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The Hong Kong Polytechnic University
Department of English

Critical thinking in Hong Kong secondary school English language classrooms: The case of five teachers

Mok Fung Yee

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

August, 2007

CERTIFICATE OF ORIGINALITY

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Abstract of thesis entitled: Critical thinking in Hong Kong secondary school English language classrooms: The case of five teachers

submitted by Mok Fung Yee

for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Applied Linguistics

at The Hong Kong Polytechnic University in August, 2007

Abstract:
In 1999 the critical thinking recommendations were issued by the Curriculum Development Council (CDC, 1999) to all junior secondary school English language teachers in Hong Kong. The emphases of the recommendations include the importance of thinking in English language learning and the requirement for teachers to develop students' critical thinking through the subject. With a focus on teachers and their context, the present study aims to (1) investigate through classroom observation if the recommendations are translated into the five teacher participants' classroom practices, and (2) to find out the teachers' perceptions of the recommendations and the factors that they perceive to be constraining the implementation of the recommendations through interviews.

Despite different interpretations of critical thinking and views on the teaching of critical thinking, all five teachers felt that the situational constraints and external pressure they faced made the implementation of the recommendations impossible. In the five case studies covering more than 1500 minutes of classroom teaching only two critical encounters were identified, and in both encounters students were given the time and space to think critically and exchange genuinely ideas in a supportive learning atmosphere.

The data show a major problem with the critical thinking recommendations, i.e. the teachers are required to develop students' critical thinking in a quantity-driven, product-centred and top-down context that deprives them and their students of both the time and space for critical thinking. The study, though exploratory, has important implications regarding the changes needed especially in the area of teacher education in the local educational context.

Acknowledgments and dedication

I would like to thank a number of people who have helped me with my research. On this journey I have been supported by secondary school teachers and administrators who were willing to share with me their sincere feelings and experience, not forgetting the many students whom I learnt from during classroom observations.

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Chapter I Introduction

Hong Kong has been undergoing a lot of changes since the return of its sovereignty to China in 1997. For example, the political and socio-economic structures have been changed significantly and there has been rapid advancement in the production and consumption of information. In the educational context, the 1997 guidelines for secondary schools on the use of English as the medium of instruction (EMB, 2004a), the introduction of language benchmark examinations for English and Putonghua teachers and the launching of the education reform in 2001 (EMB, 2004b) have all generated a strong reaction from the community (Hamp-Lyons et al, 1999; HKPTU, 2004). Changes continue and they call for our honest reflection on the goal of education in the 21st century and, specifically, the role critical thinking plays in education in Hong Kong (Fok, 2002).

In Hong Kong it has been reported that employers have been complaining about the inability of school and university students to think critically (The University of Hong Kong, 1999), and the deterioration of students' English language proficiency (Lin, 1997a; Lee, et al., 1998; Coniam and Falvey, 2001). It has been claimed that English language teachers are responsible for the declining language standards in the territory (EC, 1996). At the same time, school administrators and frontline teachers have been complaining about their heavy workload (HKPTU, 2004) and the work-related pressure they face (Ng, 2004). According to the Hong Kong Education Commission (2000),

> despite the huge resources put into education and the heavy workload endured by teachers, the learning effectiveness of students does not

> remain 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.
>
> (Hong Kong Education Commission, 2000, p.4)

The education system seems to be failing employers, teachers and even students (Harris, 2001). It seems that we are surrounded by the rhetoric of blame, but the data that would explain the problems have not been available.

With a focus on teachers and their contexts, the present educational study aims to:

(1) investigate if the 1999 critical thinking recommendations (CDC, 1999) are translated into the classroom practices of five English language teachers of Secondary 1 in two local secondary schools, and

(2) find out the teachers' perceptions of the 1999 critical thinking recommendations.

The study aims to report faithfully the voices of these five teachers and analyse critically both the interview and classroom observation data collected. Such a focus extends the tradition of recognizing and valuing teachers' insight with respect to teachers' professional development, and takes the voice of teachers into account in order to facilitate educational change (Bailey, 1992; Curtis, 1997; MacGilchrist et al, 1997). One of the key outcomes is to be able to offer practical recommendations related to the professional development of teachers in relation to the implementation of the critical thinking recommendations in local secondary schools.

.

Section 1.1 Background to the study

In 1999 a set of guidelines (CDC, 1999) was issued by the Curriculum Development Council (CDC) to all secondary school English language teachers in Hong Kong. Different from the syllabuses issued before, the set of guidelines reflects new perceptions of English and English language education. The new emphases of the 1999 guidelines included the importance of thinking in English language learning and the requirement for teachers to help students to develop various reasoning skills through the English language subject.

These emphases are reflected in the new Subject Target for English Language and are infused throughout the subject guidelines. For instance, according to the Curriculum Development Council, 'the Subject Target for English Language is therefore for learners to develop an ever-improving capability to use English to think and to communicate…' (CDC, 1999, p.2). Also, apart from the four language skills, that is, reading, writing, listening and speaking, the 1999 CDC guidelines suggest that secondary school English language teachers should help their students to develop different language development strategies of which thinking skills constitute an important part. For example, the thinking skills recommended to be developed by junior secondary students include:

> • Use reasoning skills (cause and consequence, draw conclusions, etc.)
> • Analyze data and situations systematically for better understanding or solving problems
> • Think creatively/innovatively
>
> (CDC, 1999, p.27)

As stated in the Subject Target, helping students to 'acquire, develop and apply knowledge' (CDC, 1999, p.2) in the 21st century is a major focus of the English curriculum. 'Five fundamental intertwining ways of learning and using knowledge' (CDC, 1999, p.3) that are closely tied to student thinking have been identified. They are 'communicating, conceptualizing, inquiring, problem-solving and reasoning' (CDC, 1999, p.3). It is recommended by the Council that teachers consider these factors when developing teaching materials, designing teaching/learning tasks, and determining principles and criteria for assessment.

As shown in the excerpts above, the latest 1999 CDC guidelines presuppose important beliefs about thinking and critical thinking in the teaching and learning of English, which implies a shift in the focus of English language teaching and learning in the Hong Kong secondary school context. Walker, Tong and Mok-Cheung (2000) also pointed out that the latest education reform has initiated a paradigm shift in the teaching methodology of English language in secondary schools. According to them, there was a 'shift from Classical Humanist, transmissive, grammar-translation methodology, to […] progressivist, task-based, communicative methodology' (p.259) over the last three decades. The latest curricular methodology that presupposes beliefs different from those in the past stresses the importance of involving students in the processes of using and applying the language for genuine communication. This methodology calls for a new interpretation of teaching, learning and knowledge in the local educational context in the new millennium.

The critical thinking recommendations were reiterated in the Basic Education Curriculum Guide: Building on Strengths (CDC, 2002) series published by the Curriculum Development Council in 2002. It states clearly in the first booklet, Overview of the Curriculum Reform – Reflecting on Strengths and Getting Ready for Action, that the priority of the Hong Kong school curriculum for 2001 – 2006 'should be placed on communication skills, critical thinking skills and creativity [of students]' (CDC, 2002, p.10). Specifically, the roles of teachers and students in student critical thinking development are elaborated under the section, English Language Education Key Learning Area.

English Language Education Key Learning Area

Our Students	Our Teachers
Secondary 1 – Secondary 3	
- develop creativity, critical thinking and cultural awareness	- make greater use of imaginative/literary texts to develop learners' creativity, critical thinking and cultural awareness

(CDC, 2002, p.22)

However, as Morris (1996) pointed out, 'the gap between the intended and implemented curriculum is a widespread phenomenon both in Hong Kong and elsewhere' (p.120).

> Most innovations in Hong Kong have been characterized by a strategy which involved the provision of low cost resources, decision making dominated by superordinate groups, and linkages which are primarily designed to communicate the nature of official policies. There is a substantial evidence to suggest that this strategy is able to create a façade of change but unlikely to have an effect on what goes on in the classroom. (Morris, 1996, p.121)

To find out if curriculum innovations, such as the critical thinking recommendations, are really implemented in schools, I agree with Morris (1996) that it is important to investigate what really goes on in our everyday ordinary classrooms.

Carless (1997), Lin (1997b) amd Hamp-Lyons et al (1999) all stated that teachers play a crucial role in bringing out educational change in language teaching in the local context. MacGilchrist et al (1997) also described teachers as 'the main agents of change' (p.15). Morris (1996) pointed out the importance of re-educating teachers and developing their skills in carrying out education innovations. He stressed that

> effective changes require the provision of resources to aid implementation and linkages which are designed to re-educate teachers and help them develop skills. Lastly, and probably most importantly, subordinate groups, especially teachers, need to be involved in the decision making process.
>
> (Morris, 1996, p.121)

However, in the case of the critical thinking recommendations, the frontline English language teachers' understanding of critical thinking, their knowledge and perceptions of the recommendations as well as their perceptions and skills of teaching students critical thinking in the English language classroom have not been explored systematically in any study and the voices of frontline teachers regarding the critical thinking recommendations are still unknown.

Section 1.2 Objectives of the study

The objectives of the present study are:

(1) to investigate if the critical thinking recommendations are translated into the classroom practice of five teacher participants from two local secondary schools. Through classroom observation the study aims to identify the teaching of critical thinking manifested in their Secondary 1 English language classrooms.

(2) to explore the perceptions of these five teachers on the critical thinking recommendations. Through interviews, the five teachers' understandings of critical thinking and their views on the critical thinking recommendations are systematically elicited.

(3) to make practical recommendations based on the findings of the study regarding the implementation of the critical thinking recommendations in the local educational context.

Section 1.3 Organization of the thesis

In this introductory chapter, the background to the study, the need for the study, the objectives that the study hopes to achieve, and the thesis outline are presented.

Chapter Two, Literature Review, begins with a brief review of the Hong Kong educational context. The chapter also examines the fundamental and important beliefs concerning the meaning of critical thinking and the teaching of critical thinking. The chapter ends with a list of working definitions of the key terms used in the thesis.

Chapter Three, The Exploratory Study, is a discovery chapter in which the aims, design, implementation, findings and conclusions of the exploratory study are presented. What was found in the exploratory study informed the focus and design of the main study significantly. The research questions, methodology and implementation of the main study are detailed in Chapter Four, The Main Study.

Chapter Five presents the case reports on the five teacher participants detailing important features of what was heard in interviews and seen in the observed lessons. Chapter Six provides descriptive information on the four significant patterns that emerged across the five cases. Chapter Seven interprets and discusses the implications of these patterns.

Conclusions and recommendations made based on the findings of the study are detailed in the last chapter, Chapter Eight. The concluding chapter begins with a discussion of the limitations of the study and some directions for future research.

I hope to take this opportunity to thank all the five teacher participants and their school administration for the tremendous trust and genuine support they had for me and the study. Despite their unbearable workloads and the Severe Acute Respiratory Symptom[1] (SARS) outbreak, the main study, which involved 5 teaching contexts, more than 65 interviews and 120 Secondary 1 students, was conducted smoothly in their schools. Their trust encouraged and allowed me to report faithfully what I heard and saw in the schools

[1] The SARS epidemic was a new and unknown disease when it broke out in Hong Kong in 2003. Many people including frontline health care workers and local residents have been killed in the outbreak. The destruction of the infectious disease in Hong Kong was huge e.g. classes were suspended, many people were under quarantine, suspected residential buildings were evacuated and travel restrictions were imposed to minimize the spread of the disease.

and analyze critically the interview and classroom data collected. In the about 1600 minutes of classroom teaching only two brief incidents of critical encounters (see Sections 5.1.2 and 5.2.2 for Ling's and John's cases) have been identified. All five teacher participants felt that the situational constraints and external pressure they faced made the implementation of the critical thinking recommendations in their English language classrooms impossible. However, based on what was found in the main study I believe that a fundamental problem with the critical thinking recommendations is that the five frontline teachers were required to develop their students' critical thinking in a product-centred, quantity driven and top down context that deprived them of both the time and space for critical thinking or the development of a critical perspective (see Section 2.3 for its working definition). I strongly believe that a greater emphasis on teacher autonomy and empowerment would be needed in teacher preparation and professional development to help teachers to become critical thinkers who would think and act critically in their profession, which, I believe, is a prerequisite for the successful implementation of the 1999 critical thinking recommendations in local language classrooms.

Chapter II Literature review

This chapter begins with a brief review of the Hong Kong context. It is followed by a review of the literature on critical thinking. The chapter ends with a list of working definitions of the key terms used in the thesis.

Section 2.1 The Hong Kong context

This brief review of the Hong Kong context consists of four sub-sections. Section 2.1.1 describes the nine-year compulsory education in Hong Kong. Section 2.1.2 outlines the education reform launched in 2001. Section 2.1.3 discusses in general the local secondary school context and Section 2.1.4 describes the teaching and learning of English in secondary schools.

2.1.1 Basic education in Hong Kong

According to the Education and Manpower Bureau[2] (EMB, 2004a), residents of Hong Kong aged between 6 and 15 are provided with nine-year free and compulsory primary and junior secondary education. Primary education lasts six years and junior secondary education three. From the 2002/2003 school year subsidized senior secondary education or training is provided to all Secondary 3 students who hope to pursue further studies (EMB, 2004a). The compulsory education aims to serve two main purposes: (1) to provide a balanced and diverse school education that meets the different needs of our students, and helps them build up knowledge, values and skills for further studies and personal growth, and (2) to enhance students' biliterate (i.e. to write English and Chinese) and trilingual abilities (i.e. to speak English, Cantonese and Putonghua) (EMB, 2004a).

[2] The Education and Manpower Bureau has been renamed as 'Education Bureau (EDB)' from July 1, 2007.

In Hong Kong primary education comprises of two key learning stages: Key Stage I for Primary 1 – Primary 3 and Key Stage II for Primary 4 – Primary 6 (EMB, 2004b). The primary education curriculum aims to develop students' knowledge in eight key learning areas: English Language, Chinese Language, Mathematics, Science, Technology, Personal, Social and Humanities Education, Arts, and Physical Education, and in the new subject, General Studies for Primary Education (EMB, 2004b). All Primary 6 students who plan to study in a public-sector secondary school have to participate in the Secondary School Places Allocation (SSPA) System (EMB, 2004c). The system entitles students to apply directly to one preferred secondary school and submit choices of schools with reference to the school net, i.e. the catchment area they belong to, for central allocation. Places are then allocated according to the 'school net[3], banding[4], parental choice of schools and random number[5] (EMB, 2004c). There are 785 primary schools in the territory in the 2003/04 school year of which 60% are whole-day schools (EMB, 2004a). However, the number of primary schools has been decreasing because of the persistent low birth rate in Hong Kong. More than a hundred primary schools have been closed during 2004-2006 and only 669 primary schools have been left in the territory in the school year 2006/2007 (EMB, 2004a).

Secondary education in Hong Kong comprises two key learning stages: Key Stage III for Secondary 1 – Secondary 3 and Key Stage IV for Secondary 4 and Secondary 5 (EMB,

[3] There are 18 school nets in Hong Kong divided according to district administrative boundaries. All the participating primary and secondary schools of the SSAP system in the district and some places of different types of secondary schools from other districts are included in each net.
[4] There are 3 allocation bands. Based on both internal assessments of students and past results of the Academic Aptitude Test of their schools, one-third of all the Primary 6 students in each net are categorized in one of the three bands, e.g. Band I students with highest academic performance.
[5] Each student is assigned a computer generated number to decide the order of allocation within the same band.

2004b). All the students completing Secondary 5 have to take the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination (HKEAA, 2004) and the public exam results will determine if students can be promoted to Secondary 6 (Cheng et al, 2004). From the 2003/2004 school year all the subjects for Key Stage III are organized under eight key learning areas. They are: English Language, Chinese Language, Mathematics, Science, Technology, Personal, Social and Humanities Education, Arts, and Physical Education (EC, 2000; EMB, 2004b). According to the new Hong Kong school curriculum (CDC, 2002), apart from developing the knowledge of students in these key learning areas, secondary education aims to develop and consolidate students' different generic skills including critical thinking skills. In response to these curriculum changes and the questions that many local educators have regarding the huge gap between policy-making and implementation (Morris, 1996; Chow, 1998; Lam, 2003; Carless, 2005), the present study aims to investigate if the critical thinking recommendations (CDC, 1999) are translated into the classroom practice of five Secondary 1 English language teachers, who are believed to be comparatively free from public exam pressure (see Sections 6.1.3).

In October 2004 the Education and Manpower Bureau began the consultation processes on the proposed new academic structure commonly known as "334", which outlined the new structure of senior education in Hong Kong, i.e. 3 years of junior secondary education, 3 years of senior secondary education and 4 years of university education (EMB, 2004d). Under the new structure, the first cohort of students, i.e. Secondary 1 students of the 2006/07 school year, would not need to take any public exams, for example, the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination when they are in

Secondary 5. Instead, they will take a public exam in Secondary 6 before receiving four-year university education (ED, 2007).

2.1.2 Education reform

An education reform was formally launched in 2001 based on the recommendations made by the Education Commission for improving the education system in Hong Kong (EMB, 2004e). 'The scope of the reform covers the curricula, the assessment mechanisms as well as the admission systems for different stages of education' (EMB, 2004e). According to the Education Commission (2000), '"students" are the focal points of the entire reform, "life-long learning" and "all round development" the spirit'(p.i). The reform aims to move from the predominantly lower order and mechanical learning for exams to developing the students' capacity, for example, skills, dispositions and values, to deal with the rapid changes in the information age. The new 'focus of the nine-year basic education is to help students achieve an all-round personal development and to attain a basic level of competence in various aspects in preparation for life-long learning' (p.57). Consultations from key stakeholders were conducted and support measures for schools and teachers were introduced to make sure that the education reform was implemented effectively (EMB, 2004e). Four reporting sessions have been held between 2002 and 2006 by the Education Commission (EC, 2007) to disseminate the evaluation of the reform. The first two progress reports have spurred even greater change despite the strong reaction of frontline teachers (Law and Walker, 2005). Some teachers are still reserved with different reform policies, such as language benchmark (HKPTU, 2007a, 2007b, 2007c), but they seem to welcome others, such as the small class teaching policy.

Curriculum reform has been put in place to ensure the goals of the education reform are achieved (EC, 2000). As the Education Commission (2000) pointed out, the curriculum reform aims to bring a new culture of teaching and learning to the school classroom, for example, 'shifting from over-emphasizing academic studies to focusing on whole-person development, from transmission of knowledge to learning to learn' (p.60) and 'from text-books to diversified learning and teaching materials' (p.61). Through different teaching and learning methods, schools are encouraged to 'help students foster attitudes and enhance generic abilities (including skills in communication, numeracy, information technology, learning, problem solving, critical thinking, innovating, collaboration and self management)' (p.60). Specifically, using IT (Information Technology) in teaching (EMB, 2004f), project-based learning (EC, 2000), task-based teaching approach (CDC, 1999), learning activities outside the classroom (EC, 2000; Ng, 2004) have all been encouraged by the education authority to improve the quality of teaching in local schools. Schools have also been advised to adopt different focuses of assessment, for example, assessment of students' abilities as well as attitudes, assessment of learning as well as assessment for learning and a greater emphasis on school-based assessment (CDC, 1999; EC, 2000).

However, a survey conducted by the Hong Kong Mood Disorders Centre, the Chinese University of Hong Kong and the Hong Kong Professional Teachers' Union in 2004 showed that 'the reforms have stressed and upset teachers and affected their teaching' (Ng, 2004). The survey found that about 20% of the respondents showed consistent symptoms of depression and 14% of the group showed some degree of anxiety disorder.

The education reform was identified as their major source of stress. The survey also showed that the average everyday working hours of a teacher was 11.8, of which about 40% were used to complete the administrative work assigned. In the report of the survey, Lee Sing, Director of the Centre, considered the situation 'ironic' saying that 'the reforms may not be effective if teachers become depressed' (http://www.thestandard.com.hk/news_detail_frame.cfm?articleid=48906&intcatid=42).

Some local scholars and school principals participating in the 1st Hong Kong School Principals' Forum on March 19th, 2004 criticized the ongoing educational reforms and the ever changing policies for generating confusion in the education sector (HKPTU, 2004). According to the Hong Kong Professional Teachers' Union,

> about a thousand secondary and primary heads had participated in the forum and some became irate when they discussed the current education policy of Hong Kong. Tempers were running high and many participants complained that teachers felt so overburdened by the ongoing education reforms and administrative work that they could not concentrate on their teaching. In a way, the effectiveness of their teaching was affected.
> (http://www.hkptu.org/ptu/director/pubdep/ptunews/470/ptunews.htm)

The Union urged government officials to take responsibility for the problems caused by the education reform stressing that 'the education reform will never be implemented successfully if the reality of the front-line is ignored' (http://www.hkptu.org/ptu/director/pubdep/ptunews/470/ptunews.htm). It is this notion of pressure and teachers' beliefs about the changes in the educational context which the present study will focus on.

2.1.3 The secondary school context

There are 501 secondary schools in Hong Kong in the school year 2003/2004 (EMB, 2004a). In terms of the medium of instruction (MOI), these schools can be classified into two groups: Chinese-medium schools (CMI) and English-medium schools (EMI). According to the medium of instruction guidelines for secondary schools issued in 1997, 'most secondary schools in Hong Kong should adopt Chinese for teaching all academic subjects, starting with their 1998/99 Secondary 1 intake and progressing each year to a higher level of secondary education' (EMB, 2004g). The Bureau (2004g) claims that first language teaching has positive effects on student learning and is preferred by most students in the territory. This medium of instruction policy allows CMI schools to switch to English-medium for some subjects at Secondary 4 and Secondary 5 only with the approval of the education authorities. But, these schools can decide on the language for the medium of instruction for Secondary 6 and 7 based on the ability and needs of students (EMB, 2004g). A series of supportive measures, such as additional English language teachers, were introduced with the launching of the new policy (EMB, 2004g).

However, as Hamp-Lyons et al (1999) pointed out the reaction of the community to the government decision that only about a hundred EMI schools can adopt English as their medium of instruction was strong. 'The reaction of parents, pupils and school staff of those schools that have been deselected for English Medium Instruction was described by the media as well as academic research papers as outrage, ferocity and disappointment' (p.65). A possible reason for the negative emotions generated toward the medium of instruction policy, according to Hamp-Lyons et al (1999), was that English was still considered an important language in the territory.

> As English is still seen as a key to international opportunities, be they educational, economic or professional, limiting the access to EMI schools will be seen by the local community as limiting the options and opportunities of their children.
>
> (Hamp-Lyons et al, 1999, p.65).

The conflicts and tensions generated because of the MOI policy compounded with the problems caused by other top down education policies, for example, the introduction of language benchmark examinations for English and Putonghua teachers (Ip, 2005) due to the concerns raised by various business and education communities over perceived falling language standards in Hong Kong (Coniam and Falvey, 2001), the launching of the new school-based management system and the implementation of information technology in classroom teaching (Chow, 1998). The trust between frontline teachers and the education authority declined rapidly over the past few years. Many teachers felt that they were under-consulted about issues of curriculum and policy (Sachs, 2000) and more than once teachers and parents have taken their frustrations, complaints and requests onto the street in protest. However, as Ip (2005) pointed out, the voice of teachers has not been listened to with care or respect.

> The voice of teachers in the community is still very weak. To overcome the many difficulties and to keep a sustainable and capable teaching profession and with dignity, we [teachers] need to amplify our voice so that our voice will be listened with care.
>
> (Ip, 2005, http://www.iptang.net/kyip07.html)

With the notion of teacher control and mistrust especially at the management level being a focus of the present study, the study aims to report faithfully the voices of the five

teacher participants regarding their knowledge and perceptions of the critical thinking recommendations (CDC, 1999).

2.1.4 Teaching and learning of English in secondary school

Fullilove (1992) referred to Hong Kong as 'an examination-mad town' (p.131) with examination-driven education systems. Specifically, English language teaching and learning in Hong Kong is described by Morris et al (1996), as cited in Cheng et al (2004), 'as the three Ts' situation: test-centered, teacher-centered, and textbook-centered' (p.149). Biggs (1995) also pointed out that the teaching and learning approaches in the Hong Kong classroom are predominantly teacher led and quantity driven encouraging students to adopt a surface approach to learning, for example, rote learning facts given by teachers or in the textbook, which could impact negatively on students' meaningful learning.

However, Lin and Luk (2005) warned that teachers are not the only ones to blame for the operations-oriented and meaning-reduced classroom practices that are commonly found in the local English classroom. They stressed that the contextual and institutional constraints that teachers face need to be considered before anyone can make a fair judgment of teachers.

> This example is not an isolated one; similar operations-oriented classroom practices are commonly found in other classrooms. However, we urge readers to withhold judgment of the teacher. The unimaginative textbook, heavy teaching load, and the lack of professional development opportunities for teachers in Hong Kong must also be considered when we try to understand the origin of operations-oriented, meaning reduced classroom practices.
>
> (Lin & Luk, 2005, p.85)

For instance, they pointed out that heavy teacher workload is one of the contributing factors to teachers' dependence on commercially produced textbooks. Many of these textbooks, which aim only to meet the syllabus requirements of the education authority, 'tend to be reduced in both language and content and to prescribe exercises and tasks that are operations oriented, often requiring the parroting of second language structural items in mechanical ways' (2005, p.84). In fact, the education authority has long been aware of the problem but it seems that so far very little has been done to solve the problem of poor quality English language textbooks on the local market (Tsui and Bunton, 2000). Learning experience in these meaning-reduced and learning-space-limited language classrooms was reported to be far from pleasant by some students. In an informal interview a student shared with Lin (1996) the helplessness he perceived regarding the importance of English in the society, and the anger and frustration he experienced regarding English language learning.

> You want to know why I don't pay attention in English lessons?
> You really want to know? Okay, here's the reason: NO INTEREST!!
> It's so boring and difficult and I can never master it. But the society
> wants you to learn English! If you're no good in English, you are no
> good at finding a job!
>
> (Lin and Luk, 2005, p.81)

In a large pool of classroom data that Lin and Luk (2005) collected from a local school situated in a low socioeconomic area they found that English language teachers create limited space or opportunities for students to engage in creative verbal play and laughter in the classroom. The verbal play usually allows students to 'coconstruct their dialogues with the teacher, while populating them with their own preferred social languages and

voices' (Lin and Luk, 2005, p.93). With their focal awareness mostly on their perceived object of learning or operational needs many teachers are not aware that their assumptions about the specific object of learning may not shared by some of their students, or that the implication of the verbal play could be of great significance. While encouraging teachers to handle the verbal play with a liberal stance, Lin and Luk (2005) suggest that teachers should raise students' awareness of the existence of different social languages and aim to create and develop heteroglossia in their classrooms.

> We propose explicitly … engaging students in a critical discussion of the existence of different social languages and the imposed hierarchy of different social languages in the society. The aim is to create a heteroglossia in the classroom and to heteroglossize English and to change English from an authoritative discourse to an internally persuasive discourse to the students, to allow them the space to make English a language of their own by populating it with their own meanings and voices.
>
> (Lin and Luk, 2005, p.95)

In a discussion on the space of learning students enjoy in local classrooms, Tsui (2004) also pointed out that teachers and students could hold different assumptions about their perceived object of learning and that 'the ability of the teacher to negotiate and widen the common ground between himself and the students is crucial to effective learning' (p.167). All the above studies point to the need of investigating further the space of leaning that students enjoy in the local English language classroom. Specifically, the present study sets out to look at the time and space for critical thinking that students enjoy in their English lessons. Are teachers creating the space students need for their critical thinking development in the English classroom? Are teachers aware of these needs in the operational-oriented and quantity driven classroom? And, most importantly, is helping

students to develop critical thinking as required by the 1999 critical thinking recommendations (CDC, 1999) a perceived object of learning for English language teachers in Hong Kong? The present study hopes to contribute to this specific area which has yet to be fully explored in the local secondary education context.

Being aware that an exam culture is impacting on the teaching and learning in local education (Andrews & Fullilove, 1994; King, 1994; Carless, 2006), the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority has made changes, for example, to the format and weighting of the Hong Kong Certificate Examinations in English[6] with the intention to improve the teaching of English in local secondary schools (Cheng et al, 2004). However, an extensive empirical research conducted by Cheng et al (2004) investigating the influence of the revised 1996 Hong Kong Certificate Examinations on English on teachers' perceptions and classroom teaching behavior showed that 'teachers' general ways of teaching, such as teachers' talk, the nature of teaching, and delivery modes, remained unchanged in relation to the examination change' (p.162). An intended effect of the change, that is, to move teaching of English 'toward a new philosophy of teaching and learning, from noninteractive, teacher dominated classrooms to more task-based teaching approaches' (p.149) did not seem to have been achieved.

Pennington and Cheung (1995) argued that the different types of contextual pressure of the local educational context, such as strong cultural and traditional orientations interact

[6] The Hong Kong Certificate Examinations in English is one of language exams of the Hong Kong Certificate Education of Examination that students completing Secondary 5 are required to take. A pass in the English exams is usually required in university admission.

and reinforce one another making some unconventional English language teachers conform to the 'local transmissional teaching norm' (Pennington et al, 1996, p.13)

> […] orientation to tradition, authority, and order which fosters a reluctance to challenge the status quo, a low tolerance for uncertainty and instability, and a cultural expectation of tight control by the teacher over class activities and students' behaviour.
>
> (Pennington and Cheung, 1995, p.19)

Biggs (1995), Morris (1996) and Firkins and Forey (2007) also pointed out that the school system and its culture as well as the broader context could impact significantly on what actually goes on in the classroom. And, very sadly, as Evans (1997) observed, the authority and control in teaching usually remained in the hands of the teachers in many local English language classrooms despite the government recommendations on adopting a student-centered communicative teaching approach in the 1980s. These research findings point to the need to understand classroom data in context, i.e. to investigate the context and system in which teaching takes place and to find out how teachers interact with the dynamic environment they are in, and to identify the contextual constraints that they perceive to impact on their teaching, which is a major focus of the present study.

Section 2.2 Critical thinking

This literature review consists of three sub-sections. Section 2.2.1 outlines the development of critical thinking research in the educational context. Section 2.2.2 discusses different definitions of critical thinking. Section 2.2.3 presents the different views on the teaching of critical thinking in the classroom.

2.2.1 Critical thinking and education

Teaching students critical thinking has been a significant discussion topic and one of the dominant research areas in the educational context in different countries. In the States the discussion of the role of critical thinking in school curriculums began in the 80's (Marzano et al, 1988). And, the importance of critical thinking in education has drawn much attention from educators in Asia, such as Singapore (National University of Singapore, 2003) and Hong Kong (EC, 2000) over the last more than ten years.

Education psychologists, such as Thomas and Smoot (1994) and Huitt (1998), have pointed out that critical thinking is a very important element of schooling in the 21st century. Huitt (1998) stressed that in the information age thinking plays a significant role in one's success in life.

> The movement to the information age has focused attention on good thinking as an important element of life success. These changing conditions require new outcomes, such as critical thinking, to be included as a focus of schooling. Old standards of simply being able to score well on a standardized test of basic skills, though still appropriate, cannot be the sole means by which we judge the academic success or failure of our students.
>
> (http://chiron.valdosta.edu/whuitt/col/cogsys/critthnk.html)

Chaffee (1985) and Paul (1995) also stated that developing students' critical thinking abilities is the core of meaningful education. Chaffee (1985) explained that meaningful education prevents students from involving in unreflective learning of information and equips them with the tools to understand carefully the world they are in.

> Meaningful education is not the unreflective learning of information. Instead, meaningful education involves developing our critical thinking abilities, which in turn give us the tools to develop our own carefully thought-out perspective on the world.
>
> (Chaffee, 1985, p.89)

In Hong Kong Fok (2002) stressed that 'as early as 1996, the Guidelines on Civic Education have made the development of critical thinking one of the fundamental aims of civic education' (p.85). In 2000 the Hong Kong Education Commission reform proposals (EC, 2000) reiterated the importance of developing students' critical thinking. Secondary school teachers in Hong Kong are now required to teach their students critical thinking skills through different key learning areas (CDC, 2002) including English language learning (CDC, 1999). Research centers as well as research teams have been set up at local universities to conduct related research in the area, for example, The Thinking Qualities Initiative at the Centre for Educational Development of the Hong Kong Baptist University (Hong Kong Baptist University, 2002). Various professional training courses were then offered by the Education and Manpower Bureau (EMB, 2004h) and different universities, such as the Hong Kong Baptist University (Hong Kong Baptist University, 2002) to prepare teachers of different key learning areas to implement the critical thinking recommendations. Although these courses and research centres might have different definitions of critical thinking and focuses, they all show one thing, i.e. the growing importance of critical thinking in the Hong Kong educational context.

In the past few years, studies on developing students' critical thinking through different learning areas have been conducted in the local secondary school context, for example, Social and Humanities Education (Leung, 2002; Chin, 2003; Kwong, 2005; Ho, 2006),

Science (Wong, 2003; Kwok, 2004) and English language (Choi, 2006). However, as Fok (2002) stated, although there is a constant call for school teachers to develop students' critical thinking in Hong Kong, the overloaded school curriculum and other teacher factors make it difficult to happen.

Owing to different reasons (Fok, 2002), some teachers believe that critical thinking cannot be taught, and some think that it does not need to be taught deliberately. Although some teachers support the idea of teaching students critical thinking, they feel that they don't have the capacity or confidence to do it. In addition, contextual constraints, such as the exam oriented culture and the great emphasis on rote learning of facts and information for exams impact negatively on students' overall development including their development of creative and critical thinking.

> Hong Kong education is characterized by its competitive nature in which examinations reign supreme. The curriculum of Hong Kong schools has always emphasized factual knowledge, which has long been detrimental to the overall educational process. It encourages rote learning and does not induce creative and critical thinking.
>
> (Fok, 2002, p.85)

Fok (2002) concluded that despite all the recommendations from the education authority 'the teaching of critical thinking has never been an important element in our school curriculum' (Fok, 2002, p.85). With little research conducted in the area especially in the local English language teaching context, Fok's study (2002) points to the need to investigate in detail the teaching of critical thinking in secondary schools and to explore

teachers' understandings and perceptions of critical thinking and the teaching of critical thinking, and the way they interact with and act in their context.

2.2.2 Definitions of critical thinking

As Fasko (2003) pointed out 'there is no consensus on a definition of critical thinking' (p.8) in psychology, education or philosophy, and indeed the definitions of critical thinking have been changing (Huitt, 1998). Benderson (1990) and Lewis and Smith (1993), as cited in Fasko (2003), considered the philosophical and psychological perspectives on thinking or the teaching of thinking 'intrinsically different' (p.6). In the field of psychology, some researchers (Chance, 1986; Scriven & Paul, 1992; Wade, 1995) have been trying to identify all the different aspects of critical thinking and the intellectual mental processes that people go through when they think critically, for example, conceptualizing, applying, analyzing and synthesizing. Other researchers focus on investigating a particular dimension of critical thinking, for example, problem solving (Ruggiero, 1988; Zechmeister and Johnson, 1992) and decision making (Zechmeister and Johnson, 1992; Ellsworth, 1994). Apart from these processes and dimensions, metacognition (Chaffee, 1985; Jones et al, 1987; Marzano et al, 1988; Paul, 1995) and disposition (Ennis, 1987; McPeck, 1990; Beyer, 1995) are two important elements that many people consider when defining critical thinking. Critical social theorists (Giroux, 1997; Freire, 2000) tend to look at critical thinking as a tool for social inquiry and reform. Freire (2000), a leading liberating educator, called for 'a praxis entailing reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it' (p.51). Scholars from the Frankfurt School aimed to expose 'the discontinuity between the ideal and the real' through 'immanent

critique, which involves questioning a view from within' (McDaniel, 2006, p.19). So, what constitutes critical thinking? Siegel's (1988) two conceptions of critical thinking, i.e. the 'pure skills' and the 'skills plus tendencies' (p.6) conceptions, might shed some light on the question.

Siegel (1988) noted that 'despite widespread recent interest in critical thinking in education, there is no clear agreement concerning the referent of the term' (p.5), but pointed out that the notion of critical thinking has to be delineated with some precision for it to impact significantly on educational thinking and practice.

> If the notion is to carry significant weight in our educational thinking and practice, it is essential that it be delineated with some precision, so that we will know what we are talking about when we talk of the desirability of critical thinking, or of educational efforts aimed at improving students' critical thinking ability.
>
> (Siegel, 1988, p.5)

Follman (1987), as cited in Fasko (2003), also pointed out the importance of having a definition of critical thinking in education, stressing that 'without a definition of critical thinking or thinking, educators and researchers would be unable to determine when "critical thinking/thinking" has been measured successfully or taught successfully' (p.7). According to Fasko (2003), several definitions of critical thinking have been developed in the education field and argued that 'perhaps a hybrid definition would facilitate a synthesis of these various perspectives' (p.8). For example, Kurfiss (1988) stated that critical thinking is 'an investigation whose purpose is to explore a situation, phenomenon, question, or problem to arrive at a hypothesis or conclusion about it that integrates all

available information and that can therefore be convincingly justified' (as cited in Fasko, 2003, p.2). Beyer (1995) considered critical thinking as the processes of 'making reasoned judgments' (p.8). In defining critical thinking at the college level, Steele (1997) defined critical thinking as skills that 'enable individuals to solve problems for which they have no ready-made procedures or solutions' (p.6). All these researchers have pointed to the need for a delineated interpretation of critical thinking as the point of reference for related research in the field of education, i.e. a working definition of critical thinking (see Section 2.3 for the working definition of critical thinking in the present study).

Among the many different definitions of critical thinking, Siegel (1988) pointed out two clear conceptions of critical thinking: the 'pure skills' (p.6) and the 'skills plus tendencies' (p.6) conceptions of critical thinking. According to Siegel, the 'pure skills' conception of critical thinking focuses 'entirely on a person's ability to assess correctly or evaluate certain sorts of statements. A person is a critical thinker, on this view, if she has the skills, abilities, or proficiencies necessary for the proper evaluation of statements' (p.6). However, as Siegel (1988) noted, this conception is incomplete because it ignores the importance of the actual utilization of these skills and abilities in a person's everyday life. The impact of this conception of critical thinking in the educational context could be less than promising if students utilize critical thinking in tests only so as to get good grades in exams but not outside the testing context. Siegel (1988) argued that critical thinking needs something more than skills.

Siegel (1988) referred to the second conception of critical thinking the 'skills plus tendencies' (p.6) conception, i.e. 'a critical thinker has both the skills or proficiencies necessary for the proper assessing of statements (and actions), and also the tendency to exercise those proficiencies in their ordinary statement- (and action-) assessing activities' (p.6). A person is a critical thinker, following this view, if she is able and ready to think critically. As Siegel (1988) noted this conception of critical thinking extends critical thinking beyond skills of assessment of statements and action. There are also significant dispositions, values and character traits that a critical thinker needs to develop.

> Critical thinking extends far beyond skills of statement assessment, and centrally includes certain dispositions, habits of mind, and (even) character traits; and the disposition to be a critical thinker-that is, the disposition to utilize appropriate criteria in the evaluation of statements and actions, and to value belief and action which is guided by reasons- is perhaps the most important "non-skills" component of critical thinking.
>
> (Siegel, 1988, p.7)

Considering critical thinking an educational ideal, Siegel (1988) pointed out critical thinking is indeed a perspective of life.

> [The second conception of critical thinking] concerns the characterization not simply of a set of cognitive skills or criteria of reasoning assessment, but more importantly of a certain sort of person. To recognize this is to recognize the depth of the concept of critical thinking, and the importance of character, values and other moral dimensions of the concept. (Siegel, 1988, p.10)

And, Siegel (1988) stressed that helping students to develop critical thinking is indeed helping them to develop a critical perspective that would move their thinking and action appropriately by reasons.

Siegel (1988) further pointed out two central components of this conceptualization of critical thinking that would be particularly important in the educational context. The first one is 'the ability to assess reasons properly. Call this the reason assessment components' (p.23). And, the second one is the 'critical attitude or critical spirit' (p.23) component of critical thinking. It is 'the willingness, desire, and disposition to base one's actions and beliefs on reasons; that is to do reason assessment and be guided by the results of such assessment' (p.23). Siegel stated that 'both components are essential to the proper conceptualization of critical thinking, possession of which is necessary for the achievement of critical thinking by a person' (1988, p.23). Other than knowledge and understanding of the context, McPeck (1990) also pointed out the close connection of these two components with reflection and questioning in his discussion of critical thinkers.

> A critical thinker […] somehow thinks for themselves; they do not simply believe everything which they may hear or read. I have argued that such people have both the disposition (or propensity) and the relevant knowledge and skills to engage in an activity with reflective skepticism. That is, not only are they prone to question things, but they have relevant knowledge and understanding to help them do so productively.
>
> (McPeak, 1990, p.27)

It is this ‘skills plus tendencies’ (Siegel, 1988, p.6) conception of critical thinking and the two important elements of critical thinking, i.e. reflection and questioning, that form the basis of the working definition of the critical perspective in the present study (see Section 2.3).

2.2.3 The teaching of critical thinking

Based on the two conceptions of critical thinking, i.e. ‘pure skills’ and ‘skills plus tendencies’ (Siegel, 1988, p.6), the teaching approaches of critical thinking can be grouped under two main categories: (1) the teaching of critical thinking refers to teaching students trainable and assessable reasoning skills and processes, and (2) teaching of critical thinking means teaching students those trainable and assessable reasoning skills as well as cultivating in them the dispositions and awareness associated with critical thinking. It shows in the literature reviewed that engaging students actively in critical thinking processes through the effective use of teacher questions, discussion and reflection in a context that supports critical thinking and values inquiry, and teachers’ practising of critical thinking skills and attitudes and explicit explanations of the significance of critical thinking could help students to develop both the critical thinking skills and critical attitudes.

Considering the teaching of critical thinking as the teaching of a set of generic reasoning skills, such as deductive and inductive reasoning, Solon (2003) conducted a controlled experimental study that aimed to investigate the impact of different treatments of critical thinking instruction on critical thinking test scores of

community college students. The findings of the study indicated that ‘different levels of treatment can lead to significantly different levels of improvement’ and that ‘the critical thinking course intervention had more impact than the infusion approach’ (Solon, 2003, p.36). In the study three groups of community college students reported to share similar educational background and critical thinking abilities received different amounts of critical thinking instruction. The first group of students was assigned to a critical thinking course in which standard logic and reasoning were focused on. In the course, a great deal of class time was spent on argument analysis and small group discussion. Students were also required to keep a reflective journal of the weekly critique they made on the items that they selected from the mass media. The second group of students attended a psychology course in which about 25 percent of class time involved critical thinking instruction and activity. Students of this group were also required to complete some critical thinking assignments. Only some of these assignments were graded according to critical thinking principles. The last group of students was a control group who received no critical thinking instruction at all in the study. Solon’s (2003) study has revealed that regarding the teaching of critical thinking as some generic reasoning skills it is important to engage students actively in different critical thinking processes, such as analysis of ideas though discussion and reflection through writing as well as making explicit to students the significance of critical thinking.

Similarly, Yuretich (2004), who considered the teaching of critical thinking as the teaching of some higher order reasoning skills, for example, analysis, synthesis and

evaluation, conducted an empirical study to investigate the extent to which active learning strategies promoted students' critical thinking in large introductory classes in an American university. Through active learning strategies, students were given the opportunities to process and evaluate information through discussion with fellow students. In concluding the study, Yuretich (2004) pointed out that giving students a critical thinking opportunity, for example, allowing them the time to pause, reflect on, analyse and discuss an issue in a context that supports and values critical thinking, is indeed the key to critical thinking education.

> Higher-order reasoning or critical thinking can be woven into a large-enrollment class, but their inclusion requires moving beyond the traditional lecture and exam mode. Active learning methods offer the best solution. When students really ponder a question, discuss it in groups, or explain their answers to others, they are more likely to use skills at the more advanced levels of Bloom's Taxonomy.
>
> (Yuretich, 2004, p.44)

In short, in terms of considering critical thinking as some generic and high order reasoning skills, both Solon's (2003) and Yuretich's (2004) studies reveal the significance of giving students the opportunity and time to think and reflect critically in critical thinking education. In addition, in terms of teaching, engaging students in various forms of reflection and in genuine exchange of ideas in group discussion in a context that supports inquiry are also two important strategies for developing students' critical thinking skills.

Considering critical thinking as both critical thinking skills and attitudes, D' Angelo (1971) supported the 'skills plus tendencies' (Siegel, 1988, p.6) conception of critical

thinking. Apart from reasoning skills, D' Angelo (1971) pointed out some essential attitudes of critical thinkers, for example, open-mindedness, intellectual curiosity, persistence and a respect for other people's viewpoints.

> [Critical thinking is] the process of evaluating statements, arguments. It involves knowledge and application of various attitudes and skills […] The attitudes that are needed to promote critical thinking include open-mindedness, objectivity, intellectual honesty, flexibility, intellectual curiosity, intellectual skepticism, being systematic, persistence, decisiveness and a respect for other viewpoints.
>
> (D' Angelo, 1971, p.59)

In terms of developing students' critical thinking skills, like Solon (2003) and Yuretich (2004) D' Angelo (1971) also stated the importance of engaging students actively in various critical thinking processes . In particular, D' Angelo (1971) suggested that teachers engage students in critical thinking through effective questioning, for example, asking students critical questions that encourage critical responses, and encouraging students to ask critical questions in class. In terms of classroom teaching, he has made some practical suggestions on the use of bulletin boards, displays and class projects in critical thinking education.

> [Teachers] put a question on the board every day that will elicit some critical responses, e.g., Should there be any regulations concerning student dress? Did the newspapers accurately report the grievances of the teachers on strike? Students can also be encouraged to place thought provoking questions on the board. Bulletin boards, displays, class projects can be used to suggest critical questions.
>
> (D' Angelo, 1971, p.55)

Apart from giving students the opportunity and time to think critically, like Yuretich (2004), D' Angelo (1971) also pointed out the importance of creating an appropriate context for student inquiry in the classroom, stressing that 'an atmosphere in which inquiry is the foundation of classroom activities would be most conducive to the development of critical thought' (1971, p.55). He asserted that a context that encourages inquiry and values critical thinking facilitates students' development of critical thinking skills and attitudes.

Elder and Paul (2003) also pointed out that developing students into active questioners is an important part of critical thinking education. They believed that it is important for learners to keep asking questions in the learning process, stressing that 'to learn well is to question well' (p.36). In terms of meaningful learning, Elder and Paul suggested a variety of questions for students to consider during their learning process. They included questions that encourage students to approach an issue from various different aspects and levels, such as inquiring into the purpose, information, interpretation, assumption and implication of an issue.

> Deep questions drive thought beneath the surface of things, forcing you to deal with complexities.
> 1. Questions of purpose force you to define tasks.
> 2. Questions of information force you to look at your sources of information as well as assess the quality of information.
> 3. Questions of interpretation force you to examine how you are organizing or giving meaning to information.
> 4. Questions of assumption force you to examine what you are taking for granted.
> 5. Questions of implication force you to follow out where your thinking is going.

> 6. Questions of point of view force you to examine your perspective and to consider other relevant viewpoints.
>
> (Elder and Paul, 2003, p.36)

On the basis of the literature reviewed, the arguments for teachers to use questioning to develop students' critical thinking are strong. However, Bourdillon and Storey (2002) warned that teacher questions have to be handled appropriately to avoid common questioning errors in the teaching context. For instance, students are given too little thinking time to respond to challenging questions. They are not given the opportunity to ask questions and to contribute to the classroom discourse. According to Bourdillon and Storey (2002) genuine communication should be targeted in class and students' ideas should be heard, respected and considered carefully. Smith (1990) also cautioned that students should be engaged in the critical thinking process based on respect rather than power or exploitation, stressing the importance of teachers in modeling and practising critical thinking and critical attitudes in critical thinking education.

> Children learn to think critically when they have the opportunities and reason to think in critical ways; when they see (or hear) other engage in critical thinking; and when they are admitted into arguments, challenges, and debates based on respect rather than power or exploitation.
>
> (Smith, 1990, p.107)

Apart from the need for students to participate actively in the critical thinking process, some educators have stressed the need for students to be aware of what they are learning and why they are learning critical thinking (Bourdillon and Storey, 2002). Mayfield (2001) also pointed out the importance of this awareness in students' critical thinking development, stressing that teachers should make it clear to students the critical thinking

processes that they are engaged in and the purposes they hope to achieve through critical thinking.

> People already know how to do many complex kinds of thinking […] All of us developed our own way of solving problems, using "street smarts" and common sense or even trial and error. Yet what we already know can be substantially strengthened by conscious attention.
> (Mayfield, 2001, p.8)

In terms of classroom teaching, Mayfield (2001) added that a possible way to raise students' awareness of critical thinking is to engage them explicitly in critical thinking opportunities and in dialogue with others so that they could reflect on their own thinking and be aware of their thinking processes through asking questions and discussion.

However, despite a constant call for adopting a student centred approach in critical thinking education (EC, 2000; Mayfield, 2001; Bourdillon and Storey, 2002), there seems to be a lack of critical thinking opportunities in local secondary classrooms. In a collaborative project (Fok, 2002) on the teaching of critical thinking in some junior classes of a secondary school in Hong Kong, Fok (2002) found that, as shown in the student comments below, students indeed welcome a student-centred teaching approach and that they long to have the opportunity to engage actively in discussion and thinking processes in class.

> "I liked the lesson. I now understand that I always mistake opinion for fact. But there are too many worksheets to do. I would enjoy the lesson more if the teacher allowed us more small group discussion". Another student also reflected the need for more student-centered activities. 'She wrote: "It would be better if the teacher teaches less and we

> discuss more. I would like to hear more what my classmates think". These showed students treasured the opportunities for more sharing.
>
> (Fok, 2002, p.89)

The comments from the consultants of the project were in line with those of the students. They pointed out that teachers, due to various reasons, have still been conducting teaching traditionally in many local classrooms. They imparted knowledge to their students and students were always deprived of the opportunity to genuinely discuss and exchange ideas in class.

> The teachers were still influenced by the traditional way of teaching, that is, they were too conscientious in imparting knowledge to students and giving the correct answers and students were not given too much room for free discussion. At times, when they disagreed with the answers given by teachers, there was not enough time for them to discuss this difference.
>
> (Fok, 2002, p.88)

Although the data support that students prefer an interactive way of learning, Fok (2002) pointed out they were seldom given the opportunities to discuss their ideas in class or voice their opinions, which impacted negatively on their school experience. For example, many of them found their lessons not stimulating or enjoyable.

> The data supports the notion that the students enjoyed an interactive way of learning. Unlike most lessons in Hong Kong secondary schools, students who participated in these lessons had the opportunity to voice their views and test their opinions. Therefore they found the lesson both stimulating and enjoyable.
>
> (Fok, 2002, p.90)

In concluding the project, Fok (2002) stressed that equipping students with some basic ideas in distinguishing fact from opinion is far from adequate for critical thinking education, i.e. the 'pure skills' conception of critical thinking (Siegel, 1988, p.6) . Instead students need to develop various critical thinking skills as well as critical attitudes so that they would evaluate critically their own opinions and ask critical questions about the world they are in.

> What is more important is to develop students' attitude as a critical thinker: that is, to evaluate their own opinions and to ask question about their beliefs and judgments. This is the most important and the most difficult part.
>
> (Fok, 2002, p.90)

To sum up, the literature reviewed above shows that teachers need to help their students to become critical thinkers, i.e. to help them to acquire both the critical thinking skills and critical attitudes to cope with the changes and challenges in the information age. In terms of classroom teaching, effective use of teacher questions, involvement of students in genuine discussion and different forms of reflection conducted based on respect could engage students in meaningful critical thinking processes. In addition, a context that supports and values inquiry and a teaching and learning atmosphere that respects others' viewpoints are also important in facilitating students' critical thinking development. Last but not least, good models of teachers practising critical thinking skills and attitudes, and explicit explanations of the importance of critical thinking to students could also help students to develop critical thinking.

Regarding language teaching, using questions to develop students' critical thinking in the teaching of reading and writing is not uncommon. Cook (1991), who considered reading primarily as a thinking process, stressed the importance of engaging students in talking about the text they read. Elder and Paul (2004), who considered critical thinking as the art of close reading, stressed that 'to learn well, one must read well' (p.37). They emphasized the importance of engaging oneself in constant questioning in the reading process. Paul (2005) stressed that 'a critical mind improves reading by reflectively thinking about what and how it reads' (p.32). Similarly, in terms of writing Elder and Paul (2006) pointed out that revision of drafts involve both cognitive and meta-cognitive thinking processes of students and thus writing could help develop students' critical thinking. Teacher questions, which constituted a major part of the classroom teaching of the two English language participating teachers in the exploratory study (see Chapter III), were later identified as the main focus for the classroom observations in the main study (see Chapter IV). A clear pattern across the five teacher participants has emerged regarding their use of questions in their English language lessons (see Section 6. 2).

In terms of promoting social justice through the teaching of reading and writing, critical educators emphasize the importance of engaging students in critical reading and writing so as to unveil the 'underlying power-laden qualities of texts' (McDaniel, 2006, p.26). Recognizing the political nature of language (Shannon, 1995; Freire, 2000; Graff, 2000) and the socializing aspects of education, critical educators call for teachers to develop students' critical literacy so that they are aware of the social functions that literacy and language are used to accomplish, can make sense of a text in such a way that they come

to reflect on their own socio-political positions, and are ready to take an active part in transforming society. In short, critical literacy aims to empower students, and 'becoming critically literate means developing a sense that literacy is for their own social action, an awareness of how people use literacy for their own ends, and a sense of agency with respect to one's own literacy' (Dozier et al., 2006, p.18).

Critical pedagogy redefines the roles of teacher and student (Freire, 2000). Instead of receiving passively information from teachers, students' ideas are challenged and their experiences are respected. They engage actively in processes of genuine discussion, reflection and questioning of the dominant culture and prevailing ideologies in a democratic environment in which their voices can emerge. To teach critical literacy, teachers must also be critically literate (Dozier et al., 2006). They must understand literacy as a tool for social action, gain an in-depth insight into the complex relations between their own experience, their immediate context and the socio historical developments of the broader context, value social justice and have deep understanding of the cultural contexts that they are in. But, as Searle (1998) pointed out, 'the development of a dialogue-based pedagogy and critical literacy is not an easy task in such a system where all is to be prescribed' (p.9) and Freire (2000) has warned that his theories should never be viewed as a set of teaching methods or techniques. Instead, people need to 'reinvent' (Graff, 2000) his theories for their own contexts. It is this notion of critical literacy that forms the basis of the working definition of the critical perspective in the present study (see Section 2.3).

Section 2.3 Working definitions of terms

The key concepts used in the present study are defined based on the findings of the exploratory study (see Chapter III) with valuable and insightful input from the literature in the field. The key concepts include: (1) critical thinking, (2) a critical perspective, (3) critical thinkers, (4) critical questions, and (5) critical encounters.

(1) Critical thinking – Critical thinking is the process of determining the authenticity, accuracy, or value of something; characterized by the ability to seek reasons and alternatives, perceive the total solution, and change one's views based on evidence. Also called "logical" thinking and "analytical" thinking (Alvino, 1990, p.50)

As shown in the definition above, the aim of critical thinking is to determine the authenticity, accuracy or value of something. The critical thinking process involves some logical analysis that values diverse perspectives and contextual knowledge. A person who thinks critically is ready to change his/her view based on the conclusion of the analysis.

(2) A critical perspective - In terms of the critical thinking recommendations, the question central to the discussion of the meaning of critical thinking seems to be the abilities and qualities that students would need to acquire to handle changes in the 21st century. Based on the literature in the area of critical thinking, different curricular literature (i.e. CDC, 1999 & 2002; QAD, 2002), and the input of the two teachers from the exploratory study, I consider a critical perspective something important to students living in the 21st century.

The word ‘critical’ here means a questioning stance, that is, people with a critical perspective are ready to question different categories in their lives including ideologies and the status quo. They look beyond the assumptions and beliefs that help construct and are constructed in the world. This perspective is like a lens with which people can look at their world in order to relate micro relations of what is happening in their contexts to ‘macro relations of social and political power’ (Pennycook, 2001, p.8).

(3) Critical thinker – Critical thinkers as defined in the present study are people who are able and ready to think critically and independently with a critical perspective. Rather than developing students’ critical thinking skills as suggested in different curricular literature, teachers of the 21st century need to help their students to develop the critical perspective to handle the rapid changes in the new century.

The following elaboration on the critical perspective further describes the characteristics of a critical thinker. There are three important elements that constitute the critical perspective. They are a questioning mind, the quality of openness, and the ability and readiness to reflect on thinking (see Table 2.1 on p.51).

As shown in Table 2.1, people with a critical perspective are ‘unwilling to accept the taken-for-granted components of our reality and the “official” accounts of how they came to be the way they are’ (Dean, 1994, p.4). They are ‘critical thinkers that are ready to doubt [and] to challenge what is held to be true’ (Smith, 1990, p.104). However, ‘this approach to the critical seeks not so much the stable ground of an alternative truth but

rather the constant questioning of all categories' (Pennycook, 2001, p.8). Instead of 'problematizing givens' (Pennycook, 2001, p.7), people adopting a critical perspective take a questioning stance that engage in 'a continual questioning of assumptions'(Brookfield, 1987, p.6). Their 'concern is not with the solution of "problem"'(Smith, 1990, p.104), but the recognition of possibilities and alternatives (Kanpol, 1998).

Table 2.1 Three important elements that constitute the critical perspective

Three important elements that constitute the critical perspective	**People with a critical perspective:**
A questioning mind: Questioning the given (Brookfield, 1987; Smith, 1990; Dean, 1994; McBurney, 1996; Pennycook, 2001)	are ready to inquire into dominant assumptions, taken-for-granted common sense notions, established values, inherited systems and 'naturalized' beliefs. They are ready to ask questions to deepen their understanding of different categories in life.
Openness: Valuing diversities and being aware of contextual factors (Ennis, 1987; Paul, 1995)	are ready to value diversities. They welcome and respect diverse opinions. They are ready to look at an issue, a phenomenon, a problem etc, from different perspectives and to consider the contextual factors concerning the issue/phenomenon/problem discussed.
Reflection: Reflecting on thinking (Chaffee, 1985; Jones et al, 1987; Paul, 1995)	are ready and are able to reflect on their own as well as others' thinking.

People with a critical perspective genuinely value diversities (see Table 2.1). They welcome opinions that are different from theirs and are ready to look at an issue, a phenomenon or a problem from different angles in order to deepen their understanding. They are ready to look beyond different categories in life and they are aware of the context in which the categories are found and constrained. This critical perspective is far more than an enquiring mind and attitude, but a way of life.

People with this perspective are able to extend their constant questioning to their own thinking. They are ready to reflect on their own thinking, beliefs and assumptions as well as those of others. This readiness implies a limit of knowing (Spivak, 1993) and a quest for engaging oneself in the inquiring processes. As Pennycook (2001) pointed out this perspective should not be viewed as a new orthodoxy with prescribed models or procedures.

> [It] is not concerned with producing itself as a new orthodoxy, with prescribing models and procedures for doing applied linguistics. Rather, it is concerned with raising a host of new and difficult questions about knowledge, politics, and ethics.
>
> (Pennycook, 2001, p.8)

The way people perceive themselves and the role they play in the society determine, to a very large extent, how they respond to the world around them. I support Smith's (1990) belief that the critical perspective reflects the way we perceive our world.

> […] readiness to think critically, the circumstances in which we are prepared to think critically, and the very manner in which we will

> think critically, all depend on the stories we believe. The critical perspective "reflects the way we perceive the world".
>
> (Smith, 1990, p.104)

For instance, for people considering themselves as an object only in the society, they might never dream of changing the world. If they do not realize that they do know something, they will always be waiting for others to fill them in (Freire, 2000). If they are not aware that they are actually involved in one way or the other in the meaning making or negotiating processes in the context they are in, they would never embark 'on a quest for new meanings and practices' (Popkewitz, 1981, pp.14-15 as cited in Kincheloe, 1991, p.1).

It is thus important for people to think about who they are and where they are in relation to their context and the world. For people with a critical perspective as defined in this study, it is the ontological vocation of man proposed by Freire that lies at the heart of their understandings of themselves, social relations and the world. They are thinkers as well as doers in the sense that they are ready to respond to and act on the world according to their opinions (Russell, 1943). People with this critical perspective believe that:

> a man's ontological vocation is to be a Subject who acts upon … his world, and in doing so moves toward ever new possibilities of fuller and richer life individually and collectively.
>
> (http://www.perfectfit.org/CT/freire1.html)

All these characteristics of critical thinkers have important implications in critical thinking education in the local education context.

(4) Critical questions – Critical questions, as defined in the present study, engage students in the critical thinking process and thus facilitate students' development of the critical perspective. Some characteristics of critical questions that have been identified in the exploratory study are shown in Table 2.2 below.

Table 2.2 Some characteristics of critical questions

1. Critical questions encourage critical thinking, for example, they encourage students to look at an issue from different perspectives, to consider the contextual factors concerning the issue, to gather and analyze information, and to form and justify their own opinions.

2. A critical question is open-ended in the sense that there can be several possible answers to a critical question, and whether the answer is 'correct/acceptable' (convincing) depends on the justification given.

3. A critical question needs a compatible teaching context to achieve its purposes. For instance, whether the teaching context, such as the physical environment and learning atmosphere facilitates and values thinking and communication between the teacher and students, and whether students are encouraged to express their ideas in the teaching/learning context.

4. The answers to a critical question differ depending on the extent to which students elaborate their answers, and the teacher feedback to the answers given. Thus, the way the teacher handles critical questions, the series of questions asked before and after a critical question as well as the context in which the critical question is asked have to be considered in the analysis of critical questions.

5. The possible answers of a critical question should not be shown to students before it is asked. If not, the question asked is considered only recall questions.

(5) Critical encounters – Critical encounters, as defined in the present study, are opportunities created (1) for students to think critically and purposefully in a teaching and learning context that supports and values critical thinking, and (2) to cultivate important

qualities of the critical perspective in students. Some sample situations of critical encounters were developed based on the input of the exploratory study (see Chapter III). The present study focuses primarily on the first two types of critical encounters as shown in Table 2.3 below.

Table 2.3 Sample situations of critical encounters

A Questioning Mind	
(1) The teacher asks students a critical question and gives them the time and space to think about the question and express their views → S →	The teacher shows genuine interest in student answers e.g. responding (positively) to the content of student answers.
(2) The teacher encourages students to ask (critical) questions e.g. by genuinely giving them the time and space to do so → S →	The teacher shows genuine interest in student (critical) questions e.g. responding (positively) to the student questions.
Openness	
(3) *The teacher helps students to look at e.g. an issue, from various angles through questions and discussion → S → *Suggestion: The teacher first demonstrates to or tells the class the importance of considering an issue from different perspectives and its contextual factors	The teacher shows respect and genuine interest in different opinions including views different from his/hers.
Reflection	
(4) **The teacher engages students in reflection in class e.g. through reflective journal writing → S → **Suggestion: The teacher first reflects aloud in front of the class e.g. how he/she came to a decision, and talks about the importance of reflection	The teacher shows genuine interest in student reflection e.g. responding to the content of their reflection.

Key:- S meaning student participation

These working definitions of key terms provide as a point of reference in this particular research context. In the following chapter I will move on to discuss the exploratory study.

Chapter III The exploratory study

This chapter discusses the context of inquiry motivating the present study and the aims, design, implementation and findings of the exploratory study. The exploratory study, which acted as the foundation of the present study, informed the research focus, design and methodology of the main study (see Chapter IV). This chapter consists of five sections. Section 3.1 details the context of inquiry, i.e. the questions and philosophical beliefs that guided the exploratory study. Section 3.2 outlines the study's aims and design, and explains how the research design enabled me to investigate two participating teachers' opinions and behaviour regarding the 1999 critical thinking recommendations. Section 3.3 describes in detail how I gained access into the two schools and built rapport and understanding with the teachers during the study. Section 3.4 presents the findings of the exploratory study in terms of the teachers' understanding of critical thinking, their knowledge and perception of the critical thinking recommendations, and their perceived evidence of the teaching of critical thinking in their lessons. Section 3.5 details how the research questions for the main study were formulated and how the main study's strategy of inquiry unfolded as the research questions emerged.

Section 3.1 The context of inquiry

I agree completely with McDaniel (2006) that 'true research involves curiosity; we have a question and we want to find out more. We do this all the time in our real lives…although in scholarly settings, we are expected to meet specific standards and use systematic methods' (p.18). The exploratory study began with some questions that I had regarding the underlying assumptions of the critical thinking recommendations (CDC,

1999). In this section I will discuss these questions and the philosophical beliefs that guided the exploratory study.

Although the 1999 critical thinking recommendations (CDC, 1999) which emphasize the importance of critical thinking to students and the requirement for teachers to develop students' critical thinking through the English language subject, have been reiterated in different government documents, significant issues regarding the underlying aims and assumptions of the recommendations (see Table 3.1 on pp.60-61), such as the meaning of critical thinking and how the teaching of critical thinking can be put into practice, have not been addressed in the curricular literature.

For instance, as illustrated in Table 3.1, the education authority stresses that students of this century need critical thinking to deal with changes and challenges (EC, 2000) but the meaning of critical thinking has not been elaborated in any of the related government documents. As discussed in Section 2.2.2, the fact that there is 'no consensus on a definition of critical thinking' (Fasko, 2003, p.8) could pose some problems to teachers especially when they try to implement the recommendations, for example, how does the education authority understand critical thinking (see Table 3.1)? And, very importantly, how do school teachers including the two teachers participating in the exploratory study understand it (see Table 3.1)? It seems that the differences in the understanding of critical thinking need to be pointed out in the curricular literature to make sure that stakeholders of the local educational context are well aware of the differences and they are ready to exchange their ideas in discussion.

In terms of the teaching of critical thinking, as discussed in Section 2.2.3, critical thinking is more than a set of skills. It is, in fact, a perspective, i.e. a way of life (see Section 2.3 for the working definition of the critical perspective). To ensure that teachers are ready and willing to implement the critical thinking recommendations, it would be helpful to find out if the perspective is in line with the beliefs of frontline teachers, for example, based on their understanding of critical thinking, do the participating teachers in the exploratory study support the idea of teaching students critical thinking through the English language subject)? However, this issue has not been addressed in any of the related curricular literature. Other questions regarding the requirement of teaching of critical thinking have been raised and listed in Table 3.1 below. All in all, the five questions below, which aim to investigate both the teachers' opinions and behavior regarding the critical thinking recommendations, guided the exploratory study.

The meaning of critical thinking

1. How do the participating teachers in the exploratory study understand critical thinking? (Teacher opinion)

The teaching of critical thinking

2. Based on their understanding of critical thinking, do they support the idea of teaching students critical thinking through the English language subject as required by the education authority? (Teacher opinion)

3. If yes, are they aware of the different ways that can be used to develop students' critical thinking in the English language classroom? (Teacher opinion)

4. What are the examples that the teachers perceive to be manifestation of the teaching of critical thinking? (Teacher opinion)

5. In terms of actual teaching practice, have the teachers been developing their students' critical thinking in the English classroom? (Teacher opinion as well as behaviour)

Table 3.1 Research questions pursued in the exploratory study

Underlying aims and assumptions of the critical thinking recommendations	**Questions/issues that have not been addressed or elaborated in the government documents**	**Question(s) investigated in the exploratory study**
- Students in the 21st century need critical thinking in order to deal with change and challenges (EC, 2000). - The priority of the Hong Kong school curriculum for 2001 – 2006 should be placed on communication skills, critical thinking skills and creativity of students. (CDC, 2002).	<u>The meaning of critical thinking:</u> a. What is critical thinking? b. What are critical thinking skills?	1. How do the participating teachers understand critical thinking?
- Critical thinking skills can be taught through different subjects/Key Learning Areas (KLAs) in the Hong Kong school curriculum (CDC, 2002). - Language subjects, for example, English Language, provide a	<u>The teaching of critical thinking:</u> a. How can critical thinking be taught? b. Specifically, how can critical thinking be taught through the English language subject?	2. Based on their understanding of critical thinking, do the teachers support the idea of teaching students critical thinking through the English language subject? 3. If yes, are they aware of

unique context for students to develop critical thinking (CDC, 1999 & 2002).		the different ways that can be used to develop students' critical thinking in the English language classroom?
- Secondary school life is usually monotonous, students are not given comprehensive learning experiences with little room to think, explore and create (EC, 2000).	Evidence of teaching of critical thinking in the classroom	4. What are the examples that the teachers perceive to be manifestation of the teaching of critical thinking? 5. In terms of actual teaching practice, have the teachers been developing their students' critical thinking in the English classroom?

Regarding the underlying assumptions guiding the study many researchers (Hammersley, 1992; Cohen and Manion, 1994; Lynch, 1996; Scott and Usher, 1996; Guba and Lincoln, 1998) have pointed out the importance of discussing the philosophical assumptions of a study. In terms of knowledge I agree with Usher (1996) that 'knowledge is concerned not with generalizations, prediction and control but with interpretation, meaning and illumination' (p.18). I value the knowledge and experience of every frontline teacher who participated in the present study. Through the research I was determined to understand his/her perceived reality and to bring out his/her voice regarding the implementation of the critical thinking recommendations, which, to some extent, could explain why I took predominantly the role of an observer and tried, wherever possible, to remain impartial throughout the data collection. The quotation below best describes how I perceive the data and findings of the study.

> The data used for this study cannot be viewed as 'truth', 'hard' or 'objective', terms used in the positivist/ empiricist model; the data in this research are seen as representing only a partial story of the social context… Varying interpretations influence the data collected throughout this study. The data in this research cannot be taken as 'indisputable evidence'; rather, they aim to 'persuade' and 'illustrate' certain human behaviors which were caught and dissected through the lens of the researcher.
>
> (Forey, 2002, p.95)

This research, though exploratory, did allow me a valuable window on the classroom that has not been seen by many. As a researcher a significant goal of the present study is to share with the readers of my thesis through detailed description (Creswell, 1998) what I heard and saw in the participating teachers' contexts. Hopefully, illumination would be resulted as they engage themselves in critical thinking processes with what is presented and come up with their own critical conclusion of the study.

Regarding research paradigms, I am aware of the similarities and differences of the underlying assumptions between quantitative and qualitative research paradigms. In terms of similarities, Becker (1986), as cited in Denzin and Lincoln (2003), stated that both qualitative and quantitative researchers 'think they know something about society worth telling to others, and they use variety of forms, media and means to communicate their ideas and findings' (p.14). In terms of differences, qualitative researchers often focus on interpretive social science and are sensitive to social and historical contexts. Their research usually does not follow a linear path but it examines in detail social life that occurs naturally. Quantitative researchers, however, focus primarily on measuring variables and testing hypotheses with precision and objectivity (Neuman, 2003).

I agree with Onwuegbuzie (2002) that both quantitative and qualitative approaches possess their own strengths and weaknesses, and that researchers should make the most use of the approaches in order to understand more fully educational and social phenomena. Nueman (2003) also pointed out that 'qualitative and quantitative research differs in many ways, but they complement each other, as well' (p.139). I support his view that many data collecting methods are not inherently quantitative or qualitative, or mutually exclusive, and that appropriate methods should be adopted to investigate what is researched. As I focus primarily on the interpretation of the reality of the frontline teachers in the present study, the positivist model emphasizing determinacy and objectivity is obviously inappropriate, which could explain why predominantly qualitative data were collected in both the exploratory and main studies, and why I considered the participating teachers' trust in me and the study so important to the credibility of the data collected (see Section 7.1). As the researcher I am more concerned about the 'issues of the richness, texture, and feelings of raw data' (Neuman, 2003, p.137) in the present study because I believe that useful insights into the local educational context could be developed out of the data.

Section 3.2 Aims and design of the study

The exploratory and main studies were designed based on the assumption that 'teachers must think critically themselves in everyday life and in the subjects they teach and teachers must experience having their own thinking similarly cultivated' (California Commission on Teacher Credentialing, 1997, p.94) in order to help their students to develop critical thinking. Specifically, the exploratory study had four aims:

(1) to gain access to and build rapport with the teachers in the participating schools under study,

(2) to investigate secondary school English language teachers' knowledge and perceptions of the 1999 critical thinking recommendations (CDC, 1999) and the teaching of critical thinking in the classroom,

(3) to formulate focused research questions for the main study as the context revealed, and

(4) to decide on the main study's strategy of inquiry as the research questions emerged.

A significant aim of the exploratory study was to explore research possibilities in local secondary schools, for example, getting approval to conduct the research in a secondary school, to observe English language lessons and to have discussion with teachers regarding the critical thinking recommendations. Secondary schools were chosen because Secondary 1-3 students are the target group of the critical thinking recommendations. The design of the exploratory study was comparatively flexible and it allowed plenty of room for negotiations with teachers and schools, and changes to be made as the context unfolded. For example, a classroom observation scheme was developed and piloted when the need for a scheme to conduct more focused classroom observation on the teaching of critical thinking became clear in the exploratory study (see Section 4.2.3).

In order to secure fast access to local secondary schools, three junior secondary English language teachers who had shown great appreciation and commitment to the educational research I did with them before were identified and approached for the study (see Section

3.3.1). They were explained the purpose of the study and possible use of data before they were invited to participate and give their written consent. As in the main study pseudonyms were used to protect the teachers' and their schools' privacy (see Section 4.3.1). The exploratory study as well as the participating teachers and schools in it thus formed the basis of the main study and informed its design and methodology in many important ways (see Chapter IV).

The data collection of the exploratory study included classroom observations, a debriefing after each classroom observation, monthly training sessions, interviews and the participating teachers' reflective journals based on the classes videotaped and the training sessions attended. The study was designed primarily to create for the English language teachers of Secondary 1 the time and opportunities for reflection, critical thinking and a genuine exchange of ideas in a supportive and open atmosphere. The teachers of Secondary 1 were chosen because it is believed that they suffer from less pressure from public examinations. In order to investigate the teachers' opinion and teaching behaviour regarding the critical thinking recommendations, discussing with the teachers the recommendations and observing their lessons seemed inevitable. Thus, through mainly interviews and classroom observations the answers to the five guided questions were explored. In addition, the design of the exploratory study aimed to provide the teachers with the opportunities for different forms of reflection, such as written reflection through journal writing on one's teaching and reflection through discussion with fellow colleagues and the researcher in monthly training sessions.

Teacher reflective journals, as well as recordings of the observed lessons, training sessions and interviews, my research journals and the field notes I took during the study were all important data in the exploratory study. During the four-month data collection about ten Secondary 1 English language lessons of each participating teacher were scheduled to be observed to investigate the role critical thinking played in their teaching. The classroom observations provided me with wonderful opportunities to get to know how English language teaching is conducted in local secondary schools. Debriefing interviews were conducted after each classroom observation in which the participating teachers were invited to reflect on their teaching and to talk about the teaching of critical thinking that they perceived manifested in the lessons. During the data collection, the participating teachers were also invited to some monthly training sessions and individual interviews in which their knowledge and perceptions of the critical thinking recommendations were explored. The teachers were encouraged to reflect on their experience through journal writing after each classroom observation and training session.

Section 3.3 Implementation of the study

The implementation of the exploratory study consisted of two main phases: establishment and research. The important events that took place in the establishment phase are outlined in Figure 3.1 on p.68.

3.3.1 The establishment phase

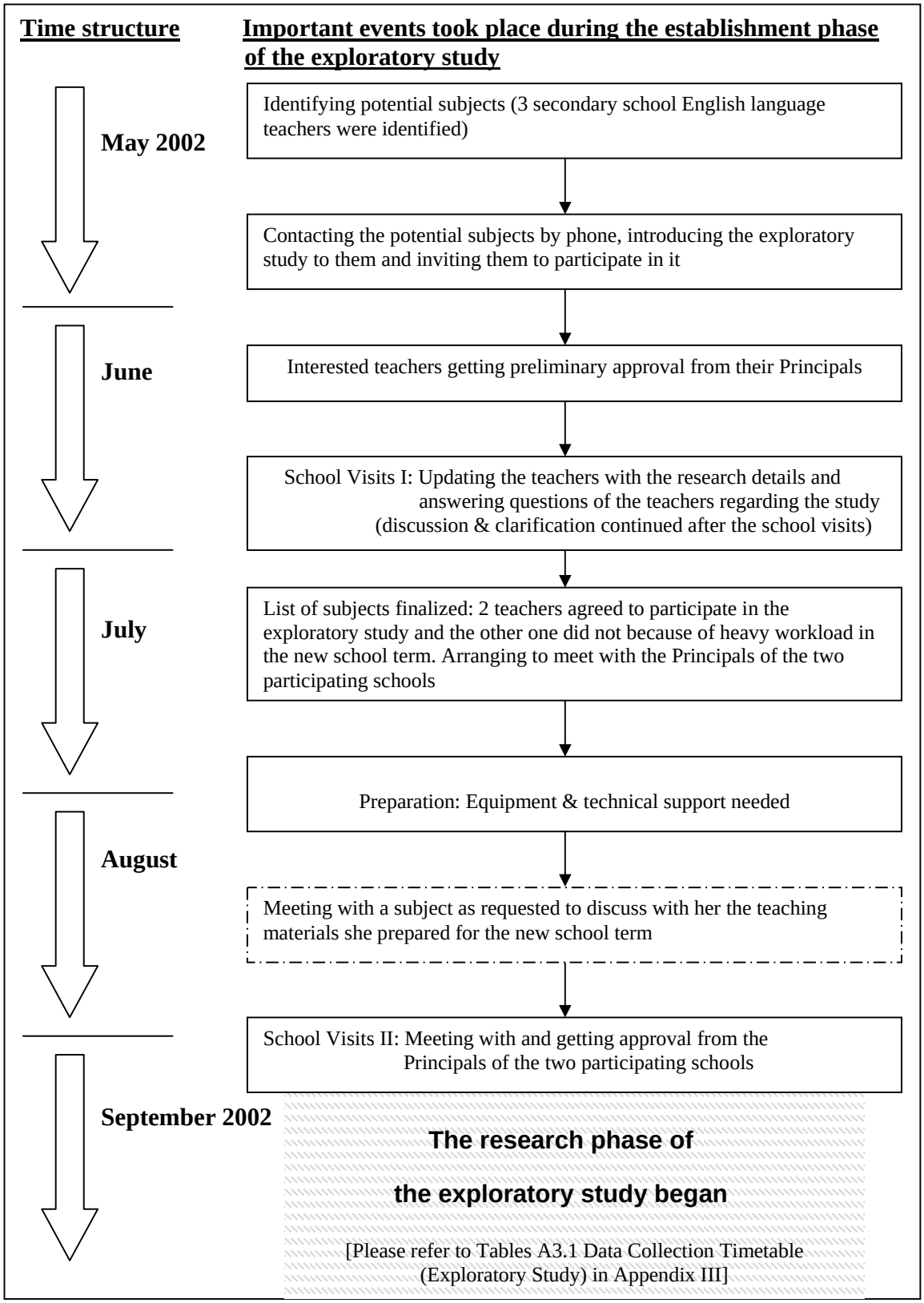
As illustrated in Figure 3.1, the establishment phase of the exploratory study took about five months, i.e. May – September 2002. The process was more difficult than expected and full of negotiations. I always had to liaise with the administration of the participating schools and teachers regarding the data collection of the study. Genuine interest in the

study was a key criterion for selecting participating teachers and schools. The purpose of this phase is best captured in the quotation below.

> […] it is important to develop early contacts in the organization/industry/ community/area in which you are interested to find out what research may be possible within the constraints of access, time, mobility, and money available for 'fieldwork', and to undertake methodological, theoretical and linguistic preparations accordingly.
>
> (Cook & Crang, 1995, p.13)

In May 2002, as shown in Figure 3.1 on p.68, I started contacting some secondary school English language teachers who had shown high commitment in various educational research projects that they had participated in before. Three target teachers, Mei Mei, Lai Lai and Ching Ching from three different schools using Chinese as the medium of instruction (CMI) were identified. I phoned all three of them and introduced to them briefly the exploratory study. School visits were then arranged if the teachers showed interests in the study. The aims of the school visit were made clear to each teacher prior to the visit, i.e. explaining to the teachers the objectives and research design of the exploratory study and answering their questions regarding the study. Interested teachers were also advised to seek preliminary approval before our meeting from their Principals in order to confirm their participation in the study. The initial feedback from the three teachers contacted was positive and visits to their schools were soon made.

Figure 3.1 The exploratory study: Establishment phase (May – Sept 2002)



In June 2002, I visited the three teachers. In the exchanges that I had with the teachers either on the phone or during the visits the teachers raised questions or made suggestions regarding the study (see Figure 3.1 on p.68). They expressed concerns and views about different issues. For example, both Mei Mei and Lai Lai hoped to have other colleagues in their schools to participate in the exploratory study. Although, due to various reasons, such as limited human resources, not all of the suggestions that the teachers made were accepted, the questions and concerns raised were seriously considered. They were discussed in an open and supportive atmosphere. The discussion and clarification went on for about a month. Mei Mei and Lai Lai finally decided to participate in the exploratory study but Ching Ching decided not to participate due to the anticipated unbearable workload in the new term. However, the decision of Mei Mei and Lai Lai could not be finalized until their teaching duties for the new academic year, i.e. 2002/03, were released in July. At the beginning of July 2002 the teaching duties of Mei Mei and Lai Lai were formally released. Mei Mei was allocated a Secondary 1 class and would be co-teaching with the new NET (Native English Teacher) in some English lessons. Lai Lai would be teaching a regular class and a remedial class in the new school year and she decided to base the exploratory study on her remedial class. They were pleased with the school arrangements and excited about the study.

As shown in Figure 3.1 on p.68 the establishment phase ended in September 2002 with two individual meetings with the Principals of the two participating schools, i.e. School A (Mei Mei) and School B (Lai Lai). Arranging the meetings took months, and I was told that the Principals were too busy to meet with me at the end of the school term. As

requested by the Principal of School B, invitation letters were brought to the schools, and the purpose and design of the exploratory study were explained in the meetings. To ensure a high level of transparency the two participating teachers, i.e. Mei Mei and Lai Lai, were invited to the meetings. The two meetings proved to be successful. Permission to conduct the exploratory study in both schools and different forms of support, such as workstations and library access, were given by the Principals.

3.3.2 The research phase

From September to November 2002 twenty Mei Mei's and Lai Lai's English lessons (ten each) were scheduled to be observed (see Appendix III, Table A3.1 Data Collection Timetable [Exploratory Study]). Most of the lessons observed were audio and/or video recorded and a classroom observation scheme was developed and piloted during the period (see Section 4.2.3). A debriefing interview was conducted after each classroom observation to capture the teacher's feelings of the observed lesson, to explore with her the reasons behind her teaching decisions and the evidence of critical thinking that she perceived to have manifested in the lesson. The teachers were encouraged to further reflect on their teaching based on the recordings of the lessons through reflective journal writing at home, and these journals were collected during the monthly training sessions. They were also encouraged to express their opinions regarding their teaching contexts and the school and broader systems on various occasions.

During the research phase of the study Mei Mei and Lai Lai were invited to attend three monthly training sessions to discuss their views on the critical thinking recommendations

(see Appendix III, Table A3.1 Data Collection Timetable [Exploratory Study]), for example, their understanding of critical thinking, their support for teaching students critical thinking and strategies to develop students' critical thinking through the English language subject. With the input from the training sessions, they were encouraged to implement the teaching of critical thinking in their Secondary 1 English language classrooms. After each session they were asked to record further reflections in their reflective journals. The commitment and investment of the two teachers in the journal keeping aspect of the study varied and so it was not always possible to collect their journals according to the agreed timetable.

In November 2002, special arrangements were made to accommodate the requests of Lai Lai, for example, cancellation of some of the classroom observations scheduled. In spite of the changes, the investment of Lai Lai in the study was not promising. For instance, she sometimes missed the agreed timeline for giving me her reflective journals and could not spare the time for debriefing interviews. By the middle of November her investments in the exploratory study were so low that the research procedure could not be carried out as planned (see Appendix III, Table A3.1 Data Collection Timetable [Exploratory Study]). The lack of reliable and good quality recording equipment provided by my university department, such as cassette recorders and video cameras, made the situation worse and thus data collection for both teachers had to stop in late November. In December 2002, individual interviews with the two teachers were conducted to collect their feedback on the exploratory study.

Section 3.4 Findings of the study

The five questions pursued in the exploratory study aimed to investigate both Mei Mei's and Lai Lai's knowledge and perceptions of the 1999 critical thinking recommendations and their teaching practices regarding the teaching of critical thinking in their English language classrooms. Below is a recap of the questions:

The meaning of critical thinking

1. How do the participating teachers in the exploratory study understand critical thinking?

The teaching of critical thinking

2. Based on their understanding of critical thinking, do they support the idea of teaching students critical thinking through the English language subject as required by the education authority?

3. If yes, are they aware of the different ways that can be used to develop students' critical thinking in the English language classroom?

4. What are the examples that the teachers perceive to be manifestation of the teaching of critical thinking?

5. In terms of actual teaching practice, have the teachers been developing their students' critical thinking in the English classroom?

To answer the questions about the teachers' opinions, i.e. questions 1-4, all Mei Mei's and Lai Lai's reflective journals, the notes they took in the training sessions, and the recordings of interviews and training sessions were studied and coded (see Appendix II Data Matrix for examples and explanations of the coding system) very carefully to identify their understanding of critical thinking and views on the teaching of critical thinking. To answer the question on teacher behavior, i.e. question 5, the recordings of the observed lessons and the two teachers' reflections on their teaching were carefully reviewed to identify the teaching of critical thinking manifested in the lessons. The two sub-sections below, Sections 3.4.1 and 3.4.2, detail and discuss the findings of the exploratory study.

3.4.1 Teacher opinions

Although both Mei Mei and Lai Lai supported the idea of teaching students critical thinking through the English language subject, their understanding of critical thinking and the strategies that they believed would help students to develop critical thinking varied and overlapped in some way, i.e. both similarities and differences were found in their opinions.

This sub-section consists of three parts: 'Understanding of critical thinking' reports Mei Mei's and Lai Lai's understanding of critical thinking, 'Support for the teaching of critical thinking' discusses their support for the teaching of critical thinking, and 'Teaching of critical thinking' presents their views on the teaching of critical thinking through the English language subject.

The understanding of critical thinking - Mei Mei (School A) and Lai Lai (School B) were invited to talk about their understanding of critical thinking on two occasions, i.e. a training session and their last individual interviews (see Appendix III, Table A3.1 Data Collection Timetable [Exploratory Study]). In the second training session both teachers were reluctant to talk about how they understood critical thinking but the notes they took on critical thinking while reading and discussing the CDC guidelines (CDC, 1999) could reflect, to some extent, how they understood the term at that time. As shown in Quote 1 Mei Mei seemed to believe that critical thinking was associated with some kind of evaluation and assessment. Below is what was found in her notes:

Quote 1

Appreciating critically Critical Listening Evaluating Judging whether something is appropriate based on some (universal) standards *[SAPMeiTS2FN]

*Please refer to Appendix II Data Matrix for examples and explanations of the coding system. For instance, (1) SA: School A, (2) P: the exploratory study, (3) Mei: Mei Mei, (4) TS2: the second training session, and (5) FN: written notes. In short, [SAPMeiTS2FN] means the notes taken by Mei Mei of School A during the second training session in the exploratory study.

According to Lai Lai, as shown in Quote 2 below, thinking and reasoning skills, the readiness to ask 'why' questions and the ability to look at an issue from different perspectives were all tied to critical thinking.

Quote 2

Develop thinking skills - Critical thinking:- the ability to reason, ask ‘why’ different perspectives [SBPLaiTS2FN]

Mei Mei and Lai Lai were invited to talk about their understanding of critical thinking again in the last individual interviews and both of them were confident in voicing their opinions this time. Mei Mei considered looking at an issue from different perspectives an important element of critical thinking. She stressed the importance of showing students that in many cases there could be more than one answer to a question. The understanding of Lai Lai was quite consistent with the notes she took previously (see Quote 2 above). She believed that critical thinking involved some reasoning and analysis. She stressed that critical thinking was not to accept what one was told blindly. She considered the readiness to reflect and the power to analyze elements of critical thinking. She added that critical thinking was closely tied to one’s confidence, awareness and values. According to her, critical thinkers dared to possess an opinion different from that of the majority. They would analyze an issue from different perspectives before passing judgment.

The support for the teaching of critical thinking - Mei Mei (School A) and Lai Lai (School B) seemed to see the importance of critical thinking in education and support the teaching of critical thinking even before the exploratory study, which helps to explain why they decided to participate in it. They both took the initiative in raising the issue of the importance of critical thinking in their very first reflective journals on the research topic. For instance, as shown in Quote 3 below, Mei Mei believed that without critical

thinking students would not be able to think for themselves or to solve new problems. Below is what she wrote in her reflective journal:

Quote 3

I think critical thinking is important for students. If students just take teachers' answers as the only correct ones, they cannot think for themselves. There will not be any creation. They may be able to solve the problems that their ancestors have met, but they will surely be at lost when facing new problems. So, students should be given chances to develop critical thinking. [SAPMeiB1TJ]

Similarly, Lai Lai, as shown in Quote 4 below, believed that critical thinking was important in education as well as language learning. However, the connection between the two was not elaborated on in the journal. Below is an excerpt of her first reflective journal:

Quote 4

When I heard about the topic of the research, I really felt very interested in it as I believe that helping students develop their critical thinking is a very important process in education and language learning. [SBPLaiB1TJ]

The teaching of critical thinking - Mei Mei (School A) and Lai Lai (School B) were invited to express their opinions on how to teach students critical thinking through the English language subject on two occasions during the exploratory study: the second training session and their final individual interviews (see Appendix III, Table A3.1 Data Collection Timetable [Exploratory Study]). In the second training session, Mei Mei seemed to have some clear ideas of how critical thinking could be taught in the English language classroom. She believed that the teaching of critical thinking could be done

through the teaching of writing, questioning and group discussion. She became very excited during the discussion. She explained that she had not realized that she actually knew a bit about how to teach her students critical thinking before the session and felt that it was not difficult to do. She talked about her experience in her reflective journal after the session.

> Jane asked us what we considered as critical thinking. Through the discussion, I realized that we actually knew a bit about it and it was not so difficult to implement it in our lesson. [SAPMeiTS2TJ]

Apart from the training sessions, the teaching of critical thinking was a common topic in Mei Mei's reflective journals. Her desire to learn more about the topic and her doubts about it were revealed in different journals throughout the exploratory study. For instance, in her first reflective journal Mei Mei expressed her interests in learning about different strategies to develop students' critical thinking in class. Also, her doubt about the effectiveness of her teaching of critical thinking was shown in her journal after Classroom Observation VI. Below is an excerpt of it:

> I am not sure if critical thinking is involved in this kind of [controlled] exercise. But I think they have to read the given information and look for the features that match the rules that they have learnt and then apply the appropriate rule. Maybe some analyses have taken place, but I am not sure whether this amounts to critical thinking.
> [SAPMeiCO6TJ]

The exploratory study has shown that although Mei Mei supported the teaching of critical thinking and that she had some ideas of how it could be done through the teaching of English language, she did not seem to be confident with her teaching of critical thinking in the classroom. Lai Lai did not seem to be confident even when she talked about her

views on the teaching of critical thinking in the second training session. She talked very briefly about the topic saying that it could be implemented through the teaching of reading.

Mei Mei and Lai Lai were invited to talk about possible ways to teach students critical thinking through the English language subject again in the individual interviews towards the end of the exploratory study. Reiterating what she said in the second training session, Mei Mei believed that critical thinking could be taught through the teaching of reading and writing, and through teaching strategies, such as questioning and group discussion. This time Lai Lai expressed with confidence that she considered a belief in critical thinking a prerequisite for developing it. She explained that people, such as students, would be willing to invest time and effort in thinking if they believe that thinking is important to them. She admitted that she was still thinking about the topic and searching for ways to teach critical thinking in class though she was not sure if critical thinking should be taught explicitly and systematically in school. She added that the exploratory study had not in any way taught her to teach critical thinking and she did not know how it could be done even after the study.

The exploratory study has shown some significant changes in both teachers. For instance, as discussed above their understanding of critical thinking became more sophisticated with the study. Also, they became more ready and confident in expressing their views, for example, about the teaching of critical thinking, towards the end of the study. Both Mei Mei and Lai Lai were passive and reluctant to voice their opinions at the beginning of the

study and seemed to consider me as an ‘expert’ to listen to and learn from. It took a great deal of time and effort, for example, by providing them with the time for thinking, the opportunity to express their opinions and positive feedback, and showing them my determination to understand their context from their perspective, to open up a space for a genuine exchange of ideas and to help them appreciate that an important aim of the study was to listen to their voices regarding the critical thinking recommendations. These findings informed the design of the main study especially in preparing the teachers for the target interview in which the teachers’ perceptions of the critical thinking recommendations were elicited (see Section 4.2.4).

3.4.2 Teacher behavior

Despite their support for the teaching of critical thinking, the classroom data show that Mei Mei’s and Lai Lai’s teaching was mostly fragmented and lower order in nature. Only two episodes of teaching of critical thinking were identified among all the lessons observed.

Teaching episode I

The first teaching episode shows that Mei Mei, of School A, created for her students an opportunity for critical thinking in the lesson, i.e. they were encouraged to justify their selection of school clubs to be introduced to the NET (Native English Teacher). As revealed in the teaching episode, Mei Mei’s positive feedback on the students’ content and the time she allowed her students to think and express their opinions facilitated critical thinking and contributed to the genuine exchange of ideas in the lesson.

In a reading/pre-writing activity Mei Mei used some ‘why’ questions to invite her students to develop their criteria for choosing three school clubs to be introduced to the school NET. During the discussion the students were encouraged through positive feedback to express and justify their opinions. Different ideas were elicited and considered seriously in an open and supportive atmosphere. Mei Mei talked about this activity which she considered important in her reflective journal after the lesson.

At the end of the lesson, I gave a worksheet to the students and asked them to find out all the clubs in our school. Then, I discussed with them the criteria they would use to choose the 3 clubs. They gave me sensible suggestions. I thought they gave me the criteria for choosing a club for themselves, so I told them in Chinese what I wanted and I also told them they gave very good suggestions and those could be criteria for choosing the 3 clubs to introduce to the NET.

*[SAPMeiCO5TJ]

*Please refer to Appendix II Data Matrix for examples and explanations of the coding system. For instance, (1) SA: School A, (2) P: the exploratory study, (3) Mei: Mei Mei, (4) CO5: the fifth classroom observation, and (5) TJ: reflective journal. In short, [SAPMeiCO5 TJ] means the reflective journal written by Mei Mei of School A after the fifth classroom observation in the exploratory study.

Teaching episode II

The second teaching episode shows that Lai Lai, of School B, created some critical thinking opportunities for her students that encouraged them to express and justify their views on different features of shopping malls. Like Mei Mei, Lai Lai also provided her students with the time for thinking and different student opinions were encouraged and discussed in an open and supportive learning atmosphere.

In a reading activity Lai Lai invited her students to express their views on different features of a shopping mall. Her questions followed a similar pattern, i.e. a question or two to focus students' attention on a particular feature of a shopping mall followed by some questions to elicit, from them, their views on the feature (see questions [1a] – [1c] below).

(1a) What is it? [a picture showing a particular feature e.g. a musical fountain]
(1b) Do you think it is important for a shopping mall to have e.g. a musical fountain?
(1c) Why?

[SBPLaiCO7AR]

Two other similar sets of questions were identified in the lesson when Lai Lai tried to elicit from her students the reasons why they believed being close to public transport (see questions [2a] – [2d] below) and play areas (see questions [3a] – [3c] below) were important to the planners of shopping malls. Below are the questions she asked her students:

(2a) How do you come to school?
(2b) Can you give me some examples of public transport?
(2c) Do you think it is important for a shopping mall to be close to public transport?

(2d) Why?

(3a) Do you think a play area is important?
(3b) Why?
(3c) Why not? [SBPLaiCO7AR]

As revealed in the observed lesson, although Lai Lai was eager to listen to the views of her students, due to various reasons, the students seemed to be reluctant to express their opinions. Their answers to the questions like 'Do you think it's important…?' were mostly short and unelaborated. Instead of ending the communication there, Lai Lai used questions like 'Why?' and 'Why not?' to encourage her students to explain their answers. In the lesson Lai Lai told the students explicitly the importance of thinking stressing that what she wanted them to do was to think.

You must always give me reasons, not just yes or no. I want you to think.

[SBPLaiCO7AR]

The second teaching episode, in fact, took place before a classroom visit to Lai Lai's class by a Quality Assurance Inspector (QAD, 2002) from the education authority. According to Lai Lai, the lesson was designed to prepare the students for the classroom observation. She was anxious about the visit and told me that from what she had heard from teachers at other schools it was important to help students to develop critical thinking to get positive comments from the inspectors, which could explain why, unlike the rest of the observed lessons, thinking seemed to be the focus of the lesson.

As revealed in the classroom observations of the exploratory study Mei Mei's and Lai Lai's teaching sometimes boiled down to memorization and mechanical application of grammar rules. Students were mainly encouraged to learn different sentence patterns, grammar rules and vocabulary in the lessons and they were seldom given the opportunity to really use the language to express themselves or communicate with others.

Section 3.5 Discussion and conclusion of the exploratory study

The exploratory study reveals that both Mei Mei and Lai Lai did not seem to be committed to implementing the critical thinking recommendations in their classrooms. Mei Mei stressed in the last individual interview that many changes had to be made to the present school context, for example, exam system and culture before the critical thinking recommendations could really be implemented in the classroom. Although she understood the importance of teaching students critical thinking and showed a commitment to the study, her teaching was found to be examination driven and the situation got even worse before the school term test. The worksheets she prepared for her students before the test contained only controlled and mechanical practice. When asked why the worksheets were designed that way, Mei Mei admitted that the worksheets were designed according to the term test, and that helping students to obtain good academic results was important in the school. Mei Mei seemed to be aware of the problem of her teaching and talked about the problem in her reflective journal after the sixth Classroom Observation.

However, even if they [her students] can do the exercises correctly, they may not have learnt the structures. I think they have not learnt the structure until they can use the

structure correctly in speaking and writing. But this kind of controlled exercise is the first step to help them manage the structures. If the students are given more chances to write and speak, they may be able to get hold of the structures easily.

[SAPMeiCO6TJ]

Similarly, Lai Lai believed that the fact that critical thinking could not be measured easily made the implementation of the critical thinking recommendations difficult in the local educational context. She explained that only things that were believed to be observable and measurable, such as exam results, were valued by the education authority and school administrators in the context. She felt that there was a mismatch between the goal of the critical thinking recommendations and the overall goal of education in the local context because critical thinking was hard to quantify, and was not tested in exams, or valued in the school. She added that although the professional development provided in the study was useful, she admitted that it was difficult for her to spare the time for different forms of reflection under the present school and education systems. She considered neither the critical thinking recommendations nor the professional development she got from the exploratory study compatible to the school and the broader educational contexts. She was also disappointed because her expectations of the exploratory study were not met, i.e. she was not taught, meaning “told explicitly”, how to teach critical thinking in the study.

To sum up, both Mei Mei and Lai Lai felt that their teaching was so constrained by the school and the broader educational contexts that the teaching of critical thinking was difficult. This mismatch between curriculum goals and the contextual reality is captured well in the quotation below:

> …while these aims [of the Secondary English Syllabi] have largely been compatible with the economic and political context of the time, they have not necessarily been compatible with school environmental factors as teacher competence, teacher attitudes, student culture, class size, and examination requirements. While it is intuitively good that subject curriculum aims are compatible with a society's politico-economic environment, it may be problematic if broader social values…have disproportionate influence on what happens in the classrooms.
>
> (Walker, 2000, p.251)

In short, the exploratory study has shown the importance of interpreting teacher perceptions and teaching practices in context, and the need to understand frontline teachers' perceived reality. The findings of the study have pointed to the need to explore the contextual factors that teachers perceive to be facilitating or constraining the teaching of critical thinking in their Secondary 1 English language classrooms, which became an important research question of the main study (see Section 4.1).

The exploratory study also informed the main study as outlined in Chapter IV in many other ways. For example, the data collected in the exploratory study especially the classroom data contributed to the operationalization of important concepts like critical thinking, critical questions and encounters in the main study (see Section 2.3 for working definitions of key terms). The experience I gained from the exploratory study and its findings informed the research design of the main study and the development of different research instruments (see Section 4.2). The exploratory study also helped me to gain the trust of the participating teachers and schools. Both Mei Mei and Lai Lai saw the

importance of the main study. They volunteered to participate and helped to recruit other English language Secondary 1 teachers. The administration of the two schools also supported the implementation of the main study, which later proved to be crucial for the successful implementation of the present study despite the SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Symptoms) outbreak. Although, to some extent, the exploratory study could not be carried out as it was planned, its objectives were achieved and the experience gained was valuable. In the following chapter, I move on to discuss the main study.

Chapter IV The main study

As an educational study the aims of the main study were twofold. In terms of teacher behaviour, a significant aim of the study was to investigate the manifestation of the teaching of critical thinking in the participating teachers' Secondary 1 English language classrooms. In terms of teacher perceptions, the main study aimed to investigate the teachers' understanding of critical thinking, their knowledge of the critical thinking recommendations, their perceptions of the teaching of critical thinking through the English language subject, and the factors that they perceived to be facilitating or constraining the teaching of critical thinking in their Secondary 1 English language classrooms.

This chapter consists of four sections. Section 4.1 details the six research questions pursued in the main study. Section 4.2 discusses the data collection design of the study including the choice of participating schools and teachers, and the use of case study approach, interviews and classroom observation for data collection. Section 4.3 describes in detail the main study's establishment and data collection phases as well as the significant teacher changes manifested in the study. Section 4.4 outlines how the classroom and interview data were analyzed and reported.

Section 4.1 Research questions

The main study's research questions were primarily built on those of the exploratory study, i.e. Questions 1-5 below, with a new focus (see Section 3.5) on the factors that the participating teachers perceived to be facilitating or constraining their teaching of critical thinking as outlined in Question 6. As revealed in the exploratory study the contexts of

Mei Mei of School A and Lai Lai of School B had a significant impact on their teaching. Although they both understood the importance of critical thinking, both supported albeit to different extents the teaching of critical thinking, and had some idea of how to develop students' critical thinking through the English language subject (see Section 3.4.1), they were not committed to implementing the critical thinking recommendations in their classrooms (see Section 3.4.2). They both felt that contextual constraints made the implementation of the recommendations impossible (see Section 3.5). For example, critical thinking was not included in the school curriculum or tested in exams and it did not seem to be valued in the school or society. The exploratory study has pointed to the need to understand how teachers perceive their context, and to investigate the possible impact of the perceived reality on their teaching. Below are the research questions that the main study aimed to pursue:

Teacher behavior

Evidence of teaching of critical thinking in the classroom

1. What role does critical thinking play in the English language classrooms of the participating teachers in the main study, i.e. in terms of actual teaching practice, have the teachers been developing their students' critical thinking in the English classroom?

Teacher Perceptions

The meaning of critical thinking

2. How do the participating teachers understand critical thinking?

The teaching of critical thinking

3. Based on their understanding of critical thinking, do the teachers support the idea of teaching students critical thinking through the English language subject as required by the 1999 critical thinking recommendations (CDC, 1999)?

4. If yes, are they aware of the different ways that can be used to develop students' critical thinking in the English language classroom?

5. What are the examples that the teachers perceive to be manifestation of the teaching of critical thinking?

6. Are there any factors that they perceive to be facilitating/constraining the implementation of the 1999 critical thinking recommendations (CDC, 1999) in their Secondary 1 English language curriculum?

The five key concepts (see Section 2.3): (1) critical thinking, (2) critical perspective, (3) critical thinker, (4) critical question, and (5) critical encounter used in the present study are defined based on the findings of the exploratory study with insightful input from the literature in the area and related documents from the local education authority. The first three concepts provide an important point of reference to the research questions of the main study on teacher perceptions, i.e. Questions 2 & 3. The working definitions of critical questions and encounters, which were developed based on Mei Mei's and Lai Lai's teaching contexts, provide a point of reference to the research questions on teacher behaviour as well as perceptions, i.e. Questions 1, 4 & 5. These two concepts, which guided the classroom observations conducted in the main study, enabled me to capture in detail the teaching of critical thinking manifested in the observed lessons.

Section 4.2 Methodology

This section consists of four sub sections. Section 4.2.1 details the choice of participating schools and teachers. Section 4.2.2 explains why the case study research approach was adopted. Sections 4.2.3 and 4.2.4 present how and why classroom observations and interviews were conducted in the main study.

4.2.1 Choice of participating schools and teachers

Choice of participating schools - The exploratory study successfully helped me to gain access to Schools A and B, and thus to enlist the support of the schools' administration for the implementation of the main study (see Section 4.3.1). Schools A and B were selected as the data collection sites after the exploratory study for two reasons. Firstly, they are part of the majority CMI schools (see Section 2.1.3) in Hong Kong. They were chosen as ordinary schools that mainly provide education to the working class students in their areas, i.e. an old public housing estate in an urban area (School A) and a new town in a suburban area (School B). Secondly, the support of the school, such as that of the school Principals, was also an important criterion in the selection of data collection sites. Like many secondary schools in Hong Kong, both Schools A and B are subsidized schools run by religious bodies. The banding of the two schools was reported to be between 1 and 2 (see Section 2.1.1). In School B there were about 40 students in each English language class and in School A about 20 students.

Choice of participating teachers –In terms of the selection of cases, the main study aimed to recruit all Secondary 1 English language teachers in Schools A and B as the participants of the main study. Secondary 1 English language teachers were selected

again for two reasons. Firstly, they fell within the target group of the 1999 critical thinking recommendations, i.e. Secondary 1-3 (CDC, 1999). Secondly, it is believed that as these teachers were comparatively free from the pressure of the public exams in Secondary 5 (see Section 6.1), they would be more likely to participate in the study. Interests in, support of and commitment to the study were all important criteria in recruiting teachers for the main study.

All the five teachers, i.e. Mei Mei (from the exploratory study) and Fun of School A, and Lai Lai (from the exploratory study), John and Ling of School B, volunteered to participate in the main study (see Table 4.1 on p.93 for their brief profiles). As in the exploratory study (see Section 3.2), I explained the purpose of the study, the use of the data and possible ways of disseminating the research findings before they were invited to participate (see Section 4.3.1). Written consent (see Appendix I) was formally obtained from the five teachers as well as their Principals for the research data and findings to be analyzed and disseminated. Pseudonyms have been used throughout the main and exploratory studies to protect the privacy of the teachers and schools.

The new participating teachers were not told the critical thinking focus of the main study until the last post classroom observation interview (see Section 4.2.4), i.e. the target interview in which their perceptions of the 1999 critical thinking recommendations (CDC, 1999) were systematically elicited. I believed that their knowledge of the research focus would have some impact on the findings of the study. However, the evidence shown in the main study reveals that Mei Mei's and Lai Lai's knowledge of the research focus did

not seem to have any impact on their classroom teaching. In line with what was found in the exploratory study both of them reiterated that their contextual constraints and external pressure were so overwhelming that the teaching of critical thinking was impossible. Both Mei Mei and Lai Lai and their school Principals were explained my concerns before the main study and agreed to not to disclose the research focus, i.e. critical thinking, to the new participating teachers.

As shown in Table 4.1 on p.93, among the five participating teachers of the main study, four of them are female. John, the native English teacher (NET) of School B, is the only male teacher in the study. All of the teachers, except Ling of School B, are subject-trained English language teachers with more than ten years of experience in teaching the subject. Only Fun of School A was a half time teacher at the time of the present study. Unlike the other four teachers, she taught no more than 30 lessons in a six-day cycle and did not have to be responsible for organizing any extra curricular activities for students. Lai Lai of School B was the Panel Chair of English responsible for the junior English curriculum.

Table 4.1 A brief profile of the five participating teachers of the main study

Name	School	Gender	Teaching experience	Major teaching subject	Teaching load & extra-curricular activities
Mei Mei (from exploratory study)	School A	Female	> 10 years (both junior and senior forms)	English	> 30 lessons in a six-day cycle responsible for different extra curricular activities
Fun	School A	Female	> 10 years (mostly senior forms)	English	< 30 lessons in a six-day cycle (half time teacher) Not responsible for any extra curricular activities
Lai Lai (from exploratory study)	School B	Female	> 10 years (both junior and senior forms)	English	< 30 lessons in a six-day cycle responsible for different extra curricular activities Panel Chair of English (junior forms)
John Native English Teacher (NET)	School B	Male	> 20 years (overseas) & 2 years (in HK, teaching mainly oral English)	English	> 30 lessons in a six-day cycle responsible for different extra curricular activities e.g. English Corner & School Radio (English)
Ling	School B	Female	> 10 years (both junior and senior forms)	English (non-subject-trained)	> 30 lessons in a six-day cycle responsible for different extra curricular activities

4.2.2 Case study research

The findings of the exploratory study revealed that the main study needed to focus on exploring teacher behavior and perceptions in context (see Section 3.5). With a primary focus on the authentic situation of what really happens in the classroom on a day-to-day basis and the participants' interaction with their dynamic environment, a case study

approach was selected for the main study to capture what was happening in the reality of the five participating teachers. As Cohen et al (2000) pointed out case studies provide

> a unique example of real people in real situations… they observe effects in real contexts, recognizing that context is a powerful determinant of both causes and effects […] Further, contexts are unique and dynamic, hence case studies investigate and report the complex dynamic and unfolding interactions of events, human relationships and other factors in a unique instance.
>
> (Cohen et al, 2000, p.181)

I agree with Cohen et al (2000) and Nisber and Watt (1984) that case studies are 'strong in reality. They can catch unique features that may otherwise be lost in larger scale data [and] these unique features might hold the key to understanding the situation' (Nisber and Watt 1984, as cited in Cohen et al 2000, p.184). Although the results of case studies may not be generalizable, 'they provide insights into other, similar situations and cases, thereby assisting interpretation of other similar cases' (p.184). The case study approach fitted well the intended data collection and participant interaction that were my goals.

With no intention to manipulate teacher behavior in the classroom, the main study aimed to investigate if there was any teaching of critical thinking in the five teachers' ordinary everyday English language classrooms and the reasons behind, which is in line with the underlying aim and assumption of a case study approach. Hitchcock and Hughes (1995), as cited in Cohen et al (2000), stated that the 'case studies approach is particularly valuable when the researcher has little control over events' (pp.181-182). Yin (1989) also pointed out that '[a] case study [approach] is preferred in examining contemporary events, but when the relevant behaviors cannot be manipulated' (p.19).

The case study approach also allowed me to have a prolonged engagement with the teacher participants and account in detail what I saw in the context as well as the subtle changes in the relationship between the teachers and researcher. A primary aim of engaging in the site for as long as I could negotiate for was to build rapport and trust with the teachers so that they would feel comfortable sharing with me their opinions about their environments and the critical thinking recommendations (CDC, 1999). I completely agree with Creswell and Miller (2000) that

> being in the field over time solidifies evidence because researchers can check out the data and their hunches and compare interview data with observational data. It is not a process that is systematically established, but constructivists recognize that the longer they stay in the field, the more the pluralistic perspectives will be heard from participants and the better the understanding of the context of participant views.
>
> (Creswell and Miller, 2000, p.128)

Creswell and Miller (2000) considered the thick and rich description of the setting, participants and themes in a qualitative study as an important procedure for establishing credibility (see Section 7.1). I support their belief that a thick description is to create

> verisimilitude, statements that produce for the readers the feeling that they have experienced, or could experience, the events being described in a study […] With this vivid detail, the researchers help the readers understand that the account is credible.
>
> (Creswell and Miller, 2000, pp.128-129)

An important purpose that I hope to achieve through the detailed description of the five case reports (see Chapter V) is that 'the rich description also enables readers to make

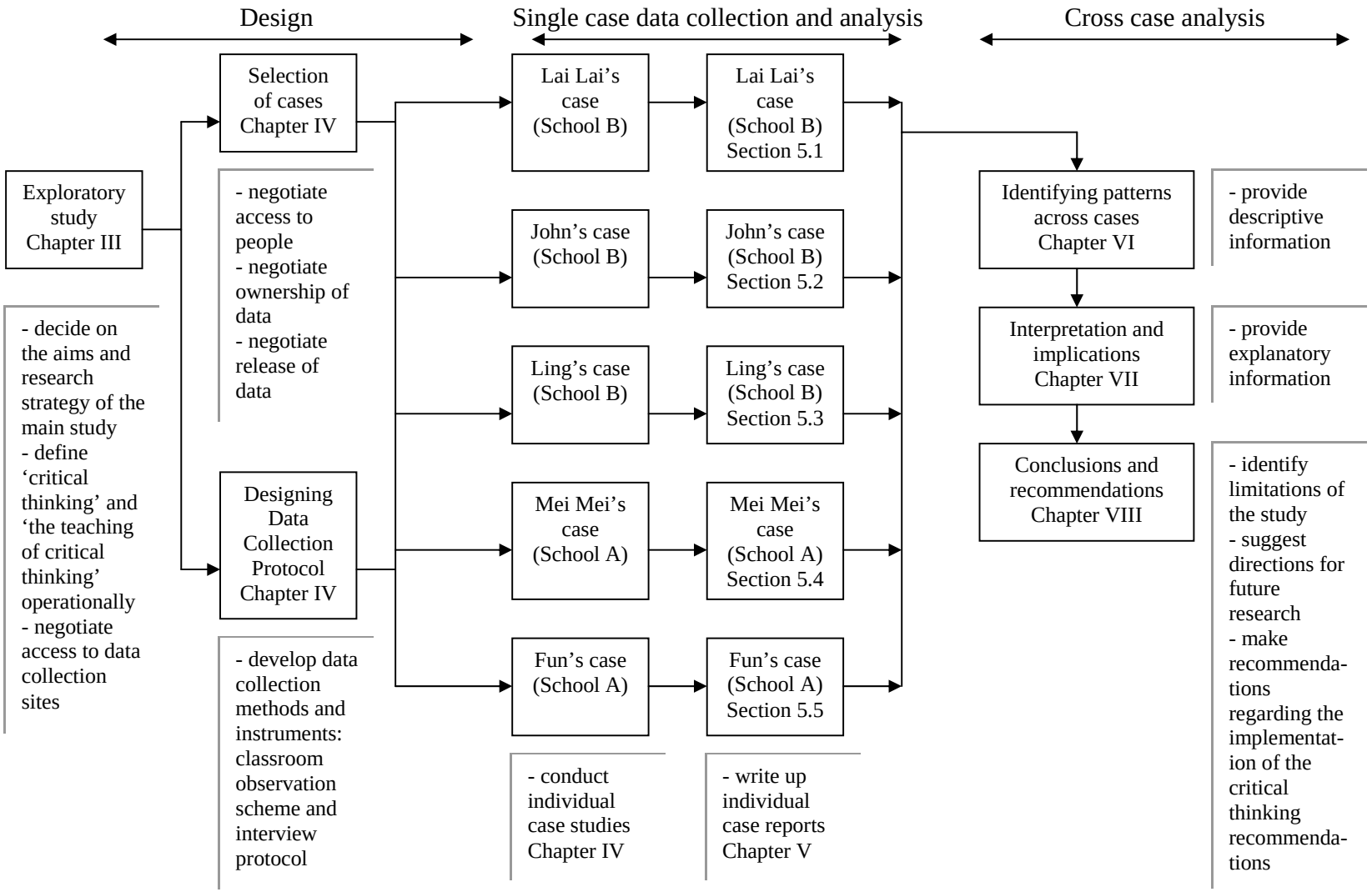
decisions about the applicability of the findings to other settings and similar contexts' (Creswell and Milner, 2000, p.129).

Last but not least, according to Adelman et al (1980), as adapted in Cohen et al (2000), 'cases studies are "a step to action". They begin in a world of action and contribute to it. Their insights may be directly interpreted and put to use; for staff or individual self-development […] and in educational policy making' (p.184). The case study approach fits also the goals of the present study because a significant objective of the main study was to make practical recommendations for different stakeholders of the local educational context, specifically for policy makers, based on the findings of the study (see Section 8.4).

The exploratory study (see Figure 4.1 on p.98), which informed the main study's design and focus in many different ways, formed the basis of the main study. The first two stages suggested by Nisbet and Watt (1984) in doing case study research best describe what happened in the exploratory study, i.e 'because case studies catch the dynamics of unfolding situations it is advisable to commence with a very wide field of focus, an open phase, without selectivity or prejudgement' (Cohen et al, 2000, p.189). With only the underlying assumptions of critical thinking in the curricular literature (i.e. CDC, 1999; EC, 2000; CDC, 2002) as guiding questions (see Section 3.1), the exploratory study began. 'Thereafter progressive focusing enables a narrower field of focus to be established, identifying key foci for subsequent study and data collection' (Cohen et al, 2000, p.189) in the main study.

As outlined in Figure 4.1 on p.98 a single case of data collection as well as analysis was then conducted with each of the five participating teachers in the main study. A comprehensive case report detailing the important features of the lessons observed and interviews conducted during data collection was prepared for each participating teacher and is presented in Chapter V. Cross case analysis was also conducted and the patterns that emerged across the five cases were identified and listed in Chapter VI. The interpretations and implications of the findings of the main study are discussed in Chapter VII. Chapter VIII details the conclusions of the whole study and recommendations regarding the implementation of the critical thinking recommendations in local English language classrooms. With the determination to understand the five participating teachers' situations in two ordinary CMI schools as well as to portray their contexts through detailed description, I decided that the case study approach would be ideal for the main study.

Figure 4.1 The case study approach of the main study



4.2.3 Classroom observation

The data collection of the main study consisted of two important components: (1) classroom observations to investigate the behaviour of the five participating teachers and (2) interviews to investigate the participating teachers' perceptions regarding the 1999 critical thinking recommendations (CDC, 1999).

A series of classroom observations were conducted in the main study to investigate the teaching of critical thinking manifested in the five participating teachers' Secondary 1 English language classrooms. As Nunan (1989) stated, 'there is no substitute for direct observation as a way of finding out about language classrooms. Certainly, if we want to enrich our understanding of language learning and teaching, we need to spend time looking in classrooms' (p.76). The exploratory study supported Nunan's belief. As revealed in the exploratory study, for different reasons, the two teachers' perceptions of what they did in their lessons did not fully reflect the complexity of what was really happening in the classrooms. The exploratory study revealed that there could be a marked difference between teacher action and their perceptions of their own teaching practices, such as they considered seeing students through a grammar topic grammar teaching. To find out the extent to which critical thinking was taught in the five participating teachers' English language lessons, classroom observation had to be conducted in the main study because the data concerned could not possibly be obtained from other sources, for example, the debriefing interviews. The teachers expressed concern that teaching critical thinking was difficult due to the reasons given above (see Section 3.5) and the classroom

observation provides evidence of those difficulties and perhaps a starting point to try to improve the current context.

The classroom observation scheme - The exploratory study informed significantly the classroom observations conducted in the main study. Firstly, it helped to operationalize important concepts, such as critical questions and critical encounters for the main study. Secondly, the classroom observation scheme developed (see Figure 4.2 Classroom observation scheme on p.103) and piloted in the exploratory study (see Section 3.3.2) ensured that the investigation of teacher classroom behaviour was conducted in a systematic and focused manner in the main study. Below is a brief recap of the working definitions of critical thinking, critical encounters and critical questions used in the present study (see Section 2.3):

Critical thinking

Critical thinking is the process of determining the authenticity, accuracy, or value of something; characterized by the ability to seek reasons and alternatives, perceive the total solution, and change one's views based on evidence. Also called "logical" thinking and "analytical" thinking (Alvino, 1990, p.50).

Critical questions

Critical questions, as defined in the present study, are questions that engage students in the critical thinking process (see Table 2.2 on p.54 for characteristics of critical questions).

Critical encounter

With a primary focus on teachers, critical encounters as defined in the present study are opportunities created (1) for students to think critically and purposefully in a teaching and learning context that supports and values critical thinking, and (2) to cultivate the important qualities of critical thinkers in students. (see Table 2.3 on p.55 for sample situations of critical encounters developed based on the input of the exploratory study).

The classroom observation scheme as shown in Figure 4.2 on p.103 served two significant purposes in the main study. It was first used to guide me, i.e. the observer, during real time classroom observation to identify the teaching of critical thinking manifested in the lessons. It was then used to categorize the audio and video recordings of the observed lessons at different stages of data analysis in the study (see Section 4.4).

The observation scheme comprises two main parts (see Figure 4.2 on p.103). The first part records the background information about the lesson observed. The information includes:

1. the number of the classroom observation conducted, for example, Classroom Observation I refers to the first classroom observation of a participating teacher,
2. the name of the teacher observed, for example, Fun
3. the date on which the classroom observation is conducted,
4. the time during which the classroom observation is conducted,
5. the class of the students observed, for example, S.1B and
6. the code for the participating school, for example, SA for School A

This set of information, which proved to be crucial in the development of the data matrix (see Appendix II), was usually filled in before the actual classroom observation.

The main part of the scheme comprises seven columns as shown in Figure 4.2 on p.103 and these columns are completed in real time according to what is observed in a lesson. The first column, No. of critical questions (encounters) identified, is designed to sequence the critical questions or encounters (see Section 2.3 for the working definitions of critical questions and critical encounters) manifested in an observed lesson. The information can give an overview of the lesson observed. For example, in total three critical questions/encounters were identified in Fun's first observed lesson. The second column, Time (as shown on the video camera), indicates the time at which a critical question/encounter is captured. The information can help me to get to the video clip concerned when the video recording of the observed lesson is reviewed.

As discussed in Chapter III (see Section 3.4.2), the context in which a question is asked is important in the analysis of critical questions manifested in class. The third column, as shown in Figure 4.2, Teaching context in which the critical question occurs, aims to capture what the teacher and students are doing when a critical question is asked by the teacher in a lesson.The fourth column, Teacher critical questions identified [teacher-student(s) interaction], aims to capture the critical questions asked by the teacher in class. The column has been split into two so as to capture also the response of the student(s) to the questions. The language in which the critical question is asked and other

Figure 4.2 CLASSROOM OBSERVATION SCHEME

Classroom Observation ___ Teacher: Date: Time: Class: (School Code)

No. of critical questions/ encounters identified	Time (as shown on the video camera)	Teaching context in which the critical question/ encounter occurs		Teacher critical questions identified [teacher – student(s) interaction]		Critical encounters identified [teacher – student(s) interaction]		Description on classroom atmosphere & learning environment	Remarks e.g. materials used, questions to be classified
		What the teacher is doing	What the students are doing	Critical questions asked by the teacher (& feedback to response of student(s)) L1/L2	Response from student(s) Nominated/ Self selected	Questions/ opinions/ requests from student(s) L1/L2 N/S	Response from the teacher		
1									

** The table above shows only a page of the scheme and plenty of space should be reserved for field notes taken by the observer

information, for example, whether the student is nominated by the teacher to answer the question or self selected, are also required.

The fifth column, Critical encounters identified [teacher-student(s) interaction], aims to capture all other critical encounters manifested in the observed lesson. The column has been split into two: Questions/opinions/requests from students and the response from the teacher. These sub columns hope to capture important questions, requests or opinions made by students in class and the teacher feedback. The language in which the questions, opinions, or requests are expressed and information like whether the students involved nominate themselves to do so are also required.

The sixth column, Description on classroom atmosphere and learning environment, aims to capture the feelings and emotions of the teacher and students during an observed lesson, for example, the tension shown in an exchange between them, the remark a student whispers under his/her breath and the book that a student is reading secretively on his/her lap. These field notes (Cohen, et al, 2000) present a sensitive and perhaps subjective perspective to understanding the observed lesson. However, they proved to be significant in understanding holistically the teachers' situations in the exploratory study. The last column, Remark e.g. materials used and questions to be classified, is an important column for anything that will be attended to after the classroom observation. Teaching materials used in the lesson and questions that could hardly be categorized in real time during classroom observation are two good examples of what goes into this column.

Being aware that my personal teaching beliefs as well as the categories in the observation scheme could, to some extent, condition what I saw in the classroom (Nunan, 1989), I have adopted other tools, such as interviews (see Section 4.2.4) and field notes to collect different data regarding the five teachers' teaching behaviour, for example, teachers' teaching experience and beliefs. These data enabled me to understand the classroom data collected from a more holistic perspective and helped me to gain a deeper understanding of the contexts and systems in which the five teachers worked. Also, the preliminary findings of the classroom data were presented to the teachers involved for validation in their last debriefing interview (see Section 4.2.4).

Recordings of classroom teaching - Apart from classroom observation, two modes of classroom data, i.e. audio and video recordings of the observed lessons, were used to capture what happened in the observed lessons of the main study, for instance, what the five teachers said in their lessons, what they did and how they did it. The exploratory study has shown that things happened very fast in Mei Mei's and Lai Lai's lessons and real time categorization of critical questions and encounters was not always possible. The two modes of data which allowed categorization to be conducted after the classroom observations (see Section 4.4) in the main study were indeed complementary to each other. For example, the video recording of a lesson could help explain an unusual long pause detected after a teacher question. Some video recordings made in the main study revealed that sometimes a long wait time was given only because the teachers were busy setting up the equipment or reading the test papers just collected, which could make their

questions less inviting despite the longer wait time given. The students could feel that the teacher, in fact, did not have any intention to listen to them.

To minimize the impact of the camcorder on the teachers and students observed, the video camera was set up on a tripod at the back of the classroom during classroom observation in the main study. With the lens facing the teachers the video recorder aimed to capture the action and movement of the teachers during the observed lessons. An audio recorder was also set up in each observed lesson to record the teacher and student talk in the lessons. To avoid data loss due to unexpected mechanical fault as in the exploratory study (see Section 3.3.2), both recording devices were placed near me for close monitoring. The fact that I had to sit at the back of the classroom during classroom observation further constrained the reception of the recording equipment (see Section 8.1).

Pre and post classroom observation interviews - Pre and post classroom observation interviews were conducted in the main study to collect background information about the lessons observed and to capture the participating teachers' opinions on their teaching. The pre classroom observation interviews aimed to elicit from the teachers before classroom observation the teaching objective, teaching plan, and stage of teaching of the lessons observed. These interviews that prepared both physically and psychologically the participating teachers and me for the classroom observation that followed provided us with an opportunity to communicate, clarify and do any last-minute preparation needed before the observed lesson. I usually began the interviews with the prompt, 'What's the teaching objective of the lesson I am going to observe?' and would then pass the floor to

the teachers to talk freely about the teaching objective and plan of the lesson and any aspects they hoped to raise in relation to the lesson. Questions about the teaching/learning materials used in the previous lessons and about the materials that would be used in the observed lessons were sometimes asked in the interviews. The background information about the observed lesson helped me to understand better the observed lesson in relation to the other lessons of the teaching cycle along with a more informed understanding when reviewing my notes and data.

The post classroom observation interviews aimed to provide the participating teachers with an opportunity to reflect on and talk about their teaching in a secure and supportive atmosphere after classroom observation. I usually began the interviews with the prompt, 'Do you think you have achieved your teaching objective(s)?' Similar to the pre classroom observation interviews, the floor would then be passed to the teachers to talk freely about their feelings of the observed lesson, their reflection on their teaching and any topic that was of interest to them. It took me a lot of time, effort and patience in the exploratory study to help Mei Mei and Lai Lai to understand that I was not speaking as an authority and that I was there to have genuine exchanges of ideas with them. Learning from the valuable experience, I refrained from passing any judgment on what the teachers said or interrupting their reflection during the interviews in the main study. Most of the time I would smile and nod at the teachers politely to encourage them to express themselves. Clarification questions were asked only when it was necessary, for example, to request for information that was crucial in comprehending what was said or for reasons behind a teaching decision made. The semi-structured interviews (Cohen et al, 2000)

proved to be very successful in encouraging the teachers to express their opinions regarding their teaching contexts and the school and broader systems in the main study. Some of them even took the initiative in sharing with me their feelings about the school administration, and the quality assurance inspection (QAD, 2002) and their inspectors, which were usually considered very sensitive issues in the local educational context.

Asking the participating teachers some focused questions was an important component of the post classroom observation interviews in the main study to help prepare the teachers for the target interview in which the teachers' perceptions of the critical thinking recommendations were systematically elicited (see Section 4.2.4). First of all, the focused questions aimed to open up a space for the participating teachers to express their views about different issues in a supportive and open atmosphere. Secondly, these open-ended questions helped me to collect important background information about the participating teachers, such as their teaching beliefs and contexts. Also, the research experience would help to familiarize the participating teachers with the format and expectation of the target interview, i.e. I would mainly take the role of a supportive and patient listener in the interview (Cohen et al, 2000).

Before ending each post classroom observation interview, the teacher interviewed was invited to express his/her views freely on a focused question, for example, 'How do you understand education?' The floor would then be passed to the teacher and he/she could decide for how long he/she wanted to talk about the assigned topic. Below is an excerpt

of a transcript of a post classroom observation interview in which John, of School B, shared with me his understanding of teaching and learning:

> It [Teaching] was a sharing of knowledge. I can learn from my students and I hope that my students can learn from me. So, there is basically no difference between a teacher and a student as such. When I hear people say that the teacher is the one who knows everything, of course not, I would say that the teacher knows nothing. We learn from each other. So I think that teaching is sharing. That's the first thing that comes to my mind, the first idea that comes to my mind. Teaching is probably not a job as such. It's more like being dedicated to an ideal. An ideal that sometimes you cannot achieve. Ok, you have a goal but you don't reach that goal but sometimes you do. Nothing is perfect. Teachers are not perfect. Teaching is not perfect. And you can keep improving. That why I say that teaching and learning are linked. They are linked because everyday you learn how to teach. Everyday the lesson is different. And success is not the guaranteed. Learning and teaching should be fun. That's my ideal. Learning should be fun. People want to learn should enjoy what they are doing; not be forced into anything. They should be allowed to have their own rhythm, which of course is not the case in the classroom, which is not the case in some types of education system where everything is far too strict. So I would say that the student who enjoys learning here in HK is the one who is academically fit. Whose mind is ready to go through pressure rather than enjoyment. These are the images that come to my mind when you talked about teaching and learning.
> [SBMJohnPoIVAR]

The topics for the focused questions, as shown in Table 4.2 on p.110, included students of the observed class, their parents, the participating teachers' understanding of teaching, learning and education, and their joys and difficulties of being a secondary school English language teacher, which had all been piloted in the exploratory study (see Section 3.3.2) to see how stimulating they were and how well they were received by the two participating teachers. The information elicited proved to be significant in interpreting the classroom data collected and understanding the systems in which the two teachers were working. These topics were then carefully sequenced, for instance, to begin with asking the teacher interviewed to talk about the students of the observed class, and presented in

different interviews. The section on focused questions would be rescheduled if the teacher was not feeling well on the day of the interview or he/she was engaging in other important commitments, such as staff meetings.

Table 4.2 Topics for focused questions

Post classroom observation interviews	Topics for the focused questions
I	Students of the observed class
II	Parents nowadays
III	Meanings of teaching, learning and education
IV	Understanding and experience of English language teaching and learning
V	The joys and difficulties of being a secondary school English language teacher in Hong Kong
VI (Target Interview)	Based on a question scheme on the critical thinking recommendations (see Appendix IV)

With the five teachers' consent, the pre and post classroom observation interviews were audio taped in Cantonese for all the local teachers and English for the NET, transcribed and translated if necessary by me who had first hand knowledge of the context in which the interviews were conducted. Only minor changes were made to John's transcripts, the Native English Teacher of School B, to make them more intelligible in written form.

4.2.4 Interviews

Interviews that were carefully designed to elicit from the five participating teachers their understanding of critical thinking, knowledge of the 1999 critical thinking recommendations (CDC, 1999), perceptions of teaching of critical thinking through the

English language subject and the factors that they perceived to be facilitating or constraining the implementation of the critical thinking recommendations constituted an important part of the main study. The design and aims of the target interview and final debriefing interview are discussed in the following sub-sections.

Target interview -To answer the research questions on teacher perceptions of the critical thinking recommendations, a target interview, i.e. the last post classroom observation interview, was conducted with each participating teacher in the main study. Based on a question scheme developed in the exploratory study (see Appendix IV for the rationale behind the questions), the five teachers' understanding of critical thinking and their views on the critical thinking recommendations were systematically elicited. Although Mei Mei and Lai Lai were from the exploratory study, they were not systematically asked these questions in the exploratory study, for example, in one interview or training session. And a comparison of the findings of the two studies reveals that their answers were mostly consistent in terms of content but both of them became more confident and their answers more elaborated in the main study. The questions asked in the target interview included:

1. How long have you been teaching English in secondary school? What other subject(s) do you teach?

2. Did you know that secondary school English language teachers had been required to help their students to develop critical thinking through the English language subject? If yes, please specify how you got the information, i.e. when and where did you <u>first read/ hear</u> about the requirement?

3. Do you think critical thinking can be developed through the English language subject? If yes, please give examples of how it can be done, for example, teaching activities, strategies or skills needed. If no, please explain.

4. How do you understand critical thinking? For example, what does it mean to you? Do you think it is something important?

5. Do you think your teaching is helping your (Secondary 1) students to develop critical thinking? Please explain.

6. Do you think critical thinking can be assessed through the English language subject? If yes, please give examples of how it can be done, for example, assessment tasks and criteria. If no, please explain.

7. Do you think appropriate support from the government or your school is given to you to help you implement the recommendations? If yes, please give examples of the support you are given. If no, suggest the support you need?

The target interview was scheduled after all the classroom observations of a teacher were conducted for two reasons. First of all, the disclosure of the research focus on critical thinking at an earlier stage of the study might impact on their classroom behavior, which could impair the findings of the classroom observation (see Section 4.2.1). Also, as discussed in the previous section the series of interviews conducted before helped to pave the way for the target interview by preparing the teachers for the research experience. As revealed in the exploratory study, a lot of time, effort and trust were needed to provide a space for the teachers to express themselves freely and share with me the educational ideas and issues that they considered important (see Section 3.4.1).

Last debriefing interview - The last debriefing interview, which was conducted after the target interview, i.e. the last post classroom observation interview, and before the end of data collection, provided me with a valuable opportunity to present to each participating teacher the preliminary findings of his/her classroom observations for comments and validation (see Section 7.1). Although the findings were preliminary, the involvement of the teachers in making meaning of the data shows my commitment to overcome possible bias on classroom data. Also, the research design was especially important in the analysis of the classroom data when the participating teachers' understanding of critical thinking and its teaching methods varied. The teachers whose lessons had not shown any evidence of teaching of critical thinking would also be invited to comment on the findings. Understandably, some teachers did not really comment on the findings. Instead, they reiterated different contextual constraints and pressure that they perceived to make the teaching of critical thinking impossible in their classrooms. These constraining factors are discussed later in Section 6.4.3.

In each debriefing interview I also explained the aims and focus of the main study including its focus on the teaching of critical thinking to the participating teachers. Based on its aims and focus, the teacher was invited to comment on the overall research design of the main study, and to offer suggestions on how to improve the research design of any similar future research. Before ending the interview, each teacher was invited to talk about the benefits he/she perceived to have gained from the main study, and any comments he/she had on the study. The rich qualitative data collected through various interviews, as well as all the field notes, and journals taken during the main study,

constituted an important part of the five participating teachers' case reports (see Chapter V).

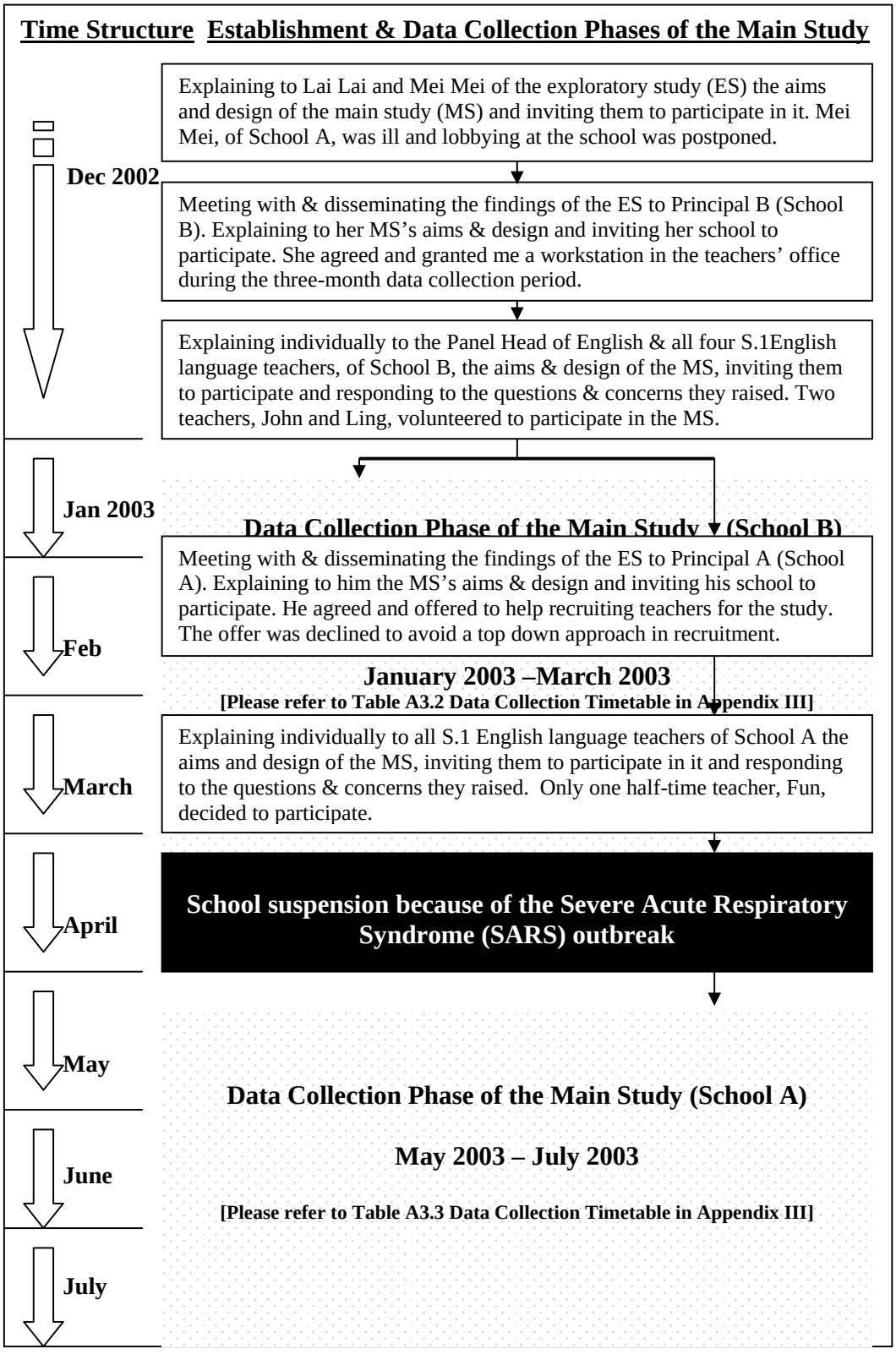
Section 4.3 Data collection

Like the exploratory study (see Section 3.3) the main study consisted of two phases: establishment and data collection. Due to the trust that had been established with the participating schools during the exploratory study and the five participating teachers' genuine support for the study, the implementation of the main study at the two schools was, on the whole, smooth and focused. Figure 4.3 on p.115 shows an overview of the two phases of the main study and outlines the important events that took place in the establishment phase of the main study.

4.3.1 The establishment phase

The establishment phase of the main study aimed to recruit all the English language teachers of Secondary 1 of Schools A and B who genuinely supported the study (see Section 4.2.1). It was not easy and it took a great deal of time and effort. As shown in Figure 4.3 on p.115 lobbying for the main study began immediately after the exploratory study in School B, i.e. December 2002, but the establishment phase at School A did not begin until February 2003 after Mei Mei fully recovered from an illness.

Figure 4.3 The main study: Establishment and data collection phases (December 2002 – July 2003)



The establishment phase at each participating school lasted about two months (see Figure 4.3 on p.115). In these two months, Mei Mei of School A and Lai Lai of School B arranged for me to meet with their colleagues individually to explain to them the aims and design of the main study. During the lobbying, I carefully explained to each teacher who was willing to meet to find out more about the study the possible disruption caused by participating in the study, such as time investment, interruption created due to classroom observation and disclosure of identity in the dissemination of findings. The ownership, use and dissemination of data and findings, and ways to protect the participants, such as anonymizing reports and use and storage of video data were also negotiated during the process. These teachers were encouraged to ask questions about the study and their questions and concerns were all carefully discussed and responded to in the meetings. Teachers were only recruited if they volunteered to participate in the study after they had been given ample opportunity for careful consideration. They were advised to inform Mei Mei or Lai Lai of their final decision when they were ready and no further explanation was necessary if they decided not to participate.

Based on the feedback of the eight teachers approached at the two schools, the teachers were grouped under two different categories. Only one teacher at School A who did not want to meet at all, because of reasons unknown, did not consider participating in the study. Other teachers took time to meet and consider participating; seven teachers fell into this category. Four teachers in this group decided after consideration not to participate in the study. Three of the teachers, of School A, and one from School B fell into this category. Although no reason was required, they all explained that they could

not afford the time to participate in the study (see Section 6.1). Two of the teachers approached at School B were those who were willing to meet and who decided to participate in the study immediately after the meeting. Both teachers showed great trust and confidence in me and the study even in our first meeting. These two teachers labelled Ling and John (Native English Teacher) in the data reporting later proved to be rich and reliable sources of data for the study. For School A, in addition to Mei Mei, only one half time teacher labelled Fun volunteered to participate in the study. In total, there were five teachers participating in the main study: Mei Mei (from the exploratory study) and Fun of School A and Lai Lai (from the exploratory study), Ling and John of School B (see Table 4.1 on p.93 for a brief profile of the participating teachers of the main study)

During the establishment phase of the main study the Principals of the two participating schools, that is, Principals A and B, were also approached. In the two meetings with the Principals some findings of the exploratory study were reported and the plan for the main study was explained. A significant aim of the meeting was to gain their approval for the implementation of the main study in the two schools. To ensure transparency both Mei Mei and Lai Lai were also invited to the meetings. An interesting thing happened when lobbying with Principal A. After listening to the aims and focus of the study in the meeting, Principal A volunteered to help invite English language teachers in his school to participate in the main study. Although I was glad to see the support and enthusiasm of the Principal for the study, I was aware of the unequal power relationship between the Principal and frontline teachers. To avoid possible pressure from the school administration on the teachers, the offer of Principal A was declined.

4.3.2 The data collection phase

As shown in Figure 4.3 on p.115 the data collection of the main study occurred in two phases: School B (January – March 2003) and School A (May – July 2003). The first data collection phase began immediately after the establishment phase at School B, and ended towards the end of March 2003. The second data collection phase began at School A in late May 2003. The full commitment of Mei Mei and Fun turned out to be critical because all the classroom observations at School A had to be completed within six teaching cycles rather than the planned three-month period. This was because classes had been suspended in all schools in Hong Kong for about a month because of the SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Symptom) outbreak. On the whole, with the support of the five participating teachers and their school administration, data collection in the two schools was conducted very smoothly.

School B - Six lessons (involving about 120 students and 1,200 minutes of classroom teaching) of each of the participating teachers, i.e. Lai Lai (see Section 5.1 for Lai Lai's case report), John (see Section 5.2 for John's case report) and Ling (see Section 5.3 for Ling's case report), were scheduled to be observed during the data collection period (see Table A3.2 Data collection timetable in Appendix III). All the observed lessons were videotaped and pre and post classroom observation interviews (see Section 4.2.3) were conducted before and after each classroom observation. The target interview (see Section 4.2.4) was conducted with each participating teacher after all his/her classroom observations were completed and all the debriefing interviews (see Section 4.2.4) were scheduled during the mid term exam period when the teachers were comparatively free from the pressure of teaching. Principal B showed genuine support for the main study.

She granted me access to their school library and allowed me to check out books from the library during the data collection period. During the three-month data collection period I was told to sit with other colleagues including Lai Lai and John in one of the staff rooms at School B where I heard and saw a lot of important and interesting things that I recorded in my field notes. These valuable data helped me to better understand School B's context and system.

School A - Although schools in Hong Kong were mostly reopened in May 2003 after the SARS outbreak, schools were on high alert during the period and lots of different measures had been adopted to prevent the spread of the disease in the schools. For example, both teachers and students had to wear face masks to school. In order not to increase the burden of Mei Mei (see Section 5.4 for Mei Mei's case report) and Fun (see Section 5.5 for Fun's case report), data collection at School A was postponed until mid May when regular classroom teaching was resumed in most schools.

Owing to the school suspension, the classroom observations conducted in School A had to be completed within six teaching cycles instead of a three-month period as originally planned. Also, with only two participating teachers in the School and lessons shortened from 40 to 35 minutes during the summer time schedule the actual observed and videotaped classroom teaching at School A was comparatively shorter. It involved about 40 students and 400 minutes of classroom teaching. In order to make good use of the time available the times and dates of most of the classroom observations conducted in School

A were discussed and fixed before the data collection actually began in the school (see Table A3.3 Data collection timetable in Appendix III).

4.3.3 Significant changes in relation to the main study

On the whole, data collection at Schools A and B were largely conducted according to the pre-agreed plans. As revealed in the data collection, a lot of important changes in relation to the participating teachers and students took place at the schools throughout the main study. First of all, there was a great change in the teachers' attitudes towards classroom observation. For instance, the date and time of a classroom observation at School B during the first month of data collection, i.e. in January 2003, were largely proposed at least two weeks before the actual classroom observation, and the proposed dates were then finalized by the teachers involved. However, classroom observation became a lot more spontaneous after this warming up stage, and much shorter notice was needed before the classroom observations. Towards the end of the data collection, the participating teachers in School B, i.e. Lai Lai, John and Ling, even took the initiative in suggesting times for classroom observation. To ensure that six of her lessons could be observed as originally planned, Ling even allowed me to film her class during the English form test (see Section 5.3.7).

The teachers' trust in the study was also manifested in the teachers' attitudes during classroom observation. The participating teachers at both schools expressed in different interviews and on other occasions that they did not feel embarrassed even if things went wrong during the observed lessons. Some stressed that they considered what had

happened and what I saw as ‘authentic’ and they were glad that I could see the real face of the students. Others never avoided eye contact during the observed lessons and some even smiled from time to time at me during classroom observations after the warming up stage. The change was especially evident in Fun of School A. She became very warm and passionate towards the end of data collection, which formed a big contrast with the cold and reserved teacher whom I saw in our first meeting (see Section 5.5.1).

Although students were not the focus of the study, another important attitudinal change that took place in the schools was the students’ attitudes towards classroom observation. Most of the students observed were found to be shy and reserved in the first classroom observation. Most classes behaved well during classroom observation at the beginning of the data collection period, but their attitudes and behavior changed dramatically towards the end of data collection especially when classroom observations were conducted more spontaneously at School B. The change was especially evident in the classes of the three new teachers, i.e. Fun of School A, and Ling and John of School B.

Another significant change that took place in the main study was reflected in the length of the interviews. As discussed in Section 4.2.4 the participating teachers were mainly the ones to decide how long they wanted to talk in the pre and post classroom observation interviews. It was found that the interviews conducted in the two schools were getting longer and longer throughout the data collection period and the change was especially obvious in School B. The longest interview among all was the fifth post classroom observation interview with Lai Lai which lasted for about 70 minutes (see Section 5.1).

All teachers became more vocal as their trust in the study and me increased; and they took the initiative in sharing with me their views on different educational issues in interviews and on other occasions, which, to some extent, could help increase the credibility of the present study (see Section 7.1).

Section 4.4 Data analysis and reporting

There are two major sources of data: classroom data and interview data. The sub-section below details how these two sets of data were analyzed and the procedures taken to establish credibility of the study.

Classroom data - Figure 4.4 categorization of classroom data in the main study on p.123 summarizes the logistics of the categorization of the classroom data collected in the main study. The classroom data collected were analysed based on Tsui et al's (2004) classifications of questions in relation to the space of learning that students enjoy in the classroom, my insider knowledge and expertise as an experienced English language teacher in Hong Kong, and the analytical framework developed in the exploratory study (see Section 2.3). As discussed in Section 4.2.3 the classroom data collected were categorized based on the critical thinking classroom observation scheme at different stages of the main study:

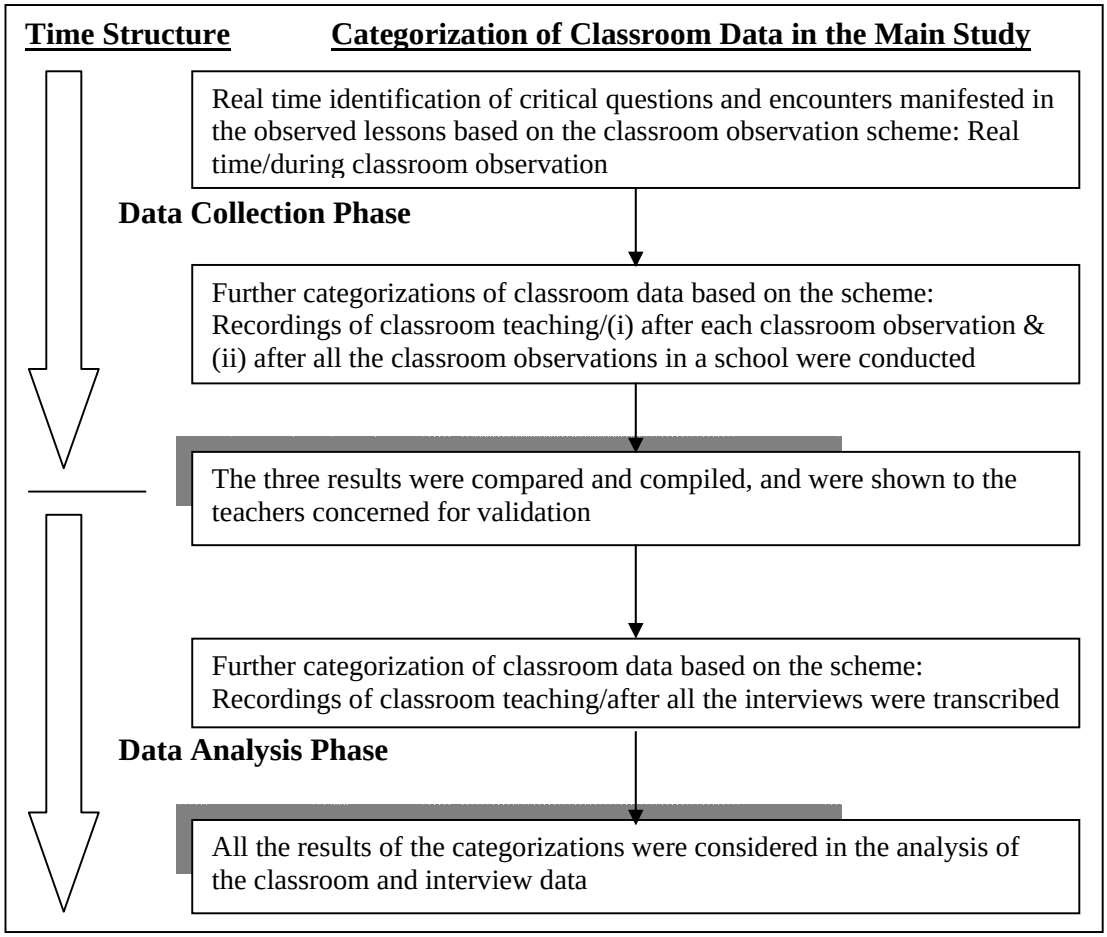
(1) during classroom observation to capture in real time the critical encounter(s) and question(s) manifested in the observed lesson
(2) after each classroom observation with special attention to the questions and encounters that could not be categorized during the lesson

(3) after all the classroom observations of a teacher were conducted with special attention to the teacher's teaching style over the data collection period

(4) after all the interviews conducted in the school were transcribed with special attention to comparison between teacher behavior and perceptions, i.e. triangulation of classroom and interview data, and their connection with the social setting they were in

To avoid possible bias of the classroom data, before ending the data collection, the preliminary results of the categorizations, i.e. the critical encounter(s) identified, were presented to the teachers involved for comments and validation in the last debriefing interview (see Section 4.2.4).

Figure 4.4 Categorization of classroom data in the main study



Interview data - In order to maintain the authenticity of what was said all the interviews in the main study were conducted in the language chosen by the participants, then transcribed and, if necessary, translated, by me. All four local teachers chose to be interviewed in Cantonese, and John, the NET, used English in his interviews. As most of the interview data were indeed translated from Cantonese to English, some approaches to discourse analysis, such as critical discourse analysis, which 'strongly relies on linguistic categories' (Meyer, 2001, p.25) with its operationalizations depending mainly on linguistic concepts, such as actors and tense became inapplicable. As noted previously as the data in the present study were on the whole translated the informant perspectives have already been shifted in some way by reporting the 'gist' of their interviews in a translated text. In the data, although I remained true to the intended meaning of the informants, the transcripts and thus data are now seen through an additional filter. Thus, a discourse analytical approach to the data, although interesting, would not be 100% accurate. Instead, inductive progressive coding and content analysis of the interview transcriptions were conducted with reference to the field notes taken and the insider knowledge I possess after working as a frontline teacher as well as a teacher trainer in Hong Kong for more than a decade. The coding and analysis of the interview data took time but my determination to handle the data with great care never failed during the long and difficult data coding, organization and analysis processes.

At the beginning of the data coding, organization and analysis processes I read through the transcriptions and listened to the interviews again and again with the primary aim to immerse myself in the data (Hycner, 1985). Adopting primarily a 'progressive focusing'

approach (Parlett and Hamilton, 1976, as cited in Cohen et al, 2000, p.148), I started 'taking a wide angle lens to gather data, and then, by sifting, sorting, reviewing and reflecting on them the salient features of the situation emerge' (Parlett and Hamilton, 1976 as cited in Cohen et al, 2000, p.148). Some repeating patterns and themes (Miles and Huberman, 1994) related to the five teachers' teaching strategies, their perceived institutional and contextual constraints, as well as their perceptions of the critical thinking recommendations became evident. The data were then reviewed and recoded until a final set of coherent and representative themes were reached. The salient patterns included feeling pressure, adopting primarily lower order teaching approaches and ineffective questioning techniques.

Inductive progressive coding of the interview data began with the writing up of individual case reports for each of the five teachers. Kerlinger (1970) defined coding as 'the translation of …respondent information to specific categories for the purpose of analysis' (Cohen et al, 2000, p.283). Codes were ascribed to the data to create some units of analysis through a 'unitizing' (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p.203) process. The codes ascribed were mainly descriptive (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992) capturing the perspectives the five teachers held about their schools, the critical thinking recommendations and the local education context, as well as the teaching strategies they adopted in their classrooms. Through a vigorous process of clustering, eliminating, modifying and refining (Hycner, 1985) four main themes and fourteen sub-categories were identified.

Theme 1 Feeling the pressure

- Time pressure
- Pressure from the school curriculum
- Exam pressure
- Pressure from students

Theme 2 Ineffective Questioning techniques

- Brief waiting time
- Inability to recognize the potential of open-ended questions
- Predominance of lower order questions

Theme 3 Low order and exam oriented teaching focus

- Grammar teaching
- Vocabulary teaching
- Teaching of writing
- Exam oriented teaching approach

Theme 4 Support for the critical thinking recommendations

- The five teachers' understanding of critical thinking
- A general support for developing students' critical thinking through the English language subject
- Factors constraining the implementation of the critical thinking recommendations

Every coding decision was made with great care. The feedback from teachers in the interviews usually involved two or more sub-categories, for instance, exam pressure and time pressure, and thus some data were double coded. In some cases there were further classifications within a sub-category, such as time pressure. All five teachers reported that the sources of time pressure they experienced were multiple and that they experienced time pressure both inside and outside their classroom. The coding of the interview data was repeated and revised over a long period taking into consideration the overall context in which the data were found. Each time the complete transcription of the interview and all the related data, for example, audio recording of the interview, field notes, research journals were revisited. Regarding the coding criteria, I agree with Holliday (2002) that the driving motive of the researcher plays a significant role in the coding process.

> The criteria for determining which fragments of data are selected will always be as subjective as all the other aspects of qualitative research. The major driving motive will be that selected fragments contain the elements that have been recognized during analysis, which generate the thematic organization. Another factor is that the fragments which are chosen are likely to be the ones which are rich in the sense of containing as many of the key elements as possible within a short space.
>
> (Holliday, 2002, p.119)

In terms of data organization and presentation a number of spidergrams showing how the patterns and themes were connected were drawn and revised during the long data reduction and organization processes. The themes and patterns as well as their sub-categories were refined again and again so as to capture a more complete picture of what was happening in the five teacher participants' English language classrooms and their

perceived reality. To sum up, the data analysis was conducted drawing from my understanding and knowledge as an insider who carried out inductive progressive coding of the interview data mediated through the medium of Cantonese (in 4 out of the 5 teacher cases). The data coding, analysis and interpreting processes were conducted vigorously and seriously always placing the identified themes 'back within the overall contexts or horizons from which these themes emerged' (Cohen et al, 2000, p.286). I believe that the ultimate aim of the analysis process was in line with that of the data collection process, i.e. to collect and report faithfully the voices of the teachers, without misinterpreting their ideas or imposing any ideas on them.

In addition to the five teacher participants, I consider the present study a valuable opportunity to engage myself as well as the readers of this thesis in critical thinking to explore the five teachers' perceived realities of their teaching contexts and the possible meanings that these realities have for all of us. As a researcher, I adopted a critical perspective (see Section 2.3) and practised critical thinking throughout the research and writing up processes using basically a questioning stance to look at everything I heard and saw in the two schools. I am aware that to me

> reality is a multiple set of mental constructions, [and] to demonstrate "truth value" researchers must show that their reconstructions in the form of findings and interpretations are credible to those being researched – credibility becomes the salient test of reality
>
> (Davis, 1992, pp.605-606)

I hope, based on the reconstructions presented in the thesis, readers will engage themselves actively in critical thinking processes before drawing any conclusions.

I hope to thank the five participating teachers for the genuine support they had for the study and their strong faith in me in bringing out their voices. I am fully aware that some teachers would feel insecure having an outsider to observe their lessons. According to Mei Mei, the idea of making all sorts of recording of their teaching could be daunting for some teachers. She believed that the knowledge and trust that teachers had for the researcher was also an important consideration for teachers to decide whether or not to participate in a research study and the fact that they were always busy discouraged them from 'taking the risk'. I want to thank the teachers again for willing to take the risk for my study and their trust encouraged me and allowed me to analyze the data critically and report faithfully what I heard and saw in their classrooms. In the following chapter I move on to discuss the five teachers' case reports.

Chapter V The five cases

Despite the SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Symptoms) outbreak and all the constraints and pressures the teachers faced, they opened up their classes for observation and spent hours sharing with me their teaching plans, reflections and education beliefs in different interviews. They could see the importance of the study and shared my vision of reporting faithfully voices of frontline teachers and what was happening in our local secondary English language classrooms. The data collected were analysed critically and reported to my best knowledge based on what was seen and heard in the two CMI schools during data collection. Towards the end of data collection all the five teachers expressed the hope to help students to develop critical thinking through English language teaching. To show my gratitude to the teachers and the support of the school administration I have promised to share with the English panels of the two schools the findings of the present study and offer them some professional development that they may need to implement the critical thinking recommendations.

This chapter presents the case reports of the five participating teachers of the main study. They are the two teachers from the exploratory study, Lai Lai and Mei Mei. For School B, apart from Lai Lai, John, the only NET (Native English Teacher) in the school, and Ling, a non-subject-trained English Language teacher, joined the main study. For School A, Mei Mei and her half-time colleague, Fun, participated in it.

This chapter comprises five sections and each section details the case of one participating teacher: Section 5.1 Lai Lai's case (School B), Section 5.2 John's case (School B),

Section 5.3 Ling's case (School B), Section 5.4 Mei Mei's case (School A), and Section 5.5 Fun's case (School A).

The significant patterns capturing the key features of the five cases will be discussed in the sub-sections of Chapter Six: Section 6.1 Feeling the pressure, Section 6.2 Ineffective questioning techniques, Section 6.3 A lower order and exam-oriented teaching focus, and Section 6.4 A Support for the critical thinking recommendations.

Section 5.1 Lai Lai (School B)

This section consists of nine sub-sections. Section 5.1.1 describes my first meeting with Lai Lai after the exploratory study. Sections 5.1.2 – 5.1.7 detail the six classroom observations and pre and post classroom observation interviews conducted as summarized in Table 5.1 below. Section 5.1.8 reports on the last debriefing interview with Lai Lai and the section ends with a portrait of Lai Lai's class in Section 5.1.9.

Table 5.1 Summary of data collection for Lai Lai

Lai Lai (School B)								
Date	16 Dec 2002	13 Jan 2003	15 Jan 2003	17 Feb 2003	26 Feb 2003	4 Mar 2003	12 Mar 2003	19 Mar 2003
Events	1st meeting after exploratory study	Pr1 0.6mins	Pr2 0.9mins	Pr3 1.4mins	Pr4 2.2mins	Pr5 11mins	Pr6 1.4mins	II 13 mins
		CO1 80mins	CO2 80mins	CO3 40mins	CO4 80mins	CO5 40mins	CO6 80mins	
		Po1 17.6 mins	Po2 5 mins	Po3 6.4 mins	Po4 18 mins	Po5 70 mins	Po6 24 mins	

Key:-
Pr: Pre Classroom Observation Interview
CO: Classroom Observation
Po: Post Classroom Observation Interview
II: Last Debriefing Interview

As shown in Table 5.1 Lai Lai and I met eight times on the dates specified. The table also shows that six classroom observations were conducted between January and March 2003. The dates of the six classroom observations and the length of all the interviews conducted, i.e. pre and post classroom observation interviews and the last debriefing interview, are also specified in the table.

.

5.1.1 First meeting with Lai Lai after the exploratory study

Although Lai Lai's investment in the exploratory study was not high, she volunteered to stay in the main study and help recruit other teachers to join. The reason why she wanted to stay in the main study became clear in our first meeting after the exploratory study. Our meeting was not planned. She came to me for advice on teacher professional development while I was waiting to meet with other teachers in her school library. She had kindly arranged for me to meet individually with some Secondary 1 teachers to introduce to them the main study.

In the conversation she told me that she could see the importance of staff development and considered participating in my study as a form of professional development for teachers. She admitted that because of the time constraint she faced (see Section 6.1), she, as the Panel Chair of English for the junior forms, could hardly organize any professional development for her colleagues. She stressed that there was no point getting a rise in salary or a nicer title if she was not given the time to focus on staff development. She then explained that she had to teach about 28 to 29 lessons in a teaching cycle. The administrative work and extra curricular activities assigned, actual teaching and marking took up all her time. She said she really wanted to help the English language teachers in the school to develop professionally but she felt that she had no time to do so. She even admitted that in order to complete all the duties assigned to her, sometimes she had to sacrifice her own teaching, and that teaching was down at the bottom of her priority list in the school. She then talked about some ideas she had on staff development, for instance, inviting trainers to the school to teach the English language teachers how to teach phonics effectively. When asked what she would do if teachers did not agree to her

ideas, she said she would consult all the teachers involved and would listen to their views carefully.

Lai Lai's emotions changed throughout the conversation. She looked upset and disappointed when she talked about the time constraint she faced in the school. However, her eyes shone with joy when she shared with me the ideas she had regarding professional development for the teachers in the school. Our conversation ended when I had to leave for my appointment with an English language teacher of Secondary 1. Lai Lai and I did not meet until the first classroom observation.

5.1.2 The first classroom observation

Lai Lai said in the first pre classroom observation interview that she planned to teach her students a story in the textbook. The story was about a poor couple who sold their precious belongings to buy Christmas presents for each other. She would first teach them some vocabulary found in the text and would then play a game with her students to see how much they could understand in the text. She would also ask them to complete some comprehension exercises in the textbook.

The first observed lesson began with a girl doing her five-minute 'free talk' presentation. For these 'free talk' presentations students could decide on the presentation topic and prepare for it accordingly. They were also encouraged to ask the class a few questions towards the end of their presentation to check the understanding of the class. Lai Lai believed that the 'free talk' activity could give the class an opportunity to use English in a

meaningful way, for example, to express themselves and to get to know more about the classmates.

After the student presentation, Lai Lai moved on to talk about the story in the textbook. She played the CD of the story bit by bit and she asked the students questions about parts of the story played. The class was divided into two big groups and the students in the two groups competed against each other. Anyone who could correctly answer a question Lai Lai asked would score one point for their group. Lai Lai asked a lot of questions about the story but most of the questions asked were simple comprehension questions about the story. Although some 'why' questions were asked, all the answers to the questions could be found in the textbook and the students could always refer to the textbook if they wanted to (see Section 6.2) Below are some of the questions Lai Lai asked in this part of the lesson:

Was Della married? How do you know?
Why was Della so sad?
What did she use to tie up her hair?
Did they have a lot of precious possessions?
How many did they have?
What were the two precious possessions?
How long was Della's hair?
What is the name of the shop?
What do you think the shop sells?

[SBMLaiCO1AR]

In the lesson Lai Lai also explained to the students the new words and phrases found in the story. She brought with her a lot of objects to help her students to understand the vocabulary in the story, such as a mirror and a gold chain. She also encouraged her

students to act out the phrases in the story, for instance, to squeal with delight, which generated some laughter in the class. She always tried to create a friendly and joyful learning atmosphere. For example, to explain what Christmas carols were she sang some very popular carols to her class. Some students joined in and the class was, on the whole, responsive.

Most of them seemed to enjoy the group competition very much. However, I also noticed that some of the students especially those sitting at the back or at the side of the classroom were not participating in the game at all. Some were reading some material that had nothing to do with the lesson and others were chatting loudly with each other. Although they paid little attention to Lai Lai, it was not difficult for them to answer her questions with the help of the groupmates who were eager to win the game. The competition took up most of the class-time. The students from the winning group were finally given a stamp on their ‘yellow card’ and they would be given a present if they got a certain number of stamps. The ‘yellow card’ rewarding system was designed by Lai Lai to encourage her students to participate in the lessons.

Lai Lai seemed to be aware of the student participation problem that I observed. To begin the post classroom observation interview, Lai Lai said only about 80% of the teaching objective had been achieved. She explained that some of the students were not really attentive in class and their participation was very low. She suspected that it was because some of the lights in the classroom were turned off when the projector was on and some students especially those sitting at the back seemed to think that she could not see them

clearly in the dark. She was also aware of the possible student participation problems in conducting group competitions in class. She admitted that the design of group competitions always allowed those lazy students who did not participate to win the game. However, learning from her experience, she believed that students were more motivated when they were participating in games and competitions, and felt that there was nothing much she could do to improve the student participation problem.

Towards the end of the interview, Lai Lai took the initiative in talking about the questions she asked in the lesson. She was very pleased with the open-ended questions she asked saying that the story had given her the opportunity to discuss with her students important values in life. She was encouraged because she felt that some of her students were more ready to answer this type of 'less controlled' questions. Below is what she said in the post classroom observation interview:

I was pleased because the students were more ready to answer some open-ended questions in class today. They got the courage to try some 'less controlled' questions. I did ask the students these types of questions before but today was more 'intensive'. A lot of these questions were asked in today's lesson. There might be only one or two open-ended questions in each lesson but this time we got the opportunity to talk about things like values and different perspectives of people. So, there were more open-ended questions in this lesson and I was glad they were willing to try to answer them. I was pleased…. And the girl who thought that the hair clip would be useful to Della when her hair grew longer. I think she was very bright and positive.

[SBMLaiPo1AR]

Although Lai Lai did not seem to see the connection between the open-ended questions she asked in the lesson and teaching of critical thinking, a critical encounter was later identified in the lesson during the classroom data analysis process. A critical encounter is

defined in the present study as an opportunity created (1) for students to think critically and purposefully in a teaching and learning context that supports and values critical thinking and (2) to cultivate important qualities of critical thinkers in students (see Section 2.3 on p.54 for the working definition of critical encounters in the present study). This particular critical encounter began with a student, Student 1 (S1), telling Lai Lai that the ending of the story was a happy one because Della, a main character in the story, would be able to use the hair clip her husband bought her when her hair grew long again. The story, A Perfect Gift, is about a poor couple who sold their precious possessions, i.e. the beautiful long hair of the wife and the gold chain watch of the husband to buy each other Christmas presents. In the end the presents bought i.e. a gold chain for the chain watch and a beautiful hair clip did not seem to be of use to the poor couple. For Lai Lai, the girl's answer was unexpected. Below is the transcript of the critical encounter:

1 2 3	T	They, they, okay, are willing to sell their precious possession okay in order to okay to to buy a present okay for each other okay. So, but at the end, at the end, were the presents useful?
4	Ss	No [Some students answered 'No' but Lai Lai did not respond to them.]
5	T	At the end, were the presents useful for them? Yes or no?
6	S1	Yes.
7 8	T	Yes? Yes? [Lai Lai looked surprised and hesitated. She repeated her answer with a rising tone.] The hair clip, was the hair clip useful again?
9	S1	Yes.
10	T	Yes? Why?
11 12 13	S1	… [The girl said something but it was too soft that the researcher could not hear. Some students did not seem to agree with the girl and shouted 'No'.]

14	T	Let her finish.
15	S1	… [The girl tried explaining her answer and Lai Lai listened carefully.
16		The explanation was again too soft to be heard or recorded.]
17	T	Ah Oh. good. Maybe, okay, in a short time, the hair the hair clip was not
18		useful. But Della's hair would grow, okay grow fast okay. Maybe in a
19		few months' time okay the hair clip would be useful. Oh good. That's a
20		good point. I didn't think of that. Yes, good, you can make point. Yes,
21		you can. [Lai Lai and the class gave the girl a big hand.] Yes, okay.
22		Thank you. In a short time, the clip's not useful. But a few months later,
23		maybe okay when Della's hair okay grow longer, it would be useful.
24		Good point. [Lai Lai wrote down the scores on the blackboard and
25		counted the points there.] Okay. Yes. Right. And then er yes? What do
26		you want to say, [name of a student (S2)]? Happy ending or sad ending?
27	S2	Sad ending.
28	T	Sad ending. Why?
29	S2	Because the presents are not useful.
30	T	Ah the presents okay, were not useful, were no longer useful okay.
31		Right okay. Maybe okay. Yes? What do you want to say?
32	S3	… [The answer of the student (S3) was too soft to be heard.]
33	T	On the one, yes? [More students wanted to answer the question and
34		finally Lai Lai responded to one of them (S4).]
35	S4	Happy ending.
36	T	Happy ending. Okay. Why?
37	S4	Because er their their the boy very very love the girl.
38	T	Ah the boy loved the girl very much okay. So, I would like to know
39		okay your opinion, class. How many of you think that it has a happy
40		ending? Put up your hands. Happy ending. Happy ending. [Lai Lai
41		counted the number of students.] Okay. How many of you think that it
42		has a poor, er, sad ending? Sad ending. Okay. A few of you. Yes, the
43		story can be sad okay or can be happy. It depends, okay, how you look

44 45 46 47 48 49 50 51		at okay, how you look at the ending alright? On the one hand, you may say, it's rather sad because the, the, the presents okay were no longer useful okay. But on the other hand, you may say it proves that Jim and Della, they loved each other very much okay. Understand what I mean? So it can be happy or it can be sad. Okay it depends okay what angle, how you look at the, the, the story okay. Right. Good. Yes. How many marks here? [Lai Lai gave the group that S4 belonged to some points before moving on to the next question.]

[SBMLaiCO1AR]

The transcript above shows that Lai Lai provided a purposeful opportunity for her students to think critically in a teaching context that valued and supported critical thinking. It shows in the encounter that Lai Lai encouraged her students to think critically about the story and express their views on how they perceived the ending. She welcomed answers that were different from hers, and encouraged her students to justify their answers by allowing them the time to think, and space to express themselves. Most importantly, she listened patiently to her students and showed genuine respect for their opinions.

Lai Lai welcomed answers that were unexpected in the critical encounter. She seemed to be a bit surprised with the 'yes' answer given by the student, S1, in line 6 of the transcript. The short 'Yes?' questions in line 7 as well as her tone and facial expression showed that the answer given was not the same as the one she had in mind. To confirm the answer of the student, she rephrased her question to make it more explicit, i.e. 'Was the hair clip useful again?' as shown in line 8. However, the answer of the student remained the same. Instead of moving on to another student for a different answer or simply answering the

question herself, she insisted on giving the student the chance to explain her answer. Although the classroom was full of noise and answers given by those enthusiastic students, Lai Lai was not distracted. The brief 'why' question in line 10 widened the space of learning of students because the question challenged S1 as well as her peers 'to consider a number of possibilities, and to formulate an answer that makes sense not only to themselves but also to the rest of the class' (Tsui et al, 2004, p.128). The short utterance 'Let her finish' in line 14 showed Lai Lai's determination to listen to the justification of the student, through which Lai Lai successfully created a critical thinking context that allowed S1 the time and space to think, to formulate an answer, and to express herself. In fact, 'the formulation of an answer is a process in which the students clarify their thinking and their understanding of the object of learning' (Tsui et al, 2004, p.128).

Lai Lai responded positively to the justification of the student even though she was surprised by her explanation. She admitted in line 20 that she had not thought about the point that the student raised, i.e. the hair clip would be useful when Della's hair grew longer again, but she assured that her justification was 'good' as shown in line 20. She showed her appreciation by giving the girl a big hand and the group that the girl belonged to some points for her answer in the group competition, which encouraged more students to join the discussion and express their views. Lai Lai showed genuine interest in her students' opinions in the critical encounter. As shown in lines 25-26 and 31 she was determined to listen to the views of her students. On both occasions she was aware that some students would like to voice their opinions. Instead of prompting a certain answer

from her students, she asked them a comparatively neutral question, that is, ‘What do you want to say?’ to widen the space of learning for students (Tsui et al, 2004) and she tried to respond to the content of the answers given by her students.

Her respect for diverse opinions was obvious in the critical encounter especially when she invited her students to show her by raising their hands how they perceived the ending of the story as shown in lines 38-42. Instead of concluding the discussion with a ‘correct’ answer, she then explained to the students the possibility of looking at an issue from different angles. In short, the classroom data have shown that Lai Lai did not just create the critical thinking opportunity and context for her students, important qualities of the critical perspective, such as openness, were reflected in her teaching.

The focused question for the first post classroom observation interview was ‘Can you tell me about the students in this class?’ Lai Lai said the class was a regular class with students of mixed abilities. The best and almost the worst students in the form could be found in the class. Most of the students were active but there were about six to seven students who were very lazy. On the whole, the class was responsive and Lai Lai admitted that it was only because they were Secondary 1 students. She told me that her senior form students never tried answering her questions.

5.1.3 The second classroom observation

In the second pre classroom observation interview, Lai Lai told me that she would finish teaching everything about the story that she talked about in the first observed lesson. She

would then move on to talk about countable and uncountable nouns, and quantifiers. She planned to bring to the class some objects for her students to describe. She said she would first teach the students what the objects were and would tell them how to describe them with quantifiers. If time allowed, she might ask the students to complete some exercises in the workbook or a worksheet to consolidate what they had learned. Because of her tight schedule, she stressed that she might not even have the time to make copies of the worksheet before the lesson.

Like the first observed lesson, as outlined above, the second observed lesson began with a 'free talk' presentation by a student. After the presentation, Lai Lai went through briefly with her students the vocabulary in the story again and she invited them to practise reading the new words and phrases in the text. The students in the front seemed to be more attentive. They were ready to answer Lai Lai's questions and do what they were told. The students at the back especially those sitting around me seemed to be reading something secretively. Lai Lai seemed to be aware of the problem right from the beginning of the lesson. From time to time she called on these students to answer her questions wishing to gain their attention. However, like the previous observed lesson, with the help of their classmates, these students always managed to pass Lai Lai's 'test' and continued to have fun without paying much attention to her or the lesson.

In the second part of the lesson, the students were divided into two groups again as in the first observed lesson. As explained in the first post classroom observation interview, Lai Lai considered conducting group competitions an effective way to motivate students to

participate in a lesson. In the form of a group competition the students had to give Lai Lai examples of countable and uncountable nouns. The students in the front were more eager to participate in the competition. Others kept looking around the classroom and some were reading books on topics that interested them. Upon the request of Lai Lai two students gave her ‘fighter jet’ and ‘machine gun’ as examples of countable nouns. Lai Lai looked a bit surprised with the examples given. I was not surprised at all because I saw them reading the books on fighter jets and machine guns right from the beginning of the lesson.

After talking briefly about what countable and uncountable nouns were and some examples from each category, Lai Lai showed the class different objects and encouraged her students to describe them using quantifiers, such as a bunch of keys and a bottle of water. Although some students seemed to care about the result of the group competition, they quarreled about the points they got and many of them became reluctant to participate in it. Before ending the lesson, Lai Lai referred her students to some spelling rules on countable and uncountable nouns in the textbook. She told the students to highlight the important part of the rules. However, many students seemed to be confused and were not able to follow. After that, Lai Lai assigned homework for the students, i.e. some exercises in the grammar book on quantifiers. She also invited the students to draw a picture. The students had to label the picture with a phrase containing a quantifier, for example, a bunch of grapes. She told the class that the best picture would be posted up in the classroom. Although Lai Lai spent about half of the lesson to talk about different types of

nouns, I was very surprised to find that the students were not given any chance to use the nouns in a context at all or to communicate with others (see Section 6.3).

Lai Lai did not seem to be pleased with the second observed lesson. When reflecting on the lesson in the post classroom observation interview, she said she was aware that some students were not paying attention to her right from the very beginning of the lesson. To try improving the situation, she divided the class into two groups to have group competitions during the second part of the lesson. However, the students had some argument over the points they got, which further distracted them from her teaching. She added that she should have reminded her students to bring with them their grammar books so that they could work on some exercises for consolidation. Below is what she said in the interview:

> And, I forgot to remind them to bring their grammar books back to school today and thus they could not do some class work in the lesson for consolidation. I think it would be better to have some consolidation. You can then see the learning outcome of students. I think for today only those who put up their hands to answer questions could really manage the teaching topic. But for those who did not put up their hands to answer questions, I don't think they can manage it.
>
> [SBMLaiPo2AR]

Lai Lai was not feeling well on the day of the second classroom observation. In order to keep the interview short, no focused question as outlined in Section 4.2.4 was asked in the post classroom observation interview. The focused questions on parents were then asked in the third post classroom observation interview. Lai Lai appreciated my understanding and concerns and she left for a medical appointment right after the interview.

5.1.4 The third classroom observation

To recap, the first observed lesson of Lai Lai was a reading comprehension lesson and her second observed lesson was mainly on grammar teaching. Lai Lai said in the pre classroom observation interview that the third observed lesson would be a brainstorming lesson for a story writing task in the textbook. Lai Lai planned to help her students to think about the setting, character and plot of a story that they were going to write. If time allowed, she said she would show her students a model composition and would draw their attention through questions to the structure and setting of the story.

Like the previous observed lessons, the third observed lesson began with a student doing his 'free talk' presentation. The boy seemed reluctant and was not really well prepared. With the help of Lai Lai, he barely managed to complete the presentation. Some students looked bored and were losing attention during the presentation. Lai Lai required the boy to try again on the following day and the boy was, obviously, not very pleased with Lai Lai's decision. Lai Lai then referred the class to a writing prompt in the textbook but many students were no longer paying much attention to her. She told the class to highlight the words that they considered important in the prompt. After she had given her class some time to do so, she asked a student, S1, the following questions.

Lai: S1, can you tell us what you have underlined? What you have highlighted, S1? What have you underlined? OK?
S1: No.
Lai: You have not underlined anything? That means what? Nothing is important or everything is important. What do you mean?
S1: Everything is important
Lai: Everything is important, er, everything, should be some words, OK, that are more important. Try.

[SBMLaiCO3AR]

In this incident, Lai Lai invited her student to explain the reason when she found that he had not underlined any part of the writing prompt. Instead of giving her student time to think or talk about his reason, Lai Lai offered her student some ‘help’ by saying ‘Nothing is important or everything is important. What do you mean?’ In fact, what she said already answered her own questions. The student, who looked so eager to sit down, quickly chose an option provided by Lai Lai saying ‘Everything is important’. But, his purpose was not achieved and he was finally allowed to sit down after he read out, apparently without much thought, a sentence from the prompt.

An interesting thing happened during this incident. When the students were told to highlight the key words in the writing prompt, I heard a boy asking his classmate this question, ‘What’s highlighting the key word?’ It seemed that the assumption of Lai Lai, i.e. all her students understood the instruction she gave them, might not be right. Similar to the previous incident, instead of giving her students time to think about or answer the question ‘When you write a story what do you need to think about?’ Lai Lai shot even more questions at her students. Her questions finally stopped when she referred the class to some help bubbles in the textbook.

Lai: When you write a story what do you need to think about? Remember, whenever you write a story you have to think about what? When you write a story what do you need to think about? Look at the help bubbles.

[SBMLaiCO3AR]

The words ‘remember’ and ‘help bubbles’ showed that Lai Lai seemed to have some predetermined answers to the questions. Also, the way how the question, i.e. ‘When you

write a story what do you need to think about?' was handled showed that it served mainly as a display question rather than an open-ended question that allowed students to express freely their opinions. I felt overwhelmed with the series of questions Lai Lai asked and that the students were not given the time or space to think critically about the questions or answer them in the lesson.

A similar incident was identified when Lai Lai tried to elicit the word 'setting' from her students.

Lai: When and where, when and where the story begins, happens, so that means you have to think about the? Think about the? Can you give me a word?
Ss: [Inaudible answers from students]
Lai: When and where, when and where the story happens, you have to think about the?
[SBMLaiCO3AR]

The series of questions finally stopped when a student hit the right answer that Lai Lai had in mind, i.e. setting. The way how Lai Lai phrased her questions, i.e. blank-filling questions with the article 'the' provided clearly showed that she was expecting a noun from her students. With such a strong predetermined answer in her mind, she did not pay much attention to the other attempts that the students made to answer her questions. Some students were discouraged by her disinterest. Their answers and attitudes changed from long well-thought out answers to short fast and blind guesses. Others gave up altogether after several attempts. Some were obviously happy to be the spectators of this 'entertaining game show'.

The way Lai Lai handled her questions so far did not seem to support the students' critical thinking development or facilitate the cultivation of critical attitudes. Students were not given much time to think about the questions asked or to answer them. Answers to her questions were mostly predetermined and most importantly, the students were not shown models of essential dispositions like being ready to listen to others and considering others' opinions in a careful and respectful manner (see Section 6.2).

When Lai Lai began to plan with her students the story that they were going to write, she asked her students the following questions:

Lai: Let's plan the story now. What should you write? What should you write? At the beginning or in the first paragraph, what should you write?
[SBMLaiCO3AR]

This time she waited for a few seconds but no student tried to respond to her questions. She then referred them to nine guided questions given in the textbook. She first required the students to categorize the questions into three groups. According to her, answering the questions in each group would help them to form a paragraph for the story. The students were then given some time to discuss with their neighbours the questions in the textbook. Contrary to Lai Lai' expectations, concerning what she hoped to achieve in the lesson, i.e. helping the students to plan for their stories, so far the data show that she was the one who decided on the content and development of the story and not the students. She told the students what to write for each paragraph. She had with her predetermined answers to the questions she asked. She was not helping her students to plan their stories but planning the story for them.

Before ending the lesson, Lai Lai encouraged her class to give suggestions on the present that they would like to buy the friend/relative in the story. Some students became very responsive and they made some interesting suggestions, such as buying a car for their mother. In some cases Lai Lai asked them for the reasons behind their suggestions. In other cases she gave the students some feedback to help them to rethink their suggestions, such as 'Can you afford a car?' 'Do you have so much money?' and 'Do you know how much money you'd need to buy a car?' This part of the lesson seemed to be the only time where students' originality was appreciated. However, the feedback and questions from Lai Lai in many cases discouraged the creativity of students. I got the impression that to Lai Lai originality, creativity and the freedom and space to express one's ideas were not as important as getting the students to complete the writing task (see Section 6.3.3).

When reflecting on the teaching of the third observed lesson, Lai Lai said in the post classroom observation interview that she was not sure to what extent the teaching objective had been achieved. She explained that she was aware that some students were not paying any attention to her during the lesson and the noise outside the classroom distracted them further from her teaching. Below is what she said in the interview:

> I am not sure to what extent the objective of the lesson has been achieved. But most students seemed to be able to follow the lesson. I was aware that some students were not paying attention at all. There was quite a lot of noise outside the classroom and some students were distracted especially during the later part of the lesson… I think the students should have some idea of how to set their stories and create their own characters now… But, I am not sure about the outcome yet because we only did part of the preparation today.
>
> [SBMLaiPo3AR]

The focused question for the post classroom observation interview was ‘Can you tell me what parents are like nowadays?’ Lai Lai said the parents of this class were quite concerned about their children but the academic support that they gave their children was not sufficient. She believed that only a few students could get the required support from their families and these students usually did better in exams too. She stressed that these students were still young and were getting some attention from their parents but the situation might change when they grew older. She admitted that there were a few students who had problem controlling themselves.

5.1.5 The fourth classroom observation

Lai Lai said in the pre classroom observation interview that her students would be having some listening practice in the fourth observed lesson. She said she had just finished the teaching unit on Christmas and the listening practice was used to consolidate what the students had learnt in the unit, such as vocabulary. She planned to complete five listening exercises in the lesson and hoped to play a game using the sounds ‘t’ and ‘d’ with her students. Lai Lai looked very tired during the interview. When asked why she was so tired, Lai Lai said that she had been busy preparing for the mid term exams, and she was also busy marking all the assignments of the Secondary 5 students. She admitted that she was exhausted and felt really tense because of the heavy workload (see Section 6.1).

The fourth observed lesson began with a boy doing his ‘free talk’ presentation. After that, Lai Lai introduced the listening practice. However, a lot of students did not have their listening books with them. Lai Lai was really cross and she explained to her students why

she was so disappointed with them. Many students seemed to be inattentive even at the beginning of the lesson. They talked and made a lot of noise. Lai Lai was aware of the problem and she stressed the importance of paying attention in class. There was a lot of talking and noise even after the listening practice began.

The students found the listening practice very difficult and it took quite some time for them to complete one exercise. Lai Lai was aware of the problem and she always asked them questions like 'Can you follow?' 'Okay?' 'Understand?' and 'Do you understand what I mean?' to see if they could understand or complete the exercises. However, in many cases she did not give her students any wait time to think about or answer the questions. Even if she did on one or two occasions, no students tried to respond to her questions. She asked her students some 'why' questions during the listening practice but they were not critical questions that stimulated critical thinking. The questions only required the students to locate some information or words in the transcript provided (see Section 6.2).

A lot of students were not doing the listening practice during the second part of the lesson. Some kept looking around without writing down anything. Others just sat still doing nothing. Lai Lai was very patient and what she said to the class was mostly positive and encouraging. Before ending the lesson, Lai Lai reiterated that she was unhappy today because a lot of students did not bring their books back to school. She encouraged the students to pay more attention in class. She then told the students what to bring to the class on the following day. Some students asked whether the grammar book was needed

but most students were busy packing their school bags and chatting without paying much attention to her.

Lai Lai talked about her students in the post classroom observation interview. She believed that it would take some time for her students to concentrate on their studies after a long holiday. She admitted that only about 15 students, less than one-third of the class, had really done the listening practice and on the whole her students did not perform well in listening lessons. Below is what she said in the interview:

> I think the objective has been achieved for some students, about 15 of them. They were able to follow the lesson and got the answers. I think that about 10 to 20 students were not learning anything during the lesson. I am sure the 12 students who forgot to bring their books were only daydreaming during the lesson. I think there were 1 to 2 students at the back who were not doing anything at all. I think only half, or even less than half of the objective for today's lesson, have been achieved. But, I think on the whole students are not performing well in listening lessons. I don't know if it is because they have to listen very carefully during the practice and the communication is mostly one way. There isn't someone real to perform in front of them, which would be less exciting and interesting to them.
>
> [SBMLaiPo4AR]

The focused question for the post classroom observation interview was 'How do you understand teaching, learning and education?' Lai Lai said there were different types of teaching, for example, teaching a subject and moral education. For teaching a subject, what the teacher had to do was to arouse the interest of students. According to Lai Lai, the teacher should possess some professional knowledge and should be able to achieve his/her teaching objectives through appropriate methods. Apart from teaching students subject knowledge, Lai Lai believed that it was more important to give students moral education, such as cultivating in them important values. In terms of learning, Lai Lai

believed that students had to take the initiative when they learned. She said that students could never learn well if they were forced to do so. She stressed that students would need to have an enquiring mind and be ready to ask questions. She added that qualities like being persistent and motivated were very important in learning. To Lai Lai, education was a huge topic. She believed that education helped students to distinguish between right and wrong and to acquire different important values.

5.1.6 The fifth classroom observation

Lai Lai said in the pre classroom observation interview that she would begin the fifth observed lesson with a 'free talk' presentation. She would then have some spelling practice with her students during the lesson. She planned to have a short revision on yes/no questions before introducing the topic on 'wh' questions. Below is how Lai Lai planned to approach the topic:

> I will teach them how to form 'wh' questions. I think some of them have learnt it before. So what I will do depends on how much they know about 'wh' questions. If I think most of them do not really know much about the topic, I will first explain to them how different question words are used. I will then draw their attention to the word order of questions. I will explain to them that they might use words like do/did/does when forming 'wh' questions.
>
> [SBMLaiPr5AR]

Instead of a student presentation, Lai Lai began the fifth observed lesson by going through the answers with her students of a test that they had done before. Interestingly, some students especially those sitting around the teacher were not paying Lai Lai much attention and she had to warn them several times to behave themselves. Unlike the first observed lesson, she had to nominate students to answer her questions because most of

the students were reluctant to do so. What she did was actually go through with her students all the answers given in her marking scheme. After that, a girl had her ‘free talk’ presentation. She was shy and spoke very softly. With Lai Lai’s encouragement, she finally managed to finish her presentation. Then Lai Lai told the students to take out a vocabulary list and she asked them to read out the words there. Lai Lai divided the class into two groups again. Students in the two groups were required to spell the words given by Lai Lai. The group that could spell more words won the group competition.

After the competition, Lai Lai wrote down some questions on the board and asked the students to complete the questions, for example, ‘… you hungry?’ and ‘…you feel hungry?’ She then checked the answers with her students. Lai Lai asked the students why ‘are’ was needed for the first question but ‘do’ was needed for the second one. A student tried to explain the rule about having a verb in a question. Lai Lai accepted the answer and explained the related grammar rules. In the rest of the lesson Lai Lai called mainly on the students who were keen to learn to answer her questions. Before ending the lesson, Lai Lai played a game with her students. She showed the students a cue card with a word on it. The students would then need to make a question with the word given. Before the game, Lai Lai summarized all the rules on forming questions she talked about before. The game was conducted in the form of a competition with students from Groups A and B competing with each other. Some students seemed to like the game and became very excited.

Although Lai Lai felt that the fifth observed lesson went smoothly, she believed that her teaching went too fast. She explained that because she wanted to play the game with the students she rushed through the part on 'wh' questions. She admitted that she should have drawn the attention of the class to the word order of 'wh' questions. She said that her students should have enjoyed the game on making questions and the learning atmosphere of the lesson was quite good. Two focused questions were asked in the fifth post classroom observation interview: (1) 'How do you understand English language teaching and learning?' and (2) 'What are the joys and difficulties of being a secondary school English language teacher?' Lai Lai believed that teaching students grammar was very important in English language teaching because English was a second language to the students in the school. She considered thinking an important element in English language teaching and believed that one's writing could reflect one's thinking. She said that students especially those in CMI (Chinese as the Medium of Instruction) schools had to take the initiative when learning English. They could not just rely on the teacher or what they learnt in the lesson. They had to practise a lot in order to learn the language well.

In terms of joys and difficulties, Lai Lai admitted that English language teachers faced more difficulties now. She was sad because she felt that English language teachers were always the ones to blame (see Section 6.1). Their effort was not appreciated. They were facing a lot of reforms. She felt helpless and did not see any way out. Below is what she said in the interview:

It's getting more and more difficult to be a secondary school English language teacher these days. It's really difficult in the present context e.g. the society. I think there are

many people in society who are not happy with the English language standard of students. They blame the teachers. But I think they are trying to simplify the reason behind the decline of the standard. They simply think that English language teachers now are not good. And their teaching is no good too. But I think they do not know much about teaching and even the broader contexts e.g. the attitude of people, the school curriculum etc. They don't know much about all these things. Everyone, including the Education Department, those QAI [Quality Assurance Inspection] people, people from the business sector, all seem to believe that the teacher is the one to blame. At the same time, we are facing a lot of reforms. Also, I think English language teachers face even more problems in a CMI school. I think we can barely survive in the present context. It's very, very hard to survive.

[SBMLaiPo5AR]

5.1.7 The sixth classroom observation

Lai Lai said in the pre classroom observation interview that she planned to teach her students comparative and superlative forms of adjectives in the last observed lesson. She said she would work out with the students some grammar rules about the formation of these adjectives, for example, adding 'er' and 'est' or 'iest' to some adjectives. After that, she planned to go through with her students some exercises they had done for homework. If possible, she would go through other worksheets that the students had done before. She stressed that the last observed lesson would be a mixture of everything with the goal of preparing the students for the quiz on the following day (see Sections 6.1 and 6.3).

Lai Lai's last observed lesson began with a 'free talk' presentation by a girl. She was well prepared and her presentation was good and clear. Her outstanding performance drew much attention from her classmates and Lai Lai was very pleased. After that, Lai Lai explained to her students some important points about the mid term exams that they had to pay attention to, such as exam format and syllabus. However, many of the students were not listening to her. They did not seem to care about what she said. They chatted

loudly making a lot of noise and creating confusion in the classroom. Lai Lai, who tried many times to quieten them down, was obviously not very successful and she barely completed what she had planned to say. Lai Lai then told the class to work out some rules about the formation of comparative and superlative forms of adjectives. Lai Lai referred them to some examples in a set of worksheets given to them before. However, the class did not seem to know what they had to do. Some looked lost and others tried asking their neighbours for help. Lai Lai seemed to be aware of the confusion and she gave the students some examples on the blackboard to work on. The examples included the words 'nice', 'large' and 'fine'. She then explained that for these simple and short adjectives they could just add 'r' to make them comparative adjectives. She also talked briefly about adjectives with two or three syllables. However, I got a very strong impression that some students did not really understand what Lai Lai was talking about. They did not seem to know what a 'syllable', 'vowel' or 'consonant' meant but Lai Lai did not seem to be aware of the problem and she kept using these terms in her teaching eventually losing lots of her students. Lai Lai talked about this part of teaching in the post classroom observation interview. She believed that it was good for students to work out grammar rules for themselves and explained that the learning process which involved a lot of thinking would help students to remember the rules better. Below is what she said in the interview:

Students were required to work out the rules regarding the formation of comparative and superlative forms of adjectives. I, in fact, had given them some notes on this before. But, I did not tell them to read the notes. But then I thought to myself: it would be better if I encouraged the students to work out the rules with me. I preferred working out the rules with them rather than giving them the rules. They would remember the rules better. If they worked together to figure out the rules e.g. a single 'r' is needed, or 'er' should be

added to the word, more thinking would be involved. It would be better than asking the students to read the notes. They might miss a lot of important things e.g. those spelling rules if they just read the handouts. So, I decided to prepare another handout for them.
[SBMLaiPo6AR]

The focused questions for the sixth post classroom observation interview were mainly about the critical thinking recommendations (see Appendix IV for the question scheme of the interview). In the interview, Lai Lai was invited to share with me her views on the critical thinking recommendations including her knowledge, understanding, perception of the recommendations and her current practice. Lai Lai believed that critical thinking was not something concrete or something that could easily be seen. According to her, it might be an internal ability that could be stimulated and trained. She stressed that it was never easy to prove that a person possessed this ability but a person's writing could reveal his/her thinking. She believed that a critical thinker would be able to analyze. He/she would be able to evaluate and ready to give comments and feedback. She added that a critical thinker would have an enquiring mind.

Lai Lai believed that English language teachers could help their students to develop critical thinking through the teaching of reading and writing. She was concerned about the English language proficiency of students stressing that the teaching of critical thinking would be possible only if students have reached a certain level of proficiency. Lai Lai also admitted that she had not been doing a great deal of teaching related to critical thinking in her Secondary 1 class. However, the present study encouraged her to do so. Despite her efforts, such as asking her students more 'why' questions and requiring them to justify their ideas, she was not sure if her students were learning to think

critically. She reiterated the doubt she raised in the exploratory study saying that she was still not sure if critical thinking needed to be taught explicitly in school.

Towards the end of the interview Lai Lai talked about the changes that would need to be made in the school curriculum and the exam and assessment systems before the critical thinking recommendations could be implemented in the school (see Section 6.4). She believed that some of the content in the school English curriculum would need to go to make room for new things, some integration might be needed in the school curriculum, and some changes in the format of exams and exam papers would also be necessary. She stressed that the recommendations relating to developing students' critical thinking through the English language subject had not been made clear or explicit to her by the school or education authority.

5.1.8 The last debriefing interview

A significant aim of the last debriefing interview was to show the participating teachers the critical encounter identified in their observed lessons and to get their feedback on it. The interview also aimed to find the benefits that the teachers perceived they gained from the study and the comments they had on the design of the study. Lai Lai was very pleased when she was described the critical encounter identified in her first observed lesson (see Section 5.1.2). She admitted that the teaching of critical thinking was not planned and that she would not have been aware of it, if it had not been pointed out. Lai Lai felt that her awareness of teaching students critical thinking had been raised because of the present study. Below is what she said in the interview:

At that time, it was something straightforward, like a reaction. I was not really thinking to myself - yes, I am teaching my students critical thinking, that's critical thinking. That's straightforward. It's not like that. I did not plan or think about it. The answer from the girl saying the hair clip would be useful when the hair of Della grew was unexpected. You know, originally I thought everyone would say that's a sad ending. So, to me, it's something unexpected. That's my reaction only. So, but now you are talking about the incident and I reflect on it. I do think that you are right and it seems the incident could help my students to develop critical thinking. [SBMLaiIIAR]

When asked to comment on the design of the main study, Lai Lai believed that I could consider observing a series of lessons by a teacher so as to find out how a teaching unit was handled. Although she believed that the design of the main study allowed me to observe more different types of lessons of each teacher, they were in many cases not related. She agreed with me that the pre classroom observation interview could in some way help fill the gap and that the feelings of the teacher were an important consideration saying that some teachers might welcome this type of classroom observation arrangement.

5.1.9 A portrait of Lai Lai's class

As revealed in the six observed lessons (see Table 5.1 Summary of data collection for Lai Lai on p.132), questions were frequently found in Lai Lai's lessons. Among them different types of questions were asked ranging from factual comprehension questions to questions that aimed to invite students to ask her questions about what they were learning. However, the questions asked were mostly lower order questions and in most cases the students could easily locate the answers in the given text. Although some 'why' questions have been identified in the observed lessons, many of the questions asked were only used to elicit from students the 'predetermined' answers she had in mind. Others were handled very briefly by Lai Lai, such as giving students a very brief wait time to think about or

answer the questions and thus some possible critical encounters were missed. Some of the ways in which Lai Lai handled her questions in the lessons did not seem to support students' critical thinking development or facilitate the cultivation of critical attitudes. For example, students were shot series of questions within a very short period of time. They were not given much time to think about the questions asked or to answer them. Most importantly, the students were not provided with models showing essential dispositions like being ready to listen to others and considering others' opinions in a careful and respectful manner.

In terms of teaching activities, games and group competitions were found to be common in Lai Lai's six observed lessons, which confirmed what she said in the first post classroom observation interview that she liked having games and group competitions in her lessons, as she believed they helped increase students' participation. In terms of teaching content, vocabulary teaching and the teaching of grammar rules seemed to be the focus of Lai Lai's teaching, which seemed to be consistent with Lai Lai's beliefs about English language teaching. When asked to describe her beliefs about English language teaching in the fifth post classroom observation interview, she said she considered grammar teaching very important for her students as English was not their first language. However, no matter what type of the lesson was, such as reading, writing or listening, students were seldom given the opportunity to use the language to communicate with others and there was little time or space for them to use the language purposefully in class.

In a nutshell, the common issues identified in Lai Lai's case were: time pressure, adherence to the school curriculum, the expanding school curriculum, the exam oriented culture, negative morale, critical thinking viewed as important but impossible in the present educational context.

Section 5.2 John (School B)

This section consists of nine sub-sections. Section 5.2.1 describes my first meeting with John. Sections 5.2.2 – 5.2.7 detail the six classroom observations and pre and post classroom observation interviews conducted as summarized in Table 5.2 below. Section 5.2.8 reports on the last debriefing interview with John and the section ends with a portrait of John's class in Section 5.2.9.

Table 5.2 Summary of data collection for John

John (School B)								
Date	16 Dec 2002	13 Jan 2003	15 Jan 2003	17 Feb 2003	20 Feb 2003	5 Mar 2003	10 Mar 2003	19Mar 2003
Events	1st meeting (lobbying) about 1 hr	Pr1 2.3mins	Pr2 4mins	Pr3 6.5mins	Pr4 3.3mins	Pr5 7mins	Pr6 1.5mins	II 44.5 mins
		CO1 80mins	CO2 80mins	CO3 40mins	CO4 80mins	CO5 40mins	CO6 80mins	
		Po1 17.6 mins	Po2 4.1 mins	Po3 20.7 mins	Po4 17.5 mins	Po5 11.6 mins	Po6 59 mins	

Key:-
Pr: Pre Classroom Observation Interview
CO: Classroom Observation
Po: Post Classroom Observation Interview
II: Last Debriefing Interview

As shown in Table 5.2 John and I met eight times on the dates specified. The table also shows that six classroom observations were conducted between January and March 2003. The dates of the six classroom observations and the length of all the interviews conducted, i.e. pre and post classroom observation interviews and the last debriefing interview, are also specified in the table.

5.2.1 First meeting with John

John was a NET (Native English Teacher) at School B. He had only been teaching there for about four months when he was invited to participate in the present study. However, engaging him in the study was not difficult at all. He seemed to recognize the significance of the study after I had explained to him its purpose, i.e. to find out what goes on in the ordinary everyday English language classroom. He immediately accepted the requests to observe his classes, have interviews before and after each classroom observation, and record his teaching.

John was then invited to talk about his duties in School B. Apart from the regular teaching assigned, John was required to hold discussion groups at the school English Corner during lunch time and after school. He helped to prepare the upper form students for public oral exams. He also helped to organize English activities for students in the school, such as the school Halloween party and English week. He was responsible for designing and presenting all the English programmes on the school radio, and was the editor of the school's English newsletter. He admitted that these duties took up much of his time but he seemed to enjoy doing them. He believed that sometimes discussion groups held during lunch time were more effective than regular oral lessons because students seemed to be more relaxed learning outside class time. The smaller group size, no more than five students in one group, allowed him to give his students the individual attention they needed. From our conversation, I got the impression that, in terms of teaching and learning, John always prioritised the benefits of his students.

In the meeting, John also talked about the education system in his home country. According to John, there was no public exam for primary or secondary school students in his country and most students could receive a university education. He felt that the students' English language results in Hong Kong were very decisive because if students did not get good results in English in the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examinations (HKCEE) or the Hong Kong Advanced Level Examinations (HKAL), they might not be able to get into university. John then shared some difficulties he had in the teaching of reading in the school and we also discussed some problems that NETs usually faced in teaching in local secondary schools. Although it was the first time that we met, his sharing was genuine and sincere (Section 7.1). He spoke calmly and gently throughout the meeting and decided to participate in the study without hesitation. He gave me a copy of his timetable. I then sent him the proposed dates and times for the first two classroom observations and he was pleased with the arrangements. John and I did not meet until the first classroom observation interview.

5.2.2 The first classroom observation

We met again in the first pre classroom observation interview. On that day I arrived in School B very early in the morning and John was pleased to see me again. Like the other participating teachers in School B, our interview was conducted in the staff common room because it was quiet and it allowed us some privacy. Amazingly, John remembered all the details about the study and was ready to share with me his plan for the first observed lesson. To begin the lesson, John planned to correct three exercises in the exercise book that the students had done for homework the night before. He explained

that the exercises were on simple past tense and they were revision exercises for his students. He would then move on to talk about a story in the textbook. John said that he had begun talking about the story, A perfect gift, which was the story that Lai Lai talked about in her first observed lesson (see Section 5.1.2), before Christmas and he was eager to find out if his students still remembered the meaning and pronunciation of the vocabulary in the story. The students would then be required to fill in a form in the textbook about the setting, plot and characters of the story. If time allowed, John would introduce the simple future. John said that according to the textbook the students were supposed to ask each other questions like 'Will you buy e.g. your mum a Christmas present?' But, Christmas had already passed and he saw no point following the textbook. Instead, he planned to ask his students questions like 'Will you buy her a present for the Chinese New Year?' because Chinese New Year was coming. John and I agreed to meet outside the classroom of his class before the observed lesson.

John went through the homework with his students at the beginning of the lesson. Instead of giving his students the answers to the exercises, he called on different students to answer the questions. He seemed to remember the names of all his students. John would say 'no' or 'I am afraid that's not correct' to answers that were inappropriate. In some cases, he gave the students some hints to help them answer the questions. But, in other cases, John did not follow up on the answers given but moved on to someone else for a different answer. John did not always require his students to explain their answers. For correct ones, he would say 'good' or 'yes' and would then repeat the correct answers

before moving on to the next question. Comparatively speaking, the wait time provided by John was usually longer than that of Lai Lai.

John then went through the story, A perfect gift, with his students. Individual students were invited to read out parts of the story. John talked about each part of the story and the vocabulary found in it. He liked to explain the meaning of new words or phrases in context and the context given was usually interesting. For instance, he talked about stepping on a banana skin and falling on the floor to explain the word ‘slip’. He sometimes acted out the words or phrases found in the text, such as ‘bump into somebody’ and ‘turn around’, which caused some laughter in the class. And, he drew simple pictures on the board to illustrate to his students the meaning of a word. Like Lai Lai, John tried to create a relaxed and supportive atmosphere in class. However, some of his students seemed to be passive and were reluctant to participate in class. Others were chatting with each other in Cantonese and I got the impression that they were not paying John much attention or respect.

John asked his students a lot of questions about the story in the first observed lesson. Below are some of the questions he asked:

1. Who are the three characters in the story?
2. What did we learn about Della in the beginning of the text? What do we know about Della when we start reading the text?
3. What can you buy in Sophie’s Hair Goods?
4. ‘Take off your hat’, what does it mean?
5. What’s ‘perfect’?
6. What is the meaning of ‘pray’? Who do people pray to? Don’t mistake ‘pray’ and ‘play’.

7. What's 'explain'?
8. What's 'grow'? Do you think you are growing?

[SBMJohnCO1AR]

As can be seen, most of them were simple comprehension questions requiring short answers, such as questions (1) - (3). Also, through questions, John hoped to elicit from his students the meaning of the vocabulary introduced in the story, for example, questions (4) – (8). Despite the reasonable wait time John gave his students, in many cases, due to a poor response from his students, John had to answer his own questions. In other cases, some students just shouted out their answers in Cantonese that John could not understand.

Before ending the lesson, John gave his students some time to complete some questions on the plot, setting and characters of the story in the textbook. He then went through the answers with them. Unlike checking the answers of the grammar exercises before, this time John always encouraged his students to explain their answers. He gave them time to think and to express their ideas. A critical encounter was identified towards the end of the first observed lesson. The critical encounter began when he asked his students to explain why they chose 1899 but not 2050 or 1999 as the time the story was set. Throughout the critical encounter John was patient and encouraging giving his students time to think about the question/answer. According to John, the answer to the question could not be found in the text and the clue was actually in the pictures given in the textbook. Below is the transcript of the encounter:

1	T	So, what is the answer to the questions?
2	S1	C
3	T	C in?
4	S1	One, what, eighty [S1 mixed up the pronunciation of ‘18’ and ‘80’.]
5 6	T	No, I know, I know we saw that in September, a long time ago. [Some students laughed.]
7	S2	1899.
8 9 10 11	T	In, yes, 1899, S2, er now, why, why didn’t you choose 2050 or 1999? [A boy said something but it was too soft to be heard by the researcher or recorded on tape.] Yes, well, 1999 is obviously in the future, is it? 2050 in the future, what about 1999?
12	S3	The past.
13 14 15 16 17 18	T	The past. [Another boy said something but it was too soft to be heard by the researcher or recorded on tape.] But what, what makes you choose 1899? [Different students gave different answers at this point e.g. a boy near me whispered, ‘from the pictures’, and another said, ‘people’. A boy then said, ‘poor’ which was then picked up by John.] Poor? Yes, but you still find poor people today.
19	S4	But now, now the shops cannot sell hair.
20 21 22	T	Shops cannot sell hair. Oh, yes, they still can. People still sell their hair. But, look, look at the pictures in your text. Look at the pictures in your text.
23	S5	The fashion.
24 25 26 27	T	Yes. The fashion, the clothes, are very different. It’s certainly not futuristic with lots of metal and shiny silver. And it doesn’t look like you and me today or 1999. So it’s definitely in the past. These clothes look very old indeed.

[SBMJohnCO1AR]

Through the ‘open questions’ (Tsui et al, 2004, p.128) in line 8, i.e. ‘Why didn’t you choose 2050 or 1999?’ and lines 14-15, i.e. ‘What makes you choose 1899?’ John encouraged his students to think critically about the answer selected, i.e. 1899. In the critical encounter, he allowed students much room to explore answers and welcomed responses from different students, again echoing Tsui et al’s (2004) assertion for the need to create space for learning. He was patient with their wrong attempts and incomplete answers, for example, ‘past’ in line 12 and ‘people’ in line 16. He discussed in a friendly manner with the students the problem of the answers they suggested, for instance, shops can still sell hair today as shown in line 20. Instead of answering the question himself, he gave the students the time and space to think about and answer the question. His first prompt was only introduced in line 21 when he referred his students to the pictures in the textbook. A student finally figured out the answer to the question with the help of the hint. As I could see, John had successfully created a critical thinking opportunity and a compatible context to engage his students in the critical thinking process. With the appropriate wait time given and the opportunity to genuinely express their opinions, some students took the initiative in joining in the discussion.

However, John did not seem to be pleased with the first observed lesson. In the post classroom observation interview, John said that he had not reached what he had planned to do with his students in the lesson. He said that it might be his problem and talked about his experience of lagging behind the teaching schedule in the first school term (see Section 6.1). He explained that he spent more time on homework at the beginning of the lesson because he wanted to make sure that the students understood what they were doing,

which, to him, did not seem to be the case in the school. He did not really understand why the teachers did not mark or even go through with their students the assignment they did during the summer holiday. He added that sometimes he spent quite some time helping his students to learn from the mistakes they made in homework and the pace or rhythm of the lesson was thus slower. He believed that students' short concentration span was a problem too. In addition he stressed that when he had to follow the textbook or the teaching schedule so closely, it was hard for him to introduce change in the lessons or bring in other teaching materials to arouse interest of his students. And, because he did not speak Cantonese, he lost personal contact with his students. Although he felt that some students seemed to have given up on the subject, he could not find out why. He stressed that with the present class size, i.e., about 40 students in a class, it was difficult to make sure that everyone was on task and everyone wanted to work.

The focused question for the first post classroom observation interview was 'Can you tell me about the students in this class?' According to John, the class was a mixed class in terms of ability and learning motivation. Some students were very good and they were really top students. They were very strict on themselves and they always did their homework and paid attention in class. There were also some students who were very good but a bit more playful. The ones in the middle were quite attentive and their results were not too good. These students would work on the exercises assigned to them most of the time. There was another group of students who were playful and sometimes did not do their homework. John stressed that they were not bad students because he believed that it was their personality to be playful.

Upon my request, John then answered some clarification questions about streaming of students in the school, names of his students and wait time. He admitted that he had no idea how the students were allocated to different classes. When I told him that I was amazed that he could remember the names of all his students, he joked that he was not very good with names because he had more than six hundred students in the school and he could only manage to remember about forty of them. In terms of wait time, John said he would never wait too long for an answer. If a student could not answer his question, he would invite other students to help or would try to rephrase his question. He would ask the question again using more simple words or would give students the answer indirectly.

5.2.3 The second classroom observation

The second classroom observation was conducted two days after the first one. I learnt from a teacher of School B on my way to the school that the school was having their staff meeting after school from 3:45pm -6:00pm. I was worried because it could mean that John would not be able to spare the time for the post classroom observation interview scheduled after school. I told John about my worries in the pre classroom observation interview and asked if he would like to reschedule the second classroom observation. He said it would be fine if we could have the interview at the English Corner. He said some senior students would have their oral practice at the English Corner after school. He suggested that we have the post classroom observation interview right after their oral practice. I agreed with John regarding the arrangements of the post classroom observation interview and was excited to find out more about their English Corner.

In the second pre classroom observation interview, John said he would, as usual, begin the lesson by going through with his students the exercises they had done for homework. He planned to correct two of them in the second observed lesson and to assign more homework. He would then ask his students some questions about the story he talked about in the last observed lesson to see if they could remember the story and the vocabulary. After that, he would introduce the future, i.e., the use of 'will'. Students would be invited to talk about the presents they bought or would buy for their family members and friends for Christmas and Chinese New Year. The students would then be required to complete a short listening practice on buying presents. John said if there was enough time, he would introduce the 'be going to' future. He added that he might change his mind during the lesson to talk about countable and uncountable nouns. He was afraid that there would be too much grammar for his students in one lesson but he believed that, comparatively speaking, countable and uncountable nouns would be a more enjoyable topic for his students.

When I got into the classroom for the second classroom observation, I found that the school Principal was already waiting there. She was there to observe John's lesson. She brought with her technicians and different devices for making recording of the teaching. She was very kind and offered me a copy of the recording of the lesson. I heard from Lai Lai that the Principal had been doing some classroom visits in the school recently. According to Lai Lai, because of some negative feedback given by the inspectors from the Education and Manpower Bureau (QAD, 2002), the Principal was eager to find out what was really going on in the English language classes. Lai Lai said the classroom

visits had put a lot of pressure on the English language teachers in the school. Some teachers in the school shared with me their worries regarding the classroom visits on different occasions.

Like the previous observed lesson, John began the second observed lesson by going through with his students the exercises they had done for homework the night before. As a brief revision, he then asked the students some questions about the story, A perfect gift. Most of the questions he asked were factual and simple questions about the story. Unlike the first observed lesson, the students were responsive and eager to answer his questions. John believed that it was because of the presence of the Principal. Below are some of the questions he asked about the story:

Was Della's hair long or short?
What did Della use to tie up her hair?
Who gave Jim his pocket watch?
What's the name of Sophie's shop?
Why did Sophie buy Della's hair?
How much did Sophie give for Della's hair?
What time did Jim arrive home?

[SBMJohnCO2AR]

According to John, the second observed lesson aimed to revise with the students the use of simple past tense and to introduce to them the future tense. Students were required to do some pair work in which they had to ask each other questions using the two tenses. Both the theme and form of the questions that the students asked in the pair work were set, i.e., talking about the Christmas and Chinese New Year presents that they had bought

or planned to buy. The pair work was very mechanical and was more like a blank-filling exercise (see Section 6.3). Below are the questions that the students asked:

Did you give your father a present for Christmas?
Will you give him a present for Chinese New Year?

[SBMJohnCO2AR]

During the pair work, the students were given two minutes to think about their questions and answers before they talked to each other. They were also allowed to write down the questions and answers if they wanted to. Some students were then invited to present to the class what they had prepared. The Principal left after the first period and did not get a chance to see the reporting back of the pair work. After she left, some students' behaviour changed tremendously from highly-disciplined and controlled to very relaxed. The video camera was still on but some of them began talking to each other making quite a lot of noise in the classroom. Although John tried to draw the attention of the students to his teaching, he was not very successful. John was calm and stable throughout the lesson and from time to time he smiled at me politely.

We had the second post classroom observation interview at the English Corner. The room was clean and cozy with lots of English teaching and learning materials. John admitted that it was very different when he first came to School B and that he had put in a lot of effort to improve it. John seemed to be relaxed in the English Corner. He reflected on different aspects of the second observed lesson. For example, he talked about why he asked his students to show him their homework in the lesson. He explained that he had found that some of them were not doing their homework properly. But, he was glad that

his students seemed to remember the story that they went through before. He said that the listening practice was not too difficult for his students and most of them could manage it. According to the school policy, in order to prepare students for the HKCEE, i.e. the exams that the students would probably take after four years, they were only allowed to listen to the tape once during listening practice and John described the requirement as 'horrible'.

John admitted that the presence of the Principal explained why some students 'jumped up' to answer his questions in the second observed lesson. He said he could also understand why some students were reluctant to present in front of the class during the pair work. John explained that he had decided not to introduce the 'be going to' future because he felt that there would be too much grammar for his students. On the whole, he said he enjoyed the parts on the story and pair work most. The focused question for the interview was not raised because of the staff meeting. But, after the second post classroom observation interview, John took the initiative in talking about the quality assurance inspection (QAD, 2002) that took place in the school recently. He talked about the unconstructive feedback from the inspectors and the impression he had of them. He believed that being open-minded, understanding and supportive were all important qualities for inspectors in helping teachers to grow professionally. We chatted for about 30 minutes after the interview. Obviously, John was not very keen on attending the staff meeting which was conducted in Cantonese.

5.2.4 The third classroom observation

Because of school holidays, the third classroom observation took place about a month after the second one. In the pre classroom observation interview, John said he would begin the third observed lesson by giving the students some information about an outing that they would be having soon. He would then return to his students their free writing and would present some gifts to those who did well. The students would then be required to complete a listening practice about Christmas. John commented that requiring his students to work on the listening practice in February was out of context and stressed that his students had to complete the practice mainly because it was part of the school curriculum (see Section 6.1.2). Below is an excerpt from the interview:

> If I was mean I would say it's just because I have to do it [John laughed] and it's part of the requirement, basically…. We are all talking about Christmas talking about different items related to Christmas, but I think it's out of context.
>
> [SBMJohnPr3AR]

John began the third observed lesson by giving his students some information about a school outing. In the outing, the students were required to conduct street interviews with English speaking foreigners in a popular tourist district. But, many students did not seem to care about what John said. They were talking to each other loudly. They did not seem to be paying John or the details about the outing much attention. Like Lai Lai, John was very patient and calm. Despite the noise and confusion, he explained the details clearly to the class. John then returned to the students the free writing they did before. According to John, students could really express themselves in free writing. Students were usually assigned a topic for free writing. For example, the teacher read an unfinished story to the students and asked them to finish the story themselves. It was then up to the students to

decide if it was going to be a happy or sad ending. Presents were then given to two students who did well in their free writing. As I could see, most students seemed to be eager to read the comments from John. According to John, he focused mainly on content when responding to free writing and teachers in the school were not supposed to mark the students' free writing.

The students were then required to complete some listening practice during the lesson. Unlike the first half of the lesson, the students became deadly quiet and were reluctant to do what they were told or answer John's questions. John had to nominate students to answer his questions but many students showed no intention to communicate with him. Some of them just ignored him and chatted with each other in Cantonese. I could feel the tension between John and some of his students. The teaching went on very slowly with John asking and answering most of his own questions. There was hardly any real communication between John and his students. In the post classroom observation interview, John took the initiative in talking about his feelings about the third observed lesson and he admitted that he felt some resistance among the students. He said that he scolded his students the week before because some of them never brought their books or completed their homework. He suspected that this was the reason why some students were not participating in the lesson. He did not think that he had achieved the teaching objectives that he had set for the lesson. He then complained about the textbook saying that it sometimes took him a long time to complete an activity in the textbook and thus it was hard for him to introduce variety in the lesson or bring in other teaching materials, which he considered important in teaching. He admitted that he could not see the

significance of some of the vocabulary in the textbook for his students. He said the school curriculum was too packed and he could not see how he could manage to complete what was assigned before the exam (see Section 6.1). He also talked about his impression of teacher-student relationships in Hong Kong. Below is an excerpt from the interview:

> The exam, no choice, the grammar has got to be done so this would mean rushing again through things. So, I think here in HK, it is even more difficult to get a good relationship with students unless, that's my impression, you are not listening to them and you are just feeding them. I teach you listening. I teach you listening. I teach you listening, basically that sort of method. But I sought interaction. So even if sometimes they are noisy, but answers are coming out, I think that is more positive than having them listen to a lesson and just sitting there anyway, watching the ceiling watching whatever. So it's a bit of a dilemma
>
> [SBMJohnPo3AR]

The focused question for John for the post classroom observation interview was 'Can you tell me what parents are like nowadays?' John admitted that he seldom had contact with parents because he did not speak Cantonese. Even on the Parents' Day, he was only required to welcome parents at the main gate. He could see the importance of communication between teachers and parents but for him he would need another teacher to help do the job. He doubted the extent to which his NET colleagues in other schools who were assigned to be class teachers of Secondary 1 could handle contact with the parents and documents that were mainly in Chinese.

5.2.5 The fourth classroom observation

The fourth pre classroom observation interview was very short. For John, the objectives of the lesson were very clear, i.e. to familiarize students with the vocabulary in the textbook and to drill them on 'wh' questions because it was the most important grammar

topic of the teaching unit. John began the fourth observed lesson by returning to the students the dictation they had previously completed. Presents were given to the students who did very well in the dictation. After that, using a projector John showed his students some pictures of food. The pictures shown included cuisine from different parts of the world. He went through the pictures with the whole class asking them their preferences for food. John sometimes talked about the ingredients, origins, and cooking methods of the dishes. Some students seemed to like the topic very much and were ready to listen to John. Others discussed excitedly among themselves in Cantonese the food shown in the pictures without paying much attention to John or the questions he asked. On the whole, both the teaching and questions John asked were mostly teacher-directed. The lesson ended with the noise and laughter of the students.

Although John believed that his students had enjoyed the fourth observed lesson, he considered the lesson a heavy one because the students were introduced to many new words in one lesson. He admitted in the post classroom observation interview that he could not see the significance of some of the new words introduced. He stressed that the students had to learn them only because they were from the textbook and would be tested in the exams. But he believed that the lesson was a good opportunity to open up the mind of the students towards foreign cultures. He planned to work with the Home Economics teacher to arrange for his students to work on a recipe of a dish introduced in the lesson. John believed that the fourth observed lesson provided a good foundation for the cross-curricular activity. He added that cross-curricular activities did not seem to be common in the school and he would try to bargain with the Home Economic teacher to see what

could be done. He believed that the activity would help the students to see why the vocabulary was important to them and they could put into practice what they had learnt. He felt that because of public exams and expectations of parents, school teachers in Hong Kong did not seem to enjoy much space in teaching (see Section 6.1). Below is an excerpt from the interview:

John: I don't think there is any (space for teachers) even even if you want to change the curriculum, let's say in S.1 – 3, you still have the public exams (in senior forms). So you cannot change otherwise S.4 students won't be prepared, won't be ready for that public exam. So there is so far no space unless you reduce the coursebook.
Researcher: Why is the coursebook so important?
John: What I heard is that parents buy the books. So the books have got to be full at the end of the school year. There's got to be something in the books. And when you waive one unit, as I told you spending nearly 2 months on Christmas after Christmas, well you understand that we can't do much more. It's difficult.

[SBMJohnPo4AR]

The focused question for John for the post classroom observation interview was 'How do you understand teaching, learning and education?' John believed that teaching and learning were closely linked together. Teaching, to him, was the sharing of knowledge. He believed that he could learn from his students and he hoped that through the teaching process they learnt something from him. According to John, teaching was not really a job. It was more like being dedicated to an ideal that sometimes could not be achieved. He considered every lesson unique and tried to learn from it. John stressed that learning and teaching should be fun. People who wanted to learn should enjoy what they were doing. They should not be forced to learn and should be allowed to follow their own rhythm. He believed that the education system in Hong Kong was strict and that many students learnt through pressure but not enjoyment. John believed that education started at home and the

teacher was only a link in a very long chain. Children started learning when they were very young and they learned from both their parents and peers. They keep on learning throughout their lives. He believed that the education system in Hong Kong allowed little room for students who were not academically minded to develop their potential, which was sad because people could be talented in different areas.

5.2.6 The fifth classroom observation

According to John, in terms of teaching objectives, the fifth observed lesson was just a melting pot of things with an ultimate aim to prepare students for the mid-term exam (see Sections 6.1.3 and 6.3.4). Below is what he said in the pre classroom observation Interview:

> So well today is going to be a bit of melting pot of things, not too sure what I am going to do except that I have to correct some homework that's about four exercises. I have got, just received some exercises on 'wh' questions, so I will go through one or two of those exercises with them. I will also go through the 'famous' vocabulary checklist with them because I have to prepare them for the unseen dictation sometime soon ... [John laughed as he said that.] I have to rush to something totally different which is comparative and superlative of adjectives because it's part of the quiz which is next week and of the exam which is the week after, so I kind of have to forget about what we are doing right now which is Unit 4 food and stuff. I have to forget about it because I am far behind the schedule, so that's it. I don't expect that this lesson would be revealing at all. There is no particular objective. The objective is to be sure that I have seen with them what they need for the quiz. But that is not a good objective.
>
> [SBMJohnPr5AR]

Although John was busy going through one after the other grammar exercises in the fifth observed lesson to prepare his students for the school exams, some of his students did not seem to see the importance of the lesson. They chatted loudly and played joyfully with each other without paying much attention to John or the grammar exercises. John tried

eliciting answers from his students but was not really successful. He ended up telling the class most of the answers to the grammar exercises. There was hardly any genuine exchange of ideas in the lesson and the lesson ended with the noise and confusion of the class.

However, as John reported in the fifth post classroom observation interview, he believed that, as far as the textbook was concerned, most of the teaching objectives of the lesson had been reached, such as seeing with the students what they would need for the English test. He admitted that the objectives reached were not essential to English language learning at all. He stressed that his students were not given the opportunity to use the language communicatively. John took the initiative in bringing up the cross-curricular activity mentioned in the previous post classroom observation interview. He said that he had already given up the teaching idea and that he had to be more practical because he really did not have the time to do so. He stressed that the opportunity had to be wasted because of the time constraints he faced in teaching. He believed that he could hardly manage anything that was not really part of the school curriculum. He admitted in the interview that he was not quite sure if the school curriculum could help prepare his students for the HKCEE; the exams that his students would probably take four years later. He was not convinced of the quantity of material included in the school curriculum, which he described as 'enormous' (see Section 6.1.2). Below is an excerpt form the interview:

Whether the school curriculum prepares them for the HKCEE or not, I am not too sure. Again, it's more like feeding ducks, it's more like feeding ducks. But what I am not

convinced is that there is too much. Although we have eleven periods, they are only 40 minutes in each, not a lot in terms of hours. But the quantity we have to do in the few hours in the week are just enormous. And that of course is a very big problem. The way it is implemented means that you have to skip maybe interesting parts just to focus on others for some reason.

[SBMJohnPo5AR]

He was also disappointed with the way grammar had to be taught in the school and how the textbook constrained his teaching.

You have to go through any grammar points without any virtually without any context…. Associate that topic a grammar topic with something real and tangible, which I think it's really important. You don't do grammar just for the sake of grammar. But the problem is that even though the idea is don't do grammar for the sake of grammar, even the coursebook is grammar oriented. No matter what you do, in the end…. To be honest, I hate using textbooks. I would rather say ok I read an interesting article in the newspaper. I'll make it simple for S.1 students. Then we'll talk about it …and pictures I take on the Internet and introducing useful vocabulary to them. I could still do the grammar things.

[SBMJohnPo5AR]

The fifth post classroom observation interview was conducted in a classroom in which John was supervising his students in a detention class. The students were making a lot of noise and the interview was interrupted several times by some students who asked to leave. To keep the interview short, the focused question on the joys and difficulties of English language teachers was not asked. Despite the noise and interruptions, John seemed to have a lot to say about the school curriculum and textbook. He was genuine and sincere (see Section 7.1) when he talked about the frustrations and disappointments he was experiencing in the school.

5.2.7 The sixth classroom observation

John said in the brief pre classroom observation interview that he planned to do three things in the sixth observed lesson: (1) to give an unseen dictation, (2) to show his students some Guinness world records, and (3) to complete with his students some grammar exercises on superlative and comparative forms of adjectives on the Internet. John began the last observed lesson with the dictation that he considered 'nonsensical'. Below is what he said about the dictation in the post classroom observation interview:

> I would say that the first part, the dictation, is kind of nonsensical because that dictation contains too many difficult words. To start with, they will not change their lives whether they can spell them or not, I think. Anyway, this is part of their curriculum. So my fear is that it will be extremely bad…. We have noticed that most papers in exams one of the biggest problems is spelling. They can't spell properly. And we have tried to find solutions. It's hard to improve their spelling but I don't think that doing such dictation would improve anything. It could only make things worse because they would be disgruntled.
>
> [SBMJohnPo6AR]

The classroom observation also showed that the students did not welcome the unseen dictation. Some students were chatting with each other. Others were even walking around the classroom when John explained to them important guidelines about the unseen dictation. According to John, the dictation passage would be read out three times and they could only start writing after the first reading. When John read out the dictation passage for the first time, some students were still talking loudly to their classmates. They made a lot of complaints during the dictation. For example, some complained that John's voice was too soft and others complained about the difficult words found in the passage. They shouted out their complaints and talked to each other as well as John in Cantonese knowing that he could not understand. Although John looked calm and responded to

some of their complaints, I got the impression that the relationship between John and his students was very tense during the dictation.

After the dictation, John showed the class some video clips of different world records on the Internet, such as the woman with the longest finger nails. Through the activity John wanted to introduce to his students with concrete examples the superlative and comparative forms of adjectives. The students seemed to like the teaching idea and they enjoyed watching the video clips. Some of them even made suggestions about what world records they hoped to see. There was some communication between John and his students regarding the selection of video clips. John as well as his students seemed to enjoy this part of the lesson. Below is what he said about his teaching in the post classroom observation interview:

> All I wanted to do today is really introduce the topic by using examples, concrete examples and I will again do the same tomorrow but without the computer telling them about the longest balloon chain I told them to try making for the coming English week. [SBMJohnPo6AR]

After reflecting on the unseen dictation and grammar teaching, John talked about the English week in the post classroom observation interview. He said a lot of English language teachers had been preparing different activities for the week. And, without much support from his colleagues or students, he was required to prepare all the programmes for the school radio in the English week.

The focused questions for the sixth post classroom observation interview were mainly about the critical thinking recommendations (see Appendix IV for the question scheme of the interview). John answered every question slowly and critical thinking was evident in what he said. John had a clear understanding of critical thinking. He believed that critical thinkers should be able to think independently, would respect diversity and have their own opinions on different issues. Like Fun in School A (see Section 5.5), John stressed that a student who thought critically would not accept blindly what other people said, including their teachers. John supported the idea that secondary school teachers should help their students to develop critical thinking through the English language subject, and he believed that it could be done through cross-curricular activities. According to John, the teaching of critical thinking in school should aim to help students to be aware of differences and to respect diversity. He considered the English language subject an appropriate subject for developing students' critical thinking in Hong Kong because English, as a foreign language to most students in Hong Kong, could help bring a new way of thinking and different cultures into the classroom.

John admitted that he had not been helping his Secondary 1 students to develop critical thinking through the English language subject. At the school level, he believed that the packed school curriculum, the time constraints he faced when teaching, an emphasis on getting good exam results, the rigid school and assessment systems and the poorly written textbook constrained his teaching, and made the teaching of critical thinking difficult (see Section 6.4.3). He added that the parents' expectations and the culture of the educational context prevented him from doing it. John stressed that some changes in the school

curriculum must be made before the critical thinking recommendations could be implemented. For example, the school English language curriculum for Secondary 1 or 2 should be lighter to allow more room for free and genuine communication, critical thinking, and the development of creativity in the students. John considered school commitment an important factor in the successful implementation of the critical thinking recommendations in the school. He believed that the recommendations could only be successfully implemented by the whole team of teachers in the school. According to John, they had to work together towards in an agreed direction and the implementation process could not be rushed. John said that he had read about the critical thinking recommendations in some documents given to him when he first arrived in Hong Kong about two years ago. He then had no more contact with the education authority and he had not heard about any support either from the school or from the education authority for teachers to help them implement the critical thinking recommendations.

Before ending the interview, John was invited to talk about his views on English language teaching and the joys and difficulties of being a secondary school English language teacher in Hong Kong. John considered communication the goal of English language teaching, i.e. learners learning English to communicate with other native or non-native English speaking people. In terms of difficulties, John believed that all the guidelines given to teachers as well as different requirements imposed on them left teachers with little space in teaching. John felt that teaching in Hong Kong was like teaching in a ‘prison’ [SBMJohnPo6AR] (see Section 6.1).

5.2.8 The last debriefing interview

A significant aim of the last debriefing interview was to show the participating teachers the critical encounter identified in their lessons and to get their feedback to it. When asked to comment on the critical encounter identified in his first observed lesson (see Section 5.2.2), John agreed that the question he asked in that particular context could be considered a critical question that facilitated the critical thinking development of the students. He stressed that to answer the question, 'What makes you choose 1899?' the students needed to read not just the text but around it including the pictures given in the textbook. Below is what he said in the interview:

> I agree indeed because they did not have the information in the text as such. The only reference was a word of pictures. [Not audible utterances] So, I wanted them to use not just the text to find the answer but also what was around the text. Because I think that sometimes what is around the text or what we call 'between the lines' is as important if not more important than the text itself when you try to understand what the text is.
>
> [SBMJohnIIAR]

John said that he had benefited from the present study because he was given the opportunity to reflect on what he was doing. John then shared his views on classroom observation and the peer observation scheme that the school was supposed to be carrying out. John believed that both teachers and students could benefit from peer classroom observation and he considered recordings of classroom teaching stimulating teaching materials for critical thinking. He said he had enjoyed the whole research experience and was eager to find out what he and other participating teachers would be doing in the following stage of the study. He looked disappointed when I told him that the data collection ended there and I would not be going to the school to have classroom observation or interviews with him in the near future.

5.2.9 A portrait of John's class

During the three-month data collection period (see Table 5.2 Summary of data collection for John on p.164), John gave me the impression that in terms of teaching he knew clearly what he was doing and why he was doing it. He spent quite a lot of time going through with his students the homework they did in the lessons. He liked to organize and relate his teaching to a particular context. He could see the importance of cross-curricular activities. He had interesting teaching ideas. He hoped to introduce variety in his lessons and bring in new teaching materials. He considered interaction and communication important in English language teaching. He was aware of the problems of the textbook and school curriculum. He believed that teaching was more like an ideal rather than a job and it was a learning process for both the teacher and student. However, his teaching experience in School B was frustrating. He had to rush through what was assigned in the school curriculum. He had to follow the textbook closely. His teaching was sometimes out of context. He felt that his teaching was heavily constrained by different factors, such as the culture and the requirements of the school. To him, time constraints in teaching would pose a big problem to the teaching of critical thinking. Although he could see the importance of critical thinking and had clear ideas of how to teach it through the English language subject, he felt that he could not afford the time to do anything that was not part of the school curriculum.

In a nutshell, the common issues identified in John's case were: time pressure, adherence to the school curriculum, the problematic school curriculum, the exam oriented culture, the rigid school system, no teaching autonomy, critical thinking viewed as important but impossible in the present educational context.

Section 5.3 Ling (School B)

This section consists of nine sub-sections. Section 5.3.1 describes my first meeting with Ling. Sections 5.3.2 – 5.3.6 detail the five classroom observations and pre and post classroom observation interviews conducted as summarized in Table 5.3 below. As the sixth classroom observation was cancelled due to the school uniform test, only the target interview that aimed to elicit Ling's views about the critical thinking recommendations was conducted and reported in Section 5.3.7. Section 5.3.8 reports on the last debriefing interview with Ling and the section ends with a portrait of Ling's class in Section 5.3.9.

Table 5.3 Summary of data collection for Ling

Ling (School B)								
Date	16 Dec 2002	14 Jan 2003	16 Jan 2003	12 Feb 2003	13 Feb 2003	11 Mar 2003	13 Mar 2003	19 Mar 2003
Events	1st meeting (lobbying) about 1 hr	Pr1 2mins	Pr2 1min	Pr3 #1	Pr4 4.2mins	Pr5 26.5mins	Cancelled #2	II 18 mins
		CO1 80mins	CO2 80mins	CO3 80mins	CO4 80mins	CO5 80mins	Cancelled #2	
		Po1 6 mins	Po2 2 mins	Po3 23.7 mins	Po4 9 mins	Po5 8.8 mins	Target Interview 21 mins	

Key:-
Pr: Pre Classroom Observation Interview
CO: Classroom Observation
Po: Post Classroom Observation Interview
II: Last Debriefing Interview
#1 Because of some mechanical problems, the third Pre Classroom Observation Interview was not recorded on tape.
#2 The classroom observation and its pre and post classroom observation interviews were cancelled because of the school uniform test.

As shown in Table 5.3 Ling and I met eight times on the dates specified. The table also shows that only five classroom observations were conducted between January and March 2003. The sixth classroom observation as well as its pre and post classroom observation interviews was cancelled due to the English uniform test on the day of the classroom

observation. Instead, a target interview was conducted to elicit Ling's perceptions on the critical thinking recommendations. The dates of the five classroom observations and the length of all the interviews conducted, i.e. pre and post classroom observation interviews, the target interview and last debriefing interview, are also specified in the table.

5.3.1 First meeting with Ling

The first meeting with Ling was a very pleasant experience. Although we met for the first time, she was ready to share her feelings, experience and views about different things. Like John in her school, her sharing was genuine and sincere (see Section 7.1) and it was not difficult to engage her in the study. She was taking a part-time course on English language teaching at the time of the present study and had to complete different assignments, but she decided to participate immediately right after she was explained the design and purpose of the study, i.e. to find out how teaching was conducted in everyday English language classrooms. She said that the school year was a very busy one because lots of people would be observing her lessons, for example, lecturers from the course she was taking, the quality assurance inspectors (QAD, 2002) and me.

Ling said in the meeting that she was an English language teacher who was not subject-trained. She studied psychology at university. She completed her secondary school education in an English speaking country and got her first degree there. She was then employed as a substitute English language teacher in School B. Although she was not teaching any subjects related to psychology there, she was not disappointed. With her rich knowledge in psychology, she got on well with her students and was then invited to

stay in the school as a regular teacher. According to Ling, she worked very hard to learn to teach the English language subject, for example, going to seminars and experimenting with different teaching ideas. She admitted that she did have some difficult times during the first few years of teaching. She believed that she had learned a lot from her hands-on experience and her past learning experience. At the time when the present study was conducted, Ling had been working as an English language teacher in School B for more than ten years. She said that she was really disappointed when she was considered an unqualified English language teacher by the education authority. According to the new government policies for language teachers, all English language teachers who were not subject-trained would need to prove that they had reached the English language standard set by the education authority before they became qualified teachers. She said she was only trying to help in a time of need, but now she seemed to be the one to blame. Her efforts were not appreciated and she felt hurt (see Section 6.1).

All the participating teachers in School B, i.e. Ling, John and Lai Lai were sent the proposed times and dates for the first two classroom observations towards the end of December. They all seemed to be pleased with the arrangements. However, I got Ling's phone call about a week before our first scheduled classroom observation. She asked if the plan for observing her class could be postponed. She explained that there would be a number of student problems after the long Christmas holiday, for example, they probably would not have their textbooks for the lesson and would not be able to concentrate on the lesson. She stressed that she would be very busy with her assignments and could spare no time for classroom observations or interviews in the following week. I explained to her

that it would not be a problem at all if the students were found to be kind of ‘messy’ as she described after a long holiday. And, the data would be valuable as long as they reflected the reality, but Ling insisted that she would need more time for her assignments and that the classroom observation had to be postponed. The date for the first classroom observation was then rescheduled and we had no contact until the first pre classroom observation interview about two weeks later.

5.3.2 The first classroom observation

Ling said in the pre classroom observation interview that she planned to talk about quantifiers in the first observed lesson. She would bring to her class some objects to elicit from her students different quantifiers, for example, a bunch of keys, a bottle of water and a tube of toothpaste. She believed that introducing the topic in this way could help arouse the interests of her students. She said that some of her students might have some knowledge on the topic and the activity would provide them with a chance to consolidate what they had learnt before. For those students who did not know much about the topic, it would be a good opportunity for them to learn. A game on quantifiers would then be played and before ending the lesson students would be required to complete some exercises on the topic for consolidation. She added that if there was still time left, she would move on to talk about countable and uncountable nouns. She would either play a game with her students or ask them to complete some grammar exercises.

The students seemed to like the first part of the lesson very much. They were very responsive describing the objects Ling showed them in English. Ling from time to time

chatted with her students about the objects she showed them, for example, asking them if they liked the candy shown. The students were then moved into groups of four and were told to write down as many as possible phrases with quantifiers. Without giving any time to research on the topic, the students had to complete the task based on what they had learnt before. After that, Ling went through with her students the phrases each group suggested. Interestingly, instead of making all the decisions herself, Ling always asked her students for opinions on whether to accept the examples given. In most cases she listened to her students and considered their views carefully. The group that gave the most correct phrases won the game and the group members were given some presents. The presents were contributed by students who spoke Cantonese in the previous English lessons. Ling assigned her students some grammar exercises as homework before ending the lesson. Although the lesson was full of laughter and there was a lot of student participation, the students were not given any opportunity to use the quantifiers in context or communicate with others during the lesson (see Section 6.3.1).

Ling seemed to be pleased with the first observed lesson. She said in the post classroom observation interview that the teaching objective of the lesson had been reached and the students ‘response was good. She admitted that this was because many students found the teaching topic manageable. She then explained why she went through the examples of quantifiers suggested by each group with the whole class during the group competition. She stressed that for questions concerning the use of a language there could be more than one correct answer to the question and she would accept answers that her students

considered right. She believed that this style of teaching and learning would be more effective and students would find the learning process more enjoyable.

The focused question for the first post classroom observation interview was ‘Can you tell me about the students in this class?’ Ling said the abilities of the students in her class were very different. The English standard of some students was comparatively higher and they knew more about the language. Some were weaker and they could hardly follow the lesson. Some of the students had even failed the listening exam in the first school term. She believed that the English language standard of most of the students was just average. In terms of learning, Ling said that only about half of the class was willing to learn and these students were more attentive in class. Some students liked to talk and they always talked in Cantonese during the English lessons. To discourage them from using Cantonese in the lessons, Ling required the students who spoke Cantonese in her lessons to contribute a small present to the class. The presents would then be given to students to recognize their efforts and participation in class. According to Ling, some students had difficulty concentrating on their work but she believed that a more interactive teaching approach and encouraging students to play a more active role in teaching and learning might help these students to learn, which probably explains why she always tried to involve students in her teaching, for example, asking her students for opinions on the answer suggested.

5.3.3 The second classroom observation

The second pre classroom observation interview was conducted very briefly. Apart from a very tight teaching schedule, Ling had to patrol the school during both recess and lunchtime on the day of the second classroom observation. Knowing that she could not spare the time for the interview, she told me to meet her outside the staff common room at a certain time. She said she would then walk past the room and we could have a brief interview there. The interview, though lasted about a minute, was conducted very smoothly. In the interview Ling said she would continue her teaching on plural nouns, for example, plural nouns ending with ‘s’ and ‘es’. She would require her students to give her some examples of plural nouns and would then wrap up the topic on nouns by having a revision with them.

In the beginning of the lesson, Ling asked her students for examples of different forms of plural nouns, such as nouns ending with ‘s’, ‘es’ and ‘ies’ and talked very briefly about spelling rules of plural nouns. Then she moved the students into two groups. The students were required to write down examples of plural nouns on the board for their group and the group that provided most examples with the correct spelling won the game. After the game, Ling showed her students a presentation on the computer. It was about different spelling rules of plural nouns. Some pictures were shown on the screen and the students were required to make sentences. For example, ‘there are three umbrellas on the desk ‘and ‘there are two books on the shelf’. Like the first observed lesson, Ling always asked her students for their opinions when going through answers with them, such as whether to accept the examples or sentences suggested, and she always listened to her students carefully. She also encouraged her students to find out the spelling of words that they

were not sure about at home. However, like the first observed lesson, the students were not given the opportunity to use the grammar taught in context or to communicate with others. Only simple and mechanical grammar exercises were used to consolidate what the students had learnt (see Section 6.3.1).

Ling did not seem to be pleased with her teaching in the second observed lesson. She said in the post classroom observation interview that she could have done better. She stressed that she was really exhausted and took the initiative in talking about some spelling mistakes she made in the lesson. Below is what she said in the interview:

> I think my teaching today was weak because I was really exhausted. I had to teach from the second period to the fifth period and had to be on duty during both recess and lunchtime. I really did not have any time to rest today or to think about time control for the lesson. Therefore I did not control the time well during the lesson. I felt really exhausted and even when I was teaching I was aware that I might have made some mistakes. I thought I might have said something wrong during the lesson. I was really exhausted. I was not too sure about whether what I was talking about was right but later on I found that I had made some [spelling] mistakes. If I really make some mistakes in class, I will try to correct them in the following lesson. But today I got the chance to correct the mistakes I had made during the Powerpoint presentation…. My teaching performance was affected by my physical condition and I did not sleep well last night but I had expected to do better.
>
> [SBMLingPo2AR]

Ling looked really exhausted even during the post classroom observation interview. To keep the interview short, no focused question was asked.

5.3.4 The third classroom observation

Ling planned to complete three things with her students in the third observed lesson: (1) some listening practice, (2) a vocabulary quiz, and (3) some pair work. Because of some

mechanical problems, the third pre classroom observation interview was not recorded on tape.

Many students seemed to find the listening practice difficult in the third observed lesson. Although Ling allowed them to listen to the tape for two or three times and went through with them the key words and phrases in the book before the actual listening, many of them could not complete their work. Some looked frustrated and were reluctant to try. Others were, obviously, not doing their work right from the beginning of the lesson. Some of them kept looking around the classroom and others just sat quietly without writing down anything. The performance of the students formed a big contrast with what was seen in the first observed lesson. The predominantly teacher-directed teaching went on very slowly with Ling doing most of the talking. After the listening practice, the students were required to complete a vocabulary quiz. Ling planned to conduct the quiz in the form of the game, bingo, but it was not really successful because the design of the activity sheet was inappropriate and many students could not understand her instructions. The lesson ended with lots of student complaints, noise and confusion.

Ling seemed to be aware of the problems of the third observed lesson. She explained in the post classroom observation interview that the listening practice was too difficult for her students. She added that some students could barely concentrate on their work after a long holiday. She stressed that the poor performance of her students was as she had expected. The focused question for the post classroom observation interview was ‘Can you tell me what parents are like nowadays?’ Ling admitted that she could not tell me

much about the topic because she was not a class teacher this year and had little contact with parents. She said that in the past many parents were concerned about the English results of their children. Among these parents were some who were well educated. Others were parents who knew nothing about English. However, they could see the importance of the language, i.e. English opened up opportunities for their children. According to Ling, parents nowadays were more concerned about how their children behaved in school, for example, whether or not they listened to the teacher and whether they talked a lot in class. She believed that it was important to show her students care and love. A good relationship with her students was essential in teaching but she admitted that it took a lot of time and effort to establish this. On the whole, she felt that her students' parents were cooperative and they could be reached more easily if needed through their mobile phones.

5.3.5 The fourth classroom observation

Ling said in the pre classroom observation interview that she planned to complete three things with her students in the fourth observed lesson: (1) some pair work, (2) some group work and (3) the running dictation. First working in pairs and then in groups, the students would be planning a Christmas party for their class in the fourth observed lesson. Ling said she would first teach her students how to form the questions they would need for their pair work. After that the students would ask their partners the questions following the guidelines given in the textbook. According to Ling, the students would then work in groups of four to discuss and work out a 'Christmas party plan'. Each group of students would be required to do an oral presentation as well as a written report later based on the results of their discussion. Ling stressed that the pair and group work aimed

to integrate the use of different language skills of the students and the grammar and vocabulary they had recently learnt in the textbook. The students would go to the school hall for an unseen dictation in the second part of the lesson.

Ling began the fourth observed lesson with the pair work as she mentioned in the pre classroom observation interview. She first formed with her students the questions that they would need for their pair work. Based on the role cards given in the textbook, they asked each other the questions. The list of questions below was basically all the questions that the students had to ask during the pair work and they were mostly given by Ling.

Where are you going to have the party?
Who are you going to invite to the party?
What food and drinks are you going to buy?
What activities are you going to do?

[SBMLingCO4AR]

The students did not seem to be excited about the topics in the pair and group work. Asking students to plan for their class Christmas party in the beginning of a year seemed totally out of context, which might explain why some students were not eager to participate in the activities. Many students looked lost and did not know what to do during the group discussion. Some approached Ling for help while others seemed to have given up soon after the group work began. Ling made some clarifications during the group work but it did not seem to help. The classroom was full of noise but not many students were talking in English or about what was required by the teacher. There was little genuine exchange of ideas between Ling and her students or among the students themselves. Many students looked relieved when the school bell finally rang. In the

second part of the lesson, the students went to the school hall to have the running dictation. Students had to work in pairs in the running dictation. A student from each pair had to read a sentence at a time from an assigned text and run across the school hall to relay it to his/her partner. His/her partner then had to write down the sentence on a piece of paper. The pair who did the best in reproducing the text within the time given was considered the winner of the game. The students especially the boys seemed to enjoy the physical space and movement and many of them said the activity was very interesting

Ling talked about time control of the fourth observed lesson in the post classroom observation interview. She explained that the students did not have enough time to complete the group work because she spent some time assigning homework and clarifying points related to the activity. She was aware that she might not have given her students clear guidelines for the group discussion and she said she would follow up later. She then explained that the group and pair work was designed and conducted to prepare her students for the HKCEE; a public exam that most students would probably take in four years time. Below is what she said in the interview:

> I want to see how well they can manage group discussion. I think they seldom have the chance to discuss with other people in English. As you know, they will need to discuss with other candidates when they have their HKCEE oral exam. I think it would be good for them to familiarize themselves with the format of group discussion or to practise their spoken English.
>
> [SBMLingPo4AR]

Ling considered the running dictation to be very successful. She said her students usually did not like dictation or vocabulary quizzes but many of them found the running dictation

very exciting. She joked that the running dictation was good because it used up some of her students' energy. She said she would consider shortening the running distance next time because some of the students looked really exhausted after it.

The focused question for the fourth post classroom observation interview was 'How do you understand teaching, learning and education?' Ling considered teaching something big as she described. She believed that apart from teaching students subject knowledge, teachers needed to care about their overall development. For instance, if she noticed that a student looked depressed or seemed to be behaving differently from usual, she would talk to him/her to see if he/she needed any help. She added that apart from the subjects they taught, teachers needed to teach students to behave well and to cultivate important values and attitudes. According to Ling, teachers had to prepare students for the real world and there were lots of things that they needed to teach their students. Ling believed that teaching and learning shared some commonalities too. For example, teachers cannot just teach their students knowledge from the textbook and, similarly, students should never learn from only the book. They needed to learn a lot of things, such as how to communicate and interact with other people. Ling explained that in Chinese 'education' meant 'to teach' and 'to cultivate'. She stressed that it was important for teachers to set their students good examples because students learnt from their teachers and applied what they learnt in their own life. With the positive influence of teachers, students would gradually pick up some good habits.

5.3.6 The fifth classroom observation

During the fifth pre classroom observation interview Ling and I had a brief conversation about her students and their learning attitudes. Ling said she was really mad with the comment that many people made that students did not learn well because the teaching was boring. She believed that this was not fair to put all the blame on teachers and stressed that students should try hard to learn and should take responsibility for their own learning. She admitted that some of her students were reluctant to learn. Using feeding a duck as an example, she said some students did not even bother to take the food she fed them. According to Ling, some of them were not willing to think. Whenever she told her students to do something that required thinking, for example, to develop an outline for a composition, most of them would not hand in their work. She had to feed them with ideas such as telling them exactly what to write in each paragraph to help them complete their work. She said that nowadays people were talking about developing students' critical thinking and creativity but she believed that there was little teachers could do if students were not willing to learn. She added that the school curriculum had been expanded rapidly during the past few years, such as adding different types of outings and visits, projects and IT learning activities. However, she stressed that nothing so far had been taken away from the original curriculum. To solve the problem of limited class time, the school had decided to make the last two periods longer on some school days, i.e. ten more minutes for each of the last two periods in the afternoon. She admitted that the increasing workload left her with little time for teaching. Despite the time constraint and student resistance she faced (see Sections 6.1.1 and 6.1.4), she liked to ask her students questions to encourage them to think. Below is what she said in the interview.

Even if the teacher wants to change the way they teach, he or she might experience resistance from students because they are not used to the new teaching approach. I think questions might help students to think. I do not tell my students everything but instead I ask them questions to encourage them to think. But time is the most important factor that teachers have to consider. We have lots of outings these days and they all take up a lot of our time. We've got more things to do and our workload is getting greater and greater but we have less time for teaching, which is very sad.

[SBMLingPr5AR]

In the pre classroom observation interview, Ling said that the fifth observed lesson would be divided into two parts. In the first part of the lesson, the students would have an unseen dictation and the dictation would be conducted according to the school exam format. Ling said the students would have two types of dictation, both seen and unseen, after each teaching unit. According to Ling, students were given several unseen dictations in a school year in order to familiarize them with the exam format. She was aware that many of her students did not like unseen dictation and that many of them did not do well. She stressed that it was part of the requirements of the school exam and thus teachers had to follow. The second part of the lesson would be teaching students the comparative and superlative forms of adjectives. When asked why the teaching topic was introduced at this time of the school year, Ling said regarding teaching she followed closely what was given in the textbook. Below is what she said in the pre classroom observation interview:

It is from the textbook and I follow mainly the textbook when I teach.

[SBMLingPr5AR]

To begin the fifth observed lesson, Ling invited some students to stand in front of the class. She then made some comparison about them, for example, comparing their height. Students were invited to make sentences accordingly, such as 'Tim is taller than Tom and

Mary is the tallest'. Some students found the activity very interesting and participated actively. They made a comparison of their classmates and answered the questions Ling asked. However, like the previous observed lessons some students were not paying very much attention to Ling or her teaching. The students sitting around me kept chatting with each other. Although they were aware that my recording equipment was on and it might record their conversation, they did not seem to mind at all. A few girls were writing and passing around secret notes on fancy writing paper. Some boys were basically doing nothing but looking around checking my equipment from time to time. Ling seemed to be aware of the problems and she gave two girls a warning for eating in the lesson. Ling later told me in the post classroom observation interview that she was glad that I could see the real face of her students. Despite the student problems, Ling believed that the teaching objectives of the lessons had been achieved. Below is what she said in the post classroom observation interview:

> I think the students have got to know more about Miss Mok and they were not a bit pretentious today. Some students even ate sweets during the lesson and others played with elastic rubber bands. It was the first time that I found students eating candy in class. I guess it's because we used some IT teaching, i.e. showing the students a Powerpoint presentation on comparative and superlative forms of adjectives in the lesson, and they thought I was kind of distracted by the machine. I think the lesson today was authentic. The students have been very active these few days…They just can't control themselves… I would say, the class was quite good today and my teaching objective has been achieved. [SBMLingPo5AR]

There were two focused questions for the post classroom observation interview: (1) How do you understand English language teaching and learning? and (2) What are the joys and difficulties of being a secondary school English language teacher? Ling said the objective of English language teaching should be to help students to manage and apply different

language skills. She stressed again that students needed to take an active role in learning. She explained that English language teachers were usually allocated three classes of students and it was very difficult for teachers to take care of the language development of more than a hundred students. She complained that many students were not taking their work seriously and even Secondary 1 students liked to copy the homework of others.

Ling then talked about how she felt being an English language teacher in Hong Kong. She believed that being an English language teacher especially in a CMI school was very difficult. Students usually did not have enough exposure to English and the declining English results caused teachers a great deal of pressure. Factors like a lack of community trust and respect for teachers were also discouraging. Below is what she said in the fifth post classroom observation interview:

> I would say, it's really hard to be a secondary school English language teacher nowadays. As we are now a CMI school and the exposure to the language for our students is very limited, the English results of students in the school are declining. If our students are not getting good results in exam, people e.g. people from the Education Department would say that it's the fault of the teacher. People seem to believe that the only reason why students are getting poor results in the exam is because the teachers are not teaching them well. But, I think they never recognize the effort we have been putting in.
>
> [SBMLingPo5AR]

Ling said that she had been taking different courses to improve her teaching, but she felt that she was always the one to blame in the educational context. She stressed that she knew the importance of using an interactive approach in teaching and how to make her teaching more interactive but the different contextual constraints she faced, such as limited class-time, a strict school curriculum, exam pressure and the fault-finding culture

made it difficult to happen (see Section 6.4.3). Below is what she said before ending the interview:

> I took extra mural courses or short courses on English language teaching e.g. using drama and poems in ELT even though I know that I may not be able to apply what I have learnt in my teaching because our teaching is very much constrained by the syllabus. Although I know how to use different approaches to make my lessons more interactive, I cannot do so because of the syllabus and time constraint. I have to make choices e.g. whether to make the teaching more interactive and enjoyable or to prepare the students for the exam. If you use an interactive approach in teaching you might need twice the amount of time you need for the one-way more directive approach to teaching. I think teachers of the subject are facing more trouble and difficulty than they ever had before. This is because students nowadays don't really appreciate the work of others. We are not supported and we are always the ones to be criticized and blamed. Sometimes I really feel sorry for myself.
>
> [SBMLingPo5AR]

5.3.7 The sixth classroom observation

The last classroom observation and the pre classroom observation interview were cancelled on the day of classroom observation because of the English form test. Ling apologized for not being able to inform me about the test earlier. She explained that English teachers of all Secondary 1 classes had been trying hard to schedule the uniform test for students in the teaching cycle. To show her support and commitment to the study, she even offered to open up her classroom for filming during the test. Being aware that there would unlikely be any critical encounters identified during the test and that the filming might pose some interference for the students during such an important test, I declined the offer and thanked Ling for her thoughtfulness. Instead, an interview was scheduled right after the test to elicit Ling's views on the critical thinking recommendations (see Appendix IV for the question scheme of the interview).

Ling believed that critical thinking was closely associated with judging and criticizing. She used the war in Iraq as an example to illustrate how she understood critical thinking. Below is what she said in the interview when she was asked her understanding of critical thinking.

> I think critical thinking is that you know how to criticize and judge something after you read it. For instance, the U.S. is going to invade Iraq now. A pretty old professor at my university once told me that the biggest terrorist in the world was the U.S. I thought about what he told me but I did not understand what he said. At that time I thought the U.S. was a good country and it was always ready to offer others help. To me, the States was just a good man and was a good country. But why did the professor say it was not? I have been thinking about what he told me again these days. I am thinking about the reason why the U.S. wants to invade Iraq. Do they do it for their oil? Or as they told the whole world that they do it because they need to disarm Iraq. For me, I think what I have been thinking about is what you consider critical thinking.
>
> [SBMLingPo6AR]

Ling believed that it was possible for teachers to help their students to develop critical thinking through the English language subject. However, she admitted that it would not be something easy to do. Reiterating what she mentioned before the fifth pre classroom observation interview she believed that many students were not willing to think and their English standards' were not high. She stressed that students needed to master the language before the teaching of critical thinking could be introduced. Regarding the teaching of critical thinking Ling considered composition writing, free writing and questions that required students to justify their choices in appropriate contexts to develop students' critical thinking. With the preconception that critical thinking was closely tied to criticism and judgment, Ling believed that junior secondary school students were not mature enough to learn critical thinking. She explained that they were too young to learn to think critically or criticize (see Section 8.1). Ling said the teaching of critical thinking

to junior form students might encourage them to pass unfounded judgment on teachers in the school. However, reiterating what she said before the fifth pre classroom observation interview she stressed that she had been developing the thinking skills of her students through teaching.

For Ling, the present education system was full of dilemmas. She believed that a lot of changes had to be made to the system before the critical thinking recommendations could be really implemented (see Section 6.4.3). According to Ling, to truly implement the recommendations even the approach of early education had to be changed. It should be student-centered and time should be set aside for a genuine exchange of ideas and critical thinking in schools. Also, public exams like the HKCEE would have to be abandoned to allow students more space for learning and exploring. Teacher professional development should focus also on helping teachers to implement the critical thinking recommendations. Better coordination and communication between the education authority and schools should be aimed at. Among the different contextual pressures she faced, she considered examination pressure to be the biggest constraint on her teaching (see Section 6.1.3). Below is what she said in the interview:

> It's just like, these days, we are told not to encourage our students to rote learn and to use a more active approach in teaching. But this causes a lot of problems in secondary schools. You need to prepare students for the HKCEE and they need to recite what they learn for the exam. They have to do so because of the exam. It is just like what we talked about just now. There are a lot of dilemmas.
>
> [SBMLingPo6AR]

As in all the interviews I had with Ling, she was genuine and sincere (see Section 7.1) in sharing with me her views and feelings in this last 'post classroom observation interview'. Her emotions were apparent in the interview and dilemma was found in what she said. On the one hand, being aware of the practical problems that might be caused by the teaching of critical thinking, for example, students passing unfound judgment on teachers or their teaching she stressed that junior secondary students were not mature enough to learn critical thinking. On the other hand, she believed that to truly implement the critical thinking recommendations, even pre-school education should allow room for students to explore and develop critical thinking. It seemed to me that she was making reference to both the actual constrained teaching context she faced everyday as well as a broader, more ideal context for implementing the critical thinking recommendations when answering the questions in the interview.

5.3.8 The last debriefing interview

A significant aim of the last debriefing interview was to show the participating teachers the critical encounter identified in their lessons and to get their feedback on it. The interview also aimed to find out the benefits that the teachers perceived to gain from the study and the comments they had on the design of the study. As there was no critical encounter identified in the lessons of Ling, she was told very briefly that no evidence of teaching of critical thinking was found in her observed lessons but that on a few occasions she was found to encourage her students to think through questioning. Ling seemed to be pleased with the finding and reiterated that she had been helping her students to develop their thinking skills. She was then invited to talk about the benefit and

design of the study. In terms of benefit, Ling said it was good to have someone to observe her lessons. She explained that she would then get a chance to listen to different voices regarding her teaching, which she considered stimulating and important for her professional development. And, that the feedback from others could always help her to reflect on her teaching. She believed that classroom visits were important for teachers like her who had been teaching for more than ten years.

In terms of the goal of the present study, Ling considered the design of the study appropriate. She explained that the three-month classroom observation period allowed me to see the changes in the performance of her students in class. She was glad that I could see the real face of her students stressing that what I saw in the school and classroom was authentic. She believed that to some extent what I saw in the school reflected the problems that many local CMI schools faced in Hong Kong. Below is what she said in the interview:

> You might have noticed that the students were really good in the very first observed lesson, but I can tell you that's not true; not real. But what you saw in the last observed lesson was real…. In fact, I don't mind if you see their real face because you are here to see something authentic. I think what you saw here really tells you what students nowadays are like. I think we should let other people know. As a teacher, you do not just teach. You have to counsel and discipline your students. I think from what you saw here you get to know more about students, teachers and the work we do in the school.
> [SBMLingIIAR]

Before ending the interview, Ling took the initiative in telling me the reason why she decided to participate in the present study despite her heavy workload. She hoped to help me to achieve an important aim of the study, i.e. to honestly report to others what I

observed in schools and classrooms and to bring out the voices of the teachers to people who were genuinely concerned about the education development in Hong Kong

I knew I did not have time for your study but I decided to participate in it because I want other people to know our difficulty; the problems that English language teachers face… I think as you are doing some research in this area, we in fact should give you more support. And I hope that if you really see the real situation and you can help us in some way. Things are not that superficial as some people think.

[SBMLingIIAR]

5.3.9 A portrait of Ling's class

The observed lessons have revealed that grammar teaching and different forms of quizzes on vocabulary were common in Ling's lessons (see Table 5.3 Summary of data collection for Ling on p.192). For grammar teaching, students were usually encouraged to remember or recall examples of grammar items taught, such as different quantifiers, plural nouns and adjectives. They were also encouraged to learn the rules related to the grammar items presented, for instance, the spelling rules of different types of plural nouns and adjectives. Students were usually encouraged to apply these rules in completing simple and mechanical exercises in the grammar book and workbook. Ling's teaching, on the whole, did not create critical thinking opportunities for her students. However, Ling liked to involve her students in her teaching, for example, asking them for and considering their opinions. Her teaching style showed the importance of listening to the opinion of others, which I suspect, might, in some way, help her students to develop the essential elements of a critical perspective (see Section 2.3), such as valuing diversity. During the three-month data collection in School B, I from time to time asked Ling about

the progress of her studies. She appreciated my support and we shared a lot on different informal occasions.

In a nutshell, the common issues identified in Ling's case were: time pressure, adherence to the school curriculum, the expanding school curriculum, the exam oriented culture, negative morale, critical thinking viewed as important but impossible in the present educational context.

Section 5.4 Mei Mei (School A)

This section consists of eight sub-sections. Section 5.4.1 describes my first meeting with Mei Mei after the exploratory study. As one classroom observation had to be cancelled due to some school activities, Sections 5.4.2 – 5.4.6 detail the five classroom observations and pre and post classroom observation interviews conducted as summarized in Table 5.4 below. Section 5.4.7 reports on the last debriefing interview with Mei Mei and the section ends with a portrait of Mei Mei's class in Section 5.4.8.

Table 5.4 Summary of data collection for Mei Mei

Mei Mei (School A)							
Date	18 Mar 2003	14 May 2003	22 May 2003	30 May 2003	10 June 2003	18 June 2003	25 June 2003
Events	1st meeting after the explora-tory study	Pr1 3.6mins	Pr2 4mins	Pr3 4.8mins	Pr4 4.8mins	Pr5 9.2mins	II 16 mins
		CO1 35mins	CO2 35mins	CO3 35mins	CO4 35mins	CO5 35mins	
		Po1 15 mins	Po2 16.6 mins	Po3 15.1 mins	Po4 23.4 mins	Po5 20.5 mins	

Key:-
Pr: Pre Classroom Observation Interview
CO: Classroom Observation
Po: Post Classroom Observation Interview
II: Last Debriefing Interview

As shown in Table 5.4 Mei Mei and I met seven times on the dates specified. The table also shows that only five classroom observations were conducted between May and June 2003. Due to some special arrangements for the class, the classroom observation originally scheduled on 5 June had to be cancelled. The dates of the five classroom observations and the length of all the interviews conducted, i.e. pre and post classroom observation interviews and the last debriefing interview, are also specified in the table.

5.4.1 First meeting with Mei Mei after the exploratory study

Mei Mei had always been supportive throughout the exploratory study. She seemed to see the importance of the main study and volunteered to stay. Like Lai Lai of School B, she helped me to recruit teachers for the main study. Arranging with her the times and dates for classroom observations were not difficult at all because she was always understanding, helpful and accommodating. We worked out the classroom observation schedule together within a very short time. Mei Mei and I agreed that I observed six of her lessons originally. Each was the first period of a 70-min double lesson. The school had adopted the split class policy so half of the class would leave for their English lesson with the NET (Native English Teacher). The remaining 22 students would go to the NET in the second period while the other half of the class would come back to have lesson with Mei Mei. Both Mei Mei and the NET had to teach the same topic twice in the double period to two different groups of students on the same day. The NET did not participate in the main study and thus her classes were not observed or reported.

5.4.2 The first classroom observation

The first classroom observation was conducted in mid May. It was the first time we met since the school reopened after the SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Symptoms) outbreak. Towards the end of March 2003 all the schools in Hong Kong had to be closed because of the SARS outbreak and most secondary classes resumed about a month later. Both teachers and students were required to wear face masks to school during that period and go through different sterilizing processes when entering school. Although most schools were on high alert after the SARS outbreak and teachers were under a lot of pressure, Mei Mei agreed to open up her classes for me to observe right after the school

reopened. The school was also very supportive and no restriction was imposed on me regarding my school visits.

Mei Mei and I had the first pre classroom observation interview in a quiet corner in the staff common room. Mei Mei said that the first observed lesson would be a writing lesson. In the lesson she planned to generate ideas with her students for a writing task by going through different pictures given in a handout. She wanted her students to know what they had to write, i.e. a diary about a trip to Ocean Park, and to have some ideas for their writing after the lesson. Mei Mei seemed to have planned the lesson very carefully. What she said in the interview was impressive because she talked about the details of the steps that she planned to go through in the lesson.

Most students seemed to be pleased when they saw me in the observed lesson. They got to know me during the exploratory study. Some of them were friendly and they approached me to ask me questions, such as ‘Why are you here again?’ and ‘What are you doing here?’ As in the exploratory study I remained silent and smiled at them politely. Others especially the students sitting close to me just ignored my presence. Although they were aware that their lesson was being videotaped, they chatted loudly in Cantonese and did whatever they liked in the lesson, for example, reading Chinese newspapers.

The observed lesson was full of questions but most of them were asked by Mei Mei. They were mainly about the writing prompt and the pictures given in the handout. Instead

of telling her students the answers directly, Mei Mei was determined to let her students figure out the answers by themselves. Through different questions like ‘What are you going to write?’ and ‘Tell me what you see in Picture 1’, Mei Mei prompted her students to talk about the writing prompt and describe the pictures on the handout. Most of the questions asked were simple and factual questions about the pictures and Mei Mei was ready to give her students time to think about the answers. However, Mei Mei was not very successful in eliciting answers from her students. The classroom was full of noise and the atmosphere did not seem to support learning. Some students repeated whatever Mei Mei said. Others did not seem to take her questions seriously and kept shouting out ‘yes’ or ‘no’ to the questions she asked. A few students intentionally sighed loudly in the middle of the lesson. Most students were reluctant to answer her questions. Some looked bored and played with their face masks. The face masks they wore, which aimed to minimize the chance for them to contract the SARS disease, became the handiest toys they had in the classroom. The lesson went on very slowly with little genuine interaction between Mei Mei and her students.

Like Lai Lai of School B, Mei Mei asked her students some open-ended questions in the first observed lesson, for example, ‘What do you have to pay attention to when you write a diary?’ and ‘What is the difference between writing a diary and a letter to the NET?’ Through the questions, she wanted them to tell her the difference between formal and informal writing, but the students seemed to be reluctant to answer these open-ended questions. Mei Mei had to nominate some students to answer her questions but the answers given were usually brief. The situation changed dramatically when Mei Mei

switched the medium of instruction from English to Cantonese. Many students volunteered to join in the discussion and the class became very responsive. Some of the answers given by the students were interesting and practical. For instance, one of them said stamps were not needed when writing a diary and the other said the tone of a diary could be warmer. In most cases Mei Mei gave her students positive feedback, which encouraged them to express their ideas. Although there were a lot of exchanges between Mei Mei and her students, what they said was mostly factual and superficial. The teaching of Mei Mei in the first observed lesson did not seem to encourage critical thinking.

Mei Mei reflected on her teaching very carefully in the post classroom observation interview. She believed that regarding the writing task the teaching objective of the first observed lesson had been achieved. However, she admitted that she did not really stimulate her students to think in the lesson or know how to do it. And, due to various reasons she did not have enough time to complete what she had planned. Below is what she said in the interview:

> So, on the surface, I think the objective of the lesson has been reached because they did describe some of the pictures. But I think they could have imagined more, but I don't know how to help them to imagine more so, I don't know. I originally planned to discuss with them the whole writing task, but I then found that it could not be done. I don't know if it's because I was slow or I spent some time scolding them. It used up some time and I did not expect to wait for them for so long to give me answers to my questions after they read the prompt. It would be okay if they said something but some students just stood there saying nothing for quite a long time. I then had to prompt them like referring them to a specific line. So, it took more time and the lesson went slowly.
>
> [SAMMeiPo1AR]

The focused question for the first post classroom observation interview was ‘Can you tell me about the students in this class?’ Mei Mei said most of the students in the class were responsive but many of them were lazy and were not willing to learn. She said getting them to hand in their homework could be very difficult and could cause her to be frustrated. She said that learning from the experience of the first observed lesson she made some changes to her teaching in the following period with the second group of students of the same class (see Section 5.4.1). The result seemed to be better but she was not sure if it was because the second group of students was brighter. I noticed something interesting about Mei Mei when she was reflecting on her teaching in the first post classroom observation interview. She was so absorbed in her own reflection that she seemed to be thinking aloud to herself. Her reflection was so deep and genuine that she did not seem to be aware of my presence. Sometimes I had difficulty following what she said but I tried not to interrupt during her reflection and asked her clarification questions if needed afterwards.

5.4.3 The second classroom observation

Mei Mei said in the pre classroom observation interview that she planned to go through a reading text with her students in the second observed lesson. Like the first observed lesson, half of the class had left for the NET’s lesson (see Section 5.4.1). The text was from the textbook and it was a newsletter about Mai Po Marshes. She said her students had visited the web site of Mai Po Marshes and should have some ideas about the place. Like the first pre classroom observation interview, Mei Mei seemed to have a clear plan for her lesson. Apart from teaching her students some new words found in the text, she

hoped to guide her students to intensively read two of the four sections of the newsletter. Below is what she said when she talked about how she planned to approach the text in the interview:

> At the beginning I think I will ask them to read the title of the passage and to guess what it is about. Then I will teach them some words because they should not know the words like 'newsletter' and 'issue'. So, I will bring to the class some newsletters for them to talk about. I will ask them to scan the passage to find out how many parts there are in the newsletter. I will then go through each part with them. I think the focus of today's lesson will be students reading through the newsletter. I want them to learn some new words. I want them to read, to intensively read the passage.… I think maybe, maybe, there are four parts in the passage. I think maybe I could finish two of them, about half of it.
>
> [SAMMeiPr2AR]

Like the first observed lesson, Mei Mei wanted her students to take a more active role in learning, i.e. to figure out the meaning of the text by themselves. Instead of talking about the newsletter herself, Mei Mei tried to get her students to talk about it through different questions. Most of the questions she asked were again simple and factual questions about the text. Below are some of the questions she asked:

> How many parts are there?
> What is Part I?
> Can you tell me what animals you can find in Mai Po?
>
> [SAMMeiCO2AR]

However, some of the questions Mei Mei asked were not clear. The situation got worse when the students were asked what the different parts of the text were about. To answer the question 'What is Part X?' sometimes the students were expected to talk about the text type of the text, such as an article or a letter. Sometimes the content or title of the text was expected, for instance, information about black-faced spoonbills or the animal

picture competition. Me Mei's expectation caused her students much confusion and she was losing the attention of many of them. The lesson went slowly and I got the impression that the students answered her questions only when they felt like it. Like the first observed lesson the classroom was full of noise. Some students kept looking around and others kept chatting with each other. There were a lot of exchanges, mostly in Cantonese, among the students themselves during the lesson. However, most of them had little or no relation to the text or what Mei Mei was talking about. In terms of teaching, there was very little genuine interaction between Mei Mei and her students and no critical encounter was identified in the lesson.

Mei Mei complained about her students in the post classroom observation interview. She seemed to be really mad with them even after the lesson. She believed that her students' misbehavior was on purpose and they started to misbehave even before her lesson began. Below is what she said in the interview:

> When I went in they were just in a mess. They were not doing what they should be doing. They did it on purpose. They did what they should not do. I was really mad. That's it. I was quite mad when I entered the classroom but I tried to calm myself down.
>
> [SAMMeiPo2AR]

Mei Mei said in the interview that she tried not to tell her students everything but let them talk about the passage in the second observed lesson. She believed that her students should be able to do it but she admitted that the teaching process was very difficult because many of them were not with her during the lesson. However, she believed that

the teaching objective of the lesson, to some extent, had been achieved. Below is what she said in the post classroom observation interview:

> On the whole, I tried not to tell them everything and let them talk about the passage. I think they could do it. But I was really mad throughout the process. Because I could feel that they were not with me. If they had been with me, things would have been a lot more relaxed. But, if you talk about the objective, I mean the thing that I hoped to do in the lesson, apart from not being able to complete all I hoped to complete, I think it was achieved. What I mean is that some students could answer my questions.
>
> [SAMMeiPo2AR]

Based on what had happened in the second observed lesson Mei Mei made some changes to her teaching with the second group of students in the following period again (see Section 5.4.1). Mei Mei thought the response of the second group was better but she admitted that she was not sure if this was due to the change in her teaching. She stressed that she reflected a lot on her teaching after the first group of students left the classroom and managed to make some changes to her teaching with the second group of students. Below is what she said in the interview:

> I was not thinking much when I was teaching. I wanted only to help them to answer my questions. I wanted them to answer more questions. But when the first group of students left the classroom, I began to think about my teaching immediately. So, I made some changes when I taught the second group.
>
> [SAMMeiPo2AR]

The focused question for the second post classroom observation interview was ‘Can you tell me what parents are like nowadays?’ Mei Mei believed that parents could have great influence on their children. She said that for different reasons some students did not receive much care or attention from their parents. She stressed that the school and parents

were playing different roles in the development of students. Their roles were unique and could not be replaced. Again I noticed that Mei Mei was going through some very deep reflection on her teaching during the second post classroom observation interview. She seemed to enjoy the time, space and a moment of peace that the post classroom observation interviews created for her.

5.4.4 The third classroom observation

Mei Mei said in the pre classroom observation interview that she planned to complete a comprehension exercise in the textbook with her students in the third observed lesson. She said that based on the vocabulary that they had learnt in the past few weeks, the students should be able to complete the exercise. When asked about the writing of her students of the picture composition discussed in the first observed lesson, Mei Mei said some students did very well but some of them were required to re-do their work. She said that the content of their writing was very poor and she believed that some students had not taken their work seriously. Below is what she said in the third pre classroom observation interview:

> Content. Some of them did not take their work seriously when they wrote. They just wanted to get some words down on the paper. The content of their work was not rich enough. They never added other ideas in their work. They never described what had happened. But some did very well too.
>
> [SAMMeiPr3AR]

Like the first two observed lessons, a lot of questions were asked by Mei Mei during the third observed lesson. Most of the questions asked were lower order questions that aimed to focus the attention of the students on the text, the comprehension questions or their

answers (see Section 6.2.3). Below are three main types of questions she asked at different stages of the lesson:

1. Drawing the attention of her students to the reading comprehension questions:
e.g. ‘Can you read (question) no. X to me, [name of a student]?’

2. Drawing the attention of her students to the reading passage, i.e. an email message:
e.g. ‘What flew away? Can you tell me? What flew away? What does ‘it’ refer to?’

3. Checking the answer of the exercise:
e.g. ‘Alright, and then no. X?’

[SAMMeiCO3AR]

Like the previous observed lessons, Mei Mei was determined to require her students to think and figure out the answers to the questions of the comprehension exercise. During the lesson Mei Mei always required her students to refer back to the email message and tell her where they found their answers. She always asked them questions like ‘What sentence tells you the answer is…?’ This type of questions usually required the students to locate the sentences, phrases or words in which the answers were found. However, I got the impression that her determination cost her much class time and students’ attention. While the weaker students seemed to find the time and attention Mei Mei was trying to give them embarrassing, the more capable students were complaining about the slow pace of the lesson. Some of them were chatting loudly with each other and others were playing around. The situation was so bad that Mei Mei had to send a student out of class in the middle of the lesson. Obviously, Mei Mei’s effort did not seem to be appreciated by some of her students. Mei Mei seemed to be aware of the problem and she took the initiative in talking about it in the post classroom observation interview:

The pace of today's lesson was slower than what I had expected… I thought the exercise was pretty easy and it could be completed within a short time. So, I did not expect that some students needed to take so long to finish the exercise. But, there were some students who completed the exercise in a very short time. There were also some students who were so weak. I knew that there should be a few of them e.g. the two boys sitting at the side of the classroom. So I went to them to show them how to complete the first two questions. But I did not know that even the boy at the back was also so weak, because he was also a repeater and today it seemed that he really did not have any idea about how to complete the exercise. I really did not understand why they did not know how to complete such an easy exercise. Therefore I had to spend more time on the exercise and had to figure out on the spot some ways to help the weaker students. But I knew that those who were brighter were bored. They just shouted out the answers, which was really disturbing.

[SAMMeiPo3AR]

The focused question for the third post classroom observation interview was 'How do you understand teaching, learning and education?' Mei Mei said teaching was to share with her students things that she knew. She stressed that the teacher should not be the one to talk throughout this sharing process. Instead, some activities should be designed for students so that they could learn through participating in the activities and experiencing the learning process. She believed that through different teaching methods teachers could lead their students to the place where they wanted them to be. Mei Mei thought that learning was a process and that like the two sides of a coin teaching and learning shared some commonalities. According to Mei Mei, education was not just about knowledge. It was something to do with a student's whole-person development. She stressed that the most important thing about education was that through it students got to know their own potential. Education was about encouraging and stimulating students and providing them with the opportunities to develop their potentials. Due to some special arrangements for the class, the classroom observation scheduled in the following week had to be cancelled.

5.4.5 The fourth classroom observation

Mei Mei said in the pre classroom observation interview that the fourth observed lesson would be a grammar lesson. She admitted that the grammar topic that she would teach in the lesson had nothing to do with the teaching unit that she had been teaching. What she said echoed the complaint that John of School B had made regarding the school curriculum. They both felt that their teaching was heavily constrained by the school curriculum and grammar teaching in both schools was fragmented and out of context (see Section 6.1.2). Below is what she said in the interview:

> In fact, the grammar items I am teaching are not related to the unit we have been talking about. But, there isn't anything I can do. I need to teach them. I have finished the topic on wild life. We are required to teach our students both countable and uncountable nouns. I think they have all learnt about them before. So, I think it's just like a revision on those singular and plurals nouns. In today's lesson, I think what they need to do is to rote learn all those related spelling rules e.g. adding 'es' to words ending with 'sh'.
>
> [SAMMeiPr4AR]

Mei Mei continued to talk about the plan she had for the observed lesson. First of all, the students would be required to complete a test on the different spelling rules concerning plural nouns. She said that she planned to type out the test but she was too exhausted to do it the night before. She would write out the questions on the board instead. After the quiz, she would go through the exercises the students had done in the grammar book. If time allowed, Mei Mei said she would ask her students to make some sentences using the words 'this', 'that', 'these' and 'those' and complete a worksheet. She stressed that all the grammar exercises were mechanical and similar question types were found in the school exam (see Sections 6.3.1 and 6.3.4).

Like the previous observed lessons, many questions were asked by Mei Mei in the fourth observed lesson. The questions asked could mainly be grouped under three categories, i.e. (1) questions used to elicit answers of an exercise from her students, such as ‘What about this one?’ and ‘This one?’(2) questions used to prompt her students to explain why a particular answer was chosen, such as ‘Why is it “went”?’ and ‘Why isn’t “a”?’ and (3) questions used to invite her students to ask questions about the exercises that they had done, such as ‘Any question?’ and ‘Any question on this?’ The second type of questions was the most common type of questions asked by Mei Mei in the lesson, but because of the poor response from her students, in many cases, she had to do the explanation herself. Like the three observed lessons before, Mei Mei was determined to make sure that even the weaker students could understand why the answers were chosen. She sometimes used Cantonese in order to explain, and she even invited her students to explain their answers in Cantonese. However, unlike the previous observed lessons, the students were quiet and they seemed to be controlled in the lesson. The relationship between Mei Mei and her students seemed to be really tense and I questioned what had happened before the observed lesson. On the whole, like the grammar lessons on countable and uncountable nouns conducted by Lai Lai and Ling in School B, Mei Mei’s students were also not given the opportunity to use what they had learnt to communicate with each other in the lesson (see Section 6.3.1).

Mei Mei talked about the spelling quiz on plural nouns in the post classroom observation interview. She believed that most students should be able to do well because the quiz did

not require much thinking from students and all they needed to do was to rote learn what they had learnt before. Below is what she said in the interview:

I think you just need to rote learn what's included in this topic. There's nothing to do with thinking. That's it. I think they should be okay with the test.
[SAMMeiPo4AR]

When reflecting on her teaching, Mei Mei said that the students should be able to manage what had been talking about in the lesson, for example, spelling rules concerning different forms of plural nouns. She stressed that what her students needed was more practice.

Two focused questions were asked in the post classroom observation interview: (1) 'How do you understand English language teaching and learning?' and (2) 'What are the joys and difficulties of being a secondary school English language teacher?' Mei Mei felt that it was difficult to be an English language teacher in Hong Kong. Echoing what Lai Lai and Ling of School B said in their interviews, she stressed that English language teachers were always the one to blame and their efforts were never appreciated in the school (see Section 7.2.2). Below is what she said in the interview:

I think we have done a lot but the school never appreciates what we have done. They just think, let's take the attainment test as an example, they just compare the results of the students say like the pre and post tests and conclude that your class is 'negative equity' [a term commonly used in home buying and mortgage in Hong Kong].… The school just puts the blame on us but they don't know that we have been working very hard and have been thinking about ways to improve the situation. I doubt if the blame should only be on us. We are the only one to shoulder the blame. I feel that there's no, there's no way out as an English language teacher especially working in this school. I think I have put in a lot

of effort but I can't see any results and I have to shoulder a lot of things. Even colleagues from other subjects also think that the teaching of the English panel is bad.

[SAMMeiPo4AR]

Mei Mei felt that even the public did not understand the work of teachers and was not giving them much support. Exam results and quantity were highly valued in the school and the educational context.

But people, especially the school, evaluate one's teaching based mainly on students' exam results. That's how they look at us. They think that it's you who is not doing the job well and thus you need to do more. You just need to organize your class more, include supplementary lessons, and so and so. You all are just not working hard enough. That's the way they think about us. That's the message we've got from them and that's the way they look at us.

[SAMMeiPo4AR]

Before ending the interview, Mei Mei talked about some problems English language teachers usually faced. They included professional development that was not developed according to their needs, poor teaching resources and time constraints.

In terms of staff professional development, the school administration and EMB just give us things that are superficial. They give us things that we might already know. So, why do they have to give us again? They should find out what we lack. Also, it's hard to find appropriate materials to use in the lesson. There are some but they might not be suitable for your students. You need to design the materials yourself. That takes both time and space because you have to, basically, do it out of nothing. There isn't a complete set of materials that you can use even though there are lots of books on games and grammar on the market They just might not fit your class. To give you an example, although the textbook publishers claimed that their textbooks were developed based on the task-based teaching approach, many of them are not and their tasks are just tedious.… The e-book they give us is just a simplified version of the textbook. They just put it on the internet and call it 'e-book'. Their activities are very boring; nothing interesting at all. So, in fact, we don't have enough time or space (to develop teaching materials for our lessons).

[SAMMeiPo4AR]

After the interview, based on my request, Mei Mei shared with me some positive feedback and comments she got from her students. She said that she was always encouraged by the email messages she got from her students. Some of them got very good results in public exams and some were studying at university. She stressed that their appreciation and encouragement kept her going and helped her to face the problems in teaching.

5.4.6 The fifth classroom observation

Mei Mei said that in order to prepare her students for the final exam, this last observed lesson would be grammar revision with lots of mechanical practice (see Sections 6.1.3 and 6.3.4). Below is what she said in the pre classroom observation interview:

> I don't have much special preparation for today's lesson because today's lesson will be even more mechanical than the lesson you observed last time. We need to rush to prepare for the exam. We need to teach the students the last language item for this term, i.e. 'wh' questions. In fact, I think they have learnt about 'wh' questions when they were in primary school. In fact, throughout the school year, I have been revising with them formation of 'wh' questions when I teach them different tenses…You know why we think 'wh' questions are so important? It's because, we can't understand why, our students just don't know how to form a 'wh' question properly. You know the oral exam format for S.4? Students have to ask some questions. The questions they form are just all wrong. It seems that they don't even know the most basic structure for a question. So we, teachers, have decided to put more emphasis on asking questions even in S.1.
>
> [SAMMeiPr5AR]

In explaining different types of questions in the lesson, Mei Mei planned to give her students a rule to follow. She said that she would then explain to them some possible variations. She seemed to be really puzzled that some of her students did not seem to be

learning despite all the work she had done. She compared her teaching and the teaching of her teachers in the interview:

> I just don't understand. I am sure my teachers then did not explain so much as we do now. And, they just taught us a few big principles. They only gave us the answers when they checked the answers with us. They never explained to us why our answers were wrong. But now, we spend so much time and effort on explaining to our students why their answers are wrong, but they still don't know why they are wrong. My teachers never gave us explanations and they did not even tell us that there could be more than one possible answer. Now we accept possible answers from our students. My teachers would just give us one correct answer. But I have learnt the language. I really don't know why. I just don't understand.
>
> [SAMMeiPr5AR]

Students were required to complete an exercise on forming 'wh' questions in the last observed lesson. They were told to do it based on a rule given on the blackboard, i.e. question word + helping verb + subject + main verb +…? For instance, the students had to form the question, 'When will you go to New York?' from the answer, 'I will go to New York next week'. The lesson was completely devoted to the explanation of all the questions formed. Mei Mei talked mainly in Cantonese throughout the observed lesson which was about a week before the end-of-term exams. She wanted to make sure that her students understood why and how each question was formed. No critical questions were identified even though a lot of questions were asked by Mei Mei in the lesson, for example, 'Which one is the question word/ main verb/ helping verb?' and 'Is "…" correct?' Unlike the previous observed lessons, Mei Mei was able to keep her students on task during the last observed lesson.

Mei Mei seemed to doubt the effectiveness of her teaching. She suspected that some students still could not manage the language patterns after the last observed lesson. She felt helpless and puzzled and talked about her doubts in the post classroom observation interview:

> I think even after today's lesson, there are still some students who are not able to manage the pattern. But, I still don't know how I can help them to manage the pattern. I really don't understand. I personally think that the topic is not difficult. It is something mechanical. It's something to do with rules. As long as they are willing to listen to the teacher and do the practice, they should be able to manage it. So, if they still can't manage the pattern, I think they have not listened to me at all. It's not something abstract or difficult to understand. I really don't understand why after I have explained to them so many times that there are still students who are not able to manage the pattern. So, I really don't know what I can do to help them. I have tried based on the experience I have for so many years to boil down the topic into some rules. I just hope that they will follow the rules. There are not many special cases. Basically they can just follow one rule. Not many special changes are needed. I really don't understand.
>
> [SAMMeiPo5AR]

The focused questions for the fifth post classroom observation interview were mainly about the critical thinking recommendations (see Appendix IV for the question scheme of the interview). Mei Mei seemed to have a clear understanding of the critical thinking recommendations and understood its importance in society. She considered looking at an issue from different perspectives a core element of critical thinking and believed that, in many cases, there could be more than one answer to a question. To her, critical thinking could help to maintain harmony in the society. Below is what she said in the interview:

> Critical thinking is something important because you just can't look at things from one angle in everyday life e.g. for the benefit of yourself. I think a reason why there are so many conflicts in our society is that people tend to look at things from one angle, i.e. for

their own benefit. We could be more understanding and society would be more harmonious if people are looking at things from different angles. That's what I think.
[SAMMeiPo5AR]

Mei Mei supported the idea that English language teachers could help their students to develop critical thinking through the subject (see Section 6.4.2). She believed that it could be done through the teaching of reading, writing and even grammar. However, she stressed that the teaching content, such as the Secondary 1 English curriculum in her school, to a large extent, constrained the teaching of critical thinking. She explained that reading materials that discussed values, and open and justifiable issues were all appropriate for this teaching purpose. Mei Mei then elaborated her idea on how teaching content could impact on the teaching of critical thinking in the classroom and talked about the role critical thinking played in her own teaching. Below is an excerpt of the interview:

For the things that I have been teaching my S.1 students, I think it's difficult to teach my students critical thinking. For example, the grammar items I am teaching now and the reading comprehension passages, such as the one on Ocean Park. They have nothing to do with values. What I can ask them is questions like 'Have you been to Ocean Park?' and 'What do you think about it?' There isn't any right or wrong answer for these questions. But I can't go any further.
[SAMMeiPo5AR]

Apart from the school curriculum, she also stressed in the interview that it was hard for her to develop critical thinking of her students because of different school and student factors (see Section 6.4.3), for instance, students' language proficiency and learning attitudes, class size and time constraint. Mei Mei expressed a great concern about the language that could be used by students in expressing themselves in class. She believed

that in order to let students express their opinions freely, which she considered an important element in the teaching of critical thinking, students should be allowed to use Cantonese to express themselves if they wanted to even in the English lesson. However, she was aware that her teaching would then be contradicting the school's language policy. In the interview Mei Mei also gave some examples of the writing tasks that she believed required critical thinking from students. She believed that to prepare students for the writing tasks teachers could engage their students in critical thinking processes through questioning, such as asking students for explanations, and incorporating group discussions in the material. However, she added that discipline problems and class size were always her concern when organizing group discussion for students. She said that the school administration had not shown much understanding or support to the possible noise and confusion generated by group discussion.

5.4.7 The last debriefing interview

A significant aim of the last debriefing interview was to show the participating teachers the critical encounter identified in their lessons and to get their feedback to it. The interview also aimed to find the benefits that the teachers perceived to gain from the study and the comments they had on the design of the study. As there was no critical encounter identified in the Mei Mei's lessons, she was told very briefly that no evidence of teaching of critical thinking was found in her observed lessons. She was not surprised with the findings, stressing that teachers needed the time and resources to develop teaching materials that could teach students English as well as develop their critical thinking. She reiterated that many changes, such as reducing class size and giving

teachers more time and space to prepare for their teaching had to be made in the present education system before the critical thinking recommendations could be implemented (see Section 6.4.3). Below is what she said in the interview:

> They need to give us the time and space to do it, i.e. to implement the critical thinking recommendations. Don't come to us and say we must have 40 students in a class. Their policies are actually contradictory. They told us recently that there must be 40 students in a class. We got a circular telling us that according to a survey Hong Kong is a place that offers students the least amount of class time in the whole of the South East Asia. In response to this my colleagues and the school administration are discussing whether we would require students to go to school on Saturdays and things like that. I think we need more time, for example, we need time to design some tasks that can really help students to develop critical thinking and that can also teach them grammar; can really teach them English. We need to search for materials with our colleagues. We need the cooperation of the teachers, which means that we might need to hold some meetings. This is the preparation that we have to do. We need smaller class sizes to implement the recommendations. The present system of assessment will need to be changed too.
>
> [SAMMeiIIAR]

She was also invited to talk about the benefits and design of the present study. In terms of the benefits, Mei Mei said that she had benefited a great deal from the exploratory study especially in the area of questioning. She admitted that she was not aware of her questioning techniques at all before the study. She got to know more about this particular aspect when she listened to and watched the audio and video recordings of her lessons in the exploratory study. She remembered that she was told in one of the meetings we had in the exploratory study that the response of a teacher to a student's question might have a great impact on the student, such as his/her self esteem. She stressed that although she always had to rush through her teaching the present study had helped draw her attention to using questions in teaching. For the main study, Mei Mei said she reflected a lot whenever she talked to me about her lessons. Through the reflection she thought about

different ways to improve her teaching and she believed that reflection could help her to handle better similar situations that would happen in the future.

When asked to comment on the design of the main study, Mei Mei responded that it all depended on the aim of the study. She considered the design of the main study appropriate regarding its focus and objectives, i.e. to find out whether the teachers of the study were helping their students to develop critical thinking through their teaching and to investigate the underlying reasons. She believed that the exploratory study had a stronger professional development component stressing that it could be very hard to recruit teachers for studies like the main study because teachers would think that they could not get any input or teaching materials from the study. Also, some teachers would feel insecure having a researcher observing their lessons. According to Mei Mei, the idea of making all sorts of recording of their teaching, for example, audio and video recording of lessons could be daunting for some teachers. She believed that the knowledge and trust that teachers had for the researcher was also an important consideration for a teacher and the fact that they were always busy discouraged them from 'taking the risk' [SAMMeiIIAR]. Mei Mei stressed that teachers would welcome studies that would provide them with teaching materials they could try out with their students because many teachers were now desperate for good and appropriate teaching materials for their students.

5.4.8 A Portrait of Mei Mei's class

Mei Mei believed that students needed to participate actively in learning. She insisted that student thinking played an important role in the learning process. For example, in two observed lessons instead of telling her students everything directly she required her students to think and figure out the meaning of a text and the requirement of a writing prompt. She stressed that the teacher was the one to provide his or her students with input and guidance throughout the learning process. The classroom observations (see Table 5.4 Summary of data collection for Mei Mei on p.216) have revealed that she mainly used different types of questions to achieve this teaching purpose and most of the questions she asked were lower order questions that did not stimulate the critical thinking of her students. Although some 'why' questions were asked, they were mainly used to guide her students to locate certain pieces of information in the given texts.

I was really impressed by the effort and time Mei Mei put into her teaching. In terms of teaching, she shared some commonalities with John. They both knew clearly what they were doing and why they were doing it. Mei Mei was reflective, eager to learn and was ready to make changes to her teaching. However, her efforts were not really appreciated by some of her students. They did not seem to pay her much respect or attention during the observed lessons. There seemed to be a huge gap between Mei Mei's and her students' expectations about teaching and learning. A lot of problems were thus caused. For example, Mei Mei was losing more and more students in the lessons throughout the classroom observation period, the relationship between her and her students was getting tense, and she herself was feeling exhausted and frustrated. Despite her frustration, Mei Mei trusted that her students were capable of completing the learning activities that she

designed for them. But, she was also aware that some of them were simply not motivated to learn and they did only what they felt like doing. In terms of teaching focus, Mei Mei has put in a lot of effort in helping her students to learn English grammar. Rote learning of grammar rules and doing mechanical grammatical practices were features she considered important for the students. However, she was also aware that the teaching outcome was not promising. She felt puzzled and could not see any way out. As she pointed out in different interviews, grammar teaching in her lessons was usually conducted without a context and grammar practice was always mechanical. Like John, Mei Mei was well aware of the problems of the school curriculum but they both claimed that in order to prepare their students for the school exams they had no choice but to closely follow the school curriculum.

In a nutshell, the common issues identified in Mei Mei's case were: time pressure, adherence to the school curriculum, the problematic school curriculum, the inappropriate teaching materials, the exam oriented culture, negative morale, critical thinking viewed as important but impossible in the present educational context.

Section 5.5 Fun (School B)

This section consists of nine sub-sections. Section 5.5.1 describes my first meeting with Fun. Sections 5.5.2 – 5.5.7 detail the six classroom observations and pre and post classroom observation interviews conducted as summarized in Table 5.5 below. Section 5.5.8 reports on the last debriefing interview with Fun and the section ends with a portrait of Fun's class in Section 5.5.9.

Table 5.5 Summary of data collection for Fun

Fun (School A)								
Date	18 Mar 2003	14 May 2003	22 May 2003	30 May 2003	5 Jun 2003	10 Jun 2003	18 Jun 2003	25 Jun 2003
Events	1st meeting (lobbying) 40mins	Pr1 4.6mins	Pr2 2.2mins	Pr3 3.7mins	Pr4 4.6mins	Pr5 9.2mins	Pr6 3.6mins	II 21.5 mins
		CO1 35mins	CO2 35mins	CO3 35mins	CO4 35mins	CO5 35mins	CO6 35mins	
		Po1 18.6 mins	Po2 18 mins	Po3 6.7 mins	Po4 14 mins	Po5 9.6 mins	Po6 17 mins	

Key:-
Pr: Pre Classroom Observation Interview
CO: Classroom Observation
Po: Post Classroom Observation Interview
II: Last Debriefing Interview

As shown in Table 5.5 Fun and I met eight times on the dates specified. The table also shows that six classroom observations were conducted between May and June 2003. The dates of the six classroom observations and the length of all the interviews conducted, i.e. pre and post classroom observation interviews and the last debriefing interview, are also specified in the table.

5.5.1 First meeting with Fun

Fun was one of the four teachers in School A who were willing to meet with me to get to know more about the main study. Unlike John or Ling of School B, Fun was distant and reserved during our first meeting. She spoke very softly throughout the meeting and seemed to have a lot of worries regarding the study. In our meeting she asked a lot of questions, for example, what would she need to do for the study and how would the findings be used? She seemed to be really concerned about what she had to do during data collection and uneasy with the idea of making a recording of her teaching. She also showed me some brief notes she had prepared for a lesson stressing that she was a dull person and her teaching was not interesting. Knowing that I would be observing her Secondary 1 class if she joined the project, she said she had been teaching for more than 12 years in secondary school but only began teaching Secondary 1 classes about a year ago. She admitted that sometimes she did not know how to handle Secondary 1 students.

We talked for about 40 minutes. She was then encouraged to take some time to think about whether she would like to join the study and tell Mei Mei, her colleague, her decision when she was ready. She was very kind and she offered me a cup of warm water after the meeting. To her, classroom observation was intrusive even though she seemed to understand the importance of and reason for doing it, i.e. to find out more about how English language teaching was conducted in the ordinary everyday classroom. It took Fun about a week to consider the project. Despite her worries, she was the only teacher in School A, other than Mei Mei, who finally agreed to participate in the study. However, towards the end of March all the schools in Hong Kong had to be closed because of the SARS outbreak and most secondary classes resumed about a month later.

I phoned Fun about a week after most schools reopened to arrange with her the times and dates for classroom observations. All the schools were on high alert at that time and different measures were put in place to prevent the spread of the disease. The whole community was living in the shadow of SARS and teachers as well as school administrators were under a lot of pressure. Fun was very quiet and passive and described the situation of the school messy. When she was explained the proposed plan for classroom observations, she was only eager to find out how many lessons would be observed for each teacher. She seemed to like the suggestion of observing six lessons of each teacher saying that there would not be enough time for more classroom observations after the SARS outbreak. I agreed but stressed again the importance of classroom observation in the study.

I proposed to have the first classroom observation on the following Day I of the six-day teaching cycle. Fun said that the NET would be teaching her class on every Day I and she would only play the role of a teaching assistant in the lesson. I explained that it would not be what the study aimed to find out. She then asked if it was fine if a single period was observed and proposed to have classroom observation during the fourth period on Day VI. She then explained that the class would only be doing listening practice in the sixth period on the same Day. Her suggestion was taken and we discussed the times for the pre and post classroom observation interviews.

Before Fun hung up she confirmed with me that she did not have to do any special preparation for the classroom observation. She was worried that she would be asked for

lesson plans on the day of observation. I reiterated that she would only be required to talk about the plan she had for her lesson in an interview before the observation and the pre classroom observation interview was designed to collect important information to help contextualize the lesson being observed. I explained again the purpose of the study, i.e. to find out how everyday English language teaching was conducted in secondary school classrooms stressing that she was not expected to do any special preparation before the classroom observation. She sounded a bit relieved when she heard that. Fun and I did not have any contact until we met for the first pre classroom observation interview.

5.5.2 The first classroom observation

Fun was busy working in her office when I got to the school on the first day of classroom observation. We had the first pre classroom observation interview in a quiet corner of the staff common room. The place was selected because it allowed us some privacy and all the interviews with Fun were conducted at this venue. In the interview, Fun talked briefly about her plan for the first observed lesson. She planned to go through with the help of the Internet a worksheet the students had done for homework and to finish a comprehension passage in the textbook that she began talking about the day before. Both the worksheet and reading text were about a reserved habitat in Hong Kong, i.e. Mai Po Marshes. First, she planned to go through the new words in the text. She would ask her students for the meaning of the new words and write down the new words, their part of speech and translation in Chinese on the blackboard. Students would copy what was written on the board and ‘do the vocabulary’ at home as Fun put it by copying each word for five times. She explained that it would help prepare her students for dictation. Unlike

the contact we had before, Fun seemed confident and her tone was firm when answering questions about her teaching in the pre classroom observation interview. She promised to give me a photocopy of the reading text for reference and we agreed to meet outside the classroom before the observed lesson.

I first saw Fun's students when they were waiting in the hallway. Fun explained that most Secondary 1 English language lessons were conducted in the form of a split class in School A, i.e. half of the class stayed in the homeroom to have their lesson while the other half had their English lesson with a different teacher in a classroom nearby. Fun's students were the group who had to go to a different classroom. Fun required her students to line up orderly outside the classroom before the lesson and they were only allowed to go in the classroom when all 21 students were there. Fun formally introduced me to the students at the beginning of the lesson but she did not explain who I was or the reason for the classroom observation. The students did not seem to be surprised or show any curiosity. I later found out from what the students said in the lesson that they had already been told in the previous lesson that they would have a visitor. They were quiet and I got the impression that most of them seemed to be controlled during the lesson.

Fun began the first observed lesson by returning to her students the worksheet they had completed for homework. The worksheet required the students to surf on the Internet to find out information about the Mai Po Marshes. Fun was apparently unpleased with some of her students who did not do their work properly. She talked to each of them asking for reasons. She then showed her class how to locate the information required on the Internet.

After that, Fun continued to go through with her students the text on Mai Po Marshes in the textbook. As she mentioned in the pre classroom observation interview, she mainly talked about the new words in the text. She always tried to relate what she was teaching with the everyday life of the students. For example, she told the students that they could be bird watching in metropolitan Hong Kong and encouraged them to pay attention to the birds commonly found in the neighbourhood. From time to time she used Cantonese to explain the meaning of new words to her students. She showed a sense of humor in the lesson too. For instance, she joked that her students were 'greedy' when they told her that greedy meant lovely. She mostly stayed in the front of the classroom standing close to the blackboard. She spoke really fast and loudly and her tone was firm and clear. She seemed to be in control of the lesson and the teaching was mostly teacher-directed.

Fun seemed to do most of the talking in the first observed lesson. She talked for about 28 minutes in the 35-minute lesson. She explained the meaning of the vocabulary, asked her students questions and in some cases answered the questions herself. The questions asked included simple yes/no questions as well as some 'why' and 'why not' questions. She asked her students the following 'why' and 'why not' questions when she was going through with them the information found in the official website of the Mai Po Marshes at the beginning of the lesson. The following incident began with Fun asking her class the question, 'Do you like eating seafood?' She seemed to be interested in finding out her students' preferences for seafood.

Fun: Do you like eating seafood?
Ss: No. [Some students said no loudly.]
Fun: You don't like eating seafood?! [Fun looked and sounded surprised.]

Ss: No. [Some students said no again.]
Fun: Why not? Hong Kong people like seafood… [Fun continued to give her view on the topic without any pause or wait time given to her students.]
[SAMFunCO1AR]

In this incident, the response of Fun, i.e. 'You don't like seafood?!' and the rising tone showed that she was surprised with the negative answer given by her students. On the surface, the follow up 'why not' question aimed to elicit from her students reasons why they did not like seafood, but the fact that Fun gave her view on the topic right away not allowing her students any time to think about or answer the question before moving on to something else made the question a display question only.

A similar incident was soon identified when Fun talked about the migratory bird, black-faced spoonbill. The incident began with Fun wanting to find out from her students the reason why the migratory bird, black-faced spoonbill, moves to Hong Kong every year. She asked them the following question:

Fun: Why do they move to Hong Kong? [Fun answered the question herself right away.]
[SAMFunCO1AR]

In fact, the 'why' question in this incident could be a good critical thinking opportunity for students because it showed in the classroom observation that Fun had not, in any way, talked about the reason for the moving of the bird. With the assumption that the students had not read about related information on the Internet the question might trigger a critical thinking process of the students. However, like the previous incident no wait time was provided by the teacher before she answered the question herself. In fact, she did not

show any intention of listening to her students at all and thus a potential critical encounter was missed (see Sections 6.2.1 and 6.2.2). The first classroom observation also revealed that Fun's students were quite reluctant to answer her questions. For example, at the beginning of the lesson Fun asked the students twice if the had any difficulty completing the worksheet, the class remained silent. Towards the end of the lesson, Fun asked them twice if they had any question about the homework assigned, and again no one tried answering the questions. The class, on the whole, was not responsive during the first observed lesson.

Fun began the first post classroom observation interview by explaining why she did not go through the worksheet with her students in the Multimedia Learning Centre, for example, problems with booking and the setting of the centre. She then talked about not having enough time to go through with her students the reading text in the first observed lesson. She said she could only manage to go through two paragraphs of it but she believed that those students who were prepared for the lesson should have learnt the vocabulary taught. She also explained why the homework, i.e. some exercises in the workbook, was assigned. Then she answered some clarification questions regarding students' access to Internet, the reason why she went through only some of the answers from the worksheet and the feelings she had about the first observed lesson. She explained that students could have access to Internet in School A easily and many of them did not complete the worksheet only because they were lazy. She stressed that through the worksheet she wanted her students to experience locating information on the Internet and to get some idea about the reading text. But she said she would handle

grammar exercises differently and would make sure that everyone got the correct answer for each question. Fun did not seem to be happy with the progress of the first observed lesson. She said she had not achieved all she had planned. She seemed to realize the fast pace of her teaching when she was reflecting on her lesson and talked about the time pressure she felt in teaching (see Section 6.1.1). Below is an excerpt from the interview:

Researcher: Are you happy with your lesson in terms of teaching progress?
Fun: Slow. It's not acceptable. Very slow.
Researcher: Why?
Fun: Why?
Researcher: Why?
Fun: [Fun remained silent for few seconds] Was it really slow? [She then whispered to herself.]
[Fun then laughed softly to herself. Then Fun looked at me and we laughed together. She finalized realized that her teaching went very fast.]
Fun: How should I put it? It is because I was in a hurry.
Researcher: Why?
Fun: I lost two periods last week because of bad weather and two more lessons will be cancelled this week because of some school activities. And, we lost a whole month because of the SARS outbreak. My students are not really bright. So, I am scared. I am scared because I don't know whether I can finish teaching them all the things that are included in the exam syllabus.
Researcher: Will there be any changes in the exam syllabus because of the SAR outbreak?
Fun: er the syllabus for the exam, our final exam has been postponed. So, no change has been made in the exam syllabus. So, I needed to rush just now. Every time when I have lessons with them, I would say to myself, 'Oh, my god! Time's up again!'

[SAMFunPo1AR]

The focused question for the first post classroom observation interview was 'Can you tell me about the students in this class?' Fun said the class was a mixed ability class in terms of their English language proficiency. There were a few students who could manage the language well. Their homework was usually good and tidy and they were attentive in class. However, some of the students in the class were lazy and they always forgot to bring the books they needed to the classroom. According to Fun, some of her students

were very weak in English. She said that among all the Secondary 1 classes in the school, her class possessed the most non Hong Kong residents. Some students were new immigrants from Mainland China but she stressed that many of these students were motivated to learn. Fun said that some of her students were passive and she believed that boys were less ready to express themselves. Others were playful and they always daydreamed in the lesson. I then confirmed with Fun the date and times for the second classroom observation and interviews right before and after it. We did not meet until the second pre classroom observation interview.

5.5 3 The second classroom observation

In the second pre classroom observation interview, Fun said as usual she would need some time to deal with student problems regarding homework, for example, finding out why they had not handed in their work and making sure that they would submit it very soon. The students would then be given a quiz on the vocabulary that they had learnt recently. Fun explained that the quiz was quite easy and was used to prepare the students for the dictation on the teaching unit they were studying. She gave me a copy of the quiz upon my request and told me proudly that she designed the quiz last school year. She admitted that she liked the teaching topic, wild life, very much and that she found some of the assigned topics of the curriculum very boring. Also, Fun planned to go through some exercises on countable and uncountable nouns in the workbook after the quiz. She said she would give her students two more worksheets on the same topic to work on as homework. If possible, she would also ask them to complete some exercises in the grammar book and talk about different spelling rules concerning the plural nouns listed.

In terms of student performance, the second observed lesson formed a very big contrast with the previous one. The students talked loudly with each other when Fun talked with individual students about the problems with their homework in the lesson. The class was full of noise but it became deadly silent once the quiz began. Fun walked around the classroom during the quiz and noticed that some students had difficulty completing it. She gave them more time to work on the quiz and even read out the questions to remind them the pronunciation of the words. After the quiz, Fun went through some exercises in the workbook as she had planned. Before she began, she asked the students some questions to lead into the topic, for example, 'What are the characteristics of countable nouns?' However, like what happened in the first observed lesson, most of the questions she asked were unanswered or answered by herself. Fun spent the rest of the lesson checking the answers of the exercises her students did on countable and uncountable nouns. She asked them quite a lot of 'why' and 'why not' questions during the process. But, in most cases, very short wait time was given. Instead, more questions or hints were provided by Fun. The following incident was one of the examples. It began when Fun asked her students why 'flower' but not 'flowers' was the answer to the question.

Fun: Why not (flowers)? [Without any wait time given] What do you see in front of the blank?
Ss: A. [Fun explained that a singular noun should be used after the article 'a' right after the student answer.] [SAMFunCO2AR]

The 'funneling effect' (Tsui et al, 2004, p.129) created by the second question, 'What do you see in front of the blank?' indeed greatly reduced the students' space of learning.

> This kind of funneling effect reduces the space in which the students can explore various possible answers for themselves, and formulate the appropriate answer. It also has the detrimental effect of encouraging students to guess what the teacher has in mind, and to try to produce an answer that will meet the teacher's approval.
> (Tsui et al, 2004, p.129)

Similarly, in this second incident, Fun shot her students more questions, i.e. 'Why? Are we talking about one flower?' after the 'why' question and finally answered the question herself.

Fun: Why (flowers)? Why? Are we talking about one flower? No, we are talking about all the flowers there. [SAMFunCO2AR]

Although some 'why' questions were asked in the two incidents, the students were deprived the time or opportunity to think about or answer the questions in both cases. The explanation Fun gave or the follow up questions she asked indeed provided answers to her own questions. The way Fun handled the 'why' questions did not facilitate a genuine exchange of ideas between the teacher and student, or support the critical thinking development of students (see Section 6.2).

Before ending the lesson, Fun quickly assigned homework, i.e. two worksheets on countable and uncountable nouns, and went briefly through the instructions found in the worksheets. After that, Fun asked her students the questions, i.e. 'Understand?' and 'Any question?' to see if they had understood what she said. No one answered the former question but some students shouted 'no' right after the latter question. Their response was

so quick and impulsive that they did not seem to have thought about the question before answering it.

Fun was passive and quiet when the second post classroom observation interview began. She seemed to be disappointed with the progress made in the lesson when she was asked if the teaching objective of the lesson had been achieved. She was worried that she would not have enough time to teach her students all the things that were assigned in the school exam syllabus (see Section 6.1) and that she had not made her teaching clear to her students. Below is part of our exchange in the interview:

Fun: (The teaching was) Slow, slower than what I expected.
Researcher: Why?
Fun: I had to rush through the part on explaining the worksheet to the students. I was afraid. If my explanation was not clear, they would not know how to complete the worksheet for homework.
Researcher: Why do you think the pace of the lesson was slow?
Fun: er.. workbook, the part on checking the answers in the workbook was quite slow. [Fun was silent after that.]
Researcher: So, do you think you have achieved your teaching objectives?
Fun: That's ok, that's ok. [Fun spoke extremely softy.] At least I could manage to give them homework to do during the weekend.

[SAMFunPo2AR]

Fun then talked about the quiz the students had in the lesson. She admitted that she did not understand why they found it so difficult because they 'had just done the vocabulary' i.e. copying each new word for five times. Like Ling of School B, Fun said she had been trying to do dictation in different formats, for example, crossword puzzle to allow some change but complained that most students still did not do well in this. To save some class

time, she explained that the quiz could have been done as homework but she stressed that her students would not have taken their work seriously if it had not been done as a quiz.

Upon request, Fun then talked about the exercises in the workbook that she went through with her students in the second observed lesson. She said that she hoped her students could figure out the answer with the hint given in the context, for example, a plural verb for a plural noun. Below is what she said in the interview:

> Yesterday the students completed the exercise. I explained to them the questions e.g. when they saw the word 'they' they should put in a plural verb and if there was an article like 'a' or 'an' they should know that a singular noun was needed. I have taught them how to find out the answer with the hint given in the context. But, I was not sure if they remembered what had been taught. So, today, I had to, although I knew that it was explained yesterday, repeat everything. [SAMFunPo2AR]

The focused question for the second post classroom observation interview was 'Can you tell me what parents are like nowadays?' Like Ling and John of School B, Fun admitted that she could not tell me much about the topic because she was not a class teacher and had little contact with parents, but she did raise some family problems that were commonly found among her students, for example, single-parents, parents who did not know how to teach their children, parents who had no time for their children, and poor communication between parents and their children. She believed that it was important for teachers to show students their love and care when handling student problems and it could take a lot of time for teachers to find out the real problems that students were facing, such as family problems. She stressed that she hardly had time for her students to

show them her love and care (see Section 7.2.2) and she admitted that sometimes she got really mad with what they did.

5.5.4 The third classroom observation

In the pre classroom observation interview, Fun said that her class would be working on a writing task in the third observed lesson. Through some preparatory exercises given in the textbook, for example, a listening practice and a handout she had prepared, she hoped to give her students some ideas to complete an informal letter describing a trip to Mai Po Marshes. In the interview she also talked about how she selected appropriate teaching materials from the textbook for the teaching purpose, such as skipping a proofreading exercise that she considered too difficult for her students and other guidelines that she considered messy. After that, she showed me the handout and went through it briefly with me. She stressed that although she had prepared the handout to help her students to complete the writing task, she was not sure if she should give it to her students. She was afraid that she would give them too much guidance. Below is what she said in the interview:

> They will have to fill in all these e.g. 'address', 'date', 'dear'.… Then, under the part 'message' there they will have to write three paragraphs. In fact, these are required in the textbook. According to the instruction here, students will have to divide their work into three main parts. The first part is the itinerary e.g. what they did first and what they did afterwards. Then in the second part they will have to write down the funny things that happened in their trip like falling in the pond and things like that given in the listening practice. Then, they will have to write a conclusion. They will have to answer questions like 'Did you enjoy the trip and why?' That' all. But, I am a bit worried. I don't know if I will give them 'too much guidance' if I give them the handout. But, I am afraid they will [Fun spoke very softly that I could not hear what she said. I got the impression that she, in fact, did not want me to hear her whisper and I did not ask her to repeat it.] if I don't give them the handout. Anyway, I don't know. [SAMFunPr3AR]

She began the third observed lesson by eliciting from her students through questions differences between formal and informal letters that she talked about in the previous lesson. Some yes/no questions were asked, such as ‘Do you use the word ‘yummy’ when you write a letter to the school principal?’ In response to these questions, some students were shouting out ‘yes’ or ‘no’ instantly. Their responses were so quick that they did not seem to have thought about the questions carefully. And, Fun seldom asked them follow up questions or to elaborate or explain their answers. Like the two previous observed lessons, Fun sometimes shot her students series of questions without giving them much time to think about or answer them (see Section 6.2). As shown in the following incident, after shooting her students a series of questions about the use of contraction in friendly letters, Fun suddenly realized that her students might not even know what contraction meant.

Fun: In friendly letters, in friendly letters, can we use contraction? Can we? Can we? Contraction [Fun then gave the Chinese translation of contraction.] OK? So, in the friendly letter we can use contraction. Understand? Remember? What are contractions? [The series of teacher questions finally stopped when Fun came to realize that some of her students might not catch the meaning of contraction. The class remained silent and some of them looked puzzled.]

[SAMFunCO3AR]

Fun then went through a listening practice given in the textbook in which students had to identify the pictures that the tape described. The class was told that they had to write a story about a trip to Mai Po Marshes and develop their stories based on what was given on the tape. Fun invited her students to talk about each picture but it seemed that only the students in the front were eager to do so. The rest of the class did not seem to pay Fun or the tape much attention. A student asked Fun a question when she was describing a bird

costume in one of the pictures. Fun listened to the student patiently and responded to his question briefly. The student question and teacher reply were too soft to be heard or recorded. The rest of the class looked bored and a student even rested his head on the desk during the listening practice. Fun knocked on his desk angrily and the boy quickly sat up straight.

After that, Fun went through with her class the handout she had prepared for them. Fun read out the questions and tried answering each of them leaving apparently no pauses or wait time. She told the class that they could finish the writing task by simply putting together the answers to the questions (see Section 6.3.3). In some cases, the students only had to complete the sentences Fun provided, for example, to answer the questions 'Did you enjoy the trip? Why? Why not?' she suggested that her students write 'I enjoyed the trip very much because…or I did not enjoy the trip because it was hot or…' Fun began the third post classroom observation interview by talking about the importance of these guided questions and of going through them in class. Below is what she said in the interview:

We began to talk about the content of the letter. What I mean by content is the idea given in the textbook. I have set some questions to help my students to think about the content of the letter e.g. what they should include in the letter and how many paragraphs they should write. They are, comparatively speaking, a weaker class so I try to give them more guidelines before they write their composition. But, their work could be very messy even if guidelines are given to them. You can't just give them guidelines like these. You must go through them with them.… For content, they just can't think of anything to write in their compositions. So, these guidelines are needed. Guided writing. But some students have told me that they did not know what to write even though they were given the guidelines. So, I have to go through the guidelines with them carefully telling them what to write for each paragraph and where the ideas can be found. Some students just have no

idea of what to write. For content, they just don't have any idea. That was why I went through the guidelines with my students just now.

[SAMFunPo3AR]

In the third post classroom observation interview, Fun admitted that she only encouraged brighter students who had confidence in expressing their ideas clearly and correctly to write about things that were not given in the textbook or handout. She said that students who could hardly manage basic sentence structures should not be using vocabulary that was not given to express their ideas. She added that grammar and tenses were two major problems her students faced during the actual writing process. 'Cantonese-English' was always found in their work, for example, 'I were take a photo' and 'I with my friends go to….' In terms of classroom teaching, Fun was aware that some of her students were just daydreaming when she went through the guidelines in the lesson. She admitted that she did most of the talking in class and there was not much interaction between her and her students. She explained that because of time pressure she did not even have time to handle these student problems (see Section 6.1.1). Below is what she said in the interview:

Fun: I don't know if the students were bored in today's lesson because I did most of the talking.
Researcher: Why do you think so?
Fun: I think there was not enough interaction in this lesson.
Researcher: Why?
Fun: I was there to explain to them the handout and only a few students who were listening to me answered my questions. For those who were not listening to me or who were daydreaming, I just got no time to wake them all up.

[SAMFunPo3AR]

Like the two previous observed lessons, Fun did most of the talking in the third observed lesson. She asked many questions and answered most of them. There was very little

genuine exchange of ideas between Fun and her students. The teaching was mainly teacher-directed and no critical encounters were identified.

The focused question for the third post classroom observation interview was 'How do you understand teaching, learning and education?' To Fun, teaching was to explain and transfer objectively something factual to her students to increase their knowledge and learning was the process in which students absorbed new knowledge and consolidated what they already knew. Fun believed that teachers were the ones to help students grow and learn new things. She considered education something all round. According to Fun, it was not just about teaching of knowledge, for example, knowledge in the book. It was more about developing students into a whole person. Education aimed to make changes in students. It helped them develop positive values. Interestingly, in the interview, Fun laughed softly to herself after talking about her teaching and learning beliefs. She stressed that she only knew how to talk about them implying that they were things easily said than done.

On the whole, Fun seemed to be a lot more at ease and confident in the third post classroom observation interview. After the interview she took the initiative in talking about a course on child development that she was attending. Fun told me that she worked half time in the school because she wanted to give her young son more time and care, which she believed would eventually save his teachers a lot of trouble. This might explain why she told me in the second post classroom observation interview that it was so important to find out more about the family background of her students when dealing

with student problems. I considered her personal sharing a sign of trust and since the third classroom observation we did not have to confirm again the times and dates for classroom observations or interviews.

5.5.5 The fourth classroom observation

Fun said in the fourth pre classroom observation interview that she originally planned to go through in the observed lesson the answers of the exercises in a worksheet on the use of the word ‘must’. But then she checked the assignment record sheet and found that five students still had not handed in their work. She decided to go through the worksheet later. After that, she showed me another set of worksheets that her students had been working on. According to Fun, they were adapted from a set of teaching/learning materials developed by the education authority after the SARS outbreak. Fun believed that the topics were close to the everyday experience of her students but she was disappointed to find that some of her students did not seem to show any interest in the topics. The set of worksheets contained different exercises on the use of the words like ‘first, ‘next’ and ‘finally’. The students were told to complete some of the exercises on sequencing instructions as homework the day before. She planned to go through the answers of these exercises and to complete with her students a short exercise on writing instructions in the fourth observed lesson.

Fun spent quite some time collecting homework from her students at the beginning of the fourth observed lesson. She talked to each of the students who had not handed in their homework asking them for reasons. After that, she went through some exercises with her

students in the worksheets. Fun was found to answer her own questions again when she was going through with her class a sequence-the-order exercise. As shown in the following incident, Fun answered her question ‘How do you know?’ right away.

Fun: Which one is the first step?
Ss: E.
Fun: How do you know? Because you see the word ‘first’. [Fun then moved on to talk about the answer of another question.]
[SAMFunCO4AR]

Similarly, in this second incident she answered the question ‘How do you know it’s the last step?’ herself before moving on to another exercise.

Fun: Which one is the last step?
Ss: D.
Fun: How do you know it’s the last step? You see the word ‘finally’. [Fun then moved on to talk about another exercise.]
[SAMFunCO4AR]

In both incidents, the students were not given the time to think about or answer the ‘how’ questions asked. They were only display questions because Fun answered the questions herself right away (see Section 6.2.1).

After checking the answers with her students, Fun moved on to talk about the instruction writing task. She began by reading out this question to her student, i.e. ‘Do you agree that throwing plastic bottles into the rubbish bin is a waste?’

Fun: Do you agree that throwing plastic bottles into the rubbish bin is a waste? [This was a question from the handout she was going through with the class.] You know, plastic bottle. What are plastic bottles? [Fun then explained the meaning of plastic bottles.]
[SAMFunCO4AR]

The question ‘Do you agree that throwing plastic bottles into the rubbish bin is a waste?’ if handled properly, could provide students an opportunity to think critically and express their views on plastic waste. The critical encounter was missed because Fun gave her students no time to think about or express their views on the topic. Fun did not seem to be aware of the potential of the question (see Section 6.2.2).

To ensure that her students could complete the short instruction writing task, Fun asked her students a lot of blank-filling questions to prompt them through the writing exercise. The following incidents have revealed that while the short wait time given between the questions left students not much time to process the questions, the blank filling questions left them not much space for thinking because Fun seemed to have predetermined answers to the questions (see Section 6.3.3). Fun used many blank-filling questions, such as ‘get an what’ and ‘not made of glass but made of’ to try to get her students to complete the first instruction, i.e. first, get an empty plastic bottle.

Fun: First, get an? Get an what? Look at your paper.
Ss: Empty bottle.
Fun: Empty bottle. Empty glass bottle? Empty glass bottle? No. Empty. Empty. Empty glass bottle? Not made of glass but made of?

[SAMFunCO4AR]

Similarly, Fun asked her students cloze questions, such as ‘wash and’ and ‘dry what’ to help them to complete the second instruction, i.e. wash and dry the plastic bottle.

Fun: First get an empty plastic bottle? Is that all? First, get an empty plastic bottle, what do you do with it? What do you do with it? What do you do with it?
Ss: Wash.
Fun: Wash and? And what? Wash and?

Ss: Dry
Fun: Dry, dry what?

[SAMFunCO4AR]

Although the class was quiet, I got the impression that they were not working on the task or listening to the teacher during the lesson. Fun seemed to be aware of the problem too and she talked about it in the post classroom observation interview when she was reflecting on the lesson. Below is an excerpt from the interview:

I think they are, perhaps, after the school suspension period and also the final exam. To them, it means that the summer holiday but not the final exam is coming. They never think about the exam or that the exam is near but in fact they are happy because classes will soon be over. It's obvious that they are not concentrating on their studies. You saw just now that some of them were just sitting still. They were like having a strike including the boy who was suspended last time. And you saw the boy in the front who told me that he did not know how to complete the task. In fact he knew how to do it but he just did not want to do it during the lesson. He could manage the task but he just did not want to do it. He knew how to do it.

[SAMFunPo4AR]

After complaining about different student problems, Fun talked about her plan for the next teaching unit. Because of time constraints she planned to complete only the parts on grammar and vocabulary of the unit. She believed that the part on 'wh' questions was important for her students because they would be tested in the HKCEE oral exam, i.e. an exam that her students would be likely to take after four years. Below is what she said in the interview:

The next unit is about food. In fact, I know it will not be possible to teach the whole unit. But, at least, I plan to teach them the vocabulary and the grammar items. This has to be taught [Fun showed me an exercise on 'wh' question words in the textbook.] because when they are promoted to S.5 they will need them in the oral exam. We, starting from this year, have been giving our students a lot of drilling on things like prepositions of time. At least, I need to teach them these grammar items.

[SAMFunPo4AR]

The focused question for the fourth post classroom observation interview was ‘How do you understand English language teaching and learning?’ To Fun, English language teaching was to help students to learn about the basic structures and skills of the language. She believed that developing their interest in the language was important but she admitted that she never succeeded in doing it. She said learning a language meant learning how to comprehend and use the language. She stressed that if a person was really interested in a language, he or she would do well in it. Before ending the interview, she shared her English language learning experience in primary and high schools and talked about the teachers who inspired her. In terms of learning, she felt that students nowadays were too dependent on their teachers.

5.5.6 The fifth classroom observation

Fun began the fifth pre classroom observation interview by talking about the dictation her students had done recently. She said that about two-third of her students did badly in the dictation that required them to write down their home address. Fun stressed that the dictation was designed to prepare her students for the end of term oral exam in which they would be asked their home address. She planned to return the dictation to the students in the lesson and asked her students to do corrections. Also, she planned to return the compositions that the students had done on Mai Po Marshes. Using the composition of a student as a sample, she wanted to help the class to think about ways to improve their work. She then explained how and why the composition was chosen and admitted that she hoped to give the student writing the sample composition some recognition and encouragement. She said she had some ideas to use when responding to

the content of student writing through questions from a staff development workshop held in the school recently. If time allowed, she hoped also to go through an assigned reading text in the lesson.

The fifth observed lesson began when Fun returned to her students the dictation. Some students looked disappointed with their results and some began working on the correction right away. Fun then moved on to talk about the compositions that the students had done on Mai Po Marshes. She began by asking the class a question, 'Do you remember your writing? A visit to the Mai Po Marshes…' The class seemed to be reluctant to answer the question with only a few students saying 'no'. Many students were working on the dictation correction when the question was asked. Fun then told the class that they did quite well in the composition and asked them for reasons. She asked if it was because they were allowed to do the writing at home. Again, the class was quiet. Fun nominated a student to answer the question but the student gave Fun a very brief answer. The reply from the student was too soft to be heard. Some students were still working on the dictation correction secretively.

Fun then handed the class the sample composition. Some students seemed eager to find out whose writing it was and how the writing was like. There were two questions written on the margin of the sample composition, i.e. 'Besides bird watching, what did you do?' and 'How do you know it's not a bird?' Fun read out the questions to the class and asked them to figure out ways to enrich the content of the composition. As shown in the following incident, instead of giving her students time to think about the questions, to

discuss ideas with their classmates or to make suggestions, Fun referred them to the textbook and she herself talked about the ideas they could add to the writing.

Fun: Besides bird watching, what did you do in Mai Po? Do you remember the pictures in the book? What did you do there besides bird watching? Besides bird watching, what did you do there? Why did the boy fall in the water? What did he do?
[SAMFunCO5AR]

Fun shot her students a series of questions without leaving them much time to answer the questions (see Section 6.2.1). Also, the questions she asked did not seem to leave the students much space to think (see Section 7.2.1), for example, the question referring the students to or talking about the pictures in the textbook. The class remained quiet. Some students seemed to be playing the role of a spectator while others were still busy copying their addresses. Because of time constraints, Fun decided not to talk about the reading text that she planned to go through in the lesson. Instead, she told the students to read through their writing and to think about ways to improve it. She encouraged them to ask her questions about the writing and she walked around the classroom answering questions they raised.

Although the classroom observation has revealed that Fun did not give her students much time or space to think about or suggest ways to improve the sample writing, she seemed to perceive what she had done differently. Below is an excerpt from the post classroom observation interview in which she was reflecting on her own teaching:

I returned the composition to them. I first gave them the work of one of their classmates to read. Then, I guided them to think about how to improve the composition. I discussed

with them what could be added to different parts of the composition. After that, when they got their own composition, they then thought about ways to improve their own work. [SAMFunPo5AR]

The focused question for the fifth post classroom observation interview was 'What are the joys and difficulties of being a secondary school English language teacher?' Fun considered students having little exposure to the language a difficulty for English language teachers. She explained that because of the new medium of instruction policy English was now used only in English lessons and many students did not seem to see the need to learn the language. Also, she expressed doubt about how English language teaching was conducted in primary school saying that some Secondary 1 students did not seem to know any basic grammar. She felt that teaching materials were much simpler than those in the past and English language teachers were provided with more resources, such as printed and on-line teaching materials. But, she stressed that their life had not improved because they could not afford the time to read, select and use the materials provided (see Section 6.1.1). Fun said that she was happy to be a teacher even though she felt exhausted and could not get much joy from the job. To her, seeing the growth and change in her students was very rewarding and she enjoyed getting email messages from students she had taught. She added that the English panel was also a source of happiness for her. Because of the support of her colleagues she did not have to fight the battle alone. Below is what she said in the fifth post classroom observation interview:

I think the English language teachers here are very good. They are ready to share their teaching materials. We share both teaching ideas and materials. There is also some support among us. We got a coordinator for each form. But if people are not willing to participate and share, having a form coordinator could mean nothing. But we are just used to that. We are ready to share our teaching materials; those good stuff. We are ready

to share with each other our anger and frustration in teaching. That's also one of the reasons why I am still teaching here. It could be really difficult if you have to fight the battle alone.

[SAMFunPo5AR]

5.5.7 The sixth classroom observation

Fun began the pre classroom observation interview by talking about a quiz that the students were having in the last observed lesson. The quiz contained some questions on grammar as well as questions testing the vocabulary that the students had learnt in the last two teaching units. Fun said the quiz helped to prepare her students for the dictation exam. She believed that the quiz was quite easy and she planned to give the class fifteen minutes to complete it. According to Fun, the objective of the last observed lesson was clear, i.e. to wrap things up before the exams. She planned to go through different exercises in the grammar book and worksheets with the class. Below is what she said in the sixth pre classroom observation interview:

As the school term is ending, we need to do some wrapping up these days. There are lots of things that we have to do before the end of the term. I collected the grammar books of my students yesterday [Fun showed me some 'wh' question exercises in the grammar book] and I am going to return them today. They did not do very well this time. I guess it's because the questions here are not so straightforward. They are not like these [Fun pointed to some filling-in-the-blank questions in a worksheet]. These are more direct and they could manage better. They just can't manage the questions that require a bit more thinking from them and that are less straightforward…. For the workbook, I want them to finish some exercises on 'wh' questions there. What we are doing now, i.e. teaching the grammar item for this unit is actually helping them to revise and prepare for the exam. That's all we will do in today's lesson. I got a lot of things that I need to return to the students but I don't think we will have time to do so today.

[SAMFunPr6AR]

The last observed lesson began with a twelve-minute quiz. After that, Fun assigned homework and went through with her students an exercise they did in the grammar book.

Fun asked a lot of questions when going through the exercise. Her questions followed a similar pattern, i.e. 'Can you say…? Why? Why not?' But, in many cases, she did not give her students any chance to answer the questions. Instead, she answered the questions herself (see Section 6.2). Below is an incident captured in the lesson:

Fun was going through with her students the answer to this question, i.e. '…is your dog called?'
Fun: Can you say who is your dog?
Ss: No.
Fun: Can you use who? Why? Why not?
Ss: A dog.
Fun: 'Who' is used with people. [Fun did the explanation right after the answer 'a dog'.]
[SAMFunCO6AR]

Two students took the initiative in asking Fun if their answers were acceptable when she went through with them the exercise. Although in both cases their answers were not accepted, Fun listened and responded to the students carefully. She stressed that context was something important for students to consider when choosing an appropriate question word for a question. The student questions and Fun's replies were not clearly heard and they were not recorded on tape because of poor reception.

Fun reflected briefly on the last observed lesson in the sixth post classroom observation interview. Fun considered her lesson very exam oriented and below is what said in the post classroom observation interview:

We then went through the answers of the exercise in the grammar book. The exercise is about 'wh' questions. We did not have enough time to go through the whole exercise. We checked the answers of seven questions only. I have to constantly remind them about 'wh' questions because the exam is at hand. I know that we should not be too exam

oriented but the exam is coming so soon and ‘wh’ questions will be tested in both the written and oral exams. So, I hope that they can remember what they have learnt better. [SAMFunPo6AR]

The focused questions for the sixth post classroom observation interview were mainly about the critical thinking recommendations (see Appendix IV for the question scheme of the interview). Fun seemed to be relaxed when answering the questions. She was eager to express her views and showed confidence in doing so. She said that she had been teaching English in secondary school for twelve years. When asked if she knew about the critical thinking recommendations before the study, she said ‘no’. She stressed that even if she heard or read about the recommendations, she had never taken it seriously. She explained that the education policy had been fluctuating during the past few years and she hardly had time to catch up with them.

Fun seemed to have a clear understanding of critical thinking. She believed that critical thinkers would not accept blindly what they were told. According to her, they would evaluate and analyze an issue before passing judgment. They would be ready to make decisions, voice their opinions and take appropriate action. She believed that critical thinking was not just some thinking skills but a perspective. It was an attitude that was closely tied to one’s personality and learning style. She added that a person’s development of critical thinking was a kind of training that took place throughout his/her growing process. She reiterated a few times in the target interview the ultimate goal that she perceived of critical thinking education, that is:

I want my students to understand that they should not just sit and wait for answers from teachers. They need to analyze and to listen to others carefully. They need to consider the details. They need to see that they should not accept what they are told blindly. What we need to do is to train up our students to analyze, judge and think about what can be done no matter what the media says. That's really critical thinking.

[SAMFunPo6AR]

Fun could understand the importance of critical thinking for the Hong Kong society, stressing that examples of 'uncritical' thinking were not difficult to find. She gave an example of 'uncritical' thinking about mass media in the interview.

Now you see many people in Hong Kong are not satisfied and are so ready to criticize. Can we then conclude that nowadays people in Hong Kong are good at critical thinking? Can I say that? In fact, many people who are constantly criticizing now do not think critically. It's because of the mass media. They just believe what they are told. To me, it has nothing to do with critical thinking.

[SAMFunPo6AR]

Although Fun seemed to have no clear idea of the critical thinking recommendations before the study, she supported the idea that secondary school teachers could help their students to develop critical thinking through all subjects including the English language subject (see Section 6.4.2). According to Fun, guiding questions, stimulating reading materials, and appropriate teaching context could allow teachers to develop critical thinking of their students through the English language subject. She even gave an example of how Secondary 1 teachers could help develop students' critical thinking through the English language subject when she was asked if she was teaching her Secondary 1 students critical thinking in the English language lessons. Below is what she said in the last post classroom observation interview:

Very little, a very low percentage. It's because our teaching focus is mainly skills training. Once in a while I might be doing it, very briefly. I think it's the way how you teach your students. For example, in the lesson just now, the question about a 'dog' and I asked my students if they could use the word 'who'. Does it count? I think it can be done by guiding them to think, for instance, by giving them some wrong answers intentionally. I just don't want them to sit and wait for my answer.

[SAMFunPo6AR]

On the whole, Fun seemed to believe that teachers could help their students to develop critical thinking through the English language subject but she admitted that because of the 'skill-training' teaching focus she was not doing much of it in her own Secondary 1 English language classroom. Also, the excerpt above shows that she seemed to be unsure about whether what she had done in the last observed lesson could help her students to develop critical thinking. She stressed the need for teachers to learn to implement the critical thinking recommendation towards the end of the interview (see Section 8.4.1).

We, English language teachers, are the ones to implement the recommendations. We are the ones who are not doing our job well. We are useless. We don't know about the recommendations. Do I have the time to learn how to do it? Have they [the education authority] given us any guidelines? What they want is some good HKCEE results. That's what they want. Have they given us anything? I don't think so. They might have given us some money to buy some software. [Fun laughed.] They might have given us some money to employ a teaching assistant. Does it count? [Fun laughed again.]

[SAMFunPo6AR]

Fun added that from time to time documents were sent to the school from the education authority but she could only afford the time to flick through them. It seemed to her that those policy makers had little to do. Without knowing much about the situations of schools or teachers, they thought about all sort of teaching ideas out of their head. Apart from reading briefly documents from schools, they knew little about their problems and needs. To her, what the education authority cared about was only good student exam

results and documents from schools. She felt that teachers were always the ones to blame in the educational context. Although schools were given more money to buy computer software and recruit new teaching assistants, the problems frontline teachers faced were not solved. Using the critical thinking recommendations as an example, she stressed that teachers were not given any time to learn about the recommendation or to learn how to implement it in the classroom.

5.5 8 The last debriefing interview

A significant aim of the last debriefing interview was to show the participating teachers the critical encounters identified in their lessons and to get their feedback on these. The interview also aimed to find out the benefits that the teachers perceived to gain from the study and the comments they had on the design of the study. As there was no critical encounter identified in Fun's lessons, she was told very briefly that no evidence of teaching of critical thinking was found in her lessons. Like Mei Mei, Fun was not surprised with the findings. She explained that she might have heard from Mei Mei the focus of the study, i.e. the critical thinking recommendations, before she was told about it in the sixth post classroom observation. She said she had deliberately thought more about her lessons because of the study, for example, to think about what critical thinking could mean in her teaching when she was preparing her lessons before the classroom observations. She said she sometimes asked her students a question or two that aimed to develop their critical thinking in the lessons. She admitted that this kind of awareness about critical thinking had never occurred to her before. She said she suddenly realized that she might be doing some kind of teaching related to critical thinking. She added that

this kind of awareness was later extended to the lessons that were not observed but when asked if critical thinking was something that she considered whenever she prepared for her lessons, she stressed that she did not think much about it reiterating that ‘sometimes she had to rush and thus nothing else could be done in the lesson’ [SAMFunIIAR]. She said she had to check her students’ homework and to have quizzes with them from time to time, and that she could hardly afford the time to think about anything else. However, she added that the teaching of critical thinking might not be something that a teacher did explicitly. Instead, it could be done through the interaction between the teacher and student, for instance, the teacher asking his or her students more questions.

In terms of the comments on the design of the study, Fun said that a fuller picture would have been obtained if lessons of other English language teachers in the school had been observed. However, she was aware that it would cause some practical problems. She was concerned about the selection of the teachers for the study stressing that she and Mei Mei were ‘atypical’ teachers in the sense that she worked only half-time in the school and Mei Mei could get up at three in the morning to prepare for her lessons. She suggested that the study should include teachers who had to teach more than thirty lessons a cycle but she added that it was also due to this heavy workload that they could spare no time for the study. Fun considered the number of classroom observations appropriate but she reiterated towards the end of the interview that it would have been better if more classes of different teachers had been observed.

Fun and I chatted for some time after the interview. She seemed to have a lot of things about education that she wanted to say. She doubted the commitment of the government to their policies, which might explain why she had not taken the critical thinking recommendations seriously as she told me in the last post classroom observation interview. And, she stressed that the education authority should go into schools to listen to the voices of teachers. Below is what she said:

I might have flicked through the document from the education authority on the critical thinking recommendation but I remember nothing about what was written there. They might change their mind again very soon say like after two or three years. So, why bother reading it? Why? They might suddenly tell you that the recommendation has been scrapped after you have prepared a whole set of materials. So, it's not you, researchers in the area, who should go into schools to listen to voices of teachers. They should be doing this instead. But they never want to take this step.

[SAMFunIIAR]

5.5 9 A portrait of Fun's class

As revealed in the six observed lessons (see Table 5.5 Summary of data collection for Fun on p.241), Fun's teaching was mostly exam driven with students doing all sorts of dictation and mechanical grammatical exercises. Also, her teaching was mainly teacher directed with Fun doing most of the talking in class. She talked very fast and liked asking her students questions in the English lessons. Different types of questions were asked in the six observed lessons ranging from lower order yes/no or blank-filling questions to higher order or 'why'/ 'why not' questions. However, the wait time for her questions was usually so short that the students were not given the opportunity to think about or answer the questions. Some critical encounters were thus missed. Also, she sometimes shot her students series of questions in a short time without listening to what they said. In some

cases, Fun even answered her own questions. It seemed that Fun was afraid that her students would not be able to answer her questions or complete the tasks they were assigned. I got a very strong impression that she was always in a rush and had to make 'good' use of every minute of the lesson. Although she sometimes encouraged her students to answer her questions or to ask her questions about things that they did not understand in class, her students seldom did so. Like Fun, her students were more than ready to ignore what she said and they had learnt from their experience that Fun would eventually answer the questions or complete the tasks herself. In terms of critical thinking education, Fun was not setting a good example in helping her students to develop important critical attitudes, for instance, allowing others time and space for critical thinking and being ready to listen to others. In a nutshell, the common issues identified in Fun's case were: time pressure, adherence to the school curriculum, the exam oriented culture, negative morale, critical thinking viewed as important but impossible in the present educational context.

Despite the constraints and pressures she faced, Fun worked very hard preparing her lessons and marking student assignments. Her concern for her students manifested clearly in many different ways, for example, using the composition of a student who always misbehaved in class as a sample composition to give him some support and encouragement. Also, she knew the background of each student well and recognized the progress they were making. Like Mei Mei, she was a very kind and warm teacher who had a tremendous passion for and commitment to her profession.

Chapter VI Patterns across the cases

This chapter, which builds on the five participating teachers' case reports (see Chapter V), aims to provide detailed descriptive information about the significant patterns that emerged across the cases (see Figure 4.1 for the case study approach of the main study on p.98). As illustrated in Chapter V, although the five teachers, Lai Lai (School B), John (School B), Ling (School B), Mei Mei (School A) and Fun (School A) came from different backgrounds, for example, John was a new NET from a European country, Ling was a non-subject-trained English language teacher and Fun was a half-time senior English language teacher who had recently taken up junior classes, and had a different understanding of critical thinking and perceptions regarding the teaching of critical thinking in the English language classroom, commonalities have been revealed in both their interview and classroom observation data.

The four significant patterns capturing the key features of the five cases are presented in the following sub-sections. Section 6.1 details the sources and impacts of the overwhelming institutional and external pressure that the five teachers reported to face inside and outside their classrooms, i.e. time pressure, adherence to school curriculum, exam pressure and pressure from students. Section 6.2 presents the three major problems of the five teachers' questioning techniques, i.e. brief waiting time, inability to take advantage of the potential of open-ended questions, and the predominantly use of lower order questions, which as revealed in the observed lessons constituted a major part of their teaching. Section 6.3 describes the teachers' predominantly lower order teaching as manifested in the teaching of grammar, vocabulary and writing, and the effects of exams on their teaching. Section 6.4 reports on the list of the five teachers' recommendations

regarding the successful implementation of the 1999 critical thinking recommendations (CDC, 1999) in their English language classrooms. These recommendations as well as important points raised in this chapter will be further discussed in various sections of the discussion and concluding chapters, i.e. Chapters VII and VIII.

Section 6.1 Feeling the pressure

In a study comparing teacher stress in Hong Kong and Germany Schwarzer et al. (1999) pointed out that significant evidence shows that teachers experience a great deal of stress. The main study's five participating teachers consistently reported that they felt different types of pressure at work including time pressure, pressure from the school curriculum, exam pressure and pressure from students. As illustrated below, the multitude of pressure experienced by the teachers interacted with and impacted on one another causing the teachers a great deal of stress and dilemma.

6.1.1 Time pressure

As revealed in different interviews, the reported sources of time pressure were multiple, for example, the overloaded school curriculum, inability to deviate from the curriculum, overwhelming exam pressure and unbearable workload and duties. The significant impact of time pressure on the five teachers as observed in their lessons and reported by the teachers in different interviews included the teachers adopting a teacher centred teaching approach, a lack of genuine exchanges of ideas between teachers and students and students deprived of the opportunity to use or apply the language learnt in class, and their low priority on teaching, for example, insufficient preparation of teachers for classes.

All five teachers have expressed views about time pressure. I illustrate this through data from Fun (School A) and John (School B). For example, Fun chased after her students for homework at the beginning of most of the observed lessons (see Sections 5.5.2-5.5.7). She always wanted to find out why her students were not handing in their homework and to make sure that they would hand in their work soon. This also happened in her first observed lesson with which she was not very pleased. She said she could not achieve all she had planned, and was worried that she would not have enough time to teach her students what was assigned in the school exam syllabus, i.e. the school curriculum to prepare them for the exams. However, as I observed in the lesson, Fun's teaching was very fast and so teacher directed that the students were not given the time or opportunity to be involved in the process of using or applying the language. Fun was so overwhelmed by the time pressure that she did not even realize how fast paced her teaching was in the lesson. Below is a brief recap of what she said that highlights the enormous time pressure she faced inside the classroom, and the different sources of time pressure when she was reflecting on her teaching in the first post classroom observation interview (see Section 5.5.2):

Researcher: Are you happy with your lesson in terms of teaching progress?
Fun: Slow. It's not acceptable. Very slow.
Researcher: Why?
Fun: Why?
Researcher: Why?
Fun: [Fun remained silent for few seconds] Was it really slow? [She then whispered to herself.]
[Fun then laughed softly to herself. Then Fun looked at me and we laughed together. She finalized realized that her teaching went very fast.]
Fun: How should I put it? It is because I was in a hurry.
Researcher: Why?

Fun: I lost two periods last week because of bad weather and two more lessons will be cancelled this week because of some school activities. And, we lost a whole month because of the SARS outbreak. My students are not really bright. So, I am scared. I am scared because I don't know whether I can finish teaching them all the things that are included in the exam syllabus.
Researcher: Will there be any changes in the exam syllabus because of the SAR outbreak?
Fun: er the syllabus for the exam, our final exam has been postponed. So, no change has been made in the exam syllabus. So, I needed to rush just now. Every time when I have lessons with them, I would say to myself, 'Oh, my god! Time's up again!'
[SAMFunPo1AR]

Although Fun (see Section 5.5) and John (see Section 5.2) were teaching at two different schools and from two very different backgrounds, both of them spent a great deal of time on student homework in their observed lessons and felt great time pressure in teaching. Like Fun, John, the NET of School B, complained about time pressure in teaching right after the first classroom observation (see Section 5.2.2). John said that he had not completed what he had planned to do with his students in the first observed lesson and took the initiative in talking about his experience of lagging behind the teaching schedule in the previous school term in the first post classroom observation interview. Although he was worried that he would not have enough time to teach what was assigned in the school curriculum, he stressed that he spent more time on homework because he wanted to make sure that his students understood what they were doing, which to him, did not seem to be a major concern in School B; and he added that he could not understand why some of his colleagues did not mark or even go through the assignment the students did. He admitted that sometimes he spent quite a lot of time helping his students to learn from the mistakes they made in their homework, and thus the pace of the lesson was slower. As revealed in the lessons observed, the time pressure Fun and John faced did not seem to allow them

the time to do what they believed to be fundamental and important for their students' learning.

As illustrated in Chapter V, the time pressure John and Fun faced impacted significantly on their teaching. John complained about time pressure again in the third post classroom observation interview (see Section 5.2.4) stressing that he had to rush through the packed exam-oriented school curriculum. According to John, the time pressure in teaching did not facilitate student participation in class, i.e. students are not involved in the process of using and applying the English language, or the cultivation of a positive teacher student relationship, which he considered a dilemma he faced at work. The brief excerpt below highlights the dilemma John faced in terms of time pressure:

> The exam, no choice, the grammar has got to be done so this would mean rushing again through things. So, I think here in HK, it is even more difficult to get a good relationship with students unless, that's my impression, you are not listening to them and you are just feeding them. I teach you listening. I teach you listening. I teach you listening, basically that sort of method. But I sought interaction. So even if sometimes they are noisy, but answers are coming out, I think that is more positive than having them listen to a lesson and just sitting there anyway, watching the ceiling watching whatever. So it's a bit of a dilemma
>
> [SBMJohnPo3AR]

In order to provide his students with a purposeful opportunity to use the vocabulary they learnt John planned to organize a cross-curricular activity with the Home Economics teacher after the fourth observed lesson (see Section 5.2.5) but he soon had to give the idea up because of the time pressure he faced in teaching. In the fifth pre classroom observation interview (see Section 5.2.6), he complained about having to rush again to

something totally different from what he was teaching to prepare his students for the school exam.

Like John and Fun, the other three teachers have also consistently reported that they felt time pressure at work. For instance, echoing the concern of Fun and John, Ling stressed that she could not afford the time to build rapport with her students because of the heavy workload. She admitted that the expanding school curriculum left her little time for her students and preparation for lessons (see Section 5.3.6). Lai Lai, the Assistant Panel Chair of English in the same school, reported similar worries about the school curriculum. She also admitted that in order to complete all the duties assigned, such as the heavy teaching load, administrative work, extra-curricular activities and marking, she sometimes had to sacrifice her teaching (see Section 5.1.1). Mei Mei, from a different school, also made similar complaints stressing that she did not have the time and space to develop appropriate teaching materials for her students (see Section 5.4.5).

To sum up, as can be seen from the case reports (Chapter V) all five teachers experienced time pressure both inside and outside their classroom, and the impact of time pressure on their teaching was significant. Outside the classroom the teachers felt that the overwhelming teaching and marking loads and non-teaching duties left them little time and space for preparing their lessons, for example, development of teaching materials and student counseling which the teachers considered important groundwork for teaching. Inside the classroom they stressed that they did not have enough time to teach what was assigned in the school curriculum and because of time pressure they could not afford to

adopt a more student-centred teaching approach or improve rapport with their students, which they considered crucial for effective teaching. The possible impact of time pressure on teachers' and student's critical thinking development will be discussed in Section 7.2.

6.1.2 Pressure from the school curriculum

The time constraints compounded with the problems of the school curriculum have caused the five teachers to struggle with their teaching. As presented in the previous section pressure was reported due to the inability to deviate from the overloaded, exam oriented, and poorly developed school curriculum. A significant impact of the pressure on the five teachers was an erosion of teacher professionalism and autonomy (see Section 7.2.2).

All five teachers have shared their concerns about the school curriculum and frustrations due to the lack of power over the curriculum on different occasions in the main study. For instance, Lai Lai (see Section 5.1.7), Ling (see Section 5.3.6) and Fun (see Section 5.5.2) have all complained about the overloaded and rigid school curriculum and exam syllabus. Lai Lai and Ling stressed that the ever expanding school curriculum left teachers little time and space for teaching or anything outside the school curriculum. Both John (see Section 5.2.6) and Mei Mei (see Section 5.4.5) felt that their teaching was heavily constrained by the poorly developed school curriculum and thus grammar teaching in both schools was fragmented and out of context.

Describing the situation of many local English language teachers as teaching in a 'prison' [SBMJohnPo6AR], John believed that Hong Kong teachers hardly enjoyed any space and autonomy in teaching (see Section 7.2.2). John admitted in the fifth post classroom observation interview (see Section 5.2.6) that he was not sure if the school curriculum could help prepare his students for the HKCEE; an examination that his students would probably take in four years' time (see Sections 6.1.3 and 6.3.4). He stressed that he was not convinced of the need for enormous quantity in the school curriculum. Below is a brief recap of what he said that highlights the problems of the school curriculum:

> Whether the school curriculum prepares them for the HKCEE or not, I am not too sure. Again, it's more like feeding ducks, it's more like feeding ducks. But what I am convinced not is that there is too much. Although we have eleven periods, they are only 40 minutes in each, not a lot in terms of hours. But the quantity we have to do in the few hours in the week are just enormous. And that of course is a very big problem. The way it is implemented means that you have to skip maybe interesting parts just to focus on others for some reason.
>
> [SBMJohnPo5AR]

As illustrated above the English curriculums in both schools were mostly driven by the quantitative conception of learning (Biggs, 1995c) and exam oriented culture (Hamp-Lyons, 1999) that dominate the local educational context. The possible impact that such a phenomenon has on students' critical thinking development will be discussed in Section 7.2.1 Students deprived of the time and space for critical thinking.

6.1.3 Exam pressure

Apart from time pressure and the problems of the school curriculum, all five teachers have reported to have suffered from a great deal of exam pressure. As illustrated in

Chapter V, the evaluation of teachers and standards by student exam results generated much stress for the five teachers and impacted on them and their teaching significantly. According to the teachers, the sources of exam pressure were multiple, for example, colleagues of other subject panels, the school administration, the quality assurance inspectors (QAD, 2002) and education authority, and even the general public. Many of them complained that there was a clear lack of trust between frontline teachers and the school administration, education authority and community owing to the exam pressure.

As revealed in Chapter V, it was not uncommon to find test preparation type of lessons, such as Lai Lai's sixth observed lesson (see Section 5.1.7), John's fifth observed lesson (see Section 5.2.6), Ling's fifth observed lesson (see Section 5.3.6), Me Mei's fifth lesson (see Section 5.4.6) and Fun's sixth observed lesson (see Section 5.5.7) before the uniformed tests or exams in both schools. Teachers such as John (see Section 5.2.4), Mei Mei (see Section 5.4.6) and Fun (see Section 5.5.2) have been complaining about having to rush through the school curriculum to prepare their students for exams or tests. Common features of these test preparation lessons identified across the five cases include:

(1) fragmented and out of context grammar teaching on items that would be tested in exams;
(2) going through lots of worksheets or mechanical grammar exercises with students in which similar questions would be found in exam papers; and
(3) having quizzes on exam topics to familiarize students with exam formats and requirements.

What John said below about the fifth observed lesson (see Section 5.2.6) which took place about two weeks before the school exam described vividly a typical test preparation lesson. He stressed that his teaching was very much constrained by the exam focused situation and there was no particular objective for the lesson but to see with the students what they needed for the exam, which he did not consider a good objective of a lesson.

> So well today is going to be a bit of melting pot of things, not too sure what I am going to do except that I have to correct some homework that's about four exercises. I have got, just received some exercises on 'wh' questions, so I will go through one or two of those exercises with them. I will also go through the 'famous' vocabulary checklist with them because I have to prepare them for the unseen dictation sometime soon... [John laughed as he said that.] I have to rush to something totally different which is comparative and superlative of adjectives because it's part of the quiz which is next week and of the exam which is the week after, so I kind of have to forget about what we are doing right now which is Unit 4 food and stuff. I have to forget about it because I am far behind the schedule, so that's it. I don't expect that this lesson would be revealing at all. There is no particular objective. The objective is to be sure that I have seen with them what they need for the quiz. But that is not a good objective.
>
> [SBMJohnPr5AR]

Similarly, Ling of the same school complained that her teaching was heavily constrained by exam pressure. According to Ling (see Section 5.3.7), the problem of time constraints and the school curriculum intensified when the school exams drew near. She believed that she could not afford the time to make her teaching more enjoyable and interactive before exams.

Although the students in the study were all Secondary 1 students, different teachers, such as Ling (see Section 5.3.5) and Fun (see Section 5.5.5) have reported that preparing students for the HKCEE, an exam that the students would probably take after 4 years (see Section 6.3.4), was an important consideration in their teaching. The concerns of these

teachers seem to be closely tied with the way they perceived themselves in their schools and the local educational context in which good numbers and figures in terms of student exam results were highly valued. What Mei Mei said in the fourth post classroom observation interview highlights the feelings that the four local teachers felt intensively, i.e. being blamed and persecuted (see Section 5.4.5):

> I think we have done a lot but the school never appreciates what we have done. They just think, let's take the attainment test as an example, they just compare the results of the students say like the pre and post tests and conclude that your class is 'negative equity' [a term commonly used in home buying and mortgage in Hong Kong].… The school just puts the blame on us but they don't know that we have been working very hard and have been thinking about ways to improve the situation. I doubt if the blame should only be on us. We are the only one to shoulder the blame. I feel that there's no, there's no way out as an English language teacher especially working in this school. I think I have put in a lot of effort but I can't see any results and I have to shoulder a lot of things. Even colleagues from other subjects also think that the teaching of the English panel is bad.
>
> [SAMMeiPo4AR]

As can be seen from the quote above, Mei Mei has been suffering from much internal pressure from her school including the school administration and colleagues of other subject panels. All the other teachers echoed her complaints saying that they did not enjoy the understanding, support and trust they hoped to have from the school administration. They felt that the schools, the education authority and even the general public did not seem to understand the situation they were in or recognize their efforts. Ling shared Mei Mei's feeling of stress and added that even the education authority has been judging the teachers in CMI schools unfairly based on student exam results, and there was a lack of recognition of what the teachers had done.

I would say, it's really hard to be a secondary school English language teacher nowadays. As we are now a CMI school and the exposure to the language for our students is very limited, the English results of students in the school are declining. If our students are not getting good results in exam, people e.g. people from the Education Department would say that it's the fault of the teacher. People seem to believe that the only reason why students are getting poor results in the exam is because the teachers are not teaching them well. But, I think they never recognize the effort we have been putting in.

[SBMLingPo5AR]

To sum up, the evaluation of teachers and standards by student exam results, the high value of exams in the local educational context, the huge amount of work that the teachers had to undertake, the overwhelming school culture and practices, a lack of recognition and the powerlessness they felt over the school curriculum and their work caused ill feeling and low morale among the five teachers. Fun believed that, on the whole, there was a lack of trust and understanding between the education authority and frontline secondary English language teachers. She believed that their voices were not heard and difficulties not known, stressing that people from the education authority, rather than me, should go into schools to listen to their voices. However, she added sadly that they would never take that step.

6.1.4 Pressure from students

Apart from the pressures discussed above, all five teachers reported to have suffered from much pressure from their students. In terms of motivation to learn, for instance, both Lai Lai (see Section 5.1.2) and Fun (see Section 5.5.2) have complained about the laziness of their students. Similarly, Ling said some of her students were very reluctant to learn and described her students as ducks that did not bother to take the food she fed them, i.e. the English proverb 'lead a horse to water but you can't make it drink' (see Section 5.3.6).

Like Ling, Mei Mei and Fun have complained that her students were reluctant to complete tasks that required thinking as manifested in poor content in guided writing.

Although, as can be seen in the observed lessons, the five teachers have been innovative, trying out different ways to improve their teaching, for example, Lai Lai has been using games and group competition to increase student participation in her lessons (see Sections 5.1.2 and 5.1.3), John has been trying to introduce variety in his lessons which he considered important in teaching (see Section 5.2.4), Ling has been adopting different formats of dictation, such as bingo (see Section 5.3.4) and running dictation (see Section 5.3.5) to prepare her students for the dictation exam, Mei Mei has been using lots of mechanical exercises and grammar rules (see Section 5.4.6) to help her students to manage English grammar, and Fun has been designing different teaching materials for her class, such as questions to guide her students to complete writing tasks (see Section 5.5.4), most of them felt puzzled and helpless that their efforts did not seem to be reflected in the exam results of their students, which put them under enormous pressure.

Despite the great pressure that the five teachers felt at work, as I observed during data collection in the two schools, they worked hard and always tried to prioritize their students' benefits when making decisions regarding their teaching. The five teachers who were all warm and kind teachers showed a genuine passion for their students and profession.

Section 6.2 Ineffective questioning techniques

Ineffective questioning techniques emerged across the five cases and some findings which help explain why these techniques are ineffective are: (1) brief waiting time, (2) inability to recognize the potential of open-ended questions, and (3) predominance of lower order questions. As can be seen in the five case reports (see Chapter V), such ineffective questioning techniques encouraged a surface approach to learning (Biggs, 1995b) and, to some extent, impacted negatively on the five teachers' teaching of critical thinking.

6.2.1 Brief waiting time

Thornbury (1996) defined wait time as 'the time teachers allow students to answer questions before, for example, asking another student, rephrasing the question, or even answering their own question themselves' (p.282). Some educators could see the important connection between wait time and thinking and they considered wait time as

> a strategy […] of allowing some time to elapse between asking a question and taking answers. The point is to enable pupils to think, and to link the question to schemata of knowledge they already possess, before having to articulate the answer. Also known as "think time".
>
> (Learning and Teaching Scotland, 2006, p.282)

As revealed in some observed lessons, the brief wait time given by the teachers ranging from zero to few seconds was not enough for students to process the language the teacher was using, to understand the question or even put up their hands to answer the question before the question was answered by the teacher. Giving students brief waiting time and using questions speedily were common features found in Fun's (see Section 5.5) and Lai

Lai's lessons (see Section 5.1) with the problems most evident in Fun's classes. Various incidents showing that Fun did not seem to have the intention to listen to her students despite the question asked have been identified in her first observed lesson (see Section 5.5.2). Below is an example of these incidents that highlights the problem of brief waiting time in Fun's lessons:

Fun: Do you like eating seafood?
Ss: No. [Some students said no loudly.]
Fun: You don't like eating seafood?! [Fun looked and sounded surprised.]
Ss: No. [Some students said no again.]
Fun: Why not? Hong Kong people like seafood… [Fun continued to give her view on the topic without any pause or wait time given to her students.]

[SAMFunCO1AR]

As discussed in Section 5.5.2 in this incident the response of Fun, i.e. 'You don't like seafood?!' showed that the negative answer given was not expected. On the surface, the 'why not' question that followed aimed to elicit from her students justifications to the answer, but Fun gave her view on the topic right away not allowing her students any time to think about or answer the question, which made the question a display question only. The classroom observation has also revealed that Fun's students were quite reluctant to answer her questions and many of them were more than ready to ignore her questions.

Being so anxious to help her students to complete the writing tasks assigned in the school curriculum, Fun was found shooting her students lots of questions in her writing lessons. As shown in the following incident in her third observed lesson (see Section 5.5.4), after shooting her students a series of questions about the use of contraction in friendly letters,

Fun suddenly realized that her students might not even know what contraction meant. The incident below highlights the problem of a brief wait time in the teaching of writing.

> Fun: In friendly letters, in friendly letters, can we use contraction? Can we? Can we? Contraction [Fun then gave the Chinese translation of contraction.] OK? So, in the friendly letter we can use contraction. Understand? Remember? What are contractions? [The series of teacher questions finally stopped when Fun came to realize that some of her students might not catch the meaning of contraction. The class remained silent and some of them looked puzzled.]
>
> [SAMFunCO3AR]

As I observed in Fun's lessons, her students were ready to give up on answering her questions and even if they did, their answers were usually short and spontaneous like those given in game shows on TV and radio.

Like Fun, Ling and Lai Lai also asked their students a lot of questions in the observed lessons and sometimes very brief wait time was provided. For instance, Lai Lai asked her students a lot of questions when going through with them some listening practice in the fourth observed lesson (see Section 5.1.5). However, in many cases she did not give her students any wait time to think about or answer the questions. The questions thus became display questions and as can be seen in the observed lesson many students, like those in Fun's class, just ignored Lai Lai's questions and did not seem to bother voicing their opinions or questions. As observed in Fun's and Lai Lai's cases, brief waiting time that deprives students of the time they need to think about or answer the question could impact negatively on students, for example, it does not facilitate students' involvement in the thinking or learning process. But, why were the teachers not aware of this problem? The possible reason for and impact of such a phenomenon on students' critical thinking

development will be discussed in Section 7.2.1 Students deprived of the time and space for critical thinking.

6.2.2 Inability to recognize the potential of open-ended questions

Apart from providing their students no or a brief wait time to answer their questions, both Fun and Lai Lai did not seem to see the potential of some of the open-ended questions asked in their lessons. For example, in the last debriefing interview (see Section 5.1.8), Lai Lai was pleased when she was described the critical encounter identified in her first observed lesson (see Section 5.1.2). She admitted that she was not aware of the connection of the questions she asked in the lesson and the teaching of critical thinking and that the teaching of critical thinking was not planned stressing that she would not have been aware of the critical encounter if it had not been pointed out.

A similar incident was identified in Fun's first observed lesson (see Section 5.5.2) in which a possible critical encounter was missed. It began with Fun wanting to find out from her students the reason why the migratory bird, Black-faced Spoonbill, moves to Hong Kong every year. She asked them the following question:

Fun: Why do they move to Hong Kong? [Fun answered the question herself right away.] [SAMFunCO1AR]

As discussed in Section 5.5.2 in fact, the 'why' question in this incident could be a good critical thinking opportunity for students because it showed in the lesson that Fun had not, in any way, talked about the reason for the moving of the bird before the question was

asked. The question asked might trigger a critical thinking process of the students. However, no wait time was provided before Fun answered the question herself. In fact, she did not show any intention to listen to her students at all, and thus a potential critical encounter was missed. Similar incidents of inability to recognize the potential of open ended questions have also been identified in Ling's lessons.

On the whole, due to various reasons, most of the 'why' questions asked in the observed lessons did not seem to allow students space for critical thinking and, most importantly, some teachers did not seem to be aware of the potential of open-ended questions. Section 7.2.1 Students deprived of the time and space for critical thinking will explore the impact of such a significant phenomenon on students' critical thinking development.

6.2.3 Predominance of lower order questions

As stated earlier there was a clear lack of waiting time and critical questions in the lessons observed. In line with this, lower order questions were found to be dominant in the five teachers' classes. As Lai Lai admitted in her first post classroom observation interview (see Section 5.1.2) 'less controlled' [SBMLaiPo1AR] questions were not common in her lessons and many students did not seem to be ready to answer this type of questions. Although some 'why' and 'why not' questions were asked in the observed lessons of the five teachers, many of them only required the students to play the role of a code breaker (Freebody and Luke, 1999) to locate pieces of information from the given reading or listening text as John admitted in his final debriefing interview.

Higher order questions were comparatively infrequent in the five teachers' lessons. Mei Mei was also aware of the problem and pointed out a possible reason for the phenomenon. In her fifth post classroom observation interview (see Section 5.4.6) she complained about the teaching materials saying that her teaching was heavily constrained by the content of the materials. She stressed that it could be difficult for her to ask her students higher order questions if the reading materials she was teaching had nothing to do with important values in life. Why did the five teachers ask predominantly lower order questions in their lessons? Is it because, as Mei Mei stated, the textbooks constrained their teaching so much that they could hardly ask any critical questions? The sub-section below which details the lower order teaching as manifested in various aspects of the five teachers' classes might shed some light on the five teachers' teaching beliefs and behavior.

Section 6.3 Low order and exam oriented teaching focus

Lower order teaching in terms of grammar teaching (see Section 6.3.1), vocabulary teaching (see Section 6.3.2) and the teaching of writing (see Section 6.3.3) , as well as the exam oriented teaching approach (see Section 6.3.4), which encouraged a predominantly product oriented and surface learning approach (Biggs, 1995b), was found to be significant features of the five teachers' English language lessons.

6.3.1 Grammar teaching

As discussed in the previous section, lower order questions were commonly found in the five teachers' observed lessons. In terms of grammar teaching, lower order teaching, such as rote learning of examples of grammar items and grammar rules seemed to be the

teaching focus of some teachers. For example, the grammar games that Ling (see Section 5.3.2) and Lai Lai (see Section 5.1.3) played with their students encouraged rote learning of quantifiers and countable and uncountable nouns. In both lessons the students were not given any opportunity to use the language taught communicatively in context. Similarly, John provided his students with the language and ideas needed to complete the pair work in the second observed lesson (see Section 5.2.3) leaving them little space to think. Also, the topics of as well as the language used in the learning tasks that were found in the observed lessons were usually decided by the teachers or textbooks. Considering providing students with rules to follow an important part of grammar teaching, Mei Mei was puzzled why some of her students did not seem to be learning the pattern of 'wh' questions even when they were provided with a rule to follow in the last observed lesson (see Section 5.4.6). As revealed in the cases of all five teachers, students were seldom given the opportunity to use English in context or to communicate with others. Instead, they were required to complete different mechanical and lower order exercises as homework or classwork, for example, on the Internet, in worksheets, workbooks and grammar books, which the teachers believed to help consolidate what they had learnt. Consistent with what Mei Mei said regarding students' homework and classwork in the exploratory study, there was a clear lack of critical thinking in these exercises that require mainly decoding competence of students (Freebody and Luke, 1999).

6.3.2 Vocabulary teaching

Rote learning of vocabulary seems to be another important teaching focus for the five teachers; and dictation or quizzes on vocabulary were commonly found in the lessons

observed. Fun (see Section 5.5.3) and Ling (see Sections 5.3.4 and 5.3.5), who were teaching at two different schools, both adopted different formats of vocabulary quizzes, for example, running dictation, bingo and crossword puzzle, as they put it, to help students to remember and spell the new words learnt. Although John did not seem to see the importance of the vocabulary found in the textbook or how dictation could help improve spelling of his students, he said that he had no choice but to follow the school curriculum stressing that the dictation could in fact make the situation worse because students would be disgruntled. What he said in the last post classroom observation interview (see Section 5.2.7) highlights the problem of vocabulary teaching in the school:

> I would say that the first part, the dictation, is kind of nonsensical because that dictation contains too many difficult words. To start with, they will not change their lives whether they can spell them or not, I think. Anyway, this is part of their curriculum. So my fear is that it will be extremely bad.… We have noticed that most papers in exams one of the biggest problems is spelling. They can't spell properly. And we have tried to find solutions. It's hard to improve their spelling but I don't think that doing such dictation would improve anything. It could only make things worse because they would be disgruntled.
>
> [SBMJohnPo6AR]

It seems that the teaching of vocabulary in both schools was heavily constrained by the textbook. For example, students were required to rote learn the new words found in the textbook even though they were not in any way close to their life experience. The teachers seem to believe that the more new words the students know the better. As I observed in most lessons, the students were not given the opportunity to use or apply the new words learnt in context. Instead, the goals of vocabulary teaching usually boiled down to helping students to pronounce a new word, spell it and tell its meaning in Cantonese.

6.3.3 Teaching of writing

In terms of teaching of writing, Fun‘s (see Section 5.5), Ling’s (see Section 5.3) and Lai Lai’s (see Section 5.1) students did not seem to be given much space for thinking or originality. Lower order teaching was manifested in the way the writing tasks were approached. For example, students were usually supplied with ideas and were told exactly how to organize their work. In Fun’s case, students could easily complete the writing task by transforming the guided questions into statements. Below is a brief recap of what Fun said about the guidelines given to her students that highlights the problem of the teaching of writing (see Section 5.5.4):

> For content, they just can’t think of anything to write in their compositions. So, these guidelines are needed. Guided writing. But some students told me that they did not know what to write even though they were given the guidelines. So, I had to go through the guidelines with them carefully telling them what to write for each paragraph and where the ideas could be found. Some students just have no idea of what to write. For content, they just don’t have any idea. That was why I went through the guidelines with my students just now.
>
> [SAMFunPo3AR]

Although Lai Lai was teaching in a different school, she seemed to adopt a similar approach in the teaching of writing. She referred her students to some guided questions in the textbook when preparing them for a story writing task in the third observed lesson (see Section 5.1.4). As revealed in the lesson, she was not helping her students to plan their story, as she told me she believed, but planning the story for them. Ling seemed to share Fun’s and Lai Lai’s views on the teaching of writing. She said before the fifth post classroom observation interview (see Section 5.3.6) that whenever she told her students to do something that required thinking, for example, develop an outline for a composition, most of them would not hand in their work. She had to feed them with ideas, such as

telling them exactly what to write in each paragraph, before they would complete their work. She said that people nowadays were talking about developing students' critical thinking and creativity, but she stressed that there was little teachers could do if students were not willing to think. As I observed in the lessons, many of their students were more than happy to jot down without much thought whatever they were told in their composition to get it done. The possible impact of Fun's and Lai Lai's predominantly product oriented teaching on students' critical thinking development will be discussed in Section 7.2.1 Students deprived of the time and space for critical thinking.

6.3.4 Exam oriented teaching approach

Apart from lower order teaching, a washback effect was also evident in the five teachers' observed lessons. Washback, defined by Cheng (2001) as 'the influence of testing on teaching and learning' (p.17), was manifested in different facets of the teaching of these teachers including the choice of topics, such as covering only the grammar topics included in the exam syllabus; teaching materials, such as asking students to complete mechanical grammar exercises in which similar questions are found in exam papers; and design of lessons, such as adopting different forms of quizzes on vocabulary to help students to prepare for the dictation exam.

As revealed in the classroom data most of the observed lessons were, to different extents, test preparation classes for the school exams and Hong Kong Certificate of Education English Language Exam (HKCEE) which will soon be replaced by a standard-referenced proficiency test (EMB, 2004i) with the introduction of the new academic structure for

senior secondary education (EMB, 2004j). With the exam content, requirements and format primarily guiding the teaching of the teachers many of them have reported to have suffered from a great deal of exam pressure (see Section 6.1.3). Fun has voiced her worries on different occasions stressing that she was scared because she was afraid that she could not finish teaching her students all the topics in the exam syllabus. Although all five teachers were teaching Secondary 1 students at two ordinary local secondary schools, English language teaching was found to be conducted in predominantly test preparation classes, and in many cases the key test, the HKCEE, would not be taken for another 4-5 years.

Section 6.4 Support for the critical thinking recommendations

As illustrated in Chapter V, the five teachers had, to some extent, a different understanding of critical thinking, but they all, to a greater or lesser extent, supported the idea of developing students' critical thinking through English language teaching. However, they have all raised different concerns regarding the implementation of the critical thinking recommendations (see Table 6.1 on p.303) stressing that changes had to be made in different areas, for example, in the school, in students and the education authority before the recommendations could be successfully implemented in the local secondary English language classroom.

6.4.1 The five teachers' understanding of critical thinking

The main study's findings regarding the teachers' understanding of critical thinking support Fasko's (2003) belief that 'there is no consensus on a definition of critical

thinking' (p.8). For instance, Lai Lai (see Section 5.1.7) believed that a critical thinker would possess an enquiring mind, be able to analyze and be ready to give feedback. John (see Section 5.2.7) considered a critical thinker someone who would be ready to question and think independently, respect diversity and have his/her own opinions on different issues. Ling (see Section 5.3.7) thought that critical thinking was closely tied to judging and criticizing. Mei Mei (see Section 5.4.6) considered looking at an issue from a variety of perspectives a core element of critical thinking. Fun (see Section 5.5.7) believed that critical thinkers would not accept blindly what they were told, and would be ready to analyze, make decisions, voice their opinions and take action. And, they all reported that, for a range of reasons, for example, having no time to get to know more about the enormous amount of recommendations and teaching initiatives from the education authority, believing that the recommendations would soon be replaced by something new, and etc, they had hardly any knowledge of the 1999 critical thinking recommendations (CDC, 1999).

6.4.2 A general support for developing students' critical thinking through the English language subject

A clear pattern that emerged across the five cases regarding the implementation of the critical thinking recommendations was that they were all positive to the teaching of critical thinking in the English language classroom, and were aware of different approaches of developing students' critical thinking through English language teaching. For example, Lai Lai believed that English language teachers could help their students to develop critical thinking through the teaching of reading and writing (see Section 5.1.7). Like Lai Lai, Fun believed that thought provoking reading materials might stimulate a

student's critical thinking (see Section 5.5.7). Both Mei Mei (see Section 5.4.6) and Ling (see Section 5.3.7) also supported the idea that English language teachers could help their students to develop critical thinking through the subject. However, Ling stressed that it would not be something easy to do. She was worried that critical thinking education would open up a space for students to criticize their teachers' performance. John (see Section 5.2.7), the NET, believed that the teaching of critical thinking could be done through cross-curricular activities. According to John, the teaching of critical thinking in school should aim to help students to learn to respect diversity. He reiterated that English language teaching is an appropriate context for developing students' critical thinking in Hong Kong because English as a foreign language to most students in Hong Kong could help bring into the classroom new cultures and ways of thinking.

Despite the fact that all five teachers supported the idea of teaching students critical thinking in the English language classroom, all of them have reported that due to various reasons, for example, time pressure and constraints of the school curriculum, they had been doing none or very little teaching of critical thinking in their classes. This finding is in line with the results of the classroom observation analysis in which only two brief critical encounters were identified in more than 1,500 minutes of recorded classroom teaching that involved 5 different teaching contexts and 160 students.

6.4.3 Factors constraining the implementation of the critical thinking recommendations

Another significant pattern that emerged across the five cases was that all five teachers reported that the situational factors as well as external pressure they faced constrained

their teaching and made the implementation of the 1999 critical thinking recommendations (CDC, 1999) impossible. Table 6.1 below summarizes the factors that the five teachers perceived to constrain the implementation of the critical thinking recommendations in their classrooms.

Table 6.1 Factors constraining the implementation of the critical thinking recommendations

Teachers / Issues raised	Lai Lai	John	Ling	Mei Mei	Fun
School English curriculum	✓	✓	✓	✓	
School assessment system and culture	✓	✓	✓		
School system and commitment		✓		✓	
Student English language ability	✓		✓	✓	
Student readiness			✓	✓	
Relationship between education authority and schools/teachers			✓		✓
Teacher professional development			✓		✓

As shown in Table 6.1, four out of the five teachers believed that the constraints of the curriculum were the most significant, and they could afford no time or space to teach anything outside the school curriculum, such as critical thinking. The students' language ability and the school assessment system and culture were considered by three out of the five teachers as factors constraining the teaching of critical thinking in their classrooms.

Other factors like the school system and commitment to critical thinking education, students' readiness for critical thinking education, relationships between the education authority and frontline teachers, and specific teacher professional development for implementing the critical thinking recommendations were all raised by at least two teachers in their target interviews (see Table 6.1 on p.303).

In terms of institutional constraints, Lai Lai, John, Ling and Mei Mei have all reported that the packed school curriculum did not allow them any time or space to teach their students critical thinking in the lessons. Regarding teaching John believed that the school curriculum left teachers little space for critical thinking and autonomy in the decision-making processes. All the teachers from School B, i.e. Lai Lai, John and Ling have reported that the school assessment system and culture, such as lower order exam content, lower order and mechanical question types and a great deal of emphasis on 'good' exam results, did not facilitate the implementation of the critical thinking recommendations. Also, both John and Mei Mei have reported different school factors that made the implementation of the recommendations impossible, such as big class size, rigid school systems that left teachers little space for thinking, school policies contradictory to the critical thinking recommendations, no shared vision in critical thinking education and little understanding or support from school administration in terms of the implementation of the critical thinking recommendations.

In terms of students, Lai Lai was concerned about the English language ability of her students stressing that the teaching of critical thinking would only be possible if students

have reached a certain standard. Like Lai Lai, Ling stressed that students needed to master the English language before the teaching of critical thinking could be introduced. However, both of them did not elaborate the idea of student language ability. Mei Mei expressed concern about the language that could be used by students in expressing themselves in class. She believed that in order to let students express their ideas freely, which she considered an important element in the teaching of critical thinking, students should be allowed to use Cantonese to express themselves in the English lessons. As observed in Mei Mei's lessons, her students took the initiative in taking part in classroom discussions when Mei Mei switched the medium of instruction from English to Cantonese. However, she was aware that what she did would then be contradicting the school's language policy. Apart from language ability, both Fun and Ling have reported resistance of students towards thinking tasks. Ling reiterated, on different occasions, that there was little teachers could do if students were not willing to think.

In terms of external pressure, both Ling and Fun stressed that there was a lack of communication, understanding and trust between the education authority and frontline teachers. They believed that these factors weakened the teachers' determination to implement the recommendations imposed by the authority including the critical thinking recommendations. They have complained that they were not given the time, support or resources to learn more about the recommendations or how to implement the recommendations in their classrooms. The brief excerpt below highlights the difficulties that English language teachers faced in the exam driven and product oriented context:

We, English language teachers, are the ones to implement the recommendations. We are the ones who are not doing our job well. We are useless. We don't know about the recommendations. Do I have the time to learn how to do it? Have they [the education authority] given us any guidelines? What they want is some good HKCEE results. That's what they want. Have they given us anything? I don't think so. They might have given us some money to buy some software. [Fun laughed.] They might have given us some money to employ a teaching assistant. Does it count? [Fun laughed again.]

[SAMFunPo6AR]

The possible impact of these institutional factors as well as the external pressure that the five teachers raised on their own critical thinking development will be discussed in Section 7.2.2 Teachers deprived of the time and space for critical thinking.

Last but not least, an unexpected pattern that emerged across the five cases regarding the 1999 critical thinking recommendations (CDC, 1999) is that the awareness of all five teachers of the recommendations had been raised. All the four local teachers, i.e. Lai Lai, Mei Mei, Fun and Ling have reported that the study had encouraged them to develop theirs students' critical thinking in their English language lessons. The positive research experience they gained from the present study had inspired them to rethink their understanding of critical thinking and the valuable reflection they developed had helped them to become more aware of the teaching decisions they made. All of them voiced the hope to help their students to develop critical thinking in their English language lessons in the last debriefing interview. I have promised to share with the participating teachers and schools what I found in the study and provide them with the support that they may need to help them implement the 1999 critical thinking recommendations in their English language classrooms.

Chapter VII Interpretation and implications

Although the data collection of the main study was conducted in two different schools, i.e. School A and School B, at different times, for example, before and after the SARS outbreak, as can be seen in the previous chapter clear patterns emerged across the five cases from both the interview and classroom data. For instance, teachers in one school echoed the concerns raised by those in the other and some teachers' teaching beliefs and practices were so similar despite their very different backgrounds. Also, the major findings of the classroom data, i.e. very little evidence of the teaching of critical thinking was found in the five teachers' observed lessons, are in line with the interview data, i.e. all five teachers felt that the institutional constraints and external pressure they faced made the teaching of critical thinking impossible.

In the section that follows, i.e. Section 7.1, the credibility of the findings of the main study is discussed. The chapter ends with a discussion in Section 7.2 on the underlying problem of the 1999 critical thinking recommendations (CDC, 1999), i.e. students (see Section 7.2.1) as well as teachers (see Section 7.2.2) are deprived of the time and space for critical thinking in a context that in many ways does not support critical thinking.

Section 7.1 Research credibility

I suggest that the findings of the main study have high credibility in terms of the research design and methodology, data collection and reporting, the commitment of the five teachers to the study, triangulation of data and support from other studies.

7.1.1 Research design and methodology

Regarding the research design and methodology (see Chapter IV), despite the predominantly rich qualitative data collected, the data collection and analysis of the whole study were conducted in a systematic and careful manner. Different measures have been taken to increase the trustworthiness of the research procedures and data collected. For example, to avoid separating the data from the context, extensive field notes were taken and research journals were kept throughout the three-year study detailing important research decisions made and things that happened in relation to the study during the period. In terms of classroom data in order to capture a more complete picture of each observed lesson every time when the classroom data were analysed, reference was made to both the audio and video recordings of the lesson, field notes and journal entries of the classroom observations, and the information collected through the classroom observation scheme. In addition, in order to overcome possible bias on the classroom data, the findings of the classroom observations were disseminated to the teacher involved during his/her last debriefing interview for comments. In terms of interviews, all the interviews were tape-recorded, translated if necessary and transcribed by me who had first hand experience of the interviews conducted.

A qualitative content analysis (Roberts et al., 2006) was then conducted with codes created to describe the interview data (see Appendix II for Data Matrix). The data were then carefully reduced and organized as clear themes and patterns emerged (see Chapter VI). The interview and classroom data were revisited at different stages of data analysis and the thesis writing process. Comparisons were made between the data collected from the teachers in one school and the data across the five participating teachers (see Figure

4.1 on p.98). On the whole, the research design of the main study allowed me to engage intensively with the data collected (Roberts et al., 2006) and the quotation below best captures the essence of this long and serious data analysis process.

> Moving backwards and forwards between the data and our interpretation of it - and making firm links between our interpretations and the data by, for example, using verbatim examples of participants' comments in written accounts of the findings… it is important that the selection of illustrative quotations does not introduce bias by 'cherry picking' the most vivid examples from the research. They should reflect the range and tone of responses generated. (Roberts, et al., 2006, p.44)

All in all, all the data were analysed, organized, selected and reported in a very careful manner to reflect the range and tone of responses generated.

7.1.2 Data collection and reporting

In terms of data collection, specifically, it was conducted in a supportive and open manner. Critical thinking was practised throughout data collection in which I tried to create for the five teachers a critical but supportive atmosphere, with time and space to think critically about what happened in their schools and classrooms. For example, the post classroom observation interviews provided them with valuable opportunities to reflect honestly on their own teaching and voice freely their opinions.

As a caring and understanding listener I tried to avoid passing any judgment on what the teachers said or imposing any ideas on them in the interviews. Instead, simple critical ‘why’ questions were asked when clarification was sought. Also, the semi-structured interviews allowed the teachers a lot of space to talk about issues that they hoped to raise.

The five teachers seemed to have enjoyed the space created for them. Their commitment to the study and trust in me increased throughout data collection and were manifested in different ways, for example, their attitudes to classroom observation changed tremendously (see Section 4.3.3). All of them became very accommodating in terms of arrangements of classroom observations and interviews towards the end of data collection and they did not feel embarrassed even when things went wrong in their observed lessons.

I hope that the separation of data description and interpretation, i.e. presenting extracts as evidence in Chapters V and VI and presenting argument and discussion in Chapters VII and VIII, could help in the display of clarity and, as Holliday (2002) suggests, could add

> to the validity of the written study by revealing to a large extent how subjectivity has been managed. It also indicates that, during the process of data collection and analysis itself, the researcher has exercised a degree of discipline within her own mind, as she has tried to manage her own perception of the difference between (a) noting physically what can be seen and heard and (b) noting what this means and why it is significant.
>
> (Holliday, 2002, p.119).

Throughout the long thesis writing process, I have made an effort to report faithfully the five teachers' voices and to analyse critically the data collected. Although I am aware of the significance of managing subjectivity in my representation of the five teachers' contexts, I am also aware that as the researcher of the study my perspective and interpretation infuse inevitably throughout the study.

7.1.3 Commitment of the teachers to the study

I believe that, to some extent, the trust of the five teachers and their support and commitment to the study help to increase the trustworthiness of the data generated. Owing to their trust and commitment, the sharing of the teachers was open and sincere, and many of them even took the initiative in talking about sensitive issues, such as their views about quality assurance inspection and inspectors (QAD, 2002) in different interviews. In terms of support for the study, Ling considered the study of high value and believed that frontline teachers despite their unbearable workload should support the implementation of this kind of research that aimed to investigate and report faithfully what was happening in local schools and classrooms. She considered what I saw in her lessons authentic and was glad that I could see her students' real faces. Fun could see the importance of the research too stressing that the education authority should go into schools, like me, to listen to the voices of frontline teachers.

Both John and Ling, of School B, seemed to have enjoyed the classroom observations very much stressing that the post classroom observation interviews helped them to look at their own teaching from more different angles, which Ling considered a very important aspect of professional development for experienced teachers. John was very disappointed when he learnt that the data collection of the study ended after the final debriefing interview, stressing that important teacher professional development, such as peer observation and reflection among teachers were seldom practised in the school.

7.1.4 Triangulation of data

The research strategies selected for the present study were coherent in the sense that they allowed triangulation of different types of data (see Section 4.2) and validation of preliminary classroom findings by the participating teachers. 'Triangulation is a validity procedure where researchers search for convergence among multiple and different sources of information to form themes and categories in a study' (Creswell and Miller, 2000, p.126). The quotation below best captures the underlying assumptions of the overall design of the main study, i.e. using rich narrative account to present to readers multiple evidence reflecting the contexts and systems of the five participating teachers.

> […] triangulation is step taken by researchers employing only the researcher's lens, and it is a systematic process of sorting through the data to find common theme or categories by eliminating overlapping areas. A popular practice is for qualitative inquirers to provide corroborating evidence collected through multiple methods, such as observations, interviews, and documents to locate major and minor themes. The narrative account is valid because researchers go through this process and reply on multiple forms of evidence rather than a single incident or data point in the study.
>
> (Creswell and Miller, 2000, p.127)

Regarding triangulation of the data, consistency has been revealed across the interview and classroom observation data. For example, in terms of teacher perceptions some teachers like Fun and Lai Lai did admit in different interviews that they considered language skills training and lower order vocabulary and grammar teaching as the foundation of English language teaching especially for foreign language learners like the students in their schools, which helps explain why lower order vocabulary and grammar teaching, and skill training were dominant in their lessons. These teaching beliefs may

also help explain why the teaching of critical thinking was rarely found in their observed lessons.

The rich qualitative data collected through various interviews help contextualize and explain what was observed in the five teachers' lessons. For instance, all five teachers admitted in their target interviews that they had very little or no knowledge of the 1999 critical thinking recommendations. It is thus understandable that teaching of critical thinking was rarely found in these teachers' observed lessons in the school year 2002/2003, three years after the recommendations were put in place, as they had not even been aware of the recommendations. Apart from fulfilling the requirements of the education authority, some teachers may genuinely see the importance of critical thinking and consider the teaching of critical thinking an important part of English language teaching. The interview data revealed that John, the new expatriate in School B, was a teacher who held such teaching beliefs. However, as can be seen in his case report (see Section 5.2), he rarely created critical encounters for his students in the observed lessons. The findings of the classroom data became explicable when John raised various situational factors and external pressure that he perceived to make the teaching of critical thinking impossible in his classroom. All the other teachers have voiced similar concerns stressing that changes had to be made in different areas before the critical thinking recommendations could be successfully implemented in the local language classroom (see Section 6.4.3).

7.1.5 Support from other studies

The constraints and problems that the five teachers raised regarding the implementation of the critical thinking recommendations, such as time constraints and teacher pressure, school curriculum, textbooks and exam dominated culture, are not uncommon in the literature describing the Hong Kong context. For instance, in the conclusion of a study on the teaching of critical thinking in a Hong Kong secondary school, Fok (2002) pointed out similar problems in the teaching of critical thinking in the local classroom stating that 'there was a great constraint of time and resources' (p.80). In terms of teacher pressure in Hong Kong, for example, a questionnaire survey on stress that secondary school teachers experienced revealed that workload and time pressure were considered the most stressful aspects of work by all 415 teachers participating in the survey about ten years ago (Hui and Chan, 1996). The present study supports Hui and Chan's (1996) findings. In addition to workload and time pressure, other significant dimensions of teacher stress that Hui and Chan (1996) pointed out were reiterated by the five teachers in the present study. For example, a lack of time to provide students with guidance and care as reiterated by Fun and Ling, poor school management and administration as suggested by John, Mei Mei and Lai Lai, and problems in managing students' behaviour and learning as stressed by all five teachers. These dimensions of teacher pressure seem to have persisted and even worsened over the last decade.

With the imposition of all the different education reforms and initiatives by the education authority over the past ten years (Cheng, 2001), Hong Kong teachers' working environment and condition have been deteriorating. In a study comparing teacher stress in Hong Kong and Germany Schwarzer et al (1999) also pointed out that

> there is ample evidence that teachers, in their course of careers, experience a great deal of stress that may result in depressed mood, exhaustion, poor performance, or attitude or personality changes, which in turn might lead to illness and premature retirement. In some societies or school systems, this might occur more often now than it did in the past. Educators have become aware of the prevalence of teacher burnout, but effective strategies to counteract this phenomenon have not yet been well established.
>
> (Germany Schwarzer et al, 1999, pp.309-310)

Different measures have been put in place by the government in early 2006 (Hong Kong Government, 2006) in response to such pressure and to alleviate teacher stress after two local teachers committed suicide. The measures included giving schools extra grants for hiring teachers or executive staff to reduce teachers' workload, launching a telephone hotline for teachers to help them cope with stress and conducting a study that aimed to investigate teacher pressure.

The four local teachers in the main study, who had been teaching in secondary schools for more than ten years (see Table 4.1 on p.93), admitted that they were now facing the greatest challenge in their teaching profession and that the situation they were experiencing was unfavourable to English language teachers especially in local CMI schools in which students' perception of the importance of English, their English proficiency and motivation to learn English were generally low. The quotation below describes vividly the dilemmas and struggles that the five teachers faced especially those in School B, i.e. Lai Lai, John and Ling, in which the class size could be as large as forty. It seems that practical issues, such as student motivation, increasing teacher workload, time pressure, problems of class size etc. have not been improved over the years.

> The stress arising from lack of time for guidance work, from heavy workload, and from teaching students with poor motivation and with low or mixed learning abilities reflects the working situation in Hong Kong, where teachers have to manage up to 40 students in a single class, as well as the numerous responsibilities and extra demands imposed as a result of the various recent educational innovations and changes. Teaching unmotivated or less able students poses a challenge to teachers and demands extra effort and time, yet improvement in students may not be immediate. Our findings support […] that the effort of teaching such students, and the variety of demands made upon them in their daily work, constitute major sources of stress for teachers.

(http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/detail?vid=5&hid=104&sid=a5575548-415b-473c-8c1b-37419668a0a4%40sessionmgr102)

In terms of the problems of the school curriculum, system and culture as reiterated by the five teachers, in a recent study of secondary school teachers in Hong Kong, Wakins (2004) also stated that 'teachers have had to cope with large ability-grouped classes, problems with the medium of instruction, and overloaded exam-dominated curricula' (p.363). Two fundamental challenges for teachers in Hong Kong, as stressed by Lai Lai on different occasions, are to help students to perform well in examinations and maintain their school's status (Harris, 2001). The message that the five teachers got from the school administration was crystal clear, i.e. no suggestions are welcome until their students get good results in public exams. Evidence shown in the present study reveals that the problems of teacher control, for instance, a top-down administrative approach, the quantitative conception of teaching and learning, for example, the-more-the-better mentality in term of the content of the school curriculum, and the product-centred culture, such as students' exam results overriding the significance of their learning process, persist and intensify in Hong Kong despite the launching of different education reforms over the new millennium. Harris's (2001) description of the Hong Kong education

system below summarizes some of the significant problems and difficulties that the five teachers faced. Many of them, for various reasons, were unconvinced that any change in teaching methodology would help improve their students' learning.

> The competition is built into the education system. Competition for "elite" primary school places, for example, is keen and even kindergarten teachers feel under pressure to drill pupils so as to enhance their chances of success […] Traditionally, a school's status is determined by its banding and language of instruction, where English is preferred over Chinese. A consequence of this is a reliance of didactic teaching methods as a pathway to success. Within the existing system, teachers have understandably remained unconvinced that any change in teaching methodology would be beneficial.
>
> (Harris, 2001, pp.21-22)

The problems of the school curriculum and system, and the expectations of the community compounded with other practical problems like poor quality textbooks, as reiterated by John and Mei Mei on various occasions, have put the teachers under a lot of pressure. In fact, according to Tsui and Bunton (2000), the problem of poor quality English language textbooks has been around, and is something the authorities have been aware of for a long time in the local educational context. It seems that effective measures to help solve the problem have not been established.

Although the present study sets out to investigate, in-depth, five teachers' perceptions and practices in two local CMI schools, it seems that the data collected cannot be understood fully without contextualizing the data within the 'big picture' of the broader local context.

The data reveal that factors of different levels intertwine and make up the reality of the five teachers. They include:

(1) teachers' perceptions and experience of the education reforms in Hong Kong,
(2) teachers' perceptions and experience of the proposed curriculum changes over the new millennium,
(3) teachers' knowledge and perceptions of education initiatives,
(4) insufficiency of teacher professional development,
(5) unbearable workloads of teachers,
(6) ineffective selection mechanism for higher education, and
(7) general criticisms of teachers.

The imposition of the critical thinking recommendations calls for a fundamental change in the local curriculum's underlying aims and assumptions but the obstacles confronted by curriculum changes in Hong Kong as summarized by Law (2004) below are tremendous:

> First, while the determined, large-scale promotion of curriculum reform aroused many teachers' hopes, many others remain pessimistic and have adopted a 'wait-and-see' approach, justified not least by the failure of past reform initiatives. Many teachers working within both systems have been unable to respond to curriculum changes that require greater professional ability because they are already over-burdened with administrative tasks. Consequently, they have been criticized for their lack of ability to adapt and for an over-reliance on textbooks […] Also, there is a greater general pressure on pupils and schools due to examinations, which are still used as a major mechanism in selecting pupils for higher education. Third, teacher-education providers in both educational systems are also not ready for the changes….
>
> (Law, 2004, p.509)

To sum up, the present study supports Law's findings (2004), revealing that in order to carry out successfully curriculum reforms in the local English language classroom as in the case of the implementation of the critical thinking recommendations, fundamental changes, for example, in teachers' working context in terms of its system and culture, teacher professional development with special emphases on teacher autonomy and empowerment, and stakeholders' honest reflections on the underlying aim and assumption of education are inevitable.

Section 7.2 Underlying problems of the 1999 critical thinking recommendations

As an experienced secondary school English language teacher and teacher trainer in Hong Kong, I also agree with the five teachers regarding the institutional constraints and external pressure they raised. However, I doubt if the five teachers would be able to help their students to develop the critical perspective (see Section 2.3), for example, through asking their students more critical questions, creating for them the time and space for critical thinking and a context that supports and values the critical perspective if they were freed from all the constraints and pressure they mentioned, which I suspect could be a chicken and egg situation.

The data of the present study reveal that in their top-down, product-centred and quantity driven school context some of the teachers' teaching beliefs were distorted. For example, some of them did not seem to realize that what they had been doing inside the classroom, such as the product-centred approach of the teaching of writing, the quantity driven conception of teaching as manifested in grammar and vocabulary teaching, and the

teacher-led and top down teaching approaches as revealed in their display questions and questioning techniques, were, in fact, reinforcing some of the culture that they found undesirable in the school or broader context. Also, many of them seemed to be feeling too exhausted to believe that they could have the knowledge and confidence to do what they believed would be truly beneficial to their students' learning, such as engaging students in the processes of applying the knowledge they have learnt and helping their students to develop the critical perspective despite the institutional constraints and external pressure they faced. The present study shows a major problem of the 1999 critical thinking recommendations, i.e. the teachers are required to develop students' critical thinking in a quantity-driven, product-centred and top-down context that deprives them and their students of both the time and space for critical thinking, which will be discussed in Sections 7.2.1 and 7.2.2.

7.2.1 Students deprived of the time and space for critical thinking

Evidence shown in the classroom data reveals that a brief wait time was sometimes provided by the teachers in the observed lessons. As Piercy and Piercy (2003) pointed out, 'wait time increases the quality and quantity of student response' (p.199). Accordingly they argue that, 'think-pair-share' (2003, p.199) is an important strategy for developing students' critical thinking by providing them the time 'to think about a question or a response to a question' (p.199) before they are required to discuss the question with a partner and share their views with the whole class. It is not difficult to understand why there was hardly any evidence of teaching of critical thinking in the five participating teachers' observed lessons if their students were deprived of even the time to think about

the question asked or the response to the question in the classroom – let alone pair up to discuss and then share their response. As I observed in many classroom observations, some students were getting into the habit of ignoring the teacher's questions while others seemed to have found ways through critical thinking to quickly silence their teachers. The problems of L2 classrooms, as pointed out by Legutke and Thomas (1991) below, describe vividly what was observed in the five teachers' classes.

> The way it [the lesson] is structured does not seem to stimulate the wish of the learners to say something, nor does it tap what they might have to say… Learners do not find room to speak as themselves, to use language in communicative encounters, to create text, to stimulate responses from fellow learners or to find solutions to relevant problems.
>
> (Legutke and Thomas, 1991, pp.8-9)

The evidence raises an important pedagogical issue, i.e. why was not a longer wait time provided by these teachers? Is it because the professional training that the teachers received has not helped them to see the importance of a wait time in teaching? Or, is it because the teaching of these teachers was so heavily grounded by their teaching contexts that they felt they could not afford it? While the overwhelming time pressure experienced by Fun, of School A, might explain the brief wait time identified in her lessons, all other participating teachers have also reported to feel different types of time pressure in teaching (see Section 6.1.1). Below is a recap of what John, of School B, said about the school English curriculum when he was frustrated with the time constraints he faced:

> Whether the school curriculum prepares them for the HKCEE or not, I am not too sure. Again, it's more like feeding ducks, it's more like feeding ducks. But what I am not convinced is that there is too much. Although we have eleven periods, they are only 40

minutes in each, not a lot in terms of hours. But the quantity we have to do in the few hours in the week is just enormous. And that of course is a very big problem.
[SBMJohnPo5AR]

It seems that the Secondary 1 English language school curriculums of the two participating schools were developed based on a quantitative assumption that 'learning is about acquiring more and more facts' (Biggs, 1995c, p.172). As shown in different observed lessons, the facts that the five teachers hoped their students would "learn" included the meanings and spellings of new words, and fragmented language patterns and grammar rules. I agree with Biggs's (1995c) belief regarding the quantitative assumption of learning, that is,

> in the quantitative tradition, learning is conceived as the aggregation of content: to be a good learner is to "know more". More of what? More of the facts, details, items, formulae, spellings, competencies, number facts… all those "basic" that many people see as so important.
> (Biggs, 1995c, p.172)

However, this conception of learning does not seem to be in line with the spirit of the education reforms launched by the education authority over the new millennium or the 1999 critical thinking recommendations which emphasize the importance of critical thinking and of students constructing knowledge actively by and for themselves. Can we have quality of teaching if quantity is what is pushing the mechanism forward? To successfully implement the critical thinking recommendations in the classroom, I believe that an honest reflection of the school curriculum regarding its content and underlying principles, and the commitment to making changes to the curriculum seem inevitable. Two significant goals of change would be to ease the time pressure that frontline teachers

feel in teaching and to help the teachers to see the significance of engaging students in critical thinking in the learning process.

Evidence from the data also reveals that the five teachers' lower order and exam oriented teaching focus was not creating critical thinking opportunities for their students. The emphasis on rote learning of all sorts of grammar items and rules and vocabulary did not seem to have created a critical thinking atmosphere for their students. The teaching and learning activities found in the observed lessons are primarily 'convergent tasks' (Yung, 1995, p.199). According to Yung (1995), convergent tasks 'only require a person to follow very specific rules and limit the answers to a few or very often only one single correct answer' (p.199). As revealed in the classroom data, the performance of students at the two schools degenerated and their participation in the lessons reduced across the data collection period. Teachers like John, Lai Lai, Mei Mei and Fun have also been aware of the problem of student participation in class but admitted sadly that there was little they could do.

I think that the institutional constraints and pressure that the five teachers faced were so overwhelming that their teaching objective was sometimes distorted. For example, as John put it the teaching objective of the lesson is to see with students what they need for exams. Some of the teachers seemed to have forgotten the fundamental nature of language education, i.e. students' participation or involvement in the processes of using and applying the language. Among the five teachers of the main study, John was the only one who seemed to be aware of the difference between teaching and rushing through with

students different materials and exercises in preparation for exams. In line with the interview data collected, engaging his students actively in the process of using and applying the language was always his primary concern. However, the institutional constraints he faced were so overwhelming that that he could hardly implement what he believed in in his own classroom. The findings of some field studies conducted at American high schools below best describe what was seen in the observed lessons, i.e. students who were expected to play a very passive role in the learning processes were like spectators of a show performed by their teachers.

> Field studies in a large sample of secondary schools have revealed that teachers use a very restricted range of pedagogical options, and these are mainly the ones that require looking up answers and recalling information. There is little emphasis on the evaluation of knowledge or the promotion of intellectual curiosity, with most of the time available for discussion dominated by teacher talk. Left as passive (and bored) spectators, with little chance to evaluate the information presented or to make critical judgments, students turn off intellectually and simple go through the motions necessary to complete the course.
>
> (Winn, 2004, p.496)

Biggs (1995b) warned that this kind of learning context could have adverse effects on students' learning. Biggs, who stressed that these convergent tasks encourage a surface approach of learning, pointed out three different types of approaches to learning, i.e.

> the surface approach is a tired, impersonal reaction to an uninspiring work demand, with rote learning usually playing a major part. The deep approach is an energetic involvement to maximize meaning. The achieving approach is a calculated attempt to maximize marks cost effectively. Good students typically have elements of both deep and achieving approaches. People have stable preferences for these approaches, but context can override the way an individual usually learns.
>
> (Biggs, 1995b, p.163).

If context, as Biggs suggested, plays such an important role in student learning, the context that the five teachers as well as their students were in cannot be overlooked. Did it facilitate the deep approach of learning? Did it encourage thinking and reflection? Did it engage the students actively in the processes of using and applying the language? More importantly, did it encourage or facilitate students' development of the critical perspective? The way these teachers handled writing tasks in their lessons might shed some light on these questions.

All the four local teachers, i.e. Fun, Mei Mei, Ling and Lai Lai, have complained that some of their students did not take their writing seriously and that they were taking a surface approach to their writing, i.e. the 'ma ma fu fu approach' (Biggs, 1995b, p.151). According to the teachers, these students tried to avoid 'detailed resource and strategy planning, monitoring, and in depth involvement with the task' (p.151) but as I observed in these teachers' lessons what the students did seem to meet their requirements. Because of the overwhelming institutional pressure and desire to meet the demands of the institution some of the teachers in the study as revealed in their observed lessons, in fact, encouraged the 'ma ma fu fu' approach to writing by feeding their students with ideas and language to ensure that their students completed the writing tasks assigned.

I believe that 'the problem here is not so much the student's reaction' (Biggs, 1995b, p.151) as suggested by Biggs 'but the fact that the teacher actually seems to encourage this approach. Teachers should not set tasks that can be dealt with so contemptuously by students' (p.151). There seemed to be a lack of faith from the teachers in their students'

ability and thus they were so ready to supply their students with ideas for their composition. While their predominantly product oriented teaching approach, i.e. by all means getting the students to complete the writing task even if they were deprived of the opportunity to be involved in the important writing processes of generating and organizing ideas, encouraged the surface approach to learning, many of their students were taking a similar product oriented approach to writing, i.e. they were more than happy to jot down without much thought whatever they were told in their composition to get it done. The present study supports Biggs's (1995b) belief that.

> a surface approach goes hand in hand with a Level 1 or quantitative conception of learning. Seeing school tasks as the reproduction of detail, and the more is reproduced, the better the learning, is an oversimplified way of looking at school learning that invites the oversimplified surface approach to school tasks.
>
> (Biggs, 1995b, pp.151-152)

The so called guidance that some teachers were giving their students to ensure that they completed the writing task, in fact, reflects a quantitative conception of learning and reinforces the surface approach of students towards writing. The product-centred culture (Harris, 1993, Sengupta, 1998) overrides important aspects of teaching and learning of writing, such as self expression and generating, selecting and organizing ideas.

Biggs (1995a) has also warned that teachers should never replace meaningful learning with rote learning as we found in all five teachers' grammar and vocabulary lessons. He pointed out that

> meaningful learning is more economical, more stable, more easily remembered, and more enjoyable, than pure rote learning. The focus in meaningful learning, is the meaning of the word, passage, or theme (the deep structure), not as in rote learning the word itself (the surface structure)…meaningful learning is obviously the major goal for school learning; rote learning is a useful tool in achieving that goal, if used appropriately and not as a substitute for meaningful learning. Unfortunately, teachers tend to value accurate, verbatim responses…. Consequently, teachers tend to give credit for correctly recalled material, rather than for how well or ingeniously the students can apply that material in new situations; and students persist with the rote memorizing because they see that as what teachers want, unless teachers take particular care to make their students think otherwise.
>
> (Biggs, 1995a, p.114)

As revealed in the observed lessons, the quotation above best describes the five teachers' surface teaching and assessment approaches towards vocabulary in the lessons. Although I agree with some of the participating teachers, such as Lai Lai and Mei Mei, that some rote learning of meaning, spelling and pronunciation of new words might be needed when teaching Secondary 1 students English language, I believe that this goal should never be a substitute for the major goal of school learning, i.e. meaningful learning. It would be important that the teacher could help their students to move away from rote learning, for example, encouraging them to use the new words learnt in new situations or to communicate with others.

These findings reveal another significant pedagogical issue: why were those teachers encouraging mainly lower order learning, such as rote learning and the application of rules, in their teaching but not critical thinking? Is it because the training that they received favoured lower order teaching rather than developing students' critical thinking? Is it because they felt that they were not proficient in teaching students critical thinking?

Or, is it because they felt so grounded by the exam dominated context that they perceived the teaching of critical thinking impossible to be carried out in their classrooms? The interview data seem to have answered some of these questions. As discussed in Section 6.4.3, all five teachers have reported consistently that their teaching was heavily constrained by many contextual factors such that the teaching of critical thinking was impossible. Also, two out of the five teachers admitted that they needed professional development in the teaching of critical thinking.

To successfully implement the critical thinking recommendations, three significant changes would be needed. First of all, teachers would need to see the importance of meaningful learning as well as its close connection with critical thinking. Also, it would be important to reduce the impact of exams on students. Last but not least, empowering teachers with the confidence and strategies to implement critical thinking education despite the situational and external pressure they face would be needed, which could mean helping teachers to become critical thinkers so that they would think and make teaching decisions critically within their institution. However, as I mentioned before, the system and culture that the five teachers were in deprived them also of the time or space to think and act critically in their profession.

7.2.2 Teachers deprived of the time and space for critical thinking

According to the 1999 critical thinking recommendations (CDC, 1999), teachers are required to teach their students critical thinking through the English language subject. Yet the irony here is that the systems and contexts that the five teachers were in did not truly

support critical thinking or allow them the time or space to think and act critically in their profession. As stated below, the various systems in which the five teachers were working and some of the concerns that the five teachers raised echo Biggs's (1995d) belief that

> effective teaching means working within the system… let us now look at the school. Just as there is an equilibrium in the classroom, so the classes and their teachers form a larger coherent system within the school as a whole, which in turn fits within the system formed by the community itself. The success, and failure, of Hong Kong' s language policy is a clear example of this wider system influencing what goes on in schools. This enveloping superstructure often prevents individual teachers from teaching the way they would like to do. Many individual teachers would like to use group methods, but group methods tend to be noisy, and some principals are old fashioned enough to believe that a noisy classroom means a weak and ineffectual teacher: therefore no group methods.
>
> (Biggs, 1995d, p.275)

Morris (1996) was also aware of the strong impact of the wider system on curriculum changes. He pointed out that the reasons why some curriculum changes are not implemented successfully in the classroom are often complicated, stressing that the characteristics of the external context, such as social, economic and political context can never be overlooked. As revealed in the five teachers' case reports (see Chapter V), all of them felt that the expectations of the school administration, education authority and even the general public left them little time or space regarding teaching. They were so grounded by the various systems that they could afford no time for anything outside the school curriculum or not tested in examinations, for example, critical thinking. The teaching decisions that these teachers made were not simple as stressed by some teachers and their concerns and worries are best captured in the quotation below:

> Teachers are willing to change, but they also have to satisfy a number of competing goals. A 'new' teaching approach might be desirable but it could result in other goals, such as syllabus coverage, classroom control and examination results, not being satisfied. So teachers make rational decisions which involve weighing up the overall costs and benefits of implementing a change.
>
> (Morris, 1996, p.120)

As revealed in the five teachers' case reports (Chapter V) the systems and contexts where they taught did not allow them the time to think and act critically in their profession or leave them any space for teacher autonomy. Evidence shown in the data reveals that the five teachers have been consistently deprived of the time and space to do what they believed to be truly beneficial to the students or their learning. For instance, although Fun admitted that the study had raised her awareness of developing students' critical thinking and the awareness even extended to the lessons that were not observed for the study, she stressed that she could not even afford the time to think about it reiterating that 'sometimes she had to rush and thus nothing else could be done in the lesson' [SAMFunIIAR]. Similarly, both Ling and Fun, who considered showing their students love and care as an important part of education, have been complaining about not having enough time to care for their students in different interviews. While Ling stressed that the heavy teaching load, administrative work and other duties assigned did not leave her much time for her students outside the classroom, Fun reiterated that she could rarely afford the time to care for her students in the lessons because of the packed and rigid school curriculum.

The present study supports Cooper's (2004) findings regarding time pressure on UK teachers, that is, time is stolen from teachers by the nature of the education system and

that the condition under which they work could impact negatively on their feelings and professionalism. Although the teachers of the two studies were working in two completely different countries at the time of the studies, their problems, as described in the quotation below, were, to a very large extent, similar. I believe that the fact that Hong Kong had been a British Colony for more than a century and that the local education system has long been influenced by the UK education system might help explain the similarities.

> Despite an overwhelming desire to support, care for and relate deeply to pupils, teachers were continually constrained by the conditions in which they worked. Time was stolen from them by the nature of the current education system; the fragmented and rigid curriculum; the time poor nature of their working conditions; the bureaucracy of modern education and the large numbers of pupils and low frequency of contact.
>
> (Cooper, 2004, p.12).

Considering the teacher's task as a very complex one, Cooper (2004) pointed out a close connection between love and care provided by teachers for students and student learning, as well as their development of thinking. According to Cooper, if teachers

> are unable to assess and scaffold emotional as well as cognitive development, the student may flounder around in internal confusion. Direction, support and intervention is vital to move students on at sufficient pace, to help motivate and encourage them in their tasks and thinking. Formative assessment, which is at the very heart of learning, needs to be both emotional and cognitive, both personal and academic.
>
> (Cooper, 2004, p.14)

However, obviously, time is needed to cultivate a caring relationship. Whether it is a light pat on the shoulder of a disappointed student, a warm smile at a frustrated learner, a

friendly football match after school or a very long talk outside the staffroom, it all takes up some of the time and energy of the teacher. According to Cooper (2004), the impact of these 'off-task' interactions which promote human relationships can be significant on student learning.

> Time is needed for real caring relationships to develop, not only through the taught curriculum but through the normal conversations and interactions which take place between people. Sometimes these may be lengthy conversations but at other times they may be simple interactions that affirm and recognize students as valued people. Their importance should not be underestimated. Such "off-tasks" interaction is more likely to enhance liking and feeling of community than purely task-related engagement. Human relationships are central to a positive learning atmosphere and are the source of the higher levels of intellect. They motivate and reassure students. (Copper, 2004, p.14)

I strongly agree with Cooper regarding the complexity of the teacher's task. Teaching does not only take place inside the classroom within the class time. The preparation needed before a lesson, such as selection and development of teaching materials as reiterated by Fun and Mei Mei, and follow up work including student counselling and rapport building as stressed by Fun and Ling, could impact significantly on the effectiveness of the teacher's teaching. They are, in fact, an important part of teaching. To genuinely ease the time pressure of teachers, the commitment to reduce the overloaded school curriculum as discussed in Section 7.2.1 would be needed. Two significant goals of change would be to initiate and practise especially by the education authority and school administrators a new orientation towards teaching and learning, i.e. to genuinely move teaching and learning from a quantity and product driven conception to students' knowledge construction, and to raise the public awareness of the importance

of lesson preparation and follow up work after a lesson and to set aside time for teachers to handle these vital ‘off tasks’.

Apart from time pressure, evidence from the data reveals that the context and condition under which the five teachers worked did not facilitate teacher development and empowerment. For example, the context John was in did not in any way leave him much autonomy in making teaching decisions or empower him in his profession. John’s teaching experience in the school, as revealed in the classroom observations, was rather frustrating. Describing himself as teaching in a prison, John stressed that his teaching was heavily constrained by factors like the rigidity of the school system, the over-filled school curriculum, the poorly developed textbooks and the quantity driven and exam oriented culture. Although he found some aspects of the school curriculum nonsensical, the pressure he faced was so overwhelming that he admitted he had no choice but to listen to his boss, for example, skipping interesting parts of a unit to focus on the topics needed for exams, teaching grammar out of context so as to cover what is assigned in the school curriculum, and having all sorts of dictation of vocabulary that did not seem to be useful to the students. As Pearson et al. (2005) stated

> if teachers are to be empowered and exalted as professional, then like other professionals, teacher must have the freedom to prescribe the best treatment for their students as doctors/lawyers do for their patients/clients and the freedom to do such has been defined by some as teacher autonomy.
>
> (Pearson et al., 2005, pp.37-38)

Working in a system that did not allow John, a teacher from a western country, to enjoy much curriculum autonomy John's stress seems inevitable. The degree of autonomy that teachers perceive to enjoy, according to Pearson et al. (2005), could be a possible indicator of job satisfaction of some teachers which, to a certain extent, is indicative of their stress level. Pearson et al. (2005) stressed in their study of teacher pressure in some U.S. elementary, middle and high schools, that

> the curriculum autonomy factor is logically consistent with teachers' identifying themselves with the profession particularly in having authority when making decisions regarding selection of activities/materials and instructional planning and sequencing, and in relieving on-the-job stress. On-the-job stress was measured by items that inquired into teachers' perceptions of their current instructional load, paper work load, and the stress of the work environment; thus, again it was not surprising that these types of stress would be perceived to be lower in teachers who perceive they have control over their curriculum.
>
> (Pearson et al., 2004, p.48)

John, a reflective teacher, perceived to have very little control over the school curriculum or his teaching. Evidence from the data reveals that John's frustration increased throughout the data collection period. The overwhelming situational pressure John faced and the rigid school system indeed undermined John's professional development, as well as that of his colleagues in the English panel as they could hardly take control over their teaching under the existing systems.

The context John was in, in fact, impeded his function as the NET in the school. The current NET scheme, which has been implemented since 1998, was designed for the NET to enhance the teaching of English in the school by 'acting as English language resource

persons; assisting in school-based teacher development; and helping to foster an enabling environment for students to practise their oral English skills' (Carless and Walker, 2006, p.463). I think a key factor in successful collaboration of NETs and LETs (Local English Teachers) in team teaching as suggested by Carless and Walker (2006), i.e. 'to agree to differ' (p.473), is inspiring and important to our understanding of the possible problems NETs face in local schools. I believe that establishing a trusting and equal relationship and an open culture in the educational context would be inevitable to ease some of the stress felt by John and other English language teachers, NETs or LETs, who feel that their teaching is heavily constrained by the school system and culture.

As can be seen in the two schools studied, the school context, as well as the broader educational context was all driven by the exam oriented culture which jeopardized the teachers' autonomy especially in areas like curriculum and instruction and impeded the effectiveness of the five teachers. As Hamp-Lyons (1999) pointed out

> in an examination culture, teachers are judged by students' examination results. This means they will feel driven to teach to the test; they may judge themselves by examination results and, although they will see that what they do is not in the children's best interests, they feel disempowered to change or even criticize the system.
>
> (Hamp-Lyons, 1999, p. 135)

The findings of the present study support Hamp-Lyon's belief. Some teachers like Fun, Ling and Lai Lai were found to prepare their Secondary 1 students for the HKCEE, an examination that the students would probably take in four years' time. Lai Lai, the Assistant Panel Chair of English in School B, has consistently voiced her powerlessness

over her job in the main study and the message she got from the school and education authority was clear, i.e. no suggestions until good exam results are shown. She felt that the quality assurance inspectors from the Education and Manpower Bureau had drawn their conclusions based on the public exam results of the school even before they went into the classroom for observation. John, the expatriate teacher from the same school, tried not to acknowledge the power of the school system when he was exploring his way through it. Feeling frustrated and exhausted he later admitted that he had no choice but to listen to the school administration. He was also disappointed with the attitudes of the quality assurance inspectors stressing that real exchange of ideas, respect and trust were important elements to help teachers grow. Although there seemed to be a lack of understanding or communication between Fun and Mei Mei and the school administration, the message they got was also clear, i.e. to help students to get good results in exams. The school system and culture, the school administration, the expectations of the general public and the education authority have put the five teachers under great pressure and most of them have consistently felt that they were useless, powerless, helpless and that they were often the ones blamed by many in the educational circles as well as in the community. All the findings point to the need to empower teachers to become autonomous professionals who can make critical decisions in terms of the teaching and learning of their students despite the contextual constraints they face and to provide professional development that can empower teachers to think critically about the 1999 critical thinking recommendations and to implement them professionally in their own context.

However, the problems of teacher empowerment, autonomy and professionalism in Hong Kong have been around for many years. According to Sachs (2000), the evidence of teacher autonomy has not been strong in Hong Kong. Teachers in Hong Kong are perceived to be under consulted in terms of curriculum issues, education policies and even school decisions. Many of them are working under a system of mistrust in which their professionalism has long been doubted and challenged. Reporting a study by Richards, Tung and Ng (1992), Sachs referred

> teachers in Hong Kong as professionals who feel under-consulted about issues of curriculum and policy. They teach large classes with few resources within demanding curriculum constraints, have considerable amounts of marking and school meetings, and often work in very cramped conditions […] teachers appear to be dissatisfied with their lack of autonomy. An example of this frustration can be seen in the perception that teachers were insufficiently consulted about recent government moves, such as the introduction of the new curriculum […] Similarly, the introduction of benchmarks for Hong Kong's secondary and primary school language teachers is another top-down, government-led initiative which has been vehemently opposed by the local teachers' union, as many teachers feel concerned about what they see as a challenge to their professionalism. In general, there has been a climate of doubt on the part of school officials about the professionalism of teachers. Evidence of teacher consultation, autonomy and decision-making is not strong. Teachers generally work in an atmosphere of mistrust at the management level and often at the school level.
>
> (Sachs, 2000, p.35-36)

In fact, the introduction of the 1999 critical thinking recommendations (CDC, 1999) was another example of top-down, government-led initiatives. Such combined top-down approaches reveal that teachers' professionalism and autonomy improved little over the years. I agree with Eraut (1994) that the contexts that teachers are in, such as 'the academic context; the organization context of policy discussion and talk about practice; and the context of practice itself' (p.20) impact significantly on the professional

knowledge they acquire. How can critical thinking be truly valued or practised in the educational context if power and authority are what is pushing the mechanism forward? How can teachers help their students to develop critical thinking in the context that deprives them both of the time and space for critical thinking? With the professional knowledge teachers acquire so closely linked to its context of acquisition and its use I believe that in such a top-down, quantity driven and product-centred context some teachers, like the teachers in the present study, could feel that critical thinking is just something inappropriate or inapplicable.

> Professional knowledge cannot be characterized in a manner that is independent of how it is learned and how it is used. It is through looking at the contexts of acquisition and its use that its essential nature is revealed… and professional knowledge is constructed through experience and its nature depends on the cumulative acquisition, selection and interpretation of that experience.
>
> (Eraut, 1994, pp.19-20)

In fact, teachers' lack of reference to critical thinking can also be viewed as a critical act, which could be manifested in their resistance towards government-led initiatives. However, as revealed in the present study some teachers were indeed capable of the construction, acquisition, selection and interpretation of what is meant by 'critical thinking'. But, for various reasons they felt that such a concept was not appropriate or applicable in their context. As the teachers clearly understood this concept and chose not to apply it, I believe that the ultimate question lies in the underlying assumption that is driving the local education system and that an honest reflection of the local education system regarding its underlying principles, assumptions and structure, and the determination to improve the system, especially by the education authority, are needed. A

significant goal of change would be to create a critical thinking educational context in which genuine exchange of ideas, discussion and critical thinking would be valued and practised in a trusting and open atmosphere by the education authority, school administrators and frontline teachers. Hopefully, other stakeholders from the same context, the general public as well as students would then experience and understand the importance of critical thinking and be ready to practise it. ‘After all, this is what education is all about: [to enable learners] to be able to analyse the facts, to look at the situation from different perspectives, and to arrive at an independent view’ (EMB, 2006c). Such goals can only happen when ‘the team’ – policy makers, teachers, parents, and students are truly supporting the same principles.

Chapter VIII Conclusions and recommendations

As discussed in the previous chapter, the present educational study, though exploratory, has important implications for the education authority, school administrators as well as frontline teachers regarding the implementation of the 1999 critical thinking recommendations (CDC, 1999). In Section 8.1, some major limitations of the study are discussed. Suggestions for future research are presented in Section 8.2. As a conclusion, Section 8.3 details the findings of the main study in relation to the three objectives that the study set out to achieve. The chapter ends with some recommendations stemming from the study regarding the implementation of the critical thinking recommendations.

Section 8.1 Limitations of the study

There are a number of limitations in the study. However, the limitations outlined below have been taken into consideration throughout the period of this study, and I would argue that the benefits and understanding gained outweigh the limitations presented here.

First of all, the design and implementation of the study were heavily constrained by the participating teachers and schools involved. The study set out to describe in detail the voices of the teacher participants and the reality that they perceived they were in. However, gaining access to the schools and classrooms was never easy and gaining their trust, support and understanding was even more difficult. Many adaptations have been made during the research process to make the objective possible. For example, reflective journal writing was not used in the main study because the teachers felt that they could not afford the time to do so, the physical environment in which the interviews were conducted might not allow the teachers the privacy they hoped to enjoy, the times and

dates for classroom observations were mostly decided by the teachers especially during the early stage of data collection, and the use of different recording devices as well as the position of the equipment was all highly constrained by the setting of the school and classroom. Although the data collected do appear to reflect an honest and truthful depiction of what really happened, I believe that it could have been an even richer data set had these limitations not been in play.

The study hoped to investigate the everyday teaching of the participating teachers, but I am aware that my presence as an observer in the schools and inside the classrooms might have changed, to some extent, the classroom context being observed. Considering every context as a dynamic one, I believe that what I have heard from the participating teachers in the interviews and seen in the classrooms might have been affected by many factors that I might not have even realized. However, as shown in the data collected, the changes in the teachers' behaviour from the start to the end and the trust developed between the teachers and students, and me, the researcher, did allow me a window on the classroom that has not been seen by many.

The working definitions of terms (see Section 2.3) as well as the classroom observation scheme (see Figure 4.2 on p.103) used in the study are not complete in the sense that they were developed and used in the present study as a point of reference in this particular context, with these particular teachers, at this particular time, and they do not imply any 'correct' or complete way of interpreting the terms or investigating critical thinking in the classroom. However, they did provide an opportunity for me to record detailed

information of the lessons observed. It remains to be seen if such a scheme could be utilized by others.

Students play an important role in the teaching of critical thinking though they were not the focus of the present study. They interact with their teachers and learning context every day and their beliefs, background and experience have a significant impact on the successful implementation of the critical thinking recommendations in the classroom. Although different teachers have reported that their students were not willing or able to think and some teachers even believed that their students were too young to learn critical thinking, as I observed in different classes many of these students did think smartly and critically in the lessons, trying to avoid doing what they were told. It seemed that the constraints of the classroom were not successful in engaging these students in (critical) thinking processes that would have been constructive to their learning.

Section 8.2 Future research

Future research could be conducted to explore how students as well as parents understand critical thinking, the way they respond to the teaching of critical thinking and the reasons behind. It would also be valuable to collect school administrators' and policy makers' views about the critical thinking recommendations and to find out the benefits and constraints that they perceive in implementing the recommendations. In addition, similar studies could be conducted in different settings, such as the Secondary 1 English language classrooms of EMI schools, in which students might be more ready to express themselves in English. In addition, studies could incorporate Secondary 1 classrooms of the Chinese language subject in which traditional Chinese culture is advocated, such as

obedience of authority, to collect more voices of teachers and students in relation to the 1999 critical thinking recommendations and to deepen the understanding of the role critical thinking plays in the Hong Kong secondary school context. Longitudinal studies to investigate the changes in students' perceptions and practices of critical thinking could be conducted across junior and/or senior secondary education, i.e. Secondary 1-3 and/or Secondary 4-6, as part of the evaluation of the success of the implementation of the critical thinking recommendations. International comparative studies on students' critical thinking development could be of great significance to the local education system as well as the development of the territory. The need to help students to develop the critical perspective in order to prepare them for the challenge of globalization is obvious and exchanging experience with other countries like Singapore in developing students' critical thinking would be valuable.

In terms of teacher professional development, research could be conducted to investigate the role critical thinking plays in both in-service and pre-service teacher training courses to see if their contexts support and facilitate the development of critical thinking of teachers and student teachers, for example, whether time and space are given to them to think and act critically. In terms of English language teaching, based on what has been found in the five teachers' classrooms, it would be valuable to conduct further research on teacher questions and questioning techniques, and the teaching of writing in secondary schools. The present study has helped me to see the close connection between thinking and writing, and I was very sad to find that many students of the five teachers were indeed deprived of the opportunity to be involved in the important thinking processes

before, during and after writing, which I believe is significant in students' development of writing skills. I plan to become a teacher educator and focus my future research on this particular area. Hopefully, what I learn from the research could show secondary school teachers a new perspective of looking at student writing and students would genuinely enjoy more space in expressing themselves even in school writing.

Section 8.3 Conclusions

As stated in Chapter I, Section 1.2, this educational study aims to achieve three objectives: (1) It aims to investigate if the 1999 critical thinking recommendations (CDC, 1999) are translated into the five teacher participants' classroom practices. Through classroom observations the study aims to identify the teaching of critical thinking manifested in their Secondary 1 English language classrooms.

Although the critical thinking recommendations requiring teachers of Key Stage III, i.e. S.1 -3, to teach their students critical thinking skills through the English language subject were issued in 1999 (CDC, 1999), the classroom data collected during the school year 2002/2003 in the two participating schools show that teaching of critical thinking was rarely found in the five participating teachers' English language classrooms. In the five case studies covering more than 26 hours of classroom teaching, only two brief critical encounters (see Sections 5.1.2 & 5.2.2) were identified. What was characteristic about these two encounters was that in both cases students were given the time and space to think critically and exchange ideas in a supportive and open atmosphere and the encounters facilitated students' development of the critical perspective.

The answer to the research question on teacher behaviour, i.e. what role does critical thinking play in the English language classrooms of the participating teachers in the main study, is thus obvious (see Section 4.1). The data show that critical thinking did not play a significant role in the teaching of the five teacher participants during the time when the present study was conducted. Although many teacher questions have been found in the observed lessons, only a few of them were critical questions. Also, only two critical encounters have been identified with no other critical thinking activities, such as reflective journal writing, found in the lessons. In short, the study shows that the 1999 critical thinking recommendations were not translated into the five Secondary 1 English language teachers' classroom practices. Their students were hardly engaged in any of the five fundamental intertwining ways of learning and using knowledge recommended by the Curriculum Development Council (CDC, 1999, p. 3), i.e. communicating, conceptualizing, inquiring, problem-solving and reasoning, during the observed lessons. The interview data also show that these five intertwining ways of learning were not the five participating teachers' major concerns when they developed teaching and learning materials and tasks for their students, and determined assessment focuses and formats.

(2) The present study aims to explore the five teachers' perceptions of the 1999 critical thinking recommendations (CDC, 1999). Through interviews the five teachers' understanding of critical thinking and their views on the critical thinking recommendations were systematically elicited.

All five teachers admitted in the study that they had very little or no knowledge of the critical thinking recommendations, but when they were asked their understanding of critical thinking in their last post classroom observation interview all of them seemed to have a clear understanding of the term and were ready to offer their opinion. Regarding the research question on the meaning of critical thinking, i.e. Question 2, as discussed in Section 6.4.1, Lai Lai believed that a critical thinker would have an enquiring mind and be able to analyze (see Section 5.1.7), John (see Section 5.2.7) considered a critical thinker someone who would be ready to question and think independently, Ling (see Section 5.3.7) thought that judging and criticizing were closely linked to critical thinking, Mei Mei (see Section 5.4.6) considered looking at an issue from a variety of perspectives as a core element of critical thinking, and Fun (see Section 5.5.7) could see the importance of the action taken after the critical thinking processes. Although the five teachers had, to some extent, different interpretations of critical thinking, their interpretations involve various aspects and elements of the key concepts of critical thinking, the critical perspective and critical thinker as defined in the present study (see Section 2.3).

Regarding the research question on the teachers' support for the critical thinking recommendations, i.e. Question 3 (see Section 4.1), on the whole, they supported the idea of teaching students critical thinking through the English language subject (see Section 6.4.2). In terms of the strategies regarding the teaching of critical thinking, i.e. Questions 4 and 5 (see Section 4.1), the interview data show that the four local teachers had very brief ideas of how to develop students' critical thinking through the subject, such as

through questioning and the teaching of writing (see Chapter V). Despite their knowledge in developing students' critical thinking, as revealed in the classroom observations, these strategies were rarely implemented or hardly implemented effectively (see Sections 6.2 & 6.3) in all five teachers' English language classrooms during the time when the present study was conducted.

Regarding the research question on the factors that the teachers perceived to be constraining or facilitating the implementation of the critical thinking recommendations, i.e. Question 6 (see Section 4.1), despite their support for developing students' critical thinking through the English language subject, all five teachers stressed that their teaching was so heavily constrained by different contextual factors and that the implementation of the critical thinking recommendations in their Secondary 1 English language curriculums was difficult. These constraints (see Section 6.4.3), which comprise both situational factors and external pressure, include a rigid over-filled and exam-oriented school English curriculum, a rigid assessment system with a great deal of emphasis on low-order learning, culture that is predominantly driven by authority, quantity and product, poor school commitment in implementing the critical thinking recommendations, students' resistance to thinking tasks and low English language proficiency, and a lack of communication between the education authority and frontline teachers and professional development regarding the teaching of critical thinking.

(3) The third aim is to make practical recommendations based on the findings of the study regarding the implementation of the critical thinking recommendations in the local

educational context. The recommendations in terms of both teacher professional development and the commitment of school administrators and the education authority to building a critical thinking community will be discussed in the following section, i.e. Section 8.4.

To conclude, the data show a major problem with the critical thinking recommendations, i.e. the teachers are required to develop students' critical thinking in a quantity-driven, product-centred and top-down context that deprives them and their students of both the time and space for critical thinking (see Section 7.2).

Section 8.4 Recommendations

Although the five participating teachers felt that the school and broader educational contexts did not seem to facilitate the implementation of the 1999 critical thinking recommendations (CDC, 1999), they became more positive about the recommendations after the main study. With the time and space created for them to think critically about the recommendations, and the open, secure and supportive environment provided for them to express themselves, the awareness of these teachers of the critical thinking recommendations increased. My determination to understand their perceived reality, to report faithfully their voices and to practise the critical perspective throughout the study was much appreciated by the teachers. Despite the constraints they faced, many of them have expressed on different occasions towards the end of the study that they hoped to really implement the recommendations in their classrooms. Although this research result was unexpected, it was very encouraging and it has important implications concerning the implementation of the critical thinking recommendations regarding both teacher

professional development and the commitment of the authorities to building a critical thinking community as presented in the following subsections, i.e. Sections 8.4.1 - 8.4.2.

8.4.1 Professional development for teachers

I agree with some participating teachers, such as Ling (see Section 5.3.7) and Fun (see Section 5.5.7) that teacher professional development in developing students' critical thinking would be needed in the successful implementation of the critical thinking recommendations. I suggest that the Education Bureau organize a series of seminars and workshops for frontline teachers and school administrators to raise their awareness on critical thinking education. These seminars and workshops would aim to provide teachers and school heads with both the time and space to reflect on their own understanding of critical thinking and its role in education, and to discuss and voice their opinions on controversial education issues. What I consider very important is the content of these seminars and workshops and how they would be delivered. In terms of content, I agree with Ling that the meaning of critical thinking would need to be discussed openly. Echoing John's concern, I recommend that a goal of critical thinking education would need to be established among frontline teachers, their school administrators and the education authority. As shown in the present study, even the five participating teachers possessed different interpretations of critical thinking and their understanding affected directly how critical thinking was taught in their classrooms.

In terms of how the professional development is delivered, I would call for an honest reflection of the teacher trainers involved. Would frontline teachers or school

administrators be given the space and time to think critically in the professional development provided? Or like the five participating teachers' classroom and school contexts, power would remain in the hands of the authority leaving the teachers little time or space to reflect or act critically? As Christenson (2004) pointed out, 'over the years, top-down methods of professional development have had limited success in changing teacher behavior' (p.5). The present study has shown that a purposeful reason to think critically, a trusting relationship and a context that supports and values critical thinking are all crucial to help teachers to experience and understand the importance of critical thinking. As promised, I plan to go back to Schools A and B to share with the teachers of the English Panel what I have found in the study and provide them with the professional development they need to help their students to develop critical thinking through the English Language subject.

8.4.2 A critical thinking community

The study shows significant findings concerning the implementation of the critical thinking recommendations, i.e. the successful implementation of the recommendations calls for the genuine support of frontline teachers, school administrators, education authority and different members of the society. Their commitment in creating a context that supports and values the critical perspective is crucial to student critical thinking development. I suggest that the Education Bureau and the Committee on the Promotion of Civic Education launch jointly some territory-wide activities, such as video production and drama contests, and exhibitions. These activities would aim to raise the awareness of

the community on the importance of different critical attitudes and to encourage the public to think critically about the world around them.

I was happy to see that a series of courses for both frontline teachers as well as school administrators on critical thinking and the teaching of critical thinking through the English language subject had been included in the professional training timetable 2004/2005 of the Education Manpower Bureau (EMB, 2004h). The launching of these courses is encouraging. They show the commitment of the education authority to the critical thinking recommendations, their awareness of the important role that school administrators play in its implementation process and the needs for teachers to have professional development in this particular area. I sincerely hope that critical thinking and the critical perspective were valued and practised in these courses and that the education authority would be committed to building a critical thinking community and give support to frontline teachers and schools throughout the implementation and evaluation of the critical thinking recommendations.

As I set up the study, one of the criteria for looking for critical encounters in the five teachers' teaching was to look for 'why' questions in their classrooms. I then found a lot of 'why' questions in the observed lessons but there was virtually no evidence of critical thinking in their teaching. The findings reveal that a 'why' question is a critical question only when it provides a meaningful opportunity for students to think critically in a context that allows them time and space to think and express themselves. Similarly, these two elements, i.e. a critical thinking opportunity and a critical thinking context, for both

teachers and students, are needed if the 1999 critical thinking recommendations (CDC, 1999) are to be successfully implemented in the local secondary school English language classroom.

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Appendices

Appendix I Consent forms for the exploratory and main studies

CONSENT FORM **(RESEARCHER'S COPY)**
(Exploratory Study)

English as a Second Language in the Hong Kong Secondary School Context: The Role of Critical Thinking in Teaching and Learning (tentative research title)

My study is about the role of critical thinking in secondary school English language teaching. Thank you for participating in my study. If you feel you are able to, please sign at the bottom of the form. Thank you.

You have participated in the exploratory study and have read the findings concerning critical thinking of the study. If you agree that I may use the findings of the study e.g. the report attached in my thesis and the data e.g. audio- and video-tape recordings of discussion, interviews and lessons in various forms of reporting, please sign below:

Name (Subject): _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Name (Researcher): _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Thanks again for participating in the exploratory study.

Appendix I Consent forms for the exploratory and main studies

CONSENT FORM **(TEACHER'S COPY)**
(Exploratory Study)

English as a Second Language in the Hong Kong Secondary School Context: The Role of Critical Thinking in Teaching and Learning (tentative research title)

My study is about the role of critical thinking in secondary school English language teaching. Thank you for participating in my study. If you feel you are able to, please sign at the bottom of the form. Thank you.

You have participated in the exploratory study and have read the findings concerning critical thinking of the study. If you agree that I may use the findings of the study e.g. the report attached in my thesis and the data e.g. audio- and video-tape recordings of discussion, interviews and lessons in various forms of reporting, please sign below:

Name (Subject): _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Name (Researcher): _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Thanks again for participating in the exploratory study.

Appendix I Consent forms for the exploratory and main studies

CONSENT FORM **(RESEARCHER'S COPY)**
(Main Study)

English as a Second Language in the Hong Kong Secondary School Context: The Role of Critical Thinking in Teaching and Learning (tentative research title)

My study is about the role of critical thinking in secondary school English language teaching. Thank you for participating in my study. If you feel you are able to, please sign at the bottom of the form. Thank you.

If you agree that I may use the findings of the study in my thesis and the data e.g. audio- and video-tape recordings of interviews and lessons in various forms of reporting, please sign below:

Name (Subject): _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Name (Researcher): _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Thanks again for participating in the main study.

Appendix I Consent forms for the exploratory and main studies

CONSENT FORM **(TEACHER'S COPY)**
(Main Study)

English as a Second Language in the Hong Kong Secondary School Context: The Role of Critical Thinking in Teaching and Learning (tentative research title)

My study is about the role of critical thinking in secondary school English language teaching. Thank you for participating in my study. If you feel you are able to, please sign the bottom of the form. Thank you.

If you agree that I may use the findings of the study in my thesis and the data e.g. audio- and video-tape recordings of interviews and lessons in various forms of reporting, please sign below:

Name (Subject):_____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Name (Researcher): _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Thanks again for participating in the main study.

Appendix II Data matrix

This appendix consists of three parts:

1. The key - a list of explanations of symbols and abbreviations used in the data matrix

2. An explanation of the data codes and coding system

3. The data matrix:

I. Exploratory study
Table A1.1.1 Mei Mei (School A)
Table A1.1.2 Lai Lai (School B)

II. Main study (School B)
Table A1.2.1 Lai Lai
Table A1.2.2 Ling
Table A1.2.3 John

III. Main study (School A)
Table A1.3.1 Mei Mei
Table A1.3.2 Fun

IV. Others
Table A1.4.1 Training sessions, researcher reflective journals & interviews with students

Appendix II Data matrix

1. The key

There are four major types of symbols and abbreviations to represent 1.) the occasions on which the data were collected, 2.) the types of data collected, 3.) the dates of the data collection, and 4.) others e.g. materials used in the training sessions.

Occasions

CO: Classroom Observation (exploratory and main studies)
TS: Training Session (exploratory study only)
II: The last debriefing Interview (exploratory and main studies)
Pr: Pre- Classroom Observation Interview (main study only)
Po: Post Classroom Observation Interview (main study only)

Data types

I. Recordings
AR: Audio recordings of lessons/interviews
VR: Video recordings of lessons

II. Journal entries
TJ: Reflective journals of teachers
RJ: Reflective journals of the researcher

III. Field notes/notes
FN: Field notes of the researcher/notes taken by the teacher (e.g. in training sessions)

IV. Others
B: Things conducted e.g. as requested by teachers before the present study

Date
'Day' – 'Month' – 'Year'

e.g. 1 020302 – 2nd March 2002

e.g. 2 190901 – 19th September 2001

Others
MA: Materials used (e.g. in training sessions)

Appendix II Data matrix

2. The codes and the coding system

Data codes

For most data there are five components in each data code. They are:

1. 'School' e.g. School A (SA), School B (SB)
2. 'Study' e.g. Exploratory Study (P), Main Study (M)
3. 'Teacher' e.g. Ling
4. 'Occasion' e.g. Classroom Observation 1 (CO1), Last Debriefing Interview (II), Pre- Classroom Observation Interview 3 (Pr3), Post Classroom Observation Interview 4 (Po4)
5. 'Data Type' e.g. Field notes (FN), Audio Recording (AR), Teacher Reflective Journal (TJ), Video Recording (VR)

And, all these components are shown in the related data matrix e.g.

(1) School B (SB)									
(2) Main Study (M)									
Ling (3)	**Classroom Observation**								
	CO1 (4)	**CO2**	**CO3**	**CO4**	**CO5**	**CO6**			
	☐ **(FN) (5)**	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐			

Some examples of data codes
Example 1:

Data code: SAPMeiCO6FN

Coding & Explanation	SA	P	Mei	CO6	FN
	School	Study	Teacher	Occasion	Data Type
	Field notes taken by the researcher during Mei Mei's (School A) sixth classroom observation in the exploratory study				

Example 2:

Data code: SBMLaiCO2AR

Coding & Explanation	SB	M	Lai	CO2	AR
	School	Study	Teacher	Occasion	Data Type
	Audio recording of Lai Lai's (School B) classroom teaching during the second classroom observation in the main study				

Appendix II Data matrix

Example 3:

Data code: SAPMeiTS1TJ

Coding & Explanation	SA	P	Mei	TS1	TJ
	School	Study	Teacher	Occasion	Data Type
	Mei Mei's (School A) reflective journal written after the first training session in the exploratory study				

Example 4:

Data code: SBPLaiIIAR

Coding & Explanation	SB	P	Lai	II	AR
	School	Study	Teacher	Occasion	Data Type
	Audio recoding of the last debriefing interview with Lai Lai (School B) in the exploratory study				

For data that are not teacher or school specific their data codes consist only of three components, i.e. 'Study', 'Occasion' & 'Data Type'

Example 5:

Data code: PTS1AR

Coding & Explanation	P	TSI	AR
	Study	Occasion	Data Typs
	Audio recording of the first training session in the exploratory study		

Example 6:

Data code: PTS2MA

Coding & Explanation	P	TS2	MA
	Study	Occasion	Data Typs
	Materials used in the second training session in the exploratory study		

Appendix II Data matrix

3. The data matrix

I. The exploratory study

Table A1.1.1 Mei Mei (School A)

School A (SA)									
Exploratory Study (P)									
Mei Mei	**Classroom Observation**								
	CO1	**CO2**	**CO3**	**CO4**	**CO5**	**CO6**	**CO7**	**CO8**	
	Date 090902	**Date 160902**	**Date 230902**	**Date 071002**	**Date 161002**	**Date 241002**	**Date 151102**	**Date 211102**	
	(TJ)						- #1	- #1	
	(FN)						- #2		
	(AR)			-	-		-	-	
	-	-	-	-	-	-	#3	-	
	#1 The teacher was required to fill in a reflective proforma instead								
	#2 The researcher needed to control the video camera (no tripod)								
	#3 Video camera facing students (limited space in the classroom)								
	Training Session								
	TS1		**TS2**		**TS3**				
	Date 140902		**Date 121002**		**Date 091102**				
	(TJ)	-	(FN)		-	-			
	Individual Interview								
	II								
	Date 141202								
	(AR)								
	Others								
	Before the study								
	Reflection on the research topic (B1)		**Discussion with Mei Mei on the teaching materials for the new school term (B2)**						
	(TJ) **#4**		(TJ) **#5**						
	#4 Researcher received the journal on 090902 (CO1)								
	#5 Researcher received the journal on 090902 (completed 290802)								

Appendix II Data matrix

I. The exploratory study

Table A1.1.2 Lai Lai (School B)

School B (SB)									
Exploratory Study (P)									
Lai Lai	**Classroom Observation #1**								
	CO1	**CO2**	**CO3**	**CO4**	**CO5**	**CO6**	**CO7**		
	Date 100902	**Date** 170902	**Date** 240902	**Date** 081002	**Date** 151002	**Date** 141102	**Date** 221102		
	(TJ)					**- #2**			
	(FN)								
	(AR)		-	-		-			
	-	-	-	-	-	-	(VR)		
	#1 Students chosen (remedial class, students from S.1C &D)								
	#2 The subject filled in the reflective proforma provided instead								
	Training Session								
	TS1		**TS2**			**TS3**			
	Date 140902		**Date 121002**			**Date 091102**			
	-	-	(TJ)	(FN)		-	-		
	Individual Interview								
	II								
	Date 071202								
	(AR)								
	Others								
	Before the study								
	Reflection on the research topic (B1)								
	(TJ) **#3**								
	#3 Researcher received the journal in July 2002								

Appendix II Data matrix

II. The main study (School B)

Table A1.2.1 Lai Lai

School B (SB)									
Main Study (M)									
Lai Lai	**Classroom Observation #1**								
	CO1	**CO2**	**CO3**	**CO4**	**CO5**	**CO6**			
	Date 130103	**Date 150103**	**Date 170203**	**Date 260203**	**Date 040303**	**Date 120303**			
	(FN)								
	(AR)								
	(VR)								
	#1 Students chosen (regular class, S.1B)								
	Pre- Classroom Observation Interview								
	Pr1	**Pr2**	**Pr3**	**Pr4**	**Pr5**	**Pr6**			
	(AR)								
	Post Classroom Observation Interview								
	Po1	**Po2**	**Po3**	**Po4**	**Po5**	**Po6**			
	(AR)								
	Final Individual Interview								
	II								
	Date 190303								
	(AR)								
	Others								

Appendix II Data matrix

II. The main study (School B)

Table A1.2.2 Ling (School B)

School B (SB)									
Main Study (M)									
Ling	**Classroom Observation**								
	CO1	**CO2**	**CO3**	**CO4**	**CO5**	**CO6**			
	Date 140103	**Date** 160103	**Date** 120203	**Date** 130203	**Date** 110303	**Date** 130303			
	(FN)					- #1			
	(AR)					- #1			
	(VR)					- #1			
	#1 CO6 cancelled because of the form test before the exam								
	Pre- Classroom Observation Interview								
	Pr1	**Pr2**	**Pr3**	**Pr4**	**Pr5**	**Pr6**			
	(AR)					- #1			
	#1 CO6 cancelled because of the form test before the exam								
	Post Classroom Observation Interview								
	Po1	**Po2**	**Po3**	**Po4**	**Po5**	**Po6**			
	(AR)								
	Final Individual Interview								
	II								
	Date 190303								
	(AR)								
	Others								

Appendix II Data matrix

II. The main study (School B)

Table A1.2.3 John (School B)

School B (SB)									
Main Study (M)									
John	**Classroom Observation**								
	CO1	**CO2**	**CO3**	**CO4**	**CO5**	**CO6**			
	Date 130103	**Date 150103**	**Date 170203**	**Date 200203**	**Date 050303**	**Date 100303**			
	(FN)								
	(AR)								
	(VR)								
	Pre- Classroom Observation Interview								
	Pr1	**Pr2**	**Pr3**	**Pr4**	**Pr5**	**Pr6**			
	(AR)								
	Post Classroom Observation Interview								
	Po1	**Po2**	**Po3**	**Po4**	**Po5**	**Po6**			
	(AR)								
	Final Individual Interview								
	II								
	Date 190303								
	(AR)								
	Others								

Appendix II Data matrix

III. The main study (School A)

Table A1.3.1 Mei Mei

School A (SA)									
Main Study (M)									
Mei Mei	**Classroom Observation**								
	CO1	**CO2**	**CO3**	**CO4**	**CO5**	**CO6**			
	Date 140503	**Date 220503**	**Date 300503**	**Date 050603**	**Date 100603**	**Date 180603**			
	(FN)			– #1					
	(AR)			– #1					
	(VR)			– #1					
	#1 CO4 cancelled by the teacher								
	Pre- Classroom Observation Interview								
	Pr1	**Pr2**	**Pr3**	**Pr4**	**Pr5**	**Pr6**			
	(AR)			– #1					
	#1 Pr4 cancelled								
	Post Classroom Observation Interview								
	Po1	**Po2**	**Po3**	**Po4**	**Po5**	**Po6**			
	(AR)			– #1					
	#1 Po4 cancelled								
	Final Individual Interview								
	II								
	Date 250603								
	(AR)								
	Others								

Appendix II Data matrix

III. The main study (School A)

Table A1.3.2 Fun

School A (SA)									
Main Study (M)									
Fun	**Classroom Observation**								
	CO1	**CO2**	**CO3**	**CO4**	**CO5**	**CO6**			
	Date 140503	**Date 220503**	**Date 300503**	**Date 050603**	**Date 100603**	**Date 180603**			
	(FN)								
	(AR)								
	(VR)								
	Pre- Classroom Observation Interview								
	Pr1	**Pr2**	**Pr3**	**Pr4**	**Pr5**	**Pr6**			
	(AR)								
	Post Classroom Observation Interview								
	Po1	**Po2**	**Po3**	**Po4**	**Po5**	**Po6**			
	(AR)								
	Final Individual Interview								
	II								
	Date 250603								
	(AR)								
	Others								

Appendix II Data matrix

IV. Others

Table A1.4.1 Training sessions, researcher reflective journals & interviews with students

Exploratory (P)/ Main Study (M)									
	Training Session (conducted in the exploratory study)								
	TS1	**TS2**	**TS3**						
	Date 140902	**Date** 121002	**Date** 091102						
	🎧 **(AR)**	🎧	🎧						
	📖 **(MA)**	📖	📖						
	Researcher reflective journal (throughout the exploratory & main studies)								
	🗐 **(RJ)**								
	Others								
	#1 🎧								
	#1 An interview was conducted with some students at School B on 260203								

Appendix III Data collection timetables

This appendix consists of three tables

Table A3.1 Data Collection Timetable (Exploratory Study)
Table A3.2 Data Collection Timetable (Main study/School B)
Table A3.3 Data Collection Timetable (Main Study/School A)

Appendix III Data collection timetables

Table A3.1 Data Collection Timetable (Exploratory Study)

September 2002						
Sun	**Mon**	**Tue**	**Wed**	**Thu**	**Fri**	**Sat**
1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**
8	**9 CO1M**	**10 CO1L**	**11**	**12**	**13**	**14 TS1**
15	**16 CO2M**	**17 CO2L**	**18**	**19**	**20**	**21**
22	**23 CO3M**	**24 CO3L**	**25**	**26**	**27**	**28**
29	**30**					
Key:- CO1M/L – Mei Mei's/Lai Lai's First Classroom Observation, TS1/2/3 – First/Second/Third Training Session						
October 2002						
Sun	**Mon**	**Tue**	**Wed**	**Thu**	**Fri**	**Sat**
		1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
6	**7 CO4M**	**8 CO4L**	**9**	**10**	**11**	**12 TS2**
13	**14**	**15 CO5L**	**16 CO5M**	**17**	**18**	**19**
20	**21**	**22**	**23**	**24 CO6M**	**25**	**26**
27	**28**	**29**	**30**	**31**		
Some classroom observations in Oct have been cancelled or rescheduled upon the requests of the teachers or due to mechanical fault/lack of equipment.						
November 2002						
Sun	**Mon**	**Tue**	**Wed**	**Thu**	**Fri**	**Sat**
					1	**2**
3	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**	**9 TS3**
10	**11**	**12**	**13**	**14 CO6L**	**15 CO7M**	**16**
17	**18**	**19**	**20**	**21 CO8M**	**22 CO7L**	**23**
24	**25**	**26**	**27**	**28**	**29**	**30**
Some classroom observations in Nov have been cancelled or rescheduled upon the requests of the teachers or due to mechanical fault/lack of equipment.						
December 2002						
Sun	**Mon**	**Tue**	**Wed**	**Thu**	**Fri**	**Sat**
1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7 IIL**
8	**9**	**10**	**11**	**12**	**13**	**14 IIM**
15	**16**	**17**	**18**	**19**	**20**	**21**
22	**23**	**24**	**25**	**26**	**27**	**28**
29	**30**	**31**				
Key:- IIM/IIL - Last Debriefing Interview with Mei Mei /Lai Lai						

Appendix III Data collection timetables

Table A3.2 Data Collection Timetable (Main Study/School B)

January 2003						
Sun	**Mon**	**Tue**	**Wed**	**Thu**	**Fri**	**Sat**
			1	**2**	**3**	**4**
5	**6**	**7**	**8**	**9**	**10**	**11**
12	**13** **CO1La** **CO1J**	**14** **CO1Li**	**15** **CO2La** **CO2J**	**16** **CO2Li**	**17**	**18**
19	**20**	**21**	**22**	**23**	**24**	**25**
26	**27**	**28**	**29**	**30**	**31**	
Key:- CO1La/Li/J - Lai Lai's /Ling's /John's First Classroom Observation						
February 2003						
Sun	**Mon**	**Tue**	**Wed**	**Thu**	**Fri**	**Sat**
						1
2	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**
9	**10**	**11**	**12** **CO3Li**	**13** **CO4Li**	**14**	**15**
16	**17** **CO3J** **CO3La**	**18**	**19**	**20** **CO4J**	**21**	**22**
23	**24**	**25**	**26** **CO4La**	**27**	**28**	
March 2003						
Sun	**Mon**	**Tue**	**Wed**	**Thu**	**Fri**	**Sat**
						1
2	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**

		CO5La	**CO5J**			
9	**10** **CO6J**	**11** **CO5Li**	**12** **CO6 La**	**13** **CO6Li** **#1**	**14**	**15**
16	**17**	**18**	**19** **IILa/Li/J**	**20**	**21**	**22**
23	**24**	**25**	**26**	**27**	**28**	**29**
30	**31**					
#1 The classroom observation was cancelled due to the school uniform test. An interview was conducted on that day, i.e. target interview to elicit Ling's perceptions of the critical thinking recommendations.						

Appendix III Data collection timetables

Table A3.3 Data Collection Timetable (Main Study/School A)

May 2003						
Sun	**Mon**	**Tue**	**Wed**	**Thu**	**Fri**	**Sat**
				1	**2**	**3**
4	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**	**9**	**10**
11	**12**	**13**	**14** **CO1M** **CO1F**	**15**	**16**	**17**
18	**19**	**20**	**21**	**22** **CO2M** **CO2F**	**23**	**24**
25	**26**	**27**	**28**	**29**	**30** **CO3M** **CO3F**	**31**
Key:- CO1M/F – Mei Mei's/Fun's First Classroom Observation						
June 2003						
Sun	**Mon**	**Tue**	**Wed**	**Thu**	**Fri**	**Sat**
1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5** **CO4M #1** **CO4F**	**6**	**7**
8	**9**	**10** **CO5M** **CO5F**	**11**	**12**	**13**	**14**
15	**16**	**17**	**18** **CO6M** **CO6F**	**19**	**20**	**21**
22	**23**	**24**	**25** **IIM** **IIF**	**26**	**27**	**28**
29	**30**					
Key:- IIM/F Last Debriefing Interview with Mei Mei/Fun						
#1 The classroom observation and all related interviews with Mei Mei were cancelled because of some special arrangement of the school						
July 2003						
Sun	**Mon**	**Tue**	**Wed**	**Thu**	**Fri**	**Sat**
		1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**

6	**7**	**8**	**9**	**10**	**11**	**12**
13	**14**	**15**	**16**	**17**	**18**	**19**
20	**21**	**22**	**23**	**24**	**25**	**26**
27	**28**	**29**	**30**	**31**		

Appendix IV Question scheme for the target interview

The target interview aims to elicit systematically the five teachers' perceptions of critical thinking and the critical thinking recommendations. There are seven questions in the scheme.

1. Background information of the teachers

Q1. How long have you been teaching English in secondary school? What other subject(s) do you teach?

Rationale: The questions are asked mainly for warming up purposes. Another significant function of the questions is to collect background information of the teachers.

2. Knowledge of the critical thinking recommendations

Q2. Did you know that secondary school English language teachers had been required to help their students to develop critical thinking through the English language subject? If yes, please specify how you got the information, i.e. when and where did you first read/ hear about the requirement?

Rationale: The first question is asked to formally introduce the topic for the interview i.e. the critical thinking recommendations. The two questions that follow aim to elicit from the participating teachers their knowledge of the recommendations, and when and how they get the information about the recommendations.

3. Teaching critical thinking through the English language subject

Q3. Do you think critical thinking can be developed through the English language subject? If yes, please give examples of how it can be done e.g. teaching activities, strategies or skills needed. If no, please explain.

Rationale: The first question is asked to elicit from the teacher participants their views on developing students' critical thinking through the English language subject. The second question aims to elicit from those who believe that critical thinking could be developed through the English language subject the critical thinking teaching methodology they have in mind.

Appendix IV Question scheme for the target interview

4. Understanding of critical thinking

Q4. How do you understand critical thinking, for example, what does it mean to you? Do you think it is something important?

Rationale: *The two questions aim to elicit from the teacher participants their understanding of critical thinking and the role they believe it plays in education.*

5. Teaching critical thinking in the S.1 class

Q5. Do you think your teaching is helping your (Secondary 1) students to develop critical thinking? Please explain.

Rationale: *The question and request aim to encourage the teacher participants to reflect on the role critical thinking plays in their Secondary 1 English language teaching. The data collected are used to triangulate what has been found in classroom observations.*

6. Assessment of critical thinking

Q6. Do you think critical thinking can be assessed through the English language subject? If yes, please give examples of how it can be done e.g. assessment tasks and criteria. If no, please explain.

Rationale: *The question and request aim to elicit from the teacher participants their views on assessing students' critical thinking, because their views on critical thinking assessment could reflect, to some extent, their understanding of critical thinking, such as whether they believe critical thinking is observable/measurable.*

7. Support needed to implement the critical thinking recommendations

Q7. Do you think appropriate support from the government or your school is given to you to help you implement the recommendations? If yes, please give examples of the support you are given. If no, please suggest the support you believe is needed.

Rationale: *The question and request aim to find out the support from the schools or education authority that the teacher participants have been given to implement the critical thinking recommendations. They aim also to find out the support that the teachers*

Appendix IV Question scheme for the target interview

believe could really help them to implement the recommendations in their classrooms.

Critical thinking in Hong Kong secondary school English language classrooms: The case of five teachers

(Mok Fung Yee)

Interview Transcripts

I. Lai Lai (School B)

1.1 Classroom Observation I
1.1.1 Pre Classroom Observation Interview I p.5
1.1.2 Post Classroom Observation Interview I p.6

1.2 Classroom Observation II
1.2.1 Pre Classroom Observation Interview II p.9
1.2.2 Post Classroom Observation Interview II p.10

1.3 Classroom Observation III
1.3.1 Pre Classroom Observation Interview III p.12
1.3.2 Post Classroom Observation Interview III p.13

1.4 Classroom Observation IV
1.4.1 Pre Classroom Observation Interview IV p.15
1.4.2 Post Classroom Observation Interview IV p.16

1.5 Classroom Observation V
1.5.1 Pre Classroom Observation Interview V P.19
1.5.2 Post Classroom Observation Interview V p.21

1.6 Classroom Observation VI
1.6.1 Pre Classroom Observation Interview VI p.38
1.6.2 Post Classroom Observation Interview VI (Target Interview) p.39

1.7 Last Debriefing Interview p.45

II. John (School B)

2.1 Classroom Observation I
2.1.1 Pre Classroom Observation Interview I p.48
2.1.2 Post Classroom Observation Interview I p.49

2.2 Classroom Observation II
2.2.1 Pre Classroom Observation Interview II p.54
2.2.2 Post Classroom Observation Interview II p.55

2.3 Classroom Observation III
2.3.1 Pre Classroom Observation Interview III p.56
2.3.2 Post Classroom Observation Interview III p.58

2.4 Classroom Observation IV
2.4.1 Pre Classroom Observation Interview IV p.63
2.4.2 Post Classroom Observation Interview IV p.64

2.5 Classroom Observation V
2.5.1 Pre Classroom Observation Interview V P.68
2.5.2 Post Classroom Observation Interview V p.70

2.6 Classroom Observation VI
2.6.1 Pre Classroom Observation Interview VI p.73
2.6.2 Post Classroom Observation Interview VI (Target Interview) p.74

2.7 Last Debriefing Interview p.87

III. Ling (School B)
3.1 Classroom Observation I
3.1.1 Pre Classroom Observation Interview I p.93
3.1.2 Post Classroom Observation Interview I p.94

3.2 Classroom Observation II
3.2.1 Pre Classroom Observation Interview II p.96
3.2.2 Post Classroom Observation Interview II p.97

3.3 Classroom Observation III
3.3.1 Pre Classroom Observation Interview III p.98
3.3.2 Post Classroom Observation Interview III p.99

3.4 Classroom Observation IV
3.4.1 Pre Classroom Observation Interview IV p.103
3.4.2 Post Classroom Observation Interview IV p.103

3.5 Classroom Observation V
3.5.1 Pre Classroom Observation Interview V P.105
3.5.2 Post Classroom Observation Interview V p.108

3.6 Target Interview (Cancellation of Classroom Observation VI) p.110

3.7 Last Debriefing Interview p.115

IV. Mei Mei (School A)
4.1 Classroom Observation I
4.1.1 Pre Classroom Observation Interview I p.118
4.1.2 Post Classroom Observation Interview I p.119

4.2 Classroom Observation II
4.2.1 Pre Classroom Observation Interview II p.122
4.2.2 Post Classroom Observation Interview II p.123

4.3 Classroom Observation III
4.3.1 Pre Classroom Observation Interview III p.127
4.3.2 Post Classroom Observation Interview III p.129

4.4 Classroom Observation IV
4.4.1 Pre Classroom Observation Interview IV p.132
4.4.2 Post Classroom Observation Interview IV p.134

4.5 Classroom Observation V
4.5.1 Pre Classroom Observation Interview V P.139
4.5.2 Post Classroom Observation Interview V (Target Interview) p.141

4.6 Last Debriefing Interview p.145

V. Fun (School A)
5.1 Classroom Observation I
5.1.1 Pre Classroom Observation Interview I p.149
5.1.2 Post Classroom Observation Interview I p.151

5.2 Classroom Observation II
5.2.1 Pre Classroom Observation Interview II p.156
5.2.2 Post Classroom Observation Interview II p.157

5.3 Classroom Observation III
5.3.1 Pre Classroom Observation Interview III p.163
5.3.2 Post Classroom Observation Interview III p.164

5.4 Classroom Observation IV
5.4.1 Pre Classroom Observation Interview IV p.166
5.4.2 Post Classroom Observation Interview IV p.168

5.5 Classroom Observation V
5.5.1 Pre Classroom Observation Interview V p.171
5.5.2 Post Classroom Observation Interview V p.173

5.6 Classroom Observation VI
5.6.1 Pre Classroom Observation Interview VI p.175
5.6.2 Post Classroom Observation Interview VI (Target Interview) p.176

5.7 Last Debriefing Interview p.180

VI. Protocol for Target Interview p.184

I. Lai Lai (School B)

As shown in Table 1 below Lai Lai and I met eight times on the dates specified. The table also shows that six classroom observations were conducted between January and March 2003. The dates of the six classroom observations and the length of all the interviews conducted, i.e. pre and post classroom observation interviews and the last debriefing interview, are also specified in the table.

Table 1 Summary of data collection for Lai Lai

Lai Lai (School B)								
Date	16 Dec 2002	13 Jan 2003	15 Jan 2003	17 Feb 2003	26 Feb 2003	4 Mar 2003	12 Mar 2003	19 Mar 2003
Events	1st meeting after exploratory study	Pr1 0.6mins	Pr2 0.9mins	Pr3 1.4mins	Pr4 2.2mins	Pr5 11mins	Pr6 1.4mins	II 13 mins
		CO1 80mins	CO2 80mins	CO3 40mins	CO4 80mins	CO5 40mins	CO6 80mins	
		Po1 17.6 mins	Po2 5 mins	Po3 6.4 mins	Po4 18 mins	Po5 70 mins	Po6 24 mins	

Key:-
Pr: Pre Classroom Observation Interview
CO: Classroom Observation
Po: Post Classroom Observation Interview
II: Last Debriefing Interview

1.1 Classroom Observation I

1.1.1 Pre Classroom Observation Interview I

R: Researcher
La: Lai Lai (School B**)**

R: What's your plan for today's lesson?

La: I am going to teach a passage today. I hope they will understand the content of the passage. Also, I am going to play a game with them. I am going to ask them some questions about the passage. The classroom will be divided into two groups and they will compete against each other. I will then ask them to complete two exercises in the coursebook. Students will have to answer the questions there. I will also teach them some vocabulary. I will explain the vocabulary to them and teach them the pronunciation of the words. I will ask them to practise reading the words. The teaching focus today is mainly on comprehending the text.

~ end of interview ~

1.1.2 Post Classroom Observation Interview I

R: Researcher
La: Lai Lai (School B)

R: Do you think you have achieved your teaching objective(s)?

La: I think after the lesson the students should be able to understand about 80-90 % of the reading text. I think, about the comprehension of the text, it should be alright. But I think some of the students were not really attentive and their participation in class was low. I was not really happy with that. I guess it's because the lights in the classroom were turned off and those students seemed to think that I could not see them clearly in the dark. But, some students were very bright in this lesson e.g. Allan. He's a very bright student even though he doesn't look like that. He's intelligent and he could manage more difficult questions. I think the students should understand the new words in the passage by now. Yes, they should be able to do it. But they might not be able to manage the pronunciation of the vocabulary because we did not have time for that in this lesson. So, I think the students might not be able to read out the words they learnt in today's lesson. Although only half of the exercise I planned to do with the students today was completed, I think they could manage to finish the exercise at home themselves. It's not difficult. So, I think, if I consider the lesson today as a whole, I would say, about 80% of its objective has been achieved.

R: Did the students read the text before the lesson?

La: Yes, they did their preparation at home before the lesson. They should have looked up the new words in the passage in the dictionary. They should have read the text once. In fact, I should have told them to complete the two exercises in the textbook too but I forgot to do so. So, they just did the activity before the passage. But, the students still could manage the comprehension exercise questions. I think most of them had read the passage before coming to class. They seemed to be able to understand it.

R: Can you tell me more about the game that you played with the students in class? Why playing games with them in the lesson?

La: Students are more motivated when they are participating in a game. Having a game is much better than just asking the whole class some questions. But, some lazy students who sleep in class could benefit from this format because students compete in two big groups and these lazy students could still win the game even if they do not participate in it. But there is nothing I could do. Anyway, it is a way to motivate the students even though I know there are holes in it

R: I've noticed that you had asked your students different types of questions in the lesson, right? Some of them are kind of open-ended. Do you always ask them open ended questions in the English lessons?

La: I was pleased because the students were more ready to answer some open-ended questions in class today. They got the courage to try some 'less controlled' questions. I did ask the students these types of questions before but today was more 'intensive'.

A lot of these questions were asked in today's lesson. There might be only one or two open-ended questions in each lesson but this time we got the opportunity to talk about things like values and different perspectives of people. So, there were more open-ended questions in this lesson and I was glad they were willing to try to answer them. I was pleased. In fact, the two boys at the corner at the back were very weak. They should be among the lowest in English in the form. There's not much that they can do with English especially in writing, but I think they could quite follow the lesson. They were willing to participate today. They were very confident today when they answered my questions. They were not shy. And the girl thought that the hair clip should be useful to Della after her hair grew longer. I think she was very bright and positive.

R: Okay, one last question, how do you feel about the students of your class?

La: The class is a regular class with students of mixed abilities. There you could find the best and almost the worst students in the form in this class. So, you see there is a big range of abilities of students. Most of the students are active. But about 6 to 7 of them are very lazy e.g. those I called on them a lot during the lesson today and the four students sitting in front of you. In terms of their English proficiency, I would say they are not too bad. Usually they respond in class. I guess it's because they are still F.1 students and I am not surprised that they perform in this way. They are very different from my F.5 students. Everyday I have to struggle with my F.5 students. You know what I told them today. I said even a teacher with the greatest patience would be killed by you. But for F.1 students you could have a happy lesson with them like the one we had today. I think, on the whole, the students in this class are good. Most of the time they could control themselves even though from time to time they might voice their concern e.g. over marks they got for the game. They would not get too far. Their response in class is generally good. But sometimes, the class next to us is very noisy and they are distracted. You might have noticed during classroom observation today that the students were less attentive during the second period. You might have heard a lot of noise like people talking softly during the period but the noise was actually from the class next to us. Some of my students then talked to each other and they thought that I would not notice. But if the class next to us is very quiet, they will behave better. So, on the whole, these students could still be changed and shaped.

R: Do you care about their exam results?

La: They are very concerned about their results. Yes, they are, very much. Only some of them are very weak e.g. Dickson who sits close to the window. He's very lazy and his foundation is poor. I think he can follow the lessons and sometimes he could even teach other students. After the first term exam results were released, a lot of them came to me to ask me their positions in class. But, according to the interesting school policy here we can't tell our students their positions either in the class or the form as a whole. The justification for the policy is that the school does not want to disappoint the students who are not doing well in the exam. Only the names of the top 5 students will be released. When my students came to see me, I could not tell them their positions because I had to follow and be responsible to the school policy. Some of my students asked me why I could not tell them, I did not really know how to answer. I myself did not understand why it could not be done too. In my opinion, it's good

that a student cares about his or her exam results and has some expectation regarding their studies. If they are concerned about what they get in the exam, they would work hard. A lot of my students came to me for their positions in class and pushed me for an explanation why the results could not be released. I did not know how to respond to them because I personally believe that they should be told the information. They should know the results even if they are not good. They have to learn to face the reality. If you are the weakest in the class, you have to accept it and work harder. We can't only tell our students good news. For those weaker students, they got no idea where they are in the class or form. They might not try to improve themselves. So, I think they are concerned about their exam results. They are more confident than the students in the remedial class. When they answer my questions they are confident that their answers are correct. I enjoy teaching them.

R: Right. Thank you.

~ end of interview ~

1.2 Classroom Observation II

1.2.1 Pre Classroom Observation Interview II

R: Researcher
La: Lai Lai (School B**)**

R: What's your plan for today's lesson?

La: I will first revise with my students the pronunciation of the words they learnt from passage we talked about (yesterday). I have finished teaching the students everything about the passage and they should understand it. I will then teach my students countable and uncountable nouns today and some quantifiers also e.g. phrases like a bag of, a little of. I will bring to the class some realia and let them describe them. I will first teach them what they are and tell them how to describe them with quantifiers. I might then ask them to complete some exercises in the workbook or I might give them a handout to work on. But, I am not sure I will have enough time to make copies of the handout.

~ end of interview ~

1.2.2 Post Classroom Observation Interview II

R: Researcher
La: Lai Lai (School B)

R: Do you think you have achieved your teaching objective(s)?

La: The overall performance of the students in today's lesson is not as good as that of the lesson we had yesterday.

R: Why?

La: Some of the students were not attentive at all even at the very beginning of the lesson. They believed that they could manage the pronunciation of the vocabulary and thus they were not paying attention at all. But I knew they were not. They could not really pronounce the words. So, I spent some time reading the words with them and I did find in today's lesson that some of the students could not manage the pronunciation of the new words. Their pronunciation was not accurate. Later on I picked individual students to read out the words to me. In fact, I was trying to give some warning to those who were not attentive or taking their work seriously. Students' participation and involvement in the first period were low. The situation only improved when the game was played, i.e. two groups competing with each other reading out the new words in the passage. Regarding the teaching of quantifiers, I think the students were brilliant. Yes, they were. They were very concerned about the marks they got for their groups e.g. they kept complaining about the marks they got. Sometimes I was confused too e.g. I was not sure if a mark had been rewarded for an answer given, and thus some trouble was caused, which might have distracted the students in some way. I think I have to think about the format of the competition and some changes might be needed. I think even the timing of the lesson today was not so good. I think it was not well organized.

R: Why?

La: I think I did not organize the part of teaching on quantifiers very well. I should have done better, I believe. I think the lesson today was not well structured. The students seemed to be able to manage the part on quantifiers very quickly. I did not really have to teach them. And, I forgot to remind them to bring their grammar books back to school today and thus they could not do some class work in the lesson for consolidation. I think it would be better to have some consolidation. You can then see the learning outcome of students. I think for today only those who put up their hands to answer questions could really manage the teaching topic. But for those who did not put up their hands to answer questions, I don't think they can manage it. Compared with the lessons we had yesterday and the day before the performance of the students today was not so good. That's how I felt.

R: Will there be any follow up on the teaching topic, i.e. quantifiers again?

La: Yes, sure because I have not taught my remedial students quantifiers. I think I might ask each student to bring something to the lesson and I might ask them to talk about it. But, it might be too difficult, right? I am not sure what they will bring.

R: So, what about the assignment? You've asked your students to draw and describe briefly a picture using a quantifier e.g. a bunch of bananas. What objectives do you want to achieve through the assignment?

La: The assignment actually serves different purposes. First of all, I can put the pictures up to consolidate what the students have learnt. It would be encouraging to the students because their pictures might be displayed in the classroom. I might also collect the pictures and use them in my teaching in the future say for example I might show my students the pictures as an introduction. Then I would move on to show the class some realia. I think it would be fun too. I was thinking about showing my students some pictures when I was preparing for today's lesson. But I did not have enough time to find them or download some from the Internet. I think it might be better for me to show my students some pictures before we play the game. I think the flow of the teaching would be better. I think the activity might help the students to develop their potentials. You know, a student who is weak in English might draw very well. It is also a change from writing. They would be happy if their work is being displayed and if they can find examples of quantifiers everywhere in their classroom. They could always revise what they have learnt. And in some way, I may use their work in my teaching next time. So, I think this teaching activity is worthwhile doing.

R: Guess it would be good if you ask your students to sign on their pictures.

La: Yes, yes, but I forgot to tell them to do so.

R: That's alright. Okay. Thank you.

~ end of interview ~

1.3 Classroom Observation III

1.3.1 Pre Classroom Observation Interview III

R: Researcher
La: Lai Lai (School B**)**

R: What's your plan for today's lesson?

La: Today I am going to teach my students something about writing composition. I have finished teaching a unit in the book. I will ask them to think about a story. I will help them to think about the setting, character and plot of the story. If we have enough time, I might ask a student to read out a model composition for the class. I will then ask them some questions about the structure and setting of the story. I hope to draw their attention to all these things when they write their own stories. But it all depends on the time we have. We will do it if we have enough time. If not we will just focus on writing the outlines for the stories. The composition task is a story writing task. According to the task each student is required to buy his/her friend a present that his/her friend has always wanted. My students will have to think about the plot of the story e.g. whether or not it is easy to buy the present. Today's lesson is for brainstorming only. I will give them some composition paper for them to work on their outlines at home. I might ask them to hand in their work to me later. They will start writing the story in the next lesson.

~ end of interview ~

1.3.2 Post Classroom Observation Interview III

R: Researcher
La: Lai Lai (School B)

R: Do you think you have achieved your teaching objective(s)?

La: I am not sure to what extent the objective of the lesson has been achieved. But most students seemed to be able to follow the lesson. I was aware that some students were not paying attention at all. There was quite a lot of noise outside the classroom and some students were distracted especially during the later part of the lesson. So you might have been aware that I kept calling out the names of some students who were misbehaving in class. I wanted them to know that I was aware of what they were doing. For the part on brainstorming for the writing task, I was glad when a student said that he would buy his teacher {the boy said he would buy his English language teacher, i.e. Lai Lai, a microphone during the lesson because she then would not have to speak loudly} a microphone. He was very concerned about his teachers, which is good, I think. I also helped the students to think about the presents they suggested e.g. whether or not they could afford them and to think about whether or not the story they were writing was developing logically. These are important things to consider when writing the story. But we did not have time to talk about how they would get the presents. I planned to use some time to talk about how to make that part more interesting. I think they should have some ideas of how to set their stories and create their own characters now. At first, they did not know that they were one of the characters in the story. To me, it's important for students to know their relationship with what they are writing e.g. is he or she a character in the story or just a story-teller. I think they need to bear in mind that they are one of the characters in the story. I have made these two things clear to them in today's lesson, which was something important that I have achieved. But, I am not sure about the outcome yet because we did only part of the preparation today.

R: Okay, so, would like to hear how you think about the parents in Hong Kong, in general, or the parents of the students of this class. Are they supportive or?

La: The parents of this class are quite concerned about their children but the academic support that they give their children is not enough. I think only a few students e.g. Patrick, could get some good academic support from their families and thus their English proficiency is comparatively higher. Patrick's mother supervises closely his homework and she began cultivating in him some good attitudes since he was young.

R: Any examples?

La: His mother reads with him and she teaches him to write. His compositions, free writing and even weekly journals are quite good. I think his mother usually reads through his work before he hands it in. His work is always logical and sensible. I think education that a child receives at home is very important. But, on the whole, the academic support that my students get from their families is not adequate. I think the students in this class are still young. They are in F.1 so they still get some attention from their parents. But there are one or two students who can hardly control themselves and their parents lose control over them too. On the whole, the students in

this school are not receiving enough academic support from their families. I think their supervision is not adequate too.

R: Any weird, interesting or unreasonable demands from parents so far especially on the parents' day?

La: One or two parents told us that they appreciated what we had done for our students e.g. the vocabulary book we developed for them. One of them said the vocabulary book was comprehensive. But I think they were parents of high quality. I used to give my students some simple reading comprehension exercises to do and I was told that some parents liked those exercises too. The exercises are from a book published in China. Some parents liked those exercises because they thought they were easy to manage and they would help students to improve their reading ability gradually. But then I stopped making copies of the exercises because of the copyright problem. The school told us not to violate any rules concerning photocopying. But the book itself is very good. The problem is that we can't get the copyright from the publisher and the book cannot be found in the bookshops here in Hong Kong. I guess we might have to go back to China to place the order. I don't really know how to do it and I got no connections. I bought the book when I was visiting one of the book cities in China. The book was cheap and it contains 100 reading passages. The comprehension questions are mostly multiple choices questions. There are some filling in the blanks questions too. Explanations of the difficult words in the passage are given too. It's ready made and students can finish the exercise without looking up words in the dictionary. It's not difficult for students to complete the exercises and it's easy for the teacher to check the answers too. But, it's the problem of copyright that prevented me from using the book again. If I could help my students to buy the book, I would have done so because it would then save a lot of trouble e.g. making copies of the book. But there is also a problem, i.e. answers of the exercises are given at the end of the book. The students in our school are not really self-disciplined and they would just copy the answers given. So, there would still be a problem even if we purchased the book for our students. But, I think to the students of high quality it would not be a problem. They would first do the exercises. Then check the answers and think about the questions that they are not sure. But our students would never do that. They would just copy the answers. We are always playing a game with our students in which we are the cops chasing after the thief. I think that is why we have to make copies for our students most of the time. But we are also worried because we don't know if that violates any rules concerning photocopy. We are in a dilemma.

~ end of interview ~

1.4 Classroom Observation IV

1.4.1 Pre Classroom Observation Interview IV

R: Researcher
La: Lai Lai (School B**)**

R: What's your plan for today's lesson?

La: We will have some listening practice today. We have finished the unit about Christmas. The students have learnt everything in the unit and we have done what is required. The listening practice is, kind of, consolidation of what the students they have learnt e.g. vocabulary, and it is also an opportunity for them to polish their listening skills. I hope we can finish the exercises from A to F. But I don't know if we can finish all of the exercises. But it should be okay because they are not very difficult. I hope we can play a game if they get the chance to do the last exercise. It is about the difference between the sounds 'd' and 't'. The students will practise reading some words. I might ask a student to read out a word and ask the rest of the class to tell me if the word contains the 'd' or 'r' sound.

R: You are really busy this week, right?

La: Yes, this week we are preparing for the mid term exam. We call the uniformed test the mid term exam. We are trying to give back the F.5 students all the work they have handed in e.g. compositions and past exam papers. So, we are really busy and tense now.

~ end of interview ~

1.4.2 Post Classroom Observation Interview IV

R: Researcher
La: Lai Lai (School B)

R: Do you think you have achieved your teaching objective(s)?

La: I think the students still cannot concentrate on their studies even though the Chinese New Year holiday ended more than a week ago. For so many times they have forgotten to bring what they need to the class. Although I have been telling them very clearly what to bring to the class, some students still forgot to bring their books. I always fill in the reminder on the blackboard to remind them what to bring to the lessons. But many students are not paying attention to me and some students just don't bother to copy it down in their school handbooks. That's why just now I had to ask each student who forgot to bring the listening book to explain to me why they did not fill in their student handbooks. Some of them have not yet come. Some are now receiving some kind of help with their homework and others are kept by their teachers for other reasons. I think one or two might have gone home and I will have to follow up on them later. To be honest, I did expect that some students would forget about their books but I never thought it would be such a great number, twelve of them. In fact, during the lesson yesterday I reminded them more than once to bring their listening books to school today. I kept saying things like please remember to bring your listening book to school. I even reminded them the colour of the book, i.e. the orange one. It's because we do not have listening lessons very often and I think some students do not pack their school bags everyday. They just leave several English books in their school bags e.g. the textbook, Longman Express. So, they might not have the book they need if they do not listen to the instruction of the teacher clearly. Although I knew that there would be some students who would forget to bring the book, there were just too many this time. So, I told the students during the lesson several times that I was not pleased with what they did. I think it's important to tell them my feelings. There were so many students who did not have the book with them today and they were not attentive at all. Two students in the front kept talking to each other. They seemed to be at lost because they did not have the book with them. So, even when I showed them transparencies and whatsoever, they just could not follow. So, it's really important for students to bring to the class the book they need. Some students even slept during the lesson. I guess it's because the classroom was quite dark today. Once I was aware of the problem I switched on more lights especially those in the middle. It is understandable that some students would fall asleep in a classroom with dim light. I personally don't think the lesson was boring because it is the way how listening practice is done. What could I do to make the lesson more exciting and fun? What I am doing is required by the curriculum. I think students need to concentrate more on their work, if not, problems will be found e.g. sleeping and reading comic books during the lesson. Just now I found that a student was reading a comic book in the lesson and scolded him because of this. His performance in class has been declining after he was assigned the seat near the hallway. He seemed to believe that his misbehavior was not easily spotted by the teacher when he sat there. So, I have already told the other class teacher that a new seating arrangement would soon be needed. Next week he will be assigned a new seat, maybe somewhere in the front. The English standard of this boy is really low. But he was very eager to learn at the beginning of the school year. His writing skill is poor too and so is his foundation.

He always thinks that the teacher would not notice him in class. You know, students are funny. They think that you can't see them when they can't see you. So, he always reads comic books during the lesson. I scolded them just now. Mainly the students in the front were more attentive today. Mark and Sunny are always good learners. They are my great fans. Mark was wonderful and just now he offered to help me to prepare a Powerpoint presentation on food. When I asked him how he could pass his work to me, he said he would save his work in a disk and give it to me. He was so good. He is really interested in learning English. He likes to be close to the teacher. He is willing to offer you help. His attitude is good. He is really good, I think. He failed in the running dictation because his partner did not cooperate with him. His partner did not like him and so he slowed himself down during the dictation. Even when he got to Mark, he just told him that he had forgotten everything he had read. He wanted Mark to get zero in the dictation and he did not mind having zero too. When I got to know what he had done, I told him that he would get zero for the dictation. But, for Mark, I gave him another chance to try again. This time I assigned someone to read out the passage to Mark and he got 95 marks. I told the boy that he would not get what he wanted. This boy was really mean. But Mark was wonderful. I did not prepare any paper for Mark for the re-dictation. But you know what, he came; well prepared, with a sheet of paper with the name of the school and everything typed on it. I was really impressed. He studied the book before the re-dictation and he even thought about the paper he needed. He was so thoughtful. Not many students are like him these days. He was taking his studies seriously. I praised him for what he had done. I think he has been interested in the language since he was very young. So I think it is important that students' interests are aroused in primary schools. It would be a lot easier for us. But if students are bad when they get into a secondary school, we will then face a lot of problems. So, I think I was quite busy during the lesson today trying to stop the misbehavior of students e.g. to stop them from reading comic books and so on. It was really tiring. I think the objective has been achieved for some students, about 15 of them. They were able to follow the lesson and got the answers. I think that about 10 to 20 students were not learning anything during the lesson. I am sure the 12 students who forgot to bring their books were only daydreaming during the lesson. I think there were 1 to 2 students at the back who were not doing anything at all. I think only half, or even less than half of the objective for today's lesson, have been achieved. But, I think on the whole students are not performing well in listening lessons. I don't know if it is because they have to listen very carefully during the practice and the communication is mostly one way. There isn't someone real to perform in front of them, which would be less exciting and interesting to them. I think every time when I have listening practice with my students, this class or the remedial class, I find that students can hardly concentrate on their work. Even if the materials are not difficult at all, they still find it difficult to concentrate on their work. I just don't know what I can do. I think they need to practise their listening skills. They need to listen for themselves. I try to teach them what to pay attention to or focus on before playing the CD. I think I am doing all that can be done. But the effectiveness of listening practice is not promising. What do you think? Any opinions?

R: Right. I remember that you actually have brought up this topic more than once. Although I agree with you in many ways e.g. students need this kind of practice, I do not have any answers for you. I guess it would be helpful if you try talking to your students and find out more about their thinking and perception of the language.

[The interview was stopped because some students wanted to talk to Lai Lai. They were being punished and they were standing in the hallway outside the staff common room during the interview. The interruption led to the topic, i.e. handling students' problems, below.]

R: I guess it's not easy to handle students' problems.

La: It's never easy to work as a teacher as you have to handle a lot of problems of your students, inside or outside the classroom e.g. students who misbehave in your lesson or students of your class who misbehave in the lessons of other subjects. As a class teacher you are like the parent of your students. You have to handle the problem once you got the complaint from other teachers. In many cases, you will have to defense and fight for your students because you are their class teacher.

R: Right. Last question, can you tell me how you understand, teaching, learning and education? How do you understand all these terms?

La: In terms of teaching. I think there are different types of teaching e.g. teaching the knowledge of a particular subject and moral education. For teaching a particular subject, what the teacher has to do is to arouse the interest of students in learning the subject. The teacher needs to possess some professional knowledge and is able to do well in that particular area. The teacher should be able to achieve his or her teaching objectives through appropriate methods. Apart from teaching students academic knowledge, I think it is more important, I guess I am talking about education now, to give students appropriate moral education e.g. things like values and judgment, and right attitudes. For learning, I think you need to take initiative when you learn. You can never learn well if you need to be forced to learn. You need an enquiring mind too and to be ready to ask questions. You are ready to think about things that you are not sure and are ready to find out more about it. You need motivation and this type of attitude when you learn. You need to be persistent too. If you want to learn more about something, you need to be persistent and I think this learning strategy is important. I think education is a huge topic and it is kind of an umbrella term. It covers a lot of things e.g. moral education that I talked about just now. I think education contains an affective element. It's about the attitude of a person throughout his or her life. Through education some values will be cultivated in students. Those values would help them to establish their perceptions of the things around them, which would help them to decide what they will do the rest of their life. Apart from equipping them with the academic knowledge they need, I think the most important thing about education is that it helps students to distinguish between the right and the wrong and to be able to think and be conscientious. Ideally, their integrity would develop and they would become virtuous. They would be willing to contribute to the society. Education is something big and it includes also interpersonal relationship e.g. the relationship between the teacher and student or the relationship among students themselves. The relationship would long remain in the heart of a student and might have big influence on his or her life. I would say, to me, teaching is something comparatively lower order while education is higher order and it covers a lot of things like all the things that I just talked about.

~ end of interview ~

1.5 Classroom Observation V

1.5.1 Pre Classroom Observation Interview V

R: Researcher
La: Lai Lai (School B**)**

R: What's your plan for today's lesson?

La: As usual, we will begin the lesson with a free talk presentation. I will then spell some words with them. I told them to spell some words yesterday. In fact, I tell my students to spell some words every day because the students in this school are really weak in spelling. I need to push them a bit. But, I don't know if they have got their revision books with them. I forgot to remind them to bring the books yesterday. I required them to use an exercise book as revision book. From time to time the students are required to dictate some words e.g. ten words or so. The words are mainly from the coursebook. At first, I did not require everyone to write down the words but some of them did not take their work seriously e.g. they do not study but try their luck. Then I required them to write down the new words in their revision books. They swap their books and mark the work of their classmates. They will then have to tell me the result of their dictation. If I ask them to dictate 15 words, the passing mark for the dictation might be 13 or 12. It's relatively high. But I want them to take their work seriously. The passing mark will not be 7 out of 15. I will not tell them what the passing mark is beforehand. Some of them are really naughty and they ask me what the passing mark is before the dictation. I will not tell them. In fact, I look around during the dictation to see how well they are doing. I will then decide on the passing mark based on the performance of the majority of the class. If I find that most of the students are doing very well, I will raise the passing mark a bit, but I might lower the passing mark if I find that they are not doing well. Also, I will have a short revision on yes/no questions with them and I will then move on to teach them wh questions today. We will first revise the different forms of yes/no questions e.g. using is/am/are to form a certain type of questions and do/did/does for another. I will teach them how to form 'wh' questions. I think some of them have learnt it before. So what I will do depends on how much they know about 'wh' questions. If I think most of them do not really know much about the topic, I will first explain to them how different question words are used. I will then draw their attention to the word order of questions. I will explain to them that they might use words like do/did/does when forming 'wh' questions. I will move from the revision on yes/no questions to the formation of wh questions. The last activity will be a game. I am not sure if they can manage it. But we have been playing this game for some time but the rule for the game is different this time, i.e. they are required to make a question but not a sentence with the word given. I will show them some cue cards. I bought this set of cards from Canada [Lai Lai showed me the set of cards.] but you can also get it in Hong Kong. On each card there is a word and they will have to ask a question with the work given. I am not sure if they can handle the game. They love this game. They take turns to make sentences with the word given. I always divide the class into two groups so that they can compete against each other. Marks will be given to the group if its group member can make a sentence correctly with the word given. Usually Group A wins because they are better than Group B. The students of Group A are more proactive. Once in a while Group B wins and they would be very happy. I don't know if they

can manage the game this time. But I have been trying to make questions based on the words given on the cards. Any question will do as long as it is sensible.

[Lai Lai and I played the game after the interview and we discussed the details of the marking scheme for the game.]

~ end of interview ~

1.5.2 Post Classroom Observation Interview V

[Unlike other interviews this interview was conducted in the conference room next to the Principal's office. The room provided me and Lai Lai a lot of privacy during the interview. Most teacher interviews were conducted in the staff common room or the covered playground in School B.]

R: Researcher
La: Lai Lai (School B)

R: Do you think you have achieved your teaching objective(s)?

La: I think the lesson today went kind of smoothly. I think the objective set has been achieved. But, I think I was going too fast. After I had taught them those wh words, I should have demonstrated to the students how to form questions with the words paying special attention to the word order. I was going too fast during the lesson. I wanted to play the game with them and thus this important part was missed out. I think I need to do it tomorrow. But I am not sure, some students seemed to be able to manage wh questions quite well. But, I still think it would be better if I do the demonstration. In terms of the design of the lesson, I first talked about yes/no questions today using it to lead into wh questions. I think this sequence helps students to manage the language pattern better. Students always have problems using the words like verb to be and do, did and does. I think it would be appropriate to talk about these things before introducing wh questions. But, I think I have skipped a very important step For the game, I think the students enjoyed the game very much and they had much fun. Their performance was better than what I expected. Some of the students were very smart and produced questions that are often found in the lesson e.g. how do you spell….? The learning atmosphere was okay. But there are always a few students who are not participating in any teaching activities. That's why I then required students in each group to take turns to form questions. I noticed that some students were more willing to participate in class but some were just not trying. The new arrangement made sure that everyone was given the chance to make questions using the word given on the cue card. It helped raise the participation of students. Group B was the winner today. To them, it was a great encouragement. I think they will be more eager to participate in the game tomorrow because they had lost for so many times in the past. They got only 1 mark more than Group A today. They were very pleased. I think there were only a few students who were not behaving well in today's lesson and even the three boys at the back were behaving well today. I guess it's because of the game. The game was pretty exciting. Comparing today's lesson with the last lesson you observed, i.e. the listening lesson, I think, on the whole, this lesson is better.

R: Okay, thank you. Let's move on to the assigned topics then. Could you please tell me how you understand English language teaching and learning?

La: English is our second language. Therefore I think it's important to teach our students grammar of English. I think, as you said, we need to teach them how to think. I think when you read the composition of a student you will get to know his or her thinking. I think the most difficult thing about marking a composition is that you have to correct their thinking. Through the language e.g. English, a teacher can get to know

how a student thinks e.g. their organizing skills and the way he or she presents his or her ideas. I think, yes, as you said, thinking is an important element in English language teaching (I did not talk about thinking or English language teaching at all in the interview. The fact that Lai Lai participated in the preliminary study could explain what she said here). We need to teach our students some grammar because we are all second language learners. We are different from those native speakers. They can just talk about things that they see. Grammar is something you must teach your students. It is a must. I think some drills e.g. mechanical drills, might be needed too especially at the early stage of learning. Mechanical drills are important. The teacher has to help those more advanced learners to see how the language is used in everyday life. If you can show students that English is something important to them, they would be more motivated to learn. So to students, English would not be just a subject in the school. As an English language teacher, I always want my students to understand that English is actually a tool to them. It is not just a subject. English can lead them to anywhere they want e.g. it can help them to study other subjects. It is something useful to them. I always tell my students that they might not be able to apply what they have learnt in other subjects e.g. Chemistry and Chinese History. But the language subjects are different. Everyday you communicate with other people either in Chinese or English e.g. writing a note. I hope my students would understand and agree with me that English is a tool. And, to them, English is very important e.g. for their future studies or communication with others. It's a tool, not just a subject. For English language learning, I think if you want to learn English well you need to read more, listen to it more and speak the language more. Also, you need to be proactive when you learn a language. As you know we are a CMI school. If students are not motivated to learn and they just reply on what the English language teacher teaches them in the lesson, it will never be adequate. They can learn very little from the lesson e.g. limited vocabulary. Tell me how many new words the student can learn from their coursebook. Also, the new words introduced in the coursebook are of limited variety. What they can learn from the coursebook might not be in any way related to their life. So, I think if you want to learn English, you need to put in a lot of time and patience. You should not be afraid of failure and you have to understand that it always takes quite some time before you can see your own improvement. You need to expose yourself to the language. You need to grasp every opportunity you can to learn e.g. reading English newspapers, magazines or books. These are recommendations for people who want to learn a language. These recommendations are very important. What students learn in the lessons is never enough especially in CMI schools. For EMI schools students can learn more and different types of English vocabulary from different subjects. Their students are better in that sense. But, for us, very traditional CMI schools, if our students are not taking initiative, they are not trying to learn the language outside the classroom, I would say, they will not learn the language well. They could only learn very little from the lessons. Really. Very little. Tell me, how many things can you learn in a school year? How many compositions do you teach your students in one school year? There are not many. If they are not willing to put in time and effort to learn the language outside class time, I think their learning will not be effective. According to my experience, I have learnt a lot from reading English papers after class.

R: Have you shared your view with your students, I mean, in terms of English language learning?

La: I think that's very difficult. Although we keep telling them this, we don't know whether or not they will bear this in mind. I think it depends on the way how they look at life, i.e. whether they are focusing on the present or planning their life for the future. I told my F.1 students that English was very important on the first day that we met in July. I told them that their English results determined whether or not they could get into universities. I told them also that if they failed the English subject in HKCEE they would not be promoted to F.6. You would say I was very being practical. Ideally, I could have said something like you learn to gain more knowledge but I think students of this level could not understand. To me, that's very high sounding. I think you need to help them to see how English is important to them; their life and studies. I made it very clear to them that English was a very important subject and there wasn't any shortcut for learning the language. I told them that they needed to put in a lot of effort for a very long time before they could see any improvement. They must be willing to work hard e.g. looking up words in the dictionary. Therefore, I always force them to look up words that they don't know in the dictionary. I told them that I could always tell them in a second the meaning of the word that they did not know. But, why can I explain the meaning of the word to them? It's because I looked up the word in the dictionary before. But, I know it is not very likely that student will do what you tell them. Students nowadays do not like hard work. My son is a good example. He does not like looking up words in the dictionary. But, I insist that he has to find out the meaning of new words in the dictionary. He can only ask me for help if he has already looked up the word in the dictionary and he is still not sure about the meaning of it. I also insist that students should have different kinds of exposure to English e.g. I even require my F.1 students to read English papers. Everyday they have to complete some newspaper cutting homework. Remedial students are only required to hand in their work three times a week. Last time I told them to translate some phrases or sentences in the new items that they selected into Chinese. It's a bit more difficult but they could choose the sentences that they hoped to work on themselves. When I marked their work in the past, I found that some students still did not understand the news item even after they had looked up all the new words in it. So, this time I just wanted to see if they could translate a sentence logically themselves.

R: Are all the newspaper cutting tasks the same?

La: No, from time to time I make changes to the tasks. Later on, I might require them to write a summary of the selected news item. I hope to move from the easier task to the more demanding one.

R: So the students have to complete different types of homework for the English subject?

La: Yes, yes.

LA: Say like the comparatively more mechanical exercises that are found in the workbook and some assignments that aim to increase the exposure of the students to the language such as reading English papers, completing different types of tasks, projects and free-writing. Yes, free writing, can you tell me more about it is done in the school?

La: The writing topics are changed all the time. Sometimes I require them to write about interesting things that I have found. For example, there is a unit in the coursebook that is about Christmas. We sang some Christmas carols in the lesson. I then encouraged them to write their own lyrics for the song, We Wish You Are Merry Christmas. Some of their work was really funny and good. I also invited them to present their work in class, i.e. singing the song to the whole class. They worked in groups of three or four to produce their own lyrics. After they sang the song, the rest of the class voted for the best lyrics e.g. lyrics that are most meaningful, most interesting and matching the melody most. Then the students were required to work on another song at home. Once I asked my students to write a simple poem for free-writing. I sometimes ask them to write about different festivals e.g. the Mid Autumn Festival and Chinese New Year. So, students are usually allowed to write freely about something that they have done recently. For example, I told them to write about their feedback to the running dictation we had and the oral presentation. Free-writing is like essay writing.

R: How do you assess free writing?

La: Usually, I correct those mistakes that are really obvious. I do not mark their free-writing the way I mark their composition. I correct fewer mistakes and I mark only those very obvious ones. I mainly respond to their work. For example, I will answer the question they ask me. It's like what we do for weekly journals. Sometimes I share with them my opinions on the things that they talk about. I am trying to show them a model. If a student makes a lot of mistake in his or her work, he or she might not be able to benefit from your correction. It might be better for me to write something for them to read. But it all depends on which student I am responding to. Free writing is a way for the teacher to collect the opinions of the students but it is done in English. But some students do write their weekly journals in English too. They are brilliant. They choose to use English themselves. I never do force them. To me, it's okay for them to use either Chinese or English to write their weekly journals. I think it is important for students to be interested in the language before they learn it. I think, compared to other subjects, English is not something easy to learn and you might not see any result over a short period of time. For other subjects say like Chinese History, if you study hard for one night, you might be able to answer one or two questions in the exam. But for the English language subject, even if you complete a whole reading comprehension exercise book, it's very likely that the questions in the book are not found in the exam paper. Therefore students usually give up easily because they cannot see the outcome of their learning. So, as a teacher, you have to encourage your students all the time hoping that they will not give up so easily. You have to remind them also that it takes longer time to see the result. There isn't any shortcut for English language learning. It takes time for them to see the result. But only good students will listen to you. Most students will not follow your advice. In my class there are only a few students who listen to me.

R: Right, right. Okay, let's move on to the assigned topic for this interview. What do you think are the joy and difficulty of secondary school English language teachers in Hong Kong?

La: It's getting more and more difficult to be a secondary school English language teacher these days. It's really difficult in the present context e.g. the society. I think

there are many people in society who are not happy with the English language standard of students. They blame the teachers. But I think they are trying to simplify the reason behind the decline of the standard. They simply think that English language teachers now are not good. And their teaching is no good too. But I think they do not know much about teaching and even the broader contexts e.g. the attitude of people, the school curriculum etc. They don't know much about all these things. Everyone, including the Education Department, those QAI [Quality Assurance Inspection] people, people from the business sector, all seem to believe that the teacher is the one to blame. At the same time, we are facing a lot of reforms. Also, I think English language teachers face even more problems in a CMI school. I think we can barely survive in the present context. It's very, very hard to survive. I think the effort that the English language teachers in our schools put in their work is no less than that of the teachers of other subjects. I think we actually put in more effort. For example, the preparation we do for our lessons and the teaching aids that we prepare are really good. A lot of the colleagues in our English panel are very good too. We are not less capable when compared to the teachers of other subjects. But our teaching effectiveness is not high

R: What do you mean by teaching effectiveness?

La: I mean, exam results. The teaching effectiveness is low in terms of student exam results, for both school and public exams. And the learning atmosphere during the lesson might not be too good because to our students English is their second language. Some students really do not try to listen to the teacher during the lesson. They start to sleep even before you open your mouth to talk like my F.5 students. I don't think it's because my lesson is boring. I don't even get the chance to talk. Three of them were already sleeping on the desk even before I opened my mouth. So, why? Is it because the way I look? They are bored when they look at me? I think some students are like that. I once asked my F.1 class how many of them were from primary schools that used English as the medium of instruction in English lessons. Only half of them came from schools that used English as their medium of instruction for English classes. But, you know what, they are really brighter students in the class e.g. Pearl, Parko and Polly. They are just brighter. They got better writing and listening skills. But the training that students receive in primary schools could be very different. Can be very different, I can tell you. Some students have never written any composition when they come to our school. Some students have never tried unseen dictation before. Even my son, who is now studying P.4, has to do unseen dictation in his school. A girl in my class failed in her first unseen dictation here and she was really heart broken. Her mother rang me and told me that her girl had never had unseen dictation before. But the girl improved a lot in the second unseen dictation. The students in our school are generally passive towards English learning. Some of them really hate the subject. They are hostile to the language.

R: But, why?

La: They really think that they know nothing about it and they could never manage it. It is something very difficult for them to learn. They just want to be left alone. Some of them keep saying to me that their standard of English is terrible e.g. standard of a P.3 school kid and they can never manage it. They just beg me to leave them alone. Others make similar requests. Some determined to give up on English when they were

in primary schools. I think it's really hard to teach students English now. It seems that we are getting more resources e.g. computers. It's good say like we have some teaching assistants to help us now. It's good to the teacher.

R: What are the main duties of those teaching assistants?

La: Our teaching assistants are quite brilliant and she could help us with a lot of things. Sometimes she helps us to prepare worksheets for students. At least, she could help us to do the typing. She sometimes helps me to search for information. When I was developing the vocabulary booklet, she helped me to do the editing. It was very time consuming. Sometimes she helps us with very simple marking, the simple stuff only. Our teaching assistant is quite good and she knows how to prepare those Powerpoint slides. She studied translation at university. So, she can help us a lot.

R: How many teaching assistants are there in the school?

La: In the past we had a teaching assistant specifically for the English panel but now all the teaching assistants are shared by the teachers of different subjects. Now we have three teaching assistants and we share all three of them. But, we usually go for the one we are used to work with. Her English is the best among the three and the English standard of the other two is not good at all. So, she is also the busiest one. She is not just good in English. She, on the whole, is very capable. So, she should be the busiest teaching assistant in the school.

R: What about the teaching assistants in the school? Do they have any teaching duties?

La: They don't really have to teach but sometimes they help in special rooms like MMLC (Multimedia Language Learning Centre). They also help in the preparation rooms when we have oral exams with F.5 students. They help to control the flow of students. It's good that we seem to have more resources now. The coursebooks we find on the market now are more ready made and they contain a lot of things. To teachers, they are more convenient to be used. For example, in the past we had to prepare our own passages for unseen dictation but now these passages are also given in the teacher's book. You now can just use the ones given in the book and you do not have to prepare them yourself, which would take you lot of time and effort. In fact, I would say, we now have more resources in terms of teaching. But, these resources cannot really help solve the problems we face e.g. the number of students in one class. There are too many students in one class now. I think even the number of teaching periods for English language teachers is also a problem. I think the teaching periods of language teachers should be fewer. It's because they need to do a lot of marking. The type of marking we do is more difficult. I think if each teacher has to teach say like 30 periods each cycle, the workload of the music teacher would be very different from that of an English language teacher. For music teachers they don't really have to bring their work home even though I am aware that they might have to prepare students for interschool music festivals. But still, they can relax themselves when they get back home. But we are very different. We need to do a lot of marking at home, a lot! So, considering the quality of teaching or fairness of teachers in terms of workload I think the teaching periods of language teachers should be reasonably reduced. If we do not need to teach so many lessons, we would have more time to prepare for our lessons. I could then make my lessons more interesting. I might be

able to mark faster. Now we always ask students to complete different types of assignments, but we don't really have the time to mark them. No way, we just can't mark them all. There are too many of them. We are, in fact, facing a big problem. If our teaching load could be reduced, we could give our students feedback to their work more promptly. The teaching effectiveness would be better. I really think that it would be good if we do not have to teach so many lessons a cycle. I think teaching 4 lessons each day would be appropriate. We would then use the rest of the time to prepare for our lessons and organize our teaching. You feel really exhausted if you have to teach 6 lessons a day, really exhausted!! It's not just the teaching you do that exhausts you. It's also the stress e.g. you have to move from one thing to another very quickly. For example, you have to prepare the books and teaching materials before you go into a classroom. You got no time even to clear up your desk before you work. There is not enough time for you to do your work. So, as I told you before, our teaching load is too great and the most difficult problem we face is that most students are not motivated to learn. Their attitudes are even worst too. People's respect for English language teachers is declining now. You know, in the past, English language teachers were considered important and capable. It seemed that they were highly respected. But, now it seems that English language teachers are considered sinners. This is the way how I feel. They keep accusing us for the fall of the English standard of students. This is really how I feel. So, many of our colleagues feel that it is getting more and more difficult to work as a secondary school teacher now. It's hard, very hard, even though we seem to have more resources now. We still face a lot of problems. I think the quality of our students is declining. They are afraid of difficulty and they do not want to put in effort in learning. But these are all the qualities that a student needs to posses in order to learn English. Without these qualities, they would never mange the language well.

R: So, what do you think about support that you are getting from EMB, if any?

La: I think in terms of money, yes, we are getting more than what we had in the past especially after Mr Tung became the Chief Executive of the SAR. But I don't think we should spend the money mainly on hardware. I think more should be allocated on human resources e.g. reducing the size of the class and increasing the number of English language teachers in each school. I think the money should be spent in these areas. The quality of education would not be raised if you just give me a lot of hardware or money. It's not solving the problem. When talking about support for teachers I do think that those ED people are organizing a lot of training for teachers. But, as a teacher, it's hard to attend these classes after school. It's too tiring especially if they have to travel a long way. It would be even more difficulties for teachers who have to take care of their families or those who are weak physically. If possible, but I might be asking for too much, it would be better if they could hold training for teachers in different districts e.g. in Yuen Long. So, they would travel to different districts to hold training for teachers. I think more teachers would then be willing to attend the training courses. For example, people nowadays keep talking about project learning, but I think teachers are not receiving much training in the area. Teachers have never been taught how to guide their students to complete their projects. We are not given any formal training at all. But last time when I went to the school of my son, I found that the school had got a lot of resources. They had some kind of partnership with the Chinese University of Hong Kong and they held a series of workshops for teachers (3-day workshop), parents (1-day workshop) and students

(3-day workshop) to teach them how projects should be completed. The things that they talked about included how to decide a topic for your project and how to do discussion and solve problems effectively. Then I thought to myself, yes, we are all required to ask our students to complete different types of projects, but we have never equipped our students with the skills they need. We ourselves have never received any training in that area and we don't know how things should be done too. I do think that we need a clear mind and good thinking to complete a project. You have to think about the whole process. You have to think about the outcome of the project and even the way how it is presented. Up till now I really have never seen any circulars about training for teachers on using projects in teaching and learning. But, nowadays everyone is talking about project learning. So, you see, there are a lot of things going on e.g. project learning and learning outside the classroom. Some people just blindly follow but I doubt if students can really benefit from all these things. Yes, we are given more money now and we seem to enjoy more flexibility. But I think students still might not be able to benefit from all these. I think for important things that teachers should know refresher courses should be organized for teachers so that every one of them would be well equipped. I think it would be really good for them to provide us district-based teacher training. But, I think I might be asking for too much.

R: So, what about the support given by QAI then? Say like after the school inspection?

La: QAI will not tell you directly what they want you to do. They require you to reflect and plan for yourself. So, there is not any support from them. What we are doing now is that based on the things that they suggested we have to think for ourselves how to improve the school e.g. how different subject panels or committees should respond to their comments and derive strategic plans based on their comments.

R: But, in their annual reports they have promised to give schools a lot of support ?!

La: Their support is actually things like, you can phone them up and ask them if it is appropriate to phrase our ideas in a certain way in our report. And, we can also ask them if a certain method is appropriate to improve an area that we need to work on. The support they are talking about is not something like sending a term of people to the school to offer them practical and specific help based on the area that they identified e.g. providing English language teachers in our school support in areas like teaching methodologies.

R: But I remember clearly that I have read about school based support given by QAI in their annual reports?

La: No, there is not any school based support. They only came for a few days to have classroom observation during the inspection. I think the whole QAI process does not in any ways or at any stages e.g. after classroom observation, include telling the school what to do to improve themselves. But we are required to write a follow up report to the QAI after the supervision. Last time when I met with them, the people from QAI showed us some of the follow up reports that others schools submitted in the past. Some of the responses from the school to the recommendation of QAI are unrelated at all. It's so funny. Some of their responses are just silly. But, those reports were all accepted. So, we thought to ourselves; yes, the QAI is highlighting some areas that the schools have to work on and the schools at the same time are trying to

respond to the comments. However, it seems that no one really cares if the suggestions given in the follow up reports are practical or can be implemented, or even if the suggestions given are really solutions to the problems raised. The QAI people do not seem to care if the suggestions are really implemented.

R: Will QAI follow up on that?

La: They told us that they would not. But they would inform the district office of education that your school belongs to. That's what I was told. So, I think what I need to do is just to write them something. But, I am not sure if they will try to find out whether I will actually implement what I have promised or to what extent I am implementing the plan. I guess they might think that we are all educated people working in the education context and we are self-disciplined and will do what we should. So, the follow up work they will do ends when submit your follow up report. Once they get the follow up report their work is done. We then asked them what would happen if we handed in a report of very low quality. They said to avoid this it was important for us to contact them by phone when we were writing up our report. We are given four months to work on the report after the supervision. The support they mean is talking to them on the phone and asking them whether the way we are writing is correct. Then, people from the district office will come to monitor the school. But I don't really understand. You know, the district office does not take part in the supervision at all and they know nothing about what has happened. But then they are the one to monitor the school afterwards. No one knows how the school will be monitored and how long it will last. I don't know. I think eventually no one would come to school to monitor us at all. I really think so.

R: What about the self evaluation required by QAI? I mean it seems that schools have to evaluate their own performance and report to QAI.

La: Self evaluation? You have to do it when you write up the follow up report. Yes, at the beginning of the QAI process there are also some questionnaires for us to fill in. You are required to evaluate the overall management of the school, the leadership of the principal and the performance of students and parents. I hope through the questionnaire survey to see if the aim of the school is achieved.

R: The evaluation includes also evaluation of teaching, right?

La: I think they are the one to evaluate our teaching. They do it through observing our lessons.

R: So is there any evaluation of teaching by peers or teachers themselves?

La: No, no, no. But when the principal observes our lessons, we have to fill in a small section on self evaluation of our teaching e.g. teacher performance, student learning outcome, and the achievement of teaching objectives.

R: So the classroom visits by the principal are in some way related to the ones done by the QAI people?

La: The principal does the classroom observations because she really wants to know more about the work of the English panel because the students' English exam results are not good. She wants to see how students perform in the lessons. We told her that our students were not really motivated to learn etc. But, the comment on our students from the QAI people was very good. But you know they just came to see one or two lessons of some teachers. So, you can imagine that students would behave well in class. They are not really band 5 students who fight even in front of outsiders. Our students are not that bad. But, some of them are really passive in English lessons and do not take their work seriously. I think you will get some idea of the standard of the student if you have a look at the homework they hand in. If someone does not take his or her homework seriously, his or her work is lousy. I am not talking about quantity only. Some students might hand in all their homework but their work could be awful. So, the principal wants to find out more about the situation e.g. whether our students are bad. So, she tries to go to every class including split classes to know more about the students. But I think the classroom observation that the principal does is for her own reference only. She wants to know how the English panel is operating. She hopes to give us some advice too. We need to hand in a lot of stuff to her these days. We are under very close supervision now. We still need to talk to her about our lessons later.

R: Can I ask the banding of this school?

La: When there were 5 bands in the system, we were somewhere between 2.5-3. The best banding we got was 2.4x. But it was usually something like 2.5x. But now, there are only three bands. So the new banding is about 1.52. Last year, we got about 100 band 2 students and about 90 band 1 students. You then take the average. I think the English language proficiency of students in the schools in the New Territories is generally lower. I think our school might be worse than other schools because the learning atmosphere of English here is poor. We have been adopting the CMI policy for many years. I guess for at least 8 years. We did it before many other schools. And that is why we face more problems. Those who come out first die first. We have only 1 F.4 class that use English as the medium of instruction. So, you see, how can our students compete with other candidates in the HKCEE? I am not surprised that their exam results are not as good as the results of others. Our students do not do anything outside the classroom to learn the language. They study other subjects in Chinese. So, their results are comparatively lower than the results of students from CMI schools of similar bandings. However, the way how the school itself looks at the problem is different. They just think that we are giving ourselves or the school an excuse. But to me, it is not an excuse and there is a good reason to support the way we think. Let me give you an example, some schools were only forced to adopt the CMI policy in 2002 and many of them allow the subject teachers to use English as the medium of instruction once the students are promoted to F.4. Not many of them are like us. Chinese is used as the only medium of instruction from F.1-5 here for subjects other than English. I think all these factors, in some way, affect the English exam results of our students. Our results are not good. That is the main reason why our results are not good.

R: But, what about parents? Is the medium of instruction a concern for parents?

La: Yes, sure. The school policy on medium of instruction affects the impression of parents of the school and their choices. It's a vicious cycle. The number of students

for the first round of admission for F.1 has decreased this year. That is why I have been suggesting that we should have one more F.4 class that uses English as the medium of instruction. It would become a good selling point of our school. We could show other people the flexibility of our school curriculum. There would be both Chinese and English streams for students of F.4. And, there would be both arts and science classes for each stream. So, if their child could manage their studies well e.g. English, they would be allocated in the English stream. So, whether or not a student would study in the English stream would become a totally personal choice of the students. That is the right direction we should head for, I think. But the way how the school thinks is different. They just tell us that no changes will be made unless there is some improvement in the exam results of our students. According to them, we should not head for that direction. It would be risky. It might affect the results of other subjects. But, I think we have to look at the development of the school in the long run. I think the exam results of our students might dive for a year or so. I do think so. I do think that the new direction could help us to recruit better students. Some parents did ask me about the policy of medium of instruction of the school. Parents are concerned about it. As a parent, I am concerned about the language policy of the school of my son too. I think the students in our school are just scared of the language. I guess it's because of their limited exposure. They seldom have the opportunity to use it. For example, most of their lessons are conducted in Chinese. They just don't bother to listen to you in the English lesson. Many of them are hostile to it. There are only very few of them who really want to learn English. When I am teaching, I will focus only on those who want to learn. They give us the support we need to carry on with our work. But there are not many of them. So, I am glad this year because I got a F.1 class. I used to teach F.3 classes for many years. You can never change those F.3 students. We are just like fighting with a fatal disease. There is nothing you can do for them. It's hopeless. Completely!. It is very difficult for students with a weak foundation to survive in secondary schools. I think primary education is really important. It's the foundation of education. It includes the learning skills and attitudes of students. It's the primary education that shapes a student. We can't do much for F.3 students. There is nothing you could do for them. So, I enjoy teaching F.1 students. You can impact on them more easily. You can arouse their interests in learning more easily. So, as I told you before, I consider myself a very successful teacher if my students do not hate the subject. To me, that's successful. Because so many of them just hate it. I am content if they don't hate the subject after my teaching. They might not be very good at English but at least they don't hate it. Many of my colleagues, those from the English panel, told me that it was hard to be an English language teacher. It's so hard. We are facing the hardest time we have ever experienced. I hope to see changes in our students quickly. When we see that our students are not doing well in exams, we feel sorry for them. They might not be able to get into universities if they fail the subject even though the results of other subjects might are good. We really feel sorry for our students and we do hope to help them. We want so much to know some teaching methods that are effective. I mean, things that we could manage, things that could help our students. But the problem we are facing now is that we don't see any way out. We don't know where we have done wrong. If anyone, who is so wise, could show us a way, I would say, it would be welcome by the whole team. We would be willing to try that out. We definitely would consider it our mission. But the problem is we have been trying a lot of things in our teaching for our students and we do believe that what we are doing is not wrong. But, I don't know why, the teaching outcome is not promising. I even compare our English language teachers with those in other schools

and I think that our qualifications should be more or less the same. I do think that there are some teachers who are more committed in each school. Some would be more dedicated and some would not. Our background should be more or less the same too e.g. graduates from local universities, colleges of education or graduates from universities overseas. There should not be such a big difference between us. But, why are our students getting such poor results in exams? To us, this is the biggest question we have. We don't know why. We can't even face the teachers of other subjects in the school. When we talk about exam results we don't know what to say. English language teachers used to enjoy a very high status either in the school or the society in the past. One of my colleagues told me that the English language teachers she used to have were all lady-like. But she said we looked more like mad women now. We got to prepare so much for our lessons and have to bring all the stuff to the classroom ourselves. Yes, we are just like mad women now. You know, the English language teachers in the past were so elegant. But now, we are always the messiest ones. You might find us taking a lot of things to our class e.g. a CD player, a stack of books, a laptop computer, some realia and a microphone etc. We are doing all these because we hope that our students would listen to us. Why do we have to do so much? We just want them to pay more attention to us. But I do think that English is not something easy to learn. I think it is a reason why students do not want to learn it. As you know, we are all Chinese and we have to require our students to discuss in English. It is difficult for them. Unless you just sit next to them and keep an eye on them, they would not speak in English. But if there are 6 to 10 groups of students in a class and you have to walk around the classroom to supervise them all, how could you manage? Many of them will just switch back to Cantonese once you walk away. And, if they want to talk to you in class, they would prefer using Cantonese. If you keep telling them to speak in English, some of them might switch briefly to English. To me, it's something natural and understandable. So, I think if you tell them to expose themselves to the language after school, I suspect, not even one student out of ten will do it. Students are like this. Students now are like this.

R: So, what about the joy of being a secondary school English language teacher?

La: Personally, I would say, I enjoy teaching English very much. I can't really teach other subjects. I like teaching English. One of the reasons why I don't want to teach in primary schools is that you need to teach a lot of subjects there. That's very troublesome. I like teaching English because English language teaching enjoys a lot more flexibility. You can design your lessons. Even if you teach your students tenses, you can select what tenses to teach. For example in our school, I teach my students 6-7 kinds of tenses only. They can't learn them even if you teach them more. They will be confused. You can just teach them those basic ones e.g. present tense. We don't teach our students, even F.5 students, those tenses that are too complicated. For example, we don't teach our students inversion. That's too complicated for them. They can't manage it. They can manage those simple structures. But for subjects like Chinese History and others, you have to teach everything. Yeah, we have to rush sometimes. Yeah, to rush through the coursebook. But it is true for every subject. What I am saying is that English language teachers got more flexibility e.g. flexibility in terms of what to teach and what teaching activities are used in our lessons, if you have sufficient time and resources. Yes, we enjoy more diversity in teaching especially in the way we teach. Talking about joy, we don't have much now, I am afraid to say. You might feel very happy if you get some good compositions from

your students. But, not many of them are good. We don't get much joy from teaching. In fact if students are willing to do what they are told, we would be thrilled. We would be contented. If they are willing to do something for their learning, even if it is something small, we would be glad. I am sure we got more difficulties than joy these days. It's very difficult.

[I thought the interview ended there but Lai Lai did not want to stop at all. She seemed to have a lot to say. With the consent of Lai Lai, I switched on the tape recorder again. The first topic we talked about was teaching effectiveness.]

R: You mentioned teaching effectiveness just now. How do you understand it?

La: Everything in the education context now is being quantified. People want only to see figures and statistics. That is the way how people look at teaching effectiveness. And I think in terms of teaching the easiest way to quantify the teaching effectiveness of a teacher is the passing rate of the student in exams and tests e.g. how many credits they get in HKCEE/ HKAL. So, if the passing rate of your students is not high, you definitely would be criticized as having poor learning outcome. Or they will say your teaching is not good. To give you an example, we sometimes feel that we were doing quite well in the lessons that were observed by the principal. Still comments from her were things like your learning outcomes were not good. She would say your learning outcome is good if she sees that every student in the class can speak English during the lesson. That was the impression we got after talking to her after the classroom visits. For example, in one or two observed lessons of mine, the students were able to do what they were told. But, definitely, not all of the students put up their hands to tell me that they could manage the task. About ten hands were raised and there were about 20-30 students who were quiet. I think most of them could manage the task even though they did not tell me or in any way show it. But the learning outcome given by the principal of the lesson was unsatisfactory. I failed for the part on learning outcome. I failed. I was teaching the students some vocabulary of the passage in the book. I was teaching them some vocabulary like squeal with delight. I tried to ask some students to come out to act out the phrases. And we played a game together with two groups competing with each other. A student from a group read the phrase on the card given and then he or she had to act out the phrase to the other group. The students of the other group then guessed the phrase on the card. There were more than ten phrases and the students could all get them right. But I was then told by the principal that she believed that only those students who came out could understand the phrases. And she believed that the rest of the class could not act them out. Or put it in this way, she did not see that the rest of the class acted out the phrases so she believed that they could not do it. But, I looked at the whole thing differently. I would say the students who came out could understand the phrases and I believed that the rest of the class could understand the phrases too. But the game allowed only some students to act out the phrases in front of the class. But to the principal, say if you are teaching your students wh questions, she will say that your learning outcome is high if she sees that all students can make wh questions in class. This is the way how she understands learning outcomes even though I did explain to her that the size of the class and the format of the game may in some way limit the participation of students in class. But to me, I think she got her understanding of learning outcomes. She came to her conclusion even before she came to our classes. The learning outcome is not good. Our passing rates in public exams were low in the past. That is a fact. And thus our

learning outcome is always poor, according to her. I think the school administration is just like the QAI people. They all got their own conclusion before coming to our classes. So, I think, on the level of the school, the school administration and even the community, figures are always equivalent to teaching effectiveness. You can say nothing until you show them figures that they like. That's it. Those figures are always public exams' results or those of attainment tests. The results of the attainment tests of our students are bad too especially those F.3 students. You know why, students never take the test seriously. They think that it is not a real exam. They just do it carelessly. Basically, the quality, I mean their attitudes, of the students in our school affect seriously and negatively the outcome of their learning. I think many of them are not taking their studies seriously. This will impact negatively on the people around them too. So, they are not doing well in exams. In fact, the overall academic results of our students are not good e.g. the passing rate for many subjects is about 60-70% while the passing rate of other schools is between 80-90%. The overall learning atmosphere in the school is not intense. And English is a subject that requires students to be highly motivated. But our students do not posses the motivation at all. So, the first subject that they give up is usually English. So, it is very difficult for English language teachers to teach the subject. We hope very much that the school would do something to help to create a better learning atmosphere e.g. encouraging constructive competition among students such as telling the students their positions in the class or form. We never do that but I think this kind of constructive competition might encourage our students to work harder. We also suggested that we should have one more English F.4 class. We even suggested that students come to school on Saturday to practise past exam papers in the hall more frequently. We made the suggestion but the school objected because they told us that there were a lot of activities to be held in the school hall e.g. sports activities. We, in fact, suggested that we have those practice every week and all the members of the panel together with the teaching assistants would take turns to supervise the F.4 and 5 students. We wanted them to work on the past exam papers or any supplementary exercises. We wanted to create an exam atmosphere so that they would take their work seriously. But the school said we could organize these activities only three times in one school term. We think it would not be useful then. We hoped to make it a habit of our students. I mean a habit for them. There are school policies that are not supporting what we are doing or what we want to do. And we can't in any way change the school policies. But we are then accused not being able to help our students to get better grades in exams. I do think that colleagues of other subjects understand our difficulty. They understand. Sometimes when I talk to teachers of other subjects e.g. Chinese History and Science, they tell me that they understand our difficulties. They show us sympathy. A Chinese language teacher once told me that it's so hard for her to teach her students the Chinese language, and it would be even more difficult for me to teach them English. SIGH! How could you do that, she asked me. And when I look around my panel, there are more than 10 teachers in the English panel, I feel sorry for them because many of them work very hard. They put in a lot of effort. But we just can't see any desirable teaching outcomes. We always say if someone could suggest to us say like a complete plan or direction that would work for our students, we would rush to him or her in no time. But, we can't see any way out now. What has gone wrong? Is that because our teaching methods are poor? Is that because we are heading a wrong direction in teaching? I have been thinking about all these questions. The school has always required us to make our lessons interesting, interesting, very interesting. We are required to reduce the amount of mechanical practice in class. But I think sometimes

our students do need things like mechanical drills especially when they have not yet mastered what they are learning. For example, a lot of students still can't get the third person singular right after our teaching. They still make a lot of mistakes. I think if I require them to do say 100 questions on the topic, they might be able to manage the pattern better and the right form would come to them automatically. I think it might be good to the students. Or for the patterns like there is and there are, this year I teach the patterns very explicitly to my class and I have found that many of them could manage the patterns now. Even though some of them still make mistakes like there have from time to time other students could correct the mistakes immediately. I think we need to constantly remind our students again and again, endlessly, the patterns that they learn. We need to put aside considerations like whether the practice is boring. I think it is good to require students to recite short passages in English. Reciting was not encouraged when I was studying at the College of Education. At that time only the communicative approach was encouraged. They encouraged only communication and considered grammar teaching boring and unimportant. But I think reciting is good. Students would remember some sentence patterns when they recite, which might help them in writing. I think they would remember better the flow of ideas in the text. I think that helps exercise their brain too. I think students need to read out the words too. I do think that it is good to have more choral speaking and reading aloud practice in class, and more spelling too. I think it might help because our students are really weak in spelling. That's their weakest area. Another thing is that they tend to write things like chinglish. That's the most difficult thing to handle. There are a lot of students who say I no bring book to me. It's something hard for us to eradicate. In some cases the students really do not know how to express themselves in English. And this type of language is quite impossible to be eliminated in just a few days. So, if students are always exposed to some good English, they would do better. But, no, they are not. They are not exposed to good examples of English at all. There are not many students who really read and even enjoy reading the books when they do their book reports. They just do it for the sake of handing in the assignment. They are not reading to learn or to gain some knowledge. Some of them do their homework because it is what is required. Meeting our requirement you know. They don't think that they are learning at all. So, how could they learn the language well? You have to think and internalize what you learn when you are learning a language. Then you have to put what you have learnt into practice. But for other subjects like Math, the type of learning is of lower order. But learning languages is something of higher order and more complicated. Learning languages e.g. English is higher order learning. It's difficult. But we can't put all these things in the minds of our students. Unless they are willing to change their learning attitudes, there is not any way out. To many young children, learning English is never something easy because they don't get much support from their families. For example, my son has got a comprehension exercise book that is really difficult. About half of the words in a passage are all new. I found it silly too. The publisher highlights all the difficult words in the passage and you will see that about half of the passage is highlighted. So, you see, if a child can get no support from his or her parents, how could he or she handle the exercise? I even talked to the panel chair of English in the school. I told her that I would prefer something less difficult but they would then be required to do the easier exercises more often. I think students should expose themselves to different types of genre. But I was told that some parents preferred difficult exercises. I think the confidence of students would be boosted if they are allowed to do something that they can manage. My son cries almost every time he does the exercises. But that helps me to rethink the

importance of the support that a child is getting from his or her family. Some parents do have the knowledge to help their children with their homework but many of them do not have the time to do so. Some students start to find English language learning disgusting when they are very young. I think some students give up English after P.3. For instance I think what my son is now doing is very demanding. Compared to what he did in P.3, what he is doing now is more demanding and complicated. I think some students just stop learning when they got to P.4. I think the environment might also cause some problems for students. Adults always think that they are too passive. But, I think it's not really fair to ask a 7 or 8 year-old kid for so much. How would they be so mature? So, I think there are things that we can't change. I can really see the constraints our students face. Many parents can still help their kids with their homework when they are studying in primary schools. But, for English, they really can't do anything for them. So, I think students got their own problems too. Even the society itself has changed a lot too. So, I think it's hard for students to learn English. But at the same time our exam system is getting more and more complicated too e.g. the different papers of the HKCEE. To me, the exam format is too demanding. Now they require students to discuss with each other in English. It's not easy even if you do it in Cantonese. It's hard if you have to do it logically with a rich content. Some students might not understand the topic. And they are required to talk to 3 other candidates. They are all strangers to each other. And they need to discuss naturally with them. I do think that this exam format is too demanding for secondary school students. It's too demanding. Their average English proficiency is not high but the exams are getting more and more demanding. We used to describe a picture in an oral exam. And, sometimes the students were required to finish a dialogue or something like that. It's only interaction between the candidate and the examiner. But now it is completely different. Students have to interact with other candidates. Some problems would be caused if you need to discuss with a candidate who can't even speak clearly. So, how could you discuss with him or her? It would not be possible. Some candidates speak very softly and you can hardly hear them, not to mention having discussion with them. To me, this format is too idealistic. For Paper III, so many skills are integrated in one paper e.g. students have to read a lot of data files before completing the tasks. The information they need might spread over the reading materials. I do think that it is too complicated and it might not be something our students need in their real life. I think this format is not necessary. I think our students now are less capable but the format of our exams are getting more and more complicated. So, we face even more problems when we teach. I think most students do not possess the skills required in the exams. So, the frustration of students is great. I think there are quite a lot of English language teachers in primary schools that are not subject trained. I think it does affect the quality of teaching in primary schools. I think the impact could be huge. Don't get me wrong. I am not saying that they should be blamed. But I think we have to re-think about the system there. In primary schools equal teaching load is shared by most teachers. Under the system each teacher has to teach two main subjects. I don't really know the details. You need to teach a language subject even if you are not subject trained or good at it. If a teacher can't really manage the subject well, it's not hard to imagine the result. And I feel sorry for them. So, when we talk about education reforms, we should not just focus on teaching methodologies. You should rethink the whole education system, and human resources e.g. teachers too. They all need to be changed. The teaching load of teachers, I would say, must be revised. It's not fair to base on the number of teaching periods to decide the teaching load of a teacher. A more reasonable way to handle the problem is as I

said just now language teachers would be required to teach fewer periods than other subject teachers. I think this should be applied in both secondary and primary schools. It's even more important for primary schools. I think some teachers in primary schools are not subject trained but they are required to teach English. My husband is a good example. he was chosen to be an English language teacher because his English result of the HKCEE was quite good, comparatively speaking. But his result was not that good, to be honest. He has been teaching English for several years now. And no training has been offered to them until now. They are now required to meet the benchmark set by the government. I think no particular training was given to the teachers who were forced to teach a subject that they did not major in in the College of Education. But for my husband he did join some refresher courses e.g. 16/4-week refresher courses. But I think it's the whole system that has to be revised. I think the government is now investing in education a lot of money but they never invest the money in human resources. I think their mentality is like this: even if more teachers are being employed, you, teachers, would be doing more or less the same thing as you are doing now. There might not be any improvement. I think it is the way how they think. Our effort can't be seen but those hardware and resources they give us can all be seen. Everyone can see that. That is the way I feel. But I think within the education context, we all know that human resources are more important but not hardware. But, the government has got a very different view. I believe that the government would think that we would enjoy just more free time if our teaching load was reduced. Our teaching would not be improved. I know their concern and there are both good and bad teachers in every school. But I do think that there are more good teachers than the bad ones. So, I think, if they did change, the positive result would be greater than the negative one. I think there are more good teachers than bad teachers in a school. There might be 2-3 bad teachers in a school but 10 good teachers. So, it would be good at least you are helping those 10 good teachers. But, if they only give us money or hardware, I think our students might not be able to benefit from the resources. I think if you give me more time to mark, I might be able to return to my students their free writing in a very short time. That would be wonderful. But, now it might take us 2-3 weeks to mark their work. We got many other meetings to attend too. We need to meet with parents from time to time. And, we need to handle the problems of our students. We really do not have much time to mark the work of our students. We then have to sacrifice the time we have with our families. We feel exhausted and we are stressed too Teaching language subjects is exhausting and stressful. So, we always say English language teachers get old easily. Really, we get old easily. Marking the compositions of your students is painful, i.e. it's like you are pierced by small needles. You just keep counting the number of books you have marked. You feel frustrated when you find that you are only marking very slowly.

~ end of interview ~

1.6 Classroom Observation VI

1.6.1 Pre Classroom Observation Interview VI

R: Researcher
La: Lai Lai (School B**)**

R: What's your plan for today's lesson?

La: I will first teach them about comparative and superlative forms of adjectives. We will then work on a worksheet together and they will have to work out some grammar rules regarding the use of comparative and superlative forms of adjectives e.g. adding er and est or iest to some words. After that, I will check the answers of the exercises in the book. They did the exercises as homework before. If we have enough time, we will check the answers of some worksheets that they did before. They are about formation of questions and the use of prepositions. They are having a quiz tomorrow. It all depends on the time we have. The lesson today will be a mixed of everything. So, it is not about just one theme. I need to prepare them for the quiz tomorrow.

~ end of interview ~

1.6.2 Post Classroom Observation Interview VI

R: Researcher
La: Lai Lai (School B)

R: Do you think you have achieved your teaching objective(s)?

La: Today's lesson was not so good because I was not really in a good shape. I could not really think clearly. The beginning of the lesson was quite boring. We were doing some mechanical practice. It was a bit boring. You must go through the stuff with them. You just can't skip that. The pace of the lesson could have been faster if the students were brighter, I think. But some of the students were not as bright as others. So, in order to make sure that the weaker ones could follow, the pace of the lesson had to be slowed down. For the part on comparatives and superlatives, students were required to work out the rules regarding the formation of comparative and superlative forms of adjectives. I, in fact, had given them some notes on this before. But, I did not tell them to read the notes. But then I thought to myself: it would be better if I encouraged the students to work out the rules with me. I preferred working out the rules with them rather than giving them the rules. They would remember the rules better. If they worked together to figure out the rules e.g. a single 'r' is needed, or 'er' should be added to the word, more thinking would be involved. It would be better than asking the students to read the notes. They might miss a lot of important things e.g. those spelling rules if they just read the handouts. So, I decided to prepare another handout for them. You know taking about interaction in today's lesson and the game, I think there isn't much interaction in the lesson today. The situation improved only when we played the game together. But the timing of the lesson was not good and we did not have much time for the game. Originally I thought the game would be more exciting and interesting, but the timing was poor. So, we had to rush through the game. We just rushed through it. In terms of the questions of the students about the use of the article the, when they raised the questions about the use of the word the, I became more aware of the use of the word and then I explained to them when the word should be used. When I talked about the table, I mean the picture on the handout, I hoped to focus on students' attention on the form of the adjective only. I planned to talk about the usage, i.e. adding the article the a bit later. So, when I wrapped up the section towards the end of the lesson, I required the students to use the examples on balloons that we had talked about to complete some sentences e.g. the was missing before a superlative and than was missing after a comparative. I hoped to show them how different forms of adjectives should be used e.g. adding the word than to it and adding est to the adjective. In fact, yesterday, we played a game together. Some students came out to gas up some balloons. The students were really excited. After that we compared the size of the balloons. At first, they did not know why they had to do so. I did not tell them. So, you could expect, some of the balloons were bigger and some were smaller. Then I introduced the concept of comparison. The one who won the game was given the balloon as a present. But they were just naughty. They pierced the balloons with something sharp and all of the balloons were finally blown up. They seemed to enjoy the great noise that they were making. So, when I talked about balloons just now some of them became very excited. That's why the sentences that the students had to fill in towards the end of the lesson were about balloons. On the whole, I would say, some students in this class lose their temper easily e.g. Mark. They just yell at their classmates if their classmates have done something wrong.

They always put the blame on others. So, every lesson I have to calm them down and tell me not to yell at their classmates. I always encourage them to learn from each other too. I think it's something to do with moral education. I hope what I have been doing would really impact positively on my students. It seems to me that students are getting more and more interested in learning the vocabulary about their everyday life. They reminded me about the words that I had asked them to look for the day before. And many of them now are willing to jot down the vocabulary in their notebooks. I hope it can help some students, if not all, to form a good habit of learning vocabulary. I think about half of the class has done so. I think that's quite good. They are more eager to learn about the vocabulary about the things around them. I think that's good. In fact, I always try to link what they are doing say like vocabulary learning with their assignment on newspaper cutting. I, from time to time, ask them meaning of some new words. I encourage them to find some vocabulary in the papers. At the beginning of the term I told them that they would be required to hand in some newspaper cutting assignments, so all of them have to subscribe the paper. We usually place the order through the school and it costs only a dollar or $1.5 for a copy. But the Student Standard is not so good because they got only a booklet for students. No current news is included in the booklet. It has nothing to do with news. It's only, kind of, sharing. Important incidents and issues are only discussed a long time after they happen. It's mainly about sharing of opinions. It's not about the latest news that happens everyday. The South China Morning Post has got both including the Young Post and news. But the booklet from the Standard got some good points too. It is printed in colour. It could be stored easily. So I keep every single issue and some articles are quite good e.g. to discuss topics about whether students should bring mobile phones to school and pollution. A lot of issues are discussed in the booklet but what is lacking is the current news. So, you can't discuss with your students the hottest news that is reported on that day e.g. the scandal of the Financial Secretary of purchasing his new car. But you can do that with the South China Morning Post. I sometimes ask them to find out some new words from the newspaper e.g. budget deficit. They might be able to spot the words from the headline easily. Once they found the words 'cut deficit' in the headline and I then told them to guess which word in the headline means 'deficit.' Some of them said it should be the word starting with the letter d. Then I asked them to explain why they thought so. Some of them just shouted out you see the word cut. They enjoy reading newspapers with me in this way. But if you ask them to read the papers alone, then you can expect the quality of their work would not be so good. They will be less motivated. But if you do that with them in class, they will be interested in reading the papers. They are more ready to make guesses. Now I am asking them to do some simple translation of words in newspapers. Only some of them are doing their work well. Others are not taking the work seriously. But, I am glad because students seem to be more interested in the vocabulary about things around them. I think they find it challenging. They are challenged every day.

[I asked Lai Lai how many English language teachers there were in the school and the possibility of inviting them to fill in a one-page questionnaire. She said there were about 14 English teachers in the school but she stressed that she was not sure if they would be willing to help. She added that some of them preferred simple question types e.g. ticking the appropriate boxes, to open ended questions. After that I started to go through with her the questions in the questionnaire.]
R: How long have you been teaching English in secondary schools?

La: About fourteen years now. I teach the English language subject only, from F.1 to F.5.

R: Did you know that secondary school English language teachers had been required to help their students to develop critical thinking through the English language subject? If yes, please specify how you got the information, i.e. when and where did you first read/ hear about the requirement?

La: Mm. How should I put it? I think it was only implied. It has not been made clear to me. I got to know it from the syllabus, the green one, from talking to you and some seminars that I went to. But they (Education Bureau) have never told us clearly that we, English language teachers, have to help our students to develop critical thinking. They have never sent us a clear message about the requirement. And, I think, generally speaking, most ordinary teachers would not read the syllabus very often. But, sometimes I have to work on my own assignments and as a panel head, I have to read the syllabus and I got to know about it. But in fact, I was not so aware of it until participated in your study.

R: Do you think critical thinking can be developed through the English language subject? If yes, please give examples of how it can be done e.g. teaching activities, strategies or skills. If no, please explain.

La: I think so but I think it can only be done if students have mastered a certain level of English proficiency. If they don't, it's hard for students to decide if a certain way of writing is logical and sensible. I think all languages are related to thinking. They, either English or Chinese, are related to thinking. For example, whether or not what you are saying is logical and clear depends on your thinking. So I think to answer your question I would say, yes, it is possible to help a student to develop critical thinking through the English language subject. But the prerequisite is that the student needs to possess a certain level of proficiency. I think critical thinking can be developed through both reading and writing. I think when we read, especially when we are doing intensive reading, we always discuss with our students the thinking of the author e.g. his or her flow of ideas and the underlying meaning implied in a sentence. I think we can help students to develop critical thinking through intensive reading. Also, from the feedback we give to their compositions we can challenge them to rethink their ideas.

R: How do you understand critical thinking e.g. what does it mean to you? Is it something important?]

La: Mm. This question is difficult to answer. It is not something concrete or that can be seen easily. It might be an internal ability. And this ability can be stimulated and trained. It can be explored too. But it can't be proved easily that someone possesses this ability. It is because it is something to do with one's thinking. But as I told you before from what you write your thinking is revealed.

R: So what qualities do you think a critical thinker possesses?

La: I think he or she would be able to analyze. He or she would be able to evaluate and to give comments and feedback. He or she would possess an enquiring mind.

R: Do you think your teaching now is helping your students to develop critical thinking? Please explain.

La: A bit only. A bit only. I don't know because I still think that I might be doing something unconsciously but I am not sure whether the student can get it. I am not sure whether they can get it because it is very difficult to quantify critical thinking. Sometimes, I hope through a certain activity to help my students to develop critical thinking. That's only my intention but I am not sure whether it works. I think evidence of critical thinking can be seen in one's writing. But it's hard to see it in one's everyday life. It's hard to be quantified so I am not sure. As I told you before I think it seems that critical thinking develops with our age and experience. We don't really need someone to teach us, explicitly, how to think. I think we just learn by experience. It develops over time. So, I am not sure if my teaching can inspire them to think critically. I think if there is someone who could really inspire students, he or she would do a very good job. But I do think that I am not that good. I think I have tried more, really more, to help students to develop critical thinking. I think I am asking them more why questions that require them to explain their answers. I am doing it more consciously now and require my students to justify their opinions.

R: Do you think critical thinking can be assessed through the English language subject? If yes, please give examples of how it can be done e.g. assessment tasks and criteria. If no, please explain.

La: As I explained to you just now, it cannot be really measured. But things like the quality of their assignments would to a certain extent reflect one's critical thinking. But the assessment of it can never be done clearly and easily like testing your IQ. I think, just because I don't really know much about it. There isn't a system for us to measure the level of critical thinking of our students. It seems that there isn't any systematic way or test to measure it. But, as I said before I don't know much about it. Perhaps it could be done but I don't know. But we can get to know more about the thinking of our students from things like the assignments that they hand in e.g. the way how they organize and present their data in their projects and how they do their presentation such as free talk, and whether they have any topic sentence or if they talk around a theme. I think from all these things we might get to know more about the thinking of our students. But I think it's only a reflection. It is not an exact number.

R: Do you think appropriate support by the government or your school is given to you to implement the recommendations? If yes, please give examples of the support you are given. If no, suggest the support you need.

La: No, no, we have never been offered any training or workshops that are related to helping our students to develop critical thinking. I think they have not done anything clearly for teachers to tell us about the recommendations. But words like critical thinking and generic skills might have been brought up briefly in different seminars. These words are commonly used these days. You can always hear people say them. But, we have never been told clearly the recommendations or how the recommendations could be implemented. To give you an example, we had a meeting a short time ago. The principal together with all the panel heads met to talk about how to develop students' generic skills and what kind of training or support we need to do this. I raised the problem of using projects in our teaching. When the idea of project

learning was introduced, teachers of every subject just followed. But in fact, we, teachers, have never been trained/told/equipped how to teach our students to complete a project. What are the steps that we need to go through when we complete a project? How can we inspire our students if we don't know much about all these things? Although you will see students are doing all sort of projects for different subjects, the teachers actually do not know much about project learning. I told them in the meeting that there should be some kind of training for teachers so that they will be well equipped before they are required to implement the recommendations e.g. we need to know what the generic skills are and how to guide our students through the process of completing a project. I really think that no support or training has been given to us by the EMB. We have not been given anything specifically about critical thinking.

R: So what kinds of support do you hope to have from the EMB?

La: I think they should arrange for us some workshops in which some video clips of real classroom teaching, oh please, not me, not my lessons, would be viewed and discussed to see if the teacher in the video is in any way helping his or her students to develop critical thinking. If it is agreed that what the teacher is doing would not help his or her students to develop critical thinking, the attendees would then discussed what could be done to help students to develop critical thinking. I think this kind of demonstration would be useful. I think we might be teaching similar teaching topics and if other people could help their students to develop critical thinking through the topic we could learn from them and see what we could be done for our own students. We might not be aware of what we are doing now is in fact in some way helping our students to develop critical thinking. Or we just might not know how to do it. So, it would be good if these types of workshops are organized and we could view and discuss some video clips of teaching to think about how we could help our students to develop critical thinking. It would be good if they, I mean people from the EMB, could come to our school to give us some support e.g. they could bring to us something concrete, tailor-made school curriculum for us to try out with our students. I might try out the materials that they provide and try to find out ways to help my students to develop critical thinking. I think we need to see some demonstration. We hope to have some materials for us to try out. I don't think we need a lot of theories because what we need is in fact some hands on experience.

R: Any support do you hope to have from the school?

La: I think the curriculum has to be changed. The present curriculum will have to be changed so that development of critical thinking would be integrated in it. I guess something has to be taken away.

R: Could you please elaborate a bit on that?

La: I think if you want to add something new to the present curriculum, obviously something old has to go to make room for the new stuff. Or if you really want to retain what you already have in the present curriculum then you might have to think about how to integrate the new stuff in it. But, you still need to make some choices, i.e. to let go something.

R: So, what about the exam and assessment systems? Would any changes be needed?

La: Yes, that's the topic that I am really interested in. How can we measure one's thinking? I am really interested in this topic because as I told you just now I tried to help my students to develop critical thinking but I was not sure if my students would really benefit from what I had done. To what extent have I raised the critical thinking level of my students? I really don't know. Also, I don't know how to measure it. So, it would be really interesting if there is a very objective, reliable and valid assessment method for measuring critical thinking of our students. I think if students are aware of the difference between their levels of critical thinking, they would be motivated to improve themselves. In terms of practice, I think some changes might be needed in terms of the exam papers. Some changes might be needed e.g. now for the Chinese language subject students are required to study fewer assigned texts. But I have to admit that I do not know the details. But some integration has been done and so now their exam format is similar to the English language subject. The result is that students can't really rote learn to pass the exam. So, I think it is possible that there is some change in the format of the exam papers. I think it is something of higher order. There might be changes in a particular section of the exam in which students' critical thinking is specifically assessed. I think it all depends on how mature our teaching regarding critical thinking would be at that time.

~ end of interview ~

1.7 Last Debriefing Interview

R: Researcher
La: Lai Lai (School B)

R: As I told you in the last interview a very important objective of my study is to identify the teaching of critical thinking manifested in the participating teachers' observed lessons. So far based on the preliminary analysis of all your classroom data I have identified one critical encounter in your very first observed lesson in which you gave your students the time and space to think critically about Della and her present. Do agree that it's a critical encounter? What's your feedback or comment to the findings?

La: I think so but only after you described it. At that time, when I was teaching, things just came to me quite spontaneously like a reaction. I did not do it intentionally. I did not really think about critical thinking. I did not plan the incident. To me the answer of the student was unexpected. I thought everyone would say the story was a sad one. So her answer was just unexpected and my response was only a spontaneous reaction. But now you are talking about it and I reflect on it and I do agree with you.

R: Another thing that I've found about your teaching is that you always encourage your students to listen to and learn from each other. I think it's an important critical attitude that we need to cultivate in our students. However, as I observed in the first observed lesson I think most students did not really understand your explanation of the importance of looking at from more different angles and thus that particular part of teaching was not that effective. Do you remember what happened in the lesson that day?

La: Not really, not really. You know the first classroom observation happened quite some time ago.

R: True, true. Yes, I can understand. [I then explained briefly to Lai Lai the meaning of critical encounters as defined in this study and the details of the critical encounter.] Were you aware that you were indeed asking a critical question while you were teaching in the lesson?

La: At that time, it was something straightforward, like a reaction. I was not really thinking to myself - yes, I am teaching my students critical thinking, that's critical thinking. That's straightforward. It's not like that. I did not plan or think about it. The answer from the girl saying the hair clip would be useful when the hair of Della grew was unexpected. You know, originally I thought everyone would say that's a sad ending. So, to me, it's something unexpected. That's my reaction only. So, but now you are talking about the incident and I reflect on it. I do think that you are right and it seems the incident could help my students to develop critical thinking. I think it's all about awareness. I think in my mind I know some elements of critical thinking and I want to try them out in my teaching. But I do not have anything concrete with me like how, I mean the way, to develop my students' critical thinking. Because so far we just teach and you observe and we got nothing from you. So, we got nothing concrete with us. But I do think that my awareness has been raised.

R: Do you have any suggestions for me in terms of improving the design of the study?

La: I think you might consider observing continuously the lessons of a teacher for two or three days. It might be better. I think you would then see how a topic is dealt with completely. It might be better than moving from one individual lesson to another and they might not be related in any way. But your design might allow you to see more different types of lessons. But I think it might be helpful for you to go to the lessons of individual teachers and try to observe a series of lessons e.g. for two or three days, to see how a teaching topic is handled. [I then explained to Lai Lai the difficulties I faced in arranging classroom observation with teachers and Lai Lai seemed to understand my concerns] Yes, I do think that it depends on the teacher too. It depends whether the teacher wants to be observed in this way.

[After the interview, Lai Lai asked me if they would be given a copy of the research findings. I told her that I would go back to the school to share with them the findings after the study.]

~ end of interview ~

II. John (School B)

As shown in Table 2 John and I met eight times on the dates specified. The table also shows that six classroom observations were conducted between January and March 2003. The dates of the six classroom observations and the length of all the interviews conducted, i.e. pre and post classroom observation interviews and the last debriefing interview, are also specified in the table.

Table 2 Summary of data collection for John

John (School B)								
Date	16 Dec 2002	13 Jan 2003	15 Jan 2003	17 Feb 2003	20 Feb 2003	5 Mar 2003	10 Mar 2003	19Mar 2003
Events	1st meeting (lobbying) about 1 hr	Pr1 2.3mins	Pr2 4mins	Pr3 6.5mins	Pr4 3.3mins	Pr5 7mins	Pr6 1.5mins	II
		CO1 80mins	CO2 80mins	CO3 40mins	CO4 80mins	CO5 40mins	CO6 80mins	44.5 mins
		Po1 17.6 mins	Po2 4.1 mins	Po3 20.7 mins	Po4 17.5 mins	Po5 11.6 mins	Po6 59 mins	

Key:-
Pr: Pre Classroom Observation Interview
CO: Classroom Observation
Po: Post Classroom Observation Interview
II: Last Debriefing Interview

2.1 Classroom Observation I

2.1.1 Pre Classroom Observation Interview I

R: Researcher
J: John (School B)

R: Okay, thank you. You can start now.

J: Alright, well, I will first start by correcting three exercises in the exercise book. That's the homework they have to do for today. After that, the the the homework is about the past simple tense which we saw before Christmas which is kind of a revision. And then, I would go on with what I started last lesson that is reading a passage which is a Christmas story. So I am testing their pronunciation, will see the vocabulary with them and after reading the passage they will have to, to fill in a form in their book about the setting, the plot and the characters. The idea here is to introduce those three topics because they will have to write a Christmas story later on. And, what else, I'll ask them a few questions to see if they really understand the text, a few questions about the text and if we have time I'll introduce the future simple. It shouldn't take much long. Actually, in in the book, they are supposed to make sentences like what what would you buy for that Christmas. Now I think this is a bit silly because Christmas is behind. I already know that nobody did anything for Christmas. So, basically if if they ask each other that question what will you buy for mum or will you buy a present for mum, they'd say no I won't. My idea is to do something like did you buy a present for mum for Christmas, first question. Probably no I didn't. Second question will you buy a present for Chinese New Year so that they use both past and future tense. So that's my target today.

R: Okay. Thank you. Thank you very much. That's all?

J: That's all.

~ end of interview ~

2.1.2 Post Classroom Observation Interview I

R: Researcher
J: John (School B)

R: Hello. Yes. Okay. Thank you.

J: Okay. So, first of all, I didn't reach what I planned to do with them.

R: Really?

J: Because I told you that I would try to introduce the future as well which I didn't manage to do. I think that I may be a bit slower time. That's one of my problems. In the first term I had a big gap in the sense that I was one unit behind the schedule compared to his colleagues and so I had to rush through things which the students didn't like, which I didn't like. I had to give them like fifteen pages of homework in one go to be ready. I didn't like that. So this is why I I I spent a little bit more time on the homework at the beginning because I want to make sure that they understand what they are doing which doesn't seem to be the case here in HK. From my experience I can see that going through homework or exercises just answer correct correct answers. There is little explanation behind.

R: So, what what what do you expect then because just now you said that's not really the case here in Hong Kong?

J: Well, that's my way of teaching.

R: But just now you said explanation, do you want your students to give you explanation?

J: Sometimes I want students to give me explanation and sometimes I want to explain why they make a mistake. I think it's important for them to learn from their mistakes. They need to know why, why you make mistakes. If not, it is pointless. So, I realized that I sometimes spend a lot of time on that so the pace the rhythm of the lessons slower and I could be behind. Reading the text is a bit tedious. First of all, because they are shy of of reading, reading in front of everyone. They are very confused about names used in the English book, things like Jim, or Della or Jack or. They don't know how to pronounce those names and even though some like Jim may be foreign in the textbook and they can't remember the pronunciation. There are even, there are even very strange names in the textbook. I think it is a bit silly, I mean for those who made the textbook, I think there's something wrong with their, but anyway. Names like Zinc Zippy or stuff like that shouldn't be taught to students who can't already pronounce Jim or or John, but anyway. So I think I think reading is important but again it takes time. Individual reading takes time. Going through the vocabulary is pretty fast because there were there were a lot of new words in in the text but not too many new words and I focus on on the most important ones. I tried to focus on the most important ones. I didn't have time to ask the questions to see if they really understand the text. I wanted to do that after the form but we didn't complete the form so my my target is like I had reached maybe three quarter of my target. Mm, what do you want to know?

R: Questions from me. Can I ask you something about reading first? Just now you said you think reading is important but then you didn't explain. Why?

J: Okay. I think reading is important because you cannot expect them to pronounce clearly if they don't read the text aloud. Pronunciation is important and that's what we we are told all the time they should have a good pronunciation. Most of the time the kids are silent they might listen to what the teacher says and nothing else happens. That's why I'm trying, every time when we have a passage to read at least a little bit if I am on time if I am not then I'll have to make sure that they will also read it. Also, I think that if they read, they might have a better comprehension. They have to focus on the text whereas if they have some silent reading they might just go through very quickly and chat after after 2 minutes or so not really concentrating. Concentration is of course a problem as we know from previous research in Belgium I am so sure whether that's true in Hong Kong kids of that age and even older older kids can focus on ten minutes and then we need to change and that is a big problem. How can we possibly change go to a different activity if you have to follow a textbook and if you have to follow your colleagues and doing the textbook as well. How can you possibly change let's say 15 minutes we do something and 15 minutes we try to do something else which is probably not available in the textbook or the grammar book. If I jump from one book to another book, I will find exactly the same exercises, so, for me that that's not a change. If I do reading comprehension and then I jump to a grammar exercise I can't feel the change because it's till the textbook. So, changing would mean taking material from outside but that of course would make make me behind schedule will leave me behind schedule, so I have to be extremely careful. So, I can feel I can feel by myself that in the end at the end that they started to get bored and wanted to get over.

R: But you did something to kind of grasp their attention.

J: Yes, you mean, you mean like explaining things using body language.

R: Yes, you used, you used interesting contexts to help them to understand phrases and words to draw their attention and at the same time I noticed that you called on names of some students who were making kind of trouble.

J: Yes, well, those those four guys at the front there have sort of given up studying English. One of them when he came here said I don't like English. I don't want to learn English. I am not interested. I try to, try to find something to do with him, but he would end up talking using Cantonese to speak to me. So, there's nothing much that I could do. I have been through the subject teacher because I need someone to translate so I lose this personal contact because because of the go-between and so my impact is is much less if I had direct contact with them and the other three might have given up, just given up. I am not sure whether it's only in English or else coz I haven't seen all the results but definitely in English they have given up, just given up, which is a bit sad of course. But when you have forty students to handle, it's quite a hard task to make sure that everyone works, everyone wants to work.

R: True. So tell me something about your students. What do think about this class?

J: Well, it's a, it's a mixed class in terms of abilities, so some students are very very good. There's a girl called Cecil, a girl called Ivy on the other side who are really top students. And they are sort of students who are very strict towards themselves and they are always ready with their homework. They pay attention in class. You have a feel more students who are also very good but a bit more playful. The ones in the middle I'd say are quite attentive as such the average students. Their results are not too good, it's like between fifty and sixty but they are attentive and they will they will prepare their exercises most of the time. And then you have you have a group or team of I won't say trouble makers they are playful. They are playful. Sometimes they don't do the exercise but they are not that bad, I think, as such.

R: I still, I still think that as you said some of them are playful. That's very encouraging because I do think that they do not really hate English.

J: No, that's right. That's right.

R: And, that I would consider a success.

J: It's their personality to be playful. It's not, the aim is not to disrupt. That's my feeling, not to disrupt the class as such. It's just the way they are.

R: You know, their age, you know, kind of trapped not just in the classroom but, but I would say they tried they tried I mean some of them tried very hard to answer your questions.

J: That's right. Yes, they tried their best. They tried their best. Honestly, their result is average, I would say, if we take the result from the whole class, you have a few students around eighty eighty to ninety percent.

R: That's pretty good.

J: Yes, and then quite a few between sixty and eighty, a whole range, and I think that in the previous exam five or six failed overall which is not too many students if you think about it.

R: How were they assigned to your class, I mean, because, I know that in some schools they got some kind of attainment tests at the very beginning?

J: I, I, I, have no idea here how they were assigned. I was told that previously the school tried to have a very bad form 1 with all the poor students so that all the other forms would be like average or top, but this year, they've tried to mix them up, a little bit. And, so that's why there are remedial classes in my class and IC as well.

R: But, I would say I found something really amazing. You can remember all their names.

J: Yes, I could only remember their names and that's my problem in the school. I, I.

R: What do you mean by that?

J: I have contact with about six hundred students, I teach about six hundred students and I can remember forty names.

R: Not bad.

J: Not bad, but embarrassing because when you can't address some using their names they don't listen to you. They avoid looking at you.

R: Yes, I know. But it takes time. You are not a computer.

J: In Belgium, it take took me three months to remember fifteen names.

R: Why?

J: I am very bad in remembering names.

R: But, this time, I would say, you are doing a very good job. Yeah, forty, forty, it's not easy.

J: Well, forty yes, I have to. I see them eleven times a week so I should end up remembering all of them.

R: I observed something very interesting if they cannot really answer your questions you wait you give them time to think and so quite I mean just now just now some students could manage to give you an answer maybe they got it from from their friends whatever. Have you ever tried to ask a question, to ask a student a question but after a long long time and he or she really couldn't give you anything. I mean, have you any, do you have any experience like that? What did you, what would you do?

J: I never wait too long, otherwise, otherwise, it would be a disruption to the class. They would start chatting if I focus on one student and that student cannot answer. One of the things that I do is either can anyone help him or her or I try to ask the same question in another way using words that are a bit simple or or trying to give the answer indirectly that that's the way I try to if it's hopeless than obviously I would go to another student.

R: Because you know I was kind of surprised I said wow finally they could answer all your questions. When I was a teacher I was I just had to wait I mean my experience's I just had to wait they didn't really try to give me anything and sometimes I find that it quite embarrassing. I didn't really know what to do and I said wow. So, John, that's wonderful, they could manage.

J: But I guess I guess part of the words part of the questions were about the vocabulary that I taught on Friday so they should basically they should all be able to answer technically speaking if they have revised whatever which they probably haven't done but then anyway some of them remember some of them don't need to revise they remember from what they hear in the classroom and then using using body language can help as well demonstrating and then oh yes use paper to. They don't know the word […] because they haven't seen the word […]. Use paper I think that's good enough to me as an answer. I don't expect them to use the exact word. I expect

them to be able to to to paraphrase, make themselves understand by whoever is listening. I think that's one point.

[I told John after the interview that I had a very brief chat with some of his students. His students were very curious and wanted to know why their lesson was video-recorded.]

~ end of interview ~

2.2 Classroom Observation II

2.2.1 Pre Classroom Observation Interview II

R: Researcher
J: John (School B)

R: So, okay, could you please tell tell tell me a little bit about what you are going to do this afternoon?

J: So, as usual, I am going to correct two exercises with them today and give them more homework for tomorrow. And, after that, I'll go through the story, the main story that I read with them by asking them some questions. We finished filling in the form about the setting, character and the plot so I've got some questions to ask them to see to see if they remember the story, and if they understand the vocabulary, if they remember the meaning of the new words that they have been taught. So that would be one part of the lesson. I hope it will be quick enough so that I can go on to introducing the future, not to be too difficult, I mean at least the future with 'will' is the first one. So I will try to contrast with the past tense and the future tense by talking about Christmas and Chinese New Year since I think it's a bit useless to use the future for Christmas. It's doesn't match reality. You do it for Christmas. That's all they tell me about. The Christmas was in December. Yes, thank you, so I would rather introduce Chinese New Year in here. So basically to ask them what they intend to do if they intend to offer presents to a relative, a close member of the family. After that, we'll have a listening comprehension, which again is about presents. So they will have to listen to a tape and write down what, Allan and Denny, the two characters of the conversation are offering to their parents. And, I won't I won't do the pair work which is about 'what is my partner going to do' or 'what will my partner offer to his mum and dad' because that's what I intend to do before, before really doing the listening part. And then, after that, if there's enough time, well we'll go on to the 'be going to' future which might cause a bit of trouble coz I am not too sure that the examples in the book are suitable to explain the difference between 'will' and 'going to', even the explanation is not quite convincing. If I read the explanation for the teacher I realize that, it is quite confused, not very clear, so I'll try to do that, there is lots of exercises on 'going to', I am afraid, so I think I think that will be all for today, unless I change my mind during the lesson and focus on countable and uncountable nouns coz I think maybe too much grammar in one go, might overload their brains, think it's more enjoyable to talk about countables and uncountables, so the objective the objective will be to make them use the future tense in contrast with the past tense

R: Thank you.

~ end of interview ~

2.2.2 Post Classroom Observation Interview II

R: Researcher
J: John (School B)

R: Testing. Yeah. Good. Thank you.

J: So I think this lesson started as usual by checking their homework. If I asked the few students to show me their books is because yesterday they didn't all do their homework., I wanted to make sure. Well I think this, I don't like giving homework so much but they are doing well. Need these exercises, most of them, especially for the weaker ones. It's good practice. So I am trying to give them less everyday. Now for the text I think they they remember most most events in the text. They were able to answer the questions rather accurately which is quite good. I actually forgot to check the vocabulary. [John laughed] The listening part, I don't think it is very difficult. Probably this time they were a bit surprised that the tape didn't mention every present twice because before what we did is well there was a repetition of the answer twice either given by Student A and then repeated by Student B to make it easier. But I think listening twice to the tape is is good practice rather than listening once to the tape and aiming at HKCEE where students can only listen to the tape once. Okay this is a horrible thing to do. Now they were well behaved because of the principal's presence. I think that is one element. They even jumped up to answer and some of them do do that all the time but others won't won't react that way. So they are impressive if someone important is there or someone new is there, someone they don't know and some researchers coming on they are a bit scared, a bit scared. I think I think they can handle difficult situation in a short time for most of them especially coming to the front is not easy. They try to hide. They try to speak in a very very low voice so that nobody can understand them but they do it. They do it. They are not too reluctant. They will try to bargain a little bit though. That's it. I think there is also a good support between classmates. They will spontaneously clap their hands and encourage the people who go to the blackboard so that's very positive. I didn't want to go on to the 'is going', 'to be going' stuff because I thought that one thing about grammar is enough and I didn't do too much about the future as I think they can handle it. So, next lesson tomorrow, I'll be I plan to do similar exercise to see if my impression is right or wrong and then I will move on to to […] Part. I think the best part that they enjoyed best was talking about the text. I made them think about the text and answer the questions, and the exercise about the presents, the future and the task. The homework stuff is a bit routine. So, really motivating. That's my impression for today.

R: Thank you.

~ end of interview ~

2.3 Classroom Observation III

2.3.1 Pre Classroom Observation Interview III

R: Researcher
J: John (School B)

J: So it's my turn now.

R: Yes, thanks a lot.

J: Alright, well, today is a bit like 'a bit of a mixed bag'. I have to start by giving out some forms to the students that they will use next Friday, I mean this Friday, on their outing to Tsim Sha Tsui to interview some foreigners and well I had to do some marking on those forms because the questions were either not too relevant or not really good in terms of grammar or structure.

R: That means the students will have to think about their questions?

J: Well they had to think about the questions, beforehand, normally with the help of Form Six students but I think the cooperation was not too good so what I am returning them is what I would like them to ask the foreigners and I will have to explain again how it is going to happen and what they have to bring on Friday so that's the first part. The second part I am going to give back their free writing and well congratulate one student who did something marvelous…. And, after that I will start the lesson which is basically listening today so I will be doing some listening passages I started in the last lesson. It's still about Christmas, mind you! This is to end this session. Testing their listening is not too much of a problem most of them manage to get the message rather clearly. I play some of the passages two times so that they have time to check but if I see that most of them are ready after one go, then I just leave it like that because for their final exam they could only listen to the tape once.

R: Just once.

J: Just once, yes, so I try to prepare them for that

R: Very challenging.

J: Very challenging indeed, very challenging indeed, this is also the opportunity for me to have them speak a little bit because I ask them extra questions. I don't just expect them to give me the answer. Sometimes I need an explanation, or just remind me what the words mean… the answer. And, if we have time, if we have time there will be a phoenix passage where they will have to recognize 't' and 'd' the sound difference in context and I think that will be all for today because it's fair short.

R: Yeah, one period.

J: So, normally as I said they don't have any problem with listening for most of them. It's one of their strengths.

R: What do you think about listening? Because um, what do you think um, what is your objective of doing all these particular exercises?

J: If I was mean I would say it's just because I have to do it [John laughed] and it's part of the requirement basically. I think that these types of exercises are out of context. We are all talking about Christmas talking about different items related to Christmas but I think it's out of context. The idea now is to try how able they are in taking out information along with other details so that they have to catch the right sort of information but it seems it seems that there is not much problem there.

R: Because I don't know, I talked to students of other classes even teachers sometimes students think that it's difficult, listening activities, and I do think that sometimes they do not really know why, I mean, why they have to do that.

J: Mine, mine found these activities boring. They are always, or well, speed up, speed up, for most of them, for most of them. But I guess for them if they pay more attention to the tape, I am not sure whether they are really paying attention to the conversation or what they hear they could improve their pronunciation. One of the big problems that we found after the exam and after the tests is that they can't match the spelling with the pronunciation so they may know what you are talking about but they can't write it or they just can't pronounce it and they will try to spell it out so that is one of their biggest problems so maybe this listening activity is kind of good to improve part of the problem.

R: Again it depends on how the students, you know, treat the exercise, whether or not they are willing to listen carefully and trying to remember pronunciation that they don't really know. Depends on that.

J: But actually I always try to ask them a few questions that are not in the exercise to make sure they listen to the whole conversation. Sometimes they don't get it but I quite understand. Otherwise they can answer. They can answer.

R: Okay, thank you.

J: You are welcome.

~ end of interview ~

2.3.2 Post Classroom Observation Interview III

R: Researcher
J: John (School B)

R: Could you please tell me something about your lesson, whether or not your objectives have been achieved?

J: No, I don't think that the objectives have been achieved.

R: Why?

J: Because for some reasons the class was too quiet. Now this maybe due to the fact that I scolded them very severely last week because some of them never have their books and so they may have […]. Probably they were not really willing to do the exercises at first. They gave in a little bit near the end but I think it was too late. Mmm Yeah, I felt it's very hard today to go through that lesson at such in terms, I am not sure. I tried to finish the phoenix exercise because that one is is important. But, I don't think I will go on with the other parts. I will […] move on to the next unit because otherwise it will be the same problem. I will be too late. I will not have enough time for teaching everything.

R: You raised something very interesting. It seems to me that whether or not students are motivated to learn something depends very much on how they perceive the subject

J: Yes.

R: Whether or not they like the teacher.

J: Yes. And, whether or not the teacher behaves in a certain way or a different way. I realize that sometimes, it's not particular to that class, if I have to take measures in the next lesson they will probably, will probably be a wall, an invisible wall of indifference, silence-ness. Okay, you want us to be silent, well we'll BE silent. [A student came to John and asked him a question.] Yes, but at the moment I'm busy. Can you wait five ten minutes? Okay. Sorry.

R: I can understand. It seems to me that that's even more important. I mean the teacher-student relationship is even more important. No matter what you do if they they they are not going to listen to you because they are not kind of happy with you and it's hard.

J: It's it's it's hard to solve the problem in one period. Sometimes they are over-excited because they are from whatever lessons with a little bit more freedom, I guess. Or sometimes they are completely like like after sleep and and it's not consistent. I mean this happens at anytime of the day. You could understand that the class is more sleepier after lunch for example but that's not always the case. They can be very sleepy at eight o'clock in the morning and extremely lively at one-thirty in the afternoon. It's inconsistent.

R: Right, now, but but just now you talked about something that they expect the teachers to do or students expect teachers not to do. Is it like something to do with discipline is important. So it seems to me that we are in teachers we are in a very difficult situation.

J: Yes.

R: How far, I mean, to what extent you can exercise your authority to stop those behavior which is really […] in class? And, at the same time keep the students motivated at least you and your students are in a good relationship and they are willing to learn.

J: But I think that this is […] like any relationship between two people or friends or family members. At some point people will argue or quarrel and I guess this is true for a teacher and his students but it's true that they will like some teachers and dislike other teachers. They might like you for a period and dislike you for another period. One big problem for me is that it's communication. If there is a serious problem, I only have English to use or someone in between to go between which of course is not desirable because when you have your only feelings to express and the best way is to go direct but this is impossible. So that has already created a few a few problems, confusion and misunderstanding.

R: So what would you do? Would you do anything? I mean now it seems that they are trying to build the wall again.

J: I am not sure. I think I think there's two there's two reasons there here for their attitude. […] they don't like the listening practice and to be honest I think it's too much. If if I could like play with all those elements in the lesson, I would do ten-minute listening and oral and move on to something else. Try to try to plan a lesson that has as many activities as possible but the big problem is that it's the coursebook, the main coursebook. Some of the activities take over a period. So if you have one period, it's very very difficult to use, let's say, two or three books and it's also difficult to add extra elements in the sense that well you will not cover everything you need for them to go through the exam which is about one month's time. And actually within that month I suppose we are all supposed to do Unit 4 plus one part of Unit 7. If if I am not good at Maths we came back from the holiday on the third of January we are on the twentieth of February and we have finished Unit 5. So again, I can't see how we can squeeze one full unit and pieces of another unit into one month especially because this week we are going to lose some lessons for going to the outing which of course is very interesting but there's no compensation in the curriculum at such. The exam, no choice, the grammar has got to be done so this would mean rushing again through things. So, I think here in HK, it is even more difficult to get a good relationship with students unless, that's my impression, you are not listening to them and you are just feeding them. I teach you listening. I teach you listening. I teach you listening, basically that sort of method. But I sought interaction. So even if sometimes they are noisy, but answers are coming out, I think that is more positive than having them listen to a lesson and just sitting there anyway, watching the ceiling watching whatever. So it's a bit of a dilemma

R: You have to follow quite closely the textbook, the main one, I mean.

J: The main one, yes, the most important one. That's the most important one.

R: That means including all those like listening, related listening practice and grammar practice.

J: And, and stupid vocabulary. I mean, I don't, I'll give you a simple example. I am not sure that F.1 students should know that women can squeal with delight. I am sorry but this is not basic vocabulary. Okay, before you squeeze that into a conversation I I I think you'd be old enough okay and well written than well spoken but this is this is in their coursebook and there are lots lots of words like that and expressions like that which I find totally useless. But, they have to know them because it's part of the curriculum.

R: Will they be tested in exams I mean these new words and phrases?

J: They will be tested in exams for example in in cloze passages in in dictations and certainly in grammar exercises, yes, yes.

R: Thanks for telling me. I mean it seems you are right you know er you know what should be done.

J: Well I

R: But the fact is under the system you might not be able to do what you think be a better way.

J: Yes, let's say that. No, I won't say that I know what should be done but at least I can see what should not be done at that age. This is an anecdote but last year I was working with another NET teacher in another school and she told me that in the exam she had put the word 'telephone' and all her colleagues complained that the word 'telephone' is not part of the basic requirement and she had to change like an exercise or two because it was based on telephone. So this in my mind this is like well I don't know. You are telling me tales, I mean, you know. It's like, it's like what? Am I on planet /sÞt/ with Zippy and Zinc because this is what what the sort of words that that need to to to hear okay when they are visiting /sÞt/ or whatever. Right.

R: The textbook, I would never forget!

J: Yes, The textbooks are, I don't know. I don't know whose behind those textbooks. I suppose they are marvelous. They are marvelous university professors and eminent eminent people native speakers most probably.

R: But Zinc and Zippy. [Both John and I laughed.] Okay, tell me a little bit about free writing.

J: Okay, free writing. That's more more important than. My idea behind free writing is that students can express themselves and really show what they are going to write and how they can write it.
R: Would they be assigned a topic?

J: They would be assigned a topic as such, yes. But, it's their freedom to to to follow their ideas after that so that the topic is very general. For example, the last one I did with them I read a story with them and then I said the story was not finished. Now it's your turn to finish the story to find an end to that story. It's up to you to decide whether it's going to be a happy end or a sad end whatever. And, I come up with interesting results. True and real personal ideas which I tend not to find in straight compositions so that's the main difference that I think between free writing and and compo.

R: And, one important thing is how do you mark free writing. Do you mark it?

J: Okay, so I don't mark free writing because we are not supposed to mark free writing. We are only supposed to mark compos. So even if free writing is good but I have introduced a system of of let's say good points stamps chop chop as they call them and and after a while they get a pink sheet or they get a simple like a pen or eraser something useful for them and that motivates them anyway especially F.1.

R: I was really glad because just now when you gave them back the book I observed very closely and found that some boys did you know read I didn't I didn't know what you you wrote on the book but I do think that they care shows that they care about the comments from you.

J: Of course, they do.

R: That' a very good sign. Usually if you give them their composition, they will look at the mark and put it aside. But just now they were really reading. That's a very good sign to me.

J: I think that at first they they probably didn't understand my comments. But I try to use the same sorts of vocabulary in my comments.

R: You mainly respond to their ideas?

J: Yes, I main respond to their ideas. I praise them if the ideas are good. I praise them if their English is good. And, I never I never express a negative idea unless someone has done nothing. Then of course well I have to take a measure even if it's only verbal but I have to say well if you go on like that then I will have to take a sanction. And if it's not good then I will I will always say something like okay but you can do better. See your text is nice. Keep trying something like that trying to make sure that they don't lose faith in them in themselves in themselves.

R; Alright. Okay. I know that I keep a lot of your students waiting.

J: It's alright.

R: One more thing. I want you to tell me how you think about parents. I know that schools cannot remember I guess it's in January you had a

J: Yes, we had the parents' day but unfortunately I was not involved in the parents' day. I'm there to smile. [John told his students that he would be free in about five

minutes.] Actually nothing is prepared for tomorrow's radio programme in the morning because my colleagues did not really help me to find students and these are not the most pleasant students in the world, anyway, I will sing tomorrow. So what was I what was I talking about?

R: Parents.

J: Yes, parents, well, I have no contact with parents.

R: Why?

J: Because well just because of the language problem, the language barrier.

R: But, did they tell you to come back on that day and stand somewhere close to the main gate.

J: I have to be here. I was on duty near the main gate and smile saying morning in Cantonese for one hour in the morning and one hour in the afternoon, but basically I have no no contact with the parents. Just one one mother approached me this time and surprisingly he's a student in F.5. I don't know maybe for some reasons, her son told her something about me or whatever and she approached me and she said how do you think my son could improve his spoken English but she spoke perfect English and the guy was there mum […]. He's a tall guy and his mother is short and that's really funny. That's all I can tell about parents.

R: Do you think it's, but it's hard I mean it's hard to say because sometimes communication with parents.

J: It's important, of course. I would need an extra teacher then to meet the parents. So it's probably very difficult but I don't know how my NET colleagues manage when they are class teachers in F.1. I don't know how they manage. Some schools assign them to be class teachers in F.1. I really don't know how they manage. How they manage all the paper work in Chinese to start with and contact with parents if there is any problem.

R: But, you know what, yeah, I know, even before you said anything, you must be assigned somewhere important at the main gate standing there for you know whole morning or whatever. Thank you very much.

J: You are welcome.

~ end of interview ~

2.4 Classroom Observation IV

2.4.1 Pre Classroom Observation Interview IV

R: Researcher
J: John (School B)

R: Okay, could you please tell me what you are going to do today?

J: Alright so, yesterday I started Unit 4 which is about eating, eating out, food so I had some kind of extra long brainstorming with the students as an intro. I asked them what types of restaurant they knew, what types of food they knew, how to cook food, advantages and disadvantages of eating out or eating in so that was the intro. I didn't want to use the coursebook but today I will start the coursebook so will go into details I would say, doing exercises about food, restaurants, students reading a passage, full of strange names to pronounce and strange words to pronounce again. [John laughed] So basically the objective today is just to familiarize them with vocabulary related to food and also drill them on 'wh' questions because this is one of the biggest grammar topics of this unit.

[I asked John a question about the grammar and exercise books that the students are using after the interview. John confirmed that students had to complete all sorts of exercises in their grammar books, exercise books, workbooks and project books. He considered many of these exercises boring.]

~ end of interview ~

2.4.2 Post Classroom Observation Interview IV

R: Researcher
J: John (School B)

R: Okay, thank you. Thanks a lot.

J: So I think that the students enjoyed the first part of the lesson watching those photos and trying to guess what it is. They they they they know obviously they know some of the desserts actually. I think that some of the pictures are not good enough to reveal exactly what it is so the garlic bread yes very strange thing. [Both John and I laughed.] I guess that in the next lesson I actually want to talk about the next lesson rather than this lesson because I feel that this lesson has just been like giving them a lot of vocabulary to digest and so in the next lesson I really want to see how much they can remember from such a heavy lesson I would call it a very heavy lesson. So see how much they can remember probably I'll be showing them some of the pictures again or other pictures and also train their pronunciation because all those words seem that foreign with very special pronunciation. […] Now again again when you go to a restaurant in England you usually order by number.

R: Even in Hong Kong.

J: Even in Hong Kong so I I don't know how important all those words are for them. Probably for the local food, they are not important at all in any case but I guess that's a good way to open their open their mind towards foreign cultures and what I would like to do is work with the Home Economics teacher and try to have them prepare a recipe either on one of the things that they saw in the pictures or anything else. So prepare all the ingredients with labeling them. Give them a list of the ingredients and they have to find out which is which and then follow the instruction. I think that this lesson could provide a good foundation for cross curricular activities which is something that is very rarely done in Hong Kong if not never done, so I will try to bargain with that teacher and see what we can do.

R: That would be interesting.

J: Yes, yes, because at least they will understand why those words are important and they will put into practice what they are learning in a very theoretical way without touching without smelling.

R: Can I ask a question, John? Why, it's interesting that towards the end of the lesson, you tried to check answers with them, right? I mean I don't know all that but when I looked around the students did their homework.

J: The students did, did their homework. From time to time I check but usually I trust them and I think that creates a better atmosphere. If I was checking on them every time I give them homework something to do they probably would […] I don't check regularly and I don't mind if some of them haven't prepared but most of the time yes they are ready. They are ready.

R: Right, John, can I ask you, how you think or your own understanding of three words, teaching, what is it? Learning, what is it? And education?

J: Okay, well I think that first of all teaching and learning are closely linked. It's a sharing knowledge. I can learn from my students and I hope that my students can learn from me so I think there is basically no difference between a teacher and a student as such. When I hear people say that well the teacher is the one who knows everything, well of course, not. I would say that the teacher the teacher knows nothing. We learn from each other so I think that teaching is caring. That's the the the first thing that comes to my mind, the first idea that comes to my mind. Teaching is probably not a job as such. It's more like being dedicated to an ideal. An ideal that sometimes you cannot achieve, okay, you you you have a goal but you don't reach the goal but sometimes you do. Nothing is perfect. Teachers are not perfect. Teaching is not perfect. And you can keep improving. That's why I say that teaching and learning are linked are linked because everyday you learn how to teach. Everyday your lesson is different. And success is not guaranteed. Now learning, learning and teaching should be fun. That's my ideal. Learning should be fun. People who want to learn should enjoy what they are doing, not be forced into anything. They should be allowed to have their own rhythm, which of course is not the case in the classroom which is not the case in some types of education systems where everything is far too straight. So I would say that the students who enjoy learning here in Hong Kong is the one who is academically fit whose mind is ready to go through pressure rather than enjoyment. These are the images that come in my mind when you talk about teaching and learning. And what did you mention?

R: Education.

J: Education. Mind, education. Education starts starts at home. The teacher is only a link in a very very long chain. Children start learning when when when they are with their parents and they learn when they are with their friends and and they keep on learning. And so education is something very fast. Teachers cannot do everything. I know that in the mind of some parents, maybe not in Hong Kong, in Belgium, some parents say well the teacher is there to education my child and I don't educate my child is not my responsibility. So in some cases the teachers should be the father and the mother the brother and the sister everything and the teachers as well. So education, yes, it's trying to find your way in life, trying to sort out what you like and what you don't like and again it should be done in an open minded way. Now what I noticed here in Hong Kong is that there is. In Hong Kong my impression is that little space for those who are not academically minded. People can be talented in lots of things, alright? They can be good at sports-men or women. They can be good […], plumber. So I think I think that if you want to have a real efficient really efficient education system you should have space for those people who are not ready to go through all these academic pressure but still want to do something out of their lives not just hang about. My impression is that if you are not academically ready then you end up in the street with little opportunities to do anything else and that is bad because this means that education or at least one side of education is leaving which leaves you in the hands of the other side of education which could be some bad sort of education. Education for me is everything. It's what we call the good side and what we call the bad side. I am not there to decide what is bad and what is good, what is right and wrong. I don't think so. I don't think that the teachers have their right to interfere in a

student's private life. So no matter if someone turns bad a person's life is their own responsibilities from a certain point on but where we are is responsible is when we do not provide them with other means of going on in society when when the education system fails to provide them with possible tools that would direct them to many different directions. So I think in Belgium the system is much more open minded in the sense that if students are not fit enough to go to university we would direct them to secondary schools that specialize say in sports, say in bakery in even making flowers, designing clothes.

R: Is it some kind of vocational?

J: It's similar to some kind of vocational studies.

R: People in Hong Kong are trying to close down.

J: Yes, that's what I heard, I heard, yeah, yes. So this is missing here I think. I was told by my colleagues that there's one secondary school with sports options. Whole Hong Kong just one. So this is this is the problem.

R: Just now, John, you talked about space for students, right? Open mind, what about teachers? Do you think that under you know the present system space for is there any space for teachers? And, do you think that the process has opened minds towards teaching and learning, and education.

J: I think it's important to be open-mind, yes. You need to see further than your nose, further than your school. I'd say further than your staffroom, further than your school and further than the city or the country you live in. The world world is around outside if you are not ready for it, you could get into trouble easily. That may happen to youngsters who go abroad and suddenly find something that they are not aware of. They could easily get into trouble. When I compare when I compare the magazines that are available for secondary students here in Hong Kong and the ones that we have in Europe, there is a gap, a huge gap. The ones here are academically based. Let's prepare them for exams, okay. It's more or less one colour and black ticks so it's very dull, not pleasant, attractive and it tackles those so called serious and important issues. Okay let's avoid the things that are not politically correct. Whereas the magazines that we have, colourful, pictures are extremely vivid and the text is spontaneous and they talk freely about everything youngsters want to learn about, want to know about. So there's no boundary. We don't hide things.

R: And, it's not grammar focused.

J: And, it's not grammar focused.

R: Yeah, you'll find you'll find the text. There are words on the side and that's a magazine.

J: That's the magazines to learn foreign language. No they are based on communication. Communication is the most important thing. So, you have another question? You had two questions?

R; Just one is space for teachers?

J: Oh, yes, space for teachers. I don't think there is any (space for teachers) even even if you want to change the curriculum, let's say, in S. 1-3, you still have the public examinations (in senior forms). So you cannot change otherwise S.4 students won't be prepared, won't be ready for that public exam. So there is so far no space unless you reduce the coursebook.

R: Why is the coursebook so important?

J: What I heard is that parents buy the books. So the books have got to be full at the end of the school year. There's got to be something in the books. And, when you waive one unit, as I told you spending nearly 2 months on Christmas after Christmas, well, you understand that we can't do much more. It's difficult.

R: It's difficult. Thanks, John.

J: It's difficult.

~ end of interview ~

2.5 Classroom Observation V

2.5.1 Pre Classroom Observation Interview V

R: Researcher
J: John (School B)

R: Okay, testing, yes, thank you.

J: So well today is going to be a bit of melting pot of things, not too sure what I am going to do except that I have to correct some homework that's about four exercises. I have got, just received some exercises on 'wh' questions, so I will go through one or two of those exercises with them. I will also go through the 'famous' vocabulary checklist with them because I have to prepare them for the unseen dictation sometime soon... [John laughed as he said that.] I have to rush to something totally different which is comparative and superlative of adjectives because it's part of the quiz which is next week and of the exam which is the week after, so I kind of have to forget about what we are doing right now which is Unit 4 food and stuff. I have to forget about it because I am far behind the schedule, so that's it. I don't expect that this lesson would be revealing at all. There is no particular objective. The objective is to be sure that I have seen with them what they need for the quiz. But that is not a good objective.

R: But, can I ask a question?

J: Sure.

R: Why, why, why, it seems to me that it's just out of nothing, why comparatives and superlatives?

J: Don't ask me why, I don't know, I have been told that I should do that so I am doing it.

R: Is it? Is it? I don't know. Does it come from the book or what?

J: It it it comes from a unit that we are not really going to talk about so we are just focusing on the grammar unit in that particular unit. Although that unit is interesting according to me because it is about world records so that would be extremely fun with the students. We are not concentrating on the topic we are just concentrating on the comparatives and superlatives. It is out of nowhere.

[John told me after the interview that his students would need to go to a detention class after school because of their misbehavior in the lesson that morning and he would be having another meeting at 4 to discuss with other English language teachers the programme for the coming English week. He said apart from teaching he was assigned other duties like the school radio broadcast which took place once a cycle, editing the school newsletter which is issued three times a year and special English activities such as the Halloween party and the English week. These duties took up much of his time. He felt that sometimes he was not given the support he needed e.g. the software he used for editing, to complete these tasks. He understood that the software was very expensive and the school would not purchase it for him. Because

he had to complete a lot of duties and tasks he was assigned, he sometimes had to work late and he looked exhausted during the interview.]

~ end of interview ~

2.5.2 Post Classroom Observation Interview V

R: Researcher
J: John (School B)

R: Okay, so what about, what do you think about the lesson that you had just now?

J: Well, I think that they had prepared, most of them had prepared their homework seriously and actually the topic is not too difficult for them, wh-questions, is not too difficult. The only problem is the verb. They don't know exactly how to use the verb after why, which, who so that's why I' going to drill them a bit more on that during the next lesson. I did not expect to do more in 40 minutes actually because I want to make sure that they have correct answers. And the second point is that the in the open close passage some of them didn't find the right word but I would say that the exercise is not that easy and some of the answers that they suggested would do as well so that's why they are acceptable […] . Again I realize that some difficult vocabulary and words are probably too difficult, so it's a bit of, it's a bit of the nonsense to ask them to remember those words. They are not immediately useful. I 'm I'm sure that they cannot ask for help if they have problems in the street. They can probably not ask for help but they can they can order spaghetti […] and I wonder what is more important. So, my point is that as far as the coursebook is concerned, most of the objectives have been covered and reached but it's not the essential thing in English. That's probably is the problem. Although although I I said I would introduce more topical things in my in my lessons, I try to be more practical. I have no time to do so.

R: Yeah, and I remember last time you talked about asking the Home Economics teacher to help, right?

J: That's right. I I I haven't asked because because I am lack of time, simply a lack of time. I am far too busy to start preparing anything more so. I know it's wasted. It's an opportunity that is wasted but as long as it is not really part of the curriculum I can't see how I can possibly manage.

R: But, I'm I'm really interested in the curriculum that you talked about. This is not the first time you talk about that. You talked about it several times. Let me a bit about the curriculum, I mean, is it something fixed or what? Is it something you know developed according to the book? Or or what is it? Is it something that you were given at the beginning of the term or?

J: Well I'm I'm I'm not quite sure. Well I know how it is developed by the government but it seems to be implemented in very different ways according to the school. I went to different schools and most of them are teaching the same so most coursebooks whether they are called Longman, Cambridge or whatever seem to focus on exactly the same Ocean Park and […] You name it you get it. So it seems it seems that there must be someone somewhere who has decided once and for all that the topics to be discussed in the classroom are fixed topics. Whether the school curriculum prepares them for the HKCEE or not, I am not too sure. Again, it's more like feeding ducks, it's more like feeding ducks. But what I am convinced not is that there is too much. Although we have eleven periods, they are only 40 minutes in each, not a lot in terms of hours. But the quantity we have to do in the few hours in the

week are just enormous. And that of course is a very big problem. The way it is implemented means that you have to skip maybe interesting parts just to focus on others for some reason. You have to go through any grammar points without any virtually any context. Now I am very epic that talking about comparatives and superlatives I I had the idea of organizing the longest balloon chain for the English week, so longest, longer, I can I can relate to that event and tell them well you know it's going to be something […] longer, longest, shorter, shortest, bigger, biggest. Associate that topic a grammar topic with something real and tangible, which I think is really important. You don't do grammar just for the sake of grammar. But the problem is that even though the idea is don't do grammar, even the coursebook is grammar oriented. No matter what you do, in the end.

R: But, you have to follow closely what is given in the coursebook?

J: Yes, to follow closely because you teach one class out of four or five classes in the same form. So if you teach differently other teachers of course there will be a problem. It's a problem unless you rethink the whole course by yourself and […] but it's impossible. It could take a full year to do that, so I don't want to think of doing my own worksheet and rethink the whole course.

R: But if if you are given time and a group of teachers to work with you you can work with your colleagues, do you think it's a better idea? Is it okay? Possible?

J: Maybe, but if the school is ready to try that is the point. That is the point.

R: Okay, what do you mean by ready?

J: It means well get rid of the coursebook. Let's go for it. Let's do something on our own, our own material, material that is diversive that we can teach different things for two three four years and maybe come back later and update update the topics.

R: Right. Because I am aware that some schools, I guess few years ago, started I guess two or three years ago, they started to throw away their textbooks and the principals asked the teachers to work out their own worksheets and materials for their for their for the English subject. But, feedback from teachers they were very disappointed because they said I didn't know how to develop materials and they didn't really have much time to do that. I mean you know everyday you have to go into the classrooms and you need some materials and that's why they said they were not ready to do that.

J: Of course, it's time consuming. But, actually that's what I did in Belgium because we we most schools don't use any coursebooks. To be honest, I hate using textbooks. I would rather say ok I read an interesting article in the newspaper. I'll make it simple for S.1 students. Then we'll talk about it […] and pictures I take on the Internet and introducing useful vocabulary to them. I could still do the grammar things.

R: But I guess you know as you said just now ready say like assessment has to be compatible to the new system. I really want you to talk about three things, but I can't keep you longer. Actually for today, I want you to talk about English language teaching. You told me a little bit how you understand English language learning to

learn a second language your own experience and whatever and then the joy and difficulties of being a secondary school English teacher in Hong Kong. Maybe we can talk about them later on Monday when I come back.

J: Yes. Monday or anytime you are here.

R: That's very kind of you.

~ end of interview ~

2.6 Classroom Observation VI

2.6.1 Pre Classroom Observation Interview VI

R: Researcher
J: John (School B)

R: Okay. Thank you. You can start now.

J: Alright so today we will just start with unseen dictation about the previous unit that I didn't complete for good reasons because I had to go on with the comparative and superlative forms of adjectives which I briefly started in the previous lesson. I think I'm going to use the computer. I'm going to use the Guineas World of Records website to show them a few records so as to introduce adjectives like the longest, fastest whatever. I want I want to illustrate, to make it more enjoyable although the topic of comparative and superlative is not too difficult apparently but I'd like to test it today, to test it today, so I'll do some exercises as well. I have prepared some worksheets. One of the worksheets is on the Internet. I may use the computer again to complete it. So that's that's the idea. I just want to take my time and of course of course it would be better for the quiz on Thursday I think on the 30th.

R: Okay, thank you. Thank you.

~ end of interview ~

2.6.2 Post Classroom Observation Interview VI

R: Researcher
J: John (School B)

R: Okay, tell tell me something about […]

J: Well, I would say that the first part, the dictation, is kind of nonsensical because that dictation contains too many difficult words. To start with, they will not change their lives whether they can spell them or not, I think. Anyway, this is part of their curriculum. So my fear is that it will be extremely bad…. We have noticed that most papers in exams one of the biggest problems is spelling. They can't spell properly. And we have tried to find solutions. It's hard to improve their spelling but I don't think that doing such dictation would improve anything. It could only make things worse because they would be disgruntled. So I think it would be better to teach them less vocabulary and do shorter dictations. That is one thing, more regular, shorter dictations. The second thing is that the marking system should be changed. I mean, if they have a spelling mistake, it's five marks out of one hundred. Now if you count the numbers of words in the dictation it's easy to get zero if you miss one or two sentences. So I think it's it's also unfair in a sense that if you accumulate difficulty and you don't change the marking scheme then my conclusion is that only with top students can have good marks'

R: So, what about the part on superlatives and

J: I think that that part today was a little bit like well having fun rather than really studying something new or trying to consolidate what they were told in the last lesson. Actually tomorrow I intend to use the coursebook so to have something a bit more structured. All I wanted to do today is really introduce the topic by using examples, concrete examples and I will again do the same tomorrow but without the computer telling them about the longest balloon chain I told them to try making for the coming English week. I will I will introduce the the the event telling them if they want to join they will have to do the longest have to be longer than so this is again something very concrete. Then I will use the pictures in the coursebook to show them basically size size and weight that is the idea so this is again would be rushing through things putting everything together asking them to see if they are able to form questions and at the same time use comparative superlative. So something a bit more concrete with clear examples and then and more exercises.

R: So what about the English week? You mentioned it I guess twice. Is it something that is going to happen after the mid term exam?

J: So this is going to happen on the eighth of April so that is why it's after the mid term exam just before the Easter Holiday.

R: So, what what what what would be included in that week? Anything special activities after school? Or whatever?

J: Yes, there will be special activities after school. I think only one. Some activities during lunch time. Some song dedication in the morning. We have an assembly as

well so we have two periods and […] we'll have some games in the hall. Plus, if students apply, we'll have the election of Mr and Miss English that is a novelty. But we need to have students applying.

R: What about students? Do they have to speak in English during that week?

J: The students don't have to speak in English as far as I know. But whenever they want to join game stalls or any activities then yes they would have to use English.

R: And you are the one to organize.

J: No, the whole team the whole team is responsible for the English week and I am not the only one to organize for God's sake. No way. No way. But then I have to prepare some students. I have to prepare some DJs for the radio and the song dedication. Of course I will have a special Radio KL because I have one during the English week and I'll do something special for that. And I will also have to prepare some students to be moderators during the games in the hall along with another colleague.

R: […]

J: They do learn a lot because it's more concrete than being in the classroom I guess. It's real life situation. They have to think about what to say, how to behave, how to draw the other's attention which is quite a job actually. Now one thing I noticed because I was given the moderators' text for last year I think is that what the students prepared was extremely formal. Terminology used, the length of the sentences and everything reveals keep you are ready to go through a formal exam, only formal English is used. So, what we are going to do, what we are going to try this year is to have something more appealing to everyone. More familiar everyday English.

R: That would be more interesting.

J: I think so. I think so. And also we have to think that those students S.4,6 students who moderate the games are talking to F.1-3 students so the level of English should be easier.

R: How long have you been teaching English in secondary schools in Hong Kong?

J: Oh, in HK only, so about two years about two years.

R: What about including in other places?

J: You mean you mean at home as well?

R: Right.

J: At home, twenty years.

R: So you are very experienced?

J: No. Just have twenty two years behind me.

R: Did you know that secondary school English language teachers had been required to help their students to develop critical thinking through the English language subject?

J: Curricular thinking, is it?

R: Critical thinking. Did you know that?

J: Critical thinking. es, I am aware that the curriculum and the government everyone up there.

R: Good! Could you please tell me when and where did you first hear about it or read about it?

J: I think it was when I arrived in HK and started to get some documents from the government. I am not too sure about the time.

R: So, do you think critical thinking can be developed through the subject English language subject?

J: Well, I think the curriculum needs to be changed before critical thinking can be introduced so that there is room for I'd call critical thinking lessons. There is no room for that at the moment.

R: Yeah, you mentioned change. I mean can you give some some examples?

J: Well I I I think for me the curriculum for F.1 or 2 at least should be lighter to allow more space for free communication, critical thinking, creativity. All those things that are not present at the moment just because you have to rush through everything to reach the goal, the aim, whatever the target set by the textbook and the curriculum as such.

R: So, if I understand correctly you do think that it can be developed through the subject.

J: I think it can. Yes, of course. Well, I think if you relate the subject to other subjects so do some cross curricular activity so you can develop critical thinking e.g. if you relate English to what is happening in the world let's say history, geography for example then you can probably show students that HK is not the only place in the world. And that some people are […] they are and they may start thinking and say well what you are told in HK may not be exactly what happens outside in the world that is how you get students to to think.

R: How do you understand critical thinking? What it means to you? Or or whether or not you think is important in education?

J: Well I think that critical thinking is not just saying yes to what the teacher feeds you but also think think by yourself. Develop your own ideas about topics, different topics, different issues. English in a sense could help because it's a different language.

And it's a different way of thinking compare to Chinese. So, introducing cultural elements for example in the subject might help.

R: So do you think your teaching now is helping your students to develop critical thinking?

J: I am sorry to say no. I don't think so. Because I am following the curriculum. I have little, I'd say no time to introduce anything from the outside world. I just can't do it. If I do it, then I would be late compared to my colleagues. So I will put my class my group in danger in terms of exams. I may develop something positive but I will not develop what the education system is doing […].

R: Do you think critical thinking can be assessed through the subject?

J: I think that you could probably assess critical thinking through things like compositions, group conversation where you can ask students to think and think about the topic, give their own ideas about the topic. Assessment would always be subjective in the sense that the student's idea might not be the same as yours but that is something a teacher should accept. You should not penalize a student because he is saying something that is totally opposite from what you think. So, yes, I think assessment is, definitely possible with an open mind.

R: Do you think the government has been giving you I don't know what actually I don't know what they have they they offer any kind of support to help you to implement the recommendation? This is their recommendation, to to to implement critical thinking curriculum in your classroom. Do you think you have any support or?

J: I haven't heard of any support and and and from my own position I just feel that there is not any support at all. Because the government is not my direct employer so I don't have any more contact at all with the Education Department or whatsoever. My employer is school so basically I have to follow the rules of the school and not the rules of the government or anybody else. So I think that a teacher on his or her own cannot do much unless the whole team is ready to to to change the direction which we are we are running sometimes but not walking.

R: Now, last time I should have asked you I should have given you time to talk about three three things. The first one is, I guess we have to do it right now, English language teaching, what is it? English language learning and also difficulties and the joy of being a secondary English language teacher in HK.

J: Alright. So which one you would want me to start with?

R: English language teaching.

J:: English language teaching, right. Well, I think that is like any teaching in the world. It needs dedication. You need to be dedicated to become a teacher otherwise it's better to do something different even though the job is not easy at time and you may think of giving up, which is quite normal. I think there is quite a lot of pressure a lot of tension going on. English language teaching now, well, probably probably my aim is lower than the expectation here in Hong Kong. I don't think that everyone can be

bilingual and perfectly bilingual. I think that as an English language teacher I should in secondary school arouse their interests towards English. Arouse interests towards English speaking countries as well not just the language but also the culture. And try to motivate the students to learn by themselves because although the teacher is there to help, the teacher is not there to give everything. It's impossible. You can't give everything. What is everything anyway? We know that the average native speaker uses about five thousand words ten thousands in the time is it something like that? And er three hundred thousand words in the English dictionary on the English language. So, I think the teacher is there to give some foundations. Alright you can push those foundations high up of course especially if you have good students. But if you have average students or weaker students, then your ambition should be moderate. Not too high. It's useless because in that case you become the one to disgust people about English.

R: So what do you teach your students? What do you want to teach your students?

J: What I would like to teach my students is how to communicate properly with people who speak English or with people who know English and are not necessarily native speakers. Communication is important if you go abroad. If you speak only Cantonese, well, I think you might get into trouble, in some situations that you might find it difficult. You might not like the country just because you don't you don't speak the you can't even ask a simple question. So communication is important.

R: How, I mean, I guess other people will ask then how, what do they have to learn before they can communicate with others?

J: Well, if I want to give you an example, it should be easier than an explanation, I think. I I I always come back with the same example. If if what do you think is more important? Excuse me, can you tell me the way to the station or excuse me why did you squeal with delight? Which one is more important? I am sorry to take this example but this is taken out of the coursebook and it seems that there is no can you tell me the way to the station please but there is squeal with delight in the textbook. So, it seems that we are not aiming at communication at all here. Basic communication, we are aiming at super vocabulary student a new super hero. That's my impression. So I would like to have because it seems not to be done in primary school, I don't know. They already have like six years of English but what's been done there. I am not really aware of. I have not been told. Is it a secret? Or do I have to go by myself into a primary school and ask what they are doing there. I don't know. But it seems that when they reach F.1 there is not much there, just a few things. And most of it has got to be redone for most students like 10% 10% seem to have a good background to me but the rest is just like very average. So what I would like to do with with most of them is is yes try to inculcate the basic thing for communication in F.1 and F.2 and then after that you can think of including every aspect of the language especially vocabulary because they need vocabulary and it is important for communication.

R: What do you think? Do you think that the curriculum that you are following now allows you to do […] helping students to communicate?

J: Very little because I think that you can only teach efficient communication first of all in a smaller group and with more time. With forty students you cannot really go ahead with communication as such. Because there will always be people who are not interested no matter what you do. And they will tend to disturb since you cannot you are not videoing me but I quote unquote you cannot eliminate them from the group. The rotten fruit has to stay in the middle of the group no matter what you do. So, the problem will will will spread only spread and that make […]. So different aspects should be changed before you can really achieve that goal.

R: Is it important that is it important for f.1 English language teachers to know how English is taught in you know primary schools? Primary school students, how they learn English there? What has been taught might not be what has been learnt.

J: Yes, I think it is extremely important because when students come to their secondary school, you expect them to know a certain level. I don't even know what that level is. Alright? For example, for their reading ability they are given a test and they have to fill in an open cloze and that determines their reading level. What that test is based on? I have no idea. Who made that? Nobody knows. I asked who prepared the test […] it has been used for ages, nobody knows where the test comes from. Who did that test? Whether it is still up to date? No idea. Alright? But according to the marks given to that test, they get reading level A, B, C, D, E whatever […]. But this is an example of how things work. There is from what I hear no communication between primary and secondary so I don't know what my colleague in P.6 did with his or her students. And this is extremely embarrassing. This is the same here in the secondary school. If I teach if I teach F.3, I think it is important for me to know what has been done in F.2 and and F.1. Because as you said what was taught was not necessarily learnt. And what was learnt was not necessarily taught. Students can learn on their own as well. So it is important to know how far the teacher went, how they taught things. Otherwise you cannot you cannot solve the problem I think.

R: Even within the school you cannot really find out what the students have been kind of exposed to?

J: I don't' think so. We have to mark, not really mark, we have to check a summer exercise book that all students receive in June, I guess, or something in July. So all students are supposed to have the same exercise book and all are supposed to complete the whole exercise book. Now I actually wanted to go through all the pages but I realized that it was huge work. And then I had a look because I did not know […] I had a look at my colleagues and they were just looking at a few pages and marking one or two things here and there. I am going to do the same and actually return the book and say nothing. Because the aim is they should do the exercise and that's all. It's nothing else to achieve but filling in the book and I am sure it's useful or not. It's probably another requirement from the government. I am not sure. So there is nothing concrete coming out of that, first. But from what I saw of a lot of things that are not good so I I guess if this book really really presents what the students should be able to achieve after P.6 I can say that not a lot of them manage to, properly. But then again every school has got a different book. I saw thousands and thousands of different summer exercise books. I am not sure what the goal is, what the aim is. Within the school of course we got a better way of communicating because we are sitting next to

each other and we know what they are doing. I can ask my colleagues in F.2 F.3 what they are doing if I am teaching F.4. So communication is of course easier. I also get the coursebook so I can really know what they are doing. But between primary and secondary I don't know so they make mistakes I don't know why they make those mistakes. So it can be difficult, it can be difficult to correct their mistakes and improve things if you don't know why it happens. So I think that since the government allocates students to different schools it would be good to have contact with those primary schools that the students come from and just have a chat with the English teachers there.

R: I guess the learning styles of students are important.

J: Every student learns in a different way.

R: Yeah, to some extent what they received what they heard in primary schools might shape to some extent the way they learn. And then now they are in new school F.1 here and I guess it's difficult for both teachers and students. For teachers, teachers would have to find out more about how they learnt. Students would have to find out more about the teaching styles of the teachers and at the same time they might have to find out how they actually learn. They might not really be aware of their own learning styles but if there is some kind of gap or mismatch between the two then they might you know face some kind of learning difficulties.

J: Yes, that's right. And, of course, well, when you change teachers there is always a gap because some […] might not be the same pronunciation, might not be the same teaching style and all those factors may create a war between the students and the teacher. As we said before if a student doesn't like you it's likely that he may not like the subject.

R: So, John, let's talk about English language learning. You got some learning experience. What about what about the people in Belgium? Do they got their own language or they speak English?

J: No, we speak either French or Dutch because we don't have any Belgium language. So we have two national languages. Most people would be more or less bilingual. And English then comes either as a second or third language now […] But er English is important in Europe and everyone is aware of that so whenever people shop or they sell something they are able to communicate in English.

R: Even in the market?

J: Even in the market? Oh yes certainly. You'll meet definitely people who can help.

R: So, wonderful. Sorry, just curious. What about your experience? […]

J: Okay, learning is a difficult process no matter which subject you are talking about. I think that some people can learn languages in an easier way than other people. Not everyone is equal towards languages and it's the same for Math. I think that some people are very logical and they have a Mathematical mind. I don't have one. I don't have one not not maybe because I didn't develop. I had Mathematics although I was

learning Latin Greek myself. So Latin Greek means, Latin, Greek, French, Dutch, English, German, Mathematics, Biology whatever everything there. Okay, because we have like 17 to 20 subjects in every year no matter what you do. So okay I did not develop that side. So I don't know. Okay my interest was not really focusing on Math although I am interested in Science. But my aim was become an English teacher. Now learning a language is it easy or difficult. I think it is easy if you are motivated and you want to learn by yourself and you are ready to say well the teacher is only there to give me some basic things and I have to go on learning when I go back home. The lesson doesn't stop when the bell rings. But mentality has changed so I would say that learning process has probably become more difficult for most students because they will tend to enjoy enjoy enjoy life more, or no, I can't say so. Actually compared to most Hong Kong students, ours are extremely quote unquote I insist lazy that is the my if you don't mind me talking about my own experience as a student. My revising period after class when I come back home after class would be probably between five and seven and I would never do anything for school after seven unless there were serious tests or exams because I have always thought and my parents were the same that life has got to be enjoyed as well. Now whether that has helped me, whether that had facilities for learning. I think so in the sense that I had facilities for learning. That is why I said not everyone is equal towards English. But not anyone is equal towards any subjects in particular some people have got facility they memorize quickly, they they they understand things quickly and others need to revise revise revise and then at the end the result is not too good. But I think that you can pull everyone who is willing to learn you can pull them up to a certain level but that would not be the same level at the end no matter what you do. And those who are not willing to learn. I don't think you can do much. [I was curious and I asked John about the language situation in Belgium and John shared with me interesting information about language education there.]

J: Let me explain the situation first, so when I was at home, we would start English in F.3, so from F3 to F.6 we don't have any F.7. Nowadays we start English in F.2 but we don't have any English. So far we don't have any English in primary schools. We really start in secondary two now or secondary three.

R: It's kind of second language.

J: It's kind of second or third still it's third language for people who live in the bilingual zone in Belgium still it's third language.

R: So what about primary schools then? Do they study any languages?

J: So in primary schools all people got to study both national languages. First of all, their mother tongue which is either French or Dutch again I talked about the second national language […].

R: Wow, so again they have to manage.

J: They have to manage but you can notice that students are less keen on learning the second language in the south of the country that is where people are French speaking. They are not very keen on learning Dutch and the level of knowledge in Dutch is getting poor and poor. Something that is similar similar to English in Hong Kong.

R: I guess so.

J: But, in the north of the country where they speak Dutch they are very keen on learning French and English of course even more because Dutch is not really a world language. Dutch is spoken by a mere seven to ten millions people in the world which strange enough is the same as Cantonese probably what seven to ten millions people maybe a bit more not much more so this is the situation in Belgium. And, next, okay we start in secondary two these days we can have two periods a week or four periods a week in English.

R: Not many.

J: Two periods a week if it is the third language and four periods a week if it is a second language, alright? So it's not many in compared to Hong Kong but I I I can definitely say that we achieve communication at the end of whatever you get

R: Why then?

J: Why? I think that well first of all the system is not aiming at any exams whatsoever, any public exams I mean. Students still have to take school exams twice a year and they have to pass because otherwise they cannot go on to the next form. But there is no public exam. So the aim of the lesson is really communication. We have fifteen to twenty students in a class, which is a wonderful situation. I am not saying that our students are are are not lazy, they are. You still have to find ways to motivate them but if they are not motivated they will tell you. And then you can frankly ask them what would you like to do. Some of them will come up with ideas that will arouse interests. For most of them we don't necessarily have coursebooks. Lots of schools have given up coursebooks just because it's too too rigid. And also it's because it's too expensive. Students can't afford to buy the books because they are far too expensive. Since schools do not provide any material this is a particular situation the government has decided that schools cannot ask money ask students for money so students have got the right to say that no I've no money to buy to buy coursebooks. I don't know whether this situation is going to change again because I read in the news that people are thinking of buying coursebooks again for English or Dutch whatever. But I don't know teachers are quite happy making their material and be close to real life. I mean if you see an interesting article in a magazine you can use it straight away in the class. You can prepare it one or two days before and use it in the class and that will match with what is happening on TV. You can switch on the TV during the lesson and then you watch the news and watch the news live and have that part of critical thinking. What are we looking at we are looking at George Bush who was trying to invade Iraqi. Is it good? Is it bad? I think it is. I don't think it is. Okay, you have a real yes you have a real conversation. We can achieve more in less time and with less only a few hours. And you think about it two periods a week. We don't have a cycle system which means that when we have a holiday those hours will just disappear. Okay, so maybe at the end in the year we will not have as many hours as you should just because of the holidays and this is not compensated for because as we don't think it is useful to compensate for anything. And we can adapt if the students are really weak we go slowly. There is less in the exam. The teacher is responsible for his own exam. There is no school exam as such no group exam as such. So if I teach F.1 and you teach F.1, you do your own business and I do my own business as long as

we can reach the same aim. But maybe I'll reach later than you that's all. It doesn't matter. So what we cannot teach in the first term just teach it in the second term and we can catch up because some parts are easier than others. So we can really spend more time on parts where students […].

R: It seems that teachers enjoy more flexibility and they can to a larger extent to decide what to do in the lesson.

J: Yes, but surprisingly enough if you interview teachers in Belgium they will tell you that they are not happy at all. Probably because there is hardly any guideline at all so it's like it's like the the the, the opposite of Hong Kong. Hong Kong tells you exactly what to do and teachers complain because they can't leave its prison and in Belgium we feel that there is no guidelines at all and so sometimes we wonder where should we go to make sure that we meet the requirement of the university, for example.

R: They do not have public exams for English but still.

J: Well English is still the requirement for some subjects at university of course English If you want to study English that's the basic requirement but there is no exam entry exam at the university. They do like a test and then they can test students well you are okay for this subject and not okay for that subject but it's still the choice of the student to decide what he or she wants to do in the end. But for example if you study Math and Sciences, English is a compulsory subject which is not taught in the first year of university. There is a big exam at the end of the first year if you want to study Math and Sciences. And if you fail out you go and the students are left on their own. So there is no teaching English since they have to manage by themselves. So this also means in the sense that students are aware of that they may be aware how the system works in higher education. So students know in advance that if they fail in English okay they may go to university but they may have a big problem then to solve it. They are not they are not fit. They are not fit that is where critical thinking as well I think comes in. They have they can choose for themselves. To to to take an extreme example if they want to be tramps in the street or if they want to be doctors in reputed hospitals, it's their choice so we will probably feed them up to F.3 or F.4. After that they have to learn how to manage their own lives how to be responsible for everything and once they reach university. That's it. It's their business. It's their problem.

R: So what about the situation in Belgium? What about yes it is no English can be the second or third language so will they be able to use it in their everyday life say like talk to their friends might not be parents […]

J: Well, using English is of course not a problem. You have a lot of tourists first of all. Secondly England is only is only 40 minutes away by plane and lots of people enjoy going to England for weekend or even a day off. So English is easily accessible. Radio and TV stations are quite abundant I mean we get we get lots of channels in English not just sports and news we get real TV channels if I may say so. So being in contact with English is not a problem. I can understand that if you live here in the far end of the territories probably a big problem to get in contact with foreigners. Some students I guess getting contact to ICQ also the Internet but that does not replace real life contact and live contact. So that in the end is a problem.

R: Okay, the last point, the difficulty or or I don't know the constraints or even happiness things that you want to share with me being a secondary school English language teacher here in Hong Kong. You've been working as an English teacher here for two years as you said just now. So, you should have some kind of I don't know your opinions or views being here as a secondary school teacher.

J: Well, my year before I was not a NET as such I was employed on on short contact basis and sent to different schools with I'll say very little guidelines. Guidelines would be like well could you teach that sort of aspect to our students could you improve their oral English improve their written English and then I was more or less left on my own with very little material. Most of the time I had to prepare my own material for those lessons. That sense of freedom works a bit like that Belgium where you are responsible for your own lesson and you know that if you fail and it's your fault probably okay a lot of problems come from your side whether your lessons are not prepared enough or your ambition is too high. But also you realize that some students are not willing to learn because those lessons are extra curricular activities. So they have to stay at school they are forced to stay at school although we are told that they are not really forced and they join on a voluntary basis no I don't believe those things I am afraid. That is one aspect. Well I have nothing much to say about that. Now this year is very different. It is a structured system there are rules and regulations. I knew what to expect so I did not open my eyes wide and pop my eye balls out like the woman in America {referring to the world record the teacher showed the students in class} No I knew what to expect and I knew it would not be a fairy tale. Whether it is more difficult to teach here or in Belgium to make a comparison I don't think so. Problems are the same they are just multiplied when you are in the classroom they are just multiplied. The biggest problem here is that most students are passive so very few of them would tell you what they really think about the lesson about what is going on about the topic about whatever exercise you did with them So they would be afraid of expressing themselves not only because they are afraid of making mistakes but there is also another problem but also they are probably afraid of you as a teacher in my mind I think when they are still F.1 they still have the impression that the teacher is one who knows everything and then should be respected in a sense something like that. That's bad. Again I come from a different situation in Belgium where the students tell you very frankly what they think and you can also tell them very frankly what you think which speeds things up here it might take a few weeks to sort out a problem because you can't exactly see what is going on.

R: Can I ask you a question about?

J: Sure.

R: Do you think the reasons why the students are not telling you how they think. First of all, if they have to tell you they have to use English. That's a problem, right. And the second thing is they might not really know how to express themselves because I doubt whether they are given a chance to talk their opinions or how they feel even in Cantonese.

J: You have a point there. I think that the language is a barrier but then we can always have a translator for them and even when asked in Cantonese they won't really speak out what they have on their heart on their mind whether it comes from the fact that

they are not allowed to voice their opinions at home I don't know I am not sure. I have the impression when I see family together there is a lot of communication going on that children are really talking to their father or mother. Sometimes it seems extremely hot in terms of exchange verbal exchange. I don't understand them. I don't understand them but I remember seeing a boy probably fourteen or fifteen and they were not arguing but they were obviously exchanging ideas and they did not seem to agree.

R: Genuine communication.

J: Genuine communication, so I don't know. I don't know whether it's a case for everyone. I am sure that in the school it is not part of the culture not part of the culture. That's obvious. That's obvious unless you come up to the point that you fight against one student you have to take them down here but then what I see is teachers shouting and […] and some students smiling. I don't know. I don't know what is going on exactly I know that someone is being punished but I don't know whether it is the teacher or the student actually. So this is actually a problem because if you have no communication because for me it's a lack of communication if you have no communication with students who behave badly you are actually in trouble because they don't if they are in F.3 they don't believe you the super hero and everything […] . A fairy tale you are in trouble because there is no communication you have never asked them for any ideas or what they thought. It's risk of course. It's a risk but isn't it worthwhile. Of course if they don't like you then they might be bias. Your course is rubbish. Or you may think that they are too young to express their ideas. But I think that that that students can be very spontaneous. I am sure the little Eddie {a funny student who always voices his opinions loudly in class even when he is not invited to do so} there who is always playing around. He likes teasing me but actually he is capable of doing things when he wants to work but I don't know how to make him work. And apparently it is the same in other such […]. One of those who come down here frequently to be punished with others but why would that guy not have any ideas even if sometimes he is a bit playful. At least listen to them. One One one thing that I heard from organizers of a film festival in Belgium is that you can always listen to the audience's ideas but you should never apply them or only apply a little bit. Because if you never ask anyone then they will think you are directing everything all the time. But if you ask at least they think that you might adapt and you might like to adapt very very few things which is quite enough then to satisfy the public in general.

R: So, teaching is never something easy.

J: No, of course it is not.

R: […]

J: When I see them bored in front of me looking through the window then I really want to throw the coursebook […] Okay, let's do something different and let's do something that everyone likes.

R: But it is because of the time constraint and the curriculum assigned, you can't.

J: You can't.

R: I remember not just once you talked about lesson design and said it might not be appropriate to ask students to do practice during the whole 40 or 80 minutes.

J: Actually what I did today is getting rid of the coursebook because I watched with them a few pictures if you think about it they think probably did not learn much in terms of English but I think they may have discovered something that they did not know about and I think that's part of the learning process whether you are teaching them English, Geography, Chinese or whatever. So what is more important? Is it your subject? Or is it what is available to your students all over the world?

R: Or is it the curriculum? Thank you so much, John.

J: You are welcome.

~ end of interview ~

2.7 Last Debriefing Interview

R: Researcher
J: John (School B)

[I began the interview by telling John that I had found one critical encounter in his first observed lesson. I then briefly explained to him the meaning of critical encounters as defined in this study and asked him for comments on my finding.]

J: I agree indeed because they did not have the information in the text as such. The only reference was a word of pictures. [Not audible utterances] So, I wanted them to use not just the text to find the answer but also what was around the text. Because I think that sometimes what is around the text or what we call 'between the lines' is as important if not more important than the text itself when you try to understand what the text is. [I then shared with John a finding regarding the use of why questions by teachers and believed that not all why questions asked could be considered critical questions because some of these questions required only students to locate a certain piece of information in a text or just to recall something that they had read or seen and John completely agreed.]

R: Okay. So, thank you very much and the second thing is, the second thing is, do you think you have benefited from the study?

J: Well of course so far there is no conclusion to your study but that would take long time. But, I think that it's beneficial for me in the sense that I, I , I can think about what I am doing. Maybe teachers tend not to think about what they are doing it, how they are doing it unless there is a problem. For example suddenly all your students get very bad marks. So you wonder oh is it really my fault? Or, have I done anything wrong? We tend to be very satisfied I think. If, if students get good marks, well then everything is okay. Well, that might just be the surface. You never know then what has happened underneath. So I think having having someone to observe me is is a way for me to to ask myself questions about my teaching. [I then asked John if he thought that our interviews could indeed create for him opportunities to reflect on his teaching.] Yes, definitely. Definitely. Maybe we should have this more often, i.e. and and we should even have that with our students. Now, now, you, you realize that they are not keen on being on the video. That's a big problem. But if we could from time to time video a classroom or, or video group work, and then show the exercise as such again to everyone and have some sort of discussion with all the students, that would first of all be critical thinking, I think, in the sense that they would have to judge their peers. They would be allowed to give their own opinions on about what is going on so it would not just be the teacher saying oh that's good and that's bad. I think I think it would be a plus for everyone. But of course you have to cross this barrier that the fear of the microphone and the fear of the video. [I asked John then who would be appropriate to reflect with teachers on their teaching.] Well I guess another teacher would be the first person I would think of. You can't imagine having researchers coming every week and doing that on a regular basis. But sharing a lesson with a colleague might be a good idea, and maybe not just colleagues from your school but colleagues from other schools. Now in the Hong Kong system it is impossible, I think, in the sense that teachers could not just leave their school to spend an hour in another school unless that would probably involve a lot of paper work. And that would again I

think arouse suspicion why why have we got to invite teachers from other schools. Why do they have to monitor us? Even I would say we are supposed to do peer monitoring.

R: Yes, yes, yes, I have heard about that.

J: Sorry to say that nothing happens. I once asked the colleagues let's do it and the person said well let me think about it. I guess the person is still thinking.

R: I guess so. [I then shared briefly with John a project on peer observation that I learnt about in another school.]

J: You can't see yourself. Nothing happens probably because people are afraid. I think that everyone says that oh students are so shy but I think that some teachers are as well. [I then told John that I really liked his idea of using video recording of classroom activities as teaching materials.] Yes, because it, it, it would teach them a lot about themselves, about their friends, about what they can improve because I believe as well that when a student comes to the front of the classroom whether alone or in a group and they have a presentation, again, they don't see themselves. So, they may have, they may have the impression that everything is fine and rosy and it's not. Or they might have the impression that it's totally bad and what they do is rubbish and it's not true. So, by, by, by having the opportunity to have a […] it would be good. [I shared briefly with John about the research design of the study.] I had a very good experience back in Belgium. We our school welcome the exchange student from Australia. She was extremely pleasant, an extremely pleasant girl. Although she did not speak French at first, she was, she was not afraid of anything and in a matter of weeks she could communicate with all the students in the school using English and even the students were trying their best. They suddenly realized that English is interesting we can use it. And I learnt a lot from her. But it was the same kind of steps that you did. Can I come to your class? And I didn't have the reaction of sort of what's the point of coming to an English lesson. I just asked her how would you benefit from it. She simply told me that well I want to see how teachers in other countries teach my mother tongue. I want to see if it is sufficient and I said yes of course. I will learn from you and she said I would also learn from your teaching. After one lesson she came to me I always say that and you show your students that that was a mistake and she said well she checked at home in a grammar book and she realized that she was making a mistake. So she said well it's great and we had a lot of fun together and the students. They mixed very very easily with her and that was quite an experience. It's something that's missing here in Hong Kong. Why can't schools invite exchange students? […] Have a real presence in the school. […] Probably because nobody knows exactly how to use the resources (i.e. the NET). That is my impression. When I listened to all the teachers in different schools since I went to different schools, I can see that most schools try different schemes with the same NET. And, and, and it seems that nothing really works. Because the resource as such is not flexible or is not made flexible which is understandable in the sense but it seems that no method is suitable enough. No there is only problem and little from them and their experience that seems to be lots of problems and little rewards or compensation. [I then shared with John some of the complaints that school administration had about NETs in secondary schools.] One of the complaints that I heard frequently is Net teachers being employed as a local teacher. So, having three classes and that's it and

complaining that most of the time his classes were F.1 students and there were a lot of communication problems. And, so they felt that it's a waste of time and money and they even said themselves that I get paid a lot of money and why can't they just employ a local teacher. I am doing exactly the same job but it's even more difficult because I can never use Cantonese. I don't speak Cantonese. [I told John that in some schools NETs were only required to teach oral classes and some NETs never got the opportunity to share with their students their experience and culture.] I also heard people during our induction programmes I also heard Net teachers who were being asked to talk about something my students are just wonderful they love me and everyone was laughing because obviously that was going so far that it became unbelievable. So, you, you, you wonder, very serious people, HKUST not to mention the university, and the language department. [I talked about the concerns and difficulties that NETs faced to wrap up our discussion on the topic. I then talked about the difficulty I faced in reporting the data that I had collected because what was captured even by the video recorder would not be complete.] So it is only facing one direction when sometimes facing another direction it might be interesting as well watching students see what they are doing, see their facial expressions but that would be a great opportunity if you do so and come back with some excerpts from your video, some clips of your video and show them [I agreed with John that it would be useful to show the students some of the video clips that I had made and asked them to comment on them.] They seem to have little opportunity to express themselves [I added that the culture might be a factor as well.] It is still, I think it is still the culture where if the teacher is there and they have to keep quiet and they can't express their opinions and if they feel the lesson is not good doesn't matter the teacher is always right but, but my feeling is that some you can see if students are bored or not and I realize myself that I am boring them sometimes and at other time I am stimulating. It maybe because of me but it maybe because of external factors. Nobody is perfect and even the teacher sometimes is tired and the lesson will suffer. So, I think that it would be good to have their viewpoints. From their viewpoints how is it going on their performance, teachers' performance, performance of their classmates? I realize that in some groups F.2 & 3 I can see that some students really want the people who disturb the lesson really want them out they want to learn something. But they are afraid, afraid to speak because of the other ones who are stronger and they disturb anything just keep chatting. Yes, they are the power ones. They are the George W. Bush of the classroom so to speak. So, I feel, I feel sorry for those students who are in classes like that. [I stressed that the video clips would be very good materials for teaching critical thinking.] The student is there and the material is everyday life at school. It's available but nobody uses it. I mentioned something earlier that I noticed students giving up in F.1 giving up English and maybe other subjects it's not about English only and that there should be measures for that in the sense that we should try to tackle the problem in F.1 and not let them go on and say in F.2 that they are so bad they are going to decrease the reputation of the school when they get to F.5 because they are not going to the exam. That's an easy thing to say when they get into F.5 it's too late. You have to tackle the problem in F.1. The only reaction I got is well let's organize extra lessons after class and during the summer holidays. I said to myself those guys don't want to study anymore and you are going to force them to come here during the holidays. This is nonsense. This is nonsense. [I told John that I really enjoyed talking to him and believed that we shared a lot of things in common in terms of teaching beliefs.] But it seems to be a trend in Hong Kong not in this school. I am not talking about this school because I saw it everywhere everywhere [I then talked

about a problem of the education system here in Hong Kong, i.e. people are not getting into or trying to solve the core of the problems we faced.] The core is probably not the subject. The core is probably something personal, whatever. It's not just one factor. If you see students who sleep in class and your reaction is well they don't want to learn and so I am going to force them to learn it's going to make the situation worse. You have to talk to them counseling that would be one of my first reactions and my second reaction would be something I suggested […] is to have cross curricular activities trying to show them that English can be used in all their subjects meaning that part of there something is going to interest us I am sure unless you really have the, the, the huge zero student but to me that does not really exist. Even the rabble must be interested in something even if it is computer games. But you can use the computer game in English, why not, you don't have to do it the whole year round. Of course not, of course not, but why not spend a few lessons on, on using a computer game you can use adventure games they have to type things and they have to read. This is audio visual material when you think about it. It's not paper III. It's not the exam, so what? So what? It's authentic and it's more important and it will build up their confidence so I think that if you use English in other situations than just the English lesson then you might find out that students well are interested in science, so let's do an experiment in English. They are interested in cooking, well let's give them all the ingredients in English. You have the labels here and you have the ingredients there let's okay, let them do it. Put the labels they might make a mistake so what you give them instruction they cook they read the instruction in English. You can do that with P.E.. You can do that with Geography. Geography would be a very good topic. Art […] Design and technology so there are many opportunities there. [I added that the cross curricular activities might indeed help the students to develop their interests and hobbies e.g. collecting stamps.] Yes, a few of them do but very few. This will build up their confidence. They will forget about rules. They will make mistakes. So what? So what? [I told John that I believed that the activities might indeed increase students' participation in the lesson.] I feel sorry sometimes when I mark the quizzes and the exams that I have to deduct marks for every possible mistake because I think it is nonsensical. It doesn't make sense. If you, okay, you have to write Peter is taller than his friend but the student unfortunately writes Peter is taller than his friends and then no mark I can't see the point if the point is teaching them comparatives why the mark should be deducted because he wrote friends rather than friend because there is only one friend in the picture of two. As a French speaker, as a French native speaker I would say that if my teachers had done the same with me in French I would be no where for French is such a difficult language that people make mistakes. People make mistakes, gender adding a small letter here because it is female rather than male […] So yes you have to be aware of the rules but you have also to be aware that if you are talking to someone you are not going to interrupt him or her every few seconds you say oh this is i not a and oh this is s not s. I mean this is completely ridiculous. This is completely ridiculous. [I joked that if John were doing that to me, I would never be able to finish my interview.] I wouldn't. I would never teach then because then first I would have to correct myself then I would have to correct every student. I think my best reward from my past experience in Belgium is not students coming to see me after the final exam and say I have good marks in the exam no but it's students coming back and saying I did not do very well in your course or your lessons and I know I did not work well but I went on holidays to England and to America and I talked to the people there and they could understand me and I was surprised and I felt after all you were teaching us something useful. That's, that's the reward. That's the

real reward of a teacher. It's not 90%, it's not 99 out of 100, that does not matter As I say it's not because you have 99 out of 100 that you are a good student. I have a friend. He is a bit of a joker but at the same time he always say I want to have A when I have a paper in university. I want to have A because if I have B I will feel depressed. And then I told him once and he was very very furious and do you think that an A student will make a A teacher. He was really furious of me. [I told John that his question was indeed a very good one.] He is a good student and he is a good teacher so there is no problem in challenging him a little bit but I am trying to challenge his thinking in which I think he is the typical Hong Kong thinking. And since he is interested in England and he likes England very much I can't understand why his mind cannot also move a little bit towards the western and a different approach to think because from those new teachers there can be a change in the future. But if the new teachers, in their twenty something, think as the teachers who are fifty something nothing will change. [I told John that I still remembered very clearly something he said in one of our interviews, i.e. a very bad secondary school student could be a very good student in university.] Labeling seems to be a favourite activity here in Hong Kong. I have a friend who is in F.5 in a secondary school and he is labeled bad mainly because he likes to have his hair here and he wears some earrings. So he is labeled bad and the trouble is that it has got into his mind and the, well, he does not want to learn English and when I met him first I met him through other friends he did not speak English to me. He just said I don't want like English and I don't want to talk to you. And then I came towards him by using whatever Cantonese I could and then he just yes I don't know much but I can say a few words and can you try to do the same in English? Then gradually he started to opening up but I think of course his English is very poor but I think the situation has been going on for some, well, I don't know. Anything that you want to add? [I thanked John sincerely again telling him that I had really learnt a lot from him though I was aware that other people might have very different comments on him or his teaching.] Like you would have in the outside world. This is a small world; an reflection of what is outside. It's true for any schools.

R: Thank you.

J: You are welcome.

~ end of interview ~

III. Ling (School B)

As shown in Table 3 below Ling and I met eight times on the dates specified. The table also shows that only five classroom observations were conducted between January and March 2003. The sixth classroom observation as well as its pre and post classroom observation interviews was cancelled due to the English uniform test on the day of the classroom observation. Instead, a target interview was conducted to elicit Ling's perceptions on the critical thinking recommendations. The dates of the five classroom observations and the length of all the interviews conducted, i.e. pre and post classroom observation interviews, the target interview and last debriefing interview, are also specified in the table.

Table 3 Summary of data collection for Ling

Ling (School B)								
Date	16 Dec 2002	14 Jan 2003	16 Jan 2003	12 Feb 2003	13 Feb 2003	11 Mar 2003	13 Mar 2003	19 Mar 2003
Events	1st meeting (lobbying) about 1 hr	Pr1 2mins	Pr2 1min	Pr3 #1	Pr4 4.2mins	Pr5 26.5mins	Cancelled #2	II 18 mins
		CO1 80mins	CO2 80mins	CO3 80mins	CO4 80mins	CO5 80mins	Cancelled #2	
		Po1 6 mins	Po2 2 mins	Po3 23.7 mins	Po4 9 mins	Po5 8.8 mins	Target Interview 21 mins	

Key:-
Pr: Pre Classroom Observation Interview
CO: Classroom Observation
Po: Post Classroom Observation Interview
II: Last Debriefing Interview
#1 Because of some mechanical problems, the third Pre Classroom Observation Interview was not recorded on tape.
#2 The classroom observation and its pre and post classroom observation interviews were cancelled because of the school uniform test.

3.1 Classroom Observation I

3.1.1 Pre Classroom Observation Interview I

R: Researcher
Li: Ling (School B)

R: What's your plan for today's lesson?

Li: I am teaching my students quantifiers today. I will first use some realia to arouse the interests of my students and I know that some students may have some knowledge of the topic and this lesson will provide them an opportunity to revise what they have learnt. And for those who do not know much about the topic they will be given an opportunity to learn more about it. I will then let them play some games that are related to the teaching topic, i.e. quantifiers. I hope through the game the students can learn more about quantifiers. The game may be conducted in the form of a group competition e.g. a few students in one group or dividing the class into two big groups. I think competitions can arouse the interest of students in learning. Small presents will be presented to those students who win the game. The presents are contributed by the students themselves because they have to buy a small present for the class if they speak Cantonese during the English lesson. After the game, I will ask them to complete some exercises. This part of the lesson is mainly for consolidating what the students have learnt. If there is still time left, I will teach them the difference between countable and uncountable nouns. I will ask them to complete some exercises afterwards or to play some games with them. I guess that's what a double period could cover.

~ end of interview ~

3.1.2 Post Classroom Observation Interview I

R: Researcher
Li: Ling (School B)

R: Do you think you have achieved your teaching objective(s)?

Li: I think the teaching objective of the lesson today has been reached and the response of the students was good. They were eager to learn. They participated actively in the group work e.g. they tried their best to produce more examples and for words that they were not sure they even took the initiative in asking me for help. I could see that they made some spelling mistakes. But I think if students are asked to produce something without much preparation beforehand, they tend to make some mistakes. As a teacher, we are like helpers to our students and we can offer them help and advice when needed. I think when I checked the answers of a group of students, the students of the other groups could also help to spot the mistakes made by their classmates and I think it can help them to remember better what they learn. Some of the answers given by students were very interesting. Some of their answers were unexpected though they were acceptable. I think for questions concerning language there might be more than one correct answer to a question. If an answer given by a student is acceptable and the other students would also consider the answer correct, as a teacher we should also accept the answer. I think this way of learning would be more effective and I think the learning process would be more enjoyable for students too. Mm. I think the performance of students in class today was quite good. They took their work seriously e.g. they participated actively in group discussion and they put in a lot of effort. What we talked about today was quite simple and thus the students could handle the work quite well. I think for teaching topics that students cannot really manage, their performance might not be as good as what we observed today. I am pleased with their overall performance today such as their response and I think everything was good.

R: Okay. Thank you. Can you tell me more about your students say like their abilities?

La: In terms of their abilities, the abilities of the students in this class are different. The English level of some students is comparatively higher and they know more about the subject. Some are weaker and they cannot really follow the lesson. Some of these students even failed the listening exam in the first term. I think the English standard of most students in this class is just average. They are neither good at nor weak in English. A few of them are outstanding but there are also a few of them who are really weak in English. Regarding discipline of the class, some of the boys in this class are very talkative. You might have noticed that during the classroom observation just now some of them just kept talking in class. They do it very naturally. Sometimes they speak in English but sometimes they speak in Cantonese. I have to remind them constantly that they will need to contribute a present if they talk in Cantonese in class. They will then try to switch to English. If you don’t remind them, they will just keep on talking in Cantonese. I think a way to encourage them to use English during the lesson is that we give them some kind of punishment, i.e. contributing a present whenever they use Cantonese but at the same time we tell them that they may get back their presents if they perform well in class. I think this could encourage the students to put in more effort. In terms of learning attitudes, I think about half of the

class is willing to learn and these students are more attentive in class. However, there are also some students, though not many of them, who are not paying much attention in the lesson. These students might not be attentive in the lessons of other subjects. From their class teachers I have found that some of these students have problems concentrating on their work. But I think the situation could improve if the teaching is more interactive and students would take a more active role in learning.

~ end of interview ~

3.2 Classroom Observation II

3.2.1 Pre Classroom Observation Interview II

R: Researcher
Li: Ling (School B)

R: What's your plan for today's lesson?

Li: I will continue my teaching on plural nouns today, i.e. adding s or es to a noun. I will then ask the students to give me some examples of plural nouns. I will wrap up the teaching topic on nouns by having a revision with them on what they have learnt about nouns e.g. singular and plural nouns, and countable and uncountable nouns.

~ end of interview ~

3.2.2 Post Classroom Observation Interview II

R: Researcher
Li: Ling (School B)

R: Do you think you have achieved your teaching objective(s)?

Li: I think my teaching today was weak because I was really exhausted. I had to teach from the second period to the fifth period and had to be on duty during both recess and lunchtime. I really did not have any time to rest today or to think about time control for the lesson. Therefore I did not control the time well during the lesson. I felt really exhausted and even when I was teaching I was aware that I might have made some mistakes. I thought I might have said something wrong during the lesson. I was really exhausted. I was not too sure about whether what I was talking about was right but later on I found that I had made some [spelling] mistakes. If I really make some mistakes in class, I will try to correct them in the following lesson. But today I got the chance to correct the mistakes I had made during the Powerpoint presentation. Sometimes I think about what I am teaching when I teach. I think teaching can help you to think in some way. If you consider today's lesson a revision of what the students have learnt before, then I would say it was successful. My teaching performance was affected by my physical condition and I did not sleep well last night but I had expected to do better.

~ end of interview ~

3.3 Classroom Observation III

3.3.1 Pre Classroom Observation Interview III

[The interview was not recorded due to some mechanical fault. However, according to the research journal I took after the interview Ling planned to do three things with her students in the lesson, i.e. completing some listening practice, a dictation (bingo) and some pair work.]

3.3.2 Post Classroom Observation Interview III

R: Researcher
Li: Ling (School B)

R: Do you think you have achieved your teaching objective(s)?

Li: Because of time constraint I could only complete the listening practice and dictation. There was no time for students to complete the pair work as it was planned. For the listening practice I expected the class would behave like what you saw today. When my students are required to listen to a lot of English words or to people who speak English really fast they will just lose their interest. To my students the listening practice that they worked on today was quite difficult because the content of the listening text was rich and the students needed to really understand the text before they could get the answers from it. That's why sometimes I just let them listen to the tape for two or three times. And, sometimes I taught them some key words in the text before I let them listen to the tape. I think this can help them to answer the questions in the book. I think it is quite impossible for students to understand every single detail of the text before they complete the task required. I think what the students need to do is to spot the key points from the tape and try to figure out the information needed. I usually teach my students the difficult words found in the listening text before they work on the practice. I hope it can help them to understand more about the text when they listen to the tape. But there are also things that I am concerned about, i.e. if you teach them a lot of words beforehand, they would tend to listen only to what you have just talked about when they listen to the tape and they might miss other important information. So I would say, if you think that your students could handle the listening practice, try not to explain too much about the text to them beforehand and just let them try and see how much they can get from the tape. I think it's not easy for teachers to develop the listening skill of students. It depends a lot on the effort that students put in their work. And that's why I tend to use more Cantonese in class after a long holiday or I will try to avoid having listening practice with my students when they get back to school from a holiday. But I don't know why. It seems that my students are still very tired these days. The Chinese New Year Holiday was quite long. In terms of learning attitudes still I think most of the students were okay in this lesson. Only some students were not paying attention in class. But I think it might not be possible to offer sufficient individual help during the lesson to those who were not paying attention in class today. They might need to listen to the tape ten times before they can understand it. It is quite impossible to offer these students help during the lesson. If you see that some students are not listening to the tape, you can just warn them. But for those who are very weak, you have to wait for them to come to you. It's not because we do not want to teach them. It's because if they are not willing to learn, even though you give them the tape and ask them to listen to it at home they will still not do it or just lie to you. It's difficult.

R: What about the dictation then? Do you have anything to say about it?

Li: I had required my students to study quite a lot of vocabulary for the dictation today but in fact some of the words were found in the dictation that they did before. There were only about 10 to 20 phrases that were not included in the previous dictation. I decided to make the dictation a bingo game so that students would not

have to write out too many words for it and the game might arouse their interests. But I forgot about the rule of the game when I prepared for the dictation so the grid that I provided for my students was not really appropriate and I don't know why some students did not really know how to play the game. But, anyway, I will see how well they did it. I think if you ask my students to study 10 or 20 words for a dictation, most of them would be able to manage but if you ask them to study more the result would be very different. Students complained a lot today because they had to study a lot of vocabulary for the dictation today. I guess about 50 words or phrases. That's why they complained a lot even during the lesson. To me, their reaction today was just normal. I just wanted them to try. You know, students need to study a lot for the HKCEE. Although you might say they are just F.1 students and there is still plenty of time before the exam, I think they need to accumulate the vocabulary that they learn. I think students should not just rote learn some words for dictation. They should try to analyze the words e.g. cutting a word into several trunks and remember them. If they do so, they should be able to handle a lot of words. But, I think there might be 1 or 2 students in the class who really cannot handle the dictation. I think they should go to the remedial class for more help. The teacher would never be able to give them sufficient help and individual attention in a regular class.

R: Okay. Thank you. So, could you please tell me how you feel about the parents of these students? Are they concerned about their English results?

Li: To be honest, I can't tell you much about the parents of the students in this class because I am not their class teacher and on the parents' day I mainly met with the parents of the students in my own class. But I could, based on the experience that I have had as a F.1 class teacher in the past few years, tell you more about parents today. Yes, I agree with you that there are some parents who are very concerned about the English results of their children. Among these parents there are some who are actually well educated but there are also some parents who know nothing about English and they really hope that their children could manage the language well. But, nowadays parents of this type are getting fewer and fewer.

R: Why?

Li: Now it seems to me that parents are more concerned about the behavior of their children in school e.g. whether or not they listen to the teacher and whether they talk a lot in class. Some parents think that their children are more obedient in school and they tend to listen to their teachers. I do think that it is true for some students. I think it's because parents and teachers might approach a problem differently. To me teachers need to help students to understand the consequence of what they do. It's important that teachers nowadays are ready change. You have to think faster than your students. You need to make them see the consequence of their behavior. Sometimes I might use rewards. I think we need both positive and negative reinforcement to handle our students. I do think that what I have learnt from psychology does help me a lot in my teaching. We can't scold our students now. They would be really mad if they are scolded. You might need to give them some time to calm down. Sometimes we need other teachers to help and that's why we have 2 class teachers for one class. For my own class I play the role of a kind mother and the other teacher has to play the role of a strict father. I have to explain to them again and again why we scold them. We need to make them see that we scold them out of

love. We care for them and that's why we discipline them. It's all about the relationship between the teacher and student. But it takes a lot of time to establish good relationship with your students. You have to help them to see that what you do is really good for them. You might have to talk to students outside class time. It takes a lot of time and effort. But I think if you do not stop the misbehavior of a student it will spread like epidemic. You have to let them see the consequence, e.g. I might inform their parents about their misbehavior or keep bugging them. We need the cooperation of parents when we teach but I think the family structure nowadays is getting more and more complicated e.g. students with single parents or stepfathers or stepmothers. It's important that parents are willing to cooperate with us if we want to teach our students well. I think my educational background, i.e. a degree in sociology helps me a lot in handling students' problems. I would say most of the parents nowadays are cooperative and they can be reached quite easily with the help of cell phones. But still for parents who don't really care for their children or those who can't really control them, we might not be able to get the cooperation we need. In general, parents are cooperative, I'd say. But some of them would feel frustrated and they might give up. In that case we need to seek help from professionals e.g. social workers.

~ end of interview ~

3.4 Classroom Observation IV

3.4.1 Pre Classroom Observation Interview IV

R: Researcher
Li: Ling (School B)

R: What's your plan for today's lesson?

Li: I will begin the lesson with some pair work. Working in pairs, the students will have to prepare a Christmas party for the class. I will first teach them how to form questions. After they have formed some questions, based on the role cards given in the coursebook, they will ask and answer each other's questions. After the pair work, I will move on to some group work. They will work in groups of four. They will have to discuss and work out a Christmas party plan. Later on based on what they have discussed today the students will need to do an oral report as well as a written report. This activity aims to integrate the use of different language skills. I will have a running dictation in the school hall during the second period. In this activity students will have to work in pairs. Because there are 41 students in the class, there will be a group of three. Students in a group will have to work together to complete the unseen dictation for today. A student from each group will first read a sentence from a text given. He or she will then have to run to his or her partner and tell him or her what he or she could remember. Based on what is told by his or her partner, the other student will have to fill in the blanks of a cloze text given by the teacher. The dictation will take about one period. The group who can fill in most blanks of the cloze text correctly in the shortest time will be considered the winner of the game. Small presents will be given to the students of the winning group.

R: Just now you talked about asking your students to do some pair work at the beginning of the lesson. What objectives do you want to achieve through the pair work?

Li: It's a revision on vocabulary. In this activity the students will have to use what they have learnt e.g. present continuous tense and the vocabulary of different food items. It's an integrated activity to help students to revise the grammar items and vocabulary that they have learnt in this unit.

~ end of interview ~

3.4.2 Post Classroom Observation Interview IV

R: Researcher
Li: Ling (School B)

R: Do you think you have achieved your teaching objective(s)?

Li: You know, the students are having a holiday tomorrow, so I had to assign some homework for them to do during the holiday at the beginning of the lesson. It took me some time to do so. Therefore, there was not enough time for the group work and they did not have enough time to complete it at the beginning of the lesson. I found that some students did not really know what to do during their discussion. I guess I might not have explained the instruction clearly. So I needed to use some time to make sure that they knew what they had to do. And I think that could explain why they did not have enough time for the group work. I hope they would finish their work during lunchtime today because they stay in school to have lunch and they will have about 30 minutes free time after lunch. If not, I will follow up on what they have done today next week. I will ask them to do an oral report or presentation. I want to see how well they can manage group discussion. I think they seldom have the chance to discuss with other people in English. As you know, they will need to discuss with other candidates when they have their HKCEE oral exam. I think it would be good for them to familiarize themselves with the format of group discussion or to practise their spoken English. In terms of the running dictation the students enjoyed the activity very much and they had much fun. This time they did not have to just sit down and write on a piece of paper. Instead they were allowed to run across the school hall. I asked them for feedback after the dictation. Most of them told me that they liked doing dictation in this way. But I got a problem too because I did not know how to switch on the microphone in the hall. Things in the past used to be simpler. There was a room in which you could control everything by a switch but now things are different. And because of this I had to run to them to tell them the instruction for the activity but some of them were not able to understand the instruction and I guess it's because it was in English. It seemed that I needed to use some Cantonese to help. I needed to use both languages and they finally became clear with the instruction. I think the activity was quite successful. There was one student who cheated but the rest of the class was trying their best e.g. running quickly across the hall. I think this type of dictation is quite good because it uses up some of their energy. But I might consider shortening the running distance next time because some of them were really exhausted after the dictation.

R: Okay. Thank you. If there's nothing to add, I want you to share with me your teaching beliefs? How do you understand teaching, learning and education?

Li: I think teaching means to teach. Teaching is a huge thing. Although we try to teach our students the knowledge they need, they might at the same time face some problems concerning other areas of life e.g. establishing positive interpersonal relationship with others. So I think apart from teaching our students some subject knowledge we need to care about their overall development. For example, if you find a student who seems to be depressed or if he or she behaves differently e.g. being very naughty in class, you need to talk to him or her to see if he or she needs any help. Apart from the subject we teach, we need also to teach our students to behave well

and some other important attitudes. The school is just a miniature of the society and we, teachers, are preparing our students for the real world. There are a lot of things that we need to teach our students. For learning, I guess is the same. Apart from learning knowledge from textbooks, students need to learn a lot of other things e.g. how to deal with other people. As for education, I think, it means 'to teach' and 'to cultivate' (the direct Chinese translation of the word 'education'). As a teacher, apart from teaching your students knowledge, you are also cultivating some important qualities in them. Sometimes you would see the growth and development of your students. That's interesting. Some F.2 or even F.5 students still remember what I told them when they were studying in F.1. They would say things to me like yes I know what you are going to say or yes, you told us that when we were in F.1. So, I think we need to teach our students not just knowledge from books, we also have to prepare them for the real world e.g. how to deal with other people and handle their work. They would listen to you. They just learn from you and apply what they have learnt in their own lives. Being courtesy is an example. Some F.1 students are really rude when they just come to the school. But if you teach them how to behave well e.g. saying good morning to teachers and if you are persistent enough, they will then pick up the good habits gradually.

[After the interview Ling shared with me her experience of raising her daughters].

~ end of interview ~

3.5 Classroom Observation V

3.5.1 Pre Classroom Observation Interview V

R: Researcher
Li: Ling (School B)

[I was having a chat with Ling before the interview. After Ling said that some students needed to be fed I said that some students could not wait to be fed when they learnt. Then Ling said the following.]

Li: They don't eat even when you feed them. Whenever I tell them to do something that requires thinking e.g. developing a plan before writing a composition, most of them, more than ten students in the class, would not hand in their work. If you feed them with ideas like telling them what to write in each paragraph, they will then complete their work. But now people are talking about encouraging students to think critically and creatively but what can we do if students do not want them at all. I want to help them to develop their creativity but they are not willing to. What can I do?

R: Yes, yes. So, what about your plan for today's lesson?

Li: First we will have an unseen dictation. It will follow the format of the school examination. Usually we have several unseen dictations in a school year in order to familiarize students with the exam format. Most students do not do well in unseen dictations. It is because different abilities of students are tested in dictation e.g. whether or not they can spell the words correctly and whether or not they can understand the dictation passage. Many students sometimes mix up words like a and are. But some students are making fewer this kind of mistakes because now they know more about the difference between singular and plural nouns. Most of them do not like dictation. However, it is part of the requirement of the school exam and we need to give students the opportunity to familiarize themselves with the exam format. Usually there are two dictations, both seen and unseen for each teaching unit. After the dictation I will talk about comparatives. First of all, I will invite some students to come out and make some comparison about them e.g. comparing their height. I guess students would be motivated because they like making comparison of the sizes of their classmates. Then I will show the students a Powerpoint presentation. I might use some transparencies and exercises too. It all depends on how much time I have because students might need quite a lot of time to check their work after the unseen dictation. Time control would be a bit difficult for a lesson like this one when students are having dictation. But I will do as much as I can. If I do not have much time left, I will teach students some adjectives. But I'll teach if I have enough time.

R: You talked about teaching students comparative and superlative adjectives just now. Is the grammar topic from the cousrebook?

Li: Yes. It is from the textbook and I follow mainly the textbook when I teach. If you follow the grammar book when you teach, you will teach those short and simple adjectives first e.g. adjectives with one or two syllables, and move on to adjectives that are longer and the grammar book provides some exercises for students to work on. I want to begin with some short adjectives too e.g. those with two syllables and will

talk about those longer ones e.g. adding ‘more’ and ‘most’ to form the comparative and superlative forms of a word.

R: Thank you. That’s all? Before the interview we talked a bit about composition writing. Right? So in general, how are students prepared for writing tasks?

Li: We got some resource materials for students to prepare them for different writing tasks and most of them are heavily guided. There is a tendency in students that they rely heavily on the guidance given by the teacher and that they would not put in any new ideas themselves. Now we need to help students to develop creativity and critical thinking and I think I could do it more through free writing. Or I will ask them to draft their work on paper and give it to me to read first. For students who could handle their work, I will encourage them to follow their own ideas. But for those weaker students, we need to give them a lot of guidance in order to help them to complete their work. If not, they might hand in something too bad that they will eventually have to do the work over again. For those compositions that require students to produce something different from what is given in the coursebook, I usually require the students to produce a draft first. The draft will not be marked. I will only highlight the mistakes I find there. Some students who want to avoid making the same mistake in the revised composition would come to me for help. I think students could learn more in this way. I don’t prefer giving students a lot of guidance and requiring them to follow what is given.

R: Do you respond to the content of the draft composition?

Li: I don’t really respond to the content of the draft e.g. I will only say whether the content is okay or not. However, I will respond to the content of the work that students finally hand in. Good compositions will be published in the newsletter of the school.

R: It will take you some time to read through the drafts of your students.

Li: It might take more time for a teacher to mark the work of the students in this way. It all depends on the time I have. When I am busy, I usually don’t find any good compositions from my students. If I have more time, I might type out the work of my students and put it up on the notice board. But again, it all depends on the time I have. This year there are a lot of things that I have not done because I am really too busy. In fact, there are ways to help students learn better, but we got very limited time. So, I do think that we need more time to make our teaching better.

R; What about creative thinking and critical thinking that we talked about before the interview?

Li: I do think that students need to be proactive if they want to learn. But, some students are used to be fed. If you don’t feed them, they will not eat. So, we have to give them more control. Not many students could work well if they are not fed and you will see that these students are in many ways motivated. They usually have a stronger foundation for English. But I would say their foundation is not established in secondary school. It was built during their primary education. It will be too late if they build up their foundation in secondary school.

R: What do you mean by foundation?

Li: You can still shape those F.1 students but not the senior ones. I think some of the senior students are so weak in English that they cannot really follow your teaching or complete their homework. They are just too weak to complete their homework and are too frustrated to learn. If you do not give these students a lot of guidance, they will not be able to complete their work. That is why class work is done more often than homework. We are not sure how they would perform in exams and sometimes we need to teach them some phrases that might be applicable in exams. Some students show improvement in this kind of teaching and they value the support the teacher gives them. Some students are used to be forced to do their work. The culture might mould them in this way. Even if the teacher wants to change the way they teach, he or she might experience resistance from students because they are not used to the new teaching approach. I think questions might help students to think. I do not tell my students everything but instead I ask them questions to encourage them to think. But time is the most important factor that teachers have to consider. We have lots of outings these days and they all take up a lot of our time. We've got more things to do and our workload is getting greater and greater but we have less time for teaching, which is very sad. We always try to think about ways to help our students to develop creativity e.g. project learning, but the fact is the teacher does not know how to teach it. It needs the cooperation of parents too but we all feel lost. It might take several years for teachers to learn and find out the problems that students face in project learning. To me, in terms of learning students are either starving or too full to learn. Sometimes I wonder if students could really take on all the things that we prepare for them e.g. moral education and civic education etc. The school tends to give more and more to students these days but it's hard to cut or reduce things from the original curriculum. A possible way designed by the school to solve the problem of limited class time is that to there would be ten minutes longer for the each of the last two periods in the afternoon.

~ end of interview ~

3.5.2 Post Classroom Observation Interview V

R: Researcher
Li: Ling (School B)

R: Do you think you have achieved your teaching objective(s)?

Li: Considering the lesson as a whole I think the lesson today went smoothly. The unseen dictation took only a period. In the second period the students learnt in a very enjoyable way about comparative and superlative forms of adjectives. I think the students have got to know more about Miss Mok and they were not a bit pretentious today. Some students even ate sweets during the lesson and others played with elastic rubber bands. It was the first time that I found students eating candy in class. I guess it's because we used some IT teaching, i.e. showing the students a Powerpoint presentation on comparative and superlative forms of adjectives in the lesson, and they thought I was kind of distracted by the machine. I think the lesson today was authentic. The students have been very active these few days. As a teacher, I have to control them and I even put them all in detention class yesterday for 15 minutes. […] They just can't control themselves. I would say, the students were just being themselves today. If you ask them to pass around something, they will become very excited and will walk around and talk to each other. You will then have to control them. I would say, the class was quite good today and my teaching objective has been achieved.

R: Okay. Thank you. Today I want you to share with me how you understand English language teaching and English language learning.

Li: I think the objective of English language teaching is to help students to manage the language, i.e. students are able to apply different language skills. I think their exposure to English is very limited. We restrict our teaching to a few topics and hope that they would learn more vocabulary about the topics. Hopefully, they will then move on to making sentences and writing paragraphs using the vocabulary that they have learnt. Students need to play a very active role in this learning process because I think teaching and learning go hand in hand. They can't really be separated. However, we are not sure whether or not they are willing to learn. If they are willing to learn when you teach them, there would be communication between the teacher and student. But, in reality, most of the time, our teaching is one way only. Some students are not willing to listen to English or learn about it and some students are too weak to learn the language. They can't really follow the lesson. Their learning is not enjoyable at all. When I see that they feel frustrated, I will try to give them more help e.g. by giving them more hints or even the answers. But, you can't do it in the long run. How can a teacher spend so much time on only one student? English teachers are usually allocated 3 classes of students. There are more than a hundred of students that the teacher needs to take care of. It's very difficult. I think students need to play a more active role in learning. For example, if we ask them to collect some information to write up their essays and if they really do their work seriously, they will learn a lot. But some students, even those F.1 students, just want to copy the work from their classmates. So, you see they are not learning at all. How would they learn then?

R: What do you think are the joy and difficulty of being a secondary school English language teacher in Hong Kong?

Li: I personally enjoy teaching remedial classes. If you can help a student to learn something and they appreciate your effort, you will feel really happy. A word of thanks from our students means a lot to us. You would feel really glad if you think that you are accepted by your students. Teachers do not really want to have any rewards but we hope to see that our effort is recognized and appreciated. If you ask me the difficulty of being a secondary school English language teacher, I would say, it's really hard to be a secondary school English language teacher nowadays. As we are now a CMI school and the exposure to the language for our students is very limited, the English results of students in the school are declining. If our students are not getting good results in exam, people e.g. people from the Education Department would say that it's the fault of the teacher. People seem to believe that the only reason why students are getting poor results in the exam is because the teachers are not teaching them well. But, I think they never recognize the effort we have been putting in. I think it's just weird. When I first became a teacher, the school was absolutely clear that I studied sociology at university but I was required to teach English. I kept on learning during the past ten years to learn more about English language teaching. But now I was suddenly told that I am not a qualified English language teacher and am required to be benchmarked. I don't mind being required to meet all those new requirements set by them but I am not pleased with the way how they handle things. They should not have let me be an English language teacher in the first place and after so many years of work hard I was suddenly told that I am not qualified at all. I have been learning and improving myself during the past more than ten years. I took extra mural courses or short courses on English language teaching e.g. using drama and poems in ELT even though I know that I may not be able to apply what I have learnt in my teaching because our teaching is very much constrained by the syllabus. Although I know how to use different approaches to make my lessons more interactive, I cannot do so because of the syllabus and time constraint. I have to make choices e.g. whether to make the teaching more interactive and enjoyable or to prepare the students for the exam. If you use an interactive approach in teaching you might need twice the amount of time you need for the one-way more directive approach to teaching. I think teachers of the subject are facing more trouble and difficulty than they ever had before. This is because students nowadays don't really appreciate the work of others. We are not supported and we are always the ones to be criticized and blamed. Sometimes I really feel sorry for myself.

~ end of interview ~

3.6 Target Interview

[There is no pre or post classroom observation interview VI with Ling because the scheduled classroom observation was cancelled due to a quiz before the mid term exam. However, the target interview was conducted with Ling on that day to elicit her views on the critical thinking recommendations.]

R: Researcher
Li: Ling (School B)

R: Today, I will be asking you some questions about the critical thinking recommendations. So first of all, could you please tell me how long you you been teaching English in secondary schools?

Li: From 1990 until now, about 13 years. I teach the subject, English Language, only.

R: Did you know that secondary school English language teachers had been required to help their students to develop critical thinking through the English language subject? If yes, please specify how you got the information, i.e. when and where did you first read/ hear about the requirement?

Li: Yes, I got to know it because of my studies. I think I have read about it in some government documents. Yes, I think I have read it in the syllabus. I guess I have known about it for few years now. But I am not sure for how long exactly.

R: Do you think critical thinking can be developed through the English language subject? If yes, please give examples of how it can be done e.g. teaching activities, strategies or skills. If no, please explain.

Li: I think it's quite difficult to do so. I think for the English language subject we could help our students to develop critical thinking mainly through things like composition writing and free writing. But even if you ask your students to think about how to write a composition e.g. you ask them to tell us what they want to express in Chinese and you then teach them how to put their ideas in English, you'd find that you, the teacher, would eventually be the one to do all the thinking. Students nowadays are not willing to think. Only a small amount of students are willing to do so. I think it's should be an end but not the means. I think for this subject developing students' thinking should not be the ultimate concern. It's more important to help students to master the language so that they could express themselves in the language and you might then see evidence of critical thinking in it.

R: So, what do you mean by mastering the language?

Li: For mastering the language I mean students should be able to express what they think clearly in the language, i.e. they can express their ideas accurately in English. According to my experience, some students encounter some difficulties in their free writing because of a lack of vocabulary. Some students are more willing to try to express themselves. I got a student who wrote swim single instead of swim alone in his free writing. I then told the student the appropriate way of putting the idea and I think by correcting the mistakes our students make in their writing we could help

them to master the language. Apart from expressing themselves in English, students need different types of exposure of the language before they can master it e.g. reading English books and newspapers. They need to have contact with different types of the language such as watching English movies and listening to the English radio channels. If they got enough exposure to the language, they would then be able to master it. My learning experience tells me that that is true. I did not just go to English classes to learn the language. It's impossible to learn a language in that way. Apart from going to classes, I did a lot of things myself. Students need to do a lot outside the classroom in order to learn the language and they would then manage the language well. What I am trying to say is students need to master the language before we can introduce some critical thinking materials in our teaching. I guess from time to time we are doing it now. For instance, if you think that your students have already learnt the present tense, instead of teaching them all over again you can give them a sentence with a verb in the present tense and ask them why the present tense is used in the sentence but I have to admit that I am not sure if it is about critical thinking. I think university students but not our students can handle critical thinking. I think junior secondary students are not ready to think critically. They are not mentally ready or mature enough to do so.

R: So, in fact, how do you understand critical thinking e.g. what does it mean to you? Is it something important?

Li: I think critical thinking is that you know how to criticize and judge something after you read it. For instance, the U.S. is going to invade Iraq now. A pretty old professor at my university once told me that the biggest terrorist in the world was the U.S. I thought about what he told me but I did not understand what he said. At that time I thought the U.S. was a good country and it was always ready to offer others help. To me, the States was just a good man and was a good country. But why did the professor say it was not? I have been thinking about what he told me again these days. I am thinking about the reason why the U.S. wants to invade Iraq. Do they do it for their oil? Or as they told the whole world that they do it because they need to disarm Iraq. For me, I think what I have been thinking about is what you consider critical thinking. But I think if you share your thinking with your students even in lessons like General Education students would just think that what you are talking about has got nothing to do with them. I think people at their age are still playful and they love to play a lot. They might not like to criticize or judge other things. I am not sure we should require our students to criticize and judge at this stage. I think there would be some problems. I think it is more appropriate and reasonable to require senior form students e.g. F.4 or 5 students to think critically because they are more mature and stable. Lower form students e.g. F.1-3 are just kids. They are just too young and they are not ready to do it. They are too young to think critically.

R: Do you think your teaching now is helping your students to develop critical thinking? Please explain.

Li: Yes, I always want them to think because I think they never use their brain. I force them to exercise their brain. I have helped my students to develop critical thinking. But it depends whether or not they are willing to do so. For example, I always require my students to draft their compositions. I seldom give them guidelines before they write and I just let them try. I hope to see if they can manage. I might give them the writing prompt only and some hints e.g. how many paragraphs they should write. I

will let them try. I will then look at their draft. If I find that most of the students cannot manage the work, I will then give them more guidelines. I hope they would think more before they write.

R: What about critical thinking then?

Li: For critical thinking, sometimes I talk less so that my students can talk more in class. I always throw them questions and ask them for reasons to their answers. I always ask them questions like why is it so?and why isn't it the other way? I ask them to tell why A is chosen instead of B. I will then let them think.

R: Do you think critical thinking can be assessed through the English language subject? If yes, please give examples of how it can be done e.g. assessment tasks and criteria. If no, please explain.]

Li: No, because critical thinking is something very subjective. If I think what Student A said is good, does it mean that I should give him or her higher marks? And, lower marks for Student B then. But other teachers might have different opinions. They might think that the answer given by Student B is better. I think it would not be fair. So, I think critical thinking cannot be measured. It's like love. You can't say my love for you is eight or nine degrees. Right?

R: Do you think appropriate support by the government or your school is given to you to implement the recommendation? If yes, please give examples of the support you are given. If no, suggest the support you need.

Li: No. The government has not given us any support at all. I think we got only a lot of documents. Because of my studies I need to read a lot of documents on curriculum. After I have read them, a lot of questions came to me e.g. is so and so included in the curriculum? I never knew about it. We are required to do so and so but what have they given us to help us to do them. They just give us sets of documents and some examples and ask us to follow what they have done. But they never seem to be aware that the topics that they set might not be the ones we are teaching our students. Then how could we apply what they have given us? This is the first problem, I think. Okay, you might say yes, we need to follow their examples and we need to do some adaptation and modification, but we do not have the time to do so, which is also a problem.]

R: So, what about the support from the school?

Li: The critical thinking recommendations have not been really talked about in the school. The recommendations have not been made explicit in the school at all.

R: Then, what about the support you hope to have?

Li: I think, basically, critical thinking is something that we need to cultivate in our students when they are very young so that they can criticize and pass judgment on different things. But there is a risk too because if you allow your students to criticize or judge, the classroom would become a discussion zone but not a learning zone. There might be too many opinions from students that even teaching can't take place in

class. I think it might be the case. I remember we had both lectures and tutorials at my university. We talked and discussed a lot during tutorial classes and we thought critically. I think we don't have the time to do so in our school. I guess some changes are needed if we really want to help our students to develop critical thinking say like some time would be given to us for lecturing and there would also be time for students to discuss. That would be okay then. But this could never be implemented if those public exams like HKCEE or HKAL were not scrapped. If there are exams, your teaching will be shaped and constrained by the exams. You would not have the space or time to do anything else. So, in fact, it's very difficult. It's just like the Chinese saying; you want the pony to be good and you want it not to eat food. How could it be possible? Sometimes you just could not get all you want. Could you have good horses that never eat? You got to choose, to make choices. I guess English should not be the only subject to help students to develop critical thinking. If students cannot really know how to use the language how can they criticize or judge using the language. This is a big problem. If you want to develop students' critical thinking you might have to start with their mother tongue and do it with the English language subject later.

R: When would be appropriate then?

Li: I think it would be more appropriate to introduce critical thinking to students when they are in F.3 or 4. Those F.1 and 2 students are not really stable. Sometimes they behave like kids. I guess F.3 and 4 students are more stable and they would be ready to think more. I think if you really want your students to think critically, the whole education system would need to be changed e.g. even early education would need to be student directed say like students would do more talking than the teacher in class. But I doubt if learning would take place if you say students would be given the chance to express themselves more than the teacher. I think we face a lot of dilemmas. Also, yes, it's good to help your students to develop critical thinking when they are young, but I am not sure they are ready or mature enough to do so. It's just like, these days, we are told not to encourage our students to rote learn and to use a more active approach in teaching. But this causes a lot of problems in secondary schools. You need to prepare students for the HKCEE and they need to recite what they learn for the exam. They have to do so because of the exam. It is just like what we talked about just now. There are a lot of dilemmas. Also, there seems to be a gap between primary and secondary education too. Students come from different primary schools and they possess different attitudes. So, I think we need better coordination from the government before we can implement the recommendations say like tell us when exactly we should introduce critical thinking in our curriculum. And even teachers would need some training before they could really help their students to develop critical thinking. That is very important. They always require us to do something that we do not really know how to do. We are not taught or brought up in that kind of culture. How could we teach something that we have not learnt? That is a big problem.

R: What kind of training do you think would be needed?

Li: I think at least we need to go to some classes in which we would be told what critical thinking is. I think critical thinking is a huge topic. Tell us what they want our students to think critically e.g. which aspects do they want our students to be critical

about? If you say, they want students to think about politics issues more critically, then we can introduce politics in our teaching for students to think about. I am not really sure what they mean by being critical? Do they want our students to be critical towards everything? Do they want them to criticize everything around them? By then, students might even criticize the teaching approaches of teachers. So, what should we do then? This is a big dilemma.

~ end of interview ~

3.7 Last Debriefing Interview

R: Researcher
Li: Ling (School B)

[I began the interview by telling Ling something I had noticed in her teaching, i.e. she likes to invite students to comment on the answers/ideas given by the others and in many cases she considers very carefully the opinions of her students. I then told her that what she had been doing might help cultivate important critical attitudes in her students and asked her for comments on my findings.]

Li: I think there could be a bit of cultivation of critical attitudes in students. I think students should be very careful when they think. I think our students get into contact with different things on different levels. I think you know we are in the New Territories and there are a lot of things that our students have never got in touch with. So, if they get the chance to go to other countries e.g. to travel to other countries, I think they might see something that we have never seen. So, if they think that an answer given is correct and I guess there is no absolute answer for the game like the one we played in the lesson I think I should accept their answer and I think the opportunity could help my students to think about whether the issue discussed is really true. I think before you talk to me today I never thought of this as an opportunity to help my students to develop critical thinking. But I think in fact subconsciously I think I am always helping my students to develop critical thinking. I think they never use their brains and so I constantly want them to use their brain. I always tell them that if you don't exercise your brain, it would rust. I always give them this kind of training. As for my own class, I, even as their class teacher, would not tell my students to go to the library to get the newspapers. Instead, I asked them questions like what did the announcement tell us yesterday? Do you remember? Some of them then replied and said something like open the windows. I said no. Some of them then said library and it was closing. We then eventually got to the point that they had to collect the papers from the library. In fact, I do not want to tell my students everything directly. I want them to think first. I want them to do a bit of thinking. Because I think they can remember the things that they have thought about better. I think this is what I want to do. For critical thinking, I guess I might have done a bit of it unintentionally. I did not do it with a clear intent. But I think this is my teaching style. I do not want to tell my students everything. Instead I think if they know something they should be the one to tell me. That's my way of teaching. [Ling reiterated that she agreed with me regarding my findings that she was ready to listen to the opinion of her students and was ready to let them think. And, her teaching style might help to cultivate important critical attitudes in her students.] But, I had not thought about the teaching episode as an opportunity to develop critical thinking of my students until you talked about it just now. I think the observer can see things more clearly than we do. So I think sometimes it is good to have someone to observe your lessons. You got the chance to listen to different opinions. That's stimulating and it can help you to think about your own teaching. After you have been teaching for more than ten years you just feel numb You are just insensitive and you know the curriculum now is always changing and we as teachers need to change too. You can't just adopt the teaching style of your own teachers. You need to learn and try new things constantly. I am someone who likes to try new things. To me, it's not difficult to cope with all these changes. I think with all the changes I will not be bored. I don't

want my teaching to be something routine. If I were the student, I would be bored too. I would do something new if I got the time to think and prepare for it, something new for my teaching. But I don't always have the time to do so. The biggest problem is that I don't have the time to do so. If I had time, I would like to try different teaching methods. [I told Ling that I could still remember what she said in our first meeting. She said teachers today were like ball jugglers trying to catch all the balls thrown to them and she agreed.] To be honest, I knew I did not have time for your study but I decided to participate in it because I want other people to know our difficulty; the problems that English language teachers face. In fact, in many cases it's not us, the teachers, who do not want to work hard. There is just no time and resources for us to do so. For instance, they asked us to use the project learning approach in our teaching but in fact I do not know how to do it. How can I teach my students to do it then? I am really puzzled. How can I do it? Sometimes it is where the problem lies. I think as you are doing some research in this area, we in fact should give you more support. And I hope that if you really see the real situation and you can help us in some way. Things are not that superficial as some people think; you teachers are not willing to be benchmarked because you do not want to change and if you are not ready to change you better work as a librarian then or just please don't teach anymore. I think that's not true. […] So you see I sometimes make mistakes in my lessons especially when I am exhausted. But I guess no one is perfect and I don't think there is someone who would never make mistakes. So let me tell you I made the mistake in that lesson because I was really tired. I think the mistake would have been avoided if I had not been so tired that day.

R: Right. Okay. Do you have any comments or suggestions for me in terms of the research design of the study e.g. do you think observing five or six lessons of each participating teacher would be appropriate?

Li: I think that should be enough because you see when the students got to know more about you their performance in class became more and more authentic; just authentic. I think that's good and you got what you targeted. You might have noticed that the students were really good in the very first observed lesson, but I can tell you that's not true; not real. But what you saw in the last observed lesson was real. I really appreciated their courage. They were not a bit pretentious. In fact I don't really mind if you see their real face because you are here to see something authentic. I think what you saw here really tells you what students nowadays are like. I think we should let other people know. As a teacher, you do not just teach. You have to counsel and discipline your students. I think from what you saw here you get to know more about students, teachers and the work we do in the school. […] I think I have experienced a lot with you. You seem to have been with me through my studies. Let's shake hands.

~ end of interview ~

IV. Mei Mei (School A)

As shown in Table 4 below Mei Mei and I met seven times on the dates specified. The table also shows that only five classroom observations were conducted between May and June 2003. Due to some special arrangements for the class, the classroom observation originally scheduled on 5 June had to be cancelled. The dates of the five classroom observations and the length of all the interviews conducted, i.e. pre and post classroom observation interviews and the last debriefing interview, are also specified in the table.

Table 4 Summary of data collection for Mei Mei

<table>
<tr><td colspan="8">Mei Mei (School A)</td></tr>
<tr><td>Date</td><td>18 Mar 2003</td><td>14 May 2003</td><td>22 May 2003</td><td>30 May 2003</td><td>10 June 2003</td><td>18 June 2003</td><td>25 June 2003</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="3">Events</td><td rowspan="3">1st meeting after the explora-tory study</td><td>Pr1 3.6mins</td><td>Pr2 4mins</td><td>Pr3 4.8mins</td><td>Pr4 4.8mins</td><td>Pr5 9.2mins</td><td rowspan="3">II 16 mins</td></tr>
<tr><td>CO1 35mins</td><td>CO2 35mins</td><td>CO3 35mins</td><td>CO4 35mins</td><td>CO5 35mins</td></tr>
<tr><td>Po1 15 mins</td><td>Po2 16.6 mins</td><td>Po3 15.1 mins</td><td>Po4 23.4 mins</td><td>Po5 20.5 mins</td></tr>
</table>

Key:-
Pr: Pre Classroom Observation Interview
CO: Classroom Observation
Po: Post Classroom Observation Interview
II: Last Debriefing Interview

4.1 Classroom Observation I

4.1.1 Pre Classroom Observation Interview I

R: Researcher
M: Mei Mei (School A)

[Before the interview Mei Mei and I had a nice short chat. One thing that we talked about was her students, i.e. the S.1B class. Mei Mei told me that her students were very lovely but they, in fact, were extremely lazy and that made her really mad sometimes.]

R: What's your plan for today's lesson?

M: Today I am going to teach my students how to write a composition. It is about a trip to Ocean Park. The passage in the textbook has already been taught before the SARS outbreak and the students should have learnt the vocabulary there. But, I am afraid that they would have forgotten the vocabulary now because the words were taught long time ago. But yesterday, we worked on the listening practice of the unit and the same vocabulary was used in the listening practice. I think it could help to remind them what they had learnt. Today, I will first look at the writing prompt with them. I want them to know that they are going to write a diary. And the diary is about their experience of a trip to Ocean Park. With the help of the pictures on the handout, the pictures are supposed to be some photographs taken in Ocean Park, I plan to ask them, first of all, if they know they are going to write a dairy. Then I will ask them what they will write in the diary. I want them to tell me that they went to Ocean Park and as shown in the handout they went to the Ocean Theatre and their experience there, just two things, i.e. what happened there and their feelings. After all these, I want them to think about the fifth picture. They have to think about what happens in picture five. As they are still young, I will go through each picture with them e.g. I will ask them what is shown in the picture. For example, what happens in picture one. First, I hope to pool more ideas together because sometimes they just don't have much to say. Each of them only writes very little. I want to pool more ideas so that they know they can write more for each picture. Also, I hope that helps them to use the vocabulary that they have learnt. For those that they have forgotten I will remind them. After that, I will discuss with them how to divide the text into paragraphs. On the handout it shows that picture one […] but it is a diary and there should be an introduction to talk about, supposed in the first paragraph they should write down where they have gone to and with whom. So, I will ask them what they will write in the introduction, the first paragraph and the ending, and also the content in the middle. After that, I will ask them to start writing the diary. But I know they will not have enough time for that. So, in fact, they will have to complete it at home.

R: Can they write down their feelings in the diary?

M: Yes, you are right. In fact, based on the pictures, they could write down whatever they want. Some might feel that something is very exciting and others may not and thus what they write down could be very different.

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~ end of interview ~

4.1.2 Post Classroom Observation Interview I

R: Researcher
M: Mei Mei (School A)

R: Do you think you have achieved your teaching objective(s)?

M: I think my students could answer the questions I asked them. But from the answers they gave me, I think they were not taking their work seriously when they read the writing prompt. I think they did not really read the four lines. I think the words there are not difficult. With their English proficiency I believe that they should be able to understand those four lines of words. If they had read the prompt carefully, I think I would not have to refer them to different lines when I went through the prompt with them. I needed to ask them a lot of questions and refer them to different lines of the prompt to locate the important information. But later on when I asked them to read a particular line, they were able to find the information they needed, which shows that they could indeed understand the prompt. In fact, I just wanted them to know what they were required to do for the task and to have a clear idea of the task. So, I think, on the whole, for those who were attentive during the lesson, but I can't be sure if everyone of them has listened to me, should have got the main idea of the prompt and they should know the difference between a diary and a letter to a teacher by now. So, on the surface, I think the objective of the lesson has been reached because they did describe some of the pictures. But I think they could have imagined more, but I don't know how to help them to imagine more so, I don't know. I originally planned to discuss with them the whole writing task, but I then found that it could not be done. I don't know if it's because I was slow or I spent some time scolding them. It used up some time and I did not expect to wait for them for so long to give me answers to my questions after they read the prompt. It would be okay if they said something but some students just stood there saying nothing for quite a long time. I then had to prompt them like referring them to a specific line. So, it took more time and the lesson went slowly. I think they could finish writing the diary at home. [Mei Mei then told me that she needed some time to think. I told her to take her time and to talk freely about whatever she had in mind regarding the lesson e.g. interesting or important things that happened in the lesson or opportunities that she missed in the lesson etc.] Yes, it's here [Mei Mei referred me to some pictures on the handout.] I suddenly realized that after the first period. That's why I added it in the second period. I asked the students of the second group what the people were doing in the picture. Some of them said they were preparing for the performance. They said it themselves. Then I asked them to guess what the performance would be e.g. this girl was holding a ball near a sea lion. Some students said the sea lion would sit on the ball. Another student said something like balance with the ball. Then I began to realize that the two pictures might be showing two different performances. I told the first group that some people were preparing for a performance in this picture. I was not so satisfied because I had to tell them what the picture's about. But the students in the second group told me their opinions themselves. I don't know if the students in the second group are brighter but they told me what they thought. A student said that some training was going on but there was another student who said they were preparing for the show. So, I suddenly realized that I could ask them to think about what the actual performance would be e.g. the girl was holding a ball and standing near a sea lion. I did not think about it during the first period and the idea came to me suddenly during the second

period. So, the students of the second group got the opportunity to think about the picture and voice their opinions. I think, maybe, your teaching will improve if you teach something for the second time. That's it. So, I think, I could have used the first picture more fully and they could put in more their imagination. That's it.

R: It seems to me that you like asking your students questions in class. But, can I ask if you have a standard or model answer in mind when you ask your students a question?

M: No, no. Nothing special but some of the pictures e.g. the things that the people in the picture are holding, are pretty clear and so they could not wrongly describe them. I would say I usually do not have any expected answers. I would accept any answers that are reasonable. But, I definitely would not consider training appropriate for this picture because there is a big crowd of audience. This picture is definitely not about a training session. It might be some kind of preparation before the performance. I think for things that are not, in my opinion, reasonable according to the writing prompt, I would say that's not right. But sometimes they give me answers that are different from mine like what the boys suggested just now that the sea lion would try to balance the ball or sit on it. I think his idea was very interesting. I thought the sea lion would jump through the loop but a student said it would keep the loop spinning with its mouth. I think these are all reasonable answers. But if what they say is unrelated to the prompt, then I will not accept their answers. Yes, a boy asked me a question about the order of the pictures. I originally planned to talk about the sequence of the pictures when I talked about the paragraphing of the diary. I remember that he asked me the question when I was talking about the fifth picture. I wanted to concentrate on the fifth picture first. You know, the students had to think about an activity for picture five. It could be anything and it would be the ending of the dairy. It would be okay no matter what sequence they follow because there are different ways to describe an event e.g. you can first talk about the present and then move back to the past or you can talk about the most exciting part first. I would accept whatever sequence they like. But I planned to talk about it after we discussed the content for each paragraph e.g. what would be included in the first paragraph. Whether they would describe their experience chronologically it's up to them. I planned to talk about it a bit later. [I briefly summarized what Mei Mei said and confirmed with her that on the whole the teaching objective of the lesson has been achieved] Yes, I think, for things like understanding the prompt. But for stimulating the thinking of the students, I don't think so. I think their English is not good. The last composition that they worked on was about a shrinking machine. They got some guidelines to help them to complete the task. They had to think about alternatives like if they were too small to eat a hamburger, what could they eat and if they were too small to sleep on their own beds where could they sleep? I had to return their work to them because some students wrote things like they could eat sandwiches if they could not eat hamburgers! Sandwiches are just as big as hamburgers. Right? Some even said they could sleep in a cat. I think that they just did not take their work seriously. So, I had to discuss with them the composition again but this time they gave me some very interesting ideas. Then I asked them why they got so many ideas then but not the time when they were writing their composition. They just filled whatever they liked in the blanks given e.g. I can't sleep on my bed but I… I got the impression that they were just not taking their work seriously. I then asked them why there was such a big difference. They told me that they did not know how to express their ideas in English. That's it. But I am

not sure if this is the reason why they tend to say less. [I then reminded Mei Mei that that during the lesson she once allowed the students to express their ideas in Cantonese. Though both Mei Mei and I had forgotten about the exact question, we remembered the incident. I then asked Mei Mei if that was the reason why she allowed her students to speak in Cantonese.] Yes, yes, yes.

R: Is that true that you wanted your students to talk more by allowing them to express themselves in Cantonese?

M: Right, right, right, right.

R: So, what do you think about the students in the class?

M: They are, in fact, a group of students who are quite active. In fact, they can be quite responsive. In fact, some students try to answer when I ask them a question. But, they sometimes are not attentive. Some are responsive and talkative. They just like to complain about each other, like the students at the back, I mean, the cute fat boy. They are quite naughty. Also, talking about homework, they do not take their work seriously. You have to chase them really hard for their homework. That's it. That could drive you crazy. That could drive you crazy when you have to chase them for their homework. But when I have lessons with them and they are very responsive I would feel very happy. That's it. Sometimes they are not very supportive to their classmates In terms of their views on learning English, so far I have not found anyone who is hostile to the language. But there are one or two students who are quite weak. I guess it's because they are still young and what we are teaching is not really difficult. I think they are just lazy. But they are lazy not just in learning English.

R: So they are lazy in learning other subjects too?

M: Yes, I think the students of this class are just lazy.

R: What about their English exam results?

M: Mm. They are in class B, right? So, their results should be quite good, I mean, theoretically. But they are not. Some of them could not pass the last school writing exam. Yes, the English writing exam. Nine of them failed in the exam and the class was the one who had most students who could not pass the exam. Class A should be the best and then comes class B and so on. The NET teacher marked their work and she said that they had not read the writing prompt carefully. That's it. So, you have to push them. They are just lazy.

R: So, how many students are there in the group today?]

M: 22 students. There are 44 students in the class. There are 44 students in this class. So, half of them means 22.

~ end of interview ~

4.2 Classroom Observation II

4.2.1 Pre Classroom Observation Interview II

R: Researcher
M: Mei Mei (School A)

R: What's your plan for today's lesson?

M: I am going to teach them a passage on wildlife in a new chapter of the coursebook today. In the last lesson I gave my students a worksheet to work on. In fact, the passage is about the Mai PO Marshes. During the last lesson, in order to arouse the interest of the students in Mai Po, I went through with them the worksheet. The worksheet required them to go to the web site of Mai Po to find out the answers to some questions about the Marshes. I had the previous lesson in our Multimedia Learning Centre in which students could access the Internet. But, we did not finish the worksheet. My original plan was that they first finished all the questions in the worksheet, I would then begin to talk about the passage after they got all the answers. But, we had only one lesson yesterday and we did not have enough time to complete the worksheet. Also, some students needed to complete the worksheet after school but the problem was that some students did not have a computer at home and they could not finish their work on the same day. I agreed that they could finish the worksheet in two days. But I will not wait for them all to complete the whole worksheet. Based on the information they have with them, perhaps just a brief idea about what Mai Po is or the opportunity for them to look at some pictures of Mai Po on the Internet, I hope that they would get a more concrete idea of the place. I think these would help the students to understand the text when I talk about the newsletter of Mai Po. I don't know how to put it. They should know something about Mai Po by now. They would not be completely ignorant about the place. They might have heard of the place but they might have never been there. But, now at least they should have looked at some photographs on the Internet. I think it would be better if they know more about the place before I talk about the text. It would be easier to lead into the passage. At the beginning I think I will ask them to read the title of the passage and to guess what the text is about. Then I will teach them some words because they should not know the words like 'newsletter' and 'issue'. So, I will bring to the class some newsletters for them to talk about. I will ask them to scan the passage to find out how many parts there are in the newsletter. I will then go through each part with them. I think the focus of today's lesson will be students reading through the newsletter. I want them to learn some new words. I want them to read, to intensively read the passage.

R: How much of the passage do you think you will cover today?

M: I think maybe, maybe, there are four parts in the passage, I think maybe I could finish two of them, about half of it. I think I could ask the students some questions about the two parts, in detail, maybe that's all I could finish in today's lesson.

~ end of interview ~

4.2.2 Post Classroom Observation Interview II

R: Researcher
M: Mei Mei (School A)

R: Do you think you have achieved your teaching objective(s)?

M: I was quite mad, in fact. When I walked into the classroom, I found that the students were not getting ready for the lesson at all. When I walked in, I was a bit mad. I hated when, when they asked me questions. I usually welcome questions especially when they ask me questions at an appropriate time and ask me appropriate questions. But when the whole class is not settled yet and they keep saying Ms? Ms? Ms? I would be very angry. I hate that. When I went in they were just in a mess. They were not doing what they should be doing. They did it on purpose. They did what they should not do. I was really mad. That's it. I was quite mad when I entered the classroom but I tried to calm myself down. Then, then, I think some students were just dead. They were not a bit attentive. But, they could manage to answer my questions if I guided them to do so. So, I think they can think quite well. On the whole, I tried not to tell them everything and let them talk about the passage. I think they could do it. But I was really mad throughout the process. Because I could feel that they were not with me. If they had been with me, things would have been a lot more relaxed. But, if you talk about the objective, I mean the thing that I hoped to do in the lesson, apart from not being able to complete all I hoped to complete, I think it was achieved. What I mean is that some students could answer my questions. But I doubt if the students who listened to what I said have really gone through the reading and thinking process. I don't' know. When I called on a student, he was forced to think and I do think that he would go through the process. But some of the students were just sitting there doing nothing. I don't know if all students were listening to me. So, I am not sure if those who just sat there and listened to the answers given by their classmates have gone through the process. I have no idea. That's it. But then, I thought about what had happened immediately after the first period. I think I was too eager to help them to understand and talk about the text that I missed something important such as asking them for their opinions. So in the second period I did not refer the group of students to the textbook at the beginning of the lesson. Instead, I asked the students, because we went to the MMLC yesterday to complete a worksheet on Mai Po, some questions about Mai Po e.g. have you ever been to Mai Po? Do you want to go to Mai Po? Do you like birds? Have you ever tried bird-watching? I did find that they were more attentive compared to the first group of students. But, I don't know if it's because the students in this group are better. Some top and diligent students are in the second group. I don't know if it's the way I began the lesson or the students themselves that made the difference. The students in this group were more attentive. The students in the second group were more willing to participate. They were willing to participate more in the lesson. This was the way how I began the lesson. In the first period, I asked the students how many parts there were in the passage, many of them gave me the correct answer, i.e. five parts. Then I talked about the content of each part. But, when I talked about the part on Dave's letter, I told them to read out the whole part even though I had told them before what they had to pay attention to. I told them to read through the whole part before answering my question. But the student who was nominated to answer the question about this part was being silent for a long time. He just stood there not being able to answer the question. So, I told him to read a certain

line and he could then answer the question. So, in the second period, I did not tell the students to read the whole part. And, before I talked about the part on Dave's letter, I referred them to the Dave's page and asked them if the text had told them anything about the letter. I think this way of phrasing and sequencing the questions might be better than going straight to the letter because they might not be aware of the letter at that time. Also, they might be confused about the first two parts. They might be confused. So, in the second period, I told them that we were going to read Dave's letter and I asked them to find out if it told them anything about the letter in the second part. Then I stopped after we talked about the first point. And, the students were able to give me the answer quickly, i.e. a visit to Mai Po. Then, I continued to talk about the second point. After they had read it, I asked them from where, which part of the text that they could find the information about Mai Po. They said part three immediately. Then, I talked about some rarest birds and introduced the meaning of the word, rarest. Learning from the experience of the first period, I got to know that part two was actually the letter and part three was about the third bullet point. So, after I have talked about the third point I talked about the rarest birds. Then I asked them what the rarest bird was, this time they could tell me quickly the answer. Also, when I tried to explain to them the meaning of the word, rare, for the first time, I talked about, I guess it's because I was in a great hurry and the bell had gone already, I talked about pandas. Then I told myself that pandas could only be found in China. But, in the second period, the students were more ready to participate. So, I asked them questions like where can you find pandas? Some students shouted out Hong Kong. I said yes but then I asked them who gave the pandas to us. I wanted them to participate more in the lesson. If they are willing to participate more e.g. more ready to answer questions, then I feel that there is more interaction going on between us. I think more students in this group were more involved in the lesson. That's how I felt. But I am not sure if it's because there are more diligent students in the second group or it's because of the changes I made to the second period. I am not sure. I think students' response in the second period was better.

R: It seems that you went through a lot of reflection during the two lessons. When did you do that?

M: I did it when I was really mad and angry. They were just in a mess. I wanted to scold them. But, before scolding them, I asked myself - are they the only ones to blame? Then, I thought to myself and tried to figure out if there's anything that I could do to improve the situation.

R: So you were in the lessons while you are teaching, right?

M: In fact, I was not thinking much when I was teaching. I wanted only to help them to answer my questions. I wanted them to answer more questions. But when the first group of students left the classroom, I began to think about my teaching immediately. So, I made some changes when I taught the second group.

R: So, do you think you have achieved your teaching objective?

M: Mm, I think, on the whole, the students could do what I wanted them to do e.g. to talk about the things that I wanted them to talk about. But, I think not everyone in the

class could do it. That's it. I think those who went through the process with me should have done it. But, I think not everyone in the class have gone through the process.

R: Why did you ask the students to read aloud together the text in the lesson?

M: It's because I saw the NET do it. Perhaps it could help to focus their attention. The voice of a student might be too soft. If I read out the passage myself, some of them might be distracted by other things and the voice of a student would be too soft. So, perhaps, it may help them to focus on the passage.

R: But, why did you read with her students?

M: It's because they might not know how to pronounce the words there. Also, if I had not read with them, they would have read out the passage in a terrible way and they would then laugh. That's it.

R: Okay. Thank you. Let's talk about the parents of these students. How do you feel about them?

M: I think some parents really love their children. Unlike the parents in the past who tend to beat up and scold their children, some parents nowadays because of the love they have for their children they tend to listen to them. But, I think some of them have gone too far that they actually spoil their children even though I am aware that there are different types of parents. These parents are afraid that their children would be mad at them or they are afraid that their children would not enjoy the freedom they want. But, sometimes I do think that we need to push our kids a bit. So, many kids nowadays tend not to listen to others. Their families respect their opinions so much that many of them just behave like a king. There are also some problem parents e.g. those who are divorced. The children of these parents tend to be neglected. Some of them would behave strangely. Their emotion would become unstable. There is a fat boy in my class whose father mainly works in China. He doesn't have a mother. So, he always tries to seek our attention. He tries to be cute but he loses his temper easily. He's not responsible too and sometimes he does something bad. That's it.

R: So, who take care of this boy?

M: I think his grandma or other relatives take care of him. There are some parents who scold their children fiercely. Many of them have gone too far that their children become rebellious. I think if the parents know how to teach their children appropriately, you would see the difference in these children. Those children are nice and they know how to respect others. They have love for others and are usually responsible. So, I would say, there are many different types of parents. But, I think parents of our generation would tend to scold and beat up their children. But now you can find different types of parents. And so children nowadays tend to put their demands on others. Also, I think some of them, I guess it's because of their families e.g. the influence of their father and mother, tend to put their blame on the teacher, but some of them are not, really they are not but they respect their children so much that they never force them to do anything. I think that's not okay.

R: So, are the parents nowadays cooperative, on the whole?

M: On the whole, they are. Some, not many of them, are uncooperative.

R: What do they care about then?

M: Whether their children behave well in school and their academic results, I think, just these two things. I mean their behavior. I think they do think that their behavior in school is important e.g. whether they behave well. Yes, these two things are what they care about e.g. whether or not they are learning something bad from others. Their behavior and their academic results, just these two things, I think. Sometimes some parents are really interesting. They will tell you that their children don't listen to them at all. But you know, they are not kindergarten kids now. For kindergarten kids, they might listen to the teachers rather than their parents. But secondary school students are different. If the parents of secondary school students are not able to discipline their own children, these students usually won't listen to the teachers in school. And once there was a parent who phoned me up in the morning telling me that her child was not willing to put on the coat. She said her child did not want to put on the coat even though the weather was very cold. She told me to talk to her child. I promised to do so but I thought to myself. If she could not convince her child, it's quite hard for us to do so. Her child did not want to put on the coat because many students in the class did not put it on. I think you can see a lot from a child. I mean you will know something about his family if you look at the behavior of a child. I do think that the family itself impacts heavily on the way how a student behaves in class. For some students, I would say, there is nothing that we can do to help. I think for some cases the school just can't do anything to help. Then we might have to wait until the day when the child has committed some big mistakes. But, I don't know if they would get a second chance. The school and the parents are playing different roles. Schools can never replace a family, I think.

~ end of interview ~

4.3 Classroom Observation III

4.3.1 Pre Classroom Observation Interview III

R: Researcher
M: Mei Mei (School A)

R: What's your plan for today's lesson?

M: In this lesson I plan to complete some exercises in the workbook with my students. There is a comprehension exercise in the workbook. The comprehension exercise is similar to the comprehension passage we were talking about last time, i.e. a newsletter from WWF (World Wild Fund). I have just finished talking about the passage. We did not have time to go through the passage this week. Their homework books will be checked soon and I need to make sure that correction is properly done. So, I broke the unit into smaller trunks and went through them bit by bit whenever I had time. I have just finished the unit. I hope that they can use the vocabulary they have learnt in the unit to complete the comprehension exercise, the exercise in the workbook. If we have enough time, they will complete more exercises. The exercises will also be found in the workbook. I hope they can use the vocabulary they have learnt to complete a cloze passage. They will be given words to choose from. One of the aims of the exercise is to see if they can use the words they have learnt correctly. The content of the exercise is similar to what we have talked about, i.e. wild life and WWF. They are of the same topics. They share a similar topic and similar vocabulary is found. They share some differences too e.g. the sentences are not exactly the same and the position might be different. Through the exercise I hope to see if they can use the new words they have learnt, to see if they can do it correctly.

R: What about the picture composition your students did about two week ago?

M: Which composition?

R: The picture composition you did with them.

M: No, that's not a composition.

R: Really? I might have made a mistake then.

M: That's a newsletter. It's the newsletter of WWF.

R: I mean the one I observed in the first lesson. The picture composition that required students to think about what they wanted to put in the last picture.

M: Yes, yes, they have done it.

R: What about their work? Is it good?

M: Some are good but some are bad. Some students did put in a lot of effort but some obviously did not take their work seriously. I marked their work and I told those who did not do well to rewrite their work. There is a group of students who need to rewrite the composition. They will have to do it after school.

R: What do you mean by not doing well?

M: Content. Some of them did not take their work seriously when they wrote. They just wanted to get some words down on the paper. The content of their work was not rich enough. They never added other ideas in their work. They never described what had happened. But some did very well too. Remember the question a student asked me about the sequence of the pictures? So, in the second period, I discussed with the students what the order could be. I told the boy that he had asked a very good question and the order in fact was not fixed. I told them that there could be some variations. The boy actually did quite well this time. Variations in the order of the events were shown in some of the work of the students. Some of their work is quite interesting. In fact, I would consider their work logical. Some students did not follow the sequence of the pictures given in the handout. But, there were some students who did not do well too. They have to rewrite their work. That's it.

[I asked Mei Mei for a copy of the exercises that she planned to do with the class today and she gladly promised to do so.]

~ end of interview ~

4.3.2 Post Classroom Observation Interview III

R: Researcher
M: Mei Mei (School A)

R: Do you think you have achieved your teaching objective(s)?

M: The pace of today's lesson was slower than what I had expected… I thought the exercise was pretty easy and it could be completed within a short time. So, I did not expect that some students needed to take so long to finish the exercise. But, there were some students who completed the exercise in a very short time. There were also some students who were so weak. I knew that there should be a few of them e.g. the two boys sitting at the side of the classroom. So I went to them to show them how to complete the first two questions. But I did not know that even the boy at the back was also so weak, because he was also a repeater and today it seemed that he really did not have any idea about how to complete the exercise. I really did not understand why they did not know how to complete such an easy exercise. Therefore I had to spend more time on the exercise and had to figure out on the spot some ways to help the weaker students. But I knew that those who were brighter were bored. They just shouted out the answers, which was really disturbing. Also, they do not really like one of their classmates, Tsui Tak Fat. So, they always complain about him and they made a lot of complaints in the lesson just now. As there were only 22 students in the classroom, I might not notice even if they were not sitting according to the seating plan. When I found that some students were not sitting at their own seats, I told them to go back to their original seats. But, I overlooked some of them and it's no big deal. Right? The reason why I insist that they should be sitting according to the seating plan has nothing to do with my teaching. But, I do think that they should follow the rule. They should not, without the permission of the teacher, move around the classroom. But, I later realized that some of the students did not sit according to the seating plan in today's lesson. And, they really dislike the student, so they kept complaining about him in the lesson. The complaints were really disturbing and their behavior was just annoying. That's it. I felt really annoyed during the lesson because some students were not able to answer my questions, others were shouting out the answers and some kept complaining about their classmates. And, I think that the problems that were raised by some students especially those who complained about their classmates have got nothing to do with their learning at all, which I considered very annoying. And there was also a student; the one whom I asked to leave the classroom. He is always talkative in class. He likes to repeat whatever I say in the lesson. Sometimes he yawns loudly in front of the whole class and interrupts others' conversation. I really couldn't stand him, so I told him to leave the classroom just now. [Mei Mei paused for a while.] But, I think I really did not expect that it would be so difficult for them to complete such an easy exercise. For example there aren't, I think, any difficult words in the passage. What they need to look at is only the superficial meaning of the word. The whole exercise is about finding out the order of the events. There aren't any difficult questions at all. I guess some students, maybe three or four of them, might need more time to complete the exercise because of their language proficiency.

R: Just now you talked about the pace of the lesson. Can I ask why do you think it's slow?

M: There were some students who did not know how to answer the questions.

R: Do you think your teaching was really slow?

M: I think, I think. [Mei Mei paused.]

R: Don't get me wrong. I just want you to elaborate your answer a bit.

M: It's because they could not give me the answers, which implied that they did not know how to answer the questions. There were some students who could answer the questions, but just some of them. There were also some students who did not know how to answer the questions. So, it took me some time to offer help to those who could not answer the questions. But there were students who already knew the answers. [Mei Mei remained silent. I tried to explain to Mei Mei that it's important for her as well as other teacher participants of the project, to elaborate their own ideas.] I think the students of a 'B' class should be able to complete the comprehension exercise in a lesson. There isn't any reason why they can't finish it. But the fact is that they could not do it. It's because some students did not know how to answer the questions. I think there's something that hindered them. It might be their reading skills. Now, I think, maybe, they did not know the phrase learn about. I think the author of the passage intends to trick the student. For example the words black-faced spoonbill can be found in three different places of the passage. In the passage, you can't find anything like the guide talks about… but you can find things like they learn about… But, if you read down the passage, you will then find the sentence, the guide also talks about … So, you can see, they learn about the bird because the guide talks about it. In the second paragraph, you will find something like Lisa, look but not Lisa saw… Maybe some students, I later found out, were actually confused. But those who possessed better reading skills were not affected. I think most of the students could manage the reading task. But there were two to three students who could not answer the questions. The problem was I needed to check the answers with the students. Those who are brighter completed the exercise within a short time but there were about three or four students who could not finish their work. So, what should I do? Should I check the answers or wait until those weaker students to finish their work? But, it would mean that it would keep more than ten students waiting. But, as I got to know this, in the second lesson, I pointed this out to the students. When I walked around the classroom I did find that some weaker students were confused by the text. I did let them try the exercise first. But then when they came to that question and I found that some students had got the wrong answer, I tried to work out the answer with the whole class. They needed to distinguish between the words saw and learn. So, I told them that we saw with our eyes and we could learn from reading books or newsletters as the one we read last time. I even asked them if they needed to see a real black-faced spoonbill in order to learn about it. They said no. I then told them that we learnt about the bird from reading the book. So I referred them to the second paragraph of the passage and asked them how the character there learnt about the bird. Those brighter students told me that the guide talked about the bird. I think it's because we had gone through all these some students found it easier to find out the answers for the questions. I think the discussion did offer some help to some students even though in the end the students in the second group like those in the first group could not finish the exercise. The fact that the discussion in the second period happened a lot more earlier than the one in the first period prevented some students in

the second group from feeling confused and helpless. And, the students of the second group were less bored because they were able to participate in the discussion. They continued to work on the questions afterwards.

R: Okay. Thank you. Anything you would like to add? If not, could you please tell me how you understand teaching, learning and education?

M: The topics are very broad indeed. I think teaching is to share with my students the things that I know. But I think that the teacher should not be the one who talks through this sharing process. Some activities should be designed for students so that they can learn through participating in the activities and experiencing the process. Through different teaching approaches and methods teachers lead students to the place where they want them to be. Some of the things that the teacher teaches are new to the students and the students only learn about them through participating in the teaching and learning activities. But, there are also things that students might already know. [Mei Mei paused for some time.] Some students might already know the thing that the teacher teaches them but it has not been sort out clearly. They might possess only a vague idea without any concrete examples. I think learning is a process. Learning and teaching involve the same processes just like the two sides of a coin. So if a student can't learn what the teacher teaches him/her, the teacher's teaching objective has not been really achieved, I think. Teachers are the ones to design some activities to teach their students 'something' and students are there to learn about the 'something'. Students need to experience the process. The process could involve things like playing some games, completing some exercises or watching a movie. In fact, teaching and learning are only the two sides of a coin. That's it. Education is not just to do with knowledge. It's something to do with a whole person. The most important thing about education is that through it students get to know their potentials. It's about encouraging, stimulating and providing opportunities for students to develop their potentials. That's it.

~ end of interview ~

4.4 Classroom Observation IV

4.4.1 Pre Classroom Observation Interview IV

R: Researcher
M: Mei Mei (School A)

R: What's your plan for today's lesson?

M: In fact, the grammar items I am teaching are not related to the unit we have been talking about. But, there isn't anything I can do. I need to teach them. I have finished the topic on wild life. We are required to teach our students both countable and uncountable nouns. I think they have all learnt about them before. So, I think it's just like a revision on those singular and plurals nouns. In today's lesson, I think what they need to do is to rote learn all those related spelling rules e.g. adding 'es' to words ending with 'sh' and I have told them to study the rules, they are having a test. I planned to type out the test for them but I was really exhausted yesterday. I have not typed it out but I will write down the questions on the board during the lesson. I will give them some nouns. If they think that the noun given possesses a plural form, they will then need to write it down. They will have to write the letter 'n', or write down the word 'no' if the noun given is singular and is uncountable. The whole test is about testing their memory. I told them to do some homework yesterday, i.e. some exercises on uncountable and countable nouns in the grammar book. I will check the answers with them today. That's the exercise on the last page of the grammar book. This one. No, not this one. [Mei Mei tried showing me the exercise in the grammar book] Yes, we will check the answers of the exercise. I went through briefly with my students towards the end of the previous lesson the use of the words like these, those, that and this. I think I need to make sure after they have learnt about countable and uncountable nouns if they can use these words appropriately. But, I think they should know them all. So, I just went through them very briefly. I just revised with them some examples what they had learnt in primary schools. And, in today's lesson, after they have completed the test, I will spend some time, though it will not be long, on having them to talk about some realia using these words e.g. this is a ruler. I want to see if they will add the article a before the noun. Or they might talk about their hair. The practice is very mechanical. It is only used to test if they can use those words like these, those, that and this correctly. For example, they shouldn't use the article a before an uncountable noun, the nouns without a plural form. If there is still some time left, I will ask them to complete this worksheet. [Again, Mei Mei tried showing me the worksheet.] I think that should be enough for a single period. They will need to complete this worksheet. Again, it's very mechanical. They just need to make some sentences. That's it.

[I asked Mei Mei to show me how to complete the questions in the worksheet. Mei Mei pointed at a picture in the worksheet and said the following.]

M: The two people are talking to each other. She introduces something to him saying this is a recorder and that is a camera. And, these are puppies. I give them only the singular form of the noun and they need to change it to the plural form if necessary. [Again I asked Mei Mei for a copy of the exercise in the grammar book.] For homework, I might ask them to complete the exercise here. [Mei Mei showed me the

exercise] It's because the words used here have just been taught in the unit e.g. we talked about e.g. black faced spoonbill. They should know all these words by now.

[Both Mei Mei and I said we had learnt some new words from the unit too and we both laughed]

~ end of interview ~

4.4.2 Post Classroom Observation Interview IV

R: Researcher
M: Mei Mei (School A)

R: Do you think you have achieved your teaching objective(s)?

M: I don't know if they could manage the test in today's lesson because I have not read through the test papers that they handed in. But just based on their reaction in class say like a lot of people volunteered to tell me the answers I think their results should be okay. Some students are just lazy and I guess the result of this test depends mainly on whether or not they have studied their book. Those who had studied beforehand should be able to manage the test. But for those who didn't I really don't know. What I wanted to do through the test was to make them study their book. Things will just accumulate and get out of control if they don't study what they have learnt. So, after I talked about the topic yesterday I told them to study what they had learnt right away. So, they can remember better what they have learnt because I think you just need to rote learn what's included in this topic. There's nothing to do with thinking. That's it. I think they should be okay with the test. After the test, we moved on to a grammar exercise. The students were required to explain their answers. From their explanations, I think they could understand why a particular answer was chosen. But sometimes they did not really know the appropriate term to express themselves. But, later on, I think many of them could express their ideas clearly. The exercise, I think, is just right for their standard. There wasn't much time left after that. We talked about the use of this and that briefly yesterday. I hoped they could have more practice on the topic. I think the topic itself is pretty easy and they should be able to manage it. And, I had a short revision with them today on the topic. I think the mistakes they made today were mainly careless mistakes. So, if they can have more practice I can then find out the common mistakes they make. Today's revision included also the use of some plural nouns like glasses. We don't have any plural nouns in Cantonese. Cantonese and English are very different in terms of the use of plural nouns. My students usually miss out the articles needed in a sentence e.g. a and an. I think, on the whole, they can manage the use of the words, this, that, these and those. The common mistakes they make are things like the use of articles e.g. a and an and some spelling mistakes. Some of them might not know how to spell the plural form of a noun and some of them are just too messy and forget to convert the singular form of a noun to its plural form. That's it. The more they practice, the easier I can find out the common mistakes they make and I can then give them some appropriate help. And, I gave them some more practice to finish at home.

R: Okay. Thank you. Is there anything that you'd like to add? If no, then could you please share with me how you understand English language teaching and learning e.g. your understanding and experience?

M: For teaching, I think you have to provide your students with an environment so that they can have exposure to the language; either in the form of reading, speaking, listening or writing English. I think in fact teaching and learning are closely tied together. I think students need to be motivated before they learn. But, it's something difficult to do. I enjoyed learning English very much when I was a student and I enjoyed reading too. My teachers spoke to us only in English. English was the

medium of instruction of most subjects not including Chinese language, Chinese History and Physical Education. I was very keen on learning English and I was proud of being able to use the language. At that time, I believed that learning English was not really something difficult to me or my friends. It in fact was something interesting because I read quite a lot of novels during leisure time and English helped me to get lots of enjoyment out of reading. It was true for movie watching too. I still remember the English language teacher I had when I was studying F.3. She was a sister and we liked her very much. She always showed us some movies without any subtitle. I remember that we have seen movies like The Longest Day, The Diary of Anne Frank and Jane Eyre. In fact we could not really catch what was said in the movies but we tried inferring from the story and we enjoyed watching them very much. The teacher told us that we needed to have some exposure to the language of native speakers. She told us that we could manage better if we practiced more. So, we just tried even if no subtitle was given. And, we began to enjoy watching movies. I remember also the Integrated Science teacher I had in F.1. She was also a sister. She could not speak Cantonese at all. But, she was not a westerner though I did not know where she was from. I remember that I could not understand her teaching at all during the lessons because her accent was really difficult to understand. I don't know but my friends and I did the same thing, i.e. we tried our best to listen to her in class. It was not very successful at the beginning but we never gave up. Gradually we began to understand her better. She was a very good teacher. She taught us Chemistry and Biology during F.4 and 5. That's it. We would look up words that we did not know in dictionary. And, the teachers at that time did not adopt any special teaching methods, just chalk and talk. When they taught us grammar, they just gave us some examples and told us to complete some practice. But still we enjoyed the learning process very much. I did enjoy the learning process at that time. And there was nothing special in reading lessons. Students had to read a book and the teacher just asked them some questions about the book. He or she even would not explain to you what the book was about. But, through the questioning you got to understand the book better. We were helped to understand the book in greater detail through questions. I guess it's because mine was a girls' school. I think I enjoyed learning English very much at that time. We kept learning and we really learnt a lot about the language. And sometimes we got some opportunities to speak in English say like the English Speaking Day. We could speak only in English on that day. If not, we would be punished. That's it. But now it seems that there is a lack of motivation in students especially boys regarding English language learning. So we need to think about ways to motivate them. But, I think it's a huge challenge. How can we make our teaching interesting and motivate our students to learn? I dare try something more special and interesting with my F.1 class. They are still very young and a bit naughty. But, they still listen to teachers. Last time, when we I was teaching them the topic on uncountable and countable nouns, I told them to find some examples of countable and uncountable nouns in magazines. I then told them to do some cut and paste with the examples they got. That was quite interesting. And, they took their work seriously. But for my F.2 class I in fact have prepared some games. I even laminated the materials. They are about the use of passive voice. I used my own money for colour printing and laminating the materials. The NET helped me to prepare the teaching materials. Everything is ready now but has never been used. It's because I am afraid I can't handle the discipline problems of the students. So, although I want to arouse the interest of my students with some games, the discipline problem of the class is a major concern to me. Even if you think the game is interesting, they might not agree with you. So, there is some hesitation

especially for those weaker classes. Also, sometimes, you know Doris, I have seen her moving her students in groups but how could that be done with such a big class size?! I have seen her teaching and I think that there are both good and bad points of the arrangement. Without your close supervision some students will tend to talk about things that are unrelated to the lesson. They will not be doing what they are told. So there is some hesitation here. You need to consider very carefully if a certain approach will work or not especially when the class size now is so big and students are generally naughty. To me the term, cooperative learning, is really high sounding. But my question is do they really cooperate? Learning. Cooperate. It's because you can't be with every single student throughout the lesson. You can see them all when you are standing in the front of the classroom. Yes, but you still can't be sure that they are learning but at least those good students can learn and you can manage the discipline of the class. These are things that I worry about. So, I think, how teachers can help their students to learn is a big problem. Also, I think there are things that we can't really help. For example, there are some students who got phobia in learning English. It might not be something that they develop now but the phobia was developed during their primary education. These students just hate learning English. So, sometimes they just channel their anger on you because you, English language teachers, represent the language; something that they really hate. So, but, how could we help these students to channel themselves? I think we can't do that only within the English lesson. Some counseling might be needed. So, I don't know. I think we have done a lot but the school never appreciates what we have done. They just think, let's take the attainment test as an example, they just compare the results of the students say like the pre and post tests and conclude that your class is 'negative equity' [a term commonly used in home buying and mortgage in Hong Kong].… The school just puts the blame on us but they don't know that we have been working very hard and have been thinking about ways to improve the situation. I doubt if the blame should only be on us. We are the only one to shoulder the blame. I feel that there's no, there's no way out as an English language teacher especially working in this school. I think I have put in a lot of effort but I can't see any results and I have to shoulder a lot of things. Even colleagues from other subjects also think that the teaching of the English panel is bad. That's it. [I told Mei Mei that in fact she had been talking about the assigned topic for the next post classroom observation interview, i.e. the joy and difficulty of being a secondary school English language teacher in Hong Kong. I agreed with her that there are a lot of things that the teacher needs to consider before making any teaching decisions.] But people, especially the school, evaluate one's teaching based mainly on students' exam results. That's how they look at us. They think that it's you who is not doing the job well and thus you need to do more. You just need to organize your class more, include supplementary lessons, and so and so. You all are just not working hard enough. That's the way they think about us. That's the message we've got from them and that's the way they look at us. You know what, it was really funny. They have organized some workshops on writing for us because the writing of our students is generally bad. You know what the workshops were about? Process writing. The Principal himself invited a professor from HKU to give a talk on the topic. The professor was here to teach us how to mark our students' compositions and to comment on them. These are things we have done before, right? I have invited you to talk about the topic, right? So, it seems to me that those people whom he invites must be good but those we invite are not. What the professor said is just the order from the King because he was invited by him. We have, we have already done that for our colleagues, even though not all of the teachers were convinced of the idea. But the

problem is, the feeling is, we are not good. We have to attend very similar workshops twice. My feeling is that an outside who knows nothing about what is happening in our school tries to give us some advice after looking briefly at few documents of the school. The professor just gave us some theories. The theory is clear to us. However, the problem is how the theory can be applied in our teaching and whether or not it is useful. Does the professor know who is using the approach in the school? Why are they (not) using the approach? Is it because they don't know about the theory that some teachers are not using the approach? What prevents them from using the approach? The professor just gave us some theories that all the teachers in the panel had already known about. I understand that some teachers might have missed the workshops we organized. Colleagues who came to our workshops must have heard about process writing. Do they need to listen to the same topic again? Do they need to waste the time on the workshop? We have to listen to an outsider who is here to tell us what we should do in our teaching. But, the professor knows nothing about us. The professor has only read some of the documents about the school; things like minutes of meetings etc. The professor has not read the work of our students and has not observed any classes in our school at all. The professor knows completely nothing about the school. The professor has not even talked to the teachers. That's it. There will also be some more workshops. The principal will continue to organize some workshops for us. My feeling is that going to those workshops is just a waste of time. Each lasts for three to four hours after school. The last one we attended began at about 2 in the afternoon and ended at about 5. My feeling is that the school does not really know what we have done. And, as long as he organizes some workshops for us, he can tell other people that he has done something to help the English panel. There are lots of things that we know. We know the theories. What we have done has been constantly ignored. He just does not know what we have done. Then he tries to give us some help. I know there are many ways to respond to students' writing. One of the ways the professor taught us was to respond to the work of our students through questions. I do think that for our students, I mean students in our school, questions are the most appropriate way to respond to the writing of our students. So, I have been using it for quite some time. But, the question we face is whether or not we can afford the time for our students to complete the second draft. That's it. I think if we must ask our students to complete ten compositions in a school year, it's just impossible. But there was something good happened in the workshop. The professor said in the presence of our principal that it's not possible for students to complete ten writing tasks in a school year if process writing approach was adopted. The professor said only six could be done. That's just a slap on his face. That's the best thing about the workshop. I am not saying that the professor is not good or not knowledgeable, but he was not giving us what we needed. Yes, In terms of staff professional development, the school administration and EMB just give us things that are superficial. They give us things that we might already know. So, why do they have to give us again? They should find out what we lack. Also, it's hard to find appropriate materials to use in the lesson. There are some but they might not be suitable for your students. You need to design the materials yourself. That takes both time and space because you have to, basically, do it out of nothing. There isn't a complete set of materials that you can use even though there are lots of books on games and grammar on the market They just might not fit your class. To give you an example, although the textbook publishers claimed that their textbooks were developed based on the task-based teaching approach, many of them are not and their tasks are just tedious.

R: What about the supplementary materials provided by the publisher e.g. passages for unseen dictation?

M: But they are not, I will not use the unseen dictation passages there. They are not appropriate and are boring. The e-book they give us is just a simplified version of the textbook. They just put it on the internet and call it ‘e-book’. Their activities are very boring; nothing interesting at all. So, in fact, we don’t have enough time or space (to develop teaching materials for our lessons).

R: Going back to the question on the joy and difficulties of English teachers, what do you consider the joy of being a secondary school English teacher in HK?

M: Some students who have really learnt and improved themselves. I have a student who got an A in the public exam. I did not teach him English while he was studying F.4 and 5 but I was his English teacher from F.1-3. He studied F.6 in this school too. In fact, he has treated me to lunch before. I attended also his F.5 graduation dinner. After he completed F.7 we ate out again with some of his classmates and he thanked me for helping him to establish a good English foundation. He said that he would not be able to get the A without the solid foundation. I was really glad. That made me really happy. He is now studying at university. I still keep in touch with some of my students. And, also there is a student. I taught him English when he was studying F.1. He was really mad at me at that time because he said I was very strict and he just ignored me. But I was his teacher again when he was studying F.4 and 5. He was still very rebellious at that time and was not really willing to learn the language. But he came to me and took some photos with me on his graduation day. Now he is studying in the UK and he still sends me emails. Once he told me that among all the teachers in the school I was the one whom he felt most sorry for. He regretted for what he had done to me in the past. I was really happy to see his change. Sometimes I got some encouragement from the emails my students send me. They help me to face the troubles I have now in my teaching.

~ end of interview ~

4.5 Classroom Observation V

4.5.1 Pre Classroom Observation Interview V

R: Researcher
M: Mei Mei (School A)

R: What's your plan for today's lesson?

M: I don't have much special preparation for today's lesson because today's lesson will be even more mechanical than the lesson you observed last time. We need to rush to prepare for the exam. We need to teach the students the last language item for this term, i.e. 'wh' questions. In fact, I think they have learnt about 'wh' questions when they were in primary school. In fact, throughout the school year, I have been revising with them formation of 'wh' questions when I teach them different tenses.

R: Why are wh questions so important?

M: You know why we think 'wh' questions are so important? It's because, we can't understand why, our students just don't know how to form a 'wh' question properly. You know the oral exam format for S.4? Students have to ask some questions. The questions they form are just all wrong. It seems that they don't even know the most basic structure for a question. So we, teachers, have decided to put more emphasis on asking questions even in S.1. Students are required to write down the questions they make in tests. Because of the big class size it's difficult to see if all the questions they make are correct. But we can collect the questions they have written down to see if they are right. So, after discussion we have decided that students asking questions should be a focus of our teaching. And there is a teaching topic in F.1 that requires students to ask different questions. And, it is the last teaching topic for this term. I have started it a bit yesterday. I plan to first revise with my students the formation of yes/no questions and then move on to different question word. My way of doing it is very much mechanical. First, I will give them a format to follow: question word + helping verb + subject + main verb +… . Then, I will explain to them some possible variations. I started the topic yesterday. I have found that questions like 'what is you do…?' are the most common mistakes they make. So you see at the beginning of the year, I mean last term, I always reminded them the difference between the main verb and helping verb. A verb to be can be the main verb or the helping verb of a sentence and they just mix up the use of do and does. I have always wanted them to see that a verb to be is sometimes used as a main verb e.g. I am a student, he is tall and I am in a classroom. In fact, only in these three situations that verb to be is used as the main verb. Then comes also the action verb. They need only do and does as the helping verb and they are never used with words like is and are. I always want to go through all these rules with them. But I think they will, in fact, it's a problem to me, forget. They might remember it for a short while if you remind them constantly. That's it. I asked the students some questions yesterday. I began with some yes/no questions. They just produced something like is you go out and things like that. I asked them also when verb to be was used but they just mixed up the use of verb to be as the helping verb and main verb. They just add the word is to everything e.g. he is going to, is he going to and then is he go to. I think for some students they are just forgetful. But I don't know how I can help them to remember all these things. I really don't know how I learnt all these. I really don't know. But to my students it's a big problem.

That's it. And in today's lesson I will revise with them all these again. I will first give them a format to follow. I will then give them some answers and they will be required to write down the questions accordingly. I will include some special cases this time e.g. apart from following the structure 'question word + helping verb + subject + main verb', in some cases they will find that 'who' the subject is actually the question verb. So some changes are needed. I will include some questions like this. I will explain to them some examples. I have asked them to finish some exercises in the workbook. I will go through the answers with them after we finish the part on making questions. I want to find out what the common mistakes are. The exercises in the workbook are mainly about question words and the use of verb to be as the main verb [I simplified this part a bit as what Mei Mei said in the interview was really disorganized and to some extent confusing.] I told them to do the exercises even before I finish teaching them the topic because I think the topic has already been taught and I just want to see how well they can manage the exercises. That's it. This is the last teaching topic to be covered. I need also to check the answers of the exercises on e.g. preposition, that they have done before, those that I have not gone through with them. I will go through the answers with them if there is some time left and they don't have much problem in asking questions. I just want to bring out the case about who and check the answers with them. I will ask them to write the answers on the board and to see how well they can do it. We will try to spot the mistake they make together. That's it. [I asked Mei Mei for a copy of the exercises in the workbook and I told her that it was not a problem if the lesson was mechanical as long as the teacher had good reasons for the design of the lesson.] In fact the reason is that it's hard, I think it's very hard say like for this one [Mei Mei referred me to a particular exercise in the workbook], we are not given a context to present the grammar item. If there were a context, things would be easier. They have given us some activities in the coursebook. They claimed that they were developed according to the theme based approach but it is not the case and that only the grammar item needed for the task would be taught. The grammar item included in the unit is fact not needed for the task. But there are some grammar items that they think should be covered say like in F.1, so they just insert them in different units. So sometimes you have to teach the grammar item just for the sake of it. But I can understand that it could be very difficult to integrate everything under a theme. I guess the number of lessons we have with our students is also a problem. That's why things are just imperfect.

R: How did you learn the language item?

M: I just don't understand. I am sure my teachers then did not explain so much as we do now. And, they just taught us a few big principles. They only gave us the answers when they checked the answers with us. They never explained to us why our answers were wrong. But now, we spend so much time and effort on explaining to our students why their answers are wrong, but they still don't know why they are wrong. My teachers never gave us explanations and they did not even tell us that there could be more than one possible answer. Now we accept possible answers from our students. My teachers would just give us one correct answer. But I have learnt the language. I really don't know why. I just don't understand.

~ end of interview ~

4.5.2 Post Classroom Observation Interview V

R: Researcher
M: Mei Mei (School A)

R: Do you think you have achieved your teaching objective(s)?

M: You know, my students are divided into two big groups. Now I think the students of the second group, i.e. class nos. 1-22, are really better than those of the first group (the group I videotaped for my study). I don't know why. It is very interesting. They are just randomly split into two groups. I know that some students in the first group did not do their work even though I told them to. And I could not give them too much individual attention because I did not have the time to do so. I know that some students are able to manage the pattern though they might be able to do it even before today's lesson. I think today's lesson is only a revision. They should have learnt the pattern in primary school. I have talked about forming questions with different question words on different occasions and the topic has been tested before. But they did not do well. I know that only some of the students could manage the pattern. But now, I still think that there are some students who can't manage it. That's it. I think even after today's lesson, there are still some students who are not able to manage the pattern. But, I still don't know how I can help them to manage the pattern. I really don't understand. I personally think that the topic is not difficult. It is something mechanical. It's something to do with rules. As long as they are willing to listen to the teacher and do the practice, they should be able to manage it. So, if they still can't manage the pattern, I think they have not listened to me at all. It's not something abstract or difficult to understand. I really don't understand why after I have explained to them so many times that there are still students who are not able to manage the pattern. So, I really don't know what I can do to help them. I have tried based on the experience I have for so many years to boil down the topic into some rules. I just hope that they will follow the rules. There are not many special cases. Basically they can just follow one rule. Not many special changes are needed. I really don't understand. I don't know why. Even F.4 and 5 students make similar mistakes in the oral exam. So, I began to give my students some rules to follow about few years ago. But still only some students could manage the pattern. But I think more students are able to manage it with the help of the rule. But there are still students who can't. That's what I can't understand. This is the biggest question I got in today's lesson. I really don't know. I am puzzled. It's because it's not just the problem of this class. It is a problem that I have found throughout the time that I am teaching in this school. We have talked about it in our meetings and we all agreed that our students do not know how to form questions. In fact, not just questions. They make mistakes like I was not go to school. They will not say I did not or I do not. Instead they will say something like I was not and I were not. For the past tense, they will say I was go and I was went. I remember that my niece who is a P.3 student always makes this type of mistakes too. I am really mad whenever she makes a similar mistake. Whenever I see something like was go in her work I scold her fiercely. So, it seems to me that these are mistakes that they make since they are young. I really don't understand. I have found similar mistakes even in the HKCEE exam papers. How can we help them, Chinese, to avoid making these mistakes again? I have tried to help them with some rules. But still they just can't manage the pattern. I don't understand. It is a question that I have been asking for so many years. But, for the second group, they did not make these mistakes

and they could also explain their answers. Only few of them are weaker but there are more students who can manage the pattern.

R: Okay. Thank you. Anything you'd like to add? If no, let's move on to some questions about the critical thinking recommendations and background information about you and the school. First of all, how long have you been teaching English in secondary schools??

M: I was initially a Math and Science teacher. I was teaching at St Mary's for five years. After I came back from the UK, I started teaching the English language subject. I have been teaching the subject for about twelve years and it is the only subject that I teach now.

R: Did you know that secondary school English language teachers had been required to help their students to develop critical thinking through the English language subject?

M: I don't know.

R: Do you think critical thinking can be developed through the English language subject? If yes, please give examples of how it can be done e.g. teaching activities, strategies or skills. If no, please explain.

M: I think so. We have discussed about it, right? I have forgotten what we had actually talked about. But I remember that we thought it could be done even through grammar teaching. I am sure it can be done through the teaching of readers. You can ask them open-ended questions that do not have a right or wrong answer. We can do it through some open-ended questions. I think we can do so with grammar teaching too e.g. you are required to fill in a blank with the correct tense of the verb given, if there could be more than one correct answer. As long as the answer is reasonable, it should be accepted. HKCEE is a good example. I think it can be done. I think it depends very much on your teaching content. Sometimes you are constrained by the teaching content e.g. we must teach our students the use of different question words. I think there could not be much critical thinking in the teaching just now. It's because you have to make sure that they can manage the pattern. It all depends on what you have to teach them. It can be done if you are teaching them a text and helping them to comprehend it. But it all depends on the proficiency level of your students. I think it can be really difficult if you require your students to express themselves only in English. But, it might not be true for students with better language proficiency. Although you are teaching your student an English reader, you might need to allow them to express themselves in Chinese. I think it could be very difficult for weaker students to express their ideas in English. This is true even for the teaching of writing. I still remember the F.4 class that I taught few years ago. They were the best class in the form. But they could not express their ideas clearly in English. Although they were writing in English and we were discussing how to approach the writing task e.g. paragraphing and sequencing of ideas, they told me their ideas in Cantonese. So, I think we can help our students to develop critical thinking through composition writing and the teaching of readers. But our discussion needs to be conducted in Cantonese, I mean, for the students in our school. I don't know if it is true for those Band 1 schools. But for our students, it is something impossible. I think if you want to help your students to develop critical thinking, you must let them voice their opinions.

And asking them for explanation would be a must. Usually the question/issue discussed would be open in the sense that it does not have a right or wrong answer. Whether or not their opinion is appropriate depends mainly on the justification they give. So, if they are really allowed to express their ideas, nothing should be there to hinder them including their use of language. So, Cantonese should be allowed to be used by students.

R: How do you understand critical thinking e.g. what does it mean to you? Is it something important?

M: Critical thinking is there isn't a 'right' answer to the issue or question discussed. Critical thinking is that you look at an issue from many different perspectives. You look at something from different angles. That's critical thinking. For some questions there might be only one correct answer, but there are also things that we can look at from different perspectives. Critical thinking is something important because you just can't look at things from one angle in everyday life e.g. for the benefit of yourself. I think a reason why there are so many conflicts in our society is that people tend to look at things from one angle, i.e. for their own benefit. We could be more understanding and society would be more harmonious if people are looking at things from different angles. That's what I think.

R: Do you think your teaching now is helping your F.1 students to develop critical thinking? Please explain.

M: For the things that I have been teaching my S.1 students, I think it's difficult to teach my students critical thinking. For example, the grammar items I am teaching now and the reading comprehension passages, such as the one on Ocean Park. They have nothing to do with values. What I can ask them is questions like 'Have you been to Ocean Park?' and 'What do you think about it?' There isn't any right or wrong answer for these questions. But I can't go any further.

R: Do you think critical thinking can be assessed through the English language subject? If yes, please give examples of how it can be done e.g. assessment tasks and criteria. If no, please explain.

M: It depends on the task that you use, I think. Apart from composition writing, I don't think we are doing much. It's possible for composition writing if you are [Mei Mei paused for a while] but I think we are not really doing it. I guess it can be done if they are required to write those argumentative essays. But, in fact F.1 students are not writing this type of composition. It's possible but it's not very likely. Let me see. If you are talking about having students to express their opinions, we have done a composition on shopping centers. They were required to review a shopping center in their neighbourhood. They needed to talk about the features of the center and they had to comment on it. They needed also to give reasons to support their ideas. I think they were weak in this. Some students wrote something like this is a good shopping center because there are many shops. I had to ask them why a shopping center with many shops was a good one. I remember also they were once required to work on a project on Japan. They had to design an itinerary for a three-day trip based on a certain budget. I guess it might involve some kind of critical thinking in it even though they were not required to justify their plans. They only had to think about how the money

could be spent. But I think they still needed to make a lot of decisions when they were designing the itinerary. In fact, what we wanted to do was to give them the opportunity to search for relevant information from different sources e.g. surfing on the Internet to find out the prices for things like accommodation and food. I think critical thinking was needed throughout the process. I think we cannot assess their critical thinking through these tasks unless we have told them to justify their choices. That could be one of our requirements. But I don't know if it's because we have not given them enough guidelines, they just do not do well in these types of tasks. We always need to chase them for the final product. We have required them to hand in their first and second drafts. But their products are not good. It's possible to assess students' critical thinking through the English language subject, I think. But it takes time to do so. You need to spend a lot of time on discussion and asking them questions. You might not have enough time to do it especially when you need to do it with every single group of students in your class. I can only give them some advice e.g. telling them to think about some questions. However, many of them will never think about those questions. They won't take their work seriously. You can't just follow up on it with every single group. I think the discussion process is extremely important. But you won't have the time to discuss every single idea with them.

R: Do you think appropriate support by the government or your school is given to you to implement the recommendation? If yes, please give examples of the support you are given. If no, suggest the support you hope to have.

M: No. [Mei Mei answered the question even before I finished the questions] No, nothing at all. What they have given us is a book (i.e. the CDC curriculum guide).

~ end of interview ~

4.6 Last Debriefing Interview

R: Researcher
M: Mei Mei

R: Regarding the implementation of the critical thinking recommendations what kind of support either from the EMB or the school do you hope to have?

M: I think it's important for them to offer us teaching resources e.g. some teaching kits like those task-based teaching exemplars. I have not seen those exemplars though. No, I haven't. They could show us a lot of examples. Or they could give us some books or other things for reference. They need to give us the time and space to do it, i.e. to implement the critical thinking recommendations. Don't come to us and say we must have 40 students in a class. Their policies are actually contradictory. They told us recently that there must be 40 students in a class. We got a circular telling us that according to a survey Hong Kong is a place that offers students the least amount of class time in the whole of the South East Asia. In response to this my colleagues and the school administration are discussing whether we would require students to go to school on Saturdays and things like that. I think we need more time, for example, we need time to design some tasks that can really help students to develop critical thinking and that can also teach them grammar; can really teach them English. We need to search for materials with our colleagues. We need the cooperation of the teachers, which means that we might need to hold some meetings. This is the preparation that we have to do. We need smaller class sizes to implement the recommendations. The present system of assessment will need to be changed too. Question papers like the ones that we are using now might no longer be appropriate. I have gone to some courses on assessment e.g. writing student profile. I think the recommendations could only be implemented if the school factors or environment are changed, for example, a more integrated approach needs to be adopted. Unlike what we are doing now the student might be asked to complete a task through which many aspects of him or her would be assessed e.g. listening, oral and critical thinking skills. Now the listening and oral exams are not related in any way. But, then we would not be able to conduct the exam in such a big group as we are doing now. In fact, the whole structure of the school would need to be changed. Even the timetable needs to be changed too. But look at us. Nothing has been changed so far. Everything is just the same. Also, I think we, teachers, need some training. I think they should go to schools, like you, to give teachers some on-site support. They should conduct research with the teachers there and based on the needs of the students of the school design some teaching tasks for the students. The tasks should not just involve critical thinking. They should include also values building and all sorts of skills they advocate. In total, eight of them? I am not sure. If they really want their recommendations to be implemented, they can't just require us to go to some seminars in which only theories are talked about. I think those who only talk about theories are people who are immortal. They have no ideas of what is happening to us. They just give us some theories. To me, that's unrealistic. But, they could come to our school to work with us to get to know more about our students. One or two of them in each school would be fine. They would be here to lead us and give us some training based on our needs. For example, they could give us some advice on in searching for resources on the Internet. That's it. Don't just tell us to attend some classes. The classes could mean

nothing once we are back in our schools. And, the lecturers would tell us things that are in anyway unrelated to our teaching!! That's it.

R: But as shown in the video recordings of you lessons critical encounters could hardly be found in your observed lessons. [I explained briefly to Mei Mei the meaning of critical encounter as defined in the study.]

M: I think say like through composition writing we can help our students to develop their thinking. Apart from writing there are a lot of things that could be done to develop their thinking e.g. reading. But we can do very little with the reading texts that we are teaching now. And, we are required to teach particular grammar items. I am not saying that we should not teach those grammar items. But, they are always unrelated to our themes at all. But they are found in certain units of the textbook and so we must teach them. I think we indeed need to teach them those grammar items because some of our students can't manage them. But, the question is that the coursebook is supposed to be developed based on the task-based teaching approach. But, I can't see any linkage between the tasks and grammar items in the coursebook at all. And, for communication, what they got in the textbook is only some very silly activities. They are unrealistic and they got no purposes at all. Even students think that they are stupid. They would not take those silly activities seriously.

R: What do you mean by silly?

M: They require students to ask each other information that they already know. They are required to pretend not to know the answer for the question. In fact, they know the information but they have to pretend that they don't know about it. They even have to jot down the information afterwards. That's really silly.

R: Do you think you have benefited from the study?

M: I think yes in terms of questioning. I was not aware of my questioning techniques at all before the study. But I got to know more about it when I listened to and watched the audio and video recordings of my lessons. And you once told us that I think during the exploratory study my response to the question raised by students is in fact very important. My reaction might have some impact on their self esteem. But, you know, we are always in a hurry that there's not much we can do but the study has helped me to pay more attention to this particular aspect. I have tried putting these elements in my lessons.

R: What about the main study then?

M: I think I reflected a lot on my teaching when I talked to you about my lessons during those post classroom observation interviews. And, I always tried to think of different ways to improve my teaching. I think the reflection can help me to handle better a similar situation in the future.

R: Do you have any suggestions for me regarding the design of my study?

M: It all depends on the aim of your research. If you want to develop teachers' skills in helping students to develop their critical thinking, I think the design of exploratory

study would be better. But if you only want to find out whether teachers are helping their students to develop critical thinking in their classrooms and the reasons behind, then the design of the main study is more appropriate. But, I think it would be really hard for you to get some subjects for a study like your main study. At first when I told my colleagues that you wanted us to try out a teaching kit on developing students' critical thinking with our F.1 students, maybe I had misunderstood you at that time, anyway, a lot of teachers were willing to participate in your study. I think in our school a lot of teachers are willing to help their students to develop critical thinking through the English language subject. However, they just don't know how to do it. As I said before we do not have any resources to help us. So, they really want to try out some materials developed by others. This idea would be welcome by many teachers. So, a lot of teachers showed interests when I talked first about your study. I think first of all they are all busy. Also, they do not know you very well. They might feel insecure and intimidating to have you in their class and making all sort of recording e.g. taking notes. I think they might think that they are not getting any input from the study. So, they are not willing to take the risk. If they think that they can get something out of the study and you are giving them something so that they can improve in their teaching, and if they are willing to learn more, they will welcome the idea more. It would be even better if you can give them something to try out. In fact, everyone is desperate for some appropriate teaching materials. For example, I went to go to HKIEd the other day to see what other people have done in the area. I think I will go there with my colleague again who is now studying abroad on a refresher course at HKIEd. We are searching everywhere for some interesting materials for our lessons. Something that is not so boring.

R: One final question, from where did you learn about the critical thinking recommendations?

M: I read about the recommendations from the green book given to use by the EMB but I was not aware of the forms of student that the recommendations are targeting at.

~ end of interview ~

V. Fun (School A)

As shown in Table 5 Fun and I met eight times on the dates specified. The table also shows that six classroom observations were conducted between May and June 2003. The dates of the six classroom observations and the length of all the interviews conducted, i.e. pre and post classroom observation interviews and the last debriefing interview, are also specified in the table.

Table 5 Summary of data collection for Fun

Fun (School A)								
Date	18 Mar 2003	14 May 2003	22 May 2003	30 May 2003	5 Jun 2003	10 Jun 2003	18 Jun 2003	25 Jun 2003
Events	1st meeting (lobbying) 40mins	Pr1 4.6mins	Pr2 2.2mins	Pr3 3.7mins	Pr4 4.6mins	Pr5 9.2mins	Pr6 3.6mins	II 21.5 mins
		CO1 35mins	CO2 35mins	CO3 35mins	CO4 35mins	CO5 35mins	CO6 35mins	
		Po1 18.6 mins	Po2 18 mins	Po3 6.7 mins	Po4 14 mins	Po5 9.6 mins	Po6 17 mins	

Key:-
Pr: Pre Classroom Observation Interview
CO: Classroom Observation
Po: Post Classroom Observation Interview
II: Last Debriefing Interview

5.1 Classroom Observation I

5.1.1 Pre Classroom Observation Interview I

R: Researcher
F: Fun (School A)

R: What's your plan for today's lesson?

F: Yesterday we started to talk about a passage on wild life. It is mainly about Mai Po and something like that. A member of the English panel has helped us to prepare a worksheet in which students are required to find out the missing information about Mai Po from the Internet. I did not require my students to finish all the questions there. I only picked six of them. I gave my students the worksheet yesterday and asked them to surf on the Internet and finish the six questions. And, today I will show them in class how to locate the information on the Internet e.g. I will show them where to click on in order to find out the information they need. After that, I will require them to finish the rest of the worksheet later at home. But I collected their worksheets this morning and have found that many of the students did not take their work seriously and some of them even missed some questions. So, I think I will need some time to discipline them. I guess it will take me about half of the lesson to finish this part. After that, I will refer the students to the passage in the textbook. We talked about the first paragraph yesterday. Today I will go through the rest of the passage. First, I will ask them to read the passage. Then I will ask them to highlight some new words. My practice is that every time when I require them to highlight some new words in a passage I will copy the words on the blackboard. I will write down also the part of speech and Chinese translation of each of the new words. Then, the students are required to go home to copy the new words. That's the homework they have to do regarding vocabulary learning. Also, after we have gone through the whole passage or after each paragraph, I require them to read out the passage or paragraph together so as to make sure that they know how to pronounce the new words, I mean, at least, at that moment. I think that would be all for the lesson.

R: So the lesson is mainly on reading, right? Can you tell me how you teach the passages in the textbook?

F: I highlight some words in each passage. I choose the words myself and write them on the blackboard during the lesson. For example, when I am reading a certain line in the passage, I will ask the students if anyone knows the meaning of a new word found in the line. In fact I have told them to look up all the words that they don't know in the passage at home before the lesson. So I will ask them if they know the word and if they know they can tell me the meaning of it. If they don't, I will write the word on the blackboard. Anyway, I will put all the new words on the blackboard as a sample to tell them that when they copy the vocabulary e.g. for the word recent they have to copy the word recent, adjective, 近來 and write out the word for five times.

R: What do you mean by copying the vocabulary'?

F: Students have to copy the vocabulary for several times at home. They have to practise because they will have dictation later. These new words are the vocabulary for this passage [Fun showed me the vocabulary list of the passage.].

[Fun promised to make me a copy of the teaching materials, i.e. two pages from the textbook ‘Longman Target’ and the set of worksheet about Mai Po. She was very cooperative and confident during the interview. She was firm when answering the questions I raised. The class would be observed was F.1C in room 103; a room close to the general office on the first floor. I told Fun that it was not necessary for her to introduce me to her students. However, when the classroom observation began Fun introduced me formally to the class. In fact, during the lesson I found that Fun had already told her students about my visit the day before.]

~ end of interview ~

5.1.2 Post Classroom Observation Interview I

R: Researcher
F: Fun (School A)

R: Do you think you have achieved your teaching objective(s)?

F: At the beginning of the lesson I checked the answers of the worksheet with my students by showing them how to find the required information from the Internet. I originally planned to use one whole period to do it and to take them to the MMLC, i.e. Multi-media Learning Centre so that all of us could surf on the Internet together to look for the information. But because of some reasons e.g. the weather (the red rainstorm warning was in effect the week before and two English lessons of the class were cancelled) a lot of lessons have been or will be cancelled. Classes will be suspended this Friday for the visit of some P.6 students and two more English lessons of this class will be cancelled. So, I do not want to waste another period. That's why I gave them the worksheets yesterday and asked them to complete it at home. I did not require them to finish all the questions there. Instead I picked a few for them; those simpler ones. I then went through the worksheet with them in class. That's it. That took me about half of the lesson. It might have taken more than half of the lesson. I then continued to talk bout the passage in the textbook. In the lesson yesterday we talked about the first half of the passage. The passage is a letter about Mai Po. We looked at its website on the Internet just now. I planned to talk about the whole letter in today's lesson. But I only managed to go through two paragraphs with the students. In terms of the vocabulary in the passage I think the students should have learnt the vocabulary that I wanted them to learn. Some students, obviously, had looked up the new words in the passage before they came to the lesson. But some of them were just saying nonsense. In fact, I wanted them to work on the exercise in the workbook after today's lesson because there are some reading comprehension and vocabulary exercises. After they have read the passage, they should be able to complete those exercises and they got a long weekend. They do not have to go to school this Friday. Therefore, they need to work on those exercises during the holiday. Anyway, I will assign the homework during the sixth period so that they can try, just these four pages and they will have to hand in their work on Monday.

R: Just now you talked about asking students to find information from the Internet. Do they have access to Internet e.g. at home or in the school?

F: In the school they can go to the library or the self access learning center to surf on the Internet. They can go whenever they are open. It is something very easy for them to do. That is why they don't have an excuse for not being able to complete their work. In the self access learning center you can find a lot of software. Students can use the computers there. It's a room on the fifth floor. It's for the whole school and is not designed for a specific subject. Students can use the facilities there when the centre is open. Therefore it is unreasonable for students to say that they could not access the Internet. There is only one reason why they cannot access the Internet - they are lazy.

R: What's your purpose of going through with your students the answers of the worksheet?

F: In fact they have completed some worksheets that are similar to this one, maybe one or two worksheets before. So, basically they should know what to do. Last time they worked on a worksheet on Ocean Park and they surfed on the Internet, i.e. the official website of Ocean Park, to find out more about Ocean Park. So, they should have a general idea of what to do for this task. They only have to find some information from the Internet. They just need to surf on the Internet and jot down the information they need. In fact, I scanned through the answers on their worksheets before the lesson. And, I marked down also the names of the students who had not completed all the assigned questions. I will look at the work of these students again tomorrow. Just like what I told them just now - please hand in your work tomorrow if you have not handed in it today. [Fun sighed loudly.] For those students from the Chan's family there are few of them who habitually do not submit their homework. They just forget everything including their textbooks. I collected their work this morning and I scanned through their work during my free lesson. I did not mark their questions as such. I only checked if they had done their work. I did not want to mark their answers saying which one is right and which one is wrong. They are not primary school kids now. I just wanted them to experience the information searching process. I think it's meaningless for me to collect their worksheets again and again to check the answers if they are not taking their work seriously. It's meaningless no matter how many times you check the answers with them. So, for this kind of worksheets, I will not go through every single question with them. But for those on grammar, I will be stricter and will make sure that everyone has got the correct answer for each question. In fact, the questions that I picked on this worksheet are closely related to the passage in the textbook.

R: Are you happy with your lesson in terms of teaching progress?

F: Slow. It's not acceptable. Very slow.

R: Why?

F: Why?

R: Why?

F: [Fun remained silent for few seconds] Was it really slow? [She then whispered to herself.]

[Fun then laughed softly to herself. Then Fun looked at me and we laughed together. She finalized realized that her teaching went very fast.]

F: How should I put it? It is because I was in a hurry.

R: Why?

F: I lost two periods last week because of bad weather and two more lessons will be cancelled this week because of some school activities. And, we lost a whole month because of the SARS outbreak. My students are not really bright. So, I am scared. I am scared because I don't know whether I can finish teaching them all the things that are included in the exam syllabus.

R: Will there be any changes in the exam syllabus because of the SAR outbreak?

F: er the syllabus for the exam, our final exam has been postponed. So, no change has been made in the exam syllabus. So, I needed to rush just now. Every time when I have lessons with them, I would say to myself, 'Oh, my god! Time's up again!' But that's okay because some students did look up the new words in the passage. They knew that I purposefully required them to write down the word trip again because the word had appeared in different units e.g. the one on Ocean Park and a unit in Book 1A, a trip to Japan. They said that Ms Chan we had copied the word three or four times already. It seemed that they were criticizing me but I was happy because they remembered that I had taught them the word before. When my students copy the vocabulary at home, first of all, they need to write down the word. They then have to write down the part of speech and Chinese meaning of the word. These pieces of information should have been written down in class. Then when they go back home, they have to copy the word for five times. After I have finished teaching a unit, I will collect and check their vocabulary books to see if they have spelt the words correctly. If they make any mistakes, they will be required to do some correction. Usually, a week after the unit has been taught, I will have dictation with them on the vocabulary learnt in the unit. After that, I will have dictation again with them but this time I will focus on the passage in the unit. Sometimes we have unseen dictation and it's hard to find a passage in which you can find all the new words learnt in the unit. The textbook publisher now provides us with some passages for unseen dictation. We can use them or we can develop our own. In fact I have found something quite useful in the workbook. Last time when I had dictation with my students on the previous unit, I used a passage that I found in the workbook because the exercises in the workbook cover mostly what is included in the corresponding unit in the textbook. So, as you know, an exercise in the workbook is usually one page long and you can find all the vocabulary needed there. But for the dictation that focuses on the new words, sometimes I will follow the usual way but sometimes I will do it in the form of a crossword puzzle. Their results are generally okay. But I have found a problem of doing dictation in the form of a crossword puzzle. Even if students know the meaning and spelling of a word, they may not know how to pronounce it. So, in comparison, if I just read out the word to them they might learn also the pronunciation of the word and this format might help students to improve their pronunciation. But if I use the format of a crossword puzzle, they will not have the opportunity to listen to the words. So something important is missing. For crossword puzzles, I have to design them myself. I will do it on the Internet. Luckily, I did some last year.

R: It seems to me that you have put in a lot of effort to make sure that your students complete their homework. Is that right?

F: It's because my students are very lazy. They are very lazy. I am lucky because I have more free time (Fun was a half time teacher at the time of the study and she did not have to take up any extra-curricular activities.) When my F.5 students were still here, I could not afford the time to check their work in great detail, as if I was investigating a dead body. Their homework is [Fun sighed loudly.] their homework is just terrible. Even if they do their work, their answers are still wrong after I go through the exercise with them. I have to fold up a little corner of the page in their homework book to remind them to do the correction.

R: But it would then take you quite some time to check their work again and again.

F: Yes, but the school principal checks the students' exercise books from time to time. That's a problem then. So, I check all the answers with my students in class. I do it in class because I can make sure that they get the correct answers and I can also explain the answers to them. But, they are still daydreaming. Nothing can be done.

R: So, what do you think about this class, say like their English proficiency?

F: I think their proficiency varies greatly. There are a few students in the class who are highly proficient in English. They can always follow my teaching. Their homework is always nice and neat.

R: How many of them approximately?

F: Three to four, I think and one of them is a repeater, the boy sitting near the window. He is a repeater and I taught him English too last year. He is, I think, lazy especially when he studies other subjects. You know English is not a subject that you can get very high marks if you work hard. But I think it's because he was lazy and he could not be promoted to F.2. But, he does get some sense for English. Another one is the monitor; the one who helped me to connect the wires just now. This class is very special indeed. It is the only class in F.1 that you can find most non Hong Kong residents. Some are immigrants from the Mainland.

R: Are they students all new immigrants to Hong Kong?

F: Not really, like the monitor, he came to Hong Kong when he was very young so his English proficiency is pretty high. He's brilliant. He can make no mistakes in his composition, I mean those simple and short ones, those guided short writing. There is another boy, Kent. I think his parents teach him a lot of things. But there are also some students who are very careless, like the one sitting in the front, the repeater. There are two other students, the tall and the short ones, both with the family name, Chan. In fact, the family name of the very careless repeater is also Chan. [Fun sighed loudly.] They are very similar, in this sense. The one who misinterpreted the word greedy as lovely in the lesson today is always attention seeking. Also, he is very lazy. He is also a repeater but he is quite different from the tall guy, the one who did not hand in his work today. The taller one is less intelligent and the shorter one is smarter. He can understand my teaching but he is just lazy. One is lazy but intelligent and the other one is lazy and intelligent, no, I mean lazy and not intelligent. There are two special students in this class who are new immigrants from Mainland China. They are willing to learn and they work hard but I guess it's because of their foundation sometimes I can see that their effort seems to be wasted. I can see that they are very attentive in class. They listen to the teacher attentively in class. They ask questions if they don't understand. But you know boys are sometimes more passive and you have to walk to them to ask them if they understand what has been taught. That's it. The rest of the class likes to play and they always daydream in the lesson. So, there some variation, I think, and I sometimes find it hard to, say those smart students could understand my teaching easily but those who are not so smart could not and they might still be daydreaming.

R: So, do you think they are good students, I mean, to you?

F: Good? [There was then a long pause.] Mm I think you need to be very careful in terms of seating arrangement. If you are not careful enough, they will not be good then. You need to make sure that those who are very talkative are sitting with those who seldom speak.

R: Can I ask why you require them to queue outside the classroom before the lesson?

F: I just want to make sure that they line up properly, and to mark sure the at least two-third of the class have arrived before I let them go into the classroom. It's because I don't want to give those latecomers an impression that the whole class has to wait for them in the classroom. I want them to be ashamed of their behavior because some students are always late. Their own classroom is indeed very close to my classroom, just on the other side of the stairs. It's just the room next to F.1B. To them, it's like something habitual. They always say that they have left something in their classroom and go back to the classroom to get their stuff at the beginning of the lesson. Whenever I ask them for their homework, they will tell me that they have left their work in their classroom.

R: I really appreciate your effort in making sure that your students complete their homework properly. I think they will take their work more seriously because they know eventually they will have to submit their work to you.

F: Yes, it's because I make notes of those students who do not hand in their work. If not, I will forget. And if you forget once, they will think that you are always forgetful and you will then face a lot of problems in the future. That's why you can see my notebook. I use it to jot down all these things. Because here (Fun pointed to her head) is not working well, so I need to do so.

[I thanked Fun for her time and asked her if she would like to add anything to the interview. I thought the interview would end there but Fun continued to talk about the differences in the English proficiency of her students.]

F: In terms of students' abilities, I will arrange those who are better in English and those who play a comparatively active role in learning to sit with those who are weaker in English. I will also remind them to offer their partners help when it is needed. I hope the arrangement could offer the weaker students more help. Although there are only 21 students in this class, you can't just attend the need of every single student. I hope those who are brighter can help a bit. Most of them are willing to help but you have to remind them constantly. You know, they are boys, so you have to remind them. They are not so sensitive. Sometimes I have to signal them to do so e.g. by winking to them.

~ end of interview ~

5.2 Classroom Observation II

5.2.1 Pre Classroom Observation Interview II

R: Researcher
F: Fun (School A)

R: What's your plan for today's lesson?

Fun: The first thing, will be, certainly, chasing some students for their assignments. I have prepared a quiz for them. It's about the vocabulary they have learnt in the unit. [Fun showed me the quiz she prepared.] The students will have to write out the words based on the letters given. It's pretty easy. It's a revision on the vocabulary in the unit and it helps to prepare them for the dictation of the unit next week. After that, we'll move on to the workbook. I told them to finish some exercises on countable and uncountable nouns yesterday. [Fun showed me a few exercises in the workbook.] I told them to finish the exercises and I will go through the answers of the exercises with them today. Then, as we are talking about countable and uncountable nouns, I will ask them to complete some worksheets, just two pages. [Fun showed me a few worksheets.] I think I will ask them to finish them at home because we will not have enough time to finish the worksheets in class. I think that's enough for a single period. If possible, I will ask them to complete some exercises in the grammar book as well because there are some exercises on countable and uncountable nouns too e.g. p. 30 of the grammar book. Here they are. [Fun showed me the exercise in the grammar book.] I do not plan to talk about countable nouns because I think they are very simple. I will focus mainly on these [Fun showed me some examples of quantifiers e.g. a bag of], uncountable nouns. I want them to familiarize themselves with all these, just four pages only.

[I briefly summarized what Fun had just said. She believed that countable nouns were too easy for her students and she would not talk about them in class. Instead, she would focus mainly on uncountable nouns especially when they are used with quantifiers. Fun then raised a new point on spelling of words.]

F: Or perhaps I will mention very briefly about spelling of these words. [Fun showed me some spelling rules given in the grammar book e.g. wife -> wives.] I think students need to pay special attention to these two rules. That's all.

[After the interview, I asked Fun if she could give me a copy of the quiz. She checked the number of copies she had and when she found that she got more copies than she needed she gave me one right away. Fun told me that she designed the worksheet herself last year. She said frankly that she was really interested in the topic. She even admitted that she would put in more time and effort to prepare the teaching materials of a topic that she found interesting. I told her that she could understand how she felt. Fun believed that the quiz was easy because all the letters of a word were given although they were jumbled and a context was there to help the students to figure out the meaning of the word e.g. I want to eat an (a)lepp. Students will then have to write out the word apple. Fun added that the students had just learnt the vocabulary in the quiz from the textbook and so they should find the quiz easy.]

~ end of interview ~

5.2.2 Post Classroom Observation Interview II

R: Researcher
F: Fun (School A)

R: What are your feelings for the lesson just now? [Fun did not say anything. I waited for some time and asked the following question.] Do you think you have achieved your teaching objective(s)?

F: (The teaching was) Slow, slower than what I expected.

R: Why?

F: I had to rush through the part on explaining the worksheet to the students. I was afraid. If my explanation was not clear, they would not know how to complete the worksheet for homework.

R: Why do you think the pace of the lesson was slow?

F: er.. workbook, the part on checking the answers in the workbook was quite slow. [Fun was silent after that.]

R: So, do you think you have achieved your teaching objectives?

F: That's ok, that's ok. [Fun spoke extremely softy.] At least I could manage to give them homework to do during the weekend.

F: Slow, slower than what I had expected.

[I then asked Fun if she had anything to add to the interview. She said no. I then asked her some questions about her lesson. She seemed to welcome the questions. I first asked her about the quiz the students had during the lesson. I wanted to know if Fun was trying to give her students some help during the quiz by reading out the sentences in the quiz. Fun laughed.]

F: Originally, I thought, they should be able to manage the quiz. They had just copied the new words that they had learnt. There isn't any reason why they cannot spell the words and the letters are given. But when I walked around the classroom I found that many of them, about two-third of the class could not manage to fill in the blanks. So, I, anyway, okay, read out the sentences to them because this class is, comparatively speaking, quite weak. If they perform so badly every time when they have dictation, I am afraid they will lose their confidence. I think this format, because I sometimes do dictation in the form of a crossword puzzle, this format allows some change in dictation. But, the problem with this type of dictation is that students could not hear the pronunciation of the word and it might be difficult for them to see the association between the spelling of the word and its pronunciation. Sometimes reading out the word to them might help them to spell the word, which eventually might help them to remember the new words that they learn. I think it's just hard to be perfect. So, this time when I found out that many of them could not manage the quiz, I decided to read

out the sentences to them. I guess more students would be able to fill in the blanks after I read out the sentences to them. But I am not sure.

R: Yes, true. I guess we will have to wait until the quiz is marked to see how well the students have done. But, I think it's really good that you are sensitive to the needs of your students. But, I do think that the part on reading out the sentences might have taken up some class time.

F: Yes, yes. It took several minutes.

R: Apart from reading out the sentences, I think it's really good that you gave your students some time to take a good look at their work before they handed it in.

[By then Fun seemed to be more relaxed and told me more about the quiz.]

F: In fact, the worksheet could have been given to the students as homework to work on but they are lazy. If you treat it as another worksheet, they will just copy the answers of their friend's and that's all. But, if they know that it's for dictation, at least, some students, will study their book. If not, they will just sit there and do nothing!!

[I then asked Fun if I could have a copy of the two exercises that she went through with her students in the lesson. I told her that because I did not have the book with me I had to look at the book of the boy sitting next to me. Fun apologized saying that she had forgotten to make me a copy. I stressed that it was not the fault of Fun at all and in fact I had given her a lot of trouble. Fun then talked a bit about the two exercises.]

F: Yesterday the students completed the exercises. I explained to them the first two questions e.g. when they saw the word they they should put in a plural verb and if there was an article such as a or an they should know that a singular noun is needed. I have taught them how to find the answer with the hints given in the context. But I was not sure if they remembered what had been taught. So, today, I had to, even though I knew that it was explained yesterday, repeat everything.

[I told Fun that I was really impressed with the way how she dealt with students' homework e.g. first of all, she collects the work of the students to make sure that everyone does their work. Then the work would be returned to the students and the exercise would be gone through in class. She would then make sure that for exercises on grammar students would be able to get all the correct answers. Fun sighed again and responded.]

F: If you do not do that, the students will never take their work seriously. They would just put in a few words and hand in their work. They would just try their luck. So, you really have to have very close supervision.

R: I think it's really good that you write down every single answer on the board so that even the weaker students would not miss them.

F: But, they, some of them, make mistakes even when they just copy the answers from the board.

R: Yes, true, very true and its' quite common indeed. And, I do agree with you that it's important to go through the instruction very clearly with your students before they are required to do the homework.

F: I think what I did just now was too fast though. I think some students, especially those weaker ones, might not be able to follow. I think they really want me to speak more Cantonese in the lessons. But, it's a requirement of the school. Also, I hope to use more English during the English lessons. But, when I use English to explain to them how to complete an exercise, they just daydream and they won't listen to me. That's the problem. But I think that I should not let them have whatever they want. If so, they will just stop listening to you whenever you talk to them in English. They will just wait for you to do the translation afterwards. So, it's important to give them some training. But, whenever the time is running short, I tend to use Cantonese. I am afraid that they just can't understand.

R: Yes, I can understand the difficulty you face. It's never easy to make decisions in class. Things just happen very quickly in a lesson and you have to consider so many things in class.

F: So, for those important things, say like things that I want them to know, I will use Cantonese to make sure that they understand.

R: It seems to me that you personally hope to use more English in class believing that it would be good to the students.

F: Yes, that's the requirement of the school too.

R: So, for many percent of the teaching instruction has to be done in English as required by the school?

F: Ideally, 100%. That's the requirement of the school. [I then shared briefly with Fun the experience I had in terms of using English as the medium of instruction when I was teaching in a secondary school. She laughed and said it was indeed silly and crazy to quantify the amount of English used by the teacher in a lesson.] 100%, ideally 100%, of the instruction should be in English during English lessons in the school. [I thanked Fun for sharing with me her feelings about her students in the last interview and invited her to talk about parents today.]

R: Have you met with any parents of students from this class?

F: I have met with two of them.

R: Why?

F: It's because of their homework. They did not complete all their homework. And, their conduct grades were poor too.

R: So, what do you think about the parents nowadays?

F: Some of them would day I can't handle my child and please do that for me. You know like what happened yesterday, one of the students who got really poor conduct grades pretended to be his mother and signed on a letter from the school. I phoned up his mother and asked if she had seen and signed the letter. His mother said no. She told me that she and her son were not getting on well these few days and asked me to check with his father instead. I was, I was, I really did not know how to respond. That's her child and she is not getting on well with him. What can I do? For so many times I have found that problem students are usually from problem families like the one I just talked about. His family really does not know how to teach him. His mother always says that if he is naughty again he will be sent back to China for education. The relationship between the student and his mother is quite poor. So, yesterday after class I talked to the student and asked if his mother really signed the letter. He, at first, insisted that his mother signed the letter. But, then I told him that I had phoned up his mother and so and so. He remained silent. I then explained to him that he and his mother, I mean, I tried to tell him that, I tried to tell him that his mother, in fact, really wanted to give him some help but she just did not know how to do it or have the ability to do it but she really wanted to help. I guess she hasn't got a good education background. I hoped to help him to understand that his mother really wanted to help him, but I guess she just does not know how to express herself and so really, really she has not been unable to do it. I would say, because I am a mother too, so I am in a better position to explain all this to him. When he listened, I could see some changes. Although he did not say anything, he looked less hostile after I explained to him the difficulty of his mother. And, he did all the things that I told him to do yesterday after school. He handed in his work today and in today's lesson he behaved much better. So, if you are not too mad about them and you empathize them, you can offer them some help. And, for the tall guy in my class who always does not hand in his homework, he, in fact is from a single-parent family. His mother is a beautician, something like that and she has to work for long hours and has no time for him. No one knows if he has done his homework. No one cares even if he does not do his homework.

R: Do you think there are a lot of students who are from families that cannot give them any support in terms of studies?

F: I think from my more than ten years teaching experience, there are a lot of problem students, about 70, 80, 90% of them, are from families that got their own problems. That's true.

R: Usually what are the problems of these students?

F: Not doing their homework, fighting against the teachers and things like that, not bringing to class what is needed. Their attitude is just like, I just don't study my book, so what can you do to me?! Things like that.

R: What are their family problems then?

F: These students are usually from single-parent families or their parents just don't know how to teach them or have time for them. Sometimes, there is a lack of communication between the parents and the child. Once I had a student, long time ago, his mother was really worried about him, he has just graduated this year. His mother

was really worried about him, but did not know why, the relationship between them was really poor. His mother tried very hard and she always came to talk to us. But I really did not know what had happened.

R: There could be problems too if the parents care too much about their child.

F: But, I think, for many of them, the reason is that they are from single-parent families. For those students, I have found that, it will not be really effective if you try to reason with him patiently. Instead, the result might be better if you go to them and show them that you understand their situation, or show them that you love them, then they will become more cooperative. Last year I got a student who always behaved badly. But, after I showed him my love for him and gave him something to do say to shoulder some responsibilities, he became a lot better and more cooperative.

R: So, in fact, what they need is love and attention, right?

F: Yes, that's exactly what they need.

R: But, it will take you some time to show them love and care.

F: Yes, I am lucky because I am not their class teacher. If not, it would take much time to do so.

R: Yes, very true. Every class teacher has to take care of quite a number of students.

F: Yes, but I have my own problems too just because I am not their class teacher. I sometimes do not know how far I should go. [I told Fun that I could understand her concern and it's hard to strike a balance sometimes.] At least, I will do what is needed to make sure that the student will behave properly in my lessons. I will just try my best. But, sometimes, I could easily be pissed off by my students. I just can't stand their misbehavior and lose my temper easily, like what happened in the lesson you observed just now. I do think that I was really impolite to them. [I told Fun that I could understand how she felt and I believed that she got her own reasons for whatever she did. And, she must have considered a lot of things before making any decision in class.] When you go to the parents to tell them about the problem of their child, they would say something like I don't know how to teach my child, you have to do that for me. I just want to ask them this question - whose son is he? They should be the one who spend more time with their children, not me.

R: So, on the whole, are parents today cooperative with teachers?

F: I think they are cooperative. I don't have much contact with parents this year because I am not a class teacher. I don't have much contact with them. I usually contact those problem parents. I mean parents of those problem students. But if you ask them to go to school to meet you, they will come.

R: What are the things that parents nowadays consider important?

F: Their studies, I think.

R: What do mean by that?

F: It means whether their children are doing their homework properly and studying their books.

R: What about their behavior then?

F: Yes, they would listen to you carefully and would scold their children briefly in front of you. But I don't know what they would do after they get back home. If you find that your student is not in a good mood, like the boy I talked to this morning in the first lesson, something might have happened in his family. He seemed to be inattentive and I think he wanted to tell me that he was unhappy. I guess his mother has done something to him, but I do know what it is. I don't have time to find out yet. But in the sixth period, he became very active again. But, sometimes, you just don't have the time to hug them and show them you love them. Sometimes, you are mad with what they have done. But I would say I do not have much contact with parents now because I am not a class teacher.

~ end of interview ~

5.3 Classroom Observation III

5.3.1 Pre Classroom Observation Interview III

R: Researcher
F: Fun (School A)

R: What's your plan for today's lesson?

F: Today, we are going to work on a composition, i.e. writing an informal letter. [Fun showed me a handout and few pages in the textbook]. We talked about this part yesterday. We talked about the format of a letter yesterday e.g. different components of a letter and their sequence. [Fun then showed me a page in the textbook]. But, we did not have time to talk about the content and style of a letter yesterday e.g. the use of contraction, informal words and informal closing etc. I told them to complete this part at home yesterday. [Fun showed me an exercise in the textbook]. I told them to identify all these things themselves e.g. contraction, informal words and closing. But I consider this part [Fun showed me another exercise in the textbook] too difficult and I am not asking them to do it. It's a proofreading exercise and students are required to change all those formal elements into informal style. Perhaps, to my class, it's too difficult. So, I decided to skip this part. Then, after they have finished this part, [Fun referred me to the textbook again.] we will move on to the actual writing task. Students are required to write an informal letter. Before they write the letter, they will have some listening practice. The listening practice is about their trip to Mai Po. [Fun showed me the textbook again.] It's about the funny things that happened in the trip. They will have to listen to the tape and put a tick next to the correct picture. They can then put what they get from the listening practice in their own letter. After the listening practice, we will move on to this part [Fun showed me a certain page in the textbook]. But, I think it is too messy. So, instead, I have prepared a handout for them. They will have to fill in all these e.g. 'address', 'date', 'dear'…. Then, under the part 'message' there they will have to write three paragraphs. In fact, these are required in the textbook. According to the instruction here, students will have to divide their work into three main parts. The first part is the itinerary e.g. what they did first and what they did afterwards. Then in the second part they will have to write down the funny things that happened in their trip like falling in the pond and things like that given in the listening practice. Then, they will have to write a conclusion. They will have to answer questions like 'Did you enjoy the trip and why?' That' all. But, I am a bit worried. I don't know if I will give them 'too much guidance' if I give them the handout. But, I am afraid they will [Fun spoke very softly that I could not hear what she said. I got the impression that she, in fact, did not want me to hear her whisper and I did not ask her to repeat it.] if I don't give them the handout. Anyway, I don't know. But I think it will take two lessons for them to complete the letter. I think we will go through all these things in the first lesson and they will start writing the letter in the sixth period. I think they are ready to write the letter as soon as we have gone through all these things especially when their memory is still fresh .They will have to write the letter immediately. Just can't wait until next week, no, they will be having lessons with the NET next Monday. So if we just waited until next Tuesday, they would have forgotten everything by then. [I asked Fun for a copy of the materials that she would be using in the lesson and she gladly promised to prepare a set for me.]

~ end of interview ~

5.3.2 Post Classroom Observation Interview III

R: Researcher
F: Fun (School A)

R: Do you think you have achieved your teaching objective(s)?

F: Talking about the composition lesson today, as we had talked about the format of the letter in the previous lesson, we had a short revision on it at the beginning of today's lesson. I hoped to draw their attention to the format of the letter again. After that, we began to talk about the content of the letter. What I mean by content is the idea given in the textbook. I have set some questions to help my students to think about the content of the letter e.g. what they should include in the letter and how many paragraphs they should write. They are, comparatively speaking, a weaker class so I try to give them more guidelines before they write their composition. But, their work could be very messy even if guidelines are given to them. You can't just give them guidelines like these. You must go through them with them

R: What are the common problems that students face in writing composition?

F: For them the main problem is grammar especially the use of different tenses. They would write down sentences like I were take a photo. Some of them think that they must add the word were or was to the sentences when they are using the past tense. Some of them would produce some kind of Cantonese English e.g. I with my friends go to XXX. These are some examples showing their grammar problems. For content, they just can't think of anything to write in their compositions. So, these guidelines are needed. Guided writing. But some students have told me that they did not know what to write even though they were given the guidelines. So, I have to go through the guidelines with them carefully telling them what to write for each paragraph and where the ideas can be found. Some students just have no idea of what to write. For content, they just don't have any idea. That was why I went through the guidelines with my students just now.

R: So, are they allowed to include ideas that are not given by you?

F: Yes, that's okay. Some students do ask me if they could write about things that are not given in the book or the handout. I usually tell them that if they are confident that they could express their ideas correctly they could try. But, of course, it depends very much on the student. I encourage mainly those brighter students to do so. But, for those who can't even manage some basic sentence structures, I don't think they should try putting in their own ideas.

R: So, thank you. Is there anything that you would like to add to this point? [Fun remained silent and she looked puzzled.]

F: I don't know if the students were bored in today's lesson because I did most of the talking.

R: Why do you think so?

F: I think there was not enough interaction in this lesson.

R: Why?

F: I was there to explain to them the handout and only a few students who were listening to me answered my questions. For those who were not listening to me or who were daydreaming, I just got no time to wake them all up.

R: Okay. Thanks. Let's move on to the assigned topics for today then. Can you tell me how you understand teaching, learning and education?

F: For teaching, I think it's a transfer of something factual, objectively, to explain to students some knowledge to help them to increase their knowledge. It's more about knowledge, transfer of knowledge. Learning is how a student absorbs new knowledge to consolidate their, I don't know, I don't know how to put it. Learning is to help them to grow and to learn more new things. Education is more all rounded. It's not just about teaching of knowledge and knowledge in the book. It's more about developing students into a whole person. It's hoped that there would be some positive changes in a person e.g. to help a student to develop some positive values. I only know how to talk about them. [Fun laughed softly to herself and the comment implied that these things were easily said than done but I did not agree with her.]

~ end of interview ~

5.4 Classroom Observation IV

5.4.1 Pre Classroom Observation Interview IV

R: Researcher
F: Fun (School A)

R: What's your plan for today's lesson?

F: I originally planned to go through the answers of these exercises [Fun showed me a worksheet on the use of the word must] with my students. But, just now when I looked at the assignment record sheet I found that five students, five over twenty-one students, had not handed in their work. So, I think I can't go through the answers with them in today's lesson. [Fun gave a copy of the worksheet to me for reference.] And, this was used [Fun showed me another set of worksheets] to teach my students how to write instructions using words like first and next etc. I went through the first exercise of the set of the worksheets briefly in the previous lesson. This set of worksheet was developed based on the topic, SARS (Acute Severe Respiratory Symptoms) and was downloaded from the government website. Of course, we did some adaptation or I should say simplification. I wanted them to see how the words could be used. Here is an exercise about hand washing. [Fun showed me an exercise about hand washing.] And, it was also downloaded from the government website. Of course, it was also modified. The instructions were all jumbled. And towards the end of the previous lesson, I asked my students to sequence the instructions by using those words like first and next and finally. I did not really require them to copy all the instructions again although as shown in the worksheet space was provided for students to write out the instructions. I wanted them to write out the letters e.g. A, B, C, D of the instructions only. You know my class. [Fun looked frustrated and did not complete the sentence. I said the topics chosen were very interesting e.g. hand washing and flushing, and they were all close to students' life experience.] But, the students seemed to think that the topics had nothing to do with them. Okay. Then, it's the turn for them to write something. [Fun showed me a short writing exercise about making a pen holder]. It's about how to turn an empty plastic bottle into a pen- holder. These pictures and Chinese instructions were from the website of the World Wild Fund. I was afraid they did not know how to complete the exercise, so I included those Chinese instructions here with some key words too. I want to see if they could, based on the exercises here, [Fun referred me to the previous exercises.] show the sequence of the instructions using words like first and next, and use the simple present tense to talk about instructions. After that, they will have to write down the instructions themselves. Ideally, ideally, they will produce two drafts. [Fun showed me some space provided in the worksheets for the two drafts]. I will first mark the first draft and return it to them and they will then work on the second draft.

R: Do you consider the writing exercise a composition writing task?

F: It's too short and it's not composition writing. It's only a short writing exercise for students to familiarize themselves with these words. I think that's enough for a lesson. I think it would be just perfect if I could go through the answers of the homework with the students. But, now, I might ask them to prepare, towards the end of the lesson if they have already finished the writing task, the unit we are going to teach. As their workbooks have been collected to prepare for the school supervision I could not ask

them to finish the exercises in their workbooks. So, I have to move on to the next unit. I have finished teaching all the grammar items and tasks in this unit. It's just the workbook that they need to work on. We have also completed the listening practice for this unit too. So, I will probably tell them to prepare for the unit we will then be teaching.

~ end of interview ~

5.4.2 Post Classroom Observation Interview IV

R: Researcher
F: Fun (School A)

R: Do you think you have achieved your teaching objective(s)?

F: I had to deal with those students who had not handed in their homework at the beginning of the lesson. There was some difficulty in collecting their homework today. Many students had not handed in their work, at least, out of twenty one students, not including the absentee, I got only work from eleven students during the recess. That's why I was so angry now. And, the one who was responsible for collecting the assignment was irresponsible at all, and the one who was responsible for keeping records in the assignment record sheet did a terrible job. [Fun sighed.] I only require them to do something very simple, i.e. to write down what they need to do in the handbook and do their work accordingly. But, you saw just now the tall boy, he was so messy that he left the whole set of assignment in the drawer when he moved to a new seat. You saw that too, right? So, what could I do to him? Do we need to remind him in each lesson saying things like - Mr Chan, have you packed all your things? [Fun said in a low and gentle voice.] Even if he gets all the stuff he still might not do his work. So just now I had to make sure that they knew what they had to do to make up. I told them when they had to hand in their work again. I had to chase some students for the homework they did for the past two days. In fact, I could ask them to stay after school but I got some commitment today and could not stay. So, it became less powerful in terms of preventing it from happening again. I was just too kind. What a pity! Usually I require them to stay after school to make sure that they complete their work before they are allowed to go back home. They will not be allowed to hand in their work on the following day, which is too kind, I think. That's it. Then we started the lesson. First I checked with them the answers of the exercise that they did, which, I think, is okay. I think they are, perhaps, after the school suspension period and also the final exam. To them, it means that the summer holiday but not the final exam is coming. They never think about the exam or that the exam is near but in fact they are happy because classes will soon be over. It's obvious that they are not concentrating on their studies. You saw just now that some of them were just sitting still. They were like having a strike including the boy who was suspended last time. And you saw the boy in the front who told me that he did not know how to complete the task. In fact he knew how to do it but he just did not want to do it during the lesson. He could manage the task but he just did not want to do it. He knew how to do it. So, you see they just forgot everything just now even the meaning of the word, drafts. Every time when we have composition writing I will mark their first draft and return it to them. I will then tell them how to correct their work and what to pay attention to. Then they will have to work on and submit their final draft to me. They are used to this practice. But you saw that just now a lot of students asked me what the two boxes were for. Sometimes I just feel, I don't know. Then, they were asked to write out the instructions. There were some students who did know how to complete the writing task. And, they did quite well too. Here you see. [Fun showed me some of the writing of her students. She was obviously well prepared for the interview that she selected some of the work of her students to show me during the interview.] I did not teach them how to write this. [Fun referred me to a particular line written by a student.] He wrote it himself. I did not teach him. But

the performance of this boy fluctuates a lot. He could do quite well if he wants to. But this one was obviously daydreaming just now. Here you see. [Fun referred me to another piece of work written by another student.] I said simple English. The English proficiency of some students has always been good. You see. Right? Simple English. They could indeed manage the writing task quite well. But some of them were just not willing to do it. In order to make sure that they knew how to do it, I worked out with them the first instruction using very simple English. I wanted to reassure them that the task was manageable to them. But, you saw just now that some of them were just sitting still and doing nothing. They were like having a strike including the boy who was suspended last time. And you saw the boy in the front who told me that he did not know how to complete the task. In fact he knew how to do it but he just did not want to do it during the lesson. He could manage the task but he just did not want to do it. He knew how to do it. He did not even think about the answer he asked me for. Then he moved on to another question. What he wanted to do was asking you questions and wasting the time. It's just because he did not want to work on the exercise. I don't know how, but anyway, he would be able to show me something tomorrow. [Both Fun and I laughed.] That's it. That's what was done in the lesson. Then, in a very short time, I reminded them what to do to prepare for the following unit. The next unit is about food. In fact, I know it will not be possible to teach the whole unit. But, at least, I plan to teach them the vocabulary and the grammar items. This has to be taught [Fun showed me an exercise on 'wh' question words in the textbook.] because when they are promoted to S.5 they will need them in the oral exam. We, starting from this year, have been giving our students a lot of drilling on things like prepositions of time. At least, I need to teach them these grammar items. I checked the calendar briefly just now and have found that there are about ten school days left because sometimes they need to go to classes by the NET, which means that there are about twenty lessons left. I guess about seventeen or eighteen lesson left. So, just see if I can finish everything I have planned. There is some listening practice that has to be done too. Some are from this unit. I think tomorrow I might use half of the class time to complete the listening practice of the previous unit. But it would be odd if you do the listening practice of two units in one lesson, i.e. talking about both food and wild life in one lesson. We are not talking about eating wild animals, right? [Both Fun and I laughed again.] Or I can finish the listening practice on wild life in the first part of the lesson and I will not follow the regular teaching schedule, i.e. doing listening practice on Day VI only, but move on to the topic, food.

R: Okay. Thank you. Nothing to add then, right? So, could you please share with me your understanding of English language teaching and English language learning say like your understanding and experience?

F: For English language teaching, first of all, very basically, they need to learn about those basic structures. Even if they can't write in the language, they need to be able to read it. For example, when they flip through their textbook, or the Young Post, no, it might be too difficult for them, right? I mean, when they flip through a book that is right for their English standard, they should be able to read it and be able to comprehend it. And, they should have some basic writing skills. I think they should possess all these basic skills. And, there is also something that is rather difficult to achieve. It is also something that I really want to achieve but I can't no matter how hard I try. That's to help students to develop their interest for English. You need to be interested in the language if you want to learn it well. Exposure can be achieved say

like if you put your kid in America and he or she will just pick up the language. But, in Hong Kong, how could teachers help their students to develop their interest for English? It's something very difficult to achieve. That's it. Learning, learning is just the opposite. You need to learn how to comprehend something. You need to learn how to apply the language. You develop your interest in learning the language while you are learning the language. The reason why I enjoyed learning and teaching English so much was that I got a very good English language teacher when I was studying at primary school. My teacher was very nice and her teaching was very good. And of course, my exam results were not bad too. She indeed helped me to develop my interest in the language. She taught me English for two years, i.e. P4 and 5. [Fun the talked about all the English language teachers that she had during primary education and she could remember all their names, nicknames as well as personalities.] They were all my English language teachers. And also, we always thought that the English language teacher we had for F.4 and 5 could not speak Cantonese at all. He only talked to us in English even when we talked to him outside the classroom. He was one of the few male teachers in the girl school. He was quite special. You know, there were only about ten male teachers in our school and he taught us English. We did not have much confidence in him at first. But, the things he taught us can be used throughout our life. He taught us to use a notebook to job down the vocabulary and new phrases and sentences that we learnt on the both ends of it. And, during his lessons we jotted down everything important in our notebooks. And we constantly revised and studied what we had put down in our notebooks. We thus never forgot what we had learnt. I still read through my notebooks when I was studying F.6 and 7. It's really useful. And the things he taught us including writing skills were just very good. I think interest is, if you are interested in something, naturally, you will then try to learn about it. But the problem we are facing is that now there are a lot of things that can attract the attention of our students. And, the English language subject fails to compete with them at all. And, the exposure of our students to English is not adequate. We were forced to listen to English when we were young because the teacher never spoke in Cantonese. What could we do? What could we do? We had to listen to them. But now, you see, we are just afraid, we are afraid that our students would not be able to understand us if we speak only in English. So, we tend to speak also in Cantonese. But, that's where the problem lies. It's because the students would become very dependent. That probably explains why they did not understand the phrases, first draft and final draft just now. [Both Fun and I laughed.] But, if you don't explain to them how to complete a task in Cantonese, they will make a mess of. So, we are in a very difficult position. That's it.

~ end of interview ~

5.5 Classroom Observation V

5.5.1 Pre Classroom Observation Interview V

R: Researcher
F: Fun (School A)

R: What's your plan for today's lesson?

F: In today's lesson, first of all, I will give them back their dictation. Each student was required to write down his own address. It's because they will need to talk about their own address during the oral exam. Although the NET teacher has been drilling them during the past few oral lessons, they still did not seem to remember their English addresses. So, I had to have a dictation on their addresses. But, only one-third of the class made no mistake in the dictation. Two-third of them will have to do the correction. They will have to copy their own address on the two sides of the paper. Then, I will return to them their composition; the letter about their trip to Mai Po. This one. [Fun showed me some of the work of her students.] I gave the composition to the Principal last week for checking. This is only the first draft. This is the work of the student who is very tall. There are three students in my class who are called King. [Both Fun and I found the name interesting.] This student is the one whom you always talked about. You said he was not attentive in class. He is the one who sits near the window and always daydreams in the lesson. They did the work at home over the weekend. I will use his work as a sample for other students. It's because improvement is shown in the composition, first of all, even though it is not really a teaching purpose. Another reason for using this composition is that it's quite well written. The student has included all the points that had been given to them. I will invite all the students to think about the ideas that can be added to the composition. It's because a few weeks ago there was a sharing session on the teaching of composition in our school. In the sharing we talked about how composition could be marked and we were told this could be done. So, I just want to try, apart from marking their grammatical mistakes, as the Prof from HKU, Dr Wong, told us, not to spend all our effort on correcting the grammatical mistake made by our students. But you know, I am so used to that and it's hard not to do it. But, I have tried my best. And, we need to encourage our students to think about ways to improve their work. So, I added some questions as comments this time. That's one of the samples. I want the students to think as a group what can be added to the composition. I don't know if we have enough time.

R: So, will the students be handing in their final drafts soon?

F: Yes, the final, final draft. They will then have to submit their final draft. Then, I hope to, but I am not sure if I will have enough time. [Then Fun gave me a copy of a passage from the coursebook] This is the last, I mean the very last passage, that we have to teach our students this term because time is running short and the passage is quite long. There are quite a lot of difficult words in it. It's also from Longman but a simplified version. I told them to read the passage yesterday and to find out all the new words there e.g. names of food, adjectives about food and vocabulary related to food. And, I plan to talk about the passage with them in today's lesson.

[I asked Fun if I could have a copy of the sample composition. Fun said although she had not asked the student for his consent she believed that it would not be a problem. Then she made a suggestion.]

F: Sure, you can ask him for consent when you see him during classroom observation. You can go and ask him. In fact, I planned to give them back the composition yesterday when their memory was still fresh. But, he was suspended and he had to stay in the library on both Friday and yesterday. He could not go to the classroom to learn and so I can only return their work to them today. He was not the one who was suspended last time. He is big tall guy, the one who was suspended last time. He sits in the front. He was the one who left a whole set of homework in the drawer. He could not submit his work because he had left all his homework in the drawer. His homework was left in the drawer for a weekend. So you see. What can I do? That's him. You can see in fact his handwriting is not bad. He can do it if he is willing to. He's got some sense. To be honest, he's got some sense if that was really written by him. I think he should be the one who wrote it. I think no one would bother to offer him help. He has given it some thought. He must have thought it through before he wrote down anything even though in this case he crossed out the right word [The boy had written both noise and noisy in the sentence 'the birds are' but he crossed out the word noisy later.] His work is very different from the messy work he handed in in the past. He has given his work some thought this time. But, they were allowed to write the composition at home. In fact, it seems that they write better at home. And, it could be quite discouraging to some students if they are required to finish and hand in the work in class. Some of them will not take their work seriously. But, if you always allow them to write at home how will they be able to write you two compositions in an hour during the exam? Yes, that's it. Yes, we have to strike a balance. Yes, I have used their work as samples before. I have done it before. They have been shown the work of their classmates.

~ end of interview ~

5.5.2 Post Classroom Observation Interview V

R: Researcher
F: Fun (School A)

R: Do you think you have achieved your teaching objective(s)?

F: In this lesson I gave them back their dictation books. I also told them the main points that they should pay attention to regarding the exam. In fact, I have told them many times already. But I think maybe after their dictation they would remember the main points better. I hope they will not make any mistakes in their addresses again. It's just common sense. And, then, I [Fun paused for a while and she seemed to forget what she planned to talk about and she asked me the following question.] Returning to them their composition, right? Yes, I returned the composition to them. I first gave them the work of one of their classmates to read. Then, I guided them to think about how to improve the composition. I discussed with them what could be added to different parts of the composition. After that, when they got their own composition, they then thought about ways to improve their own work. I originally thought that all these could be finished in a short time and I could talk about the passage in the coursebook. But in fact, there were only five minutes left, which would not be enough for anything. So, I told them to finish their homework in class. And, if they got any questions, they could ask me. That's it.

R: Okay. Thank you. If you have nothing to add, then could you please share with me the joy and difficulty of being a secondary school English language teacher in Hong Kong?

F: The difficulty, the difficulty is that students nowadays have very little exposure to the language because English was used as the medium of instruction of many other subjects in this school in the past. The students had a better sense of the language then. Or, even if they were not interested in the language, they knew that they had to acquire the language skills in order to study other subjects well. So, they tended to put in more effort in the subject. But now learning English is just learning English in the lessons and it is just confined within the 40/80-minute class time. To many students English has nothing to do with them or their lives once an English lesson is over. That's it. Also, I think it's true for other subjects too that there are many distractions outside that grasp the attention of our students. So, they just can't really understand why they have to study or learn English now. They just can't see the need. I don't really know, I don't know how English is taught in primary schools. But I heard from my colleagues that grammar teaching is no longer the focus of English language teaching in primary schools. So, I think it is the reason why some F.1 students, when they first get to our school, do not seem to possess any basic sense of grammar. So, we have to put it more effort to help them, which I think is quite difficult. But, this was only something I heard from my colleagues. I don't really know what is happening in primary schools. That' is. For joy, what joy do we have? Things are much simpler these days. [Fun laughed softly and happily to herself.] Don't you think so? Things are a lot more simpler. Textbooks and everything else are much simpler than those in the past. We are provided with more materials; both printed and on-line materials. Although there are more resources, you still need to take time to read and select them. So, our work is just more or less the same. That's it.

R: So, on the whole, are you happy being an English language teacher?

F: It's a difficult question to answer. Whether or not I am happy, I am happy not because I am teaching my students English. I am happy because I am a teacher. I think I will also be happy if I teach my students other subjects. You would be glad when you see that some of your students are growing up e.g. they pay you a visit few years after they left the school. Yes, a boy came to see me yesterday. He was one of the students I taught in my first year of teaching here. He was studying F.4 at that time. Yesterday he invited me to have lunch with him. Yeah, that's it what makes me happy. I can see his growth and development. He is now working in field of accountancy. He is 27 years old now. And, from time to time I get some emails from my old students. As you know the school has got its own website and those old boys who miss the school might check it out from time to time. And, they can send us emails through the website. So sometimes I got emails from our old boys even though I might forget already how they look like. Or you feel very happy when you see some improvement, though it might be little, and growth in your students. It's not just about the subject. I think the source of happiness has nothing to do with the subject you teach. It's nothing black or white or technical. It might not even be students paying you visits few years after their graduation. It can be the change that you have spotted in your students after a school term. But, of course, there is less joy now. Now I feel exhaustion rather than joy these days. The cooperation among the English panel is also a source of happiness to me. It has nothing to do with students. I heard from other people that many teachers in some schools work very independently. But, I don't know. This is the only school I have been teaching. I think the English language teachers here are very good. They are ready to share their teaching materials. We share both teaching ideas and materials. There is also some support among us. We got a coordinator for each form. But if people are not willing to participate and share, having a form coordinator could mean nothing. But we are just used to that. We are ready to share our teaching materials; those good stuff. We are ready to share with each other our anger and frustration in teaching. That's also one of the reasons why I am still teaching here. It could be really difficult if you have to fight the battle alone.

R: What about the panels of other subjects?

F: [Fun remained silent for some time.] For other subjects, I do know. What I am saying is only the English panel.

~ end of interview ~

5.6 Classroom Observation

5.6.1 Pre Classroom Observation Interview VI

R: Researcher
F: Fun (School A)

R: What's your plan for today's lesson?

F: We are having a short test today. It's designed based on these two units, i.e. Units 7 & 8, I mean, the vocabulary the students have learnt in these two units. It's because they are having the dictation exam this Friday. So, the test is a revision of the vocabulary that they have learnt. There are some questions on yes/no questions too. I guess it takes about fifteen minutes for them to finish the test. [Fun showed me the test paper.] I have given them this [Fun showed me a worksheet] as homework. They should have all done it. The grammar item for this unit is forming wh questions. These [Fun showed me some exercises in the worksheet.] are just filling in the blank questions and they are very simple. The students need to rearrange the sentences given here. [Fun showed me another exercise in the worksheet]. They will have to complete this exercise, i.e. Ex. 8, at home tonight. You know, as the school term is ending, we need to do some wrapping up these days. There are lots of things that we have to do before the end of the term. I collected the grammar books of my students yesterday [Fun showed me some 'wh' question exercises in the grammar book] and I am going to return them today. They did not do very well this time. I guess it's because the questions here are not so straightforward. They are not like these [Fun pointed to some filling-in-the-blank questions in a worksheet]. These are more direct and they could manage better. They just can't manage the questions that require a bit more thinking from them and that are less straightforward. They don't really know when to use do and verb to be. We need to teach them what special verbs and modal verbs are. That's very difficult. […] But, we can do it slowly. I think we might not be able to finish everything in one lesson. And, for the workbook, I want them to finish some exercises on 'wh' questions there. What we are doing now, i.e. teaching the grammar item for this unit is actually helping them to revise and prepare for the exam. That's all we will do in today's lesson. I got a lot of things that I need to return to the students but I don't think we will have time to do so today. [I asked Fun for a copy of the teaching materials to be used in the lesson. In fact, she had kindly prepared a copy for me already.]

[Fun and I had a nice chat after the interview and it was also recorded on the tape. She said she was not sure if the students could manage the short test today. She said it's hard to say. She believed that those who took the test seriously would be able to handle it. She also told me that some questions are developed based on a particular teaching unit (or two units) by her colleagues. The questions are stored in some shared files in the computer and all teachers teaching F.1 could have access to them. The teachers can then download the appropriate ones that they think most suitable for their classes. She told me that some modifications had been made on her test paper today because she did not want her students to try those difficult questions because she did not want to discourage them especially before the exam.]

~ end of interview ~

5.6.2 Post Classroom Observation Interview VI

R: Researcher
F: Fun (School A)

R: Do you think you have achieved your teaching objective(s)?

F: We had a short test just now. It's a revision on the vocabulary of the last two units and yes/no questions. I thought they could finish the test in ten minutes but later I found that they needed more time to finish it. So, I gave them two more minutes. When I walked around the classroom I found that many students did take their work seriously. So, I decided to give them more time. We then went through the answers of the exercise in the grammar book. The exercise is about 'wh' questions. We did not have enough time to go through the whole exercise. We checked the answers of seven questions only. I have to constantly remind them about 'wh' questions because the exam is at hand. I know that we should not be too exam oriented but the exam is coming so soon and 'wh' questions will be tested in both the written and oral exams. So, I hope that they can remember what they have learnt better. In the sixth period today, we finished checking the answers of the exercise. And, we did also some listening practice. That's it.

R: So, do you think you had enough time to finish teaching what is tested in the exam?

F: I would say, it's just okay.

R: Right. Thank you. Today I will ask you some questions about the critical thinking recommendations and some background information about you too. First of all, how long have you been teaching English in secondary schools?

F: Twelve years. The major subject I teach is English.

R: Did you know that secondary school English language teachers had been required to help their students to develop critical thinking through the English language subject? [Fun began to laugh as I told her about the recommendations and she then said no very softly. I repeated her answer to confirm.] No?

F: No. I might have heard about the recommendations but even if I have I have forgotten about it completely.

R: So when and where do you think you have heard about the recommendations?

F: I don't know. You know they from time to time like to send us stuff. They just seem to have nothing to do, but my reaction is just - they are talking crap again. Sometimes I take a very brief look at the booklets they send us or I might have heard about the recommendations from those senior government officials. You know they like appearing on TV. I might have heard about the recommendations but I have never taken the recommendations seriously.

R: Okay. Do you think critical thinking can be developed through the English language subject? If yes, please give examples of how it can be done e.g. teaching activities, strategies or skills. If no, please explain.

F: I think not just the English language subject. It can be developed through all subjects. Am I right? [I did not answer the question and stressed again that there was not any correct or standard answer to the question.] Basically, it can be done through all subjects including music and art. According to my understanding of critical thinking I think that students should have the ability to judge. My understanding is that if a student could think critically he or she would know how to judge and evaluate based on what is given. Critical thinkers would not accept something blindly. They would analyze before they judge and be ready to share with others their opinions. They would then take action accordingly. We can use more guiding questions in class to help students to develop critical thinking. For example, sometimes I intentionally tell my students a wrong answer and then ask them if the answer is correct. I want my students to understand that they should not just sit and wait for answers from teachers. They need to analyze and to listen to others carefully. They need to consider the details. They need to see that they should not accept what they are told blindly. What we need to do is to train up our students to analyze, judge and think about what can be done no matter what the media says. That's really critical thinking.

R: How do you understand critical thinking e.g. what does it mean to you? Is it something important?

F: That's the ability to judge and to evaluate. We need to make decisions ourselves. We don't accept blindly what is said by others. I think it is something important in the present society.

R: Do you think your teaching now is helping your F.1 students to develop critical thinking? Please explain.

F: Very little, a very low percentage. It's because our teaching focus is mainly skills training. Once in a while I might be doing it, very briefly. I think it's the way how you teach your students. For example, in the lesson just now, the question about a 'dog' and I asked my students if they could use the word 'who'. Does it count? I think it can be done by guiding them to think, for instance, by giving them some wrong answers intentionally. I just don't want them to sit and wait for my answer. [Fun flipped through the grammar book she had with her and tried finding some examples from it] For example, like this one, both the past tense and present tense can be used. It's kind of open. So, I told them that it's kind of open and they needed to think carefully before answering the question. I told them to pay more attention to the context given. I guess something like this. They need to read the details. They need to see that they should not accept what they are told blindly. I think through this kind of practice the English language subject can be used to develop critical thinking of students.

R: Do you think critical thinking can be assessed through the English language subject? If yes, please give examples of how it can be done e.g. assessment tasks and criteria. If no, please explain.

F: Assess?!. Is it something that can be assessed? Can it be assessed? Can critical thinking be assessed? How can it be assessed? A, B, [Fun laughed as she said A, B] 100 marks. Is it something that can be assessed? I don't think so. I think it's some kind of training and it develops through one's growing process. A way of thinking is then built up and it's something to do with one's personality development and study methods. I personally think that it cannot be assessed.

R: Do you think appropriate support by the government or your school is given to you to implement the recommendations? If yes, please give examples of the support you are given. If no, suggest the support you hope to have. [Fun laughed again when she heard the recommendations and she paused for a short while.]

F: You mean this subject only or for the overall subjects? Their support aims at developing and strengthening the language skills of students but not helping them to develop critical thinking. No, no, no. They have not made the recommendations explicit to me. I don't know. No.

[I then explained to Fun that critical thinking was in fact one of the focuses of my study. Then Fun asked me what the Chinese translation of critical thinking was. I told her the official translation from the government. However, she had some reservation for the translation. Fun said the translation was very negative. I then explained to her a bit more about the background of the recommendation ands the reason for doing the study. Then the Fun asked me the following questions.]

F: How? How can we do assess critical thinking through the subject? Yes, I can understand. The Education and Manpower Bureau has done a lot of silly things for us to criticize. [Both Fun and I laughed together.] They thought about all these things in their own conference room. Now you see many people in Hong Kong are not satisfied and are so ready to criticize. Can we then conclude that nowadays people in Hong Kong are good at critical thinking? Can I say that? In fact, many people who are constantly criticizing now do not think critically. It's because of the mass media. They just believe what they are told. To me, it has nothing to do with critical thinking. What we need to do is to train up our students to analyze, judge and think about what can be done no matter what the media say. That's really critical thinking. We, English language teachers, are the ones to implement the recommendations. We are the ones who are not doing our job well. We are useless. We don't know about the recommendations. Do I have the time to learn how to do it? Have they [the education authority] given us any guidelines? What they want is some good HKCEE results. That's what they want. Have they given us anything? I don't think so. They might have given us some money to buy some software. [Fun laughed.] They might have given us some money to employ a teaching assistant. Does it count? [Fun laughed again.]

[Fun then asked me if my study was funded by the EMB. She said if it was done for them the project would have to follow a particular format. They would be very directive and they might not be pleased with the findings. She said they only worked inside their office. They only looked at very briefly documents from schools. She said that was why they needed to work like a dog to produce tons of different documents. I told Fun that I was still very reserved about drawing any conclusions after observing only six lessons of each participating teacher. Fun agreed and said that her teaching

would be different if she was teaching a different form of students a different subject. I stressed that I would be reporting what she found honestly in my research report.]

~ end of interview ~

5.7 Last Debriefing Interview

R: Researcher
F: Fun

R: Following up on the questions from the last interview, what kind of support do you hope to have from the EMB or the school to help you to implement the critical thinking recommendations?

F: Some guided teaching materials, I would say, nothing to do with IT.

R: Why?

F: We use IT just for the sake of it. It's just a waste of time and energy. Some guided teaching materials and reading materials would be more helpful.

R: For whom would these reading materials be? To be used by the teacher or for students to read?

F: Yes. On the school level, I think, in fact, we can develop our students' thinking through reading. You mean through the English language subject only?

R: Yes.

F: What do you mean, resources from the school administration or?

R: Whatever support from the school.

F: I think the teachers in this school need to help themselves. That's true. We develop our own teaching materials. We search for them ourselves. We prepare our own materials and we tailor-make them.

R: On the school level would you like to see any changes regarding the critical thinking recommendations?

F: I think we might need to add something to one or two units. What else can we ask from the school?!

R: Do you think you have benefited from the study so far?

F: I tend to reflect on my lessons more because of the study e.g. to think about what critical thinking could mean before a classroom observation when I was preparing for the lesson, and would try asking one or two questions that aim to develop students' critical thinking in the lesson. Sometimes I told myself that yes this approach could work. This kind of awareness about critical thinking never occurred to me in the past. But now, I suddenly realized that I might actually be doing something about it

R: You mean during the research process or after the research process?

F: During the research process. When I was preparing for my lessons, I would pay some attention to this particular aspect, i.e. helping students to develop critical thinking.

R: But I only told you about the research focus on critical thinking last week

F: You told us at the very beginning of the study. You or Mei Mei told me about it, I am not sure.

R: So you did know about the focus on critical thinking?

F: Yes.

R: So, you did think about this aspect when you prepared for your lessons?

F: A little bit. A little bit. A little bit. But you know the reality is that sometimes we need to rush and nothing else can be done in the classroom. You need to check the answers of their homework and have quizzes with them and can't think of anything else. I think it might not be something that you do explicitly but you might be doing it through your interaction with your students say like through asking them more questions.

R: A question on the design of my study, any suggestions do you have in terms of improving the design of my study?

F: It would be better for you to observe classes of more teachers. One is not enough. I think if you observe the classes of more teachers, you will get a fuller picture. For example don't just observe the classes of a teacher. Go to classes of different teachers every week. But I know it might possess some practical problems. I don't know. I don't really know the purpose of your research. As I told you before, I and Mei Mei are atypical subjects. Other colleagues are normal in the sense that they teach more than 30 lessons each cycle. But that is also the reason why they don't have the time to participate in the research. As a teacher, if you are not going to my class every week, I would feel less demanding. In that case, more teachers might be willing to participate in the study.

R: What I am concerned about is that I have to draw patterns of classroom teaching of a teacher after only 6 classroom observations. Do you think it's appropriate to do so?

F: I think it's okay. I think you are here to see how the subject is taught but not how the subject is taught by a particular teacher. So, I think it would be better if you can go to more classes of different teachers, not just one or two teachers. Going back to the benefit of the study, I think I tended to think more before a lesson when I was preparing for it for classroom observation and during the lesson I sometimes reminded myself that I could use some questions to stimulate the thinking of my students. And, even after that, not because you are coming to observe my lessons, I sometimes think about how to develop my students' critical thinking through the subject. I suddenly realized that there was such a requirement. What are they called? ED?

R: EMB

F: Anyway.

R: People from the authority.

F: True. Very true. I do think more about developing students' critical thinking.

R: But as shown in the video recordings of you lessons critical encounters could hardly be found in your observed lessons. [I explained briefly to Fun the meaning of critical encounter as defined in the study.]

F: Yes. I still don't know how to do it.

R: Do you think you need some specific techniques to help your students to develop critical thinking?

F: I don't know. I don't know if the questions I asked are critical or not.

R: However, it shows in the video recordings of your lessons that you always encourage your students to ask you questions. Do you think so?

F: It's because more trouble would be caused if they don't tell you what they do not understand.

[The interview formally ended here but I had a brief chat with Fun after the interview.]

R: Did you feel a lot of stress every time when I had interviews with you. Why did you agree to participate in the study?

F: First of all, I can afford the time to do so. Secondly I know it's hard to find subjects for this kind of research. My son might benefit from the findings of the research. You never know. [Fun laughed after making the comment and she asked me how the findings would be used. I told Fun that I would go back to the school to disseminate the findings of the study to probably her, Mei Mei and the Principal. I said that it would be good if other people could know more about what was really happening in the classroom.] Yes, even if they know the problem, they would say I don't have the resources and don't have the time or manpower to do what should be done. You got to wait. They just tell us to do this and that but they never care if they are actually implemented. Do you think they really care? They can tell us what to do but we do the job in our own way. We have been doing that for years.

R: I guess the task-based teaching approach is a good example.

F: Are you then using the task-based teaching approach if you follow the Longman textbook?! [Fun laughed.] I don't think the teaching approach works for all students. It's not possible for those students who don't even manage some basic skills of English to learn through the approach. They can't write a story if they don't know what the past tense is. I usually ignore those guidelines from the EMB. Their ways of disseminating education policies are indeed ridiculous. They got so many officers in the EMB. Why don't they send a team of them to each school say like once, for an hour or so, to tell us what they want us to do? Tell us what support they are offering

us. At least, by then, I would know what I am expected to do, I would have heard about that myself. Who would go to the seminars they organize? Why don't they come to our school? If they think that it is something important they need to come so that everyone would know and the resources would not be wasted. Their seminars are attended by, more or less, the same group of teachers. If only panel heads are allowed to go to those seminars, what should we do? We would have to wait for the panel head to tell us about the government policy. Why can't they come to our school then?

R: But they do stress that they have done much consultation before the development of any education recommendations

F: It's a waste of resources. They have wasted a lot of manpower and many other things to produce something that not many people would read. So what would happen? Why don't they come to our school to tell us their recommendations? So, every one in the panel would know about it. We would do it if it could be done. If there are teachers who are really interested in the topic, then they would be invited to participate in some research on the specific area. And, another problem for disseminating education recommendations in this way is that different people might have different interpretations of the guidelines. I would say this is the way how I understand the recommendations but you know different people might have different interpretations of the recommendations. But, it would be helpful if they could come to our school to tell us how the guidelines should be interpreted and to show us some examples or even lesson plans. They could show us what could be done and we could then follow their direction. What we could do with those five year-old kids, F.1 or 7 students could be very different? I would never ask my F.1 students to comment on the problems of the Article 23. Am I right? But I can do that with my F.7 students.

R: Students of Key Stage, i.e. F.1-3, are the target group of the critical thinking recommendations that we have been discussing about.

F: I am sorry. I have not read the guidelines. I might have flicked through the document from the education authority on the critical thinking recommendation but I remember nothing about what was written there. They might change their mind again very soon say like after two or three years. So, why bother reading it? Why? They might suddenly tell you that the recommendation has been scrapped after you have prepared a whole set of materials. So, it's not you, researchers in the area, who should go into schools to listen to voices of teachers. They should be doing this instead. But they never want to take this step.

~ end of interview ~

VI. Protocol for Target Interview

The target interview aims to elicit systematically the five teachers' perceptions of critical thinking and the critical thinking recommendations. There are seven questions in the scheme.

Background information of the teachers

Q1. How long have you been teaching English in secondary school? What other subject(s) do you teach?

Knowledge of the critical thinking recommendations

Q2. Did you know that secondary school English language teachers had been required to help their students to develop critical thinking through the English language subject? If yes, please specify how you got the information, i.e. when and where did you first read/ hear about the requirement?

Teaching critical thinking through the English language subject

Q3. Do you think critical thinking can be developed through the English language subject? If yes, please give examples of how it can be done e.g. teaching activities, strategies or skills needed. If no, please explain.

Understanding of critical thinking

Q4. How do you understand critical thinking, for example, what does it mean to you? Do you think it is something important?

Teaching critical thinking in the F.1 class

Q5. Do you think your teaching is helping your (Secondary 1) students to develop critical thinking? Please explain.

Assessment of critical thinking

Q6. Do you think critical thinking can be assessed through the English language subject? If yes, please give examples of how it can be done e.g. assessment tasks and criteria. If no, please explain.

Support needed to implement the critical thinking recommendations

Q7. Do you think appropriate support from the government or your school is given to you to help you implement the recommendations? If yes, please give examples of the support you are given. If no, please suggest the support you believe is needed.