask whether they want to photocopy them. It's okay for me if they don't. But if they do, I'll let them have the worksheets. (*Natalie*)

If I'm assigned to design a lesson plan for a course and I have NO ideas, I would go ask my friends. I asked, for example, which teaching techniques would work for this type of topics. When anyone in our group has not finished preparing teaching materials, the rest would go and help. This is something that everybody in the group is willing to do. We do share and exchange teaching ideas, games, and supplementary. Complaints of teaching materials and the organizational system are topics that obviously cannot be avoided in our conversations. (*Kate*)

We (*Kate*, *Nancy*, *Natalie*, and herself) often share and exchange teaching ideas. 'I did this in my classroom, and it really worked. Why don't you try it?' We also share supplementary worksheets and PowerPoint slides. We usually take turn to make the slides. I do, for example, slides for chapter A and my friend creates slides for chapter B. This would reduce our workload. We not only share teaching materials, but also share information about students. I, fortunately, knew that a friend in my gang taught my students before. I asked her about the students' learning styles, their interests, and etc. This information is important to how I design my class. However, we share the information among people inside our group ONLY! (*Debra*)

These four teachers' patterns of relationship and forms of association were evident in their observed classrooms. Worksheets and activities used in *Debra's* classes were also used in *Natalie's* and *Nancy's* classes. Moreover, their teaching styles were, to some extent, common. For instance, they simplified the content in their assigned textbooks and put it on PowerPoint. During their teaching, they explained grammar points in discrete fashion, assigned students seat-work exercises, and gave the answers to these exercises. Oftentimes they searched the Internet

and played music from YouTube to create a friendly atmosphere. When they were not sure of the exercise answers or encountered some unfamiliar vocabulary, they checked the answers or the meanings of the vocabulary from the Internet. Their group collaboration generated this particular pattern of teaching practices. Without a doubt, these four teachers' association benefited their teaching. However, their working and associating together as a group had negative consequences on their teaching and learning. Their balkanization demarcated them from other teachers and undermined their opportunities to collaborate with others (Hargreaves, 1994).

Balkanization culture was as well evident among the teachers teaching the same subject. Three experienced Thai teachers (*Wendy, Vivian, and Anna*) insisted that they worked frequently with the teachers who taught the same subjects. *Wendy* and *Vivian* similarly described how work was divided and shared among the teachers in their groups.

With the teachers teaching the same courses, I would have meetings with them before and after our actual teaching. We gathered to allocate responsibilities. A couple of teachers would design and prepare the course syllabus. Some would select the teaching materials and the content; some might write the mid-term exam; some might write the final exam. We routinely asked each other 'How was your class? How were your students?' (*Wendy*)

From the very beginning of each semester, we normally have a pre-semester meeting. The course coordinator usually prepares a tentative teaching schedule and a course outline for everyone who teaches the course. We, then, get an idea what we would teach each week, how many quizzes we would give to our students, when the public holidays are, and so on. With the teachers teaching the same course, we discuss and divide the workload together in the meeting. For example, teacher A will prepare a quiz for Week 8; teacher B will design the Listening Exam; and teachers C and D will do the Final Exam. Most of the time, we use e-mail to contact with one another. With other teachers, I don't usually have much contact with. (*Vivian*)

Anna, however, admitted that the degree to which she worked with the teachers in her group depended on her relationship with these teachers. During the interview, this particular teacher told us that;

Some years, the co-teachers were nice, so we offered help and shared information or teaching materials. And I was very happy about that. However, I, in some other years, didn't get along with the co-teachers. We, then, worked independently. (*Anna*)

On the other hand, some teachers formed a group to share and exchange personal dilemmas. *Andy* explained;

Whenever I feel tired, I confide with three or four teachers that I am close with. I also have conflicts with some teachers in the Institute. Some don't even talk to me anymore. These affect me a lot because we have to see each other everyday and work together. These also cause a difficulty for the boss to assign us work or projects. (*Andy*)

The two characteristic patterns of relationships and forms of association among the teaching members of this particular Language Institute largely restricted the types of activities that these teacher participants did with one another. Henceforth, these teachers' feelings of cohesiveness and opportunities for professional development were inevitably dwindled.

Marginalization, Exclusion, and a Lack of Professional Development

The analyzed data revealed the reciprocity between marginalization, exclusion, and a lack of professional development. Three teacher participants in the Institute's northern campus commonly complained that due to some demographical barriers, their involvement with the Institute was little (or almost non-existent). As a result, they little felt being a part of the Institute. *Kathy* voiced criticisms about lack of support from the Institute and lack of communication among teachers in different campuses. "What the Institute did was to give me, as a new teacher, only one teacher handbook and 'go teach'! The only support the Institute has been giving me is to send emails informing about TESOL conferences. That's all." With her colleagues in the Bangkok campuses, this teacher admitted that she was "not close to the teachers and the staff there. I most of the time contact them by emails." *Kathy* felt the marginalization between the Institute and her. She lamented;

I'm not yet involved in designing assignments or activities for students. I and everybody here follow the assignments approved and sent from the Bangkok campuses. I feel I belong to this campus rather than to the head office in Bangkok run by the Director of the Language Institute. (*Kathy*)

Two other teachers also indicated in the interviews that they also felt being excluded. *Ned* criticized the Institute's inadequate support for his professional growth. "Inwardly, I feel I am being ignored. Apart from that, I'm okay with my work, but I might not go anywhere or grow in this career. I just keep teaching years after years." Similarly, *Joseph* bewailed. "I felt I was left abandoned. In terms of academic work, there's no chance for us to grow here." Heavy workloads, this same teacher further complained, exhausted them and robbed them off from the opportunities to conduct research. *Joseph's* lament went on, asserting;

The teachers in the main campuses receive some research funds and their teaching load would also be lessened. We, in this campus, cannot do this. We don't have enough teachers; we have to teach these many hours and we are exhausted. We have no time to talk or to discuss about research. (*Joseph*)

Interview responses from one NEST in the Institute's Bangkok campuses emphasized the effects of marginalization. *Garry* criticized how marginalization not only stripped particularly NESTs from professional growth but also reinforced the Institute's alienation of its NESTs. Consequently, this could lead to teacher attrition.

In Thailand, foreigners are hired, but they are considered temporary employees. The system has not done a good job about integrating Thai and international teachers as a unit. If you are an international instructor, you won't grow in your careers. You will always remain in the classroom doing what you're supposed to be doing. But after a year or two or three, they begin to see that there is the separation in career paths. A lot of international instructors don't stay very long. It's the income, the lack of career paths, and perhaps a conservative attitude in certain university. So, they feel degraded. They feel demotivated to remain in Thailand. As an international instructor, I still think it's a problem that we are not fully incorporating into the whole culture of the organization. And when we feel we are not entirely incorporating. We feel we are on the outside. When you feel that you are on the outside, the mission of the inside is not my mission. (*Garry*)

The majority of the teacher participants in the Institute's Bangkok campuses complained about their lack of involvement in the Institute's activities in relation to teaching and learning. These teachers further criticized that this not only promoted the feelings of marginalization within the teachers but also reinforced these teacher participants' practices of traditional

teaching. That is, these teachers merely covered discrete grammar points, assigned students drilled practice, and prepared students for the exams. *Suzanne* had no involvement in developing a course syllabus for her course and taught to prepare students for the exams. She explained;

I have no involvement in writing the course outline. The course outline was designed by the Institute and watered down to us. I compared what I taught to the exams. I give lecture and assign homework. I know that many students would find my teaching boring. Some chitchat; some sleep. But I need to cover all the contents for the exams. (*Suzanne*)

Another teacher, *Andy*, admitted that he also taught students for the exams.

I never set goals in my teaching. And honestly, I don't know whether my teaching goes in the same direction with the Institute or my colleagues. The Institute wants us to emphasize listening and speaking but our tests still focus on reading, writing, and grammar. If I do focus on those skills, my students wouldn't be able to do the exams. (*Andy*)

Similarly, *Rene* noted, "I, to be honest, focus pretty much on grammar in my lessons because they will be in the exams." Not surprisingly, the other two teachers in the Institute's northern campus who had earlier complained about the teacher marginalization and exclusion within the Institute also taught students for the exams. *Ned* admitted, "To be honest, my primary goal of teaching is to cover all contents appeared in the exams. I focus on the test and revise the past exam questions to prepare students for the exams." *Joseph* added, "I basically follow the textbook. I give students some mock exams which are similar to the real exams in terms of the format and so on."

The cause-and-effect relationship between marginalization, exclusion, and a lack of professional development was predominantly evident in teachers' complaints of the Institute's arrangements for in-service training courses. Most training courses offered little corresponding to the teachers' needs. A group of four teachers who earlier admitted to their practice of balkanization *Debra* criticized, "There're lots of workshops and seminars here. Unfortunately, the topics of the workshops or the seminars don't really suit my interest. The Institute should have asked every teacher to vote for the topics." *Nancy* commented further, "The Institute organizes workshops for the teachers every Tuesday morning. Speakers are invited to give workshops on various things such as SPSS or how to write a proposal. They are OK. But they don't really match my needs." Similarly, *Natalie* complained. "I often attended these workshops but usually forgot about them within a couple of days. They were about, for instance, creative teaching, supplementing teaching materials, or e-learning. But they are not what I really want."

The Institute's organized in-service training could little (almost did not) help its teachers improve themselves. This was because almost all those in-service training sessions did not really meet the teachers' needs. (See Grossman, Wineburg, & Woolworth, 2001 for more details.) Nor did the results of their teacher-evaluation help these teacher participants attain professional development. This was because their evaluation was, as the majority of the teacher participants criticized, attributed to either students' ticks on a checklist or teachers' hearsay and gossips. *Patty* described the two practices of teacher evaluation within the Institute; i.e., student evaluation of a teacher and teacher evaluation of a teacher. "There is an evaluation form that students need to fill in. They are free to give us any type of feedback. And the other one is teacher evaluation. Unofficially, we may often criticize one another for doing certain things in a classroom." Several teacher participants voiced their concerns of student evaluation of a teacher.

Patty listened to what her students thought of her but she believed that “students are not significant signals of successful teaching. Students’ feedback gives you a certain type of evaluation. But I wouldn’t say it speaks all about your teaching or how effective you are as a teacher.” *Nancy* concurred, stating that “The students don’t sometimes know whether my teaching is effective or not. What they could notice is how friendly I am.” Though *Sean* believed that students’ feedback “is very important,” he doubted the credibility of student evaluation of a teacher. “But so often there is a tendency that they [*students*] just miss it though. They don’t know what they are doing. So, they are not always the best source of information about their own learning.”

Another source used for teacher evaluation in this Institute was teacher hearsay and gossips. *Anna* explained;

We don’t have the system to observe other teachers here. Hearsay and gossips among teachers were mostly used in the evaluation. I don’t know whether the stories are true or not. But if we keep hearing of a teacher’s poor teaching, we would remove that teacher from whatever class he/she is teaching and put him/her somewhere else. (*Anna*)

Garry openly criticized the teacher hearsay in the Institute.

I believe colleagues are asked to evaluate colleagues. But it’s not a very transparent evaluation system. It might be something as simple as we’re sitting at lunch and somebody makes a comment, the rumors, and the gossips. ‘Hey, did you hear what he did today?’ It’s lunch talk and the stories can be twisted. They may color your perception or color your impression of a person a little bit, maybe positively, maybe negatively. They’re not scientific; you can’t quantify them. They shouldn’t be a part of a formal evaluation. But they do. (*Garry*)

The responses from these teacher participants overall indicated the reciprocity among these teachers’ practices of individualism and balkanization, teacher marginalization, teacher evaluation, and teacher professional development. (See Diagram I for more details.) Individualism was characterized by teacher isolation and personal differences. Balkanization was generated by personal identification and relationship and by subject disciplines. Marginalization fueled by differences of power between the Institute’s administrators and its teachers was ubiquitous and its effects were clearly evidenced. Since the majority of these teachers had little (or almost no) involvement in the Institute’s goal setting, their teaching was largely based on the assigned textbook to prepare students for the examinations. The Institute organized a number of in-service training courses for its teachers. However, in spite of these many in-service training courses, the majority of the teacher participants called for more learning opportunities from the Institute. For many of the teacher participants, the results of teacher evaluation were rather unreliable. This was because these results were largely drawn from student evaluation of a teacher and from teacher hearsay and gossips.

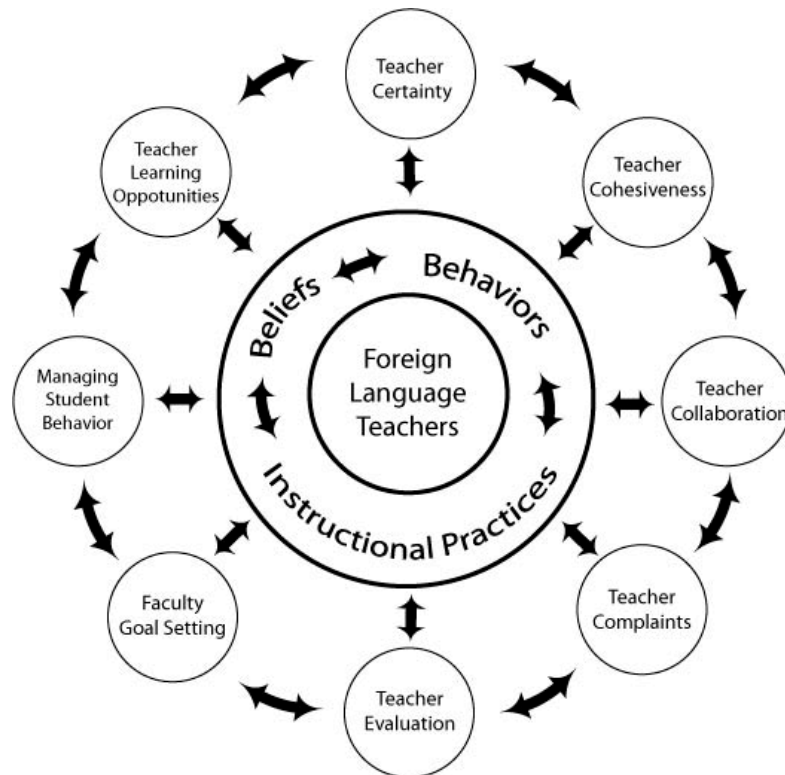


Figure I: The reciprocal relationship between eight social organizational variables and teachers' beliefs, behaviors, and instructional practices

Discussion and Conclusion

In writing our conclusion and discussion, we chose to closely adhere to Wolcott's (1990) notions. Wolcott convincingly warned a researcher that a conclusion and discussion succinctly described "what has been attempted, what has been learned, and what new questions have been raised" (p. 56). Taken this into consideration, we revisited our two research questions and used them to frame the organization of our discussion.

What Pattern of School Cultures is Practiced at *Hope University's Language Institute*?

Overall, the analysis and presentation of data revealed the school culture that was compatible with the norms reflected in Hargreaves' (1994) two patterns of teacher culture; that is, individualism and balkanization. (Originally, Hargreaves' [1994] identified four types of teacher culture including: collegiality, contrived collegiality, balkanization, and individualism.)

Our calculation of the returned questionnaires reported the teacher participants' perceptions of the Institute's norms and values. In essence, we learned about the extent to which these teacher participants either agreed or disagreed with certain practices in the Institute and the frequency to what actions had occurred within the Institute. Moreover, we as well witnessed the patterns of these teacher participants' workaday lives that involved the extent to which they

interacted with one another, shared and exchanged teaching advices and materials, and offered each other assistance, among many others.

Our interviews and observations further uncovered these teacher participants' practical patterns of their interaction with their colleagues in the Institute. Simply, there was little (or almost no) collaboration within the Institute. The Institute itself almost never promoted teacher collaboration but, in fact, reinforced marginalization between the Institute and its teachers. The teachers were largely excluded from the Institute's goal setting; they had little (or almost no) input in the Institute's organized in-service training sessions. As a consequence, the majority of the participants infrequently attended these training sessions as they hardly saw the practical benefits of these sessions.

Teacher collaboration among the teachers in the Institute was as well a dearth. These teacher participants either divided themselves and formed sub-groups or isolated themselves. In their own sub-groups, the teachers shared workload, exchanged teaching tips and teaching materials, and listened to each other's problems (and sometimes provided solutions). Hargreaves (1994) maintained that, "In balkanized cultures, these patterns mainly consist of teachers working neither in isolation, nor with most of their colleagues as a whole school, but in smaller sub-groups within the school community" (p. 213). At their worst, balkanized cultures, as Hargreaves further warned, "deplete [*teachers*] by insulating and isolating [*teachers*]. In balkanized cultures, the organizational whole is less than the sum of its parts" (p. 226). (See also Talbert, 1995 for more details.)

A couple of teacher participants preferred individuality as they wanted to preserve their professional autonomy and their power and right to exercise their decisions made relating to their own instructional practices. Though individualism satisfied these teachers with the feeling of independence and ensured them their right to both creativity and eccentricity, it also, as Hargreaves (1994) cautioned, "shuts out possible source of praise and support. Isolated teachers get little adult feedback on their value, worth and competence" (p. 167). Individualism, Hargreaves concluded, "is primarily a shortcoming, not a strength; a problem, not a possibility; something to be removed rather than something to be respected" (p. 171). (See also Hargreaves, 2001; Snow-Gerono, 2005 for more details.)

Through multiple data sources, the presentation revealed not only marginalization between the Institute and its teachers but also the teachers' practices of the two ubiquitous teacher cultures: balkanization and individualism. These two cultures clearly put this particular Language Institute on Rosenholtz' (1991) continuum of isolated settings, in which "requests and offers of assistance seem far less apt to occur. For one thing, where teachers seldom discuss substantive issues, each may perceive that they alone suffer classroom problems; that few others have similar needs. For another, given their singular orientations, teachers may share little substantive interest upon which to render mutual help" (p. 44). But in collaborative settings, Rosenholtz inserted, "[T]eachers will ask for or offer advice. Because of the inherent difficulty of the work, teachers tend to converse about management and instructional procedures and outcomes, instead of workplace complaints and non-performance-related conversation" (p. 43). Further, she concluded, collaborative norms "undergird achievement-oriented groups, they bring in new ideas, fresh ways of looking at things, and a stock of collective knowledge that is more fruitful than any one person's working alone" (p. 41). Lastly, she stressed; "[M]any minds tended to work better together than the few. Here requests for and offers of advice and assistance seemed like moral imperatives, and colleagues seldom acted without foresight and deliberate calculation" (p. 208). No doubt, Rosenholtz drew positive relationships between

teacher collaboration and their instructional practices. (See also Barth, 2006; Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009; Dooner, Mandzuk, & Clifton, 2008; Dove & Honigsfeld, 2010; Eager & Keating, 2008; Fullan, 2011; Goddard, Goddard, & Tschannen-Moran, 2007; Goulet, Krentz, & Christiansen, 2003; Grossman et al., 2001; Hargreaves, 1994; Kegan & Lahey, 2001; Little, 2003, 1990; Sergiovanni, 2002; Shulman, 1989; Sparks, 2002; Wardrip, 2009.)

So, if teacher collaboration is seen as promoting teacher improvement and professional development which could ultimately lead to school improvement, how could these teacher participants build collaborative cultures in which “[c]ollegial requests for, and offers of, advice and assistance increase the number of knowledge exchangers within schools, [and] augmenting teachers’ pedagogical options in the face of classroom decisions” (Italics added, Rosenholtz, 1991, p. 107). How could the Institute promote collaborative cultures within the Institute? And, if created, how could the Institute sustain such the cultures?

More important, these findings urged not only the Director of the participated Language Institute but also education administrators and policymakers to pay serious attention to school culture. Their understanding of school culture could “offer the basis for an expanded understanding of teacher quality and school success, one that considers several education outcomes together with data about what teachers actually think and do in the course of their work” (Rosenholtz, 1991, p. 218).

What Effects o School Cultures Have n EFL Teachers at *Hope University’s* Language Institute in Terms Of Their Instructional Practices?

Both the Institute’s marginalization of its teachers and the teachers’ practices of balkanization and individualism egged the routine/uncertain teaching culture within these teacher participants. This particular teaching culture influenced these participants’ instructional practices.

Our analyzed qualitative data (interviews, classroom observations, and written documents and artifacts) allowed us to uncover how these teachers executed their teaching. Almost all these participants did centralize their teaching on their textbooks to help prepare students for examinations. In their teaching, these teachers mainly focused on discrete grammar points and translation (for Thai EFL teachers); the activities they implemented had little (or almost no) relation with the teaching content; seatwork exercises were heavily used; interaction between a teacher and students or among students themselves was scarce; and students had no opportunities to use English for actual communication. These findings presented a picture of, Rosenholtz (1991) coined, a routine cultural setting in which teachers’ professional growth was limited. For teachers, “learning to teach apparently means arriving at a fixed destination through the vehicle of experience. Teaching skills are at one predetermined and inflexible; if teachers become familiar with textbooks and curriculum, paperwork, and other routine operating procedures, they seem to have learned their crafts” (p. 82). Worse yet, Rosenholtz criticized further, teachers themselves held their personal beliefs that “successful teaching does not entail more than a rudimentary command of routine classroom practice conjures a view of large student batch processing, where the same techniques can be applied over and over to essentially the same raw materials” (p. 82).

Our findings concurred with those of Kleinsasser (1993) and Sato and Kleinsasser (2004). Kleinsasser described the reciprocal effects between the routine/uncertain teaching culture and foreign language teachers’ teaching practices this way. He wrote;

The routine environment reveals heavy teacher reliance on controlled practice...uncertain/routine teachers emphasize language form, or usage to the exclusion of language use...teachers suspect that some students have no foreign language learning ability...students spend class time talking about the foreign language grammar in English..." (Kleinsasser, 1993, p. 383).

Sato and Kleinsasser's report of the teaching practices of the EFL teachers in one Japanese high school whose culture was identified as routine/uncertain coincided with Kleinsasser's. They asserted,

[T]he majority of the teachers continued to teach according to the lessons in the textbook, putting emphasis on grammar and translation, while avoiding communication-oriented activities. Classroom observation data helped further describe and illuminate these EFL teachers' practices. The majority of teachers in regular classes (and even in special and elective classes) confronted to an established pattern of teaching with heavy emphasis on grammar explanation and Japanese-English translations. These teachers committed more attention to classroom order [*and*] adhered to their routine practices of grammar-translation activities. (Italics added, pp. 808-809)

Importantly, our findings not only raised the awareness of the possible threats of the existence of a routine/uncertain school culture but also stressed the necessity to alleviate the culture as such. Rosenholtz (1991) suggested schools offer teachers opportunities for professional development.

Organizational resources should also attenuate teacher uncertainty by actually providing greater technical assistance. One obvious resource is teachers' opportunities to learn ... Teaching dilemmas calling for reasoned intentions, informed choices, and responsible actions are better resolved where the social organization of school facilitates those processes, and teachers having the capacity to transform less into more successful practices should therefore experience less uncertainty about their work. (p. 107)

Future Studies

Through multiple data sources, our research findings emphasize the significance of school culture and its effects on teachers' instructional practices. Nonetheless, more similar research (in the field of EFL education and other disciplines) is still needed to capture and define the complexity of teaching (Lortie, 1998). Hence, researchers are urged to venture into real classrooms particularly at a tertiary level of education to study how teachers in different learning environments define the social organization of their schools (Kane, Sandretto, & Heath, 2002). This is because each social organization is unique.

Social organizations vary enormously from school to school. This means that teachers from different settings may hold altogether different definitions of school reality. Teachers' situated activities and the interpretation that is made of them, then, allow for different but equally valid conceptions of teaching from their varied points of view. (Rosenholtz, 1991, p. 3)

More queries need to be probed. For example, to what extent are teachers (both EFL teachers and teachers from other subject disciplines) aware of the practical existence of their

school culture? To what extent do teachers recognize the reciprocal effects of cultures of teaching and their instructional practices? In what manner are teachers aware of the impacts of the routine/uncertain school culture? To what extent do teachers recognize the reciprocity of the routine/uncertain school culture and their instructional practices? How could teachers learn to inquire their own practices? How could teachers take responsibility not only for their own learning but also of their colleagues? How could teachers understand and clarify the effects of the routine/uncertain school culture? Answers to these queries could not only offer better insights into teachers' understandings of the social organization of their schools but also, at their best, contribute to better teaching and learning. These have been missing from much of education research which has been conducted outside the schools and away from teachers.

While each of these approaches – rules, authority, structures – makes a contribution to the whole, none of them *is* the whole, and all are essentially external to how schools and their inhabitants really behave. If we are to get a fuller sense of how best to support professional growth in schools, we must examine the themes and vocabulary of schools and more openness to how things really happen in schools. This is a mild way of suggesting that we not impose solutions and that we recognize that outside-looking-in is different from inside-looking-around. (Italics original, Cooper, 1988, p. 45)

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