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我国英语沉浸式教学的调查与研究

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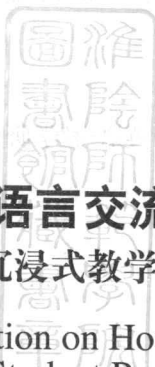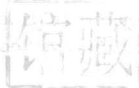梁小华 著 ◂

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　　为展示学术研究的最新动态和成果，并为广大优秀的博士人才提供广阔的学术交流的平台，上海外语教育出版社隆重推出"外教社博学文库"。该文库遴选国内的优秀博士论文，遵循严格的"专家推荐、匿名评审、好中选优"的筛选流程，内容涵盖语言学、文学、翻译和教学法研究等各个领域。该文库为开放系列，理论创新性强、材料科学翔实、论述周密严谨、文字简洁流畅，其问世必将为国内外广大读者在相关的外语学习和研究领域提供又一宝贵的学术资源。

<div align="right">上海外语教育出版社</div>

In memory of my beloved parents
Who natured us with their integrity, sincerity and generosity
Nurtured us with their gentleness, kindness and patience
Inspired us with passion, devotion, and aspiration
And imbued us with their
Endless love

纪念敬爱的父亲母亲
是你们孕我们以正直、诚挚、信实与恩慈
育我们以温柔、良善、喜乐与忍耐
励我们以热情、志向与虔诚
予我们以无尽的
爱

序

听到梁小华老师的博士学位论文即将出版，我感到十分高兴。我和梁老师是 2004 年在北京举行的一次研讨会上认识的。梁老师长期从事外语的教学与研究工作，对教学法的研究情有独钟。她在香港大学攻读博士学位期间，对沉浸式教学进行了深入的研究，完成论文的写作并获得香港大学博士学位。

读完梁博士这本著作，本人受到许多启发。全书以"社会活动理论"为理论框架，研究了我国沉浸式环境中，活动对学生语言交流的介入作用，详细地分析了学生活动类型和学生语言交流的特点，讨论了学生活动的多变性和灵活性、学生在活动中表现出的主观能动性以及学生活动介入的多层面性。

全书的一个显著特点是重视实证研究，并对调查数据展开详细的分析。数据采集主要通过观察和访谈，分析方法主要是采用口头语言话语分析的方法和技巧。

全书的第二个特点是紧扣我国英语教学的实际。作者首先分析学生活动类型和学生在活动中的特点，找出学生活动类型与学生语言交流特点之间的内在关系。其次，作者对学生同一任务产生的不同活动、同一活动中学生承担的不同角色、各种任务潜在的学习机会展开研究。此外，作者从多个方面探索了学生在活动中激活和采用的介入手段，包括学生语言游戏、学生互动、母语使用、语言转换、任务、活动类型以及学科知识内容。

II

全书的第三个特点是得出了有意义的结论,即角色扮演能激发学生的英语学习兴趣,能培养学生的创造力和想象力,还能提高学生对社会关系的理解。研究还表明,问与答是提高学生的探究能力、思辨能力和批评思维的有效途径。对话是拓宽学生话题面、培养学生交际能力的有力手段。

可以说,梁博士详细、深入的研究让我们了解到沉浸式教学的特点和发展现状,更让我们认识了学生活动在沉浸式环境中的积极作用。这项研究不仅具有理论意义,而且对我国的英语教学以及教学法的研究具有很好的参考价值,希望读者能从中受益。本人期待梁小华博士能继续在英语教学的研究中出更多的成果。

<div align="right">

杨信彰

2012 年 1 月 8 日于厦门

</div>

前言

我国英语沉浸式教学模式始于 1997 年古城西安,由一两所幼儿园的探索到向全国有条件的地方推广,其发展备受关注。期间出现了一批有影响的论文和著作,例如《中外第二语言沉浸式教学研究》(强海燕、赵琳,西安交通大学出版社,2001)、《小学低年级英语沉浸式综合教程》(强海燕、赵琳,西安交通大学出版社,2001)以及《英语沉浸式教学研究论文集》(迟延萍,2006)。新的教学模式和良好的教学效果激发了我想去了解它的强烈好奇心。此时,正逢国家留学基金委派我去加拿大UBC访学一年,师从我国英语沉浸式教学项目CCUEI(中国、加拿大、美国英语沉浸式合作项目)的加方负责人Prof. Linda Siegel并参与她的部分研究。2003 年回国后,就积极投身于英语沉浸式教学的课题研究。在 2004 年与 2005 年的英语沉浸式教学年会上,两次与香港大学教育学院的Prof. Chris Davison相遇,期间她对我的研究表现出了极大的兴趣和关注。2007 年 1 月我进入香港大学攻读博士学位,在导师Prof. Steve Andrews、Dr. Jasmine Luk、Prof. Chris Davison和Dr. Gary Harfitt的指导下开始了本研究的设计、选题及数据采集和分析,并开始从事本书的撰写工作。期间受到了严格的研究方法的训练,得到了老师们的精心指导,在阅读了大量国内外的文献后找到了研究的突破点。整整四年的学习,几乎没有过星期六和星期日,一路洒满了汗水与泪水,倾注了无数的心血,其目的是尽量为国际教育界深入了解我国英语沉浸式教学打开窗口,尽量为我国读者提供一个了解英语沉浸式教学的全景。愿本书的出

版能给英语教师、本领域的学者、研究人员以及语言政策的决策和参与者们提供参考。

IV　　本书共分十章。

第一章："导论"。本章从作者本人的学习和教学经验入手，陈述了作者从事本项研究的动机，从中勾画出我国英语教学与改革的轨迹与现状，尤其是新的《英语课程标准》对英语教学的影响。由此引入了对本项研究的主体——我国第一个英语沉浸式教学项目CCUEI的初步介绍。本章最后指出了本项研究的目标与核心，同时指出了此研究的重要性。第二章和第三章是文选综述。

第二章："沉浸式教育"。本章重点介绍沉浸式教育的起源、定义、特点以及不同类别，通过描述西方沉浸式教育的发展，分析我国英语沉浸式教学（以CCUEI为例）的特点及现状，并指出本项研究的突破点。有关沉浸式教育的研究有很多，尽管重点不同，但大多是通过测试结果报道沉浸式教学的良好效果的。本研究是以学习过程为重点的研究，是我国英语沉浸式教学研究中首项此类研究。本章最后描述了沉浸式教育所面临的问题和挑战。

第三章："互动、活动及学生语言交流"。本章主要是通过文献综述指出本研究在该领域所处的学术及研究地位，找出研究的突破点，形成适合本研究的研究框架。并从认知和社会文化两个不同的视角对"互动"进行诠释，重点落在学生间的语言交流上。从认知的角度评述了二语习得中Long的互动假设、Pica的语言含义磋商以及Swain的结果假设；从社会文化的角度回顾了Vygotsky对语言及语言学习的核心概念和Engestrom的活动理论。本章就活动的本质进行了探讨，批判地分析了本研究采用社会文化理论的依据，从文献中对学生语言交流进行了评述。

第四章："研究方法"。本章是本项研究的整体设计。本研究是个案研究，采用的是多样的数据收集和数据分析方法。个案点的采选是因为其具有独特性，希望通过两年的跟踪调查，能对英语沉浸式教学中学生的互动学习提供一个全面的描述与分析。研究对象是八位不同英语语言水平的学生，考虑到性别的平衡性各选其半。两年期间，作者四次入校进行长达三个月的观察与调查，采集数据，同时进行数据分析。分析

时首先将录音和录像进行了文字转译，然后在活动理论的框架下，用话语分析的方法对学生间的语言交流进行具体分析。通过浓描、参加人员核实、同伴反馈和自我反思等手段确保研究的可信性。

第五章："研究学校环境及研究对象"。本章是对研究学校环境和研究对象的具体描述，其中包括我国的英语语言政策、英语沉浸式教学的语言决策、研究学校的特点、教师所面临的挑战、学生对英语和英语教师的态度以及师生关系。简而言之，这一章在深入调查和研究的基础上具体描述学校的困境和教师所面临的挑战。第六章至第八章是具体的数据分析和结果的呈现，籍此深入探讨活动对学生语言交流的介入作用。

第六章："活动类型与学生语言交流"。本章在分析大量数据的基础上概括了学生活动类型以及在各类活动中学生语言交流的特点。

第七章："学生活动的本质与学生的主观能动性"。本章揭示了学生活动的动态性以及活动与环境的紧密联系性。

第八章："介入形式"。本章揭示学生在活动中运用的多维介入模式。

第九章："讨论"。本章首先是对本研究的总结，然后围绕两大主题展开总体讨论。第一大主题是活动对学生语言交流的介入作用，体现在活动的类型与学生语言交流的关系、介入的多维性、学生的主观能动性及教师在其中的作用等。第二大主题是重点突出介入的多维性的本质特点、活动类型与学生语言交流的关系、活动的动态性及与环境的紧密联系性，从中反映出学生的主观能动性。

第十章："结论"。本章通过重述活动对学生语言交流的介入作用，对本研究进行了总体概括，陈述了本研究的意义及其不足，并指出了进一步的研究方向。

典打来的电话让我的生活充满了阳光。感谢我的先生刘继光,在我的整个职业生涯中,从未反对过我做的任何决定,总是说"你喜欢就好",而后默默支持和付出。感谢子豪爷爷在我学习期间对他无微不至的关怀和照顾。感谢我的哥哥们和姐姐,是他们一直关注我的每一步,在我前进的道路上一如既往地给我予关怀与支持。愿此书是献给他们的最好礼物。

梁小华

2011 年 3 月 22 日于香港大学许爱周楼

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List of Abbreviations and Symbols

BA	Bachelor of Arts
CCEI	China-Canada Collaborative English Immersion Program
CCUEI	China-Canada-United States Collaborative English Immersion Program
CET	College English Test
COLT	Communicative Orientation of Language Teaching
Com	Communicative
Con	Conversation
EC	Ethnography of Communication
ELT	English Language Teaching
G3	Grade 3
G4	Grade 4
G5	Grade 5
I	English Immersion Classes
IH	The Interaction Hypothesis
L	English Language Classes
LREs	Language-related Episodes
L1	The First Language or Native Language
L2	The Second Language, or Language Other than the First Language
MA	Master of Arts

NCEE	The National College Entrance Examination
NEC	The New English Curriculum
NM	Negotiation of Meaning
NNS	Non-native Speakers
Non-com	Non-communicative
NS	Native Speakers
OH	The Output Hypothesis
PEP	People's Education Press
PEP textbook	Textbook Compiled by People's Education Press
PRC	The People's Republic of China
QA	Question-answer
RP	Role Play
SLA	Second Language Acquisition
ZPD	The Zone of Proximal Development

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

This chapter introduces the researcher's motivation for the study, and describes the context of the study by rehearsing the background of English language teaching (ELT) in China and describing the China-Canada-United States English Immersion (CCUEI) program. Several research questions are posed, followed by the aim and significance of the study. The chapter concludes with a preview of the structure of the thesis.

1.1 Motivation for the Current Study

In China, the number of English language learners has increased dramatically since the introduction of the *New English Curriculum* (*NEC*), which established English as a compulsory subject from Primary Grade 3 onward (The Ministry of Education, 2001b, p.50). The aims of the *NEC* are to raise the students' cultural awareness, enhance their language knowledge, language skills and strategies in using English, and foster the students' positive affects and attitudes towards English language learning. Although task-based language teaching is officially advocated in the *NEC* guidelines (The Ministry of Education, 2001b), primary schoolteachers are still unaware of how to implement it in their classroom practice, and continue to use traditional

1

teaching methods such as explaining lexical and grammatical items in L1 (Deng & Carless, 2009 ; Zhang, 2005). In addition, there is little in-service training available for primary school teachers, and few researchers are working at that level. Hence, teaching English language effectively to primary and younger learners has become a social need. The CCUEI program attempt to enhance young learners' English language learning through certain content subjects using English as the medium. Although numerous studies on the CCUEI program (e.g., Fang, Wang & Siegel, 2001; Pei, 1998; Qiang, 2000; Qiang & Zhao, 2001b; Zhang & Pei, 2005; Zhao & Qiang, 2002) have shown that the CCUEI immersion students outperformed their non-immersion counterparts, very few have examined the students' learning processes within the CCUEI context. As an educator and a researcher, the author feels an urgent need to research the complexity of the young learners' learning processes in ELT, especially within the CCUEI in China.

The current study was also motivated by the author's experiences in English language learning and teaching, which ranged from secondary school to university, and from conducting research at tertiary-level English teaching to being a key investigator of kindergarten and primary school level English immersion.

In the late 1970s, under President Deng's leadership, foreign language learning was reestablished within the educational system.[1] Traditional methods of knowledge transmission instruction was employed through translation while listening and speaking in English eschewed. Thus, although the students had learned English vocabulary, understood English grammar and collocations, completed the exercises in the textbook and the supplementary teaching materials, they had not developed much actual ability to communicate in English.

In 2002, sponsored by the China Scholarship Council, the author studied Bilingualism at the University of British Columbia under the supervision of

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1 English was an elective course at that time for most of the students and counted for only 10% of their total score according to the policy. Few of them were selected to study English as a future major. Those who were preparing for the entrance exam as English majors did not need to take the math portion of the university entrance examination.

Linda Siegel and participated in her research. After returning to China in 2003, she involved herself in the research into the English immersion program at, first, a kindergarten, and then two primary schools (both lower and upper grades). In 2005, as part of the annual conference on English immersion held in Guangzhou, she accompanied the researchers on English immersion program during several school visits, and was much impressed by the students' active participation in classroom activities. One of the schools they visited later became the data source for this study. The program's effectiveness the researchers reported fascinated her, and she wanted to further explore the nature of the students' activities and the processes of their English language learning.

Table 1.1 outlines the author's experience, firstly as an English language learner who had learned English in traditional English classes yet still lacked the ability to communicate in English, and secondly as an English language teacher who tried to stress the student performance and witnessed their English language development, and thirdly as an academic who researched English immersion program as to both children's cognitive development and

Table 1.1   The Author's Learning, Teaching and Researching Experiences

As a learner of English

Year	Level	Learning experiences
From the late 1970s to the early 2000s	secondary school, college, university undergraduate and university postgraduate	− mostly via traditional instruction: grammar-centered, knowledge-transmitting instruction; translating, reciting, and doing grammar exercises; (no speaking at all) − later on via "communicative language teaching" with more emphasis on language use

As a teacher of English

Year	Level	Teaching experiences
From the early 1980s to the mid-2000s	secondary school, university undergraduate, and university postgraduate	− tried to teach English through English − tried to encourage students to use English − tried to create chances for students to communicate in English − tried to encourage students to participate in extracurricular activities to learn English

(to be continued)

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As a researcher of English		
Year	Level	Researching experiences
From the early 1990s to the mid-2000s	secondary school, university, kindergarten, primary	– reported about the successful teaching and learning experience – conducted studies about university students' learning strategies – studied some cultural differences in using the language – researched on immersion programs

university students' English language learning strategies. She took a critical attitude throughout the research process so as to rule out any potential bias.

The following section provides the background information and development about ELT in China and the first English immersion program, the CCUEI. This helps offer a better understanding towards the status quo of English immersion in China.

1.2　ELT in China

ELT in China has been greatly influenced by its language policy, which has undergone constant changes including shifts in English language policy, the development of various English syllabi, and the reform of tertiary, secondary and primary education curricula, all of which have combined to cause changes and challenges in ELT. An introduction to the CCUEI, China's first and most influential English immersion program follows.

1.2.1　Policy of ELT: An Overview

ELT in China since the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC) may be divided into five periods according to the *de facto* changes in language policy: 1949-1956; 1957-1966; 1966-1976; 1977-2000; and 2001

onward[1].

In 1949, the year in which the PRC was established, foreign language learning was stressed as an education requirement (Adamson & Kwo, 2002; Adamson & Morris, 1997; Lam, 2002, 2005). Because of the PRC's close ties to Moscow, Russian was the foreign language of choice for most schools and universities. That situation didn't change over many years until, by 1956, English had eclipsed Russian in its popularity, which remained the case for about 10 years, roughly from 1957 to 1966 (Hu, 2002b; Lam, 2002, 2005). The Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), however, led to a decade of chaotic dysfunction at all aspects of the educational system, including ELT (Fu, 1986; Hu & Seifman, 1987; Lam, 2002, 2005). In effect, the general educational system failed in its normal functions, and the teaching of foreign languages was banned (Hu, 2002b; Lam, 2002, 2005).

The reestablishment of the National College Entrance Examination (NCEE)[2] in 1977 and the advocation of the Four Modernizations[3] in 1978 engendered the educational reforms and changes, particularly in ELT (Huang, 1987; Lam, 2002, 2005; Ross, 1993). Since then, China has gradually opened itself to the world, and has played an increasingly important role in the world affairs, to the extent that English is now widely used in every field of national development (Lam, 2002, 2005).

Due to the globalization, English has become a commonly used language throughout the world (Crystal, 1997; Curriculum Development Council, 1999; Lam, 2002, 2005; Nunan, 2003). In 2001, the *NEC* established English

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1 This idea was inspired by Lam's (2002) research on English education in China.

2 The National Entrance Examination was reinstated in 1977 to recruit excellent students into universities, and to reestablish the postgraduate students' enrollment system. It was, (and is), considered extremely important in people's lives, and affects nearly everyone either as parents or students or relatives. The job position quotas were allocated by the government when the students graduated from universities and their future career was virtually decided at that time.

3 The Four Modernizations were advocated by Deng Xiaoping in 1978 to enhance China's political, economic and cultural development, and referred to the modernizations in agriculture, industry, national defense, and science and technology. The modernization in science and technology was the basis for the other three.

as a compulsory subject from primary Grade 3 onward (The Ministry of Education, 2001b); in practice, many primary schools start English language teaching as early as Primary Grade 1. Table 1.2 presents the changes in language policy and their impact on foreign language teaching.

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1.2.2 Development of the English Language Teaching Syllabi for Secondary Schools

Before 1983, English was an elective course rather than a key subject, and held only a very low weighting at the secondary level[1] in the *NCEE*. One's English score counted for 10 percent of their total *NCEE* score in 1979 and 30 percent in 1982. In 1983, however, it counted 100 percent as a subject in the *NCEE* (Wang, 2006). Since 1983, the number of hours allocated to English language teaching has increased. As such, students' requirements have moved beyond learning basic linguistic skills to include developing communicative competence and cross-cultural understanding. The development of the English language teaching syllabi for secondary schools is presented below.

Table 1.2   Changes in Language Policy and Their Impact on Foreign
Language Teaching

Changes of language policy		Impact on foreign language learning		
Years	Language Policy	English	Other languages	Reasons
1949–1956	Foreign language as a requirement of education	Not selected by most schools	Russian selected by most schools	Good relationship between China and Russia
1957–1966	The same language policy	Selected by many schools	Not selected by many schools as before	Tension between China and Russia

(to be continued)

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1 Before the *New English Curriculum* (*NEC*) was issued in 2001, English language teaching began at the junior secondary level; there was no English language learning requirement at the primary level.

| Changes of language policy | | Impact on foreign language learning | | |
Years	Language Policy	English	Other languages	Reasons
1966-1976	No foreign language teaching permitted	Forbidden, banned, cancelled	Forbidden, banned, cancelled	The Cultural Revolution
1977-2000	Foreign language as a requirement of education to enhance the Four Modernizations and the Open Policy	Selected by all the schools at different levels gradually	A variety of other foreign languages are selected by different schools for different reasons	English became the most widely used language in the world in science, technology, education, trade and so on
2001 onward	English as a compulsory subject from Primary Grade 3	Selected by all the primary schools from Grade 3 or from Grade 1	A variety of other foreign languages are selected by different schools for different reasons	Globalization, English as a global language

The 1978 English language teaching syllabus allocated around two hours per week for ELT. At that time, students were required to master basic pronunciation, grammatical rules, and a vocabulary of about 2200 words; they were also required to obtain basic listening, speaking, writing, and translating skills (The Ministry of Education, 1978). The 1990 syllabus required the students to master a number of phrases and idioms, to be able to use some 1800 to 2000 words, and to read independently from the supplementary teaching materials (which were somewhat more accessible than the textbooks); the time allocated for ELT had been increased to around four hours per week (The Ministry of Education, 1990, 1993). The 1996 syllabus added the goals of nurturing students' interest in English language learning and enhancing their understanding of Western countries (The Ministry of Education, 1996). The 2000 syllabus aimed not only to enhance the students' integrated communicative competence, but also to inculcate their positive attitude towards English language learning; it also sought to develop students' capacity for independent exploration and creative thinking, vital skills that can improve cross-cultural understanding

and help students to go beyond basic language skills (The Ministry of Education, 2000). Clearly, the importance of English has steadily increased, to the extent that it is now a key subject for the students. Table 1.3 illustrates the development of the English language teaching syllabus for secondary schools.

Table 1. 3   Development of the English Language teaching
Syllabus for Secondary Schools

Year	Requirement	Time allocated for instruction
The 1978 syllabus	– to master the basic pronunciation, grammatical rules – to have a vocabulary of about 2200 words with the basic listening, speaking, writing and translating skills	around 2 hours of instruction per week
The 1990 syllabus	– to master a number of phrases and idioms – to have the ability to use around 1800 to 2000 words and read independently the materials which were a little easier than the textbooks	around 4 hours of instruction per week
The 1993 syllabus	– to train students' communicative competence; and the use of the four language skills and their ability for self-study are stressed	around 5-6 hours of instruction per week
The 1996 syllabus	– to cultivate the students' interest in English language learning and to enhance a better understanding about the Western countries	around 5-6 hours of instruction per week (Most schools have the autonomy to decide the hours.)
The 2000 syllabus	– to enhance the students' integrated communicative competence – to position their positive attitude and to better their cross-cultural understanding – to develop their independent exploration and their creative thinking	around 5–6 hours of instruction per week (Most schools have the autonomy to decide the hours.)

8

Effective ways of teaching and learning English have become urgent needs for students, teachers and society alike. Accordingly, English education requirements have increased year by year for both students and teachers. From a student's perspective, the time spent learning English has increased from two hours per week to six hours or more; they are now required to listen to and speak in English; and, in addition to understanding basic language rules and grammar, they must be able to use the four skills, think independently and demonstrate cross-cultural understanding. As regards teachers, instruction requirements have changed from knowledge transmitting to exploration and creativity cultivation, and from teacher-centered instruction to student-centered participation.

1.2.3 Reform of the Curriculum

By 2001, the English language was entrenched as a compulsory subject in the educational system (The Ministry of Education, 2001a, 2001b). The Ministry of Education provided guidelines on the *NEC*[1] for primary schools. The new guidelines state that the aim of teaching English is to arouse the students' interest in the language, to enhance their understanding about Western cultures, and to make them confident in language learning as well as positive towards language use. Inquiry, exploration, cultural awareness, creativity and cooperation are goals to attain in English language teaching and learning. To attain these goals, the Ministry of Education advocated task-based language teaching in the guideline to the *NEC* in 2001 as a core strategy to be

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1 The *NEC* includes nine levels of language proficiency. Primary school students are required to reach Level 2 by the time they graduate; junior secondary students are required to reach Level 5 when they graduate; and senior secondary students are required to reach Level 8, which is nearly equivalent to the College English Test (CET) Band 4 and Band 6 assessments used to measure college students' English language proficiency. University students are expected to pass CET Band 4 and are encouraged to pass Band 6 on completing their university English study. This testing system has been used by the the China National College English Testing Centre since the late 1980s.

9

used by teachers in their teaching transactions (The Ministry of Education, 2001a, 2001b). The new requirements aim to standardize and regularize *10* the requirements of students' English proficiency level at all levels in the evaluation system.

1.2.4 Changes and Challenges Encountered in ELT

Changes in language policy brought about both changes and challenges in ELT in China. At the national level, the Chinese government regards English as a critical means of further opening up the country, an essential approach to realizing the Modernizations, an important foundation for international competition (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996a, 1996b; Jin & Cortazzi, 2002; Lam, 2005; Maley, 1995), and "the recognition of China's significant role in world affairs" (Jin & Cortazzi, 2002, p.53). For the students, English plays a key role in their future educational and occupational success (Jin & Cortazzi, 2002; Li, 2000). English proficiency is the key to such opportunities as studying abroad, a good job, and career advancement (Jin & Cortazzi, 2002; Li, 2000; Ng & Tang, 1997).

The new requirements made English a compulsory subject beginning in Grade 3 of primary school (The Ministry of Education, 2001b). However, just as the social need for English showed the importance of English, so did the dissatisfaction with and complaints about problems[1] in ELT in China (Chen & Zhang, 1998; Ma, 2009; Wang & Cheng, 2008). Teaching and learning were inefficient, and students, despite years of study, could not communicate effectively in English (Chen & Zhang, 1998; Li, 1996; Ng & Tang, 1997; Wang & Cheng, 2008). At the tertiary level, the Higher Education Foreign Language Teaching Committee reported a ratio of 1 : 130 of English teachers to students

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1 The problems discussed include: schools lack qualified teachers; teachers lack effective teaching methods; students lack the ability to use the language and parents and educators worry about the effect of the examination-oriented evaluation system (Cortazzi & Jin, 2001; G. W. Hu, 2002a, 2002b).

(Wang & Tao, 2004). A survey of 139 secondary schools in 15 provinces in China found that the majority of students only recognized about 1800 words, had very limited grammatical knowledge about the English language, and could speak and write only in fragments (Wei, 1998a, 1998b). At the primary level, even though a task-based approach has been recommended, the teachers continue to use L1 with the teacher-dominated, knowledge-transmitting and grammar-based methods in ELT classroom teaching (Deng & Carless, 2009; Zhang, 2005). Table 1.4 outlines the changes and challenges encountered in ELT in China.

Table 1. 4   Changes and Challenges Encountered in ELT in China

Changes	Challenges	Some evidence
On the national level: – English as a critical means of further opening up – an inevitable approach for realizing the Modernizations – an important foundation for international competition In students' life: – English proficiency as a key to various opportunities: 1) to enter universities 2) to go abroad for further studies 3) to get promoted in the career development 4) to be recruited into good job positions	1) Students: the lack of ability to use the language; the pressure of gate-keeping examinations 2) Teachers: the lack of effective teaching methodology 3) Schools: the lack of qualified teachers 4) Parents and educators: worry about the impact of the examination-orientated evaluation system	1) The teacher/student ratio is 1:130 2) Most students have very limited language competence: – limited grammatical knowledge about the language – speaking and writing fragments – a vocabulary of 1800 words 3) Teachers' teaching method: the teacher-dominated, knowledge-transmitting grammar-based methods gained from their own learning experience 4) Test-driven

Driven by the central government, all levels of ELT in China from primary to tertiary, have experienced a variety of changes, ranging from revamped curricula and tests to reformed teacher training and teaching methodologies. Despite this, many studies (e.g., Chen, 1988; Deng & Carless,

2009; Hu, 2002b; Hui, 1997; Ng & Tang, 1997; Rao, 1996; Zhang & Pei, 2005; Zhang, 2005) have shown that ELT and its associated revisions have not brought about fundamental changes, especially at the primary school level.

Primary English teachers face most of the challenges. Their limited English language proficiency constrains them from following the reforms, and little systematic professional in-service training has been provided for them. They struggle to implement the government requirements with the understanding of English language teaching they have gleaned from their own learning experience. The *NEC* has been implemented and syllabus reform has been carried out, to the extent that teachers teach according to their own understanding and their own learning experience.

The reformed curriculum showed educators the need to introduce systematic changes, and some educators began to advocate an immersion model for pre-primary and primary school English, pointing to its well-documented success in second language teaching (Cummins, 1987, 1995; Duff, 1997; Genesee, 1987; Lyster, 2008; Swain, 1984, 1996; Swain & Johnson, 1997; Swain & Lapkin, 1986).

1.2.5 The First English Immersion Program in China — the CCUEI

Since the late 1990s, English immersion program has been advocated by researchers and teachers in China. The first and the most influential immersion model was the "China-Canada Collaborative English Immersion (CCEI)" program (Qiang, 2000; Qiang & Zhao, 2000), which was renamed "China-Canada-United States Collaborative English Immersion (CCUEI)" program since 2002 with the experts from the US joining in. (Zhao & Qiang, 2002).

Led by Prof. Qiang of South China Normal University[1] and Prof. Siegel

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1 Before coming to South China Normal University, Prof. Qiang Haiyan taught in Shanxi Normal University. in Xi'an, where she was the key investigator of the immersion program in Xi'an.

of the University of British Columbia, Canada, the CCUEI (then called the CCEI) was firstly introduced in Xi'an in 1997 (Qiang, 2000; Qiang & Zhao, 2000). The program marked a departure from the Chinese context in English instruction and also showed the regional autonomy in education. In English immersion programs, English, as the medium of instruction, is taught through the integration with other content subjects. The aim is to fully develop the students' English language skills, increase their confidence in English language learning, enhance their written and spoken English proficiency, ensure satisfactory development in content-based learning, and improve their understanding of Western culture without sacrificing their knowledge of and appreciation for Chinese culture and identity (Qiang, 2000; Qiang & Zhao, 2000). The CCUEI program in Xi'an were both effective and successful (Fang, et al., 2001; Pei, 1998; Qiang, 2000; Qiang & Zhao, 2001b; Zhang & Pei, 2005; Zhao & Qiang, 2002) despite the fact that there were some controversial reports on the effectiveness of immersion programs (see Chapter 2 for more details), and English immersion programs were soon introduced into other cities in China (Liang, 2004; Qiang, 2000; Zhang & Yan, 2007; Zhao, Li, & Gao, 2006). However, as mentioned earlier, nearly all the studies focused on the effectiveness of immersion with an outcome-orientation. Very few researchers took a process-oriented approach to their research on the learning process in the CCUEI besides the researcher Pei (2007).

1.3 Aim of the Study and Research Questions

Rather than focusing on the macro-level effectiveness of immersion programs in China, this study examines how the students' activities and interaction at the micro-level mediate their peer talk in the learning process, as revealed by both in- and out-of-classroom data. It explores the interrelationships between student activity type and peer talk, the nature of activity and student agency, and forms of mediation in students' enactment of the mediational means. Implications can be drawn from the study for ELT in

China in general and English-immersion programs specifically. Its findings offer insights into activities and classroom interaction, especially students' and teachers' involvement in classroom activities in task-based language teaching and learning.

Grounded in sociocultural theory, activity theory in particular, this study focuses on student activities in their learning processes and explores how the activities mediate student peer talk in an English immersion context, in order to answer the following three research questions:

1) What is the nature of student activities in an English immersion context in China?

2) How do the activities in which the students are engaged mediate their peer talk?

3) What are the salient features of peer talk in student activities?

1.4 Significance of the Study

Student interaction has been of increasing interest to researchers over the last two decades, and the subject of numerous studies. For example, Swain and Lapkin (1998) have investigated the dialogue of "language-related episodes" (LREs) between two Grade 8 French immersion students jointly writing a story; Storch (2001, 2002) has identified four patterns of peer interaction through examining the equality and mutuality in interaction; Coughlan and Duff (1994) have examined the dynamics of student activities; Donato (1994) has re-examined five studies, concluding that student interaction creates a collective zone of proximal development (ZPD) in which they are both the novice and the expert; and Ohta (2001) has examined the students' learning processes in learning Japanese. As Thorne (2005) has pointed out, the nexus between sociocultural theories and analysis should be built by examining the interlocutors' discourses. Therefore, this study, by investigating student peer talk in their learning processes, should contribute to the understanding of student interaction from the sociocultural perspective.

As we can see, a great deal of research on the CCUEI has been done, most of which were outcome-oriented studies, focusing on the program effectiveness, while very few studies have examined the teaching and learning processes. As such, this study is significant for its examination of the learning processes in student-student peer interaction within the CCUEI in China. It examines the mediation of student activities in student peer talk from a sociocultural perspective, adapting Engestrom's (Engestrom, Miettinen, & Punamaki, 1999) activity theory as its framework, with the dialectical interaction among the activity components imbued in the investigation. According to sociocultural theories, cognition and knowledge are dialogically constructed (Lantolf, 2000c; Lantolf & Appel, 1994a; Lantolf & Beckett, 2009; Swain, Brooks & Tocalli-Beller, 2002; Vygotsky, 1978, 1981b, 1997; Wertsch, 1985). By examining the students' activities and interactions, this study will also enrich the field of interaction with an in-depth investigation.

Given that task-based language teaching is officially advocated in the guidelines to the *NEC*, this study, by examining the nature of student activities when performing tasks, contributes to both activity theory and task-based language teaching, and, by examining the features of peer talk, contribute to the research field of interaction and provide insights into ELT for both immersion and mainstream students.

1.5   Outline of the Thesis

Chapter one describes the research motivation and the research background of ELT in China, states the research aim and research questions of the current study, and presents the significance of the study.

Chapters Two and Three review the relevant literature, and present the study's theoretical orientation. Chapter Two provides an overall review of immersion education worldwide, beginning in Canada, and then reviews research studies on immersion in other Western countries. It ends with a review of English immersion in China, especially the CCUEI program. Chapter

Three first reviews the major research on interaction within the cognitive paradigm and the sociocultural theoretical paradigm. The role of tasks and activities in interaction studies is reviewed from psycholinguistic and sociocultual perspectives, followed by a review of peer talk. Research gaps are identified and a conceptual framework is developed. Chapter Four presents the methodological design of the study. The features of settings and the participants involved in the case study are depicted, after which data collection and analysis methods are discussed, with the trustworthiness of the study presented.

Chapters Five to Eight are about the results of the study. Chapter Five describes the study's context and its participants from the macro-level to the micro-level, offering detailed information about the setting, and the participants, as well as the changes and challenges facing the English immersion teacher(s). Chapter Six examines the student activity types and the features of student peer talk in an effort to reveal the interrelationships between them. Chapter Seven illustrates the dynamic and situated nature of activity in peer talk, as revealed in the students' emerging agency. Chapter Eight depicts the forms of mediations, with particular attention to the multidimensional nature of mediations in the students' enactment of mediational means in their activities.

Chapter Nine to Ten are concluding chapters. Chapter Nine provides a general discussion of the study's findings: the nature of student activities, the mediations of student activities in peer talk, and the salient features of peer talk. Chapter Ten provides the summary of the findings and states its theoretical and pedagogical implications. It also points out the study's limitations and indicates the directions for future research.

CHAPTER TWO

IMMERSION EDUCATION

The first and most influential English immersion program in China, the CCUEI, has adopted the Canadian immersion education model and contextualized it to Chinese English language teaching (Qiang, 2000; Qiang & Zhao, 2000; Qiang & Zhao, 2001b). In order to fully understand the CCUEI, this chapter briefly introduces the immersion education in Canada, reviews the relevant research studies on its expansion to other Western countries. After that, it reviews English immersion in China – the CCUEI program, and describes general challenges in immersion education.

2.1   Immersion Education in Canada ──────────

Immersion education in Canada expanded rapidly in the late 1960s, following the enactment of the Official Languages Act, which gave French the same rights and status as English in Parliament and in all services of the federal government (Johnson & Swain, 1997; Siegel, et al., 2009). Dissatisfied with the generally low quality of French language education, some parents pushed schools to make innovations in their teaching, leading to the creation of the St. Lambert French immersion class in Quebec in 1965 (Johnson & Swain, 1997; Siegel, et al., 2009). Thereafter, the term *immersion* was used to describe school

programs in Quebec, Canada, in which French was used to teach content subjects to English-speaking children (Cummins, 1995, 1998; Genesee, 1995; Johnson & Swain, 1997; Siegel, et al., 2009). The success of the original St. Lambert program, the strong perception of the potential economic, political and social value of proficiency in French (Swain & Johnson, 1997), and research and evaluation results (Lambert & Tucker, 1972) led to the expansion of immersion education across Canada in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

2.1.1 Definition of Immersion

Immersion is a form of bilingual education in which "the majority of the students receive part of their instruction through the medium of a second language and part through their first language" (Genesee, 1987, p.1). Terrell (1981) maintains that immersion programs create conditions for students similar to those for students who acquired their first language by creating the desire to use the immersion language in meaningful and interesting communication. According to Lightbown and Spada (2006), the high quality inputs in the immersion programs enhance the students' chances of internalizing the target language by using it as they would their first language.

2.1.2 Features of Immersion

The typical characteristic of immersion is to integrate the teaching of language, content, and culture without using students' first language (Francis & Reyhner, 2002; Reyhner, 1998). Although the purpose and types of immersion vary greatly, one salient feature of immersion is that a communicative approach is used to conduct the second/foreign language instruction (Met, 1998) and language use is stressed for meaningful communication in appropriate contexts in the language classroom (Brinton, Snow & Wesche, 2003; Genesee, 1995; Savignon, 1991a, 1991b; Snow, Met

& Genesee, 1989). By offering students authentic and meaningful learning, immersion programs mesh with the concept that language learning in children should be a systematic process that enhances both language use and language learning (Swain, 2000).

Bostwick (2004-2005) states that the four goals of immersion are to develop the L2 proficiency skills, ensure immersion students' develop the L1 competency and skills equal to those of the mainstream students, impart a mastery of content subjects, and improve the students' understanding of other cultures.

Johnson and Swain (1997, pp.6-8) summarize the key features[1] of immersion programs, emphasizing the additive and bilingual nature of their curricula and culture as core principles. Swain and Lapkin (2005) redefined some of these features based on their review of three important studies on the immersion programs in Canada. The immersion medium of instruction is referred to as the immersion language rather than the L2, as, for many students coming from an immigrant or multilingual background, the immersion medium for instruction may be their L3 or L4; overt support must be given, not only to the L1, but to all the home languages. As Swain and Lapkin (2005, p.172) have claimed, the classroom needs to recognize and reflect the students' native cultures, not just the L1 local culture. This redefinition shows the importance of taking changing contexts into account in research studies.

2.1.3 Varieties of Immersion Programs

Swain and Johnson (1997) point out that immersion programs can be

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1 Swain and Johnson (1997, pp. 6-8) summarize eight core features of the Canadian immersion programs as follows: the L2 is a medium of instruction; the immersion curriculum parallels the local L1 curriculum; overt support exists for the L1; the program aims for additive bilingualism; exposure to the L2 is largely confined to the classroom; students enter with similar (and limited) level of L2 proficiency; the teachers are bilingual; and the classroom culture is that of the local L1 community.

classified according to their differences in aims, socioeconomic contexts, and manner of implementation.

20   The medium of instruction for immersion programs can be any language chosen to be a second language. The aims of individual immersion program differ as follows: some target language proficiency for economic, political or social reasons; some pursue language support and language survival; and still, others reveal the power relations in the immersion language (Johnson & Swain, 1997). The implementation of the immersion programs varies according to their level, the extent of immersion, and the social context. According to Cummins (2000), immersion can begin in kindergarten ("early immersion"), Primary 4 or 5 ("middle immersion"), Junior Secondary Grade 7 ("late immersion"), or even at university level ("late, late" immersion) (Swain & Johnson, 1997). Based on the time allocated for immersion, Swain & Johnson (1997, p.9) categorize programs as either total (full) immersion or partial immersion. "Full" immersion means that the target language is the medium of instruction in 100 percent of the curriculum for one year or more years; and "partial" immersion means that 50 percent or less of the content subject instruction is conducted in the target language, the L2 (Cummins, 1995, 1998; Swain & Johnson 1997). Cummins (2000) further explains that depending on the linguistic and social context, immersion programs can be for majority-language students to learn a minority language, (e.g., French immersion program for students coming from the middle or upper-middle class background), for minority-language students to learn a majority language, (e.g., immersion for immigrants), or can be a two-way or dual immersion, with both parties benefiting from the language environment. No matter what purposes the French immersion programs were for in Canada, the learning and using of the immersion language were closely connected to the real life context, where the learners had the the chances of using the immersion language in their real life. This differs from the context of the CCUEI in China, as English in China is taught as a foreign language, which students learn and use only in the school setting, and not often in the real life context.

      Canadian immersion programs have been documented in many research studies (e.g., Cummins, 1995, 1998, 2008, 2009; Cummins & Swain, 1986; Day

& Shapson, 1996; Lapkin, 1998; Skutnabb-Kangas, 1995; Swain & Cummins, 2008), and their success has spawned imitations in other parts of the world (Bjorklund, 1997; Cummins, 1995, 1998, 2008; Cummins & Swain, 1986; de Courcy, 1997; Duff, 1997; Eng, Gun, & Sharpe, 1997; Johnson, 1997; Johnson & Swain, 1997; Met & Lorenz, 1997; Swain & Cummins, 2008; Swain & Johnson, 1997). The next section reviews studies on its expansion to other Western countries.

2.2 Immersion Education in Other Western Countries

Immersion Education has spread to other parts of the world due to its success in Canada, and the diversity of immersion programs can be observed in a variety of immersion programs which have emerged outside of Canada, with the time allocation ranging from partial to full immersion and the beginning age level varying from early to late (Cummins 1995, 1998, 2008), as defined in 2.1.3.

Duff's (1997) studies address late partial English immersion in Hungary, conducted against a backdrop of East European political and economic uncertainty. In English immersion programs involving early intensive English content-based instruction and extracurricular activities, immersion students on the whole achieved high levels of EFL proficiency. Similar to the immersion context in Canada, de Courcy and Berthold (1997) conducted immersion studies in Australia by presenting a case study of Benowa State High, site of the first immersion program in Queensland and later the model for immersion programs throughout that state. In the US, a three-year longitudinal study by Christian and associates (Christian, Howard & Loeb, 2000) of a Spanish-English two-way immersion program reports positive effects on the learners on both sides. Bae (2007) examines the students' writing ability which comprised coherence, grammar and content through story-composing, a performance-based narrative task across groups in a Korean-English Two-Way Immersion Program in Los Angeles Unified School District. Spezzini's (2004)

research examines students' English language use in a late English immersion program (12th Graders) at the American School of Asuncion in Asuncion, Paraguay. According to Bjorklund (1997), early Finnish immersion research mostly focuses on the students' achievements both in L1 and L2. Nearly all these immersion studies were conducted at the secondary level or university level, and very few studies of the immersion programs focused on the learners as young as those in the CCUEI in China.

2.3 English Immersion Program in China — the CCUEI

In addition to the research into the CCUEI program, other studies on English immersion in China have also been conducted such as Wang and Cui's (2006) examination of English immersion programs delivered to junior secondary students at a summer camp in 2005. That analysis shows that students' English proficiency in the four language skills improved greatly within a short time (one month). At the university level, Su and Chen (2007) examined an English immersion program that features computer-assisted autonomous learning in extracurricular activities, including news reporting, oral debating, group discussion and reading aloud, all in English. In this case, the immersion students outperformed their non-immersion counterparts in their CET Band 4 with a pass rate of 96.55 percent (Su & Chen, 2007). Positive results were also reported at this level by Liu (2005) and Yang (2005a, 2005b) and many other researchers. As the current study is contextualized in the CCUEI, it will focus on research about the CCUEI program.

As the first and most influential English immersion program in China, the CCUEI began in Xi'an in 1997 at preschool and primary school levels, focusing on young learners, as introduced in Section 1.2.5. It aimed not only to promote students' learning of English, but also to enhance students' understanding and appreciation of other cultures. By integrating content subjects into the English language teaching, it was expected to create natural

conditions for children to use the target language for learning (Qiang, 2000; Qiang & Zhao, 2000; Qiang & Zhao, 2001b). Content-based learning was supposed to motivate children to master the second language and offer them broad and varied situations to use it in meaningful communications. It was anticipated that offering more exposure to the target language and more opportunities for communication would lead to higher levels of language proficiency (Qiang, 2000; Qiang & Zhao, 2000; Qiang & Zhao, 2001b). The following section reviews the characteristics of the CCUEI and the research on it.

2.3.1 Characteristics of the CCUEI

The CCUEI is modeled on the Canadian immersion pattern, which was a second language situation, and contextualized into the Chinese context (Qiang, 2000; Qiang & Zhao, 2000; Qiang & Zhao, 2001b), which was a fully foreign language context. According to Qiang and Zhao (2001a), English immersion in China integrates English language instruction with certain content-based subjects in which the teacher only speaks the second language. English is thus both the teaching content and the teaching medium. The students are immersed in English for about half of their school time or less in such subjects as Social Science, Living Science, etc.

Collaboration among immersion teachers, immersion educators and researchers is a core characteristic of the CCUEI; key members of the CCUEI program, researchers and educators in pedagogy work closely with English language teachers, to put the principles of immersion into practice. The researchers, in addition to providing the teachers with theoretical training, regularly observe and comment upon their classroom teaching and discuss ways of improving it. With immersion teachers working closely with the immersion program researchers and educators, English immersion in Xi'an was seen as successful (Fang, et al., 2001; Pei, 1998; Qiang, 2000; Qiang & Zhao, 2001b; Zhang & Pei, 2005; Zhao & Qiang, 2002), and the program quickly expanded to other cities.

The immersion programs differed from the mainstream schools in both curriculum and pedagogy. In the CCUEI curriculum, some content subjects were taught in English instead of in Chinese, while the mainstream schools were bound to the all-Chinese government-guided local curriculum. In addition, while the mainstream classroom teaching of English, constrained by its focus on linguistic aspects, (or more narrowly on lexical items and syntax) was characterized by teacher-dominated, knowledge-transmitting, whole class interaction (Deng & Carless, 2009; Zhang & Pei, 2005; Zhang, 2005), pedagogy in English immersion classes was featured with students actively participating in the learning activities, which showed the attempts at integration of linguistic and sociocultural elements with educational elements (e.g., needs, goals, motivation, learners, teaching materials and teaching methods) (Johnson, 1989; White, 1988).

2.3.2   Research on the CCUEI Program

Since its inception in 1997 in Xi'an, a great deal of research has been conducted into the CCUEI (e.g., Fang, et al., 2001; Pei, 1998; Qiang, 2000; Qiang & Zhao, 2001b; Zhang & Pei, 2005; Zhao & Qiang, 2002). Positive findings have included students' learning of language forms and language use, and the curricular implications thereof for teachers' instruction.

English immersion students seem to develop greater mastery of English language forms including word-reading, vocabulary and phonetic awareness than do the non-immersion mainstream students. Zhang and Yan's (2007) study of Beijing kindergarten children compares the effectiveness of three models of early word-reading (traditional international phonetic reading, somewhat innovative whole-word reading, and natural letter-word reading, which is a feature of English immersion teaching) and it shows that the early word-reading ability of immersion children who practiced natural letter-word reading was the best among these three groups. Qiang and Zhao (2000) state that children in Xi'an learned to guess meanings based on context in the first month of immersion, to imitate the teacher in the second month, and

to respond actively to the teacher in the third month. Within one year's time, the children had a vocabulary of 400 active and 600 passive words. Chi and Zhao (2004, p.17), in their six-year research experiment involving English immersion elementary school in Xi'an, claim that the immersion students had better phonetic awareness than the non-immersion students, and had developed "a vocabulary of around 2000 words and 600 commonly-used sentences, and could write about 300 to 500 words to describe pictures" after six years of English immersion.

English immersion students also seem to develop better English language listening and speaking skills. Chi and Zhao's (2004) study shows that the immersion students in Xi'an could communicate freely with native English-speaking teachers, while Qiang and Zhao (2000) report that, after one year of immersion, students showed better comprehension than their non-immersion Grade 5 counterparts when they listened to the same English stories. In a comparative study conducted in a kindergarten in Shanghai, Zhao and his associates (2007) compared an English immersion program with two other English teaching models — one that taught English as a subject, and one that taught English as a subject but used English as a medium of instruction. Based on tests involving Yes-No questions, WH-questions, ok-tag questions[1] and short answer questions, the immersion children displayed superior English language skills and outperformed the other children when answering questions independently. English immersion experiments in kindergartens in Xi'an show that children tried to use English to communicate spontaneously (Zhao, 2004); when waiting for the lift, one child said, "just a moment", while another child, noticed that a number of teachers were sitting in on the class, commented, "there are so many teachers in our classroom". Clearly, the immersion children were using English to communicate.

English immersion students seem to display better cognitive development

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1 As the children were beginners with kindergarten-level knowledge of English language, the teacher used questions tagged with an "ok" in the rising inflection. The researchers categorized these as "ok-tag" questions.

in social relations and attention, and show greater interest in and a more positive attitude towards English. Liang's (2004, 2005a, 2005b, 2005c) studies on English immersion in Wuhan show that the immersion students had better social communicative competence and showed more concern and intentionality about the things and events around them. Using quantitative research methods, Zhao and his associates (Zhao, Pei, Liu & Siegel, 2006) examine the language cognitive development, study attitude and English language use of immersion kindergarten children in Xi'an. The children were tested on their phonetic awareness, working memory and sentence-making, and CHILDES[1] – a specialized test of children's spoken interaction – was used to calculate the turn-taking frequency, vocabulary and discourse used. Results show that the immersion students performed much better in the tests than the control group did, and participated positively and actively in the English learning activities (Zhao, et al., 2006).

Siegel's (Siegel, et al., 2009) and Knell's (Knell, et al., 2007) research study focuses on the L1 (Chinese) and the L2 (English) performance such as word identification, phonological awareness, vocabulary, letter naming, and oral proficiency among 183 Xi'an immersion students. The results of the tests show that the immersion students scored much higher than their counterparts of non-immersion students.

In addition to studies on students' learning, research was also conducted into curriculum design and teachers' instruction strategies in the CCUEI. Pei (2007) conducted case studies in Xi'an at primary and kindergarten levels on the teachers' scaffolding such as IRF sequence in classroom interaction, and found that the sequencing of activities and the modified teachers' follow-up patterns in their scaffolding enhanced students' participation in the teacher–student activities. Di (2001) and Gao (2004) compare immersion and traditional English language teaching in China, both finding English

1 CHILDES stands for Child Language Data Exchange System, which was founded by Brian Mac Whinney and Catherine Snow and is located at Carnegie University (Pittsburgh). It is the child language component of the Talk Bank System which is a system for sharing and studying conversational interactions.

immersion to be more effective based on the students' achievement. Li (2003) reports positive results with English immersion among Hui minority children in Wuzhong, Ningxia Province. In addition, Fu's (2007) 12-week case study of a kindergarten immersion program in Dalian maintains that English immersion was effective in terms of curriculum design and teaching strategy. Table 2.1 outlines the research on the CCUEI.

Table 2. 1　Research on the CCUEI with Positive Findings

Source	Context	Focus
Qiang & Zhao (2000)	P in Xi'an	– comprehension of meaning through communication, vocabulary gaining ∗ language use and language form
Di (2001)	K in Xi'an	– the effectiveness of immersion ∗ pedagogy and curriculum
Li (2003)	K in Ningxia	– implications of teachers' instruction ∗ pedagogy and curriculum
Zhao (2004)	K in Xi'an	– speaking ability (able to use English spontaneously) ∗ language use
Chi & Zhao (2004)	P in Xi'an	– phonetic awareness, vocabulary gaining (of 2000 words, 600 sentences), writing ability (able to write 300–500 words to describe the pictures) speaking ability (able to communicate freely with native teachers) ∗ language form and language use
Liang (2004) (2005)	K in Wuhan P in Wuhan	– social communicative competence and intentionality – language (L1 and L2), arithmetic, creativity ∗ cognitive development
Gao (2004)	K in Shanghai	– comparison of instruction designs and models ∗ pedagogy and curriculum
Zhao, et al. (2006)	K in Xi'an	– phonetic awareness, CHILDES test for spoken interaction ∗ language form, language use and cognitive development

(to be continued)

Source	Context	Focus
Zhao, et al. (2007)	K in Shanghai	– students' output (able to answer questions independently), ∗ language use
Zhang & Yan (2007)	K in Beijing	– early word-reading ability through comparing 3 models: international phonetic reading, whole-word reading and letter-word reading (adopted in immersion) ∗ language form
Pei (2007)	K and O in Xi'an	– teachers' scaffolding in classroom activities, sequencing of activities, modified follow-up patterns ∗ teachers' instruction strategies
Fu (2007)	K in Dalian	– curriculum design, teaching strategies, teaching materials ∗ pedagogy
Knell, et al. (2007) Siegel, et al. (2009)	P in Xi'an	– the students' performance in tests in both L1 and L2 word identification, phonological awareness, vocabulary, letter naming, oral proficiency ∗ language form, language use and pedagogical use

Notes: K= kindergarten   P = primary school   ∗= focus

Not all researchers, however, report on positive findings of immersion programs, with some noting challenges and problems in some instances. The next section addresses challenges facing immersion education both in and outside of China.

2.4   Challenges to Immersion Education Worldwide

The positive findings within immersion education notwithstanding, some significant challenges were identified as well. Some researchers, for example, contend that immersion may not effectively develop students' linguistic competence. Yu and Atkinson (1988) have examined China's Hong Kong secondary school English immersion students' linguistic competence

based on case studies and error analysis of student compositions. The results show that the majority of the students scored below average in English composition and average in Chinese composition. This leads the authors to argue that English-medium education in China's Hong Kong was ineffective, as many students "lacked communicative competence when writing in English" (Yu & Atkinson, 1988, p.267). Cummins (1998) states that in Canada, even though immersion students displayed high reading ability, they made more significant errors in grammar than did native French speakers, much as what Lambert and Tucker (1972) had reported earlier in Canada. Yang (2005a, 2005b) reports in his study that students with lower English proficiency could not follow the immersion class routine and could not participate in classroom activities.

In addition, some researchers argue that immersion students' language proficiency is not well developed. Spezzini's (2004) study shows that, while the immersion students' language proficiency exceeded that of non-immersion students, their listening, speaking and writing ability did not equal that of native English speakers of the same age or grade; moreover, immersion students were less accurate in vocabulary and grammar than students who had been taught in the traditional model (Kinberg, 2001, cited in Huang, 2004, p.12).

Moreover, there is some concern about the impact of immersion on the students' identity. He (2003) and Cao (2003) claim that bilingualism may weaken the status of L1, and thus endanger Chinese students' identity. "L1 is not only the tool to transmit knowledge and information, but the symbol of recognition, the carrier of its national culture and the support for the national affection." (He, 2003, p.39) The two researchers worry that immersion may cause students to lose or become confused about their own identity and culture.

Furthermore, a lack of qualified teachers and teaching resources presents a great challenge to the implementation of immersion. According to Duff (1997), problems have emerged in immersion programs in Hungary, such as increased difficulty in retaining qualified teachers, a lack of quality instruction resources, a lack of clear communication between the native English teachers and their students, and worries by the parents that the Ministry of Education

might end their support for these programs. Some immersion programs were unsuccessful and had to be canceled, for which the school, the teachers, and especially the students paid a heavy price.

Similar problems have been encountered in the CCUEI in China. Pei (1998) and Zhao (2004) state that a lack of qualified bilingual teachers, resources for instruction and effective ways of assessing the immersion students' proficiency puts the CCUEI in a difficult situation, as the immersion students needed to take the same public examination as do the mainstream students (Chi & Zhao, 2004; Wei, 2004; Wei & Lu, 2003; Zhang & Pei, 2005).

2.5　Research Gap

In sum, most of the research on the CCUEI has, to date, focused on the effectiveness of English immersion, stressing students' achievement. Pei's (2007) seems to be the first process-oriented study, focusing on teacher-student interactions, in particular the sequencing of activities and the teachers' follow-up patterns in their scaffolding for the students in their learning. The current study also takes a process-oriented approach, but examines a different aspect from Pei's (2007) study: the student-student interaction in student activities in an English immersion context, such as the interrelationships between student activity and peer talk, the nature of student activity, and the multidimensional mediations in student activities, (which is based on the sociocultural theory that students enhance their problem solving in their zone of proximal development under adult guidance or in collaboration with capable peers). It may help to fill the research gap on immersion students' activities in their learning processes within the CCUEI context in China. Research on the teaching and learning processes provides valuable insights into the "how" and the "why" of effective teaching and learning in the implementation of the immersion programs, so as to avoid the blind modeling of positive research report without knowledge about the implementation processes.

2.6 Summary

This chapter has located the current study in the literature on immersion education, and identified existing research gaps in immersion education, specifically regarding the CCUEI — the first and most influential of English immersion program in China. As the CCUEI adopted an existing Canadian immersion model to suit the Chinese context, immersion education in Canada was briefly reviewed, and its definition, characteristics and varieties described. The success of immersion education in Canada led to its adoption in other countries, including China, where it was incarnated as the CCUEI. A great deal of research has been conducted within and on the CCUEI, the majority of which reporting positive results. This has largely focused on the young learners' learning outcomes and the effectiveness of the English immersion, albeit with different foci, which indicates the necessity of researching the processes of teaching and learning within the CCUEI. The problems with and challenges facing immersion education were also reviewed. The next chapter will address the interaction between cognitive and sociocultural paradigms, focusing on activity and peer talk.

CHAPTER THREE

INTERACTION, ACTIVITY AND PEER TALK

This chapter reviews the relevant literature on interaction from two different theoretical paradigms: a cognitive perspective, including Long's (1981, 1983) "interaction modification" for comprehensible input, Pica's (1988, 1994) negotiation of meaning, Swain's (1985, 1993, 1995) output hypothesis, and a sociocultural perspective, focusing on Vygotskian key concepts and research studies. Next, the role of tasks and activities is reviewed from a psycholinguistic perspective and a sociocultural perspective, after which the chapter reviews, from a sociocultural perspective, studies on peer talk, which is regarded as revealing the nexus between theory and practice (Thorne, 2005). The conceptual framework is developed after the literature review and research gaps are identified, before the chapter concludes with a summary.

3.1 Cognitive and Sociocultural Paradigms in Interaction

Interaction has long been an interest of researchers, and has been researched from various perspectives, either cognitive like Piaget's or sociocultural like Vygotsky's. Piaget (1955, 1962) outlined several principles for cognitive-structure construction, which mark the earliest contributions to the

theories of interaction. According to Piaget (1955), the child interacts with his or her environment, using whatever mental map he or she has built up; this interaction is from the individual to the social, from cognition to environment. Vygotsky's sociocultural view differs from Piaget's in that Vygotsky views interaction as moving from the social to the individual. According to Vygotsky (1981b, p.163),

> any function in the child's cultural development appears twice, or on two planes, first it appears between people as an inter-psychological category, and then within the child as an intrapsychological category. This is equally true with regard to voluntary attention, logical memory, and the formation of concepts, and the development of volition.

In Vygotsky's view, interaction is socially rooted and is the cause and source of development, taking place first interpersonally, and then intra-personally.

3.1.1 Interaction within the Cognitive Paradigm

As an important factor in second language acquisition (Clark, 2007; Hall & Verplaetse, 2000b; Mackey, 2007; Philip & Duchesne, 2008; van Lier, 1988; Watanabe & Swain, 2007), interaction has been much researched from a traditional cognitive perspective. As Hall (Hall & Verplaetse, 2000a) points out, language is traditionally viewed as a separate external linguistic system, and learning as mastering the structures of the system through the preexisting mental cognition. This traditional perspective greatly impacts the interaction research. For example, Ellis (1999a), adopting a cognitive perspective on interaction, maintains that, for a person to interact interpersonally, cognitive interaction must first occur within that person (intrapersonal interaction).

Many studies on second language interaction have been conducted from a traditional cognitive perspective, with different foci, varying from comprehensible input to comprehensible output, the two ends of information processing. The focus of learning shifted from "self-repair" to "other repair"

(Schegloff, Jefferson & Sacks, 1977), from internal mechanisms such as Chomsky's (1965, 1968) language acquisition device to an acknowledgement of the role of external contexts, such as learners' interactions with other people (see, for example, Ellis, 1984, 1985a, 1994, 1999a, 2000; Gass, 1997; Hatch, 1978b; Long, 1981, 1983; Pica, 1992). Long's (1981, 1983) "interactional modification" for comprehensible input, Pica's (1994) negotiation of meaning, and Swain's (1985, 1995) output hypothesis all contribute to the field of interaction in second language acquisition.

3.1.1.1 The Interaction Hypothesis (IH)

Hatch's (1978a, 1978b) interaction process and Long's (1981, 1983) interactional modification form what has been called the interaction hypothesis, which is, in turn, greatly influenced by Krashen's (1985) comprehensible input hypothesis. According to Ellis (1999a, 1999b), an earlier version of the interaction hypothesis (IH) was tightly connected to the input hypothesis, which holds that adequate input can enable learners to acquire the target language effectively (Krashen, 1985). Ellis (1999b) also regards interaction as one of the three ways in which input can be made comprehensible[1].

Hatch (1978a, 1978b) argues in favor of learning through interaction (cited in Ellis, 1999a, p.3), stating that, through interaction, students learn what is new to them. According to Long (1981), interactional modification can make input comprehensible; his "interactional modification" for comprehensible input (1983) forms the basis of the interaction hypothesis. His later redefinition added new elements such as environmental contributions, selective attention to and negative feedback on the interaction hypothesis (Long, 1996), thus connecting interaction modification and linguistic environment. According to Long's (Long, 1985; Long & Porter, 1985) interaction hypothesis, using the target language in interactions strongly facilitates language acquisition.

Research findings seem to support the interaction hypothesis (e.g., Mackey 1999, p.565; Pica, Young and Doughty, 1987). However, Ellis (2003, p.79)

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1 The other two ways are simplified input and the learner's use of context.

points out the restrictiveness of its input-driven orientation, which focuses on exchanges between less and more competent speakers. Verplaetse (1993) holds that native speaker (NS) modifications may hinder the non-native speaker (NNS) in their attempts to participate in the communication. According to Long and Sato (1983), modified foreigner talk may not reflect real life interaction; in such situations, Pica (Pica, 1988; Pica, Doughty & Young, 1986) argues that one should investigate the NNS's role in the interaction and the negotiation of meaning[1].

3.1.1.2 Negotiation of Meaning (NM)

Pica, Doughty and Young (1986) argue that SLA research on NNS's role in interaction should shift its focus by looking beyond the comprehension of input to examine the process of making input comprehensible. Pica (1992, 1994, 1996) maintains that negotiation of meaning provides learners with opportunities to reflect on their own use of L2 and facilitates comprehension; negotiation of meaning here refers to interactions through which learners and their interlocutors modify their language phonologically, lexically and morpho-syntactically, in order to achieve mutual understanding in their communication (Pica, 1992, 1994, 1996). Negotiation helps learners not only to comprehend messages that are encoded in the phonological, lexical, and syntactic forms and features, but also to get feedback. Negotiations also provide learners with opportunities to produce output, by prompting them to monitor, manipulate, and modify their output (Pica, 1994, 1996).

Negotiation of meaning is an effective way of enhancing both NS-NNS and NNS-NNS interaction (Pica, 1988, 1992, 1996; Gass & Varonis, 1985; Pica, Doughty & Young, 1986). Hall and Verplaetse (2000a, p.4) highlight the essential role of negotiation of meaning in maximizing comprehensible input in the acquisition process. At the same time, however, Pica (1996, p.255) points out the rarity of being able to employ negotiation in classroom and in language teaching situations. While Pica (1992, 1994, 1996) proposes negotiation of

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1 Negotiation of meaning and negotiation for meaning are used interchangeably by some researchers and in the current study.

meaning in interaction, Swain (1985) maintains that enabling non-native speakers to produce more target-like outputs may lead to successful second language acquisition.

3.1.1.3 The Output Hypothesis (OH)

Swain (1995, p.98) posits the need for research focused on output, "output pushes learners to process language more than input", which forces learners to exert more mental effort to create linguistic forms and meanings, to reach the communication goal, and "to move from the semantic, open-ended, strategic processing prevalent in comprehension to the complete grammatical processing needed for accurate production" (Swain, 2000, p.99). Although the output hypothesis holds that producing the target language enhances fluency and accuracy, Ellis (1988) maintains that fluency does not necessarily mean accuracy; accordingly, Swain (1995) proposes three further functions for learner output, stating that these three functions of output[1] have the potential of "promoting accuracy" (Swain, 1995, p.141).

As they are at opposite ends of the information processing (Ellis, 2003; Hall & Verplaetse, 2000a), neither modification of input nor of output provides a holistic picture of L2 development, where discourse or sociolinguistic competence in language use is underemphasized (Hall & Verplaetse, 2000a, p.6). As Donato (1988) points out, the social context, which should be more

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1 The first function was the "noticing or triggering" function or what might be referred to as the conscious-raising role. In producing the target language, the second language learners may notice some of their linguistic problems and "it may make them aware of something they need to find out about their L2" (Swain, 1995, p.129). The second was the hypothesis-testing function. Second language learners may try out new forms and structures of the target language through using the language output such as saying or writing something "to see what works and what does not" (Swain, 1995, p.132). And the third was the metalinguistic function, or what might be referred to as its "reflective" role (Swain, 1995, p.128). Second language learners reflected consciously about the form of the target language through metalinguistic output, trying to "reconstruct the text as accurately as possible, with respect to content and grammar" (Swain, 1995, p.133). Research findings show that the "reflective" role of output contributed to second language development through metalinguistic talk between peers.

dynamic, is impoverished and undervalued by conceiving of interaction as the simple processing of input and output information. Savignon (1991a) takes a similar view, stating that stable and constant meaning indexes the missing nature of meaning making.

In sum, interaction from the cognitive perspective emphasizes the "conduit" function of learning, stressing the modification and comprehension of input through interaction, the negotiation of meaning, and pushing output to enhance accuracy and fluency. As Kramsch (2000, 2002) points out, the traditional view is that language and language acquisition occupy two separate planes between the individual and the social. In language and language acquisition, psychological processes are thought to be located "in the head" while social processes and communication, together with language use, are thought to be located "in its social context" (Kramsch, 2000, p.133), and cognitive self-development as the first interaction (Ellis, 2003). However, such a perspective fails to address the social roots of interaction, and for this reason, the current study does not adopt the cognitive perspective, but the sociocultural one. The following section will review interaction from a sociocultural perspective.

3.1.2 Interaction within the Sociocultural Theoretical Paradigm

According to sociocultural theorists, interaction is socially rooted, and social interaction causes learning (Vygotsky, 1978, 1987). From this perspective, mediation in the context of social interactions through goal-directed activity, is the major determinant of children's development. Children acquire the language, regulate their behavior, develop their thinking and enhance the development of their higher mental processes in the zone of proximal development (ZPD) (Vygotsky, 1978, 1987). This view casts much light on student interactions in the current study, which accordingly grounds itself in sociocultural theories, particularly in activity theory (Engestrom, et al., 1999; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006; Leont'ev, 1978; Leont'ev, 1981; Vygotsky, 1978, 1987; Wertsch, 1985, 1991, 1998). Vygotsky's core concepts about language and language learning lay the basis for

the study. In this section, language and language learning are reviewed from a sociocultural viewpoint, with the introduction of the key terms such as the ZPD, *38* mediation and internalization. This is followed by a review of research studies explaining the features of these concepts.

3.1.2.1 The Vygotskian Key Concepts about Language and Language Learning

Language and Language learning. Sociocultural and cognitive theories perceive language and language learning from different points of view. Language, more than just a means of communication (Ellis, 1994), is the most important cultural tool, and carries with it the characteristics that mediate the human mind. It is also the most important psychological tool, and mediates human mental activity in learning and in participating in various sociocultural activities (Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky (1981b, p.136) draws an analogy between the role of technical and mechanical tools and that of psychological tools, meaning cultural artifacts such as language, mnemonic techniques, algebraic symbols, diagrams, and schemes, all of which serve as mediational means of the individual's mental activity (Lantolf & Appel, 1994a, p.8). Psychological tools, also called symbolic tools or signs (Lantolf, 2000a), are internally oriented, and cause "changes in the behavior of other people or oneself" (Vygotsky, 1978, p.53). As Lantolf and Appel (1994a) maintain, tools that are created under specific cultural and historical conditions carry with them the characteristics of the culture by showing its state and level of labor activity. Supporting these views, Mercer (1995, 2000) claims that language is a tool people use collectively to think together, to make sense of experience, and to solve problems, while Gee (1992) states that language is both a product and a process of social interaction, when examined from the sociocultural perspective.

Language learning is a process that is first social, then individual (Mitchell & Myles, 1998, p.147; Vygotsky, 1978, 1981a). Situated in social interaction, language learning is co-constructed through scaffolding and the mediation of interaction in the learning process (Lantolf & Appel, 1994a, p.9). Second language acquisition is similarly a socioculturally mediated process rooted

in social interaction (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006; Vygotsky, 1978). According to Patthey-Chavez and Clare (1996, p.517), to learn to use a language means to make appropriate choices about the language, to accept the rules and values which are hidden behind the language and originate in the larger community, and to mediate the social relations implicit in the language. Sociocultural theories contribute new meanings to interaction by defining language and language learning in a broader social and cultural sense, by proposing core concepts in learning and in social interaction, such as the ZPD, regulation, mediation and internalization. To facilitate understanding of this research study, the key concepts and terms are elaborated below.

Regulation and the zone of proximal development (ZPD). As mentioned above, sociocultural theories maintain that language learning is interactional, moving from the social to the individual. Learning creates the ZPD, the space in which the learner achieves a new potential level of development through mediation and regulation (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006; Vygotsky, 1978), in a process that develops dynamically and transforms the social context (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006; Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky (1978, pp.85-86) defines the ZPD as "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers"; and the actual developmental level as "the level of development of a child's mental functions that has been established as a result of certain already *completed* development cycles" (emphasis in the original). Collaboration with more capable peers (Vygotsky, 1978) may cause transformation in the process of internalization (the internal reconstruction of external operations). Other researchers further explore the concept of the ZPD: for example, Ohta (2001) extends the ZPD for L2 learning to focus on interaction and collaboration in second language acquisition; DiCamilla and Anton (1997) stress students' assisted support (scaffolding) within the ZPD; and Lantolf (2000a, 2000b, 2000c; 1994b) elaborates further on the dialectical relations of the dialogic interaction and the transformation from other-regulation to self-regulation, and from the inter-mental plane to intra-mental plane in the ZPD (Lantolf

& Appel, 1994a).

Language learning through social interaction offers students opportunities
to develop through three stages of regulation: object-regulation, other-
regulation and self-regulation (Vygotsky, 1978). In the early stages of their
mental development, children can only pursue independent actions where
their environment has a direct impact (Wertsch, 1979), referred to as object-
regulation. At the next stage of mental growth, appropriate linguistically-
mediated assistance from a parent or from older or more capable peers enables
the child to accomplish certain tasks, a condition known as other-regulation.
The last stage of mental development is self-regulation, which is self-realized
through appropriation and internalization; it indicates a child's control over his
own behavior in carrying out independent decontextualized actions (Lantolf,
2000a, 2000b; Lantolf & Appel, 1994a). Students progress through the stages
within their ZPD in their learning, as shown in Figure 3.1.
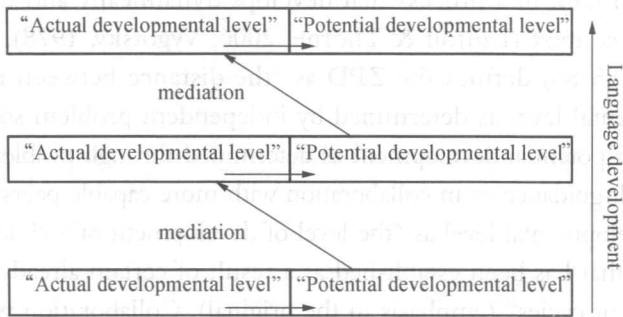
Figure 3.1 *Development of the ZPD (Based on Lantolf and Thorne, 2006; Vygotsky, 1978)*

Mediation and internalization. According to sociocultural theories, the
human mind is mediated by sociocultural artifacts (language in particular);
at the same time and in much the same way, it internalizes the language and
transforms its nature, which is not static but dynamic, and imbued with
social and cultural norms and values (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006; Vygotsky,
1978). Mediation is the establishing of a connection between the self and the
outside world (Vygotsky, 1978) and the process through which "culturally

constructed artifacts, concepts, and activities" are employed "to regulate (i.e., gain voluntary control over and transform) the material world or their own and each other's social and mental activities" (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006, p.79). According to Vygotsky (1978), human beings use both physical and symbolic tools to mediate and transform their relationships with those around them. Sign systems include language, writing, number system, etc.; like tool systems, sign systems are created by society, embedded with cultural and social changes over time, and are transformed when the individual internalizes "culturally produced sign systems" (Vygotsky, 1978, p.7). Essential to a child's cognitive development is speech mediation through interaction, because their perception of the world unfolds and unpacks in the close relationship between language and social perspectives (Vygotsky, 1978).

Mediation results in children's internalization of language, knowledge and culture. According to Vygotsky (1978, p.56), internalization is "the internal reconstruction of an external operation", and is characterized by reconstruction, transformation, and a long series of developmental events (Vygotsky, 1978, pp.56-57). Lantolf (2000a) also emphasizes the goal-directedness and social origin of internalization. The social context functions as an important element in internalization, as in Donato's (1994) explanation of the novice's internalization of the experienced individual's strategic guiding processes.

3.1.2.2 Research Revealing the Vygotskian Key Concepts

The following paragraphs discuss research into the Vygotskian key concepts, including the dynamic deployment of regulation in the ZPD; goal-directed, scaffolded participation in interaction; the mediation of interaction; and private speech as the indicator of internalization of learning in activity.

The dynamic deployment of regulation in the ZPD. The transition from object-regulation to other-regulation and self-regulation in the ZPD is dynamic and fluid, and is decided by many factors. According to a Vygotskian view of language, the purpose of investigation in dialogic communication is to discover the locus of control (Ahmed, 1994). Ahmed

(1994) analyzes the dyads of a native and a non-native speaker of English, taken from a larger study (Ahmed, 1988) on task-based dyadic conversation in solving puzzles. The results show that, when faced with extremely difficult tasks, even a native speaker "may exhibit object-regulation as reflected through deployment of specific features of his or her linguistic system" (Ahmed, 1988, p.170). The same speaker may use both object- and self-regulation in the same task, and linguistic form can function dynamically, serving more than one function.

Goal-directed, scaffolded participation in interaction. Donato (2000, p.46), after reviewing five studies from the sociocultural perspective, examining psychological, linguistic, social and individual elements in L2 classrooms, and understanding "the powerful relationship between social interaction, social context, and language", argues that goal-directed, scaffolded interaction encourages students to be active agents in L2 learning, and to show their values, assumptions and obligations in the interaction. According to him, language learning in sociocultural theories is a developmental process of mediation through semiotic resources generated in the classroom, where instruction is treated as essential to second language development (Donato, 2000; Wertsch, 1991, 1998).

The mediation of interaction. Collaborative dialogue mediates students' language learning. Swain (2000, p.97) has redefined her output hypothesis based on a review of three studies on collaborative dialogue that emphasize collaborative dialogue as "the knowledge-building (linguistic knowledge construction in SLA), the outstripped competence from the performance, the amalgamation of language use and language learning, the mediation of language learning through language use and the cognitive and social characteristic as activity". Kowal and Swain's (1997) study depicts the mediation of dialogic interaction in participants' understanding and solutions. Holunga's (1994) study explores the impact of verbalization of meta-cognitive strategies on advanced adult second language learners of English by comparing three groups of learners. His study illustrates the role of collaborative dialogue in mediating language learning through strategies such as predicting, planning, monitoring, and evaluation (Brown & Palincsar, 1981). Similar results are

reported in Swain and Lapkin's (1998) study of Grade 8 French immersion students, in which language form was focused on and analyzed. As Swain (2000) puts it, the dialogue between the two students, Doug and Kathy, provided both of them opportunities to use the language and reflect on their own language use.

Private speech as the indicator of internalization of learning in activity. Private speech serves as an indicator of internalization in interaction. Private speech, which has been interpreted in classic Piagetian theory as evidence of children's "incapacity" (Mitchell & Myles, 1998, p.148), is regarded as social and interpersonal in a Vygotskian view, a sign of advancement in the transitional move from other-regulation to self-regulation. Vygotsky (1978) found in his study of psychological development that children used egocentric speech (private speech) to gain control over task performance, and that private speech played a crucial role in enhancing both the intellectual development and the psychological independence. Bivens and Berk's (1990) longitudinal study of elementary school students on their use of task relevant private speech suggested the correlation between the use of private speech and the students' eventual academic achievement. Frawley and Lantolf's (1985) and McCafferty's (1994) studies showed similar findings that L2 proficiency was related to the use of private speech, pointing out that private speech indicated internalization.

These studies revealed the dynamic nature of students' development within the ZPD, showing the importance of collaborative dialogue in task performance and arguing for the goal-directed interaction in participating in activities. However, more research is needed on the learning process from the students' perspective, which is what the current study aims at — examining the students' activities from the sociocultural perspective by providing more of an emic point of view. From the sociocultural perspective, language learning is mediated in social interaction, in which tasks and activities play an important role for both researchers and teachers. The next section elaborates on the role of tasks and activities in language learning, from both a psycholinguistic and a socio-cultural perspective.

3.2   The Role of Tasks and Activities in Interaction

Tasks and activities elicit students' language use, and are employed by both teachers and researchers (Ellis, 2003). For researchers, tasks and activities are used to document learners' language development, while teachers use tasks and activities as opportunities for learners to develop the L2 language proficiency through communication (Ellis, 2003). Therefore, the overall goal of tasks and activities in both research and teaching practice is to encourage the use of language for developing language proficiency (Ellis, 2003). The current study takes Coughlan and Duff's definition about "task" and "activity", where "task" refers to the plan, while "activity" refers to the performance of the task (Coughlan & Duff, 1994).

3.2.1   Tasks and Activities from a Psycholinguistic Perspective

Tasks are advocated in language instruction to enhance learning (Ellis, 2003; Long, 1985; Long & Crookes, 1992; Skehan, 1996, 2003; Willis, 1996) and create more interaction (Gong & Luo, 2003). Kumaravadivelu (personal communication)[1] explains that people use the terms "task" and "activity" almost interchangeably, and that there is no difference between the two. Ellis (personal communication)[2] uses the term "activity" to cover both tasks

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1 The author contacted Prof. Kumaravadivelu through email on May 19, 2008 about the confusion of these two terms. He kindly replied, noting that "we have in our field several terminological confusions and this is one of them. People use the terms almost interchangeably."

2 The author contacted Prof. Ellis through email on May 20, 2008 about the confusion of these two terms. He kindly replied as follows: "The problem is that the terms 'task' and 'activity' are used with different meanings by different researchers and teacher educators. The author uses the term 'activity' as a general cover term for both 'exercises' and 'tasks' ".

and exercises. As tasks and activities seem to be treated as synonyms from a cognitive perspective, the review in this section will mainly focus on tasks. First, the origin of task-based language teaching is described and the definition of task discussed, followed by an outline of the features and classification of tasks. The rationale for adopting a sociocultural perspective is presented at the end of this section, along with critiques on research about tasks from a cognitive perspective.

3.2.1.1 The Definitions of a Task

The "task-based" syllabus originated in US military training in the 1950s (Gong & Luo, 2003; Long, 1985; Long & Crookes, 1992; Skehan, 1996, 2003; Willis, 1996), and developed to include, in the late 1970s, communicative tasks, based on naturalistic L1 language acquisition in Prahbu's (1987) Bangalore Experiment (Chan, 2006). In the 1980s it became the main attraction in applied linguistics (Ellis, 2000). The concept of task is controversial because of its multiple interpretations; different definitions stress different aspects of tasks. For example, in his definition of task, Prahbu (1987) emphasizes the dominance and regulation of the process by the teacher. Long (1985) stresses authenticity by offering up examples of real life activity. Nunan (2004) distinguishes real-world or target tasks from pedagogical tasks, and stresses the role of language use in the classroom. Willis (1996) emphasizes communicative purpose and goal-directed objectives in his definition. Skehan (1998) extends the definition of task to include social relations, and emphasizes that the outcome of a completed task informs the task's meaning. Ellis (2003) emphasizes pragmatic language use and the potential for transfer into real-world use. Because of the diverse interpretation of tasks, dispute and disagreement arise as to whether to focus on tasks or on form or meaning. Littlewood (2004) describes tasks using a continuum ranging from non-communicative learning with a focus on form, to authentic communication with a focus on meaning. Table 3.1 summarizes the definitions of task given by different researchers and their different foci.

Table 3.1 Definitions of Task and Their Different Emphasis

Source	Definition	Emphasis
Long (1985, p.89)	A piece of work undertaken for oneself or for others, freely or for some reward. By task is meant the hundred and one things people do in everyday life, at work, at play and in-between.	– real life activities
Prahbu (1987, p.24)	An activity which requires learners to arrive at an outcome from given information through some process of thought, and which allows teachers to control and regulate that process.	– the outcome of the task – the teacher's regulation
Nunan (2004, p.4)	A task is a piece of classroom work which involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language while their attention is focused on mobilizing their grammatical knowledge in order to express meaning, and in which the intention is to convey meaning rather than to manipulate form. A task should have a sense of completeness.	– meaning – language use – completeness
Willis (1996, p.23)	Tasks are always activities where the target language is used by the learner for a communicative purpose (goal) in order to achieve an outcome.	– the goal – the outcome
Skehan (1998, p.95)	A task is an activity in which meaning is primary; there is some communication problem to solve; there is some sort of relationship to comparable real-world activities; task completion has some priority; the assessment of the task is in terms of outcome.	– meaning (social relation emerge in the definition) – task completion – the outcome
Ellis (2003, p.16)	A task is a work plan that requires learners to process language pragmatically in order to achieve an outcome that can be evaluated in terms of whether the correct or appropriate propositional content has been conveyed. To this end, it requires them to give primary attention to meaning and to make use of their own linguistic resources, although the design of the task may predispose them to choose particular forms. A task is intended to result in language use that bears a resemblance, direct or indirect, to the way language is used in the real world. Like other language activities, a task can engage productive or receptive, and oral or written skills, and also various cognitive processes.	– pragmatic language use and meaning – outcome – cognitive processes

(to be continued)

Source	Definition	Emphasis
Littlewood (2004, pp.320-322)	Definitions of tasks range along a continuum according to the extent to which they insist on communicative purpose as an essential criterion.	– the purpose – the continuum

3.2.1.2 Classification of Tasks

According to Ellis (2003, p.211), the classification of tasks can provide a basis for course design. Identifying effective task types may satisfy the needs of particular learners, and also provide teachers a framework for conducting classroom tasks.

Different researchers approach the classification of tasks in different ways. Based on interaction related to the potential for language learning, Long (1981), Duff (1986) and Berwick (1993), classify tasks as one-way and two-way, convergent and divergent, and closed and open. Based on cognitive operations, Prabhu (1987, p.46) assigns three general types: "information-gap activity", "reasoning-gap activity", and "opinion-gap activity". Using the concept of genre, Swales (1990) divides tasks into recipes, political speeches, job application letters, good/bad news letters, medical consultations and radio-telephonic flight control messages, while Willis (1996, pp.26-27) categorizes tasks into "listing", "ordering and sorting", "comparing", "problem-solving", "sharing personal experiences", and "creative tasks", according to their function. Ellis (2003, pp.211-216) reviews studies by Willis (1996), Swales (1990), Prabhu (1987), Duff (1986) and others, and classifies tasks as either pedagogic, rhetorical, cognitive or psycholinguistic, four categories described by Ellis (2003, pp.211-216) based on the learners' operation are presented in Table 3.2.

The categorization of task types helps researchers, educators and teachers unpack the complexity of tasks, and "the effectiveness or comparison of different types of tasks, [and] the complexity of task taxonomy" (Zhang, 2005, p.21) provide teachers references for task design in their teaching practice.

Table 3.2   The Classification of Tasks (Based on Ellis, 2003, pp.211-216)

Classification	Examples
Pedagogic	listing, ordering and sorting, comparing, problem-solving, sharing personal experiences, creative tasks, etc. (Willis, 1996)
Rhetorical	genre-based tasks, e.g., political speeches, job application letters, good/bad news letters, medical consultations, and radio-telephonic flight control message, etc. (Swales, 1990)
Cognitive (cognitive operation)	information-gap tasks, reasoning-gap tasks and opinion-gap tasks, etc. (Prabhu, 1987)
Psycholinguistic (interaction potentials)	one-way tasks, two-way tasks, convergent tasks, divergent tasks, closed tasks, open tasks, etc. (Long, 1981; Duff, 1986, Berwick, 1990)

3.2.1.3   The Features of a Task

The features of a task include its criteria, design features and variables for promoting interaction.

Criteria and design features. Ellis (2003, pp.9-21) describes two different features of tasks — criteria and design. A task: 1) is a work plan; 2) involves a primary focus on meaning; 3) involves real-world processing of language use; 4) can involve any of the four language skills; 5) engages cognitive processes; and, 6) has a clearly defined communicative outcome. Ellis (2003, p.21) has developed a framework for design features, which comprises goal, input, condition, procedures, and predicted outcome. It is illustrated in Table 3.3.

Table 3. 3   The Framework of Tasks (Ellis, 2003, p.21)

Design feature	Description
1. Goal	The general purpose of the task, e.g., to practice the ability to describe object concisely; to provide an opportunity for the use of relative clauses.

(to be continued)

Design feature	Description
2. Input	The verbal or non-verbal information supplied by the task, e.g., pictures; a map; written text.
3. Condition	The way in which the information is presented, e.g., split vs. shared information, or the way in which it is to be used, e.g., converging vs. diverging.
4. Procedures	The methodological procedures to be followed in performing the task, e.g., group vs. pair work; planning time vs. no planning time.
5.Predicted outcome: Product	The "product" that results from completing the task, e.g., a completed table; a route drawn in on a map; a list of differences between two pictures. The predicted product can be "open", i.e., allow for several possibilities, or "closed", i.e., allow for only one "correct" solution.
Process	The linguistic and cognitive processes the task is hypothesized to generate.

The impact of task variables. Task type and participatory organization impact the amount of language elicited. Information gap tasks and opinion gap tasks are different, as the former requires an exchange of information, which is optional in the latter. According to Nakahama, Tyler, and van Lier (2001), negotiation exchanges in mandated information exchange tasks are mechanical, as they focus on lexical items. Required information exchanges include one-way and two-way tasks, depending on whether information is one-way or shared (Ellis, 2003). In terms of task outcome, closed tasks elicit more negotiation than do open tasks (Ellis, 2003). Topic, discourse mode and cognitive complexity also have a great impact on learners' task performance (Ellis, 2003). Topic familiarity and importance are two key factors that "impact on the learners' propensity to negotiate meaning" (Ellis, 2003, p.91). Table 3.4 illustrates how Ellis (2003, p.96) summarizes the relationship between task variables and interaction quality.

Table 3. 4   Task Dimensions Hypothesized to Impact Positively on L2 Acquisition according to the Interaction Hypothesis (Ellis, 2003, p.96)

Task features	More positive	Less positive
Information exchange	Required (information gap)	Optional (opinion gap)
Information gap	Two-way	One-way
Outcome	Closed	Open
Topic	Human-ethical Familiar	Objective-spatial Less familiar
Discourse domain	Narrative Collaborative	Description Expository
Cognitive complexity	Context-free Detailed information	Context-dependent Less detailed information

3.2.1.4   Critiques on research of tasks from a psycholinguistic perspective

Researchers from a psycholinguistic perspective appear to define tasks based on both the work plan and students' performance of the plan, and to use the terms "task" and "activity" interchangeably. Furthermore, psycholinguistic research provides an incomplete picture, insofar as it focuses on tasks from a curriculum and pedagogy designer's perspective, and overlooks the students' perspective on task performance and the features in the learning process (Sangarun, 2005).

In addition, research studies on task features and types provide teachers and educators with refreshing insights into language teaching (Ellis, 2003; Littlewood, 2004; VanPatten, 1990; VanPatten & Williams, 2007); however, as Skehan and Foster (2005, p.193) note, reflections on the "sorts of activities, and… methods of using them" are simply assumptions based on "unsystematic and subjective experience". A certain type of task cannot, on its own, solve the problems in ELT. The dynamic and situated nature of activity and the

affective elements and social relations that "shape learners' cognitive and linguistic behavior" (Ortega, 2005, p.107) should be emphasized, and the dialectical interplay among activity type and other activity components should be explored in student activities. According to Vygotsky (1978), Leont'ev (1981) and Engestrom (1987), activities are collective and social in nature and this should be taken into account accordingly (Tsui & Law, 2007). In language teaching, Andrews (2007) also emphasizes the sociocultural dimensions of teacher language awareness. When the dynamics and situated nature of activity are taken into consideration in task-based language teaching, teachers' flexibility in dealing with complex activities is broadened, and activities are perceived of and understood systematically, thus enriching students' learning opportunities.

Task-based language teaching, as an approach, views teaching and learning more from the curriculum or pedagogy designers' perspective, emphasizing task completion and students' being on-task. However, the students' perspective needs to be adopted in the research, as activities may simultaneously have multiple goals (Wertsch, 1998) that students may conduct at the motive, action or condition level (Leont'ev, 1981). Thus, when students are working at a motive level with multiple goals, teachers and educators should be aware that side-task (Wickens & Kessel, 1979) or even off-task (Glynn, Thomas, & Shee, 1973) activities may potentially be great opportunities for students' learning.

Ortega (2005, pp.104-106) reports that foreign language learners typically tend towards morpho-syntax, and therefore argues for "form-in-meaning". Second language acquisition cannot be reduced to the simple accumulation of certain skills (Leont'ev, 1973; p.20, cited in Robbins, 2003, p.83); meanings and forms should be integrated in students' learning process.

In short, the findings of research on tasks from a cognitive perspective have provided researchers, (immersion) educators, and teachers with invaluable insights into and guidance for language teaching and learning from a pedagogy and curriculum designers' perspective. However, more research conducted from the student perspective is needed to examine students' learning processes. The current study, from a students' perspective, focuses on

student activities, arguing for task-based language learning and teaching from a sociocultural perspective in which mediation and the dynamic nature of activity in peer talk are emphasized. The next section reviews task and activity from a sociocultural perspective, and elaborates on the nature and features of activity.

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3.2.2 Tasks and Activities from a Sociocultural Perspective

Vygotsky and his follower, Leont'ev, both propose that "socially meaningful activity generates higher forms of human consciousness" (cited in Lantolf & Thorne, 2006, p.214), although each emphasizes different aspects of activity. Vygotsky emphasizes cultural mediation, while Leont'ev focuses on the genesis and mediation of mind through sensuous human activity. According to Vygotskian theories, an individual's development is made possible by the kinds of activities in which they are engaged and the kind of institutions of which they are a part (Rogoff, 1994, 2003). Tasks and activities are defined differently from a sociocultural perspective, and their roles in language learning are differently interpreted.

3.2.2.1 The Definition of Activities

Different researchers give different definitions of task and activity. For example, Leont'ev (1977) states that a task is a goal pursued in special conditions, while activity is a collective and social system (cited in Bedny & Meister, 1997, p.6). Engestrom (Engestrom, et al., 1999) argues that activity refers to "historically mediated artifacts, cultural resources that are common to the society at large" and relations between activity systems provide the development of artifacts. Bedney and Meister (1997) define activity as a coherent system in which internal mental processes and external behavior function dialectically, and directly motivate the achievement of conscious goals. Lantolf and Thorne (2006) maintain that new forms of reality are created through activity, while Heddegaard (Heddegaard, Chaiklin & Jensen, 1999) holds that activity, and transformational activity in particular, refers to different aspects of social practice that can provide the conditions for learners'

psychological development (Davydov, 1999). As has been shown above, activity is defined by more researchers compared with task. Apparently, researchers from the sociocultural perspective have avoided the confusion of these two definitions. Coughlan and Duff (1994) make matters clearer still by providing an operational definition of the two terms.

Coughlan and Duff (1994, p.175), taking the same perspective as Leont'ev's (1977), differentiate tasks and activities in their research on second language learning, stating that a task is a work plan, and "a kind of 'behavior blueprint' provided to subjects in order to elicit linguistic data", whereas an activity "comprises the behavior that is actually produced when an individual (or a group) performs a task. It is the process, as well as the outcome, of the task, examined in its sociocultural context". As stated earlier, this study adopts Coughlan and Duff's(1994) operational definition of task and activity in examining student activities.

3.2.2.2   Activity Theory and the Complex System of Activity

Activity theory. From a sociocultural perspective, activity is not a single action but a group of actions that are collective and social in nature and are embedded in an activity system (Leont'ev, 1981; Vygotsky, 1978). This view of activity is addressed by activity theory and illustrated by the complex model of activity system (Engestrom, 1987; Engestrom, et al., 1999).

The essence of activity theory is that activity is a unit of analysis in an "object-oriented, collective, and culturally mediated human action, or action system" (Engestrom, et al., 1999, p.9). Activity is tool-mediated, and culturally, historically, and institutionally situated (Cole, 1996; Lantolf, 2007; Lantolf & Beckett, 2009; Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001; Lantolf & Poehner, 2008; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006, 2007; Wertsch, 1991; Wink & Putney, 2002). Tsui and Law (2007, pp.1290−1291) outline briefly the basic tenets of activity theory below:

> The concept of "activity" as mediating between the individual and the social
> dimensions of human development originated from Vygotsky's proposal of human
> action mediated by psychological tools as a unit of analysis of the individual's higher

cognitive processes (Vygotsky, 1978). It was further developed by his followers, Leont'ev and Luria, who proposed that individual or group actions are embedded in activity systems which are collective and social in nature, and must be understood accordingly. Hence, they expanded the unit of analysis from human action to activity system and their work has come to be known as Activity Theory (see Leont' ev, 1981; Luria, 1974).

Activity system. Leont'ev (1981) proposes activity as a system with three levels: "motivation", "action", and "condition" (Lantolf & Appel, 1994a, p.21). As Lantolf and Appel (1994a) further explain, motivation is the most global level, in that it imbues activity with an object-related motive and asks why something is done (Lantolf & Appel, 1994a, p.21). Action is the intermediate level and refers to specifically taken actions driven by the motive and goal to know what is done. Condition is the final level, and refers to circumstance-conditioned operations that usually become automated procedures, and determine how something is done (Lantolf & Appel, 1994a, p.21). Wertsch (1985, p.212) claims that activity reveals social roles, and that the selection and operational composition of actions, together with "the functional significance of these actions" are decoded by the setting. Table 3.5 presents the levels of the activity system.

Table 3. 5   The Levels of the Activity System (Based on Lantolf & Appel, 1994a, p.21)

Activity level	Features defined
The level of motivation	Being the most global level Being object-related Answering the question "why something is done"
The level of action	Being the intermediate level Being goal-directed Answering the question "what is done"
The level of condition/operation	Being the final level Being circumstance-conditioned Becoming automated procedures Answering the question "how it is done"

The complex model of activity system. Activity theory has been "further developed by Engestrom (1987) who proposed three more components of an activity system — the community, rules and the division of labor" (Tsui and Law 2007, p.1291). This is referred to as second generation activity theory. Because of the collective nature of activity systems, the community becomes the basis for social relations. Rules such as norms, conventions, expectations, and the social relations within the community mediate the relationship between subjects and community. Through the division of labor, "the transformation of the object of the activity system into the outcome is achieved" (Tsui & Law, 2007, p.1291). The activity system is best illustrated through the example of primeval collective hunting by Leont' ev (1981). The object which was the motive of the collective hunting was to obtain food. In the community the instruments were spears or stones. The division of labor was that some beat the bushes to frighten the animal and drive it out, others shot the animal with their tools. The action of the beater is meaningful only when it is perceived as part of the object. To demonstrate the relationship within the system of activity, Engestrom (Engestrom, et al., 1999, p.31) developed the complex model of activity system, as depicted in Figure 3.2.
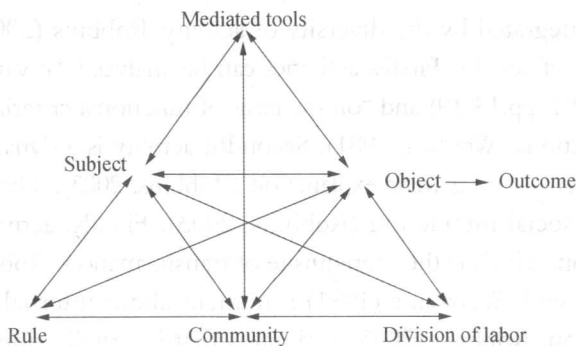
Figure 3.2   The Complex Model of Activity System (Engestrom, et al., 1999, p.31)

The system is complex for four reasons. First, it is internally dialectically correlated, such that variation of one component leads to changes in other

system components. Motive decides what action will be taken, and action is influenced by the conditions and means of mediation. Second, the activity system is dynamic, as "the same actions may accomplish different activities and may transfer from one activity to another; the same activity may be realized by different actions" (Engestrom, 1987; Engestrom, et al., 1999). Third, activities are correlated between the systems. Last, the activities in which participants are engaged provide the social processes for learners to develop meaning and cultivate cultural life (Tsui & Law, 2007).

Activity theory is an essential notion in the Vygotskian sociocultural framework (Donato, 1988; Leont'ev, 1978; Leont'ev, 1981; Tharp & Gallimore, 1988; Wertsch, 1985, 1991, 1998). Self-regulation and "the unity of cognition and external practical behavior" are central to activity theory (Bedny & Meister, 1997, p.2). Engestrom (1999) points out that the processes of internalization and externalization are inseparable from the activity, as internalization leads to reproduction of culture and, through externalization, the creation of new artifacts makes transformation possible.

3.2.2.3   The Nature of Activity — Its Dynamics and Situatedness

Activities that are not only cognition-based include "cognitive, executive, evaluative, and emotional aspects" (Bedny & Meister, 1997, p.75), which are integrated by the diversity of activity. Robbins (2003) outlines four features of activity. Firstly, activities can be analyzed "at various levels" (Wertsch, 1981, pp.18-19) and "on the basis of functional criteria" according to their functions (Wertsch, 1981). Secondly, activity is a dynamic process in developmental and genetic explanation (Robbins, 2003). Thirdly, activity emphasizes social interaction (Robbins, 2003). Finally, activity leads to internalization, which is the prerequisite of transformation (Robbins, 2003); this meshes with Wertsch's (1981) statement about internalization and externalization. Robbins (2003) maintains that internalization is realized through mediation. In a Vygotskian view, the perception of psychological development is a dynamic process "full of upheavals, sudden changes, and reversals", leading to "the formation of the cultural, higher mental functions" (Kozulin, 1986, p.266).

The nature of activity lies in its situatedness and dynamics. Social context in interaction results in cognitive development, and is seen to be the most important and "dynamic" element in this process (Vygotsky, 1978, 1981b); Vygotsky's (1981b) concept of the ZPD also shows the dynamic process of learning and development. Following Vygotsky, Leont'ev (1981, p.47) emphasizes the situated nature of activity in his statement:

> Human psychology is concerned with the activity of concrete individuals, which takes place either in a collective — i.e., jointly with other people — or in a situation in which the subject deals directly with the surrounding world of objects — e.g., at the porter's wheel or the writer's desk. However, if we removed human activity from the system of social relationships and social life, it would not exist and would have no structure. With all its varied forms, the human individual's activity is a system in the system of social relations. It does not exist without these relations.

Lantolf (2000c) somewhat echoes Leont'ev, stating that instability is the nature of activity. The situatedness emphasizes the dynamic relationship between social context, goals, the individual and the community. This lays the theoretical basis for the current study.

3.2.2.4 Research Revealing the Nature of Activity

The growing interest among teachers and researchers in language development in SLA through situated interactional activity in classrooms, tutoring sessions and other teaching-learning settings has informed a growing number of research studies that explore students' developmental processes in learners' interaction (e.g., Anton & DiCamilla, 1998; Brooks, 1992; Donato, 1988, 1994; Frawley & Lantolf, 1985; Hall, 1995; Lantolf & Appel, 1994b; Ohta, 1995, 1997; Swain & Lapkin, 1998; van Lier, 1996). In its interaction with the social context, a task may be "static" and "constant", but activity is "dynamic" (Coughlan & Duff, 1994, p.191).

Coughlan and Duff (1994) studied five learners (one Cambodian and four Hungarians), assigning each the task of describing a picture. The activities elicited by this single task varied considerably in terms of their

goals, resulting in different performances. According to Coughlan and Duff (1994, p.174), humans and the activities in which they participate are interrelated. Although the nature of a task is relatively controlled, a range of discourse types affect the learners' multiple interpretations of that task (Coughlan & Duff, 1994). The task may be the same, but the activities it evokes may be different, as the activity in the interaction reveals one's world knowledge, which is the product of one's interaction with that world (Wertsch, 1981, 1991).

Results from other studies are in accord with Coughlan and Duff's (1994) findings. According to Platt and Brooks (1994), the two groups of students in their study performed the same role-play task differently, as their motives and goals were different. Wang's (Wang, 1996, cited in Donato, 2000, p.41) study shows that different learners have significantly different interpretations of the same task and perform accordingly. Lantolf and Genung (2002) studied the learning experience of a doctoral student, who spent time in a primary school to improve his language proficiency; his motive and goal were dynamic as he carried out the activity because they were adjusted throughout the process, revealing the situated nature of activity.

The research by Coughlan and Duff (1994) and by Lantolf and Genung (2002) illustrated empirically the dynamics and situatedness of activity by showing that the same task leads to different activities. However, further research is needed to investigate the dimensions of the differences of activities, as the dynamic nature of activity does not mean that activity is out of control, and knowing the dimensions of the differences of activities is of critical importance to teachers in their teaching practice. Based on such research studies from the sociocultural perspective, Thorne (2005) builds a research nexus between sociocultural theories and Conversation Analysis by examining the interlocutors' discourses in their interaction. Davison (Cummins & Davison, 2007; Davison, 2007) notes the importance of investigating the relationship between talk, individuality and development of argument in interaction. Taking their views into consideration, the current study fills the gap by investigating students' peer talk in their activities and reveals the mediations of situated and dynamic activities to provide a deeper

understanding of students' actual performance in collaborative activities. The following section will review peer talk in interaction.

3.3 Peer Talk

As the current study focuses on student activity and peer talk, rather than on interaction in general, this section reviews peer talk in spoken interaction, including the origin of peer talk, its definition, its key features as revealed by research studies, and the frameworks employed by previous studies in analyzing peer talk.

3.3.1 Definition of Peer Talk

Studies on peer talk can be traced back to Garvey's (1974, 1975) research on peer interaction during peer play, and to Ervin-Tripp and Mitchell-Kernan's (1977) publication entitled Child Discourse. The term "peer talk" was first used in an early study by Yawkey (1978) on the value of role play. According to Blum-Kulka and Snow (2004), peer talk may foster children's communicative skills and strategies in observing the turn-taking, responding to questions, and correcting each other's errors. It may also enable children to be socialized into the community and society to which they belong.

Peer talk is a form of interaction between or among peers in a natural or school setting (Gass & Madden, 1985; Klinck, 1984; Yawkey, 1978); research on peer talk has usually taken place in the latter. Peer talk studies have adopted different perspectives, although most come from a cognitive perspective. For example, Klinck's (1984) study of error analysis focuses on peers' native-like correction patterns in a French immersion class. The conference papers collected in the book *Input in Second Language Acquisition*, edited by Gass and Madden (1985), present peer talk as input. Paratore and McCormack (1997) expand on a variety of views on peer talk, such as cross-age peer talk

and quality cross-cultural peer talk. Pearson (2004) examines the impact of peer talk on children's writing. Cekaite and Aronsson (2004, p.289) see peer talk as "child-child discourse" that includes two contextual features: "(1) its collaborative, multi-party, symmetrical participation structure; and (2) its shared worlds of childhood culture". Peer talk offers children opportunities to experience a wide range of discourse types, and provides "opportunities for collaborative, multi-faceted language learning" (Blum-Kulka, Huck-Taglicht, & Avni, 2004, p.308).

This study proceeds from a sociocultural perspective. Peer talk is taken to mean students' dialogic talk in a natural school setting, including both talk for pedagogical practice and authentic and meaningful talk between two or more peers. Peer talk enables peers to scaffold each other, make meaning, get meanings across, and internalize embedded social relations and the language "form-in-meaning" (Ortega, 2005, p.106) through collaborative activities.

3.3.2 Peer Talk as a Type of Spoken Interaction

Spoken interaction is an interpersonal, collective social activity, of which peer talk is but one type. Spoken interaction serves a variety of functions in social relationships — propositional (e.g., presenting a thought), interactional (e.g., regulating some aspect of the conversation), attitudinal and affective (e.g., signaling likes and dislikes of or the general affective state towards the conversational partner), and relational (e.g., conveying messages) (Bickmore, 2004).

Turn-taking and cooperation are two main principles followed by participants in spoken interaction (Stenstrom, 1994). According to Stenstrom (1994), a turn is what the current speaker says before the floor is taken over by the next speaker. Throughout the interaction, even when they are not taking the turn, the speakers are actively following the basic rules of turn-taking by listening (Stenstrom, 1994). There are three aspects to the strategies used in spoken interaction: first, the turn-taking system, including taking, holding, and

yielding the turn, as well as back-channeling; second, the exchange procedure, i.e., opening, initiating, repairing, responding, re-opening and following up; and third, accompanying strategies such as socializing, hedging and organizing (Stenstrom, 1994, pp.68-132). Cooperation seems to be equally important. Grice (1975) proposes four cooperative maxims to capture the basic rules generally followed in interaction and communication: quantity, quality, relation, and manner.

The cooperative principle, the functions of spoken interaction, and interactional strategies also give insights into the patterns and functions of peer talk in spoken interaction (Bickmore, 2004; Stenstrom, 1994).

3.3.3 Research Revealing the Features of Peer Talk

Research from the sociocultural perspective reveals that peer talk can be seen as a collective ZPD, as co-construction of scaffolding in language learning, and as an effective learning network, all of which are described below.

3.3.3.1 Peer Talk as a Collective ZPD in L2 Learning

Peer talk creates a collective ZPD in which to build not only grammatical competence, but also expressive and cultural competence through goal-directed interaction. Ohta (2000) studies learner-learner interactive processes by providing developmentally appropriate assistance to two university learners of Japanese, Hal and Becky, in completing an oral translation task. Data analysis of the learners' discourse in its sequence context shows that the language of social interaction was internalized in the ZPD (Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1985). In Vygotsky's (1978) view, the person providing the assistance is supposed to be an adult or experienced peer, and the learner, a child or novice; Ohta (2000) extends this to include peer interaction with no clear expert present. According to Ohta (2000), peer interaction in the foreign language arena shows that discrepancy in peer interaction (Anton & DiCamilla, 1998; Brooks, 1992; Ohta, 1995, 1997) offers more chances for students learning from each others' differentiated ZPDs (Donato, 1994).

Another longitudinal study, carried out by Ohta (2001, p.125) over one academic year in Japanese language classes, shows that, by working collectively and interacting through peer talk, students built "bridges to proficiency" in their collective ZPD. Similar findings can be seen in Swain and Lapkin's (2001) research, in which students were clear about changes and were able to build knowledge through their talk and incorporate it into their stories as their dialogic interaction continued.

In peer interaction, language play also creates ZPDs. According to Vygotsky (1978), students create the ZPD through play in collaboration with their peers, which allows them to exceed their current abilities (Lantolf, 2000a). Play is an especially important activity for development, because after class during play, students expand their overall communication repertoires by creatively accessing a wide range of linguistic repertoire that is often "devalued or ignored in classrooms" (Pomerantz & Bell, 2007, p.556); playful talk such as teasing, joking, verbal play, music making and chanting helps children to explore social roles, relations, and identities "by exploiting the ambiguity and context dependency of play" (Lytra, 2007, p.20). Luk and Lin (2007, p.136) investigate students' making fun during lessons through phonological play, social talk, teasing and talking about taboo topics, concluding that

> by manipulating the infinite possibility of the rhymes, rhythms, parallelism, or pun between the L1 and L2, students create individual expressions with new "iconoclastic ideas" (Cook, 2000, p.201) that may have signified a desire on the part of the students to assert agency (i.e., an individual's capacities to act independently of structural constraints) as language users, and to gain a sense of ownership of the speech.

3.3.3.2　Peer Talk as Co-construction of Scaffolding in Learning

Peer talk functions as scaffolding, allowing potential levels of development to be realized. According to Donato (2000), Greenfield (1984) and Wood and others (Wood, et al., 1976), scaffolding occurs when the expert learner in the interaction provides support through speech to the novice learner in order to develop the novice's competence. Research into scaffolding in L2 has focused on the guided assistance provided to learners by language teachers

(Ellis, 1985a; Pei, 2007; Ulichny, 1990; Wong-Fillmore, 1985). Moving beyond that definition of scaffolding, Donato and McCormick (1994) claim that both the expert and the novice co-construct scaffolding through their mutual interaction in the activity.

Repetition in peer talk scaffolds students' linguistic development. DiCamilla and Anton's (1997) study of Spanish L2 learners' discourse in their writing assignments shows that repetition helped the students better understand the language features, and provided them with the necessary mediation to solve lexical, spelling, and verb form problems.

Peers scaffold each other affectively, linguistically and sociolinguistically. Foster and Ohta (2005) studied negotiation for meaning in the language classroom from a sociocultural perspective as well as cognitive perspective, qualitatively exploring learners' support for each other in target language learning, and identifying incidents of negotiation of meaning and their impact on occasions of communication breakdown. The results show that learners were actively engaged in the interaction, attended to peers' needs, and utilized self-repair when there was a communication breakdown (Foster & Ohta, 2005).

Peer collaborative dialogue (Swain, 2000) also scaffolds students' learning. Watanabe and Swain (2007) examined learner's second language (L2) proficiency and their interactional patterns in L2 learning, finding that both the collaborative and collaboration-oriented patterns (but not the domination-oriented pattern) in expert/novice pairs led to students' better achievement, allowing less proficient students to benefit from their partner's assistance, and more proficient students to benefit (van Lier, 1996) from teaching.

Peer interaction is critical for cognitive and language development (Rogoff, 1998) and crucial for L2 learning (Blum-Kulka, et al., 2004), during which affective support provides scaffolding among peers (Ervin-Tripp, 1986). Davison (2007) and Derewianka (2008) also emphasize the valuing of feelings and passion in interaction. Peck's (1978) study shows that the rapport built through the friendship-based peer interaction promotes children's L2 proficiency by providing modified and appropriate feedback. Similar results are reported about peers' co-construction of scaffolding in Japanese classes (Kanagy, 1999), in American immersion kindergarten classes (Fassler, 1998), and in ESL

classrooms (Duff, 1995).

3.3.3.3 Peer Talk as an Effective Learning Network

Research on peer talk in content subjects offers insights on the content-based immersion context of this study. For example, peer talk in math problem-solving builds a learning network, lessens frustration and extends mathematical concepts to the students (Vetter, 1992). Vetter (1992) has found that, through verbalizing their thinking process in solving math problems, students built a learning network with effective understanding and correct mathematical thinking, where frustration was lessened and mathematical concepts extended. Wheeldon's (2006) research addresses improving the quality of students' talk in L1 context by problem solving through peer talk. She finds that the tone of the students' peer talk changed from disputational talk to exploratory talk, and that more statements were made within the same length of time using good talking rules; according to Wheeldon, seeming disputes were in fact attempts to solve the problem through exploration.

There are also contradictory findings, however, on peer interaction in language learning. For example, Tudge (1990) contends that when a child interacts with a less competent peer, their interaction may result in regression. Washburn (1994) challenges claims about interaction in the ZPD, arguing that not all expert/learner interactions lead to L2 development and that learning is impossible if the learner who, if fossilized, does not have a ZPD, fails to appropriate the help. According to these researchers, peer talk may not necessarily and definitely lead to students' language development. These counter-arguments help me to avoid preconceptions in this study.

3.3.3.4 Gaps Identified in Research Studies on Peer Talk

These researches on peer talk inform the current study about important aspects of peer interaction such as collective ZPD, peer language play and co-construction of peer scaffolding. However, they were conducted in contexts that are very different from China, where the English language is taught as a foreign language. The CCUEI was conducted in this foreign language learning context. Research on peer talk in this very different context may reveal

significantly different features; peer talk in the Chinese context therefore needs to be researched. Meanwhile, the studies discussed above revealed features of peer talk among adolescents and adult learners rather than primary young learners, although some studies did address young learners' peer talk in L1 contexts, including Blum-Kulka (Blum-Kulka, et al., 2004), Vetter (1992) and Wheeldon (2006). More studies therefore need to be conducted on young learners' L2 discourse.

3.4　The Conceptual Framework of the Current Study

The current study investigates, from a sociocultural perspective, how activities mediate student peer talk, and examines student activities in classroom and after-class settings in an English immersion context in China. Its conceptual framework draws on the reviewed literature on interaction, activity and peer talk from the sociocultural perspective, and is adapted from Engestrom's complex activity system.

3.4.1　Components of the Conceptual Framework

Engestrom's (Engestrom, et al., 1999, p.31) model of activity system (see Section 3.2.2.2) is adapted into the theoretical conceptual framework of this study. It includes seven components — subject, object, rules, community, division of labor, mediational means, and outcome — that are explained below.

As the current study examines student activities, the term "subject" is used to refer to peer students, while "object" refers to the mastery of subject contents, the use of L2, the understanding of culture embedded in the language, and language learning through achieving task-driven goals. The term "rules" refers to the school's norms, conventions and regulations and teachers' guidelines or expectations. The "community" refers to a pair or group within

the activity, class, or school. The school in this study was a boarding school where students only went home on weekends, and the class was where the students had their class studies and self-studies. The "division of labor" refers to students' role relations in the activities, with Storch's (2002) dyadic model used as a reference. Based on mutuality and equality, Storch identified four types of peer role relations: collaborative, dominant/dominant, dominant/passive, and expert/novice (see Section 4.4.2.3 for more details of Storch's model). The "mediational means" refers to tasks, subject contents (as this is an English immersion context), and genre (as genre impacts linguistic production) (Ellis, 2003; Wertsch, 1998). The "outcome" refers to goal-directed achievements and the completion of the tasks assigned by the teacher, with peer talk used as an indicator thereof. The theoretical conceptual framework is illustrated in Figure 3.3.

Mediational means: task, genre, subject contents, peer talk, realia, textbook, teaching materials

Subject: the students

Object: task-driven goals, the L2, contents and culture

Outcome: goals achieved? And students' peer talk as an indicator

Rule: norms, conventions, regulations and expectations

Community: the pair or the group, the class and the school

Division of labor: among the students, role relations (Storch's model)

Figure 3.3   The Conceptual Framework for the Current Study

3.4.2　Relations among These Components

The relationship between these components can be summed up as

follows. The object of acquiring L2 and mastering the subject contents and embedded culture directs the whole teaching and learning process. Based on the object, tasks are designed to achieve expected outcomes and reach expected goals. Peer students, regulated by community rules, divide their work, deploy various mediational means in their activities and try to achieve their goals. The goals are task-driven, with expected outcomes. Through the division of labor, the goals of peer students will be transformed into the outcome, where either the goal achieved or the process of achieving the goals impacts the object of the language learning and the outcome. The outcome, at the same time, gives the teacher feedback about implementation and actual task performance. The object includes task-driven goals and mastery of L2, the subject content, and the embedded culture. Activity is situated and dynamic, and lies in the dialectical relations among activity components, which are both internally and externally correlated (Tsui & Law, 2007) and will yield a different actual outcome if any one of the components changes.

3.5 Summary

The main purpose of this chapter has been to locate this study in the relevant theoretical literature, identify the research gap and develop an appropriate conceptual framework for it. First, the literature on interaction was reviewed, from both a cognitive and a sociocultural perspective; the role of tasks, and activities in particular, was reviewed with a focus on peer talk as a type of spoken interaction. From a cognitive perspective, Long's interaction hypothesis, Pica's negotiation of meaning, and Swain's output hypothesis were reviewed in second language acquisition from a psycholinguistic perspective. The cognitive perspective views language learning as a "conduit" process, first individual, then social, lying on two separate planes. It provides an incomplete picture of tasks and activities more from a curriculum and pedagogy designer's perspective. From a sociocultural perspective, language learning is socially rooted, first interpersonally and then intrapersonally, and social interaction is

the base for language learning. The dynamic and situated nature of activity is best revealed in Engestrom's activity system, which, as a unit of analysis, functions as a powerful way of focusing on the mediating structures, and suits the current study as its conceptual framework. Thus in this chapter, from a sociocultural perspective, Vygotskian key concepts about interaction in language and language learning, particularly activity theory, were reviewed, together with research studies on the nature of activity. The research gap was identified, and the rationale for adopting a sociocultural perspective in this study was presented, with critiques of the research on tasks from a cognitive perspective. The features of peer talk were presented through an overview of the literature. In the end, drawing upon the literature reviewed, a conceptual framework was developed for the current study. The next chapter presents an overview of the research methodology.

CHAPTER FOUR

METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the overall research design and methodology for the current study. It begins with a general introduction to this study: its aim, its methods for data collection and analysis, and its research focus. A detailed description of the methodology adopted, methods of data collection, and data analysis techniques are then presented. A discussion of the trustworthiness of the current study is presented next, after which a summary concludes the chapter.

4.1 Introduction

Owing to the nature of students' learning processes, this study employs a qualitative approach to examine children's learning processes and to interpret what happens in student activities; how those activities mediate student peer talk; reveal patterns and features of students' interaction that can be generalized within the case; and understand the students' learning processes from an emic view in the activities within an English immersion context from a sociocultural perspective. The methodology adopted is a case study that uses a number of methods, both to collect data (including observations, field notes, interviews and physical artifacts) and to analyze it (such as spoken discourse analysis). The

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current research investigates how activities mediate student peer talk, in order to reveal the interrelationships between student activity type and peer talk, the situated and dynamic nature of activity in the students' emerging agency, and the enactment of multidimensional mediational means in student activities.

4.2　A Case Study

Case studies are one of the most important methods of qualitative research (Merriam, 1988, 1998; Merriam, 2009; Merriam & Associates, 2002; Stake, 1980, 1995, 2000; Yin, 1989, 1994, 2003, 2009, 2005). Different researchers define case study differently with different foci. For example, Merriam (1988, p.16) defines case study by emphasizing its "intensive holistic description" and single entity of analysis. Miles and Huberman (1994) stress the boundedness of a case. Yin (1994, p.1) stresses the inquiry nature of case study and its real-life context, stating that case study is "the preferred strategy when 'how' or 'why' questions are being posed, when the investigator has little control over events, and when focus is on a real-life context". Based on the above elements, the definition of a case study could be summarized as an intense holistic exploration of a single phenomenon within its natural lifelike context.

The key features of a case study are that it concerns a single phenomenon; the phenomenon occurs in a real-life bounded context; and it investigates "why" and 'how" questions. Merriam (1998, pp.29-30) states that a case study is "particularistic" (focused on a particular issue or phenomenon), "descriptive" (providing a rich description of the issue or phenomenon), and "heuristic" (providing in-depth understanding of the issue or phenomenon).

The setting for this study was a privately-funded primary English immersion school. The case selected was one class in the school with embedded entities of analysis (Yin, 2009, p.46), and multiple elements included. For example, activities included not only in-class activities but also after-class activities. Peer talk in activities, both in and after class settings, was investigated. Participants included the principals, the English immersion

teachers, and the selected students, as well as their parents.

This study addresses a sociocultural phenomenon in a natural school setting (naturally emergent peer talk in activities in an immersion context), the reasons for that phenomenon (the "why"), and, in particular, the extent to which the phenomenon mediated students' peer talk (the "how"). This case study aims to understand peer talk in terms of activities and the linguistic meanings that peers brought to those activities, and how both shaped and were shaped by their interactions (Lantolf, 2000a; Lantolf & Appel, 1994b).

4.3 Selection of the Setting and the Participants

The setting for this case study was a privately-funded primary English immersion boarding school in Guangdong Province, and was selected because it was the first school to have adopted English immersion at the school level. The class and the participants in the school were selected through purposeful sampling.

4.3.1 The Sampling

Purposeful sampling, which was used in this research, is well-suited to an in-depth study. According to Patton (Patton, 1980, 1990, 2002, 2008; Patton & Patrizi, 2005), purposeful sampling involves the selection of a case or cases with rich information about issues of critical importance to the study. Patton (1990, pp.160-180) lists fifteen types[1] of purposeful sampling. In this study the

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1 The fifteen types Patton (1990, pp.160-180) listed are: extreme or deviant case sampling, intensity sampling, maximum variation sampling, homogeneous samples, typical case sampling, stratified purposeful sampling, critical case sampling, snowball or chain sampling, criterion sampling, theory-based or operational construct sampling, confirming and disconfirming cases, opportunistic sampling, purposeful random sampling, sampling political important cases, and convenience sampling.

purposeful sampling method used to select the school contained features of maximum variation sampling and typical case sampling in order to account for diverse variations and to identify important common patterns and "highlight what is typical and average" (Patton, 1990, p.182).

The class, the teacher and the students were selected as the main research participants based on the following criteria:

— the teacher was willing to participate in the research;

— the class was recommended by the school principal on the basis of its having a warm and positive classroom atmosphere; Following the principles of purposeful sampling, a group of six students[1] was selected with the following considerations: 1) there was a balance of gender — three girls and three boys; 2) the students came from different family backgrounds — some from well-educated families, some from ordinary business families, and some from farmer's families; 3) they had different personalities (which will be introduced in Section 5.3.4); and 4) they came from comparatively different language proficiency levels — two from the high proficiency level, two from the intermediate level and two from the lower level, with an effort to achieve maximum variation. The teacher selected these students according to their test scores based on their performance. In order to make sure that they came from different language levels, the author conducted the first interviews with them in English in order to gain knowledge of their oral English proficiency level.

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1 Six students were selected according to their English language proficiency with a gender balance: two from higher proficiency level, two from intermediate level and two from lower level. However, one student named Hanfeng dropped out because he was transferred to another school, another student with similar language proficiency named Peiqiong replaced him. Another student volunteered to be among the participants. The reason for not selecting him was that he had an experience of living in Singapore for three years, which means that he could not represent the mainstream students. Thus he was observed marginally. This student is included in Table 4.1.

4.3.2 The Setting

This research involved one privately-funded primary English immersion boarding school in Guangdong Province. The school[1] has offered its English immersion program since 2004, when the school was first set up. Unlike other English programs in Xi'an, Shanghai, Wuhan, and Beijing, where English immersion has been carried out as an experiment to examine the effectiveness of the immersion programs, and has been limited to experimental and control groups in public schools, this school implemented its English immersion program in all five of its Grade 1 classes, beginning in September, 2004[2]. While virtually all classes in the first four primary grades were immersion classes, very little actual time was spent on English immersion content instruction, and English immersion subjects were limited to social science, living science, P.E., and fine arts. Further details will be provided in Chapter 5.

4.3.3 The Participants

The participants in this study consist of the the principals, the immersion teachers, the selected students and their parents. However, as this study focuses on the student activities, the participants introduced here are mainly the student participants in the selected class.

The selected class had been involved in the immersion program since September, 2004. It consisted of 37 students, 25 boys and 12 girls,

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1 The school is a complex school that includes primary, secondary junior, and secondary senior levels. This research was conducted in the primary school; the setting refers to the primary school.

2 In the spring of 2008, the primary school had 21 English immersion classes and a total of about 800 immersion students. All the classes in Grade 1, 2, 3 and 4 were immersion classes except two newly formed classes of new comers. But in September of 2008, with the policy change under the pressure of testing and ranking system by a new school principal, the English immersion program was changed (see Chapter 5 for details).

with an average age of around 11 years old in 2008. Eight students from this class were selected as research participants, based on the teacher's recommendation and the need for gender balance and a variety of language proficiency levels. Table 4.1 gives a brief introduction to these students. A detailed description of the participants and the context is given in Chapter 5.

Table 4. 1   A Brief Introduction of the Student Participants

Name	Gender	Age	English proficiency level
Liuliu	Female	10	Higher
Yoyo	Female	11	Higher
Wenwen	Female	11	Intermediate
Changqing	Male	10	Intermediate
Nanhai	Male	11	Lower
Hanfeng	Male	10	Lower (transferred to another school and dropped out)
Peiqiong	Male	11	Lower (replaced Hanfeng)
Xumeng	Male	11	Higher (having lived in Singapore for 3 years)

4.4   Data Collection and Data Analysis

A variety of data collection and analysis methods and techniques were employed in this case study, based on two considerations. The first was "to avoid bias and subjectivity" (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007, p.256), and "to ensure trustworthiness" (Yin, 1994, p.18). This was accomplished by drawing data from diverse sources, such as observations, interviews and physical artifacts. In addition, the case study findings were accessible to a number of external audiences (such as discussing with my supervisors,

presenting at international conferences and debriefing my fellow students), and the draft findings were reviewed by key informants (Yin, 1989, 1994, 2003, 2009). The second consideration was the ability to handle the complexities and dynamics expected to be encountered by the researcher in the process of the research.

Multiple data collection sources, which fit the chain of evidence for in-depth analysis, were employed. Observations of whole-class instruction and selected students were carried out, both in and after class; the observations were audio- and video-recorded, and transcribed. After the observations had yielded information about what happened in class, interviews were conducted to clarify certain points and to deepen the researcher's understanding of what had been observed. The transcripts of the audio/video recordings were a rich database for interpretation and reinterpretation. Field notes recorded additional information, such as the atmosphere in the classroom and the flavor of the interaction, supplementing the audio/video recordings. More details about data collection are presented below.

4.4.1   Data Collection

Observations and interviews were the major methods employed to collect data in this qualitative case study. According to Merriam (2009, p.136), observation provides "firsthand" information and, when combined with interviews and document analysis, offers a holistic account of the phenomenon under investigation. Audio/video recording and field notes were used to keep records of in-class lessons, activities, and student and teacher behavior during the activities. Physical artifacts such as realia, teaching plans, and student worksheets were also collected as supplementary support for the main dataset. These qualitative methods offered opportunities to obtain rich naturally-occurring data, allowing a deeper understanding and an emic interpretation of the student interaction in the current study. Table 4.2 summarizes the data collection instruments and their purposes.

Table 4.2 Data Collection Instruments and Purposes

Method	Techniques	Purpose
Observations	audio/video recordings; field notes; physical artifacts	− to record student discourse in activities − to note down teacher's and students' behavior in the activities, including some critical instances − to support the holistic understanding of the participants and the contexts
Interviews	audio recordings	− to get the information such as background knowledge, clarification of the participants' behavior, their perspectives and beliefs, and checks of the interpretations − to get multiple perspectives for better understanding of the activities

4.4.1.1 Time Arrangement for Data Collection and the Purposes

Data were collected over a two-year period lasting from May, 2007 to May, 2009, with the selected class being observed from Grade 3 to Grade 5. In these two years, four visits were paid to the school for data collection purposes, each visit lasting from one to eight weeks, depending on its specific purpose. The aim of this study was to achieve a deeper understanding of student activities and student peer talk in a constantly changing school context. During the school visits, the selected students had electronic digital recorders attached to them to record their in- and after-class interactions. Field notes were made noting teacher and student behavior and other relevant information, and interviews were conducted with the students and the teacher(s). Table 4.3 lists the periods of data collection and the purposes for each period.

Table 4.3 Time Arrangements of Data Collection and the Purposes

Time	Duration	Hours	Type of Classes Per Week	Purposes
May 2007	1 week	11	7 regular classes 2 morning reading classes 2 evening self-study classes 2 extra-curricular classes	Pilot study (interviews, audio/video recordings both in class and after class), to try out the research design for this study and its feasibility

(to be continued)

Time	Duration	Hours	Type of Classes Per Week	Purposes
Mar. 2008	2 weeks	22	7 regular classes 2 morning reading classes 2 evening self-study classes 2 extra-curricular classes	Main Study Phase 1 (interviews, audio/video recordings both in class and after class, field notes, physical objects), to get the first part of main data for analysis. The reason for two weeks is that usually two weeks is the time teachers take to complete a whole unit of lessons, which is regarded as a teaching unit
Oct. 2008 to Nov. 2008	8 weeks	80	6 regular classes 2 morning reading classes 2 evening self-study classes 2 extra-curricular classes	Main Study Phase 2 (interviews, audio/video recordings both in class and after class, field notes, physical objects), to get the second part of main data for analysis
May 2009	1 week	7	3 regular classes 4 hours for debriefing	Member checking, to get the participants' feedback and follow-up opinions

Note: The "hours" refers to teaching hour which occupies 40 minutes every class. One morning reading class occupies half an hour. One extracurricular activity class occupied half an hour.

4.4.1.2 Observations

The rationale and the actual employment of observation techniques in the study. The distinctive feature of observation is that the researcher is provided with "live data", which naturally occurs in the social context (Cohen, et al., 2007, p.396). Robson (2002) claims that observations offer live data in reality. Observation provides opportunities for the researcher to observe everyday behavior that might otherwise escape notice (Cooper and Schindler, 2001), and enables the researcher to draw data from a wide range of settings (Cohen, et al., 2007). In the current study, observations provided opportunities to obtain authentic and live data about the participants and their learning processes in the activities. While observation is an important data collection tool, it is not without its weaknesses, among which are "the

subjectivity and limitation and selection of our memory and our attention" (Cohen, et al., 2007, p.410); in other words, there is a danger that the researcher might select what they want to observe, and interpret the situation rather than record the phenomenon. One's attention may be distracted, and one's memory may select or repress certain events. Being aware of these potential weaknesses, this study employed rich, thick description to ensure the trustworthiness of the research, as will be discussed further in Section 4.5.

The observational techniques used were audio- or video-recording the activities, taking field notes and collecting field physical artifacts. Digital recorders were attached to the eight selected students, allowing their interactions to be recorded not only in immersion and regular English classes, but also their after-class engagement in evening self-study and other extracurricular activities. Audio recordings were transcribed in detail by the researcher, and video recordings were used to capture classroom atmosphere, whole class instruction and interaction. Field notes were taken with a focus on the eight selected students in both in- and after-class observations. The observation checklist for the current study was developed based on suggestions by Merriam (1988) and Lin (2007); more specifically, it consists of two sets: one for classroom activities in instruction and one for the elements of the activity system, i.e., subject, object, mediational means, outcome, community, division of labor and rules, and subtle factors such as non-verbal communication; activity theory was used for analysis of activities in the pedagogical practices. Physical artifacts such as teaching plans, student worksheets, assignments, school slogans and relevant school files were collected and examined to enrich the researcher's understanding of the collected recorded data and its context.

The actual dataset of observations. The dataset contained over 120 hours of observations (see the time arrangement of data collection in Section 4.4.1.1 for reference). The classes observed were English immersion classes, regular English language classes, evening self-study classes, morning reading classes, and extracurricular activity classes. In addition, some school events were also observed, such as the School Science and Culture Festival and the opening ceremony of the school sports games (see for reference Table 4.3 *Time arrangement of data collection and purposes*).

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4.4.1.3   Interviews

The rationale and the actual employment of interview techniques in the study. An interview is a purposeful dialogue (Dexter, 1970, p.136; cited in Merriam, 2009, p.88) designed to find out perceptions and opinions and "to allow us to enter into other person's perspective" (Patton, 2002, p.341). According to Merriam (2009), it is important and necessary for researchers to conduct interviews to discover people's feelings about or interpretation of the world around them, and to include past events. Interviewing is regarded as an appropriate means of conducting case studies (Merriam, 2009, p.88).

Different types of interviews were used in the current study, including individual and focus group interviews. Interviews with teachers and principals were mainly individual interviews, as the format affords the interviewer dynamic control, encourages the interviewee to share richer information, and allows the researcher to probe issues more deeply (Morgan, 1997). Student interviews, however, were generally focus group interviews. Morgan (1997, p.6) defines a focus group interview as a research technique that "collects data through group interaction on a topic" given by the researcher, who provides the focus, with the data themselves coming from the group members. According to Morgan (1997), the main advantage of focus group is the opportunity it affords to collect rich information on a topic during a limited time span.

Semi-structured interviews were employed in the study, as the format is both fairly flexible and dialogic (Cohen, et al., 2007). A semi-structured format enables the researcher to respond to emergent situations and the perspective of the interviewee, and allows the interviewee to offer his own opinions as they become relevant (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Holstein & Grubrium, 1995; Merriam, 2009; Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Patton, 1990, 2002, 2008; Patton & Patrizi, 2005; Seidman, 1998). The interviews provided the researcher opportunities to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon from an emic viewpoint.

The actual dataset of interviews. The dataset contained 24 hours and 45 minutes of interviews. Twenty-seven individual interviews were conducted

with the selected teacher (Ouya) with the duration ranging from 10 minutes to 40 minutes; six with the principals (Yie Gie, Xie) with the duration ranging from 30 minutes to 50 minutes, and 18 with the other immersion teachers (Funa, Wuna, Xiee, Yongqia, Cailia, Wulia, Liwia, Guolia, and Linzia) with the duration ranging from 15 minutes to 30 minutes; a total of 30 individual and focus group interviews were conducted with the selected students (Liuliu, Yoyo, Changqing, Wenwen, Hanfeng, Nanhai, Peiqiong and Xumeng)[1] with the duration ranging from five minutes to 20 minutes. In addition, a number of informal personal communications occurred in the process of data collection, such as lunchtime or dinnertime talks in the canteen, or talks over the phone.

There were four types of interviews, to suit a range of purposes and functions. Background information interviews were conducted with the principal to gain background knowledge of the school and the implementation of its immersion program, with the teacher to get basic information about his teaching experience, with the eight students to gather their general ideas about learning English, and with the students' parents to glean their social and cultural background information. Teacher-related interviews were conducted with the teacher before lessons to discover his teaching plan, and after lessons to address questions that emerged during the observation. Activity-related interviews were conducted with the selected students when questions emerged through observation. Immersion teacher collaboration-related interviews were conducted with other immersion teacher(s) to learn their views on collaboration and to explore their implementation of the immersion program, as illustrated in Table 4.4.

Table 4.4   Types of Interviews in the Case Study

Interview type	Participants	Purposes and functions
1)	the school principal, the selected teachers, the selected students and their parents	background information about the school, about the teacher and the students

(to be continued)

1 Pseudonyms were used for all the participants for the ethical reason.

Interview type	Participants	Purposes and functions
2)	the selected teacher	teacher-related information of instruction such as teaching plan and the goals of the lessons
3)	the selected students	activity-related questions emerging in the class or outside the class
4)	the immersion teachers	implementation and collaboration in their teaching planning and instruction

It was important for the researcher to be aware of the limitations of interviews and to take measures to ensure the trustworthiness of interview data. An interview, for example, is more than just an exchange of information between the interviewer and the interviewee for knowledge production, and its effectiveness can be limited depending on the researcher's abilities and interpersonal skills (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Holstein & Grubrium, 1995; Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Nunan, 1992; Patton, 1990; Seidman, 1998). In addition, data from questions that emerge from observations might be fragmented, making data analysis difficult (Cohen, et al., 2007). To ensure the trustworthiness of the data, the researcher took personal notes, constantly critiqued her assumptions (Marshall & Rossman, 1999), and watched for contradictory patterns or issues (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993; Marshall & Rossman, 1999).

4.4.2 Data Analysis

The current study aimed to reveal the patterns and themes of student interaction in their learning process rather than the students' language development. Engestrom's complex activity system functions as a powerful way of revealing the dynamics and the situatedness of activities, although it could not demonstrate students' language development. Therefore, in the analysis, student activity was viewed as a unit of analysis for the purpose of investigating the dynamic nature of activity and the interrelationship between

activity and peer talk. Engestrom's complex activity system was employed as both the theoretical and the analytical framework for examining student activities (see Section 3.4 for a detailed description of the activity system).

Data on a total of 110 student activities[1] were transcribed in detail and analyzed using four layers of data analysis. Firstly, in order to know their nature, student activities were examined and categorized into different types, based on the data and the activity system. Secondly, the nature of the activities was examined through the optic of the activity system, to understand the mediations of activity and unpack the complexity of its dynamics. Thirdly, data analysis was focused on peer talk with focal elements in students' discourse identified, based on the data and the previous studies. Salient features of peer talk were revealed through the identification of these foci. Fourthly, the identified focal elements were further analysed with patterns of interaction revealed, based on the data. These four layers of analysis are summarized into Figure 4.1 as the analytical framework of the current study and the detailed description of this framework is presented in the next section.

Layer 1. Categorization of the student activities
(based on the activity system and the data)

Layer 2. Analysis on: 1) the complexity of the dynamics of the student activities (based on the activity system and the data); and 2) the multidimensional mediations in the students' enactment of mediational means in their activities

Layer 3. Identification of focal elements of peer talk in the student activities, through which salient features of peer talk are revealed (based on focal elements in spoken discourse analysis on peer talk)

Layer 4. Further analysis on the identified focal elements, grounded on the data, for example, language play, peer assistance and the use of L1 as well as code-switching

Figure 4.1   The Analytical Framework of the Current Study

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1 Student activities were calculated based on Spada and Frohlich's (1995, p.30) criterion: "The beginning or end of an activity is typically marked by a change in the overall theme or content."

4.4.2.1 Categorization of the Student Activities

Researchers such as Nunan (2004) and Valcarcel (Valcarcel, Chaudron, Verdu, & Roca, 1995, pp.150-154) reported on the classification of classroom activities. Nunan (2004, pp.57-58) lists seven tasks and activities proposed by Pattison (1987): "dialogues and role plays", "matching activities", "communication activities", "pictures and picture stories", "puzzles and problems", "discussions", and "decisions". Valcarcel (Valcarcel, et al., 1995, pp.150-154) divides classroom instruction into four phases, each containing different activities: information and motivation; organizing and selecting information and content; focus/working; and transfer/application. Their classification is summarized in Table 4.5.

Table 4.5   Types of Classroom Activities (Based on Valcarcel, et al., 1995, pp.150-154)

Phases	Activity types within the phase
Information & motivation phase	warming up, setting, brainstorm, storytelling and a propos
Organizing and selecting information and content phase	organizational, content explanation, role play demonstration, recognition, language modeling, dialogue/ narrative presentation, question-answer display, and review
Focus/working phase	translation, dictation, copying, reading aloud, drill, dialogue/narrative recitation, cued narrative/dialogue, drill meaningful, preparation, identification, games, question-answer referential, checking, and wrap-up
Transfer/application phase	information transfer, information exchange, role-play, report, narration, discussion, composition, problem solving, drama, and simulation

However, these categorizations serve only as significant reference to the classification of activities in the current study for three reasons. Firstly, the classification of the student activities in the present study functions as the basis for the investigation of the nature of activity; in contrast to the

studies mentioned above, where the purpose was to find the most effective type of activity. Secondly, the activities examined in these other studies were

classroom activities, mostly teacher-student activities, with the investigation of student activities also being from the teacher's perspective; the current study, by contrast, focuses on the student activities with an emic perspective. Thirdly, the activities in their studies were limited to the classroom, while the current study investigates activities both in class and after class.

Based on subjects, rules, the community, and the division of labor of the activity system, activities were categorized into two main categories: individual activities and collaborative activities. Based on the "authenticity" of context and the "real life" needs, these two main categories were further categorized into communicative and non-communicative activities. Hence the four types of activities were individual communicative activities, individual non-communicative activities, collaborative communicative activities, and collaborative non-communicative activities. The collaborative non-communicative activities were further categorized in detail according to the linguistic support the students had in their activities. There were two reasons for this further categorization: 1) the purpose of the study focused on peer talk — the collaborative dialogue, and 2) the data analysis showed that most of the student activities were collaborative non-communicative activities. (See Chapter 6 for the details of the analysis.)

4.4.2.2 Analysis on the Dynamics of Student Activities

The categorization of the student activities was the basis for further analysis of the nature of activity. The activity system was used as the classification framework. The complex activity system was employed to categorize the activity type and to examine the dynamic nature of activity and mediations of activity. In the activity system, rules refer to the relations, norms, conventions and expectations of the community. Peer role relations play an important role in rules. Storch's (2002) model (see Section 4.4.2.3) of peer interaction serves as a parameter for explaining role relations among the peers in activities in this study. Table 4.6 illustrates the four types of relations and the meanings (Storch, 2002, p.128).

Table 4.6   Four Types of Peer Interaction (Based on Storch, 2002, p.128)

Type	Meaning
1) Collaborative	alternative views offered, discussed, leading to resolutions acceptable to both
2) Dominant/dominant	unwillingness or inability to fully engage with each other's contribution, despite equal contribution
3) Dominant/passive	little negotiation, few contributions or challenges forthcoming from the more passive participants
4) Expert/novice	one participant acting as an expert who actively encourages the other to participate

Note: The categorization is based on mutuality and equality.

Mediational means used in the activities were identified from the data. The nature of an activity was revealed by its dynamic relationship among activity components. Peer talk functioned as both a mediational means and an indicator of actual outcome. Based on the activity system and the data, the dynamic nature of activity was revealed from three aspects: 1) different activities emerging from the same task; 2) different roles emerging in the same activity; and 3) potential learning opportunities in side-task or even off-task activities (see Chapter 7 for the details of the analysis). The multidimensional mediations of activity were illustrated in the students' enactment of the mediational means in the activities (see Chapter 8 for the details of analysis).

4.4.2.3   Foci in Spoken Discourse Analysis on the Student Peer Talk

Researchers such as Kumpulainen and Mutanen, Ohta, Storch and Duff have researched on peer interaction, and the frameworks they developed offer an analytical basis for identifying the focal elements of peer talk in the current study. Based on Duff's table of common foci in micro-level discourse analysis, Kumpulainen and Mutanen's (1999) framework for peer group interaction, Ohta's (2001) illustration of peer interaction assistance and its benefits, and Storch's (2002) model of dyadic interaction are synthesized for the current study to identify the focal elements in student peer talk in their activities.

Kumpulainen and Mutanen's framework of peer group interaction

According to Kumpulainen and Mutanen (1999, p.453), observation, student interviews, and transcripts of verbal interaction could provide a holistic perspective on students' "cognitive, social and emotional processes", and promote understanding of social relations. Peer interaction is perceived as a dynamic process in which communication and learning occur through the instrument of language and other semiotic tools (Kumpulainen & Mutanen, 1999). Peer discourse is a tool-in-action shaped by participants by defining culturally-rooted situations (Edwards, 1993; Edwards & Potter, 1992). Summarizing the research on peer group interaction, Kumpulainen and Mutanen (1999, p.455) developed a framework with three analytic dimensions: verbal interaction, cognitive processing and social processing. Table 4.7 lists the three dimensions and their categorization in the framework.

Table 4.7   Analytical Framework of Peer Interaction (Kumpulainen & Mutanen, 1999, p.457)

Dimension	Analytical categorization
Cognitive processing	exploratory/interpretative procedural/routine off-task
Social processing	collaborative (tutoring, argumentative) individualistic domination conflict confusion
Language functions	informative reasoning evaluative interrogative responsive organizational judgmental (agrees, disagrees) argumentational compositional revision dictation

(to be continued)

Dimension	Analytical categorization
Language functions	reading aloud repetition experiential affectional

The three dimensions in Kumpulainen and Mutanen's framework were taken into consideration for identifying the focal elements of peer talk in the current study. However, Kumpulainen and Mutanen's framework focuses on the functions of peer interaction, mainly the linguistic functions, while peer role relations and peer interaction patterns are better illustrated in Ohta's (2001) and Storch's (2002) studies.

Ohta's framework of peer assistance and its benefits

Ohta's work offers an in-depth understanding of the patterns and the functions of peer interaction. In a longitudinal case study of students' Japanese language development, Ohta (2001) examined their classroom interactions from a sociocultural perspective, focusing on the learning process, investigating assisted performance in action and categorizing the methods of assistance used during peer interaction. When peer interlocutors struggled, their partners assisted them through such strategies as waiting, prompting, co-constructing and explaining; in response to errors, partners would use either NTRI (Next Turn Repair Initiator) without repair or NTRI with repair provided, and ask the teacher for help (Ohta, 2001, p.89), as shown in Table 4.8.

Table 4.8 Some Methods of Assistance Occurring during Classroom Peer Interaction (Ohta, 2001, p.89)

Methods	E	Description
(1) When the peer interlocutor is struggling		
Waiting	1	One partner gives the other, even when struggling, time to complete an utterance without making any contribution.

(to be continued)

Methods	E	Description
Prompting	2	Partner repeats the syllable or word just uttered, helping the interlocutor to continue.
Co-construction	2-3	Partner contributes a syllable, word, phrase, or grammatical particle that completes or works towards completion of the utterance. This includes prompts that occur in the absence of an error, when the learner stops speaking, or produces false starts.
Explaining	4	Partner explains in English.

(2) When the peer interlocutor makes an error, partners use the above methods (waiting, co-construction and prompting) as well as the methods listed below.

NTRI (w/o repair)	1-2	Partner indicates that the preceding utterance is somehow problematic (for example, by saying "huh?" or "nani?" (what).) When the NTRI is in the form of a prompt, it more explicitly targets the error. The NTRI provides an opportunity for the interlocutor to consider the utterance and self-correct. This is the case even when the NTRI is triggered by comprehension difficulties rather than by a linguistic error.
NTRI (provide)	3	Partner initiates and carries out repair (either fully or partially by providing a syllable, word, or phrase to the interlocutor. These may be in the form of recasts, which build semantically on the learner's utterance but change or expand it.)
Asking	4	Peer partner notices their interlocutor's error and asks the teacher about it.

Note: E= level of explicitness from least explicit (1) to most explicit (4)
　　　 NTRI= Next Turn Repair Initiator

According to Ohta's (2001) findings, interaction offers peers opportunities for language development, and enables learners to do what they could not have done otherwise while internalizing the language at the same time. The general benefits of peer assistance are general development in interaction, vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, and interactional style.

The peer assisting strategies in Table 4.8 and the benefit from peer assistance, both linguistic and strategic are important reference sources for the current study. However, peer interaction is supposed to be rich, diverse, dynamic and multidimensional, and features various patterns and functions. The limitation of Ohta's framework is that it covers only one aspect of

classroom peer interaction and describes the four strategies of peer assistance in their communication, which are not wholly adequate for this study, as the current study examines the communicative competence students draw on for linguistic and sociocultural purposes. Hence, Storch's (2002) research which reveals the peer relations in the interaction gives insights into the current study.

Storch's model of peer interactional relations

Storch's model of peer interactional relations makes up for what Ohta (2001) does not cover, which is included among the activity components of the current study. Storch (2002) examined the nature of dyadic interaction and its potential effects on second language development in an adult ESL classroom in Australia. In analyzing data from a sociocultural perspective, it was vitally important to identify the relationship between participants (Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005). Grounded in the sociocultural theories, Storch's model (2002, p.128) depicts role relationships in dyadic interaction, accounting for both equality (the degree of control over the task) and mutuality (the level of engagement with each other's contribution) (Damon and Phelps, 1989, cited in Storch, 2002, p.127). The four distinguished role relationships identified in Storch's model are collaborative, dominant/dominant, dominant/passive, and expert/novice, as illustrated in Figure 4.2.

High mutuality

4 Expert/novice	1 Collaborative
3 Dominant/passive	2 Dominant/dominant

Low mutuality
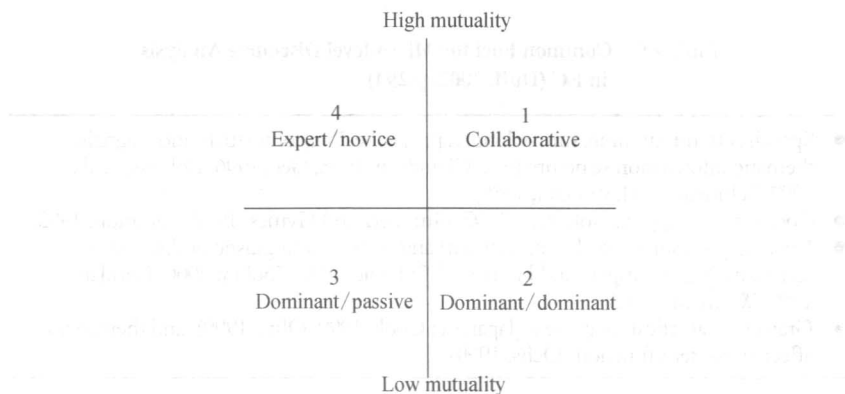
Figure 4.2 *A Model of Dyadic Interaction (Storch, 2002, p.128)*

The collaborative pattern refers to a situation where peers discuss opinions, and reach resolutions that are suitable for both participants (Storch, 2002, p.128). The dominant/dominant pattern is when peers are unable or unwilling to actively involve the other party, although they may have equal control over the task (Storch, 2002, pp.128-129). The dominant/passive pattern refers to a situation in which the more passive participant makes few contributions and little negotiation emerges (Storch, 2002, p.129). Finally, the expert/novice pattern describes a situation wherein one participant exercises more control over the task by acting as an expert and encouraging and actively involving the other participant in the participation (Storch, 2002, p.129). Storch's model deals with an important aspect of interaction — role relationships — and provides insights into what the current study sets out to examine.

Duff's common foci for micro-level discourse analysis

Duff's (2002, p.294) table (as shown below) summarized these research foci which included speech acts, code-switching, personal pronouns and their sociolinguistic or discursive functions, grammatical particles and their socio-affective content/function, IRE (or IRF) analysis and the role of evaluation move specifically, silence and its significance, recurring structures that signal boundaries between/within activities and their functions, as shown in table 4.9.

Table 4.9   Common Foci for Micro-level Discourse Analysis
in EC (Duff, 2002, p.294)

- Speech acts, questioning, turn-taking, repair, cohesion, contextualization signals, thematic/information structure (e.g., Chaudron, 1988; Gee, 1996; Roberts, et al., 1992; Schiffrin, 1994; van Lier, 1988)
- Code-switching (e.g., Goldstein, 1997; Gumperz and Hymes, 1972; Rampton, 1995)
- Personal pronouns (e.g., I/you; us/them) and their sociolinguistic or discursive functions (e.g., Gumperz and Hymes,1972; Poole, 1992; Toohey, 2000; Harklau, 1999; Wartham, 1992)
- Grammatical articals (e.g., ne in Japanese; Cook, 1999; Ohta, 1999), and their socio-affective content/function (Ochs, 1990)

(to be continued)

- IRE (or IRF) analysis (Mehan, 1979): Initiation–Response–Evaluation interaction patterns (e.g., Cook, 1999; Gutierrez, 1994; Hall, 1988; Losey, 1995; Ohta, 1999; Poole, 1990; 1992); and role of the Evaluation move specifically (e.g., Cazden, 1986; Duff, 2000; Gutierrez, 1994; Hall and Verplaetse, 2000; O'Connor and Michaels, 1993; Wells, 1993)
- Silence and its significance (e.g., resistance, fear, sulking; Losey, 1997, Tannen and Saville-Troike, 1985)
- Recurring structures that signal boundaries between/ within activities and their functions (Gumperz, 1982)

Note: EC means ethnography of communication

Duff's (2002, p.294) table of common foci for micro-level discourse analysis is an important reference, but did not fit this study exactly. For example, Duff uses IRF to describe teacher-student interaction pattern, but IRF is not the focus of the current study. In the current study, focal attention was paid to the nature of student activities and the interrelationships between student activities and peer talk, i.e., students' discourse features in their activities. Thus the four analytical frameworks were synthesized, and adapted to analyze peer talk in the current study, according to the themes and patterns that emerged from the data.

Based on Duff's (2002, p.294) table of common foci for micro-level discourse analysis, taking into consideration of Ohta's (2001, p.89) peer assistance strategies, Kumpulainen and Mutanen's (1999, p.457) three dimensions of peer group interaction, and Storch's peer relations in interaction, "the focal elements in spoken discourse analysis on peer talk" for the current study was developed to analyze the peer talk and identify the features of peer talk. This modified focal elements categorize the peer talk data into two types: pre-activity peer talk and activity peer talk. Pre-activity peer talk refers to students' planning, explaining, prompting, questioning, commenting, reasoning, describing, waiting, etc., before their performance of the task; activity peer talk is how the students convey meaning during their performance of the task, and involves three different dimensions of peer interaction such as sociolinguistic, pragmatic and linguistic dimensions, for example, peer assistance, reciprocity, channeling back, challenging, clarification request, private speech, language play, chanting, repetition, parallelism, the use

of L1, code-switching, turn-taking, repair, self-repair, cohesion, coherence, contextualization signals, waiting, explaining, prompting, questioning commenting, reasoning, describing, personal pronouns, grammatical particles, peer assistance, recurring phrases or structures, etc., as represented in Figure 4.3. When peer talk is coded according to this framework, the features of peer talk can be identified accordingly.

Pre-activity talk:

    planning, explaining, co-constructing, prompting, questioning, waiting, etc.

Activity talk:

    turn-taking, repair, self-repair, cohesion, coherence, peer assistance, reciprocity, channeling back, challenging, clarification request, private speech, language play, chanting, repetition, parallelism, the use of L1, code-switching, contextualizing signals, waiting, explaining, questioning, prompting, co-constructing, personal pronoun, grammatical particles, recurring sentences and phrases, etc.

Figure 4.3   *Focal Elements in Spoken Discourse Analysis on Peer Talk*
(Adapted from Kumpulainen and Mutanen's (1999, p.457) framework, Duff's (2002, p.294) table and Ohta's (2001, p.89) table for the special purpose of this study)

4.4.2.4   Further Analysis on the Identified Focal Elements

The identified salient features of peer talk were peer language play, peer assistance, the use of L1 and code-switching. These foci, which also served as mediational means in student activities, were further analyzed, together with other mediational means identified in the current study such as task, activity types and subject contents. Emerging from the data, peer language play includes playing with pronunciation such as anglicizing, elongating the vowel, and exaggerating; with lexis such as nickname and transliterating; with sentence structure through parallelism, repetition, and chanting; and with the content through dramatizing the scene. Peer assistance includes language-related, content-related, task-related, behavior-related, and affect-

related aspects. The L1 and code-switching show the purposes of negotiating the roles, assisting their peers, clarifying the tasks, monitoring the tasks, encouraging, and fun (See Chapter 8 for the detailed analysis of forms of mediation).

4.5   Trustworthiness

This study employs various strategies to ensure trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), including thick description, member checking, peer debriefing and self-reflexivity. In addition, it takes care to address ethical concerns. These strategies are described below.

4.5.1   Thick Description

Rich thick description provides the depth, breadth and richness for the exploration and understanding of the question under study (Flick, 1998). Although some researchers contend that triangulation is incoherent and empirically empty (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p.307), thick description from multiple resources and multiple methods is used to gain multiple perspectives for a holistic picture and an in-depth analysis of the case. Hence, Denzin's (1997) and Flick's (1998) types of triangulation serve as very important measures for the current study.

Multiple data sources and multiple methods were used to ensure thick description of the case for the purpose of trustworthiness. To achieve a holistic picture, data were collected from different sources, and a variety of methods were employed in collecting the data. Physical artifacts were also collected to enrich the understanding of the data. Iterative exploration of the data was conducted, and data analysis was conducted both during the data collection periods and after the completion of the field work. Two additional measures were taken to ensure thick description, validation and

verification, as proposed by Patton (1980, p.329): "(1) checking out the consistency of findings generated by different data-collection methods; and (2) checking out the consistency of different data sources within the same method". As Patton (1980, p.331) explains, consistency does not mean that the data are all the same, but that one is aware of the differences, attempts to identify the reasons for these differences, and tries to give "reasonable explanations for the differences in data from different sources" in order to contribute to the validity of the findings. The study's multiple attempts to achieve multiple perspectives for thick description are illustrated in Table 4.10.

Table 4.10   Multiple Attempts to Achieve Multiple Perspectives in the Study

Types	Operational methods	Limitations	Measures to be taken
Multiple data sources	– different methods of data collection: field notes, interviews, observation, physical artifacts – different perspectives of the participants: the principal, the teachers, the students as well as their parents – different contexts taken into consideration: in class, after class, the class, the school and the larger social and cultural context	epistemologically incoherent	– to be aware of the differences – to identify the reasons for the differences
Multiple data collection methods Iterative analysis	– interviews, observation, field notes, physical artifacts – during the data collection period, after the field work	data- driven different interpretations	– to give reasonable explanation for the differences
Physical artifacts as supplementary support to spoken discourse analysis	– collection of the physical artifacts such as students' worksheets, teacher's teaching plan, etc.	explanatorily incomplete	

4.5.2 Member Checking

Interpretations and tentative findings were presented to all the participants, especially the English teacher(s) involved and the selected students, and their opinions sought. Post-analysis interviews were conducted to allow the participants to identify and correct unclear or misinterpreted analysis. This is what Merriam (2009, p.217) proposes to ensure internal validity or credibility — making sure one's interpretation of the data "rings true" with the participants. Maxwell (2005) emphasizes the importance of member checking, calling it the most important way of ruling out potential misinterpretations of participants' deeds and opinions, and an important way of guarding against our biases and misinterpretations.

4.5.3 Peer Debriefing

Another strategy is peer debriefing, also referred to as *peer examination* or *peer review* (Merriam, 2009, p.220; emphasis in original). Peer debriefing can be conducted in each stage of the research, and peers can be used to go through the raw data and check the plausibility on the findings according to the truthfulness of the data; the peer in question can be an expert in the field or a novice (Merriam, 2009).

Peer debriefing was employed throughout this study. Two fellow students from the Centre of the Applied English Studies provided regular feedback on issues emerging from the research. The author met them once every month, at which time they routinely challenged her to reflect on the research from design to analysis. Such occasions stimulated further thinking about her research. For example, before data collection, they met to discuss the interview questions and list potential difficulties and problems she might encounter while collecting her data.

96 4.5.4 Self Reflexivity

Self reflexivity refers to the process of critical self-reflection by the researcher in this qualitative study, who acts as the main research instrument (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). In qualitative research, the researcher is the key instrument for both data collection and data analysis, thus the researcher's "reflexivity" (Merriam, 2009, p.219) is one of the most important strategies used to ensure internal validity. Maxwell (2005, p.108) emphasizes the importance of making the researcher's perspective, biases, and assumptions clear to the reader, not to rule out the diversified values and expectations he/she brings to the study, but to understand "how a *particular* researcher's values and expectations influence the conduct and conclusions of the study" (emphasis in original).

From the very beginning of the research, the author reminded herself of the potential research orientation by presenting her motivation for doing this research in the introduction to the thesis. Frequently, she reflected critically on the research orientation and the stance she took, so as to remain aware of the potential biases that might occur in the study.

4.5.5 Ethical Concerns

As the current study concerned young children, approval was sought to ensure that the research did not violate ethical principles (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2000). The privacy of study participants was respected; pseudonyms were used to obscure the identity of the participants, school and area. The participants were volunteers, and were not under any pressure. They can choose to participate in or withdraw from the research at any time. Formal consent was obtained from the school principal, the teachers, the students and their parents before data collection began. The data collected were kept confidential, and were not used for purposes other than that of this study. The findings from the research were explained to the participants.

4.6   Summary

This chapter presented the overall research design of this longitudinal case study. In the study, a number of methods of data collection and data analysis were employed to gain an in-depth understanding of the case. The research site and participants for the study were purposefully selected due to the uniqueness of the situation. It is hoped that the longitudinal case study will provide a holistic picture and a better understanding of the process of students' English language learning through peer interaction in activities in an English immersion context. A gender-balanced group of eight students from three different language proficiency levels, from different family backgrounds and with different personalities was involved in the study. Data collection was carried out on four occasions over the two-year duration of the study. Data analysis was done in tandem with the data collection. Video or/and audio recordings of the interactions were transcribed and analyzed using spoken discourse analysis techniques within the framework of the activity system and the focal elements in peer interaction. Thick description from multiple sources, member checking, peer review and self-reflexivity were employed throughout the study to ensure the trustworthiness of the study. The next chapter presents a more detailed description of the school context and the participants in the study.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONTEXT AND PARTICIPANTS

This case study was conducted from May, 2007 to May, 2009, during which time the author went into the field on four occasions to collect data on student activities from multiple sources, making detailed transcriptions of peer talk, as stated in Chapter 4. Before presenting an analysis of student activities and peer talk, this chapter describes the relevant institutional activities — specifically ELT in China, the school context and the participants. The description of the school context and the participants aims at providing a deeper understanding of student activities and peer talk, which will be presented in the following chapters. The presentation of the school context and the participants is based on the interview data, observations, and the field notes taken during the school visits. This chapter starts with a brief introduction of the educational context of ELT in China, both nationwide and within the CCUEI[1].

5.1   ELT in China

In recent years, great changes have taken place in ELT in China, as

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1 For a more detailed description, please refer to Section 1.2.

introduced in Section 1.2. The most recent and influential of these was the publication of the *NEC* (The Ministry of Education, 2001b), which regulates English language teaching and learning in schools. According to its guidelines (The Ministry of Education, 2001b), English is required as a compulsory subject starting in Primary Grade 3, and no public test is given to the primary students. The stated aim of teaching English at the primary level is to enhance the students' integrated capacity to use the language, including cultural awareness, language knowledge, language skills, learning strategies and affective attitudes (The Ministry of Education, 2001b). In reality, in implementing the *NEC*, many schools stipulated English as a compulsory subject not from Grade 3, but from Grade 1, in order to advance their status and respond to parents' requests. Moreover, despite national guidelines, English as a subject is tested at the end of each semester from Grade 3 onward by the public local testing system, along with Chinese and Math. With the implementation of the *NEC*, the number of young English language learners has increased dramatically, and more problems and challenges have occured. For example, although task-based language teaching is officially advocated in the guideline to the *NEC* (The Ministry of Education, 2001b), few teachers know how to implement it, and continue to rely upon traditional teaching methods (Deng & Carless, 2009; Zhang, 2005). English immersion programs seem to have taken the initiative in exploring ways of enhancing English language learning for young students. According to Prof. Qiang (2000), immersion programs arouse children's interest in English language learning, enhance their appreciation of related cultures, and enhance both L1 and L2 language learning, which is in line with the *NEC* expectations.

5.2   The School Context

The school in the current study was affected both by policy changes and its location as well as socio-economic background. It showed features of constant changes due to its susceptibility to the testing and ranking system,

sensitivity to parents' choices, and its resultant instability. There were constant changes to school policy and the curriculum for English immersion, which was reflected in the moving of the English immersion teachers' office.

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5.2.1 The School

The school in the present study was a privately-funded school located in Guangdong Province, an economically developing zone in China. It was built in 2004, at which time students were enrolled for the first time, and the English immersion program was adopted. Its physical location, social and economic background, and intention to be innovative gave this school several unique characteristics.

5.2.2 The Features of the School Context

Particularly salient features of the school context were the school's implementation of English immersion, the high status of English language learning in the school, susceptibility to the local testing system and ranking practice, sensitivity to parents' choice, greater freedom to choose textbooks, potential to provide more learning opportunities as a boarding school, high turnover rate, and unstable English language policy.

5.2.2.1 The Implementation of English Immersion

Unlike immersion programs elsewhere in China, which were limited in scope and largely experimental, this school adopted English as a selling point to parents, most of whom planned to send their children abroad for studies in the future. Nonetheless, the English immersion program at this school was very much a partial one.

Moreover, English immersion teaching hours were reduced following the arrival of a new principal. Under the former principal's policy, for Grades 3 and 4, seven of each week's 36 total teaching hours were allocated to English

teaching, three of these for English immersion; in Grade 5, seven English teaching hours were allotted, with two and a half reserved[1] for English immersion. Under the pressure of the testing and ranking system, the new principal made some changes in policy: English teaching hours in Grades 3, 4 and 5 were reduced to six, with Grades 3 and 4 having two hours of immersion and Grade 5 one and a half (later reduced to one hour). From my observation, only Teacher Ouya was still actually teaching English immersion classes at the Grade 5 level, as allocated. The other teachers, who did not know much about English immersion, told me that they would consider it in the future. The time allocation for English and English immersion under the two principals' policies is illustrated in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1   Time Allocation of English and English Immersion in the School Curriculum

	Grade	Total teaching hours	Total English	English immersion	English language art
Policy of the former principal	1–2	36	8	5	3
	3–4	36	7	3	4
	5	36	7	2.5	4.5
Policy of the new principal	1–2	36	7	3	4
	3–4	36	6	2	4
	5	36	6	1.5 (first) 1 (later)	4.5 (first) 5 (later)

Note: Each teaching hour counts 40 minutes. There are no teaching hours for English immersion in Grade 6, because of the preparation for the public entrance exam.

The English immersion content subjects comprised Social Science,

1 The two-and-a-half teaching hours was due to the reason that for every odd week it was three, and for every even week it was two. Under the new principal, the immersion teaching hour was one-and-a-half hours, due to the reason that for odd weeks it was two, and for even weeks it was one. The adjustment of time allocation began since September, 2008 with the new principal's policy.

Moral Education and Primary Living Science. According to Prof. Qiang, the main investigator of the CCUEI, and former Principal Gie (pseudonym) of the school, it was unfeasible to turn subject teachers into English immersion teachers due to their limited English language knowledge and low English proficiency levels. The common practice in English immersion within the CCUEI program was that the English language teacher was also the English immersion subject teacher. Researchers and experts on the CCUEI came to the school every semester to provide teacher training and to solve problems the teachers had encountered. Their visits provided guidance for, and seemed to be of vital importance to the teachers, who were not confident when teaching content subjects and conducting activities in English, as revealed in interviews with Ouya, the teacher participant of this study (October 14, 2008).

5.2.2.2 The Status of English Language Learning in the School

The status of English language learning was explicitly high at this school, due to parents' expectations. Aside from adopting English immersion, this school conducted many activities to arouse the students' interest in English language learning, such as integrating English language learning with music and extracurricular activities. For example, English songs were used in morning exercises and the afternoon retreat; English was integrated in extracurricular activities; classrooms were managed using English rhymes; and an English talent show was part of the School Science and Culture Festival. The high status of English language learning seemed to impact the students' English language learning, and English immersion students' test results were an average of 10 points higher than those of public mainstream students[1].

The testing system seemed to cause difficulty in the implementation of English immersion in the school, because the public tests were still in a very traditional way, and what English immersion focused on (for example, the students' communicative competence and spoken language development)

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1 The students' high motivation and their family support all played a role in the students' achievement together with what the school had provided in the teaching context.

was not examined in these tests. This led to the dissatisfaction of the school administrators. Their dissatisfaction became greater, and they began even to doubt the effectiveness of English immersion, when some of the non-immersion classes in the school achieved similar public test results, suggesting that the immersion students' achievements could be attained in non-immersion contexts.

5.2.2.3 More Susceptibility to the Local Testing System and Ranking Practice

Being privately-funded, the school was more influenced by the local testing system and ranking practice than were public mainstream schools. Although the *NEC* guidelines (The Ministry of Education, 2001b) state that English is not to be examined in public tests, in this area English is publicly tested from Grade 3 onward, and public rankings (based on average test scores) announced. The rankings affect a school's reputation, and can result in increased or decreased enrollment, which is a matter of great concern to privately-funded schools. Thus, rankings and the students' test scores were seen as "the life of the school"; in order to ensure that the school achieved a high official ranking, it enforced stringent internal testing and ranking, meaning that, in addition to local public testing, school-level tests were given in each subject in each grade and class rankings announced at the end of every month. Teachers' employment, salaries, and professional promotions were decided by or related to the ranking system.

5.2.2.4 Greater Freedom in Choosing Textbooks

Being privately-funded, the school had greater freedom to choose textbooks: for example, it used two sets of English textbooks — the public textbook and the English immersion textbook, despite the local Educational Bureau regulation against using extra textbooks or supplementary teaching materials. However, this regulation is mostly to limit students' financial and mental burdens; as the tuition paid by the students covered all costs, the school paid for the additional textbooks.

5.2.2.5 More Chances for Students to Study with the Teachers and Their Peers

As they were attending a boarding school, the students spent more time at school and had more chances to study with the teacher and with their peers. The students stayed at the school for the whole week, except for weekends. Afternoon extracurricular activities were group activities, as were evening self-study sessions. In the evening, the students were required to study in the classroom from seven o'clock to eight thirty, two 40-minute sessions with a 10-minute recess in between. Teachers of English, Chinese, and Math were allocated some evening class periods each week. The students thus had more opportunities to work with their peers and with their English teacher than the mainstream schools could provide.

5.2.2.6 High Turnover Rate

The school had a high turnover rate, which resulted in instability in school policy and curriculum and in teaching practice. For example, Ouya said (personal communication in May, 2009) that of the more than 90 teachers working at the school when he first arrived, more than 70 had left . Of the 10 English immersion teachers present, six had left in September, 2008, and the principal was replaced[1]. The author observed five students in the class transfer

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1 In public schools, teachers usually enjoy a long-term employment or a tenure, if they work well, and follow the regulations and rules of the school and the law of the government. The teachers' salaries are transparent to all, following the government and school promotion terms. Their welfare, as well as teachers' bonuses, is standardized and monitored by the government. The teachers' professional profiles, which are most important in employment in China, are kept by the school and the local educational bureau. A transfer must be approved by the school and the educational bureau first. Thus the personnel of teachers in public schools remain comparatively stable. In privately-funded schools, it is different. The employment/dismissal is decided by the school administration based on the ranking system. The teachers' salaries and bonuses are private but higher than in the public school system, based on the school's economic situation. Consequently their workload is much heavier, and their work is more competitive. The school keeps a temporary record of how the teachers work, which is not important in the teachers' reemployment. Their transfer does not need the school's approval. All this accounts for the high turnover rate in privately-funded schools in China, according to my knowledge and experience.

to other schools, with only three new students arriving.

5.2.2.7 Unstable School Policy for English Immersion

In September, 2008, the former principal, who came from an English teaching background and had administrative experience in the English immersion programs in Xi'an, was replaced by a new principal, who came from a Chinese teaching background. The new principal told me in the interview (October 14, 2008) that she made policy changes to the immersion curriculum to ensure teachers did not use English immersion class time to prepare for exams, as they taught both. The policy changes were:

1) separating English language teaching from English immersion subject teaching;

2) placing a single English immersion teacher in charge of immersion subject teaching for an entire grade (four or five classes — 140 to 180 students);

3) reducing the English immersion time allocation from two-and-a-half teaching hours per week to one-and-a-half (later to one); and,

4) canceling the experts' school visits.

One month later, the new principal made additional policy changes (Oct. 27, 2008) based on monthly test results, which showed a forty- to fifty-point drop in students' average score. English language teachers now taught both the English language subject and the immersion content subjects, but immersion was reduced to one teaching hour per week, to enforce linguistic points and prepare students for the exams, which were based on nationally-used textbooks compiled by People's Education Press (PEP)[1]. These policy changes made the former principal wonder whether English immersion still existed at all; according to the former principal, English immersion under the new principal's curricular policy was "*liu yu kou tou, ming cun shi wang* {existing on people's lips, but dead in effect.}" (Interview on November 19, 2008).

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1 The textbooks were compiled by the People's Education Press. As a result, they call the textbooks the PEP textbook, and the English language class the PEP class.

5.2.3 The Moving of the English Immersion Teachers' Office

A key indicator of the changes in the school culture and discourse on English immersion is the moving of the English immersion teachers' office. Two moves occurred in the two-year period from early 2007 to early 2009: from a big office (close to the principal's office) in which all ten English immersion teachers worked together, to a smaller office housing four English immersion teachers and four non-immersion English teachers, and finally to diverse offices where one immersion teacher sat with teachers of other subjects.

According to Ouya (Interview on May 24, 2007) while they were in the big office, the ten immersion teachers (and often the former principal as well) met weekly for collective reflection and discussion, to plan the next week's lessons, and to address problems that had emerged in the past week. Teaching resources were shared, including the materials teachers had found or developed for their own students. In addition, teacher-parent contact and parental feedback was greatly enhanced.

When the former principal left in September, 2008, six English immersion teachers left as well, and the remaining four were moved to shared quarters on the third floor; the following February, they were dispersed into scattered small offices among teachers of other subjects working in the same grade. As a result, they collaborated less, and took more individual approaches to their teaching. English immersion came to this school with a high profile and a loud voice, but in the course of its implementation, its profile became much lower and its voice quieter.

The sensitivity to testing and ranking, high turnover rate, and changes in school policy and teachers' cultural and physical working environment revealed dilemmas faced by the school. On the one hand, the school had introduced English immersion to attract parents' attention; on the other hand, the school seemed well aware of the disconnects between immersion education and public test requirements, and so adapted its English language policy several times. Teachers were encouraged to commit to English immersion, but the school emphasized students' test scores because of the

testing and ranking system. According to Ouya (Interview on November 19, 2008), in English immersion classes, student activities and the use of English were emphasized. But when preparing for the tests, explaining grammar through L1 was essential. Thus, the school's dilemma and policy changes on the English immersion curriculum significantly impacted English immersion teachers' teaching and students' learning practice. The next section gives a detailed description of the teacher participant Ouya and the student participants.

5.3 The Participants

This section describes three aspects of the selected English immersion class on which the present study is based: the teacher participant and the challenges he faced in his teaching; the student participants; and the teacher-student relationship.

5.3.1 The Teacher Participant Ouya

Teacher Ouya is a young man who came to the school in 2005 after graduating from college in Xi'an. It was in this school that he had become aware of and had involved in research into English immersion; in his words, he grew up professionally with the English immersion program (Interviews on May 24, 2007 and November 19, 2008). He was greatly attracted by English immersion after reading about it and observing some classes in Xi'an, and volunteered to get involved when his new school adopted the program.

5.3.2 Teacher Ouya's Challenges

Ouya faced a number of problems. Firstly, there was the heavy workload involved in using two sets of textbooks: the PEP textbook and the English

immersion textbook. Effectively, he had to spend more than twice as much time familiarizing himself with the teaching contents, preparing teaching materials and designing the tasks for the class.

Secondly, having to alternate between PEP teaching methods and English immersion methods caused considerable confusion (Interview on November 19, 2008). In Grade 2, Ouya used the integrated CCUEI textbook for the English immersion; in Grade 3, however, he taught both as a traditional English language teacher using traditional methods in PEP-based classes (e.g. explaining grammar and collocations in L1) and as an English immersion content subjects teacher (using the CCUEI-developed texts and tasks). Sometimes, he taught PEP lessons using immersion techniques, while in immersion lessons he sometimes used L1 to explain language points, which was not supposed to be done in English immersion context. According to Ouya, this switching took place because he could not resist explaining grammatical points to the students if he suspected that they might be tested on them in public exams, and because he sometimes found activities effective when teaching PEP-based courses.

Thirdly, he was faced with the dilemma between preparing students for the public tests and implementing English immersion. When he was first involved in the program, immersion teachers received great support from the school board and more teaching hours were allocated for immersion subjects. Under the pressure of the ranking system in public tests, the new principal made some changes in policy. With the policy changes, all teaching was predicated on the public tests. English immersion teachers were required to review grammar and vocabulary for the PEP classes, which they had to explain in their L1. According to Teacher Ouya, when English immersion lessons involved L1 with a focus on grammar and translation, the English language environment was hampered, and the quality of English immersion declined (Interview on November 19, 2008). As tests were based on the PEP textbook, he sometimes feared that his students might be lagging behind compared with other non-immersion classes and other schools. He was willing and eager to teach English immersion content subjects properly, but what was taught in immersion lessons was not tested. The ranking of student average test scores

made him feel very stressed.

Fourthly, he faced a lack of support and guidance from the school and experts. When students were promoted to Grade 5, teachers felt that the immersion textbook which contained only keywords and pictures were too difficult, but the school would not change them due to the cost involved. The teachers did not know how to cope with this difficulty, as the experts' school visits had been cancelled. According to Ouya (Interview on October 14, 2008), the experts had helped with the selection of teaching materials and with methods and strategies to scaffold students in their instruction. Teacher Ouya said (in the same interview) that his heart ached when he saw his students' English progress regress or stop; several times, he even decided to give up his English immersion practice. (After he told me this, he was silent for several minutes, smiling bitterly and looking into the distance, at a loss for words).

Fifthly, Ouya encountered difficulty when teaching content subject in English when the subject and the English language technical terms surpassed his understanding. This difficulty manifested itself in his teaching process; he could not continue teaching the structure and functions of flowers in L2 in Grade 5, for example, because the technical terms were too difficult for him and his students. He asked me, without informing me in advance, to join in his teaching, helping and facilitating. It was a difficult experience for him, and he was uneasy about discussing it.

Sixthly, he felt isolated and helpless in his English immersion practice. When the experts and researchers' visits were canceled, no external support or guidance was available. Moreover, with the departure of the former principal and subsequent policy shifts, there was also less support and guidance from the school board, and the departure of six English immersion teachers reduced collaboration among peer teachers. There was little communication about the English immersion with teachers of other subjects in the small office. Ouya told me that he felt he was struggling single-handedly, and had lost much of his interest in innovative teaching ideas (personal communication, May 24, 2009).

These challenges had a significant impact on Ouya in his teaching. He could not teach English immersion content subjects using the medium of

English alone, and students frequently conducted activities using L1, though reminding each other to use L2, as revealed in the later chapters on peer talk data.

5.3.3   Teacher Ouya's Practice of English Immersion

Despite these challenges, Teacher Ouya carried on with English immersion practice in his classes, continuing to conduct collaborative classroom activities by changing students' seats in his class.

Changing seats was a routine in English immersion classes. In May, 2007, the author found the students sitting in pairs; when she returned in March and October, 2008, the students had been arranged sitting at single desks with space around them as students were in all the other classes, indicating that individual work was the prevailing practice and class discipline was very strict. But once the English immersion class began, the students would very quickly move their desks side by side in pairs. When the author asked Teacher Ouya why this was done, he told her that the purpose of all the other classes was to prepare for the exams, but English immersion classes were different, requiring more student collaborative work, pair work in particular.

Teacher Ouya loved the students in this class, whom he had taught since Grade 2. In his words, *"ji nian de xin xue quan hua zai ta men shen shang* {several years of meticulous care has been spent on them}" (Interview on November 26, 2008). He was very happy to talk about them, and knew every student quite well, from their English language level, to their personality and family background.

5.3.4   The Student Participants

Based on their registration information, the students in this class were mostly native Cantonese speakers. Mandarin was the language they learned when they started their preschool and primary schooling. Nearly all these

students came from middle class families, although their parents' educational background varied greatly. Some parents were well-educated, some were not, but all were wealthy enough to send their children to this beautifully established private boarding school.

As outlined earlier, the eight student participants[1] had different language proficiency levels — high, intermediate and low — and were balanced by gender. Yoyo and Liuliu were the two top girls in the class, but had different personalities. Yoyo was extroverted and talented, good at every subject including PE and music. She learned the piano during weekends while she was at home. In her teacher's words, she was "an excellent student". Liuliu was a little shy; Ouya told me, however, that when he spoke with Liuliu after class, she could understand and could communicate fairly well in English.

The girl Wenwen and the boy Changqing represented the intermediate English level. According to Teacher Ouya, Wenwen could sit in the classroom reading for hours if no one disturbed her, and had some surprising ideas while performing and acting. Changqing was a boy with a good memory, who knew well when to study and when to play, what to focus on and what to ignore.

Nanhai and Hanfeng were two boys with lower English proficiency levels. Nanhai was well-behaved and obedient, while Hanfeng was naughty and aggressive; initially, Ouya did not want him to be involved in the observed group, as he talked a lot and disturbed others. However, the author chose to include him because he was representative of a certain subset of students, based on her teaching experience; moreover, she was interested in his discourse pattern in the interaction. When Hanfeng dropped out of the study[2], another boy, Peiqiong, replaced him. Peiqiong was very similar to Hanfeng — naughty and aggressive and, as Ouya observed, never afraid of making errors in his talk. He was bold and took risks in his learning. Despite their different

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1 Six students were selected at the beginning. The boy Hanfeng dropped out because he was transferred to another school and another boy student named Peiqiong, whose background was very similar to Hanfeng, was chosen to replace him. Xumeng volunteered to be a participant, but was observed only occasionally because of his experience abroad, which was not typical in the class.

2 Hanfeng was transferred to another school, to study together with his sister.

English proficiency levels and occasions when he was unhappy with their certain behaviors, Ouya liked all his students.

5.3.5 The Students' Attitudes towards English and the English Teacher

All the student participants in the class had a very positive attitude towards English learning. When interviewed (March 10, 2008), Yoyo told me that she liked English because she had found it easy to learn from the very beginning. Nanhai found learning English very interesting, while Liuliu added that it was Teacher Ouya who made it so, and that English was what they were good at. Peiqiong agreed, saying that Ouya told many extracurricular stories, such as stories about the Second World War.

The students' positive attitudes were influenced by their aims and expectations for the future. In the group interview (November 24, 2008), Changqing told me he would go to the US for studies in the future. Peiqiong wanted to be a diplomat, which required him to have a command of the English language. Wenwen told me that good English skills could help her to find a good job, while Nanhai said that he would like to be a professor in a foreign country after he completed his studies in the US in the future. Liuliu and Yoyo were motivated to learn English for more personal reasons: Yoyo did not want to spend money on an interpreter when traveling abroad, and Liuliu wanted to be able to show off in front of those who could not speak English, as she put it "*ke yi zai bu hui ying yu de ren mian qian xuan yao xuan yao*{(I) can show off in front of those who cannot speak English}".

The students' attitudes towards Teacher Ouya informed their positive attitudes towards English learning. Through the author's personal communications with the students, she came to know that everyone in this class liked Teacher Ouya and his teaching. In interviews (May 24, 2007 and March 13, 2008), Nanhai told me that Teacher Ouya was very humorous and interesting. Liuliu told me that he was not as tough on them as other teachers, and that he spoke using a lot of gestures and actions that were really amusing

and interesting. Yoyo and Wenwen explained that other teachers always had a straight face and did not play games with them or play jokes on them, but Ouya did. Agreeing with them, Peiqiong added that Teacher Ouya sometimes wanted to appear angry, but actually looked funny. Nanhai concluded by saying that everyone in the class liked Teacher Ouya and enjoyed a good teacher-student relationship.

5.3.6 The Teacher-student Relationship

Teacher Ouya built a rapport with his students by catering to their needs. When a student had a favor to ask or needed something, they usually came to him for help. When the author asked Ouya why students came to him and not to the master teacher for that class, he told her that it was perhaps because he had been the master teacher before the present master teacher, and had had the chance to foster good relations with the students. If he had not been the master teacher before, he said, he might not have had such a good relationship with the students.

Ouya's relationship with his students was fairly egalitarian. After class, the author could usually find him at his desk, encircled by students. Sometimes she would notice him gently teasing students or joking with them after class or during extracurricular activities. On March 12, 2008, for example, during PE, the students took off their jackets and handed them over to Teacher Ouya. Teacher Ouya teased them, saying in Mandarin: "wo yao shou qian de yo. {I will charge you for it.}" Then the students said: "na wo jiu mai gei ni, yi bai kuai qian. {Then I will sell it to you—one hundred yuan for it}". Teacher Ouya replied with a broad smile, "ni men zhe xie jia huo! {You guys.}" Love and care were conveyed in his words and actions with his students.

Teacher Ouya let the students decide many things for themselves. Each extracurricular activity was proposed and voted on by the whole class. When different alternatives led to heated discussion, Ouya would write their choices on the blackboard, let the students vote on them one by one, and choose the activity based on the votes cast. Ouya's involvement of students in decision-

making facilitated students' participation and engagement in activities, in addition to reinforcing his rapport with his students.

One incident Teacher Ouya recounted (Interview on November 14, 2008) highlighted the good teacher-student relationship in this class. Every semester, there were open days for the parents to come to the school and observe the classes, and the classes to be observed were called open classes. Teacher Ouya decided to teach his open class with another class, in response to the request of the master teacher of that class. When the students came to know that Teacher Ouya would not teach the open class in their class, they looked for Teacher Ouya everywhere. When they finally found Teacher Ouya in another class, as soon as they saw him, all of them cried bitterly, asking him why he did not show equal love to them. Teacher Ouya was very moved by the scene, by their naive questioning and by their deep love for his teaching. When he came to talk about this incident, he remained silent for several minutes, and tears could be seen in his eyes. He went on to tell that as an English immersion teacher, what comforted him most was the students' respect and love for him and for his teaching.

5.4　Summary

This chapter has provided a detailed description of the study participants and the school context, including English language policy nationwide and within the immersion program, school characteristics, the challenges facing teachers, students' attitudes towards the teacher and towards English learning, and the teacher-student relationship.

The implementation of the *NEC* (The Ministry of Education, 2001b) seemed to provide schools with a favorable social context for innovative by adopting the English immersion program and enhancing students' ability to communicate in English. However, being privately-funded, the school was caught in a dilemma between adopting English immersion to develop students' English communication competence and pressing for students' high scoring in

the public tests. Immersion teachers were frustrated by the resulting changes, and struggled to meet increasing challenges with fewer internal and external supports; often, they felt helpless and isolated. The student participants had different levels of English proficiency and unique, sometimes challenging personalities, but shared a love of both English and Teacher Ouya. The good teacher-student relationship Teacher Ouya fostered seemed to enhance his teaching and their learning.

In short, the findings described in this chapter revealed the dilemma which the school was in and the challenges the teacher had to face. The last section of this chapter is the preview of the data chapters.

5.5 Preview of the Data Chapters

The data chapters (Chapters 6 to 8) address how activities mediate student peer talk from three aspects. Firstly, they reveal the interrelationships between activity type and student peer talk by identifying the features of peer talk in each activity type. Secondly, they show how dynamic and situated activity mediates student peer talk by illustrating students' emerging agency. Thirdly, they reveal the multidimensional nature of mediations in student activities.

Chapter 6 presents the categorization of student activities and the features of peer talk revealed in each activity type. Chapter 7 addresses the dynamic and situated nature of activity in student peer talk by revealing the students' agency in the activities. Chapter 8 deals with multidimensional mediations students employ in their activities. Taken together, these three chapters will address how activities mediate student peer talk in an English immersion context, which may provide some insights into English language teaching and learning in China.

CHAPTER SIX

ACTIVITY TYPE AND PEER TALK

Activity type has long been the interest of many researchers, who have tried to determine how to achieve the most "authentic" communication and "genuine" information exchange through certain types of activities. From a sociocultural perspective, and with a focus on student activities, this chapter examines the interrelationships between activity types and student peer talk by revealing the features of student peer talk in actual activity episodes.

6.1 Activity and Activity Types

Different researchers define tasks and activities in different ways, from either a sociocultural perspective or from a psycholinguistic perspective, which makes it difficult to give clear definitions for these two easily confused terms. However, having taken a sociocultural perspective, this study adopts Coughlan and Duff's (1994, p.175) operational definition of a task as a goal-directed assignment given by the teacher to the students to complete at a given time, or a piece of goal-directed work that students plan to complete by themselves at a given time; an activity, by comparison, is defined as the actual performance of the task. In short, "task" refers to a plan of action, while "activity" refers to the carrying out of that plan.

Activity type helps to explain the nature of activity, and has long attracted many researchers. Leont'ev (1981) defines the taxonomy of activity types at three levels: activity at the motive level, action at the goal level, and operation at the condition level[1]; however, this taxonomy of activity types stays at the theoretical level as a guide for analysis. Taking a psycholinguistic perspective and using tasks and activities interchangeably, Richards and Lockhart (1994) and Nolasco and Arthur (1987) categorize concrete activities used in the classroom based on purpose and function, while Coughlan and Duff (1994), taking a sociocultural perspective, note that a single task may inform different activities; however, further research is needed to investigate the complexity of differences in activities. The current study differentiates from their studies in that it focuses on student activities more from a student perspective[2], including students' actual talk in the activities and their perceptions about the activities and their talk. Engestrom's complex activity system forms the study's framework for categorizing activity types, with Nunan's (2004) and Valcarcel's (Valcarcel, et al., 1995) research used, not as a coding scheme, but as an important reference for categorization of activities.

6.2   Categorization of the Student Activities

The dataset contains 110 student activities, the boundaries of which are determined in accordance with the statement that "the beginning or end of

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1 The taxonomy of activity types at three levels was reviewed in Section 3.2.2.2. Also see Lantolf & Appel, 1994a, p.21 for the details.

2 The current study proceeds from a student perspective because of the presentation of students' actual talk in the activities through extracts and episodes and the inclusion of their perceptions of their articulation through interview data. However, this emic perspective may be limited by the fact that, although their activity extracts and episodes were included these students, as young learners, could not articulate or remember why they said this or that during the activity when asked. Admittedly, they had very tight time schedule for lessons, which made interviewing them before or after each lesson unfeasible, although they were interviewed frequently to clarify items of interest.

activity is typically marked by a change in the overall theme or content" (Spada and Frohlich 1995, p.30). Student activities comprised both in-class activities (e.g. talking about the time, discussing animal reproduction, etc.) and after-class activities (e.g., garden exploration, extracurricular PE games). After-class activities in the current study comprise activities that students conduct during break time, in evening self-study classes, and during extracurricular periods.

The categorization of the student activities was grounded on the data and was the basis for the analysis of the nature of activity, with components of Engestrom's activity system (Engestrom, 1987; Engestrom, et al., 1999) used as the framework for the categorization, as the current study aimed to reveal the dynamic nature of activity and the interrelationship between student activity and peer talk, and Engestrom's activity system was a powerful way of presenting the situatedness of activity (see Sections 3.2.2 and 3.4 for reference). As stated earlier in Section 4.4.2, based on subjects, rules, the community, and the division of labor, activities were divided into two main categories: individual activities and collaborative activities. The former are activities in which students had no verbal interaction with others, and no cooperation or collaboration while fulfilling the task. Collaborative activities are those in which students interact, cooperate or collaborate with others to complete the task.

Individual activities were further categorized as communicative or non-communicative activities based on whether (1) there were "real" needs for the activity, (2) the context was "authentic", and (3) the language to be used was known and predictable to the interlocutors and open for the interlocutors' use. Individual communicative activities refer to activities such as telling a story, writing a letter or giving a public talk. Individual non-communicative activities refer to exercises such as reading aloud, rote memorizing or copying.

Collaborative activities were also subcategorized as either communicative or non-communicative activities. Collaborative communicative activities involve collaboration among peers where there was authentic context and genuine need for communication and language use, and where the language used was neither controlled nor predictable. Collaborative non-

communicative activities involve collaboration among peers where there were different degrees of manipulation of structures, moving through a continuum of language use, from closed, controlled and contrived to open, contingent, and free.[1] The non-communicativeness of these activities lies in the fact that these activities are either teacher-designed exercises rather than "real" needs, or are conducted for pedagogical purposes in contexts that are imagined rather than authentic. The degree of the control in collaborative non-communicative activities varies according to the variations in the linguistic support or resources available. Of the 110 activities, one was an individual communicative activity, nine were individual non-communicative activities, two were collaborative communicative activities, and 98 were collaborative non-communicative activities. The number and percentage of the student activities in each type for each grade are presented in Table 6. 1.

Table 6.1   The Number and Percentage of Activities in Each Activity Type

| Grade | The Number and Percentage of Activities in Each Activity Type | | | |
| | Individual activities | | Collaborative activities | |
	Com	Non-Com	Com	Non-com
In Grade 3	0; 0%	0; 0%	1; 0.9%	10; 9.1%
In Grade 4	0; 0%	6; 5.5%	0; 0%	41; 37.3%
In Grade 5	1; 0.9%	3; 2.7%	1; 0.9%	47; 42.7%
Total	1; 0.9%	9; 8.2%	2; 1.8%	98; 89.1%

Note: Com=Communicative   Non-com= Non-communicative

As shown above, 89 percent of student activities were collaborative non-communicative activities. Using Nunan's (2004) and Valcarcel's (Valcarcel, et al., 1995) activity types as reference, these collaborative non-communicative activities are further subcategorized into role play, question-answer, and conversation, where each type varies according to the linguistic support

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1 Or "form-in-meaning" as Ortega (2005, p.106) calls it.

available.

Livingstone (1983, p.1) uses "role play" to include what other researchers might call "simulation". Although distinguishing between role play and other classroom activities (play acting, group work, etc.), she notes that, from the teaching point of view, they are the same (Livingstone, 1983). Yardley-Matwiejczuk (1997) defines role play as activities involving imagined situations. As an activity type, role play has been used frequently by educators to engage students in their learning, or by researchers to elicit data (Ellis, 2003; Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005). The current study adopts Ur's broad definition which includes simulation and students' acting, and refers to students' acting out specified roles and functions in an imagined situation (Ur, 1996; Valcarcel, et al., 1995) according to their understanding of social roles and relations. Table 6.2 illustrates the types of the students' activities.

Table 6.2   Activity Types

Activity Types			
Individual activities		**Collaborative activities**	
Non-com	**Com**	**Non-com**	**Com**
e.g. reading aloud, rote reciting, copying, etc.	e.g. telling a story, making a speech, writing a letter, etc.	e.g. role play, question-answer, conversation, etc.	e.g. playing chess, visiting art exhibition, talking to solve problem, etc.

Notes: Com= communicative   Non-com= non-communicative   RP= role play

As the current study focuses on students' peer talk in activities, which is collaborative in nature, individual activities are not included in the analysis. Of the collaborative communicative activities, one was "visiting the art exhibition", while the other was "playing chess". The former shared similar features with the activity "garden exploration" (see Section 6.3.3.4), while the latter only contained four conversation moves using the word "Here!" when the students moved their pieces. Hence, the analysis focuses on collaborative non-communicative activities.

6.3　Variations of the Non-communicative Activities

Based on their varied linguistic mediations, the non-communicative activities of role play (RP), question-answer (QA) and conversation can be further subcategorized as script-based, script-adapted, keyword-supported, and script-free. As mentioned above, these variations form a continuum of language use, moving from controlled, contrived, and closed to open, contingent, and free, towards communicative activities that show "authentic" communication contexts and "genuine" communication needs. Table 6.3 illustrates the variations of RP, QA and conversation along the continuum[1].

Table 6.3　Variations of RP, QA, and Conversation as a Continuum

Activity type	Variations of the non-communicative activities			
RP	script-based RP	script-adapted RP	keyword-supported RP	script-free RP
QA	script-based QA	script-adapted QA	keyword-supported QA	script-free QA
Con	script-based Con	script-adapted Con	keyword-supported Con	script-free Con

Notes: RP= role play　QA=question-answer　Con-conversation

As mentioned earlier, among the 110 student activities, 10 activities were

1　Littlewood (2004, p.322) has presented a continuum of what Ellis labels as "exercise" and "tasks" that distinguishes "focus on form" from "focus on meaning", moving from "non-communicative learning" to "pre-communicative language practice" to "communicative language practice" to "structured communication" to "authentic communication". The continuum in the current study differs from Littlewood's continuum in that it refers to spoken language student activities only; it does not differentiate between the focus on "form" and the focus on "meaning", as it views form and meaning as integrated and inseparable, which is what Ortega's (2005, p.106) calls "form-in-meaning". The continuum in the current study shows the degree of linguistic support employed.

individual, and 100 activities were collaborative. The number and percentage of the variations of the student activities are shown in Table 6.4.

Table 6.4   The Number and Percentage of the Variations of the Student Activities

Activity Type Grade & Number & Percentage	Individual Activities		Collaborative Activities												
			Non-com												
				Role Play				Question-Answer				Conversation			
	Com	Non-Com	Com	Scr-B	Scr-A	K-S	Scr-F	Scr-B	Scr-A	K-S	Scr-F	Scr-B	Scr-A	K-S	Scr-F
				4	6	3	5	6	7	4	6	8	18	16	15
Total number: 110	1	9	2	18				23				57			
				98											
	10		100												
Percentage	9.1%		90.9%												

Notes: Com=Communicative   Non-com=Non-communicative   RP=Role play
       Scr-B=Script-based Scr-A=Script-adapted K-S=Keyword-supported
       Scr-F=Script-free

The next section is the detailed presentation of each variation of the collaborative non-communicative activities. For each activity, an example is given with the features of peer talk identified through analysis.

6.3.1 Variations of RP and Peer Talk

Variations of RP comprise script-based RP, script-adapted RP, keyword-supported RP and script-free RP.

6.3.1.1 Script-based RP and Features of Peer Talk Revealed

Script-based RP refers to the students' taking on the roles of the play and acting out a scene by adding their laughter, silence or other physical actions to dramatize the effects, but without adapting the texts, which come from the

textbook. An example of this type of RP can be seen where the students were assigned to act out the conversation "Talking about time".

Activity 1. Talking about the time: Acting as a clock

The activity "acting as a clock" was from the English language class PEP textbook and was conducted by Changqing, Hanfeng, Liuliu, Nanhai, Wenwen, Yoyo and other students. The aim of this lesson was to master the expressions of "What time is it?" "It's time to ..." and "It's time for ..." When the students learned the time expressions, the teacher asked the students to practice the dialogue scripted in the textbook. Rather than simply read the dialogue, the students took ownership of the activity, quickly formed a group and acted out the content by animating the characters and objects in the scripts: Hanfeng acted as the short hour hand in the clock; Nanhai acted as the long minute hand; Liuliu was the person who moved "the clock hands".

Changqing, Hanfeng, Liuliu, Nanhai, Wenwen, Yoyo and other students

1. Hanfeng: *ke bu ke yi wo lai dang zhong?* {Can I act as the clock?}
2. Changqing: *ni shuo zhe yi ju.* {You say this sentence.}
3. Yoyo: *ni shuo zhe yi ju.* {You say this sentence.}
4. *Hanfeng shuo zhe yi ju.* {Hanfeng say this sentence}.
5. *kai shi.* {Start.}
6. Hanfeng: <u>What time is it?</u>
7. Yoyo: <u>Look, look at my clock.</u>
8. <u>What time is it?</u>
9. Liuliu: <u>It's eight fifty.</u>
10. <u>It's eight fifty.</u>
11. <u>It's time for music class.</u>
12. Changqing: <u>Tick tock tick tock.</u>
13. Yoyo: Says… (prompting)
14. Changqing: <u>Says the clock.</u>
15. Nanhai: <u>It's nine forty-five.</u>
16. <u>It's time for math class.</u>
17. Hanfeng: <u>It's two fifty.</u>

18. It's time for Chinese class.
19. Changqing: It's three oh five.
20. It's time for English class.
21. Wenwen: It's four twenty.
22. It's time for PE class.
23. Liuliu: Oh, it's nice.
24. Can I have a try?
25. Oh, where is the short hand.
26. Changqing: *zhe ge zhong wei shen me zou de na me kuai?* {Why does this clock move so fast?}
27. *ni men na me kuai gan ma?* {Why are you so fast?}
28. Liuliu: *wo yao shuo xiao yi dian.* {I want to (make it) shrink a little bit.}
29. Yoyo: *na wo men zai lai yi chi.* {Then let's try again.}
30. *shui shuo shui yao ta.* {The person who speaks will move his hand.}
31. *ni zhan wo hou mian.* {You stand behind me.}
32. Nanhai: *bie gao le.* {Don't do it.}
33. Yoyo: *kai shi.* {Start.}
34. *kai shi.* {Start.}
35. *yao ta.* {Move it (his hand).}
36. *yao ta.* {Move it (his hand).}
    (Students started practicing the scripted text for another time.)
    ......
53. Wenwen: *shou jian.* {Your hands itch.}
54. Nanhai: *ta diao le.* {It dropped.}
55. Hanfeng: *wo zuo duan shou.* {I act as the short hand.}
56. *ta zuo chang shou.* {He acts as the long hand.}
57. Wenwen&Liuliu: (giggling)
58. Yoyo: *lai ah.* {Come.}
59. *yu bei.* {Ready.}
60. *kai shi.* {Go.}
61. Look at my clock.
62. What time is it?
63. Ouya: Time is up.

64. Changqing: *deng yi xia zai lai*. {Wait a moment and we will do again.}
(Mar 10, 2008, Grade 4)

Liuliu moved Hanfeng and Nanhai's hands to show the time according to the textbook. Hanfeng asked to act as the clock (in line 1). Changqing and Yoyo allocated the task for each role (in lines 2 to 4) and started their acting (in line 5). The students practiced the roles talking about time according to the scripts in the textbook (in lines 6 to 25). Changqing asked why the clock moved so fast (in lines 26 and 27). Liuliu explained that she wanted Nanhai's hand to be a little shorter (shrink) as Naihai acted as the minute hand of the clock (in line 28). Yoyo asked her group to practice again (in lines 29 to 31), and urged them to start their acting (in lines 33 to 36). They started the practice for a second time (in lines 37 to 52, which is not included due to the limited space).

Wenwen blamed and condemned Hanfeng as his hand was not at the place he should put it (in line 53). Nanhai responded with a joking tone (in line 54) that it was the hand itself dropped, not he himself who intended to drop it. Hanfeng tried to explain that he did his job well as he acted as the short hand and it was Nanhai who acted as the long minute hand (in lines 55 and 56). When Wenwen and Liuliu were amused by their explanation (in line 57), giggling, Yoyo called the whole group to pay attention and get ready for another practice (in lines 58 to 62). At this time Ouya told the class that time was up (in line 63), but the students seemed still absorbed in the activity as seen in Changqing's statement (in line 64) that they would do it again in a moment. This shows the students' willingness to practice and their high engagement in the activity.

Features of peer talk in Activity 1 — the script-based RP

The following features of peer talk occurred in this RP. First, the students used their L1 in the pre-activity talk to discuss how they would act (in line 1), allocating the role (in lines 2 to 4). They did the same during the activity talk for starting the activity (in lines 5, 32, 29 to 36, 58 to 60), blaming (in lines 26 to 27), explaining (in lines 28, 55 to 56), expressing their plan (in line 64),

disapproving (in line 53) and joking (in line 54). This also shows the second feature of peer talk in this activity: the students' close cooperation and high engagement in the activity, which involved every one of the group actively. Thirdly, students experienced fun in the activity, as shown by their giggling (in line 57). Fourthly, peer assistance occurred when Yoyo prompted the pronunciation of "says" (in line 13) and Changqing picked it up (in line 14) and continued with their acting. Fifthly, the students showed their willingness to practice and communicate in the activity (in line 64).

6.3.1.2　Script-adapted RP and Features of Peer Talk Revealed

Script-adapted RP refers to students' taking (or negotiating) roles and acting out scenes in which students adapt the texts from the textbook by creating a storyline, and adding roles, props, laughter, or silence into their acting. An example of this activity was the students' talking about their school life with "their parents".

Activity 2. Talking about school life with "parents"

This activity was from the same unit of PEP English language class as Activity 1. The teacher mainly taught according to the textbook and the text the students learned from the textbook is as follows:

Zoom: Look at my clock. What time is it?

Zip: It's 8:30. It's time for music class.

Zoom: Tick, tock, tick, tock, says the clock.

It's 9:45. It's time for math class.

It's 11:05. It's time for English class.

It's 2:50. It's time for Chinese class.

It's 4:20. It's time for PE class.

Zip: Oh, it's nice. Can I have a try? Oops! Where is the shorthand?

The aim of this activity was to master the time expressions such as "What time is it?", "It's time to …" or "It's time for …". After the students learned the text and the time expressions, they were asked by the teacher to talk about their life at school, using the expressions they had just learned. The students created a scenario in the role play where they talked about their school life with their

"parent(s)" during the weekend, as shown below.

Changqing and Yoyo
1. Changqing: I am baby.
2. Yoyo: I am mummy (..)
3.   Baby *er- er-*
4. Changqing: (giggling)
5. Yoyo: *ni shi bao bao.* {You are baby.}
6.   *wo shi ma mi.* {And I am mummy.}
7.   *jiu shuo, you yi tian, fang xue le.* {That is one day after school. }
8.   *wo dao xue xiao qu jie ni.* {I went to school to pick you up.}
9.   *wo jiu wen ni.* {I would ask you.}
10.   *ni jin tian wan de kai bu kai xin.* {Are you happy today?}
11.   *guo de zen me yang?* {And how did you get along?}
12. Changqing: Yes.
13. Yoyo: *ran hou ni jiu gao shu wo.* {Then you tell me.}
14.   *ni ji dian shang ke.* {What time do you have classes?}
15.   *ji dian chi zao can?* {And what time do you have breakfast?}
16.   *ran hou ba ni zui kai xin de shi gao shu wo.* {Then tell me the most joyful moment you spent at school.}
17. Changqing: It's seven oh fi [five].
18.   It's- it's eat breakfast.
19.   It's eight o'clock.
20.   It's *er-* it's...
21. Yoyo: It's time to... (prompting in a very low voice)
22. Changqing: It's time to- it's time to go to school. (..)
23. Yoyo: Nine o'clock. (prompting in a low voice)
24. Changqing: It's nine o'clock.
25.   It-it's-it's time for English class.
26. Yoyo: Ten o'clock. (prompting in a low voice)
27. Changqing: It's ten o'clock.
28.   It- it's time- it's time for Chinese class.
29.   It's twelve o'clock. It's =

30. Yoyo: =When do you go to the playground to play football?

31. Changqing: It-it's-it's-it's three o'clock.

32. It-it's go… it's time… it's time for a play football.

33. Yoyo: It's time to… (correcting and prompting in a low voice)

34. Changqing: It's time to play football.

35. Yoyo: When do you have dinner?

(Mar. 11, 2008, Grade 4)

At the very beginning, Changqing and Yoyo attempted to plan in English how to perform the task (in lines 1 to 3). Soon they gave up because of their limited language proficiency, and Yoyo switched to the L1 to plan their roles, the context and the content of their talk, helping Changqing to understand how to conduct the activity. Yoyo was allocating the roles for their role play (in lines 2 and 3, 5 and 6), contextualizing their activity (in lines 7 and 8), telling Changqing what she would ask (in lines 9 to 11), and how Changqing would respond (in lines 13 to 16). Yoyo, who came from the higher level of English language proficiency, took the lead. When the teacher assigned them the task, Yoyo took the responsibility of helping Changqing gain a better understanding of the task through her detailed explanation.

Changqing talked about what time it was and what they were to do (in lines 17 to 19). He indicated his need for help through fillers "*er-*" and false starts (in line 20), pausing (in line 22), and when he made an error (in line 32). Yoyo prompted the sentence pattern they had learned (in line 21) when she found Changqing struggling.

Yoyo prompted Changqing with the time line (in lines 23 and 26) when she found that Changqing paused and seemed at a loss. She prompted Changqing to talk about class activity through asking him a question (in line 30). She corrected Changqing (in line 33) when she found his error. Changqing picked up Yoyo's prompts, reformulated his utterance and continued with his talk (in lines 22, 24, 27 and 34).

Features of peer talk in Activity 2 — the script-adapted RP

The following features of peer talk occur in this RP. The first is the use

of L1 in task-related peer assistance (in lines 5 to 16), where the students conducted the pre-activity talk to allocate the roles and explain the context and the content of their activity. L1 facilitated managing and planning the activity, and was used for seeking assistance during the activities. The second feature is language-related peer assistance in the activity, where the students prompted their peer interlocutor(s) with the language (lexis or sentence structures) that should be used. The third feature is content-related peer assistance in the activity, wherein the students prompted their interlocutor(s) with the content that should be included such as time line and their class activity. Students indicated their need of assistance through false starts, pauses or by making an error. Prompts were usually given in a very low voice; the prompted student picked up and reformulated their utterance and continued with their talk.

6.3.1.3 Keyword-supported RP and Features of Peer Talk Revealed

Keyword-supported RP refers to students' deciding the roles and the props (if necessary), and acting out a scene students make up based on the keywords. An example of this type of RP was the activity of home visit.

Activity 3. Home visit

This activity "home visit" was from a PEP English language class taken by Hanfeng, Nanhai and Yoyo in May, 2007, when they were in Grade 3. The task assigned to the students was to create, within the context of a friend coming for a visit, a dialogue using what they had just learned about fruits. The students created a scenario of visiting a friend's home and used the keywords such as fruits and having some fruits.

Hanfeng, Nanhai, Yoyo and other students
1. Yoyo: Hello, Nanhai!
2. Welcome [to] my home!
3. This-*er*... Do you like- What fruit do you like?
4. Nanhai: May I have a yellow?
5. Hanfeng: Banana, *ye!* [*ye* is a Chinese modal particle used to indicate some comments like surprise or complaint.]

6. Yoyo: Here you are.

7. Hanfeng: Thank you.

(???)

8. Hanfeng: //Have some fruit.

9. Ss: //Have some fruit (XX). (laughing). (The boys are teasing Nanhai, which puts both Nanhai and Yoyo in an awkward situation and trying to find a way out).(...)

10. Hanfeng: *ni zai man man lai.* {You just take your time.}

11. Yoyo: (..)Have some more.

12. Nanhai: No.

13. See you, Yoyo. (in a low voice)

14. Yoyo: See you.

(May 25, 2007, Grade 3)

Yoyo greeted Nanhai and asked him what fruit he would like to have (in lines 1 to 3). Nanhai asked Yoyo whether he could have a banana, but what came to his mind at that moment was the color of banana and he made an error in using "yellow" for banana (in line 4). Hanfeng corrected Nanhai (in line 5). Later when Hanfeng asked Nanhai "to have some fruit", other students were teasing Nanhai for his misusing "yellow" for 'banana" (in line 9), which put Nanhai in a very embarrassing and difficult situation. This was reflected by the silence. Hanfeng told Nanhai "*ni zai man man lai* {You just take your time}" (in line 10), supporting him emotionally in this difficult time. Then Yoyo and Nanhai concluded their talk (in lines 11 to 14).

Features of peer talk in Activity 3 — the keyword-supported RP

The features of peer talk appearing in this RP were affect-related peer assistance and the use of L2. Facing difficulties, teasing, blame or condemnation, students were in need of emotional support. The emotional support given offered students the opportunity and time to get over their difficulties, continue with their talk, and bring it to a coherent conclusion. Most peer talk in this RP is featured with the use of the target language: all lines except one were in the L2.

6.3.1.4 Script-free RP and Features of Peer Talk Revealed

The characteristic of this RP is that the students, depending on the unscripted context given to them, discuss and decide on a topic and negotiate the roles by themselves. It is very close to a collaborative communicative activity; however, collaborative communicative activities are driven by "real" needs and "authentic" situations, not role play. An example of this type of RP was the students' talking about pictures in: "What is wrong in the picture?" In this in-class activity, the students designed the activity by creating characters and negotiating the roles according to the pictures, then acted out the scene.

Activity 4. Acting out: What is wrong in the picture?

This activity was about proper behavior in parks and involved Changqing, Liuliu, Peiqiong, Yoyo and other students. In the Primary Living Science Book 5, five pictures were presented with the direction "Your friends are naughty when visiting a park. Tell them what is wrong." The task assigned to the students was to discuss the pictures with their partner. The teacher used "talk about" and "discuss" interchangeably when he assigned the students tasks. The students were not familiar with the genre of "discussing", so they fell back on what they were familiar with — acting out the scene.

Changqing, Liuliu, Peiqiong, Yoyo, Ss= the students, and Teacher Ouya
1. Ouya: First introduce yourself.
2. Changqing: I am Monkey.
3. Liuliu: I am Monkey, too.
4. Peiqiong: I am the BAD boy. (using a low voice to dramatize the situation)
5. Yoyo: I am the cat and the girl.
6. Ouya: Which picture do you want to show us?
7. Which picture?
8. Changqing, Liuliu, Peiqiong &Yoyo: No. 2.
9. Ouya: This one.
10. OK.

11.   Do it.
12. Liuliu: I am a happy monkey.
13. Changqing: I am a happy monkey, too.
14. Liuliu: Today is a sunny day.
15. Changqing: Yes, I like the sunny day.
16. Liuliu: Er- we can play football in this day.
17. Changqing: Look. //There is a...
18. Ouya: //There is a...
19. Liuliu: A cat.
20.   Hello, what's your name?
21. Yoyo: My name is LJ.
22. Liuliu: How old are you?
23. Yoyo: I am 9 years old.
24.   Do you like banana?
25. Liuliu: No.
26. Changqing: Give me a banana, OK?
27. Ouya: Here you are. (prompting)
28. Yoyo: Here you are.
29. Changqing: Thank you.
30. Peiqiong: Today is a sunny day.
31.   I go to park.
32. Liuliu: The bad boy is going to the park.
33.   Quick.
34. Peiqiong: (pretending he is throwing stones at the monkeys)
35.   I am happy.
36. Ss: (laughing)
37. Yoyo: Don't harm the animals.
38. Peiqiong: Oh, I am sorry,
39.   OK.
40.   For you, please.
41.   For you. (pretending he is giving bananas to the monkeys)
42. Ss: ha ha- ha ha- (clapping hands, laughing and cheering for these six students)

43. Ouya: Is that all? (showing surprise)
44. Changqing, Liuliu, Peiqiong & Yoyo: //Yes.
45. Ouya: Thank you.
46.   Please go back.
47.   You are so good.
(Oct. 23, 2008, Grade 5)

The students' acting turned the static picture into a vivid story. In this activity, (from line 1 to line 11), the students gave a brief introduction about their roles and the picture they chose. The story unfolded about the happy monkeys and the lovely girl (in lines 12 to 39). The climax came (in lines 30 to 37) as the tension occurred between the bad boy who appeared with his low voice and with his action of throwing stones at the monkeys and the girl who stopped him. Lines 38 to 44 showed that the conflict was resolved with the boy transformed to do good deeds: when the girl pointed out his bad behavior, the boy apologized and corrected his behavior by offering bananas to the monkeys. In their planning, in order to show the monkeys were "happy", the students created the "sunny day" to accompany the happiness of the monkeys. In order to show that the girl loved animals, they planned that the girl was carrying a cat and offering bananas to monkeys. In order to show the boy was bad, they dramatized the scene with the boy's voice quality and volume. They contrasted the monkeys' and girl's peace, harmony and happiness with the boy's disturbance, noise and twisted sense of "happiness". Their performance amused all the students who laughed all the way, and the teacher felt surprisingly happy about their acting and talk.

Features of peer talk in Activity 4 — the script-free RP

The following features of peer talk occurred in this RP. Firstly, the students' imagination and creativity show throughout the activity. Bearing the theme of the picture in mind, the students created a story line with a climax that transforms the bad boy. They created a new character — a girl with a cat and bananas to show her love for animals — and shaped the tone of the story using language such as "sunny day" and "happy monkeys" to contrast with

the bad boy's inappropriate deeds. Secondly, the students used a low voice to identify the bad boy and create drama within the scene. Thirdly, the students used what they had learned to communicate meaning in L2 throughout the story. Fourthly, the attractive and surprisingly amusing effects of the acting can be seen from the students' laughter and the teacher's praise. Fifthly, students' understanding of social roles, relations and norms is shown by the transformation of the bad boy.

6.3.1.5　The Interrelationship between RPs and Peer Talk

In the RPs, the features of peer talk can be summed up as follows. In script-based RP students use L1 in pre-activity planning and when seeking or providing assistance. They enjoyed the role play, close cooperation, high engagement, and control over practice. They took ownership of their activity, and were willing to practice and communicate. In the script-adapted RP, there was task-related peer assistance with the use of L1, language-related peer assistance, and content-related peer assistance. In the keyword-supported RP, the students showed affect-related peer assistance with the use of L1, and created the scenes almost entirely in L2. Finally, in the script-free RP, students showed their imagination and creativity in developing the plot, characters and tone of the story. They dramatized the scene using low voice, which brought about surprisingly amusing and attractive effects, and communicated meaning almost entirely in L2. These features are shown in Table 6.5.

Table 6.5　Features of Peer Talk in RPs

Variations of RP	Features of peer talk in the variations of RP
scrip-based RP (from English language class of Grade 4, Mar. 10, 2008)	the use of L1, fun, close cooperation and high engagement, peer assistance, control over the practice and communication, willingness to practice

(to be continued)

Variations of RP	Features of peer talk in the variations of RP
script-adapted RP (from English language class of Grade 4, Mar. 11, 2008)	task-related peer assistance with the use of L1, language-related peer assistance, content-related peer assistance, low voice used in prompting
keyword-supported RP (from English language class of Grade 3, May 25, 2007)	affect-related peer assistance in L1, the use of L2 (in all lines except one)
script-free RP (from English immersion class of Living Science of Grade 5, Oct. 23, 2008)	imagination and creativity, dramatization using the voice volume, the communication of meaning in L2, surprisingly amusing and attractive effects, understanding of social relations and social norms

RP has long been recognized as an important means of enhancing social skills and creativity in language learning (Hines, 1973; Stern, 1993). Vygotsky (1976, p.539, cited in Karpov, 2005, p.119) values role play for its "imaginary, illusory realization of unrealizable desires", while Karpov (2005) claims that role play motivates children to become interested in the social world. According to Yardley-Matwiejczuk (1997), role play enhances social skills and creativity in learning through engagement. It provides opportunities for learning through its flexibility, such as involving flexible participants, evoking flexible activities, and having flexible foci on explicit behavior or on implicit attitudes and emotions (Yardley-Matwiejczuk, 1997).

The students seemed to capitalize on these features, enhancing their creativity and imagination through flexibility, and use RP as a means of mediating their English language learning. For example, in Activity 1, the students tried to make the situation more vivid and more meaningful by imitating the teacher's acting and manipulating the roles in their play by acting as the clock, which made their reading aloud practice interesting and got them highly engaged. Activity 2 allowed Yoyo to work on her own experience, take a leading role by providing sufficient information to her peer interlocutor and take on the responsibility of helping Changqing. The students utilized the flexibility of time and space to communicate meaningfully in English. In Activity 3, the students tried to practice their understanding of social roles and

relations, and to communicate meaning in the target language through taking on the different roles in the family when "a friend came for a visit". Activity 4 showed the students' manipulations of time (a sunny day) and space (a park), the characters, the story line, the conflicts, the climax, the transformations for the purpose of using the language meaningfully and stressing the social norms and conventions to protect our environment. The students showed great creativity, high engagement and had a great deal of fun in this RP. This highly motivating function of RP in the students' English language learning seems to mesh with Stern's (1993, p.72) statement that role play can motivate students in their learning, and enhance students' creativity and communication skills with affect and body "restored" in the learning process.

The function of RP in English language learning is also revealed in the students' opinions. When interviewed (October 24, 2008), the students said that they liked role play very much, especially acting. They employed acting as a part of their English language learning process. When asked for the reasons, Yoyo said that they liked to animate the situation, where pictures and animals, plants and objects in the pictures seemed to be living and animated to them. Peiqiong said that it *"neng jia qiang ying yu* {can enhance English}". Nanhai said that it was *"hen hao wan* {great fun}". Wenwen said that it could *"ying dao bie ren xiao* {make others laugh}". Nanhai went on to explain that he learned the language expressions through acting. Liuliu said that they gained a lot of experience through acting; Changqing expanded on this, commenting that they had learned how not to get nervous when coming to the front. Yoyo and Wenwen added that they had learned some extracurricular vocabulary and sentences. In a word, students regarded acting as a part of their activities, a means mediating their English language learning.

6.3.2 Variations of QA and Peer Talk

As defined above, question-answer (QA) refers to students responding to questions (including both display and referential questions) (Valcarcel, et

al., 1995). Variations of QA comprise script-based QA, script-adapted QA, keyword-supported QA and script-free QA.

6.3.2.1 Script-based QA and Features of Peer Talk Revealed

Script-based QA refers to the students' taking on speaking roles to ask and answer questions based on the textbook texts, without adaptation. An example of this type of QA can be seen where the students were assigned to read and recite, in pairs, the text "What time is it?" from the English language class PEP textbook after they had finished copying the text.

Activity 5. Read and recite: What time is it?

This unit came from the same PEP language class unit on time as did Activities 1 and 2. The students were supposed to master such expressions as "What time is it?" "It's time for …" and "It's time to …". The teacher mainly taught according to the textbook. In the activity, Hanfeng and Liuliu took on the speaking roles of asking and answering the text from the textbook, followed the scripts, and read aloud, trying to recite.

Hanfeng and Liuliu
1. Liuliu: <u>Look at my clock.</u>
2.   <u>What time is it?</u>
3. Hanfeng: <u>It's eight thirty.</u>
4.   <u>It's time for music class.</u>
5. Liuliu: <u>Tick tock tick tock, says (..) the clock.</u>
6. Hanfeng: *hai you mei you a*? {Is there anything else?}
7. Liuliu: *kuai dian.* {Hurry up.}
8.   *ji xu.* {Go on.}
9. Hanfeng: Oh.
10.   *ai ya!* (showing unwillingness and complaining)
(Mar. 10, 2008, Grade 4)

Liuliu started the reading and recitation (in lines 1 and 2). Hangfeng read and recited the text that followed (in lines 3 and 4). When Liuliu finished the

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difficult sentence (in line 5), Hanfeng was at a loss about how to follow (in line 6). Liuliu urged him to continue (in lines 7 and 8), but Hanfeng showed his unwillingness and complained about continuing (in lines 9 and 10).

Features of peer talk in Activity 5 — the script-based QA

The peer talk in this script-based QA shows students' lack of interest in simple reading and reciting, although Hanfeng's complaint (in line 10) may come from his normal unwillingness to read and recite. Moreover, the activity took place near the end of the class, which may also account for his unwillingness and complaints.

This may have pedagogical implications: script-based reading and reciting and rote memorization are not welcomed by the students. Moreover, in task design, particularly for young learners, consideration should be given about when to conduct an activity; as Ouya stated, activities near the end of a class did not achieve what had been planned, as students were more likely to feel tired and anxious. Ouya said that, according to his experience, the optimal time for the activities for such young learners was about ten minutes after the class started (Interview on March 10, 2008).

6.3.2.2 Script-adapted QA and Features of Peer Talk Revealed

Script-adapted QA refers to students' taking on the speaking roles of asking and answering questions adapted from the textbook. An example of this involved the students' looking at the clock and creating a dialogue using the expressions they had just learned, such as "What time is it?" and "It's time to …". Following the teacher's modeling, the students asked and answered questions using the time expressions, but adapted the answer to reflect their school schedule.

Activity 6. Talking about the time according to school schedule

Similar to Activity 2 and Activity 5, this activity was drawn from the PEP English language lesson on time expressions. The students had learned the time expressions and practiced them through some in-class activities; during the evening self-study class, the teacher directed them to talk about their

life at school, using the time expressions they had just learned[1]. Due to the limited space, only extracts from the activity are presented, with their foci as subheadings.

Discussing the sequence of the talk

Hangfeng and Liuliu

1. Liuliu: *wo men xian yi qi shang liang yi xia wen shen me wen ti.* {Let's discuss about what questions to ask first.}
2. What time is it?
3. *ran hou jiu shi wen zen me zou.* {Then we ask how to get there.}
4. Hanfeng: *yi zhi wen* "what time is it now?" {Keep asking "what time is it now?"}
5. Liuliu: *bu shi.* {No.}
6. *xian wen* "what time is it now?" {Ask "what time is it now?" first.}
7. *ran hou zai wen ying gai zen me zou.* {Then ask how to get there.}
8. *jiu bi ru shuo wo wen* "what time is it now?" {For example, I ask "what time is it now?"}
9. Hanfeng: *En.* {Em.}
10. It's 5 o'clock p.m.
11. It's time to... *bu shi* {no}- It's time for P.E. class.
12. Liuliu: *ran hou ni shuo* "it's time for PE class". {Then you say "it is time for PE class".}
13. *zhi hou ne, ni shuo- ni jiu shuo- ni jiu shuo* "the gym is on the first floor" *huo* "third floor", "fourth floor". {After that you say- you say- then you say "the gym is on the first floor" or "the third floor", or "the fourth floor".}
14. *na xie- en- hao-ran hou- deng yi xia, zai wen (...) zai wen zai wen* {Those- em-fine-then- wait a minute- then ask (...) then ask- then ask}
15. What time is it?
16. It's seven o'clock.

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1 For details of the text the students had learned, please refer to Section 6.3.1.2.

17. It's time to go to the playground.
18. Henfeng: *en.* {Em.}
19. Liuliu: *ran hou ni jiu shuo- jiu shuo* "go to the playground". ={Then you say- you say "go to the playground".}
20. Hanfeng: =Play football.
21. Liuliu: *en!* Play football.
22.   *ran hou...* {then...}(...)
23.   *ke yi le ba!* {It's ok (enough) then!}
24. Hanfeng: *en.*

This activity involved Hanfeng and Liuliu, and it shows the peers' active participation in the discussion of how to conduct their activity. In the first 24 lines of pre-activity talk, Liuliu was discussing with Hanfeng the sequence of their talk. Instead of allocating the role and content to Hanfeng, Liuliu used *"wo men* {we}" to get Hanfeng actively involved in the discussion and built the contents step by step in their discussion: Liuliu elaborated in the L1 the sequence and content of their talk (in lines 1 to 3, 5 to 8, 12 to 17, 19); Liuliu echoed (in line 21) Hanfeng's prompts (in line 20); Hanfeng actively participated in the discussion, proposing the language to be used (in lines 4, 9 to 11 and 20) and agreeing with confirmations (in lines 18 and 24).

Reciprocity of the peer assistance
25. Liuliu: One? Two? Three? Action!
26.   What time is it now?
27. Hanfeng: It's one o'clock.
28.   It's time for (..)
29. Liuliu: ... to go to ... (prompting in very low voice)
30. Hanfeng: It's time for (...) art class.(...)
31. Liuliu: The art class is on the:
32. Hanfeng: ... first floor.
33. Liuliu: *en.*

......

46. Liuliu: It's 6 o'clock.

47.　　It's time for:

48. Hanfeng: ... dinner. (prompting in very low voice)

49. Liuliu: ... dinner.

50.　　The (...)

51. Hanfeng: (???) (giving prompts in a very low voice)

......

58. Liuliu: It's ten o'clock.

59.　　It's time for Chinese class.

60.　　Let's read the (...)

61. Hanfeng: *ni jiu shuo ke wen.* {Then you just say "text". }(prompting in very low voice)

62. Liuliu: Let's read the *ke wen.* {Let's read the text.}

63.　　(...)Oh, oops, sorry.

64. Hanfeng: Oh, oops, sorry.

65.　　No: problem.

......

80. Hanfeng: =playground. (prompting in very low voice)

81. Liuliu: Playground.

82.　　Let's play football, OK?

83. Hanfeng: OK.

84. Liuliu: Oh, sorry.

85. Hanfeng: You are welcome.

86. Liuliu: No problem. (prompting in very low voice)

87. Hanfeng: No problem.

Peer assistance occurred in this extract. Liuliu came from the higher proficiency level, and Hanfeng from the lower level. Liuliu assisted Hanfeng with prompts in their talk. Liuliu started the talk by asking Hanfeng about the time (in line 26). Hanfeng answered, but struggled with a pause (in line 28). When Liuliu prompted in a low voice (in line 29), Hanfeng did not pick up her prompt directly, but stuck to his previous words, using an alternative structure (in line 30). When Liuliu said "sorry" (in line 84), Hanfeng replied with "you

are welcome" (in line 85), which was an incorrect discursive response. Liuliu corrected him (in line 86) in a low voice and Hanfeng picked up the correction (in

line 87).

Peer assistance was reciprocal in this extract. When Liuliu showed her hesitation by elongating the vowel (in lines 31 and 47), Hanfeng prompted her with an answer (in lines 32 and 48). When Liuliu paused (in line 50), Hanfeng prompted again (in line 51). When Liuliu struggled with a pause (in line 60), not knowing how to pronounce "text", Hanfeng, not knowing either, prompted a strategy to solve the problem — switching the code (in line 61). Liuliu took up this strategy (in line 62). When Liuliu said "oops, sorry" (in line 63), Hanfeng first took it as a prompt and took it up (in line 64) and changed to respond with "no problem" when he realized that he should respond in this communication flow (in line 65).

The extract above showed language-related peer assistance (in sentence structure, in discourse coherence) and strategy-related peer assistance (to switch the code for the difficult lexis). The assistance was reciprocal. Though Hanfeng came from the lower language proficiency level, he assisted Liuliu with prompts in their talk.

Language play: exaggerating and chanting
88. Liuliu: Oh, you fall down.
89. Hanfeng: S-O-S! (pretending he gets hurt)
    (Liuliu pretends that she is helping him.)
90. Hanfeng: Thank you.
91. Liuliu: You are welcome.
    ......
97. Liuliu: Let's go to the canteen, OK?
98. Hanfeng: OK.
99. Liuliu: *yi qi* chant. {Let's chant together.} (suggesting in a very low voice)
100. Liuliu: //go to the canteen, eat the noodles.
101. Hanfeng: //go to the canteen, eat the noodles.
102. Liuliu: Oh! What's [Where is] the short hand?

103. Hanfeng: I don't know. (in a low voice)
104. Liuliu: Oh, it's on the long hand.
105.   Oh?oh!
106.   *ni gan shen me ne?* {What are you doing?}
107.   *wen ji dian zhong le.* {Ask what time it is.}
108. Hanfeng: *wo yi jing jiang le ji ci le.* {I have said several times}.
(Mar. 10, 2008, Evening self-study class, Grade 4)

As Liuliu and Hanfeng were talking about going to the playground to play football (in lines 80 to 82), Liuliu improvised that Hanfeng fell down (in line 88). Hanfeng picked up Liuliu's hints, continued their talk by pretending that he fell down and exaggerating with "S-O-S" (in line 89). Liuliu pretended to help him and Hanfeng thanked her (in line 90). Hanfeng's improvisional "S-O-S" dramatized the scene with this exaggeration — playing with lexis.

Chanting occurred as another form of language play, and Liuliu and Hanfeng played with the sentence structure. When Liuliu proposed that they go to the canteen together (in line 97) and chant together (in line 99), Hanfeng agreed (in line 98) and they started chanting (in lines 100 and 101).

Task-related and behavior-related peer assistance occurred in this extract. On the one hand, peers had fun enjoying the language play. On the other hand, they were highly motivated to practice and use the language. Liuliu blamed Hanfeng with a rhetorical question (in line 106), trying to call him to attend to their task, commanding him to start their practice again by asking about the time (in line 107), although Hanfeng showed his unwillingness to continue with it as he had "already said several times" (in line 108).

Features of peer talk in Activity 6 — the script-adapted QA

The following features of peer talk occurred in the above script-adapted QA. Firstly, the students displayed egalitarian peer relations in their talk, as shown in Liuliu's efforts to involve her peer interlocutor in their discussion by using the pronoun "*wo men* {we}" as well as using a conversational tone, and in Hanfeng's active participation in language use

selection. Secondly, peers showed reciprocity of assistance in their activity; although Hanfeng was from a lower language proficiency level, he assisted Liuliu, a top student, by prompting her on the language to be used and on a strategy to overcome the difficulty. Thirdly, language play emerged and was improvisational in the activity. The peers not only played with the lexis to dramatize the scene with exaggeration, but also played with sentence structure through chanting. Fourthly, the students showed their initiative by active participation and involvement in their activity and their task- and behavior-related assistance.

Liuliu and Hanfeng extended their talk to 108 lines through language practice and playful language use. This may be because the topic concerned their school life and they had a lot to say about it, or because the self-study class permitted students to spend more time on their language practice and communication.

6.3.2.3　Keyword-supported QA and Features of Peer Talk Revealed

Keyword-supported QA refers to the students' taking or negotiating their speaking roles of "asking" and "answering" questions using the keywords provided by the teacher or in the textbook. One of the examples was talking about living things.

Activity 7. Living things or non-living things?

When students entered Grade 5, their Living Science textbooks contained only pictures, with some keywords provided for them. In performing activities, the students took the topic in the picture, the roles assigned them by the teacher, and used the keywords to combine the two in their activity. After the teacher explained to the students the conditions by which living things survive, they were assigned the task of talking about living and non-living things, by asking and answering questions about growth and change, as addressed by the criteria for judging living things: 1) they can grow; 2) they can reproduce; 3) they can produce or get nutrition; and 4) they can react to external stimuli. The students had eight textbook pictures (a butterfly, a robot, the Milky Way, an electronic dog, an orange, a flower, a rock, and a jellyfish) and were asked

to determine whether they were living or non-living things, using keywords provided by the teacher.

Nanhai and Wenwen
1. Nanhai: This is a butterfly.
2. Wenwen: Is this a living things [thing]?
3. Nanhai: Yes.
4. Wenwen: Why.
5. Nanhai: Because (..)
6. Wenwen: It can …(prompting in a low voice)
7. Nanhai: It (..)
8. Wenwen: … can … (prompting)
9. Nanhai: It can (0.6) fly.
10.   What's this?
11. Wenwen: This is a (..) robot.
12. Nanhai: *Er*-is this the (..)?
13. Wenwen: Living thing. (prompting in a very low voice)
14. Nanhai: Living thing?
15. Wenwen: No, it isn't.
16. Nanhai: Why?
17. Wenwen: Because (…) it no can no can grown [grow].
18. Nanhai: Grow. (correcting Wenwen)
(Mar. 13, 2008)

Peer assistance occurred in this extract when peers assisted each other with the language structure and pronunciation. When Nanhai started his talk by stating that the picture was a butterfly (in line 1), Wenwen asked him whether it was a living thing or a non-living thing, and continued her inquiry with a "Why?" (in line 4). When Nanhai struggled with a pause (in lines 5 and 7), Wenwen prompted (in lines 6 and 8). Nanhai picked up the prompt and continued with his talk (in line 9), where Wenwen waited for Nanhai to continue. When Wenwen struggled with pauses (in lines 11 and 17), Hanfeng also waited for her to continue with her talk. Nanhai corrected Wenwen (in

line 18), when Wenwen made an error (in line 17).

Features of peer talk in Activity 7 — the keyword-supported QA

In the keyword-supported QA activity, the students learned, firstly, to exercise reason. Secondly, the students showed reciprocity in their assistance — Wenwen assisted Nanhai with prompts, and Nanhai, corrected Wenwen when she made an error. Thirdly, the students waited for their peer interlocutor(s) to finish, using waiting as a technique to assist their peers in the activity.

6.3.2.4   Script-free QA and Features of Peer Talk Revealed

Script-free QA refers to the students' taking the topic assigned by the teacher, and taking or negotiating the roles of "asking" and "answering" questions with no text provided. An example of this was the students' creating a dialogue by asking each other what was wrong in a picture.

Activity 8. Discussing what is wrong in the picture

The activity was from the living science class. The students were given only five pictures, in some of which students were misbehaving — littering, damaging a tree, hurting an animal, smoking in the woods, or scratching the wall of an historical site. No scripts or keywords were provided. The students accepted their assigned roles (one asked questions and one answered the questions), and talked about whether it was right or wrong to litter, to harm trees and animals, and to vandalize.

Nanhai and Yoyo
1. Yoyo: OK.
2. Is it wrong?
3. Nanhai: No.
4. Yoyo: No? (showing surprise)(10)
5.   *ni lai wen la.* {You ask.}
6.   *lai zhe li.* {Come here.}
7. Picture 1, do- *di yi ye. di yi ye ta de xing wei shi zheng que de ma?* {On the first page, on the first page, is his behavior right?}
8. Nanhai: *bu shi.* {No.}

9. *ai ya!* (complaining)
10. *ni wen wo a!* {You ask me.}
11. *wo bu wen ni.* {I will not ask you.}
12. Yoyo: Picture 1, the boy, is he good?
13. Nanhai: No, he litter the banana.
14. Yoyo: He litter the banana.
15. Nanhai: *shuo le.* {I have said it.}
16. Yoyo: Picture 2, is it wrong?
17. Nanhai: No.
18. Yoyo: *a?!* (showing surprise)
19. Nanhai: Yes.
20. Yoyo: Why?
21. Nanhai: Because he litters.
22. Yoyo: Because he harmed the animals. (prompting)
23. Nanhai: Because he harm the animals.
24. Yoyo: Picture 3, the boy, is it great?
25. Nanhai: No, he is damaging the tree.
26. Yoyo: Yes.
27. And Picture 4, the man, is it great?
28. Nanhai: No, he is (.) smoking,
29. He is (..)
30. Yoyo: ...in the... (prompting)
31. Nanhai: ...in the...
32. Yoyo: ...forest. (prompting)
33. Nanhai: ...forest.
34. Becau- no, the man is smoking in the forest.
35. Yoyo: OK.
36. Nanhai: Picture 1, the boy is right?
37. Yoyo: No, because the boy litter the *er-* litter the *er-* (..) litter the *shen me* {what}?
38. Nanhai: ...banana. (prompting).
39. Picture 2, the boy is good?
40. Yoyo: No, because he harm the animals.

41. Nanhai: Picture 3, the boy is good?

42. Yoyo: No, he damage the tree.

43. Nanhai: Picture 4, the man is good?

44. Yoyo: No, he is smoking in the forest.

45.   OK.

46. Yoyo: picture 3, picture 3, the girl, is it great?

47. Nanhai: No.

48. Yoyo: Why.

49. Nanhai: I don't know.

50. Yoyo: (laughing) OK.

51.   *wo lai wen.* {I will ask.}

52.   *ni lai da.* {And you will answer.}

(Oct. 24, 2008, Grade 5)

The peers' defensiveness occurred in their talk in this activity. Yoyo started the talk directly without pre-activity planning (in lines 1 and 2). When Nanhai gave the wrong answer (in line 3), Yoyo channeled it back (in line 4) and waited for Nanhai's self-repair (in line 4). When no response was made by Nanhai, Yoyo asked Nanhai to come to her and explained to him (in line 7). As introduced in Section 5.3.4, Yoyo was the top student in this class, good at every subject including PE. She usually used imperative sentences in her talk (like in lines 5 and 6), which made her seem dominant. Nanhai, who was very well behaved and obedient, was from the lower language proficiency level. His defensiveness can be seen clearly in the talk. Nanhai complained and told Yoyo firmly his reverse proposal (in lines 8 to11). His defensiveness was shown in his refusal to repeat what Yoyo had said (in line 15). When he was struggling (in lines 28, 29 and 31), Yoyo prompted (in lines 30 and 32). Aside from picking up the prompts directly, Nanhai reformulated his utterance to show his competency (in line 34). When Yoyo asked for the reason why in Picture 3 the girl was wrong (in line 48), Nanhai stated that he did not know directly (in line 49). Yoyo seemed to have detected Nanhai's defensive talk. She compromised with a laugh (in line 50), stating that she would ask and Nanhai would answer (in lines 51 and 52).

Peer assistance occurred in this activity, and with reciprocity. Yoyo assisted Nanhai with his language expressions, giving prompts (in lines 22, 30, and 32), and Nanhai also assisted Yoyo when she struggled (in line 37). Peers assisted each other indirectly such as by challenging and making clarification requests (in line 18), which led to their interlocutor's self-repair (in line 19). Private speech had social functions. Yoyo showed her struggle through private speech (in line 37), which led to Nanhai's assistance to her (in line 38).

Features of peer talk in Activity 8 — the script-free QA

In this script-free QA, the students showed reciprocity in their peer assistance. Secondly, peers assisted each other indirectly through challenges and clarification requests, which led to their peer interlocutor's self-repair. Thirdly, private speech served the social function of indicating difficulties and appealing for assistance. Fourthly, the role relations among peers were dynamic, with intimidated students like obedient Nanhai defending themselves before the more domineering students like Yoyo.

This may have pedagogical implications. Script-free QA may be challenging for less proficient students, whose defensive talk implies that, when pairing, individual abilities should be taken into consideration and top students instructed as to how to involve less proficient students actively in their activities, as Liuliu did through her pronoun use *"wo men* {we}" and a conversational tone instead of using a commanding tone in their talk.

6.3.2.5 The Interrelationship between QAs and Peer Talk

The features of peer talk in QAs can be summed up as follows. The students were unwilling, and complained about having to read aloud or recite text in the script-based QA. In the script-adapted QA, students actively participated and involved themselves in the discussion through the use of collective pronouns. Students used language play to exert control over the practice through reciprocal task-related and behavior-related peer assistance. In the keyword-supported QA, the students learned to exercise reason, and reciprocal peer assistance, including waiting, was used to assist

peer interlocutors. In the script-free QA, students again displayed reciprocal peer assistance, as well as indirect peer assistance through challenges and **150** clarification requests. Private speech, functioning socially, indicated a need for assistance. Dynamic role relations were shown in student's self-defense when confronted by their domineering peer interlocutor(s). These features are shown in Table 6.6.

Table 6.6   Features of Peer Talk in QAs

Variations of question-answer	Features of peer talk in the variations of question-answers
script-based QA (from English language class of Grade 4, Mar. 10)	unwillingness and complaint to read and recite, (near the end of class may also account for the students' unwillingness)
script-adapted QA (from English language class of Grade 4, Mar. 10, 2008 in Evening Self-study class)	active participation and involvement in the discussion, the use of pronoun in the L1 "wo men {we}", reciprocity of peer assistance, language play: – play with lexis — exaggeration – play with sentence structure — chanting students' initiative in active participation and involvement task-related and behavior-related peer assistance, extended talk (on the topic close to student life),
keyword-supported QA (from English immersion class of Living Science of Grade 4, Mar. 13, 2008)	reasoning, reciprocity of peer assistance, waiting as peer assistance
script-free QA (from English immersion class of Living Science of Grade 5, Oct. 24, 2008)	reciprocity of peer assistance, indirect peer assistance through challenging or clarification request, social function of private speech, dynamic role relations: – the intimidated student's defense before their domineering peer interlocutor(s)

QAs are a recognized means of promoting probing and reasoning in learning. For example, Postman (1979, p.140, cited in McCormick & Donato, 2000, p.183) maintains that "all our knowledge results from questions…

[and] question-asking is our most important intellectual tool". Based on Pattison's (1987) task taxonomy, Nunan's (2004, p.57) asserts that QAs create information gaps (although not when the students simply recite scripted dialogue) and provide learners with opportunities to choose the own language and discover their peer interlocutors' secret choice. Because of its probing nature, asking and answering involves comprehending information, conveying meaning and exercising reason (Prabhu, 1987).

QAs (except for rote memorization) seem to shape students' active participation and involvement, as well as their close peer cooperation and collaboration, through questions and answers. For example, peer assistance has occurred in almost all the QAs, and peers have shown reciprocity when assisting each other. In Activity 6, when the topic reflected their life experience, students showed a lot of language play and peer assistance, and extended their talk to 108 lines. In Activity 7, the students tried to probe by reasoning, and learned to employ such communication skills as waiting. In Activity 8, the students showed their communication skills by challenging their peer interlocutors. These examples indicate that QAs serve as important mediational means for the students to develop their spoken communication skills — comprehending information, conveying meaning, and reasoning (Prabhu, 1987). At the same time, QAs may be challenging for less-proficient students.

6.3.3 Variations of Conversation and Peer Talk

Conversation refers to a dialogue or piece of narrative by the students that is cued by either cards, pictures or flow charts, or real-life topics (Valcarcel, et al., 1995). It differs from RP in that the students are not allocated and do not negotiate roles to play, although the context of a conversation may be "imagined", as in role play. It differs from QA in that the students are not required by the teacher, nor set by the textbook dialogue to take on "ask and answer" roles, although students may ask each other questions in the course of their conversation. In the current study, conversations usually emerge from such tasks as "talking about" something assigned by the teacher. Variations of

conversation comprise script-based, script-adapted, keyword-supported and script-free conversation.

6.3.3.1 Script-based Conversation and Features of Peer Talk Revealed

Script-based conversation refers to students' building up a dialogue based on texts provided in the textbook, without adaptation. This type of activity is illustrated by students' reading (reciting) and practicing together excerpts of the text (dialogue) in the textbook, in an attempt to memorize it. One observed example of this type of conversation was students' making class rules according to the scripted text in the textbook.

Activity 9. Making class rules

This activity came from Moral Education and Social Science, and was designed to teach students the class rules, in English. The task assigned by the teacher was to practice the class rules, based on the text.

Wenwen and Nanhai

1. Wenwen: Let's make class rules.
2. Nanhai: OK.
3. Wenwen: *en*, (…) *er- er-* don't quarrel with classmates.
4. And (…) everybody shou [should] be quiet in the: class.
5. Nanhai: Don't put [push] in the homeway [hallway].
6. Wenwen: Yes.
7. Don't drink, *er*, eat (..) in the computer room or- or classroom.
8. Nanhai: Yes.
9. Don't waste food in the canteen.
10. Wenwen: Yes.(:)
11. And (..) and listen to teachers atively [attentively] in class.
12. Nanhai: Rai [raise] handy [hands](...)
    (???)
13. Wenwen: Come to school on time(..)
14. And hand in the work on time.
15. Nanhi: Don't run (..) and (..)

16. Wenwen: <u>Jump.</u>(prompting in a very low voice)
17. Nanhai: Jump and all in the classroom.
18. Wenwen: Yes, you are right.
19.   *en* … and we shou [should] study.
20.   We miss [must] no land [not late] for school.
21. Nanhai: Is it school?(0.6)
22. Wenwen: *kuai dian.* {Hurry up.}
23.   *kuai dian shuo.* {Hurry up and talk.} (requesting in a very low voice)
24.   *kuai dian.* {Hurry up.}
25.   *kuai dian.* {Hurry up.} (requesting in a very low voice)
(Mar. 19, 2008, Grade 4)

The students attempted to make the dialogue practice more conversational. Wenwen started the talk (in line 1) and Nanhai agreed (in line 2). Wenwen and Nanhai took turns reading out the text, and added "yes" to make it more like a conversation (in lines 3 to 15). As this was a new lesson to them, both Wenwen and Nanhai struggled with pauses and waited for each other to finish. Wenwen prompted when Nanhai could not continue, struggling with two pauses (in line 16), and Nanhai picked it up (in line 17). Wenwen then tried to adapt the text to make it more conversational in their talk (in lines 18 to 20). When Nanhai paused, Wenwen first waited (in line 21), and then urged him to hurry up (in lines 23 to 25).

Features of peer talk in Activity 9 — the script-based conversation

In this script-based conversation, the students were trying to make the text more conversational by using the word "yes" in their talk. In addition, language-related peer assistance occurred in the extract, and L1 was used in students' task-related assistance. This activity, conducted at the beginning of the class, seemed to help familiarize some of the students with language forms and pronunciation.

6.3.3.2 Script-adapted Conversation and Features of Peer Talk Revealed

Script-adapted conversation refers to the students adapting the text

they had learned from the textbook and building up a dialogue based on that adaptation. An observed example of this type of conversation was students' choosing the class rule star[1], the student who best observed class rules.

Activity 10. Choosing the rule star in the class

The students learned the class rules in English immersion class; that evening's self-study class was in English, and the first five to ten minutes were, as usual, spent on English oral activities. The students were assigned to choose the class rule star and give reasons for their choice. This task was intended to elicit students' language use by using the class rules[2] they had just learned, and students could choose as many rule stars as they wanted. The students also ranked the class rule stars, the best one receiving five stars.

Hanfeng and Liuliu

1. Hanfeng: *xian shui ne*? {Whom should I choose first?} (talking to himself in a very low voice)
2. Liuliu: I choose... (giggling)... I choose (..) Nancy.
3. Hanfeng: *en.*
4. Why?
5. Liuliu: Because he is … he is go to- he go to school is on time and …
6. Hanfeng: *ta shi nan de ma?* {Is she a male?} (in a low voice)
7. Liuliu: Oh?
8. Hanfeng: "He" *shi nan de.* {"He" refers to male.} (in a low voice)
9. Liuliu: Yes, yes, yes.
10. She go to school on time.

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1 A rule star is a person who obeys class rules and school regulations.

2 The text that they had learned is as follows: "1. We should respect our teachers and our classmates. We must not fight with others. 2. We should study hard. We must not be late or leave school without permission. 3. We should follow rules. We must not play in the corridor. 4. We should clean our classroom while on duty. We must not litter. 5. We should take good care of public property. We must not destroy anything in our school. 6. We should raise our hands before we want to answer questions. We must not make noise."

11.   And she cleaned, no, no, no, she hand in the homework on time.
12.   I give Nancy 4 (..) // star:s.
13. Hanfeng: //(laughing)
14. Liuliu: When do you try?
15. Hanfeng: //I give …
16. Liuliu: //When?
17. Hanfeng: I- I- give ZJH.
18. Liuliu: Choose. (correcting and prompting in a very low voice)
19. Hanfeng: I choose ZJH.
20. Liuliu: Why?
21. Hanfeng: Because he, he's (...) he's (..) *er-*
22.   *wo mei you ji de zhen me shuo.* {I do not remember how to say …}(…) (???)
23.   He go to school on time (..) and he …
24. Liuliu: I give …(prompting in a low voice)
25. Hanfeng: I give …
26. Liuliu: He …(prompting in a low voice)
27. Hanfeng: His five star:s.
28. Liuliu: *ran hou shuo* why. {Then ask "why".}(prompting in a low voice)
29. Hanfeng: Why?
30. Liuliu: *eh?* (showing confusion)
31.   I no … I not … I not say … I choose who.
32.   *ni shuo* "oh?oh!" {You say "oh?oh!"} (prompting in a low voice)
33. Hanfeng: Oh?oh!
(Mar. 19, 2008, Evening self-study class, Grade 4)

Reciprocity of peer assistance occurred in this activity where questioning and explaining were employed by the students to assist their peers. Hanfeng started with an utterance in the L1 about whom he should choose (in line 1). Liuliu took her turn in English with the target phrase "I choose" (in line 2). Hanfeng agreed and inquired about the reason (in lines 3 and 4). Liuliu gave the reason but misused the pronoun "he" for "she" (in line 5). Hanfeng switched to the L1 and reminded her in a low voice with a rhetorical question

for a confirmation check (in line 6). Liuliu came to understand his point (in line 7), and Hanfeng further explained in the L1 that "he" referred to male in a low voice. Liuliu understood his point with a self-repair and continued with her talk, using the correct pronoun "she" (in lines 9 to 11). Although Hanfeng came from the lower language proficiency level, he tried to assist Liuliu when she made an error, not directly but with a rhetorical question to draw her attention first, and with explanation next, which led to Liuliu's improved response. Both of them were amused when Liuliu gave Nancy four stars (in lines 12 and 13). Liuliu handed over the turn with a question, which functioned as an invitation (in line 13) and Hanfeng took over the turn (in line 15).

Peers assisted each other in turn-taking and discourse coherence. Hanfeng initiated the talk by stating that he chose ZJH (in lines 15 and 17). Liuliu corrected Hanfeng (in line 18) and Hanfeng picked up the prompts (in line 19). Liuliu asked for the reason (in line 20), and Hanfeng gave the reason that ZJH went to school on time (in lines 21 and 23) and stated his difficulty in expressing himself (in line 22). With Liuliu's prompts (in lines 24 and 26), Hanfeng gave ZJH five stars, which marked the highest ranking (in lines 25 and 27). Then the turn changed and Liuliu was the person who stated her choice while Hanfeng asked for the reason so as to sustain their talk. Liuliu prompted Hanfeng to ask "why' again (in line 29). Later she realized that she did not state her choice yet (in lines 30 and 31). She asked Hanfeng in a low voice to say "oh?oh!" (in line 32). Hanfeng picked up the prompt (in line 33).

In her interview with Liuliu (March 19, 2008), the author asked what "oh?oh!" meant in her talk. She told the author that sometimes she did not know what to say next, and used "oh?oh!" to give her something else to talk about. In this extract "oh?oh!" was used to buy herself the time to correct her error and to be discursively coherent.

Features of peer talk in Activity 10 — the script-adapted conversation

The following features of peer talk occurred in this script-adapted conversation. First, language-related peer assistance occurred and was reciprocated, with a less-proficient student (Hanfeng) skillfully using a

rhetorical question and an explanation to help Liuliu to improve her pronoun use (in a linguistic aspect). The students also assisted each other with turn-taking (in a pragmatic aspect), handing over turns directly or prompting a turnover with a question. Finally, the students tried to buy time to think about what to say next and to keep the discourse coherent using special linguistic terms, such as "oh?oh!" (in a discursive aspect).

6.3.3.3 Keyword-supported Conversation and Features of Peer Talk Revealed

Keyword-supported conversation refers to students' building a dialogue based on keywords provided in the textbook and either taking on roles according to the teacher's prompts or negotiating roles themselves. An observed example of this type of conversation was the students' talking about the ways of animal reproduction, using some keywords as prompts.

Activity 11. Talking about the ways of animal reproduction
The activity was a Primary Living Science unit about animal reproduction, and involved Wenwen and Peiqiong. The task assigned by the teacher was to list animals that lay eggs and animals that give birth to their live young.

Peiqiong and Wenwen
1. Peiqiong: *feng huang*. {Phoenix.}
2. Wenwen: *feng huan zen me sheng de?* {What is the phoenix's way of reproduction?}
3. Peiqiong: *dan sheng*. {laying eggs.}
4.   Laying eggs.
5. Wenwen: *en?*
6. Peiqiong: *bu shi,bu shi, bu shi*. {No, no. no.}
7.   *shi tai sheng*. {It is giving birth to its young.}
8.   *yin wei zhi sheng yi ge*. {Because it can reproduce only one.}
9.   … giving birth to (..)
10. Wenwen: … it young.
11.   *wo ren wei shi bu sheng*. {I think it has no reproduction.}

    12.   *yin wei ta shi shen wu.* {Because it is a fairy creature.}

    13.   *shi shi shang du yi wu er de.* {It is unique in the world.}

    (Nov 13, 2008)

The students' critical thinking emerged in their challenging, disagreeing and reasoning during their content subject learning. Peiqiong mentioned the phoenix (in line 1), but Wenwen did not know how the phoenix reproduces and asked Peiqiong for help (in line 2). Peiqiong provided the answer in both the L1 (in line 3) and the L2 (in line 4). Wenwen felt a little bit surprised about his statement and asked for clarification (in line 5). Peiqiong substituted his answer with an alternative one in the L1 (in line 7), as well as in the L2 (in line 9) and provided the reason for that answer (in line 8). Wenwen co-constructed the answer (in line 10). Instead of taking Peiqiong's answer blindly, Wenwen challenged Peiqiong with a third answer that "the phoenix has no reproduction" (in line 11), together with reasoning that "it is a fairy creature" and "unique in the world" (in lines 12 and 13). Wenwen and Peiqiong were assisting each other over the subject content. Wenwen asked for assistance directly, but she did not take up the prompts blindly when the answers were provided; she challenged and negotiated with disagreement.

In the activity, Wenwen and Peiqiong communicated in the L1 nearly all the time. This shows that a problem arose with the integration of subject content and the target language to be used. Within these 13 lines, all the lines were in the L1 except for three lines (lines 4, 9 and 10), where the objective of English immersion to enhance the English language learning seemed not well achieved.

Features of peer talk in Activity 11 — the keyword-supported conversation

Features of peer talk shown in this keyword-supported conversation include content-related peer assistance, where the students negotiated over subject content, challenging each other. Also, critical thinking and reasoning were apparent when the students, instead of accepting answers blindly, disagreed with and challenged each other. Thirdly and finally, nearly the entire

conversation was conducted in L1. It seemed that the teacher did not integrate the subject contents and target language use when designing this subject content learning task.

6.3.3.4 Script-free Conversation with Features of Peer Talk Revealed

Script-free conversation refers to students' building up a dialogue by taking a topic assigned to them by the teacher, and negotiating and deciding their roles by themselves, with no textbook text provided. An observed example of this type of conversation was garden exploration.

Activity 12. Garden exploration

This was an after-class activity based on a Primary Living Science class on living and non-living things. After the teacher explained the criteria for differentiating living and non-living things in class and organized the students' talking about the pictures, he instructed them to go to the garden after lunch to identify the living and non-living things they came across, using the criteria they had just learned. The students were very excited by the idea of applying their knowledge in practice. Due to limited space, only extracts from the activity are presented, with their foci as subheadings.

Language play: chanting and repetition
Changqing, Liuliu, Hanfeng, Nanhai, Wenwen and Xumeng
1. Yoyo: Let's go.
2. Liuliu, Wenwen & Nanhai: (giggling) OK.
3. Walk walk, walk walk walk, walk walk, walk walk walk. (chanting with music tunes with Yoyo)
4. Liuliu: wi- with han:d, with hand.
5. Yoyo: *shen me?* {What?}
6. *zen me shuo?* {How to say it?}
7. Liuliu: Hand in hand. (giggling)(???)
8. Hanfeng, *yi qi ah!* {Hanfeng, together!} (pleading)

This extract involved Changqing, Liuliu, Nanhai, Wenwen and Yoyo.

Yoyo acted as a team leader and asked them to go to the garden (in line 1). While they were walking hand in hand, Liuliu, Wenwen and Nanhai agreed (in line 2) and started the chanting with the repetition of "walk" (in line 3). Liuliu extended her turn by chanting with the repetition of "hand wi [with] hand" (in line 4). When Yoyo asked Liuliu what she said (in lines 5 and 6), Liuliu replied with "hand in hand" (in line 7) and urged Hanfeng to join her in the chanting (in line 8).

When interviewed (March 13, 2008), Yoyo told the author that she enjoyed chanting and repetition as it was more like singing songs, and speaking English itself was more like singing. Liuliu said that "hand in hand" was from an Olympic song that Ouya hummed and she liked. She added that as they were walking hand in hand the words from the song just jumped to her lips, reminding her of the song.

Language play: exclamation, personification, and exaggeration
35. Hanfeng: No.
36. Liuliu: Oh?oh!
37.　　Wait for me, wait for me.
38.　　Wow, it's beautiful.
39.　　Oh, no no no no no (…)
40.　　This is beautiful. (enjoying looking at a flower)
41.　　How beautiful!
42.　　Let's go to the (…)
43.　　Flower, I love you.
44.　　There! There!
45. Hanfeng: *du juan hua.* {azalea.}
46. Liuliu: OK, give me, give me, give me.
47. Hanfeng: It's beautiful.
48. Liuliu: It's beautiful.
49.　　Look! Look! Loo:k!
50.　　It's beautiful.
51. Hanfeng: Come on. (in a low voice)
52. Liuliu: Davi!

53. Hanfeng: *wa!* It's bea:u:tifu:l (exaggerating the pronunciation)

When Liuliu and Hanfeng went into the garden, they were attracted by the beautiful flowers. Liuliu began to exclaim about them (in lines 38, 40, 41, 48 and 50). Liuliu personalized the flower with the personal pronoun "you" and talked to the flower expressing her love for the flower. Hanfeng joined her, explaining the type of flower (in line 45), echoing Liuliu in her exclamation (in line 47) and exclaiming about the beauty of the flower by exaggerating the pronunciation of "beautiful" (in line 53). In addition, Liuliu used repetition to draw attention and for fun (in lines 37, 39, 44, 46 and 49).

Language play: parallelism
154. Hanfeng: *wa.*
155. Liuliu: wa, so cute, so beautiful.
156.   So many flowers, so many trees.

When Hanfeng exclaimed about what he saw in the garden, Liuliu, attracted by the flowers and trees in it, expressed her excitement by using the parallel structure with "so" to describe what she saw (in lines 155 and 156).

Language play: nickname
205. Liuliu: Oh! Thank you!
206.   Let's go to Ouya 2.
207. Hanfeng: OK.
208. Liuliu: Here, Ouya 2.

Liuliu used the nickname Ouya 2 to refer to Xumeng (in lines 206 and 208). The teacher's English name was Ouya. Xumeng was called "Ouya 2" by his peer students. When interviewed (March 13, 2008) as to why Xumeng was called "Ouya 2", Liuliu and Nanhai said that the reason was that Xumeng' s English was good, and that his physical shape was similar to Ouya's. When interviewed about who gave Xumeng this nickname, Teacher Ouya said that it was the students in the class. Xumeng said that he liked this nickname,

as he wished to be a good teacher like Ouya in the future. The giving of nicknames shows students' understanding about their peers' characteristics;

nicknames were accepted with good grace.

Applying their knowledge in practice

109. Xumeng: *wo lai fang wen ni yi xia.* {Let me interview you for a while.}
110. Hanfeng: *wa,* it's beautiful.
111. Xumeng: I- *wo lai fang wen ni men yi xia.* {Let me interview you for a while.}
112. What's this?
113. Liuliu: This is the … er- (..)
114. Hanfeng: *shen me, shen me, shen me?* {What, what, what?}
115.   Flower. (prompting in a very low voice)
116. Liuliu: Flower.
117. Xumeng: Is it a living thing or a non-living thing?
118. Liuliu: This is the living thing.
119. Xumeng: Living thing.
120.   Can it produce baby?
121. Liuliu: Yes.
122. Xumeng: Can it move?
123. Hanfeng: *shen me yi shi a?* {What does it mean?}
124. Liuliu: No.
125. Xumeng: OK, thank you.

When Liuliu and Hanfeng were exclaiming about the beautiful flowers in the garden, lost in the beauty of flowers, Xumeng, prompted by the teacher, came to regulate their activity by drawing their attention to apply what they had learned in practice — identifying living things and non-living things. Xumeng interrupted Liuliu and Hanfeng for an interview (in lines 109, 111 and 112) while Liuliu and Hanfeng were still absorbed in the beauty of the flowers (in lines 110, 113, 114 to 116). Xumeng started his "interview", asking them to judge the things according to the criteria they had learned (in lines

117, 119, 120 and 122). Liuliu gave the correct answers (in lines 118, 121 and 124), although Hanfeng did not quite understand what Xumeng meant (in line 123). Xumeng expressed his thanks (in line 125).

Peer assistance: language-related
162. Liuliu: *en!*
163. It's very (..)
164. *xiang zen me shuo?* {How to say "fragrant"?} (talking to herself in a very low voice)
165. *xiang zen me shuo?* {How to say "fragrant"?}(...)
166. *xiang zen me shuo?* {How to say "fragrant"?} (asking X for help)
167. Xumeng: *a?* {Yes?}
168. Liuliu: *xiang.* {Fragrant.}
169. Xumeng: *shen me xiang?* {What "fragrant"?}
170. Liuliu: *hen xiang de xiang* {Meaning very fragrant.}
171. Xumeng: It's very nice smell.
172. Liuliu: It's very nice smell.

As stated earlier, when Liuliu, Hanfeng and Xumeng went into the garden, they were attracted by the beautiful flowers. Liuliu tried to describe the fragrant smell, but she could not express "fragrant" in L2. She paused (in line 163), thinking aloud about how to say "fragrant" as shown in her private speech in a low voice (in lines 164 and 165). Then she turned to Xumeng for help (in line 166). Xumeng gave her a clarification request (in line 167), and Liuliu repeated the single lexical item "fragrant" in Chinese as her request for help (in line 168). Xumeng asked her to clarify again (in line 169), as the word "*xiang*" in Chinese may mean "fragrant" or "joss stick". Liuliu repeated her request by contextualizing the word where the word "*xiang*" is an adjective and used after the adverb "very" (in line 170). Xumeng understood her point and provided her with what he could (in line 171). Liuliu picked it up (in line 172).

In the space of 11 lines, Liuliu asked directly and indirectly for assistance, clarified it through repetition, and specified her request by contextualizing

the word. Xumeng asked Liuliu for a clarification first, asked her again for specification of the lexical item, and provided her with what assistance he could in the activity. Learning emerged as evidenced by Liuliu's picking up what Xumeng had provided.

Peer assistance: behavior-related and affect-related

181. Hanfeng: I walk. (walking on the grass)
182. Liuliu: Don't walk in the- don't walk on the grass in the garden.
183. Hanfeng: Oh.
184. Liuliu: *ni shuo* OK. {You say OK.}
185. Hanfeng: OK.
186. Liuliu: Davi, let's go here.
187.   Look, *yi?* (showing surprise)
188.   Oh?oh!
189.   *mei you ting zhi bo fang ba?* {Hope that it does not stop recording.}(looking at the recorder)
190.   *na jiu hao.* {That's great.}
191.   Oh?oh!
192. Hanfeng: It's very nice.
193. Liuliu: Yes, are you OK?
194. Hanfeng: Yes.
(Mar. 13, 2008, Grade 4)

The students reminded each other to behave well by obeying the rules and regulations in the school in their activities. In the garden, when Hanfeng was about to walk on the grass while saying "I walk" (in line 181), Liuliu stopped him from doing so by using the L2 negative imperative sentence (in line 182). In addition, when Hanfeng said "Oh", Liuliu asked Hanfeng to say "OK", meaning "I promise that I will not walk on the grass in the garden" (in line184) instead of just an "Oh" meaning "I understand it now" (in line 183). Hanfeng picked it up (in line 185).

What is more, Liuliu showed her affective concern for Hanfeng in their talk. Liuliu asked Hanfeng whether he felt OK (in line 193), as she just

stopped him from walking on the grass. Hanfeng affirmed to her that he was fine with a "yes" (in line 194).

Features of peer talk in Activity 12 — the script-free conversation

This script-free conversation included several features of peer talk. Firstly, there was abundant language play, such as chanting, repetition, exclamation, personification, exaggerated pronunciation, parallelism, and nicknaming. Secondly, students tried to apply what they had learned in practice, by identifying living and non-living things in the garden. Thirdly, peers assisted each other in language use, through affective support and behavior regulation. Fourthly, L1 was used to seek assistance and to clarify and elaborate on the student peer talk.

6.3.3.5 The Interrelationship between Conversations and Peer Talk

For this type of activity, the features of peer talk can be summed up as follows. In the script-based conversation the students were not satisfied with reading aloud or reciting, and attempted to embellish the text to make it more conversational. The conversation featured language-related peer assistance (in pronunciation) and the use of L1. In the script-adapted conversation, the students displayed reciprocal language-related peer assistance in linguistic, pragmatic and discursive aspects, and content-related peer assistance with the use of L1.

In the keyword-supported conversation, the students showed critical thinking involving challenge and reason, but used L1 in nearly every turn. The reasons may be: 1) without the teacher providing adequate linguistic support or clear emphasis on language use and content, the students may perform the task in L1, focusing on subject content rather than the target language use, which is easier for them; and 2) the students may erroneously see completing the task of listing animals according to their ways of reproduction as the goal of Activity 11. This shows the importance of integrating subject contents and target language use in immersion education. The script-free conversation featured language play such as chanting, repetition, exclamation, personification, exaggeration, parallelism and nicknaming. The students showed language-related, behavior-related and affect-related peer assistance, and were excited about applying their knowledge in practice. These features are shown in Table 6.7.

Table 6.7   Features of Peer Talk in Conversations

Variations of conversations	Features of peer talk in the variations of conversations
script-based conversation (from English immersion class of Social Science of Grade 4, Mar. 19, 2008)	students' attempt to adapt the text, language-related peer assistance (pronunciation), the use of L1
script-adapted conversation (from English immersion class of Social Science of Grade 4, Mar. 19, 2008)	the use of L1 and code-switching, reciprocity of peer assistance: – linguistic aspect (lexis) – pragmatic aspect (turn-taking) – discursive aspect (discourse coherence)
keyword-supported conversation (from English immersion class of Living Science of Grade 5, Nov. 13, 2008)	content-related peer assistance, critical thinking by challenging and reasoning, the L1 use (in all the lines except 3)
script-free conversation (from English immersion after-class activity of Living Science of Grade 4, Mar. 13, 2008)	language play: – chanting, repetition, exclamation,personification, parallelism, nickname, exaggeration(pronunciation) peer assistance: – language-related, behavior-related, affect-related – the use of L1 – applying knowledge in practice

Conversation seemed to encourage the learners' more willing and thorough participation in communication. Nunan's (2004) notes that the key feature of conversation is the flexibility it allows one to choose topics, which may make learners participate more actively. Consistent with Nunan's (2004) statement, Valcarcel (1995) suggests that conversation features flexible choices on topics of dialogue, either by following cues or addressing the authentic topics.

Flexibility over topics and bridging to authentic topics were both apparent in these conversations. Flexibility over topics, especially "real-life" topics where the students could apply what they had learned in practice, seemed to encourage the students to take risks in communicating with their peer interlocutors, reducing their inhibitions and evoking a willingness

to communicate. This flexibility seemed to enrich the students' topics of conversation. In Activity 9, for example, the students tried to make the controlled dialogue more conversational, and in Activity 10, the students took more extended turns in their talk, and showed reciprocity in peer assistance. In Activity 11, the students' critical thinking emerged in their challenging and reasoning, while in Activity 12, students used a lot of language play and offered a lot of peer assistance, due to their excitement about going to the garden to explore scientific concepts about living and non-living things in reality. These examples illuminate the features of students' conversations, indicating that the wide range of topics and their meaningful genuineness seemed to create the students' ZPD and mediate their English language learning.

6.4   Summary

This chapter has addressed activity types and features of peer talk in each activity type, in an attempt to reveal the interrelationships between the two. First, the activities were categorized into different types, after which the features of peer talk in each activity type were identified, mainly through collaborative non-communicative activity[1].

Using Engestrom's (Engestrom, et al., 1999) activity system (based on the subject, the rules, the community and the division of labor) as a framework, student activities were categorized as either individual or collaborative activities, and then subcategorized based on the "real life" needs and "authentic" context, as either communicative or non-communicative activities. As only a few examples of individual activities (communicative or non-communicative) or collaborative communicative activities were

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1 The reason for analyzing the collaborative non-communicative activities is that 89 percent of the student activities were collaborative non-communicative activities. See Section 6.1 for the details.

observed, the chapter focused on collaborative non-communicative activities, such as role play (specifically acting in this case), question-answer and conversation, and the script-based, script-adapted, keyword-supported, and script-free variations thereof.

Different features of peer talk were observed in the variations of each non-communicative activity type, as shown in Table 6.8. The four RP variations covered data from both English language class and English immersion class, and both in- and after-class activities from Grade 3 and Grade 5. Role play, specifically acting in this case, seemed to engage greatly students' cooperation and participation in the conduct of their activities. It seemed to arouse students' interest in English as they actively and creatively animated characters and objects, and provided entertainment, in the form of acting. It seemed to foster students' language-related, content-related and affect-related peer assistance, develop students' self-control over their own practice, enhance students' imagination and creativity, and promote students' understanding of the social relations and social norms and regulations. These findings have pedagogical insights for mainstream English language teaching and learning.

The four QA variations were observed during in-class activities and evening self-study class activities both, and in both English language class activities and English immersion classes with students from Grades 4 and 5. The students seemed unwilling to read and recite text, but the script-adapted QA on a topic close to their life experience seemed to provide students with sufficient textbook-based language support, actively engage them in their activities, and allow them to exert self-control over their practice. The familiarity of the topic seemed to create an optimal situation for the students to extend their talk, and enjoy language play and peer assistance in task and behavior monitoring. The evening self-study class seemed to allow students the activity time needed and encourage students to risk talking more. Reciprocal peer assistance emerged in the keyword-supported QA and script-free QA, and dynamic role relations occurred when intimidated students tried to defend themselves to their domineering peers in the script-free QA. This may indicate that script-free QA can intimidate less proficient

students, which should be taken into consideration when teaching and pairing students.

The four variations of conversation were observed only in English immersion classes, where more conversation took place, both in in-class and after-class activities, in Grade 4 and Grade 5. The students showed dissatisfaction with reciting the text, attempting to adapt it to make it more conversational. The subject contents seemed to engage the students in their activities, especially when the students could apply their subject knowledge in practice. In script-free conversations during garden exploration, for example, the students were very excited by the idea of going to the garden and actually identifying living and non-living things based on the knowledge they had just learned. They used a great deal of language play, and showed creativity in their language use. In addition, there was a great deal of peer assistance through language use, affective support and behavior monitoring.

The content subjects seemed to enhance students' critical thinking in keyword-supported conversations about the ways in which animals reproduce; however, integrating target language learning and subject content remained a problem for the teachers, as shown when the students used their L1 almost exclusively throughout the activity, contrary to the immersion objective of learning both the subject content and the target language.

The chapter examined types of student activities and features of peer talk to show the interrelationships between the two. The characteristic of RP is its potential to enhance creativity and imagination through social roles and social relations. QA is characterized by its probing and reasoning nature in mediating learning, while the main characteristic of conversation is its flexibility regarding topics and ability to bridge topics to real life. It is possible that students may demonstrate a combination of these characteristics in the process of performing a single activity type, although this was not observed in the dataset of the current study. The salient features of peer talk revealed in the activities were peer assistance, peer language play, and the use of L1 and code-switching, which will be described in detail in Chapter 8 as forms of mediations.

From an activity system perspective, activity type is a mediational means.

According to Wertsch (1998, p.42), "the introduction of novel cultural tools transforms the action"; activity type, as a cultural tool, transforms students' discourse and shapes their peer talk. However, activity works as a complex system, and activity type alone cannot bring about all the changes. It is the interaction between the agents, the mediational means, the object, the community and the rules that produces effects. Although features of peer talk are revealed in each activity type, they are not a product of the activity type alone; activity shows its dynamic and situated nature where the dialectical interaction among activity components arises. Therefore, the ways in which peer talk is mediated by the situated and dynamic nature of activity should be explored. The next chapter is a presentation of how the situated and dynamic nature of activity mediates student peer talk, where students' agency has emerged in the activities.

Table 6.8 **Features of Peer Talk in the Variations of Non-communicative Activities**

Types of non-com activities	Features of peer talk in the variations of non-com activities			
	script-based	script-adapted	keyword-supported	script-free
Role play (acting)	(L, G4) the use of the L1; fun; close cooperation; high engagement, language-related peer assistance (pronunciation); high engagement in the practice; willingness to practice; students' ownership of the activity	(L, G4) task-related peer assistance; the use of the L1; language-related peer assistance; content-related peer assistance; low voice used in prompting	(L, G3) affect-related peer assistance; the use of the L (all is in L2 but 1 line)	(I, G5) imagination & creativity (story line, character, tone for the story); dramatization by the voice volume; communicating meaning in the L2; surprisingly amusing and attracting effects; understanding of social relations and social norms

Types of non-com activities	Features of peer talk in the variations of non-com activities			
	script-based	script-adapted	keyword-supported	script-free
Question-answer	(L, G4) unwillingness and complaint to read and recite (near the end of the class)	(L, G4) active participation and involvement in the discussion; the use of pronoun "wo men {we}"; reciprocity of peer assistance; language play; the use of the L1; task-related /behavior-related peer assistance; extended talk on the topic close to the student life	(I, G4) reasoning; reciprocity of peer assistance; waiting as peer assistance	(I, G5) reciprocity of peer assistance; indirect peer assistance through challenging or clarification request; social function of private speech; dynamic role relations (the intimidated student's defense before their domineering peer interlocutor)
Conversation	(I, G4) students' attempt to adapt the text; language-related peer assistance (pronunciation); the use of the L1	(I, G4) reciprocity of peer assistance (in lexis, turn-taking, discourse coherence)	(I, G4) content-related peer assistance; critical thinking by challenging and reasoning; the use of the L1 (all is in the L1 but three lines)	(I, G4) language play (nickname, repetition, exclamation, chanting, personification, parallelism, exaggeration); peer assistance (language/ behavior/ affection-related); applying knowledge in practice

Notes: non-com = non-communicative; L= English language class; I= English immersion class; G3 = Grade 3; G4=Grade 4; G5= Grade 5

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE NATURE OF ACTIVITY AND STUDENT AGENCY

Leont'ev (1981), building on the work of Vygotsky (1978), emphasizes the dynamic and situated nature of activity; Lantolf (2000c) agrees, pointing out, also, its unstable nature. The dynamic and situated nature of activity emphasizes the dynamic interrelationships between the mediational means, the goals, the social context, the agents and the community. Focusing on student activities, this chapter examines, from a sociocultural perspective, the dynamic and situated nature of student activity, and how it shows the students' emerging agency by unpacking the complexity of differences in student activities.

7.1 The Dynamic and Situated Nature of Activity and Agency

The situated and dynamic nature of activity is well-documented (e.g., Coughlan & Duff, 1994; Engestrom, 1987; Engestrom, et al., 1999; Lantolf, 2000c; Lantolf & Appel, 1994b; Leont'ev, 1981; Vygotsky, 1978). It is revealed in Vygotsky's (1978) concept of ZPD, Engestrom's (Engestrom, 1987; Engestrom, et al., 1999) complex activity system, and Leont'ev's (1981) elaboration on the situated nature of activity. Coughlan and Duff (1994)

also illustrate, in their empirical study of the situated nature of activity, that a single task can lead to different activities (see Section 3.2.2. for details). The dynamics and situatedness of activity are due to the interplay of the activity's components, where student agency emerges in the activities.

Some researchers define agency as intervention (Giddens, 1976, 1984), others as a property (Sealey & Carter, 2004). From a sociocultural perspective, all action, including the production and interpretation of process, is "socioculturally mediated" (Ahearn, 2001, p.112). Lantolf and Pavlenko (2001), writing from a sociocultural perspective, maintain that agency is not a property, but a relationship co-constructed in the social interaction that mediates social roles and relations, and interact among these relations "dialectically" (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006, p.238).

The following sections reveal dialectical interaction among activity components from three aspects, by examining the complexity of the differences in the student activities where student agency emerges (Ahearn, 2001; Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006): peer students taking different paths to attain the same task goals; peer students taking on different roles in the same activity to maximize their potentials in the ZPD; and peer students engaging in some side-task or even off-task talk to create greater learning opportunities.

7.2   Different Activities Emerging from the Same Task

The "same task, different activities" relationship between task and activity has been examined by researchers such as Coughlan and Duff (1994) , as discussed in Section 3.2.2.4. This study shows that the same task may give rise to different activities, but that the divergence can still be explained within the activity system. The following activities show how students working at the same task were led to different activities; more specifically, it will show how peers employed different mediational means and took different paths to attain the same task goals.

174 7.2.1 The Teacher-assigned Task

This RP came from Unit 2 of the PEP textbook for primary Grade 4 students and contained six pictures illustrating a dialogue between two boys, Zip and Zoom. Zip played a joke on Zoom by setting the clock one hour ahead in the morning. The text in the textbook is as follows.

Zip: Wake up, Zoom. It's time to get up.

Zoom: Mmm. I want to sleep.

Zip: It's time to get up now.

Zip: Look! What time is it?

Zoom: It's eight o'clock. Oh! Dear! I'm late for school.

Zip: Wait! Wait! Zoom, look at that clock.

Zoom: It's seven o'clock, naughty Zip!

Zip: April Fool!

The task assigned was to choose the best actor/actress, based on their ability to act out this dialogue. After the teacher led students in reading the text aloud, they were given time to prepare their acting. After the performance, the students chose the best actor or actress and the best group. This task was designed for the students' mastery of time expressions by having them act out the scene. In the author's after-class interview with Teacher Ouya (March 19, 2008), he told her that, after performing this task, the students could recite the text; as students hated reciting, but liked acting, he designed this task to target the former by using the latter. According to Teacher Ouya, "*yao xiang zuo zui jia nan nu zhu jie jiu bi xu hui bei ke wen.* {In order to become the best actor/actress, the students had to recite the text (and master the dialogue)}".

The goal, for the students, was to be chosen as the best actor/actress. The teacher expected the students to read and recite the dialogue, and to prepare their acting for the performance. The role play was scripted, with the task, roles and content all defined by the textbook, and was expected to result in the least amount of variation in the activity; in reality, however, a great deal of diversity occurred in the activities attached to this task, as can be seen in the

following activities, which involve three groups of students. Although there were three stages to the activities — the preparation stage, show stage, and after-show stage — due to space constraints, only the preparation stage talk is presented here.

7.2.2 Different Activities Conducted by the Students

The task was the same for all three groups of students, but the activities conducted by the students differed greatly. Pair Yoyo and Changqing worked on one mediational means (the props); pair Wenwen and Nanhai worked on another mediational means (the text); and Hanfeng worked on the division of labor (the role of play in the newly formed group, as illustrated below).

7.2.2.1 Pair Yoyo and Changqing Working on the Props

In the following activity, Yoyo and Changqing were working on the physical mediational means for the play — the clock they would use in their performance. They were busy cutting out (in lines 3 and 4) and drawing the clock (in lines 9, 10, 11, and 14), and hoped to impress the audience with their props. They were not practicing the lines, as they had already mastered them. As the roles were set, they did not even plan how to act it out.

Preparation stage
Changqing, Yoyo and Teacher Ouya
1. Yoyo: Be quiet.
2. Changqing: Be quiet.
3. Yoyo: *jian zheng fang xin hao le.* {It is ok to cut it into a square.} [They are busy drawing and making the clock.]
4. *ba zhe ge* clock *cha diao ta, gai cheng* seven. {Erase this word clock and change it to seven.}
5. Ouya: *ni men hai mei zhun bei hao?* {You are still not ready?}
6. Yoyo: *kuai le.* {(It will be ok) soon.}
7. *zui hou yi ge.* {The last one.}

8. Changqing: (???)
9. Yoyo: Seven.
10. *dui.* {Right.}
11. (to Changqing) *zhe ge bu yao.* {Don't want this one.}
12. *kuai dian le.* {Hurry up.}
13. Changqing: *ke yi le.* {It's OK now.}
14. *gai cheng ji?* {What time (should I) change it to?}
15. Yoyo: Seven *la.*
(Mar. 19, 2008, Grade 4)

Although it was not a required part of the task, the teacher was not dissatisfied with their making of the clock, because he knew that the dialogue was not a problem for either of them. The fact that they had not practiced did not affect their performance; they added silence and laughter to their acting, and even changed the time from eight o'clock to ten o'clock to dramatize the scene. Both Yoyo and Changqing won cheers from their peer students, and Yoyo was chosen as the best actress after the show.

7.2.2.2 Pair Wenwen and Nanhai Working on the the Text

In the excerpt below, Wenwen and Nanhai were working on the text, practicing the lines for each role. As Nanhai came from the lower language proficiency level and Wenwen from the intermediate, they were not familiar with the lines. In the preparation stage, Wenwen and Nanhai practiced the scripts three times, with Wenwen guiding Nanhai and using a variety of strategies to help Nanhai understand the roles and their goals. Wenwen's strategies can be categorized according to two functions: instructional means (the "how") and instructional content (the "what").

Categorized according to the means of instruction:
1) Instructing with negation (in lines 8, 13, 50, 62)
2) Instructing with advising (in lines 9, 12, 33, 35, 42, 43, 49, 59, 70, 71)
3) Instructing with modeling (in lines 63, 71)
4) Instructing with exemplifying (in line 15)

5) Instructing with asking rhetorical questions (in lines 15, 45, 75)

6) Instructing with pointing out the error (in line 44)

7) Instructing with complaining/reminding (in line 36)

Categorized according to the content of instruction:

1) Instructing by stating the goal (in line 58)

2) Instructing by stating the situation (in lines 57, 70)

3) Instructing by stating the sequence (in lines 70, 72)

4) Instructing by stating the pace (in line 35)

5) Instructing by stating the manner (in lines 42, 43)

6) Instructing by stating the action (in lines 33, 49, 59, 70, 74, 75)

7) Instructing by stating the tone (in line 9)

How they prepared is shown in the following episode at the preparation stage.

Preparation stage

Nanhai, Wenwen and Teacher Ouya

1. Wenwen: *wo lai yan* Zip. {I act as Zip.}

2. *zhe ge zen me du a?* {How to pronounce this word?}

3. Nanhai: <u>Zip.</u>

4. Wenwen: <u>Wake up Zoom.</u>

5. <u>It's time to get up.</u>

6. Nanhai: *en.* (???)

7. Wenwen: *a?!* (showing surprise)

8. *ni bu neng zhe me shuo de.* {You cannot say it this way.}

9. *ni yao yong hen kun de yu qi lai shuo de.* {You should say it in a sleepy tone.}

10. Nanhai: (???)

11. Wenwen: <u>Wake up, wake up.</u>

12. *ni yao yong hen kun de yuqi lai shuo.* {You should say it in a sleepy tone.}

13. *bu neng yong hen shun de.* {Not in a smooth tone.}

14. Nanhai: *na zen me shuo ne?* {Then how to say it?}

15. Wenwen: *na jiu shi xiang shui jiao, wo tui xin ni, ni zen me shuo?* {Then if you want to sleep, I push you awake, then how will you say it?}

16. Wake up, Zoom.
17. It's time to get up.
18. Nanhai: I want (..) to sleep.
19. Wenwen: Wake up now.
20. Nanhai: *gai ni la.* {Your turn now.}
21. Wenwen: What time is it?
22. It's eight o'clock.
23. Nanhai: Oh, dear. I am late for school.
24. Wenwen: Wait, wait, Zoom.
25. Look at that clock.
26. Nanhai: It's seven o'clock.
     (They practice again, the second time.)
27. Wenwen: Wake up.
28. *shi* wake up *hai shi* woke up? {Is it "wake up" or "woke up"?}
29. Nanhai: Wake up.
30. Wenwen: Wake up, wake up, Zoom.
31. It's time to get up.
32. Nanhai: I want to slee:p.
33. Wenwen: *ni shi yao shen lan yao de o.* {You need to give a stretch.}
34. Nanhai: *na jiu qi lai bei.* {Then I get up.}
     (???)
35. Wenwen: *ni zao yi dian la.* {You must do it sooner.}
36. *shuo ni ya!* {I am talking about you!}
37. Look, what time is it?
38. It's time to get up now:!
39. Look, what time is it?
40. Nanhai: It's eight o'clock.
41. >Oh dear, I'm late for school.<
42. Wenwen: *ni yao zhao ji de.* {You should be anxious.}
43. *ni yao zhao ji de.* {You should be anxious}
44. Eight o'clock. (She speaks quietly, imitating Nanhai's way of speaking.)
45. *shi zhe yang de ma?* {Should it be this way?}
46. Nanhai: >Eight o'clock. I am late for school.< (speaking very loudly)

47. Wenwen: <u>Wait, wait Zoom.</u>
48.   <u>Look at that clo:ck.</u>
49.   *ni yao kan.* {You should look.}
50.   *bu neng na me shuo a.* {Don't say it that way.}
51. Wenwen: (to the teacher) *zui hou yi ju zen me shuo?* {How to say the last sentence?}
52. Ouya: <u>April Fool.</u>
53. Wenwen: <u>April Fool.</u>
54.   Nanhai, *wo shuo yao ta dang bao bao.* {Nanhai, I ask him to act as the baby.}
55.   *ta hai bu xiang ta ba ba ma ma na me cong ming.* {He is not as clever as his mum and dad.}
56.   *bei wo hong dao le.* {He was misled by me.} {...}
57. Wenwen: *deng xia wo men yao ban yan de luo.* {We will act in a moment.}
58.   *wo men dai hui yao zheng na nu zhu jue de.* {We will compete for the best male and female roles.}
59.   *ni yao bi shang yan jing da de yo.* {You should close your eyes and pat.}
60. Nanhai: *wo bu da.* {I will not pat.}
61.   *na xiang zhe yang la.* {Then act this way.}
62. Wenwen: *bu neng tui.* {Don't move back.}
63.   *zhe yang.* {This way.}
        [XX](They started the practice for a third time.)
64. Wenwen: <u>It's time to get up.</u>
65. Nanhai: *en,* <u>I want to sleep.</u>
66. Wenwen: <u>It's time to get up now.</u>
67.   <u>Look, what time is it?</u>
68. Nanhai: <u>Eight o'clock.</u>
69.   <u>Oh dear, I am late for school.</u>
70. Wenwen: *deng hui shang qu, ni jiu zai na ge deng zi shang.* {When we come to the front later on, you come to the chair.}
71.   *ni zhe yang zuo zhe.* {Sit this way.}

72. *wo qu la ni.* {I will come to pull you.}

73. April (…) April.

74. *ni yao tang zai yi zi shang.* {You should lie on the chair.}

75. *hai yao bi shang yan jing, zhi dao mei?* {What's more, you should shut your eyes, get it?}

76. Nanhai: *en.*

(Mar. 19, 2008, Grade 4)

The episode showed that Wenwen and Nanhai practiced the text three times (lines 1 to 26, lines 27 to 53, lines 57 to 76), trying to master the dialogue and to act well. Wenwen and Nanhai's activity in preparation stage is what the teacher expected — reading and reciting. However, the actual outcome of their performance did not reach the teacher's expectation. Although they tried hard, practicing three times, they had to read from their textbooks when they performed. When the teacher criticized their performance, Wenwen and Nanhai blamed each other for not acting well, believing that the teacher's dissatisfaction was caused by their poor acting rather than by their poor "reciting" of the text.

7.2.2.3 Hanfeng Working on the Division of Labor in the Newly Formed Group

Because Liuliu fell ill and went home just as the teacher assigned the task, Hanfeng had no acting partner. If he joined another group, all he could do was to act as a silent clock, which meant he would not have any chance to speak. In the excerpt below, Hanfeng fought for dialogue in his role, by using repetition (in lines 3, 5, 6, 23, 24, 25 26), misleading the other students (in line 28), and using exaggeration (in lines 23, 24, 25, 26) to make acting as a clock interesting. He even used the digital recorder hanging on his chest to challenge S1 and S2 (in line 18).

Preparation stage
Hanfeng, Liuliu and two other students

1. Hanfeng: You are right.

2. Liuliu: *en, gang hao.* {It just fits.}

3. Hanfeng: *en?!* I want to sleep.
4. *en. lu xia le sheng yin.* {The voice is recorded.}
5. *en?!* I want to sleep.
6. *en?!* I want to sleep.
7. A big and a small. [referring to a big clock and a small clock in the picture.]
8. *zhao ji le, wo hai mei shang xue ne.* {Feeling anxious as I have not come to school.}
9. Ouya: April Fool, do you know the meaning?
10. Hanfeng: *shi you yi ge yu ren chan sheng de.* {It is originated from a fool.}
11. (to Liuliu) *ni dang* Zoom. {You act as Zoom.}
12. Liuliu: *ta dang* Zoom. {He acts as Zoom.} [referring to the student sitting in her front]
13. Hanfeng: *ni dang da nao zhong.* {You act as the big alarm clock.}
14. *ta dang xiao nao zhong.* {And he acts as the small one.}
[Liuliu's father came to get her home as she is not feeling well.]
15. Hanfeng: (to the student sitting in front of him) *ni dang* Zoom. {You act as Zoom.}
16. *wo dang* Zip. {I act as Zip.}
17. *ni dang luo pan.* {You act as the compass.}
18. *ru guo dang* Zip, *ni gan gua zai xiong bu ma?* {If you act as Zip, dare you hang it on your chest?} (He is referring to the recorder hanging around his neck before his chest.)
19. *na jiu dui le me.* {Then it is right.}
20. *shi zhe yang de.* {It is just like this.}
21. *wo hai xiang biao : : yan ne.* {I want to per : : form.}
22. *xian zai shi biao yan shi jian.* {It is performing time.}(...)
23. I like moving, moving, moving, moving. (playing with the words)
24. It's time to get up NOW? (practicing exaggeratingly)
25. It's time to get up NOW? (practicing exaggeratingly)
26. It's time to get up NOW? (practicing exaggeratingly)
27. *ni shi wo de dao ju a.* {You are my stage prop.}
28. *wo ye xiang dang nao zhong.* {I also want to act as the alarm clock.}

29. *wo xiang zi you ao xiang.* {I want to fly.}

30. *lao shi, ke bu ke yi jie yong yi ge nao zhong?* {Teacher, can we borrow a clock?}

(Mar. 19, 2008, Grade 4)

In the end Hanfeng succeeded in persuading the other two students to let him take a speaking role, as Zip. The other two group members seemed quiet, not willing to fight with Hanfeng over the role. In the interview (October 23, 2008) with Denna, one of Hanfeng's group members, he said *"wo men zhi dao ta xiang zheng jiao se, bu xiang he ta zheng. bu guan yan shen me wo men dou hen kai xin.* {We both know that he (Hanfeng) wanted to fight for a role of the character. We did not want to fight with him for that. No matter what role we acted as, we felt happy to}". Although their performance was not seen as very good due to Hanfeng's excited performance, Hanfeng felt very happy about having won the role and about performing. Later, Hanfeng even began to sing, fitting his own words to a popular melody.

Hanfeng worked on the division of labor in the new group — trying to win a role in the performance with all his efforts. In the after-class interview (March 19, 2008), the teacher told the author, again, that he did not want Hanfeng to be in my observation group, because he was too loud and too naughty. His class had very few naughty students like him, and he was very unhappy with Hanfeng's behavior in his class — being loud and noisy, talking off-task, disturbing others and not obeying the class rules.

7.2.3 Comparison of the Three Groups of Students within the Activity System

Although the activities of these three groups were different, they had the same task goal orientation — to attain the task goals of being the best actor/actress and group/pair. Analyzed in terms of the activity system framework, the object of the three pairs (groups) was the same — to be the best actor/actress — but their agency was shown in their use of different mediational means, for example, in Wenwen and Nanhai's practicing the text and Wenwen's tutoring

Nanhai; in Yoyo and Changqing's preparation of the prop and their adaptation of the text in the dialogue; and in Hanfeng's efforts to win the role through exaggeration, repetition, and misleading statements, and his struggles with the division of labor. These differences led to different outcomes: Yoyo was named best actress, Wenwen and Nanhai were criticized for just reading from the textbook, and Hanfeng felt extremely happy and excited about winning a speaking role in the play. The comparison of these pairs through the unit of activity is illustrated in Table 7.1.

Although the two pairs and Hanfeng's group had the same task, each pursued it through different activities, thus showing the dynamic and situated nature of those activities. However, the differences all still fell within the activity system, oriented to the task goals and the activity object. This may have pedagogical implications: when analyzed using the activity system, what the students were attempting to achieve can be clearly understood and explained. Teacher Ouya praised Yoyo and Changqing for their acting, criticized Wenwen and Nanhai for reading from the textbook, and was very dissatisfied with Hanfeng's naughtiness. However, had he taken an emic view of how hard Wenwen and Hanfeng had practiced during the preparation process, and of what Hanfeng was fighting for through the activity system, he might have better understood them and offered them guidance instead of criticism.

Table 7.1   The Comparison among the Three Groups of Students within the Activity System

Components	Pair Wenwen and Nanhai	Pair Yoyo and Changqing	Group Hanfeng and two others (S1, S2)
Object (goals)	to be the best actor or actress, and group, to get familiar with the text, to imitate the tones used in the supposed authentic situation	to be the best actor or actress, and group, to make an impressive mediational device — the clock	to be the best actor or actress, to win the role in the play (for Hanfeng only)

(to be continued)

Components	Pair Wenwen and Nanhai	Pair Yoyo and Changqing	Group Hanfeng and two others (S1, S2)
Subject	Wenwen and Nanhai	Yoyo and Changqing	Hanfeng and Liuliu, later S1 and S2
Mediational means	the textbook, Wenwen's tutoring	the clock, smooth talk, imitating the authentic situation, silence and laughter	Hanfeng's repetition, exaggeration, the digital recorder
Rules	to perform equally well in the pair	to show well	to take a role for the dialogue for each member
Community	work as a pair in the class, expert/ novice in role relationship	work as a pair in the class, collaborative in role relationship	work as a group in the class, dominant/passive of Hanfeng and S1 and S2 in role relationship.
Division of labor	Wenwen as Zip, Nanhai as Zoom as proposed by Wenwen	Yoyo as Zip, Changqing as Zoom, not proposed	Hanfeng as Zip, S1 as Zoom, S2 as the clock, negotiated by Hanfeng
Outcome	read the text, failed to reach the goal of acting the best	mastered the dialogue, the clock impressive, Y voted as the best actress	Hanfeng won the role, mastered the dialogue, and enjoyed the play.
Strategies used	At the preparation stage (Wenwen) questioning, explaining, imitating, modeling, exemplifying, repeating, using contrast for emphasis, stating the goal, using rhetorical	At the preparation stage (Yoyo) using imperative clause for efficiency At the show stage (Yoyo) Not using the textbook as a reference, using pause to create dramatic effects, using laughter for authentic situation, change some of the text to add effects to their performance At the show stage	At the preparation stage (Hanfeng) using the recorder as master card, misleading others with false statement, repeating the sentence and overacting on the tone to amuse others, to give

Components	Pair Wenwen and Nanhai	Pair Yoyo and Changqing	Group Hanfeng and two others (S1, S2)
Strategies used	question At the post-show stage (Nanhai) Using pronoun "he" to distance himself from Wenwen's blame	(Changqing) Using one sentence of the text and reviewing the pattern newly learned. At the post-show stage (Yoyo) using imperative clauses and expressing her joy, (Changqing) using silence for defending himself before Yoyo	an implication of threat At the post-show stage (Hanfeng) Talking to himself in private speech, feeling very excited

The next section addresses mediations of the dynamics and situatedness of activities by revealing the different roles that student peers take on in the same activity. In student activities, there are two kinds of roles in the division of labor. One is explicit, as when roles are set by the textbook or the teacher or are negotiated by the students themselves; the other is implicit, emerging in the actions students take in the performance of their task (e.g., initiating the planning or acting as a facilitator or tutor).

7.3   Different Roles Emerging in the Same Activity

Interaction creates a collective ZPD for peers in their learning activities (Donato & McCormick, 1994). Data from the current study shows that peers took on different roles when performing the same activity to maximize their potentials. From the perspective of the teacher, they were all the same — learners; but within the activity, their putative roles as learners may change due to variations in their individual competencies. One may take the lead in an activity as a tutor, facilitating the peer interlocutor, while another may play a facilitated role, becoming a learner. One may be a proposer, offering suggestions about the activity; another may act as a defender, challenging or disagreeing with those suggestions. The diversity of the participants' different roles emerges from the activity. The following episodes involving the three

groups illustrate how the peers took on different roles in the same activity, and how the groups co-adapted to each other's needs (Larson-Freeman & Cameron, 2008) and "dialectically enacted" their roles in the activities (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006, p.238).

7.3.1 Acting as a Tutor, a Learner, a Proposer, and a Defender

The activity was about ways of sending messages, and came from the Primary Living Science Book 5. The teacher began by giving the students three sentences — "I am very hungry", "I want to sleep", and "I want to play football with you tomorrow" — and asking them to express their meaning without using language. Next, the students were asked to write a message on a piece of paper for others to express by non-verbal means; however, the author of each note had to be able to act it out him or herself. According to Teacher Ouya (Interview on October 30, 2008) the aim of the task was to show students that humans have many other ways of sending messages besides language. The following episodes show activities involving three pairs of students — Liuliu and Changqing, Yoyo and Nanhai, and Wenwen and Penqiong.

7.3.1.1 Liuliu and Changqing: the Tutor and the Learner

In the excerpt below, Changqing had difficulty expressing a concept non-verbally, and sought Liuliu's assistance. She acted as a tutor, while he acted as a learner.

Changqing, Liuliu and Teacher Ouya
1. Liuliu: *wo hua yi tai dian nao.* {I will draw a computer.}
2.   *zai hua liang ge ren da dian nao.* {Then I will draw two people playing the computer.}
3.   *zai xie ge ming tian.* {Then I will write: tomorrow.}
4.   *jiu shi ming tian ni dao wo jia lai wan dian nao.* {That is: You will come

to my home to play computer tomorrow.}

5.   *bu zun xue wo.* {Don't copy mine.}
6.   Changqing: Play basketball.
(XX)
7.   Liuliu: *ni hua.* {You draw it.}
8.   Changqing: *gao er fu qiu zen me shuo a?* {How to say Golf?}
9.   Liuliu: *ni bu yong shuo.* {You don't need to say it.}
10.   *xie jiu xing le.* {It's fine to write it.}(0.6)
11.   *ni yao shi dao wo jia lai, ni yao shi dao wo jia lai kan dian shi cai dui.* {If you come to my home, if you come to my home, it is appropriate to watch TV.}
12. Ouya: *bu xing.* {Not right.}
13.   *ni yao zi ji biao da de chu lai cai ke yi.* {It will be OK if you can express it by yourself.}
14. Liuliu: *ni hua yi xie cao di.* {You draw some grass.}
15.   *zai hua yi ge dong.* {Then draw a hole.}
16.   *zai hua yi ge qiu.* {Then draw a ball.}
17.   *zai hua yi ge gao er fu qiu de bang zi* {Then draw the stick.}
18.   *jiu ke yi le.* {Then it's done.}(11)
(Oct. 30, 2008, Grade 5)

In the activity, Liuliu told Changqing that she was planning to draw a picture which expressed the message of playing on the computer with Changqing the next day (in lines 1 to 4). Changqing was planning to draw a basketball, but he changed it to golf, attempting to make it special and more interesting (in lines 6 to 8), but he did not know how to express golf. Liuliu told Changqing the way to solve his problem by writing it down (in lines 9 to 11), and she was also thinking of changing her idea of playing on the computer to watching TV, as it would be more appropriate if Changqing came to her home. Liuliu referred back (in lines 14 to 18) to Changqing's question as to how to describe golf, telling Changqing what to draw: first some grass, then a hole, then a ball, and then a golf club. Changqing took her suggestion and expressed his idea of playing golf with some drawings.

7.3.1.2 Yoyo and Nanhai: the Proposer and the Defender

188   In the episode related below, Yoyo, a top student in virtually every subject, wanted to compete with her peers, and convey a complex and challenging concept. As a less accomplished student, Nanhai wanted to examine other students' efforts before starting his assignment; Yoyo, acting as a monitor, stopped him, and then, acting as a proposer, advised the teacher on how to conduct the activities. Nanhai acted as a proposer, pleading for a look at the pictures (in lines 25 and 26), and, as a defender, defending his intentions and actions to Yoyo (in lines 7 to 9, and 24). Power relations were revealed in their actions of proposing and defending. The role relationship was dynamic, with the peer interlocutors trying to dominate the other and defend themselves in the activity. The episode is as follows.

Nanhai, Yoyo and Teacher Ouya
1. Yoyo: (laughing)
2. Nanhai: *hua shen me?* {What to draw?}(10)
3. Yoyo: Ouya! (calling the teacher)
4. 　　Bingo! (indicating that she finished her drawing)
5. Ouya: (laughing)
6. Yoyo: Nanhai, *bu neng he wo de yi yang o!* {Nanhai, you cannot have the same as mine.}
7. Nanhai: *ni shi zuo zhe de.* {Yours is like standing.}
8. 　　*wo shi zhan zhe de.* {Mine is like sitting.}
9. 　　*zen me he ni yi yang ne?* {How can it be the same as yours?}
10. Yoyo: *hai mei hua wan.* {I haven't finished yet.}(0.6)
11. Ouya! (calling the teacher)
12. Bingo! (indicating that she finished her drawing)
　　　(XX)
13. Nanhai: *ni bie kan wo de.* {Don't look at mine.}
14. 　　*zhe cai shi shuai.* {This is smart.}
15. Yoyo: *na me duo ren shang ce shuo.* {So many people go to the toilet.}
16. 　　Ouya! Ouya! (calling the teacher)

17. Come here.
18. Ouya, *ba tu pian quan bu shou qi lai a.* {Collect all the drawings.} (suggesting to the teacher)(...)
19. *gei biao yan de ren chou me.* {Let the performer draw from the collection.}
20. Nanhai: *wo zhe zhang.* {This piece is mine.}
21. Yoyo: *bu xing.* {No.}
22. *ni zhe zhang jiao wo cai.* {Yours, let me guess.}
23. *mi feng.* {Seal it.}
24. Nanhai: *bu gei wo kan!* {You don't let me have a look!}
25. *hua de shen me ne?* {What is drawn in the picture?}
26. *gei wo kan yi zhang.* {Let me have a look at one of them.}
27. Ouya: Finished?
28. Yoyo: Bingo. (indicating that she finished the drawing)
29. Ouya! (calling the teacher)
30. Let me try.
31. Ouya! (calling the teacher)
32. Let me try.
33. *ba hua shou qi lai.* {Collect all the pictures.} (suggesting to the teacher)
34. *ba hua gei wo.* {Give your drawing to me.} (starting to collect the pictures)
35. *kuai!* {Hurry up!}
(Oct. 30, 2008, Grade 5)

At the beginning of their activity, Nanhai did not know what to draw (in line 2). What he had drawn was many people lining up to go to toilet (in line 15). Yoyo who drew people lining up to see a doctor warned Nanhai not to copy hers (in line 6). Yoyo called the teacher to come to her, and gave the teacher the following suggestions: 1) collecting all the drawings, 2) letting the performer pick one for performing from the drawings collected, 3) sealing the collection, and 4) keeping it confidential (in lines 16 to 23). The teacher did not respond to her suggestions. However, as Yoyo was the representative of English subject, she exerted her "power" and

started to collect the drawings for the teacher (in lines 33 to 35). Nanhai asked Yoyo to let him have a look at one of the drawings (in lines 24 to 26), but was turned down by Yoyo (in line 24).

When Yoyo warned him not to draw the same picture as hers (in line 6), Nanhai defended himself by explaining the difference between his picture and Yoyo's (in lines 7 to 9). When Yoyo refused to let him look at the pictures and even proposed to "seal it" (in lines 21 to 23), Nanhai first complained (in line 24), and pleaded for her to let him have a look (in lines 25 and 26). Power relations were revealed in their action of proposing and defending. The role relationship was not static but dynamic with the peer interlocutors trying to dominate and trying to defend themselves in the activity.

7.3.1.3 Wenwen and Peiqiong: the Tutor and the Learner

Although Wenwen and Peiqiong were not top students, they worked hard to prepare themselves for their performance. In this episode related below, Peiqiong acted as a learner, and Wenwen as a tutor.

Peiqiong, Wenwen and Teacher Ouya
1. Wenwen: *shi bu shi* bad people? {Does it seem like bad people?} (18)
2. (laughing) *hao yang de, hua de.* {Well done, this drawing.}
3. Peiqiong, *ni kan bu kan de chu lai shi shen me yi si?* {Can you get the meaning out of this picture?}
4. Peiqiong: *hao xiang you yi ge qiao, shi bu shi a?* {It seems like a bridge, right?}
5. *wang ba?* {Net bar?}
6. Wenwen: (giggling)
7. Peiqiong: *zhe shi shen me?* {What is this?}
8. Wenwen: *ren.* {People.}
9. Peiqiong: *zhe me luan.* {So messy.}
10. *ni jiao.* {You turn it in.}
11. *ren la!* {Throw it away (if you did not turn it in).}
12. *kuai dian xiao shi.* {Disappear soon.}
13. *ni zhe you shi shen me?* {What's this then?}

14. *mo tuo che yi yang.* {Like a motorcycle.}

15. *a! kan dong le.* {Oh, I see.}

16. Wenqen: *dian nao.* {Computer.}

17. Peiqiong: *zhe li zhe li shi ren.* {Here, here are people.}

18. *zai zhe li wan dian nao.* {Playing on the computer here.} (14)

19. Wenwen: (laughing)

20. Ouya: Finished?

21. Wenwen: Yes. (laughing)

22. Looking, you...

23. Peiqiong: Your... (correcting her)

24. Wenwen: You *a!*

25. *shen me* your! {What "your"!} (disagreeing)

26. You and me on Sunday mornings (..) Sunday (.)

27. *kuai dian.* {Hurry up!}

28. *mei shi jian le.* {Little time left.}

29. *ru guo ni kan zhe fu tu de shi hou ni jiu shuo.* {When you look at this picture, you will say (like this).}

30. You and me go to computer games.

31. *zhi dao mei?* {Know it?}

32. You and me go to computer games.

33. *ji de mei?* {Remember it?}

34. *bei shou de.* {Memorize it well.}

35. Peiqiong: Go to play ...

36. Wenwen: Go to the play, go to play the computer game.

37. *gan ma ne?* {What are you doing?}

38. Ouya *kan dao le.* {Ouya saw us.}

39. *shen jing bing.* {(You are) crazy.}

40. *na ni shen me dou mei hua.* {You did not draw anything.}

41. Ouya: *zhe ge huo dong you liang ge yao qiu.* {For this activity we have two requirements.}

42. Use language to express the actions.

43. but you mustn't speak Chinese.

44. The second one, use your body to express the picture.

45. Wenqen: Peiqiong, *wo zhe yang zi,* {I am acting like this.}
46.   *ni bu yao yi wei wo zai tan gang qin a.* {Don't take this action for playing the piano.}
47.   *wo shi zai da jian pan a.* {I am pounding the keyboard.}
48.   Ouya, *shi bu shi liang ge, liang ge ren la?* {Ouya, is it two, two people?}
49.   *liang ge, liang ge ren la?* {Two, two people?}
50. Ouya: *bu shi.* {No.}
51. Wenwen: *en, en, en, en, en.* (humming)
(Oct. 30, 2008, Grade 5)

In this activity, Wenwen was tutoring Peiqiong in how to express what she had drawn in her picture — "You and me go to play computer games on Sunday mornings". At the beginning, Wenwen asked Peiqiong for his opinion about her drawing (in line 3). Peiqiong took it as a bridge, but soon he got closer to what she meant as "net bar" (in lines 4 and 5). Step by step Wenwen guided Peiqiong to know the meaning of her drawing (in lines 8 and 16). Peiqiong got the meaning of the drawing as "people playing on the computer here" (in lines 17 to 18). Wenwen told Peiqiong what he should say when he saw this picture (in lines 29 to 30), "You and me go to computer games". Wenwen raised Peiqiong's awareness by asking him "know it?" (in line 31), and she modeled for Peiqiong by repeating the utterance "You and me go to computer games" (in line 32). She called for Peiqiong's attention by another reminder of "remember it?" (in line 33). Wenwen reminded Peiqiong of the strategy (in line 34) for a good performance: to "memorize it well". When Peiqiong showed difficulty (in line 35) in saying the sentence "go to play the computer game", Wenwen tutored him through repetition. When the teacher called the whole class to attention and started to ask some pairs to perform in front of the class according to the drawing, Wenwen was still busy tutoring Peiqiong (in lines 45 and 47) by reminding him that he should not mistake it for playing the piano when he saw her action of pounding the keyboard of the computer.

7.3.2 Dynamic Role Relations of Peer Interlocutors in the Activity

In these three activities, the peers took on different roles emerging from their activities. Liuliu acted as a tutor, while Changqing acted as a learner. Yoyo acted as a monitor when overseeing Nanhai's behavior, and as a proposer in suggesting to the teacher that she collect all the pictures; Nanhai also played multiple emerging roles, acting as a proposer by pleading to see others' pictures in advance and as a defender when complaining about Yoyo's blocking his attempts. Wenwen acted as a tutor, helping Peiqiong to understand and express her ideas in English, while Peiqiong acted as a learner, picking up what Wenwen had taught him.

Storch (2002) suggests four patterns of role relations: collaborative, dominant/dominant, dominant/passive, and expert/novice. The examples show two of Storch's patterns: dominant/passive in the case of Yoyo and Nanhai and expert/novice in the role relations between Liuliu and Changqing and between Wenwen and Peiqiong. The findings about the different roles the peers took in the same activities lend support to some of Storch's patterns of the role relations. However, these patterns of peer role relations are not static and stable but in a dynamic, dialectically adaptive and changing state, as can be seen in the emergence of different roles, the reciprocity of peer assistance, and the domineering and defending struggle in the peer relations. This seems to extend Storch's (2002) findings on peer role relationships.

7.4 Learning Opportunities in Side-task/Off-task Activities

Within a given activity, there may emerge side-task (Wickens & Kessel,

1979)[1] or even off-task (Glynn, Thomas, & Shee, 1973) activities, in which students switch back and forth to other topics. These may involve substantial opportunities for the students to use the language they have learned, to enhance their communicative competence, and to internalize the language in use, content knowledge and social relations. However, students may also engage in off-task talk for fun rather than learning.

In the first example, Liuliu and Changqing took advantage of a side-task to create greater learning opportunities. They switched between on- and side-task (Wickens & Kessel, 1979) or even off-task (Glynn, Thomas, & Shee, 1973) topics to make better use of their time, practice more, and review as much as they could. The second example shows how off-task (Glynn, Thomas, & Shee, 1973) small talk can sometimes be frivolous.

7.4.1 Liuliu and Changqing's Side-task Even Off-task Talk for Learning

This activity came from the Primary Living Science Book 5 unit "How seeds grow". The textbook section included pictures with keywords, and related tasks. The students were given the task of talking about the four ways in which plants spread their seeds — by animals, by wind, by the plant itself, and by water. Liuliu and Changqing decided to make use of the task as a review opportunity; therefore, their activity covered a range of side-task (Wickens & Kessel, 1979) and off-task (Glynn, Thomas, & Shee, 1973) topics from both immersion subject content lessons and recent English language lessons.

In the first 20 lines of this activity, Liuliu and Changqing were planning. At the very beginning (in lines 1 to 10), Liuliu and Changqing were planning what to talk about. In planning, they decided not only to talk about how plants spread their seeds, but also to talk about plant growth. Twice Liuliu and Changqing's talking overlapped (in lines 11 to 16), which shows the high

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1 According to (Wickens & Kessel, 1979), side-task refers to additional related tasks.

engagement, and Liuliu reorganized the talk and restarted the activity (in lines 18 and 19). From line 20 to 148, Liuliu and Changqing covered nine topics in their talk:

1) talking about why farmers sow seeds (in lines 20 to 22) — a side-task topic;
2) talking about how plants grow (in lines 23 to 30) —a side-task topic;
3) talking about how plants spread their seeds (in lines 31 to 41) — an on-task topic;
4) identifying what the plants are (in lines 42 to 52) — a side-task topic;
5) talking about their preference (in lines 53 to 59) — a side-task topic;
6) talking about how plants spread their seeds (in lines 60 to 101) — an on-task topic;
7) talking about their preference of the trees (in lines 102 to 111) — an off-task topic;
8) talking about their favorite food (in lines 112 to 130) — an off-task topic;
9) talking about being helpful (in lines 131 to 148) — an off-task topic.

Due to the constraint of space, only the extract from lines 102 to 148 is presented here, showing the switching of topics to some off-task (Glynn, Thomas, & Shee, 1973) topics about their preference among trees, their favorite food, and being helpful.

Changqing, Liuliu and Teacher Ouya
102. Liuliu: I like peach,
103.   *shi ba?* {Right}?
104.   *zhe shi tao hua.* {This is peach blossom.}
105.   What about you?
106.   What about you?
107. Changqing: I like, *en- en-* cotton tree.
108. Liuliu: *a!a?* (showing surprise)
109.   Yes?
110. Liuliu: *en! en!*
111.   The cotton tree is very beautiful.

112. What's your favorite food?
113. Changqing: My favo- my fa-vo-rite food is *en-* fish, tofu.
114. Liuliu: And?
115. Changqing: Chicken.
116. Liuliu: And?
117. Changqing: Baby duck.
118. Liuliu: And?
119. Changqing: *en-* cabbage.
120. Liuliu: And?
121. Changqing: Pork.
122. Liuliu: And? (laughing)
123. Changqing: What's your favorite food?
124. Liuliu: Chicken, birds, tomato, potato, green bean,
125.   and pork,
126.   and beef and mutton, and cabbage,
127.   and- and- and fish and tofu are my favorite food.
128. Changqing: *wa!* (showing surprise)
129.   You are very full.
130.   It's very so many.
131. Liuliu: What can you do?
132. Changqing: I can sweep the floor,
133.   cook the meal,
134.   and *en- o*, wash the clothes.
135. Liuliu: And?
136. Changqing: *en-* water the flowers, empty the trash,
137. Liuliu: // And?
138. Changqing: // And...
139. Liuliu: Can you do the dishes?
140.   Can you do the dishes?
141. Changqing: No.
142. Liuliu: Oh, no?
143.   Can you make the bed?
144. Changqing: Yes, *er- er-*

145. Liuliu: Can you help your mother do housework?
146. Changqing: Yes.
147. Liuliu: Oh, you are helpful.
148. Changqing: Thank you.
(Nov. 26, 2008, Grade 5)

When asked why they had switched topics (Interview on November 26, 2008), Liuliu and Changqing said that only talking about how plants spread their seeds was dull, and that they preferred to take the opportunity to review what they had learned. Liuliu was fully engaged in participating in the activity; Changqing was a little bit slow in speaking but tried hard to gain chances to communicate. Their talk expanded their activity by switching between on-task, side-task (Wickens & Kessel, 1979) and off-task topics (Glynn, Thomas, & Shee, 1973) while working, but still working towards the same learning objective as the on-task activity.

7.4.2 Liuliu and Changqing's Off-task Small Talk for Fun

Switching between on-task, side-task (Wickens & Kessel, 1979) and off-task (Glynn, Thomas, & Shee, 1973) topics only generates substantial opportunities for students' learning when the goals of side-task and off-task activities mesh with those of the on-task object. Often side-task or off-task activities involve small talk (Luk and Lin, 2007), and diverge from the learning. Even highly motivated students with a positive classroom culture may engage in off-task topics for fun in L1, as shown in the following episode with Changqing and Liuliu.

Changqing and Liuliu
1. Changqing: What's wrong?
2. Liuliu: because the man is smoking in the park.
3. The park, the park, the park, the park is don't smoking.
4. But then the man is smoking in the park.

5. Changqing: Is your father like smoking? [Does your father like smoking?]
6. Liuliu: Your father like?
7. *shen me ne?* {What?}
8. *wo ba ba you bu chou yan bu he jiu la.* {My father does not smoke or drink.} (..)
9. *bu guo wo he jiu ne.* {But I drink.} (kidding)
10. Changqing: *wo ye he.* {I drink, too.}
11. *wo he hong jiu.* {I drink red wine.}
12. Liuliu: *wo ge he hong jiu.* {My brother drinks red wine.}
13. *hai you xiang bin.* {And champagne.}
14. Changqing: *wo he bai jiu ye, hong jiu, ying guo jiu, pi jiu.* {I drink spirits, red wine, British wine, and beer.}
15. Liuliu: *ying guo jiu?* {British wine?}
16. *gan ma shuo zhe ge?* {Why did we talk about this?}
17. *dai hui Ouya you yao shuo wo men le.* {Ouya will criticize us for it in a moment.}
18. *ni yao shuo.* {You should talk.}
19. *ni bu shuo wo jiu ba ta long qi lai de yo.* {If you don't, I will put it away.}
20. Changqing: Sorry.
21. Liuliu: *jiu shuo zhe yi fu tu you shen me cuo bei.* {Just ask what's wrong in this picture.}
22. Changqing: The boy is (...), because the boy is damaging the tree.
(Oct. 24, 2008, Grade 5)

The task was to discuss what was wrong in the picture. With 5 pictures no script provided, Liuliu and Changqing were making a dialogue and talking about the picture which described a man smoking in the woods (in lines 1 to 5). However, Liuliu and Changqing were off-task for 11 lines (in lines 5 to 15), talking about drinking in their L1 till Liuliu stopped Changqing from their off-task small talk because she was afraid of Teacher Ouya's criticism (in lines 17 and 18). Liuliu urged Changqing to start the on-task talk (in lines 19

and 21) until Changqing apologized (in line 20) and started his on-task talk (in line 22).

When side-task (Wickens & Kessel, 1979) or off-task (Glynn, Thomas, & Shee, 1973) activities have the same goal orientation as the on-task activity — to master L2 and the content, and to understand the culture embedded therein — they may present significant learning opportunities and show the students' agency (Ahearn, 2001; Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006) and autonomy (Benson, 2001). This meshes with Wertsch's (1998) work on multiple simultaneous goals and Leont'ev's (1981) view that, working at the motive level, students may conduct different activities to achieve the object.

7.5   Summary

This chapter has illustrated how students realize their activities differently and exercise their emerging agency, which reveals the dynamic and situated nature of activity. The situated nature of activity can be seen in the different mediational means employed and the different paths taken to attain the task goals, the different roles emergent in the same activity — facilitator/tutor and learner, proposer and defender, and rich learning opportunities in students' side-task or off-task activities, providing they help to attain the task's object at the motive level. In task-based language teaching, being off-task is seen as something to be eliminated, and students are expected to remain on-task in activities (Ellis, 2003). However, the current study shows that fundamental opportunities to practice, communicate and internalize the language, content matters, and embedded social relations can emerge if side-task or off-task activities function with the same object orientation as the on-task activity; if they do not, they will yield much different results. Thus, teachers need to monitor students' activities, as not all the side-task or off-task activities create learning opportunities.

This research has examined the complexity of different types of activity,

the range of which still falls within, and can be perceived and explained through the activity system. The complexity of the activity's situated and dynamic nature (Lantolf, 2000c; Leont'ev, 1981) reveals the students' emerging agency (Ahearn, 2001; Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). The next chapter will address forms of mediation in student activities.

CHAPTER EIGHT

FORMS OF MEDIATION

This chapter presents forms of mediation — the ways in which students enact mediational means in their activities. First, the terms "mediation" and "mediational means" are reviewed, and the mediational means in the current study identified and categorized. This is followed by an examination of multidimensional mediations in the student activities, meaning how students employ mediational means in the activities to achieve their learning goals. As pointed out by Wertsch (1998), mediational means can either enable or limit actions. The chapter concludes with a reminder of the constraints of mediational means in the activity.

8.1 Mediation and Mediational Means

Mediation is the process of employing different cultural artifacts, concepts and activities, and physical tools to regulate one's relationship with the world and with others in society (Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1991, 1998; Lantolf, 2000c; Lantolf and Appel, 1994b; Lantolf and Thorne, 2006). The classical types of mediational means — symbolic means (language, numbers, music, etc.) and material means (realia) — are well-documented (Lantolf, 2000c; Lantolf & Appel, 1994b; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006; Leont'ev, 1978, 1981; Vygotsky, 1978).

According to Lantolf (1994), symbolic mediational means are those by which human beings exert control over themselves and their physical activities, and include "mnemonic devices, algebraic symbols, diagrams and graphs, and most importantly, language" (Lantolf, 1994, p.418). Material mediational means refer to auxiliary devices such as physical tools like spears in primitive hunting. The next section briefly describes the mediational means identified in the current study.

8.2 Categorization of the Mediational Means in the Current Study

The mediational means in the student activities observed in this study are multidimensional, coming from different sources, including peer, teacher, semiotic and material sources.

Peer talk is the main peer-sourced mediational means, and includes peer assistance, peer language play, the use of L1 and code-switching, peer acting, and peer body language (e.g., eye contact and gestures); peer talk is also an outcome indicator, showing students' actual performance in their activities. Acting is another peer source of mediational means. Students use acting to communicate, create meaning, materialize their speech (Lantolf & Poehner, 2008; Wertsch, 1998) and express their understanding and interpretations of the language. It enables students to integrate language meaning with language form through the use of peer assistance, language play, L1 and code-switching, and to create a collective ZPD (Donato, 1994) for English and content subjects.

Mediational means from peer sources are intertwined with those from teacher sources, which include nearly all aspects of students' learning. Teachers' model language use and acting for the students; design and assign tasks; set the rules and class routines; foster a positive classroom culture; involve students in decision-making; employ material mediational means such as realia; instruct the content knowledge; suggest topics; and foster student peer assistance, all of which are mediational in nature. Teachers always play a role, direct or indirect,

in students' activities, be it as an instructor, facilitator, rule-keeper or monitor, or through their non-verbal language.

Task, subject contents, activity type, text, genre, music, textbooks, teaching materials, working sheets, pictures and maps are important semiotic sources of mediational means. Task is a central mediational means, deciding the orientation and goals of the activity. Subject contents (together with topics, genre, pictures, maps, textbooks, teaching materials, worksheets, diagrams, and graphs[1]) form a basis for student activities. Activity type helps to shape student peer talk. Textbooks and teaching materials of appropriate difficulty and complexity enhance students' learning and facilitate their activity. Material sources of mediational means, including realia, computers, etc., provide an additional important dimension, and are summarized in Table 8.1.

Table 8.1   Mediational Means in the Student Activities

Types of mediational means	Subcategories of mediational means
Symbolic means	Teacher's input: assigning the tasks; giving the subject contents; setting the rules; involving the students in decision-making Teacher's acting; voice volume; Teacher's body language such as gestures and eye contact;
	Peer talk: peer assistance; language play; the use of L1 code-switching Peer acting; voice volume; Peer body language such as gestures and eye contact;
	Semiotic artifacts: task; activity type (acting); genre; subject contents; music; text; diagrams, worksheets, graphs, maps, textbook and teaching materials, pictures, etc.
Material means	Realia; computers, etc.

1 Textbooks, teaching materials, worksheets, pictures, maps, diagrams and graphs have both the semiotic side and the material side (Wertsch, 1998), but they are used, stressing more on their semiotic functions (Lantolf, 1994; Vygotsky, 1981c). This accounts for the classification of these mediational means into symbolic means coming from semiotic sources.

This chapter will not elaborate on the list of mediational means, but on the interactions between the agent and those means by examining the multidimensional mediations in students' enactment of the mediational means, i.e., how peer talk was mediated in the students' utilization of the mediational means (Wertsch, 1998). In addition, the constraints found in the interaction will be identified, as mediational means can either "empower" or "constrain action" (Wertsch, 1998, p.25), specifically, in this case, student peer talk in their activities.

8.3 Multidimensional Mediations in the Current Study

The multidimensional nature of mediations lies in the students' enactment of mediational means, i.e., how students employ mediational means in their activities to attain their learning object effectively. The mediational means employed in this study include peer language play, peer assistance, the use of L1 and code-switching, task, activity type, and subject contents as mediation.

8.3.1 Language Play as Mediation

Cook (1997, p.227) defined play as the function of "enjoyment and relaxation", and that language play was used for the purposes of self-amusement and fun (Cook, 1997, 2000). Lantolf took a different view from Cook, stating that play "is not a means for the child to have fun" but rather "serves a fundamental role in the child's development" (Lantolf, 1997, pp.4-5), and that language play was an exercise or rehearsal of target forms (Lantolf, 1997). Vygotsky's (1976) view on play and language play as both an enjoyment and an exercise of the target form, embraced both Cook's and Lantolf's ideas. Vygotsky (1976, p.549, cited in Karpov, 2005, p.151) maintained that, "A child's greatest achievements are possible in play — achievements which tomorrow

will become his average level of real action." Vygotsky (1978, p.17) points out that collaboration with others in play creates a ZPD that allows children to exceed their average abilities; in play, "a child is always above his average age, above his daily behavior; ... in play it is as though the child were trying to jump above the level of his normal behavior." (Vygotsky, 1976, p.552, cited in Karpov, 2005, p.151). In the current study, language play occurred very frequently in collaborative student activities. Language play seems to be closely connected to the school context, particularly its institutional activities, where music, rhyme, rhythm, chanting, singing and acting are encouraged and commonly practiced. In this section, the role of institutional activities in fostering students' language play is discussed, followed by a presentation of the students' praxes of language play in their activities.

8.3.1.1 The Role of Institutional Activities in Fostering Student Language Play

The school conducted many institutional activities to increase student interest in English. In particular, English language learning was integrated in music, rhymes, rhythm, and chanting in the following institutional activities.

English songs used in the morning exercises. When new students were enrolled into Grade 1 in the study school, they spent the first two weeks of the English classes learning to do their morning exercises accompanied by the English songs "Shalala" and "Head, shoulders, knees and toes". The morning exercises had a strong rhythm, and included simple actions created by the English teacher, Funa. While the older students did their morning exercises in the playground, these first-year children did theirs in the space between their classroom buildings.

Classroom managed through English rhymes. In English language classes and English immersion classes alike, English language rhymes — "1, 2, 3, I can see", "A A A, say OK", etc. — were routinely used to draw students' attention.

Chanting processed in the English language learning. In the English language class, chanting was part of the teaching and learning process for all grades. In the PEP textbook, every unit features chanting (e.g., "My math teacher is very smart. My English teacher has a kind heart. My P.E.

teacher is very strong. My music teacher sings nice songs. They help us learn. They help us play. When school is over, I want to stay"). Teachers took chanting very seriously and built it into their teaching process through classroom activities.

Music, rhymes, rhythm, chanting, singing and acting seem to foster students' language play in their English language learning. In the group interview (Mar. 13, 2008), Liuliu, holding a view similar to Yoyo's, told me that *"wo hen xi huan ying yu, yin wei shuo ying yu he chang ge cha bu duo.* {I like English very much, as speaking English is much like singing songs}".

8.3.1.2 The Praxes of the Students' Language Play

Four types of language play can be identified in the student activities: 1) playing with sound, including anglicizing the intonation of L1, transliterating the pronunciation of L2, and exaggerating vocal stresses; 2) playing with lexis, such as exaggerating, nicknaming, and personification; 3) playing with sentence structure, such as chanting, repetition, parallelism, exclamation and code-switching; and 4) playing with content, such as dramatizing a scene by acting it out. These are illustrated below.

Anglicizing the intonation of L1

This extract is from Activity "Visiting an Art Exhibition". Selected pictures by students in various grades were displayed in the school hallway. Hanfeng and Liuliu visited the exhibition, and spoke freely about what they saw. When their limited vocabulary prevented them from expressing certain concepts in English, they switched to L1, anglicizing the intonation to make it sound like English.

Extract 8.1 by Hanfeng and Liuliu
28. Liuliu: Oh, it's beautiful.
29.   Look.
30. Hanfeng: Yes, it is=
31. Liuliu: = it's paint the- it's paint the...
32. Hanfeng: LYT (reading the name of the painter)

33. Liuliu: ZYT (reading the name of the painter)
34. Hanfeng: LYT *a?* (reading the name of the painter)
35. Liuliu: ZYT. *a* ZYT. (reading the name of the painter)
36. Hanfeng: *neng yuan.* {Resource.}
37.   *wei lai neng yuan?*{Future energy source.}
38.   *wei lai neng yuan?*{Future energy source.} (speaking, using the English tone with high pitch)
(Mar. 13, 2008, grade 4, from Activity "Visiting the Art Exhibition")

When the students came to the hallway, they were attracted by the pictures that were on exhibition and exclaimed about the beauty of the pictures (in line 28). At the same time they tried to find out who the painters were (in lines 31 to 35). However, because of their limited vocabulary, they were not able to express "future energy" in English, and Hanfeng switched to L1 (in lines 36 and 37), and anglicizing the intonation to make it sound like English (in line 38). The students were using the English intonation for the Chinese phrases which they were not able to express in English.

Transliterating the pronunciation of L2

This extract is from Activity "Living Things or Non-living Things?" and involves Hanfeng and Liuliu. English vocabulary was difficult for the students, but they played with the pronunciation, trying to find successful strategies, such as using techniques of transliteration (Antony, Ajith, & Soman, 2010; Liu, 2008) in place of the English words with which they had difficulty. Techniques of transliteration help the students remember the pronunciation of the English word.

Extract 8.2   by Hanfeng and Liuliu
7. Liuliu: Do you have- *bu dui* {no, not right} do you do: he:
8. Hanfeng: *ni shuo ta hui sheng zhang de.* {You say it can grow.} (prompting in a low voice)
9. Liuliu: *sheng zhang zhen me shuo?* {How to say "grow"?} (asking for help)
10. Hanfeng: *cheng zhang?* {Grow}?

11. Gray.

12. Liuliu: Grow. (correcting Hanfeng)

13. Hanfeng: Grow *gu tou*. {Bone.} (coining the sound in Putonghua)

14. Liuliu: Can, can he grow?

15. Hanfeng: No: it isn't!

(Mar. 13, 2008, grade 4, from Activity "Living Things or Non-living Things")

When Liuliu had difficulty to continue with the talk (in line 7), Hanfeng prompted her with what to say (in line 8). When Liuliu asked Hanfeng how to say "grow" in English (in line 9), Hanfeng first channeled back with a repetition (in ine 10) and prompted the wrong word "gray" (in line 12). But the similar pronunciation reminded Liuliu of the correct word "grow" and she corrected Hanfeng (in line 13). Hanfeng repeated the English word with Mandarin pinyin, transliterating the pronunciation of L2 (Antony, Ajith, & Soman, 2010; Liu, 2008) for the memorization of the pronunciation of the word. Liuliu continued the talk with the correct expression (in line 14) with Hanfeng responding to her question (in line 15). English vocabulary was difficult for the students, especially the pronunciation. However, the students played with the pronunciation, trying to find some mnemonic skills, for example, techniques involving transliteration (Antony, Ajith, & Soman, 2010; Liu, 2008), to memorize the words that they had difficulty with.

Exaggerating and chanting

This extract is from Activity "Talking about the Time according to the School Schedule". After the students learned time expressions, Teacher Ouya asked them to talk about their school life using the time expressions according to the time schedule. Exaggeration and improvisation were used to dramatize the scene, effectively playing with lexis. Chanting occured as another form of language play, and both students played with the sentence structure.

Extract 8.3 by Pair Hanfeng and Liuliu

88. Liuliu: Oh, you fall down.

89. Hanfeng: S-O-S. (pretending he gets hurt)

   (Liuliu pretends that she is helping him.)

90. Hanfeng: Thank you.

91. Liuliu: You are welcome.

   ......

97. Liuliu: Let's go to the canteen, OK?

98. Hanfeng: OK.

99. Liuliu: *yi qi* chant. {Let's chant together.} (suggesting in a very low voice)

100. Liuliu: // Go to the canteen, eat the noodles.

101. Hanfeng: // Go to the canteen, eat the noodles.

(Mar. 10, 2008, Evening self-study class, Grade 4, from Activity "Talking about the Time according to the School Schedule")

As Liuliu and Hanfeng were talking about going to the playground to play football in the previous lines, Liuliu improvised that Hanfeng fell down (in line 88). Hanfeng picked up Liuliu's hints, and continued their talk by pretending that he fell down and exaggerating with "S-O-S" (in line 89). Liuliu pretended to help him and Hanfeng thanked her (in line 90). Hanfeng's improvisional "S-O-S" dramatized the scene with this exaggeration — playing with lexis. Chanting occurred as another form of language play, and Liuliu and Hanfeng played with the sentence structure. When Liuliu proposed that they go to the canteen together (in line 97) and chant together (in line 99), Hanfeng agreed (in line 98) and they started chanting (in lines 100 and 101).

Chanting through repetition

The following five extracts are from Activity "Garden Exploration" and involve Changqing, Liuliu, Nanhai, Wenwen and Yoyo. They are presented here to illustrate the students' play with structure, lexis and pronunciation.

Extract 8.4   by Liuliu, Yoyo, Hanfeng and other students

1. Yoyo: Let's go.

2. Liuliu, Wenwen & Nanhai: (giggling) OK.

3.　　walk walk, walk walk walk, walk walk, walk walk walk. (chanting with music tunes with Yoyo)

4.　Liuliu: wi- with han:d, with han:d.

5.　Yoyo: *shen me?* {What?}

6.　　*zhen me shuo?* {How to say it?}

7.　Liuliu: Hand in hand (giggling)(???)

8.　　Hanfeng, *yi qi a!* {Hanfeng, together.} (pleading)

(Mar. 13, 2008, from Activity "Garden Exploration")

Yoyo acted as a team leader and asked them to go to the garden (in line 1). While they were walking hand in hand, Liuliu, Wenwen and Nanhai agreed (in line 2) and started the chanting with the repetition of "walk" (in line 3) Liuliu extended her turn by chanting with the repetition of "hand wi [with] hand" (in line 4). When Yoyo asked Liuliu what she said (in lines 5 and 6), Liuliu replied with "hand in hand" (in line 7) and urged Hanfeng to join her in the chanting (in line 8). The students seemed to enjoy the chanting and repetition in their speaking for amusement and fun. When interviewed (Mar. 13, 2008), Yoyo said that she enjoyed chanting and repetition. Liuliu added that speaking English was more like singing songs, and that "hand in hand" was from an Olympic song that she liked. She added that the situation reminded her of the song, as they were walking hand in hand, and the lyrics came to mind.

Exclaiming, personifying, and exaggerating in pronunciation

Extract 8.5　by Hanfeng and Liuliu

38. Liuliu: Wow, it's beautiful.

39.　　Oh, no no no no no (…)

40.　　This is beautiful. (enjoying looking at a flower)

41.　　How beautiful.

42.　　Let's go to the (…)

43.　　Flower, I love you.

44.　　There! There!

45. Hanfeng: *du juan hua.* {Azalea.}

46. Liuliu: OK, give me, give me, give me.

47. Hanfeng: It's beautiful.
48. Liuliu: It's beautiful.
49.   Look! Look! Loo:k!
50.   It's beautiful.
51. Hanfeng: Come on. (in a low voice)
52. Liuliu: Davi!
53. Hanfeng: *wa!* It's bea:u:tifu:l. (exaggerating the pronunciation)
(Mar. 13, 2008, from Activity "Garden Exploring", continued)

When Liuliu and Hanfeng went into the garden, they were attracted by the beautiful flowers. Liuliu began to exclaim about them (in lines 38, 40, 41, 48 and 50). The flower was personified by the use of the personal pronoun "you", and by being spoken to (in line 43). Hanfeng joined her, explaining the type of flower (in line 45), echoing Liuliu in her exclamation (in line 47) and exclaiming about the beauty of the flower by exaggerating the pronunciation of "beautiful" (in line 53). Pronunciations were exaggerated for effect, and repetition was used to draw attention and for fun. In addition, Liuliu used repetition to draw attention and for fun (in lines 39, 44, 46 and 49).

Emphasizing through parallelism
Extract 8.6   by Hanfeng and Liuliu
154. Hanfeng: *wa.*
155. Liuliu: Wah, so cute, so beautiful.
156.   So many flowers, so many trees.
(Mar. 13, 2008, from Activity "Garden exploring", continued)

By using the parallel structure with "so" to describe what she saw, the student expressed and emphasized her excitement (in lines 155 and 156).

Giving nicknames
Extract 8.7   by Hanfeng and Liuliu
205. Liuliu: Oh! Thank you:
206.   Let's go to Ouya 2.

207. Hanfeng: OK.

208. Liuliu: Here, Ouya 2.

(Mar. 13, 2008, from Activity "Garden Exploring", continued)

In this extract, Liuliu used the nickname Ouya 2 to refer to Xumeng (in lines 206 and 208). The teacher's English name was Ouya. Xumeng was called "Ouya 2" by his peer students. When interviewed (Mar. 13, 2008), Liuliu and Nanhai told me Xumeng was referred to as Ouay 2, because his English was good and his physical shape was similar to that of Teacher Ouya's. Xumeng liked the nickname, as he wished to be a good teacher like Ouya in the future. The giving of nicknames shows students' understanding about their peers' characteristics.

Dramatizing the content through acting

In addition to playing with pronunciation, lexis and sentence structures, the students also played with content, dramatizing scenes during role play, for example. The following extract is from Activity "Acting Out: What Is Wrong in the Picture", and is about taking care of parks. The teacher-assigned task was to discuss the pictures with their partner. As the students were not familiar with the genre of 'discussing", they fell back on what they were familiar with — acting out the scene.

Extract 8.8   by Changqing, Liuliu, Peiqiong, Yoyo, and other students (Ss)

1.   Ouya: First introduce yourself.

2.   Changqing: I am Monkey.

3.   Liuliu: I am Monkey, too.

4.   Peiqiong: I am the BAD boy. (using a low voice to dramatize the situation)

5.   Yoyo: I am the cat and the girl.

6.   Ouya: Which picture do you want to show us?

7.   Which picture?

8.   Changqing, Liuliu, Peiqiong &Yoyo: No. 2

9.   Ouya: This one.

10.　OK.

11.　Do it.

12. Liuliu: I am a happy monkey.

13. Changqing: I am a happy monkey, too.

14. Liuliu: Today is a sunny day.

15. Changqing: Yes, I like the sunny day.

16. Liuliu: Er- we can play football in this day.

17. Changqing: Look. // There is a ...

18. Ouya: //There is a ...

19. Liuliu: A cat.

20.　Hello, what's your name?

21. Yoyo: My name is LJ.

22. Liuliu: How old are you?

23. Yoyo: I am 9 years old.

24.　Do you like banana?

25. Liuliu: No.

26. Changqing: Give me a banana, OK?

27. Ouya: Here you are. (prompting)

28. Yoyo: Here you are.

29. Changqing: Thank you.

30. Peiqiong: Today is a sunny day.

31.　I go to park.

32. Liuliu: The bad boy is going to the park.

33.　Quick.

34. Peiqiong: MON-KEY: (pretending he is throwing stones at the monkeys)

35.　I am happy.

36. Ss: (laughing)

37. Yoyo: Don't harm the animals.

38. Peiqiong: Oh, I am sorry,

39.　OK.

40.　For you, please.

41.　For you. (pretending he is giving bananas to the monkeys)

42. Ss: Ha ha- ha ha- (clapping hands, laughing and cheering for these six students)

43. Ouya: Is that all? (showing surprise)

44. Changqing, Liuliu, Peiqiong & Yoyo: // Yes.

45. Ouya: Thank you.

46.   Please go back.

47.   You are so good.

(Oct. 23, 2008, Grade 5, from Activity "Acting Out: What Is Wrong in the Picture")

The students' acting (and their careful planning and preparation) turned a static picture into a vivid story: the students set the scene on a "sunny day" to convey the idea that the monkeys were "happy"; to show that the girl loved animals, she carried a cat and fed the monkeys; the quality and volume of the boy's voice were manipulated to make him appear bad. The students also contrasted the peace, harmony and happiness shared by the monkeys and the girl with the boy's disturbance, noise and twisted sense of "happiness". In this activity (from line 1 to line 11), the students gave a brief introduction about their roles and the picture they chose. The story about the happy monkeys and the lovely girl unfolded (in lines 12 to 39). The climax came (in lines 30 to 37) as the tension occurred between the bad boy who appeared with his low voice and with his action of throwing stones at the monkeys and the girl who stopped him. Lines 38 to 44 showed that the conflict was resolved with the boy transformed to do good deeds: when the girl pointed out his bad behavior, the boy apologized and corrected his behavior by offering bananas to the monkeys.

In the above episodes, the students played with pronunciation, lexis, language and content. Chanting, parallelism and repetition, nicknaming, acting, personifying and dramatizing the scene are all techniques employed to play with the language, and to enhance their English language learning. By integrating learning and playing, the students learned as they played, and played as they learned (Li, 2007, p.19). Luk and Lin (2007, p.136) divided teacher-student and student-student fun-making into four categories: phonological play, social talk, teasing, and talking about taboo topics, which seems to "be

conducive to livening up the classroom atmosphere and in building a friendly teacher-student rapport". Lytra (2007), investigating playful talk such as teasing, joking, verbal play, music making and chanting, finds that by exploring the context of play, children make and negotiate meaning in their understanding of social roles and social relations. The present study supports and extends these findings by illustrating how students' creativity and engagement are facilitated by playing with message content through dramatization and acting.

8.3.2 Peer Assistance as Mediation

Learning creates the ZPD, wherein the learner has the potential to achieve new levels of development through mediation and regulation (Lantolf, 2000a, 2000c; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006; Ohta, 2001b; Vygotsky, 1978). Students' ZPD today will become their actual level of development, through a dynamic and non-linear process. Peer assistance enhances students' learning by helping them to progress from other-regulation to self-regulation, where social interaction is central to this progress in learning (Lantolf, 2000a, 2000c; Lantolf & Appel, 1994a; Vygotsky, 1978). As Vygotsky (1978, p.78) notes, "what a child can do with assistance today indicates what he or she will be able to do by himself or herself tomorrow", and this is a statement echoed by numerous researchers (e.g., Ahmed, 1994; Van Lier, 1996; etc.). Within the ZPD, peer assistance mediates student learning.

In the current study, peer assistance occurred in nearly all of the collaborative activities, and seems to be part of the classroom culture. In this section, the teacher's role in fostering peer assistance in the class is discussed, followed by examples of how peers assisted each other in their activities.

8.3.2.1 The Teacher's Role in Fostering the Culture of Peer Assistance

The class shows a culture of peer assistance and active participation, fostered by the teacher, who set its rules and routines, which were co-constructed by the students, who internalized the set through their interactions. The classroom culture was revealed in class assisting discourse,

during which the students frequently helped one another.

According to Teacher Ouya (Interview on May 26, 2007), three models of peer assisting had been promoted by him from the very beginning of this class. The first was one-on-one tutoring, i.e. better students tutoring poorer students; when pairing students, Ouya took this model of assisting into consideration, pairing the proficient Liuliu with Hanfeng, who was less capable than she. The second model was the optimum competition model, i.e. each student aiming to surpass another student in his or her studies. For example, Changqing, Nanhai and Peiqiong were determined to surpass Xumeng in their English study. The third was the mutual-help model, in which students helped each other with their studies. As Teacher Ouya frequently reminded the students in his class, "*mei ge ren dou you shan guang dian, dou you chang chu.* {Every one has his shining points and his merits}" (Interview on May 26, 2007).

When interviewed (Mar. 14, 2008) about the implementation and promotion of his class tutoring and assisting discourse, Teacher Ouya said that it was very effective: "*xiang hu bang zhu zai xue sheng hu dong zhong xiang dang pu bian. xue sheng men dui bang bie ren he xun qiu bang zhu dou you hen gao ji qing, dou jue de zi rang. wo bu de bu xiang ban fa jiang li ta men — gei zuo de hao de tong xue jia fen.* {Peer assistance is very common in our student activities, and the students have exhibited great enthusiasm for both offering and seeking assistance very naturally. I have to think of ways to reward those who do well — the awards are additional points on their scores}".

For their part, the students seem to enjoy assisting each other and being assisted. When asked (Group interview on Nov. 15, 2008) how they felt about peer assistance, Peiqiong said that "*he tong xue yi qi xue, xue de geng duo.* {(We) learn more in working with our classmates}", while Nanhai and Wenwen both said that "*bang zhu tong xue gan dao hen kuai le.* {(We) feel happy to assist our classmates}. Liuliu added that they "*you yi zhong dang lao shi de gan jue, te bie shi ni jiao yi ge ben xue sheng de shi hou, ni hui you yi zhong cheng jiu gan.* {(We) had a feeling of being a teacher, a feeling of gaining achievement, especially when teaching a slow student"}. Yoyo, too, mentioned the benefits she gained as follows "*bang bie ren de shi hou, zi ji you zai xue zhi shi.* {while helping others, I am learning (that knowledge) again}".

Aside from fostering the class peer assisting discourse, Teacher Ouya cultivated the classroom culture, as well, through class routines and rituals. For example, when he greeted the students and started the class, the students would reply loudly in Mandarin *"ban ji xing wang wo de ze ren.* {To make our class prosperous is my responsibility}". Teacher Ouya explained (Interview on Mar. 14, 2008) that *"zhe ge yi shi neng zen jia xue sheng de rong yu gan. yi ge ren jin bu bu suan shen me, zui zhu yao de shi quan ban yi qi jin bu, na cai shi wo men de guang rong.* {This ritual can enhance the students' sense of honor. That one person is progressing does not weigh as much as that the whole class are progressing together. That is our honor.}" He added, *"zuo wei ji ti de yi yuan, wo men de ze ren jiu shi bao hu ta, bu ran ta shou dao ban dian shang hai.* {As a member of this community, our duty is to protect it from any harm done to it.}" When asked, every student could recite this motto exactly; according to Yoyo and Wenwen, it meant that *"wo men ying gai re ai ban ji, bao hu ban ji rong yu, hu xiang bang zhu gong tong jin bu.* {we should love our class and protect the honor of our class through helping each other and progressing together}" (Interview on Mar. 14, 2008).

8.3.2.2   The Praxes of the Students' Peer Assistance

The following extracts illustrate how the students assisted their peer interlocutors in the activities through peer prompting and waiting; non-verbal expressions; correcting errors and modulating speaking volume; translation; attending to the peer interlocutor's needs; and reciprocating peer assistance.

The teacher asked the students to talk about living and non-living things based on eight pictures (a butterfly, a robot, the Milky Way, an electronic dog, an orange, a flower, a rock and a jellyfish) in the textbook section on "growth and change" and the criteria introduced in science class. Extract 8.9 involves Nanhai and Wenwen talking about a butterfly.

Peer prompting and waiting
Extract 8.9   Talking about butterfly by Pair Nanhai and Wenwen
1.   Nanhai: This is a butterfly.
2.   Wenwen: Is this a living things [thing]?
3.   Nanhai: Yes.

4. Wenwen: Why.

5. Nanhai: Because (..)

6. Wenwen: It can... (prompting in a low voice)

7. Nanhai: It (..)

8. Wenwen: ... can... (prompting)

9. Nanhai: It can (0.6) fly.

(Mar. 13, 2008, Grade 4, from Activity "Living Things or Non-living Things?")

In this extract, Wenwen and Nanhai were trying to reason why a butterfly was a living thing (in lines 1 to 4). When Nanhai hesitated and paused as he could not formulate and articulate the reason (in line 5), Wenwen prompted in a low voice (in line 6) with the two words needed "it can" in Nanhai's utterance. Nanhai picked up the prompted word "it" (in line 7), but got stuck there and still had difficulty to continue. Wenwen prompted again (in line 8) with the word "can". Nanhai at this moment picked up the prompt and articulated the reason (in line 9) with a pause of six seconds. From this extract, we see that when Nanhai had some difficulty with the reasoning, Wenwen patiently assisted him through prompts. When Nanhai picked up on the prompts, Wenwen gave him enough time to talk. Peer prompting and waiting mediated their activity.

The following three extracts involve Yoyo, Xumeng and Changqing talking about a butterfly, a robot and summarizing what they had talked about.

Assisting each other through non-verbal expressions

Extract 8.10　Talking about butterfly by Group Yoyo, Changqing and Xumeng

1. Yoyo: Is this a (..) living thing?

2. Xumeng: No, it isn't.

3.　It's a living thing.

4. Yoyo: (giggling, indicating he is wrong)

5. Xumeng: Yes, it is.

6.　It's a living thing because it can fly.

7. It can- it can...
8. Yoyo: Move. (prompting)
9. Xumeng: Move.
10. It can reproduce babies.

(Mar. 13, 2008, Grade 4, from Activity "Living Things or Non-living Things?")

In this extract, when Yoyo asked Xumeng whether the butterfly was a living thing or not (in line 1), Xumeng gave a contradictory answer: first stating that "no, it isn't" (in line 2), later stating that "it is a living thing" (in line 3). Yoyo's giggling (in line 4) led Xumeng to confirm that the butterfly is a living thing (in line 5). Following that, Xumeng continued to give reasons for his statement (in line 6) that "it can fly." He repeated the phrase and tried to find out what he wanted to express (line line 7). Yoyo prompted him (in line 8) and Xumeng picked up the prompts (in line 9). In addition, he gave another reason (in line 10) that "it can reproduce babies." This extract shows that, in the peer talk, peer students' non-verbal expressions (such as Yoyo's giggling) functioned as assistance by indicating an error, and led to their peer interlocutor's self-repair. According to the seven students (interview, Nov. 15, 2008), they regularly handed over turns through non-verbal expressions, such as eye movements or hand gestures. For example, Liuliu said, "*shi ge yan se.* {Give him a hint with our eyes}"; Nanhai told me, "*shou shi.* {Gestures}"; Changqing said, "*tui ta yi xia.* {Give him a push}"; Yoyo said, "*nie ta yi ba.* {Pinch him}"; Changqing added, "*deng ta yi yan.* {Stare at him}".

Using low voice volume in prompting and correcting their peer interlocutors
Extract 8.11   Talking about robot by Group Yoyo, Changqing and Xumeng
14. Xumeng: Is this a living thing?
15. Yoyo: No, it isn't.
16. Xumeng: *en* (…)
17. Changqing: Why why why why. (prompting in a low voice)
18. Xumeng: Why?
19. Yoyo: Because it (..) it can (…) *en* (…) produce ba- he can (..) don't

20. Xumeng: Reproduce... (prompting)

21. Yoyo: It don't [doesn't] produce baby:

22. Xumeng: Isn't this a living thing?

23. Changqing: No, it is.

24. Xumeng: No, it ISN'T. (correcting and prompting in a very low voice)

25. Changqing: No, it isn't.

(Mar. 13, 2008, Grade 4, from Activity "Living Things or Non-living Things?", continued)

Peers assisted each other a great deal in the activities and low voice volume was used in their assistance. In this extract, the first part from line 14 to line 21 is mainly between Yoyo and Xumeng; however, Changqing actively engaged himself in the talk (in line 17) prompting Xumeng with "why" in a low voice when he found Xumeng stuttering with difficulty by the pause (in line 16). Xumeng picked up (in line 18) and Yoyo explained the reason (in line 19), where she showed difficulty in articulating the reason of "reproducing babies." Xumeng prompted her with the word, and Yoyo picked up although she felt confused with the words "produce" and "reproduce". Xumeng projected the talk to Changqing (in line 22) and asked him whether the robot was a living thing or not. Changqing, influenced by the L1 in mixing that answer of negative and positive, gave the erroneous answer to the question with "no, it is" (in line 23). Xumeng corrected him and had the stress laid on the word "isn't" in order to direct Changqing's attention to the form, but still in a very low voice. Changqing immediately picked up the prompt (in line 25).

Using low voice volume to assist their peer interlocutors was observed to be a common practice in the student activities. As shown in the extract above, both Changqing was prompting Xumeng in a low voice (in line 17), and Xumeng (in line 24) was correcting Changqing and prompting Changqing with the correct answer in a very low voice. When asked why (Interview on Nov. 15, 2008), Nanhai said, *"yin wei bie ren ye zai si kao.* {Because he, too, is thinking about it}". Yoyo explained further, *"ru guo ta zai si kao, ni tu ran mao chu yi ju, jiu hui da duan ta de si lu. ta ben lai hui, ru guo ni gao yi xiao, ta zai shuo chu da an de hua, lao shi jiu hui shuo shi ni gao shu ta de da an. ta hui ren wei na ge tong*

xue bu hui. {If he is thinking about it, he will be interrupted by you when you speak out loud your sentence. He himself can work it out, but if you interrupt, though he gives the answer, the teacher will believe that it is you who tell him the answer but not that student himself can give the answer}". Liuliu emphasized, *"bang jiu shi xiao sheng ti xing, er bu shi da sheng ti ta hui da*. {Assistance means prompting someone in a low voice rather than answering in a loud voice instead of him}". Some students were concerned that their peers might lose face, while others did not want to be punished for interjecting; according to Wenwen, *"yao zhao gu qing mian*. {(We should) concern about (their) "face"}. Xumeng and Peiqiong came up with the class rule which Ouya set to them. Xumeng said, *"Ouya ting dao le jiu you ma fan le*. {If Ouya hears it, there will be trouble}". Peiqiong added, *"hui zuo fu wo cheng*. {(You will be asked to) do push-ups}". In short, therefore, they prompted their peer interlocutors in a low voice to give them a chance to think, to not interrupt them, to avoid the teacher's misunderstanding about their peer interlocutors, to avoid punishment, and to protect their peer interlocutor's "face".

Less proficient students expressed concerns of their own. Nanhai and Peiqiong, for example, had mixed feelings about being offered peer assistance. Nanhai's attitude towards peer assistance depended on the source, *"ta ping shi dui wo hen hao, wo jiu yuan yi jie shou. ta ping shi dui wo bu hao, wo jiu bu le yi jie shou. wo jiu hui ba ta ju jue kai*. {If he is nice to me in our normal time, I will accept his assistance. If he is not nice to me in our normal time, I will not feel happy to accept it. I will refuse it}". This may help to explain why Nanhai was sometimes very defensive around Yoyo, who was frequently domineering in their interactions. Peiqiong explained his frustration with peer assistance, saying *"you shi hou zi ji xue xue xue, hai shi bu hui de shi hou jiu hen sheng qi le. yao shi you ren lai jiao ni de hua, jiu shi you yi de feng ci zhe yang zi de shuo fa. jiu hao xiang bie ren kan bu qi ni, bi shi ni. jiu pa*. {Sometimes when you keep learning, still you are not able to work it out. You will feel very angry (with yourself). If on such occasions someone comes to instruct you, you will feel it ironic (to you). It seems as if others were looking down upon you, despising you. You will feel scared}". The less intrusive nature of low voice prompting speaks to these concerns, and makes it all the more valuable to and important in their

learning practice.

Assisting each other through translation

Excerpt 8.12　Summary by Group Yoyo, Changqing and Xumeng

64. Xumeng: Do you know their names?

65. Yoyo: Yes.

66. 　This is butterfly.

67. 　This is (..) robot.

68. 　This is milkway.

69. 　This is, *er* ...

70. Xumeng: Electronic dog. (prompting in a very low voice)

71. Yoyo: Electronic dog.

72. 　*Er-* this is an orange.

73. 　This is water.

74. Xumeng: Water animals. (prompting in a very low voice)

75. Yoyo: Water animals.

76. 　This is, *er-* this is...

77. Xumeng: Rock. (prompting in a very low voice)

78. Yoyo: A rock.

79. 　This is a flower.

(Mar. 13, 2008, Grade 4, from Activity "Living Things or Non-living Things?", continued)

The activity excerpted above should have been a QA type, as the teacher had assigned a task where "one asks and the other answers". However, the students, in conducting a free conversation about the pictures, were using what they had learned and even created, through translation, a new phrase "water animal" (in lines 74 and 75) for jellyfish. Extract 8.13 involved Hanfeng and Liuliu, and they were talking about electronic dog.

Attending to peer interlocutors' needs for assistance

Extract 8.13　Pair Hanfeng and Liuliu

38. Hanfeng: *ji qi gou zen me shuo?* {How to say "electronic dog"?}

39. Liuliu: Is this the dog?
40. Hanfeng: *bu shi bu shi.* {No no.}
41.   *ji qi gou.* {Electronic dog.}
42. Liuliu: Is this the dog?
43.   No, it is the...
44. Hanfeng: Chocolate.
45. Liuliu: Chocolate. (giggling)
46.   It's the chocolate dog.
47.   It's cool.
48. Hanfeng: *en,* yes?
49.   Really?
50. Liuliu: Yes, it is.
51.   Is this the no- library (giggling) non- no no...
52.   *shen me de?* {What is it}? (thinking aloud)
53. Hanfeng: Non-living thing. (prompting)
54. Liuliu: Yes. (...)

(Mar. 13, 2008, Grade 4, from Activity "Living Things or Non-living Things?")

In this extract, Hanfeng sought help from Liuliu when he could not express "electronic dog" (in line 38). When Liuliu prompted him with only "the dog" (in lines 39, 42 and 43), Hanfeng emphasized in the L1 that it was "electronic dog" (in lines 40 and 41). Then Hanfeng came up with the word "Chocolate" (in line 44), which had some resemblance in pronunciation with "electronic", and they continued to co-construct the interaction which followed. Liuliu commented on Chocolate dog "cool" (in line 47), but still there was uncertainty about the expression, which made Hanfeng inquire about it with "really?" (in line 49). When Liuliu wanted to say "non-living thing" (in line 51), she suddenly could not express herself, and tried hard to find the word through private speech (in line 52). Hanfeng detected Liuliu's need for assistance by her private speech and prompted her with the phrase "non-living thing" (in line 53). In the peer talk, peers were learning to attend to each other's needs. This extract shows that when the students found their

peer interlocutors were struggling, they provided the assistance needed, and co-constructed the interaction to support their efforts. In this case, private speech occurred in Liuliu's thinking process, which functioned socially and led to Hanfeng's provision of assistance.

When asked (Interview on Nov. 15, 2008) how they knew their peer interlocutors needed assistance, the students indicated that they were responding to a variety of verbal and non-verbal indicators (stammering, head scratching, extended silence, etc.). For example, Peiqiong said, *"ta jiu hui zhe yang zi, er- er- er- zhe yang zi.* {He would talk like this, er- er- er- like this}"; Changqing said, *"zhua tou.* {(He would be) scratching his head}"; Nanhai said, *"jiu shi zhan zai na li xiang lai xiang qu.* {(He would be) standing there and thinking about it}"; Wenwen said, *"hen jiu mei you shuo hua de shi hou.* {(He would) pause for long}"; Yoyo said, *"hai you kan zhe bie de di fang.* {Besides, (he would be) looking at somewhere else}". Their statements show that, in their peer talk, the students had learned to be aware of and attend to each other's needs. Extract 8.14 involved Nanhai and Wenwen and they were talking about robot.

Reciprocity of peer assisting

Extract 8.14　Talking about robot by Pair Nanhai and Wenwen

10. Nanhai: What's this.

11. Wenwen: This is a (..) robot.

12. Nanhai: *er-* is this the (..)

13. Wenwen: Living thing. (prompting in very low voice)

14. Nanhai: Living thing?

15. Wenwen: No, it isn't.

16. Nanhai: Why?

17. Wenwen: Because (…) it no can- no can grown [grow].

18. Nanhai: Grow (correcting Wenwen)

(Mar. 13, 2008, Grade 4, from Activity "Living Things or Non-living Things?")

In this extract, Wenwen and Nanhai were talking about whether the

robot was a living thing or a non-living thing. When Nanhai showed his difficulty with his stuttering filler "er-" and hesitation pause (in line 12), Wenwen offered him prompts of "living thing" in a very low voice (in line 13). Nanhai picked up the prompts and completed his utterance with the question (in line 14). When Wenwen had some erroneous pronunciation with "grow" (in line 17), Nanhai corrected her and provided her with the correct pronunciation (in line 18). This extract shows that reciprocity emerged in student peer assistance, and that less proficient students, such as Nanhai, could also assist their peer interlocutors, even if they were from a higher proficiency level.

To sum up, peer assistance occurred in the activities when the peer interlocutors directly asked for assistance; indirectly showed they were having difficulty through pauses, the use of fillers or lengthening of vowels, code-switching, private speech or non-verbal language; or, made an error. Peers used numerous techniques to assist their interlocutors, including repeating, translating, exemplifying, explaining, clarification, and challenging. Peers assisted each other in language manipulation, task administration, content selection, behavior monitoring, and affective support in language-, task-, content-, behavior- and affect-related aspects. When assistance was offered, the peer interlocutors might pick up the prompt or the answer directly, pick up and reformulate, ask for clarification/repetition, ignore the prompts and continue to talk, challenge and disagree with the reasoning, negotiate with an alternative answer, or defend their answer.

Ohta (2001, p.89) summarized adult learners' peer assistance in her study into two contexts — when the peer interlocutor was struggling or making an error. The current study supports and extends her study by showing many instances in which the students actively sought assistance from their peer interlocutors, and used a wide variety of skills in their peer assistance. Their youth, their familiarity with assisting class discourse, and the positive classroom culture in which they interacted may account for their sensitivity to their peer interlocutors' difficulties, the creative and patient ways in which they tutored and assisted their peers, and their bold willingness to seek assistance themselves.

8.3.3　The Use of L1 and Code-switching as Mediation

The use of L1 in L2 learning has long been controversial, and some researchers strongly oppose it. For example, Nunan (1991) proposes that L2 learning should emphasize communicative interaction in the target language, and Willis (1981) also emphasizes using the target language as often as possible. However, some research suggests L1 use may have a positive influence on the L2 learning process. Ellis (1985b) claims that L1 represents a common communication tool for students, and is the starting point from which a new language is learned. Marcaro (1997b) stresses the importance of L1 to L2 learning, and Swain and Lapkin (2000) find that the use of L1 enables the students to complete tasks more effectively and efficiently. Lantolf (2000b) emphasized the mediating role of L1 in peer assistance. Chen and Hird (2006), in a research study on a group of learners in a Chinese EFL context, report that the learners used L1 for specific reasons, such as drawing attention to other matters, encouraging contributions by group members, and negotiating in the group discussion. Spada (2007) also recognized the role of L1 in L2 learning. Song and Andrews (2009), in their investigation of teachers' beliefs and practices about L1 use in learning, identified code-switching as a common classroom practice among both teachers and students; according to Ferguson (2003, p.39), code-switching was mainly used for curriculum access, classroom management discourse, and interpersonal relations. For Adendorff (1993), code-switching enabled teachers and pupils to achieve their social and educational objectives. Ustunel and Seedhouse (2005, p.322) express similar ideas, stating that code-switching was an interactional resource that teachers and learners both drew on to carry out learning activities in "a complex, fluid and dynamic interactional environment".

In the current study, students used their L1 during pre-activity planning, when seeking or giving assistance, when asking for or offering clarifications, and during play; despite being encouraged and required to use English as much as possible, their use of L1 and code-switching mediated their activities.

This section first describes the restructuring of the rule of using L1, followed by the presentation of the praxes of the students' use of L1 as well as code-switching. Although the students used L1 and code-switching in their activities, they also showed awareness to use L2 in their learning activities.

8.3.3.1 The Restructuring of the Rule for Using the L1

The school adopted English immersion in 2004, and the selected class was among the first to enter the program. According to the characteristics of English immersion and the requirements of the CCUEI, English should be used by the teacher at all times, and the students are forbidden to use their L1 during classroom activities. However, when Teacher Ouya began his teaching practice in this class, he found it impossible to explain everything in English and have his students understand what he was teaching. For their part, his students found that being limited to the use of English only made it very difficult to conduct their activities. With the permission of his principal and the CCUEI, Teacher Ouya and other immersion teachers occasionally used L1 to explain difficult learning points, and students were allowed to use some L1 in their activities — they were, however, encouraged to use as much English as possible. Restructuring the L1 use rule accounts for students' L1 use in their activities in the English immersion context.

As discussed above, Teacher Ouya taught English immersion classes through the use of tasks, in the course of which activities were conducted. In English language class, he explained grammar rules using the L1. However, with new school policy dictating that grammar points be reviewed in immersion classes, and faced with pressure regarding public tests, Teacher Ouya became confused in his methods of teaching, and began to use the L1 to explain linguistic points, even in immersion classes. This may be another reason for students' frequent L1 use.

Although the use of L1 is contrary to the stated intent of English immersion, it mediates students' learning at certain stages, such as planning, and in certain aspects, such as assisting, negotiating the roles, clarifying, task monitoring and having fun, as shown below.

8.3.3.2 The Praxes of the Students' Use of the L1 as well as Code-switching

The following extracts illustrate students' use of L1 for role negotiation, collective assistance, clarification and defense, task monitoring, and encouraging the interlocutor's L2 use, as well as the use of code-switching for peer assistance, to overcome difficulty in lexis, to gain assistance, and for fun. Extracts 8.15 to 8.17 involve Wenwen, Peiqiong and other students. Extract 8.18 features Yoyo, Nanhai and other students, and extract 8.19 is from the presentation by Liuliu, Changqing and other students.

The activity "Acting Out: Being Helpful" came from the English language class. Students were given the assignment of acting out the text they had learned the day before. The task was intended to familiarize students with the text and encourage them to recite it if they could (Interview with Ouya on Nov. 19, 2008). Although Wenwen came from the intermediate proficiency level, she usually took the lead when it came to acting and in planning the activity with her interlocutors. The following three extracts involve Wenwen's group.

Using L1 for negotiating the roles

Extract 8.15　by Peiqiong, Wenwen and other students

10. Wenwen: *ni dang* Goat. {You act as Goat.}

11. Peiqiong: *wo bu hui dang* Goat. {I won't act as Goat.}

12. S1: *ni hui zhe li mian de na yi ge?* {Which one can you act as then?}

13. Peiqiong: *na yi ge hui shuo?* {Which one can I act as then?}

14. Wenwen: *Peiqiong dang* Goat. {Peiqiong acts as Goat.}

15.　　*na me jian dan.* {That's easy.}

16.　　*kuai guo lai.* {Come over quickly.}

17.　　*pai lian le.* {Rehearse.} (..)

18.　　*kai shi ba.* {Start.} (0.8)

(Nov. 19, 2008, Grade 5, from Activity "Acting Out: Being Helpful")

At the very beginning the students were negotiating the roles they wanted

to take. As Peiqiong came from lower proficiency level, Wenwen allocated the easiest part for Peiqiong, to be "the goat". However, when Wenwen allocated the role to Peiqiong (in line 10), Peiqiong refused to take it (in line 11) as for this role there was the lightest speaking part. S1 challenged Peiqiong, asking him what he could act as (in line 12), and Peiqiong repeated his thinking (in line 13). Wenwen came to confirm the role with Peiqiong (in line 14) and explained the reason to him (in line 15) before she urged the whole group to get started in their practice (in lines 16 to 18).

Using L1 for collective assistance

Extract 8.16   by Peiqiong, Wenwen and other students

21. Wenwen: *ni shuo* we can. {You say "we can".}
22. S1: *ni dang* Zoom me. {You act as Zoom.}
23. Wenwen: *ni dang shen me?* {What will you act as?}
24.   *ta dang* Zoom *la.* {He acts as Zoom. }
25.   *ni shuo* "we can help her" {You say "We can help her".}
26. Peiqiong: We can help her.
27. Wenwen: What can you do?
28. Peiqiong: I can sweep the floor.
29. Wenwen: I can cook the meal.
30.   What can you do, Zoom?
31. S1: I can water the flowers.
32. Wenwen: OK, just do it.
33. S2: Thank you!
34.   You are helpful.
35. Wenwen: *deng xia da sheng dian.* {Speak louder then.}
36. S2: <Thank you!>
37.   <You are helpful.> (screaming)
38. Peiqiong: *xiao sheng dian.* {Lower your voice.}
39. Wenwen: *dui le, ni yao mei you li qi yi yang.* {Right, you must pretend to be weak.}
40.   Thank you! {in a low voice}
41.   You are helpful. {in a low voice} (..)

(Nov. 19, 2008, Grade 5, from Activity "Acting Out: Being Helpful", continued)

In this extract, Wenwen prompted S2 what to say next (in line 21). When S1 got confused, Wenwen used L1 to clarify and explain his role (in line 23) and then explained the roles (in line 24), prompted him as needed (in line 25). When Wenwen asked S2 to speak louder (in line 35), S2 overreacted with screaming (in lines 36 and 37). Peiqiong reminded him to lower his voice (in line 38) and Wenwen echoed with Peiqiong (in line 39) and modeled in how to say it (in lines 40 and 41).

Using the L1 for clarification and defending
Extract 8.17   by Peiqiong, Wenwen and other students
46. Wenwen: Mother Goat is ill.
47.   *shuo*, "Mother Goat is ill."{Say "Mother Goat is ill".}
48. Peiqiong: What can...
49. Wenwen: we *a!* [It is we.]
50. Peiqiong: We can help her?
51. Wenwen: her!
52. Peiqiong: *wo jiu shi shuo de* her *me*. {What I said is her.}
53. Wenwen: *ni shuo* her? {You say "her?"}
54. Peiqiong: Her.
(Nov. 19, 2008, Grade 5, from Activity "Acting Out: Being Helpful", continued)

When Wenwen prompted S1 about what he should say (in lines 46 and 47), Peiqiong took up his role but made an error in what he should say (in line 48). Wenwen prompted him (in line 49). Peiqiong picked up her prompts and continued with his utterance but with the rising intonation of "her" (in line 50). Wenwen corrected his intonation (in line 51). Peiqiong did not take up the correction but defended himself that what he said was "her" (in line 52). Peiqiong defended himself when corrected by Wenwen, who then used L1 to explain to him his incorrect intonation (in line 53). Peiqiong picked it up using

the falling intonation with correction. Extract 8.18 involved Liuliu's group.

Using the L1 for task monitoring
Extract 8.18   by Changqing, Liuliu and other students
28. Liuliu: Changqing, *ni kuai dian lai la!* {Changqing, come here
    quickly!}
29.   *kai shi la.* {It starts.}
30.   *lai biao yan.* {Come and act.}
31.   *kuai dian!* {Hurry up!}
32.   *kai shi biao yan la:* {Acting begins!} (screaming)
33. S2: *ni dang Zip ba.* {You act as Zip.}
34. Liuliu: *mei shi jian le.* {We have little time left.}
35.   *kuai dian kai shi ne!* {Start quickly!}
(Nov. 19, 2008, Grade 5, from Activity "Acting Out: Being Helpful")

The students were highly engaged in the activity, showed enthusiasm and exerted exploration over their performance. Liuliu asked Changqing to come to her (in line 28). Then she urged the whole group to get on-task and start their practice with her accelerating emphasis on her commands line by line in her loudest voice (from line 29 to line 32). She explained to the whole group why they should hurry (in line 34) and urged the group to get started quickly (in line 35).

Using L1 for encouraging the peer interlocutors to use L2
Although the students used L1 in their pre-activity planning, to assist each other, and to monitor the task, they were aware that the L2 use in the activities was their objective. The following extract is from the activity "Talking about the Ways of Animal Reproduction" and features Changqing and Liuliu. The task assigned by the teacher was to discuss which animals give birth to the young and which lay eggs. In this extract, the students used L1 to remind each other to use L2.

Extract 8. 19   by Changqing and Liuliu

70. Liuliu: *hai you shen me?* {what else?}

71.   *cong wo men shen bian shuo qi.* {Start with what's near us.}

72. Changqing: Mouse.

73. Liuliu: dog *shi zen me sheng de?* {What is the dog's way of reproduction?}

74.   Changqing: *tai sheng.* {Giving birth to its young.}

75. Liuliu: *shuo ying wen.* {Speak English.}

76.   Give birth to the young.

77.   Give birth to the young. {prompting}

78. Changqing: Give birth to the young.

79. Liuliu: *tai sheng.* {Give birth to the young.}

80.   cat *shi zen me sheng de?* {How about the cat?}

81. Changqing: *tai sheng.* {Give birth to the young.}

82. Liuliu: *ni shuo ying wen.* {You should speak English.}

(Nov. 13, 2008, from Activity "Talking about the Ways of Animal Reproduction")

Changqing and Liuliu were working on the list of the animals which gave birth to their young and animals which laid eggs according to what the teacher had assigned to them (in lines 70 to 74), but mostly in their L1. Liuliu reminded Changqing of using English (in line 75), and prompted twice the English (in lines 76 and 77) until Changqing used it (in line 78). When Liuliu asked Changqing about how cats reproduce (in line 80), Changqing answered in the L1 (in line 81). Again Liuliu told Changqing to speak English (in line 82).

Using code-switching for peer assistance through explaining and translating

Extract 8.20 involved Yoyo's group.

Extract 8.20   by Nanhai, Yoyo and other students

16. S1: *di er ju hua zen me du de?*{How to read the second sentence?}

17. Yoyo: Help her, help her.

18.   Ill, ill, *you bing.* {Ill, ill, have illness.}

19. You are ill.
(Nov. 19, 2008, Grade 5, from Activity "Acting Out: Being Helpful")

In this extract, when S1 asked for assistance (in line 16), Yoyo prompted him with the answer and repeated it for clarification so that S1 could take it up (in line 17). Aside from that, she assisted him by repeating the new word "ill" (in line 18), translating it into Chinese (in line 18) and giving an example to show how to use the word in the sentence (in line 19).

Using code-switching as a strategy to substitute the difficult L2 lexis

The students used code-switching to overcome challenges to the continuity of their activity and talk. The following extract is from the activity "Garden Exploration", involving Nanhai and Wenwen.

Extract 8. 21   by Nanhai and Wenwen
12. Nanhai: Yes. (0.7)
13.   Is this a... (0.7)
14.   Er, is this a...
15. Wenwen: *kuai dian shuo, kuai dian kuai dian.* {Hurry up, hurry hurry.} (requesting Nanhai) (…)
16.   What's this?
17. Nanhai: This is (..)
18. Wenwen: *zhong wen zhong wen zhong wen.* {In Chinese, in Chinese, in Chinese.} (prompting in a very low voice)
19. Nanhai: A *shu ye.* {A leaf.}
20. Wenwen: Really?
21. Nanhai: Yes.
(Mar. 13, 2008, from Activity "Garden Exploration")

When Nanhai and Wenwen went into the garden, they were attracted by the plants and flowers. Nanhai tried to describe what he saw, but paused long (in line 12 and 13), and still could not find the right word (in line 14). Wenwen asked him to hurry and waited (in line 15). She elicited his talk with a question

(in line 16). When Nanhai showed his difficulty again (in line 17) with a pause, Wenwen suggested that he switch to L1 to express himself. Code-switching was used as a strategy to resolve their difficulties with the L2 lexis.

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Using code-switching as an indication of need for assistance

Extract 8.22 was from the activity "Visiting Art Exhibition", with Hanfeng and Liuliu. Returning from the school garden, they entered the hallway where selected student pictures were on exhibition, and started to talk about them.

Extract 8.22   by Hanfeng and Liuliu
148. Liuliu: *wa*, it's cool.
149.   What is it?
150. Hanfeng: It's *shui cao*. {Water grass.}
151. Liuliu: It's sea grass. (prompting)
152. Hanfeng: Oh, sea grass. This is beautiful.
(Mar. 13, 2008, from Activity "Visiting Art Exhibition")

In this extract, Liuliu first commented on what she saw (in line 148). Hanfeng showed his difficulty by switching to L1 (in line 150) when Liuliu asked him the question about what he saw (in line 149). Liuliu provided him with the translation (in line 151). Hanfeng gave a comment on what he saw by picking up the assisted answer with a comment on the picture of the sea grass (in line 152). Code-switching served as an indication for assistance and translation seemed to function as a way of peer assistance in L2 learning by the peers.

Using code-switching for fun

This extract was from the activity "Garden Exploration". After the students learned about living and non-living things, the teacher sent them to the garden to put their new knowledge to practical use.

Extract 8.23   by Hanfeng and Liuliu
138. Liuliu: You look...

139. *ai ai ai!* (calling Hanfeng for attention)
140. Ok.
141. Deng deng deng deng. (humming)
142. It's very *kongbu o*. {It is very terrible/horrible.}
143. Hanfeng: Yes.
(Mar. 13, 2008, from Activity "Garden Exploring")

When Liuliu asked Hanfeng to look at the root of the tree (in lines 138 to 140), she tried to describe it as "terrible" but she switched to L1 (in line 142). Here, Liuliu seemed to use code-switching because of lexical difficulty; however, she told me (Interview on Mar. 13, 2008) that she did it for fun, although she admitted having had lexical difficulty. Students sometimes switch to L1 to achieve some amusing effects and overcome lexical difficulty.

These extracts all show that the students used L1 and code-switching to facilitate learning in their activities: to overcome difficult lexis, to complete their task, for pre-activity planning, and for challenging. The extracts seem to support Swain and Lapkin's (2000) contention that the use of L1 enables students to plan tasks better, resulting in more successful completion of the tasks.

However, completing the task does not mean they have learned L2, as the students often use L1 instead; this seems to defeat the purpose of the activity and the goals of the task. In some activities, the students used L1 for nearly all their turns (see Section 6.3.3.3 for the detailed analysis of the activity "Talking about the Ways of Animal Reproduction" by Wenwen and Peiqiong). The overuse of L1 in L2 learning process appears to subvert the goal of increasing target language use, and to conflict with the original intentions of English immersion. Swain (1996), seeing little or no attention paid to students' target language form in use in immersion classrooms, emphasizes the integration of language form in use and subject contents in both teaching and learning.

8.3.4 Task as Mediation

Task, as a plan, forms the activity's goal, and activity is driven by the

task. The task assigned by the teacher is the central mediational means, sets the orientation of the activities, and regulates the object of the activities. This function is illustrated in the task features and in Teacher Ouya's task design.

8.3.4.1   Task Features in the Current Study

Students' activities are very closely connected to the teacher's tasks. In the current study, task displays the following three features[1].

The first feature is task formats, which can be categorized into role plays, question-answers, conversations, discussion, reporting, reading aloud, reciting, copying, doing exercises, etc. The second feature is a variation in linguistic support being provided to students: script-based, script-adapted, keyword-supported and script-free, which variations may cater to the diversity of student needs. The third feature lies in learning goals — whether they are non-communicative (e.g., to acquire some linguistic expression), communicative (e.g., to develop communicative strategies), or to acquire scientific concepts and content knowledge in content subject learning.

8.3.4.2   Ouya's "Tasks" and "Task Design"

The tasks assigned by Teacher Ouya were usually very brief. Most of the time, the students seemed to understand the tasks assigned by the teacher, and to activate the task in their performance. According to the students, they knew from Ouya's modeling what to do and how to do it; when the author interviewed Teacher Ouya, he stated the teaching objectives clearly, but could not clearly articulate his task design or his teaching plan. His teaching plans were either copied from the teachers' reference book or very simple overviews in which the object and procedure were briefly stated.

8.3.4.3   Ouya's Scaffolding through Procedures

Despite Ouya's problems with teaching plans, field notes of classroom

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1 The features of task presented here were presented as features of activity in Chapter 6, as task as the plan and activity as the performance of the plan share the similar features to some extent.

activities reveal how Teacher Ouya integrated his teaching plan and task design into his classroom instruction procedures prior to each activity. The students seemed to appropriate his modeling step by step in classroom activities. How students followed Ouya's task design and his scaffoldings can be seen in two lessons Ouya taught about time expressions, which are presented below[1].

The aim of the two lessons was to let students master expressions and patterns such as "What time is it?", "It's 9 o'clock.", and "It's time to have English class."

The first lesson. The first lesson involved six activities. *Activity 1: Weather and Duty Reporting*. Each class routinely began with one of the students doing the weather and duty reporting. *Activity 2: Ouya's Drawing, Acting and Modeling*. Ouya stood in front of a big circle drawn on the blackboard, and extended both of his hands to act as hour and minute hands. The students were very excited about Ouya's acting as a clock, laughing, guessing the time and talking about the time enthusiastically. *Activity 3: Yoyo's Modeling through Imitating Teacher Ouya*. Teacher Ouya asked Yoyo to come to the blackboard, act as the clock and ask the other students to tell the times based on the position of her hands. *Activity 4: Other Students' Reinforcing through Imitating Teacher Ouya*. Two other students came to the blackboard and modeled by imitating Teacher Ouya, as Yoyo did. *Activity 5: Students' Pair Work — Reading and Reciting the Text*. When all the students were familiar with the questions and answers, the teacher paired them off to read and recite the dialogue in the textbook. *Activity 6: Students' Group Work — Acting as a Clock*. After the reading and reciting was done, Ouya asked the students to prepare themselves to present the dialogue to the whole class. The students quickly formed themselves into groups and practiced the dialogue. The group that was observed wanted to make their dialogue interesting by imitating Ouya's actions and practices; and one student acted as the hour hand of the clock, another as its minute hand, a third moved the hands, setting the time and asking questions according to the textbook, while yet another student answered the questions according to the time acted out by

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1 Activities are used here because the focus is on what actually is happening in the performance rather than the plans.

their partners. (See Section 6.3.1.1 for the detailed analysis of the activity.)

Activity in the evening class. In the evening class, Ouya usually asked the students to spend the first five to ten minutes practicing spoken English. Ouya assigned in the evening class the students to make a clock out of paper and talk in pairs about time based on their school schedule. (See Section 6.3.2.2 for the detailed analysis of the activity.)

The second lesson. The second lesson involved four activities. *Activity 1: Weather and Duty Reporting.* As was the routine, each class began with one of the students doing the weather and duty reporting. *Activity 2: Student Pair Work — Reporting Your School Life to Your Parents.* After the weather reporting, Ouya asked the students two questions: "What will your parents do on Friday afternoon?" (Students answered that their parents would come to pick them up for the weekend); "What will you talk about with your parents?" (Students gave various responses in L1). Based on those responses, Ouya assigned this role play to the students: "Suppose that your parent comes to pick you up, tell your parent about your school life according to the school schedule." The students worked in pairs, using what they had learned the day before about the time expression and patterns. (See Section 6.3.1.2 for the detailed analysis of the activity.) *Activity 3: Student Pair Work — Talking about Life on the Moon.* After the students finished the second activity, Ouya asked them to talk about life on the moon. At first, the students were reluctant to start the activity, as they did not know what life on the moon would be like. After a while they realized they could say whatever they wanted and use what they had learned, and so began the activity. In the after-class interview (Mar. 11, 2008), Ouya said he was not satisfied with this activity. Although he had thought it would be a good way to let students practice what they had learned by talking more freely in an imagined situation, the activity did not seem to serve his purposes, the concept of life on the moon was too remote and alien to the students, and they therefore did not communicate well and his expected outcome was not achieved. *Activity 4: Student Individual Work — Copying the Text and Words and Doing the Exercises in the Exercise Book.* Ouya told those who could recite the assigned text to copy it out and do the exercises in the exercise book; those who could not recite the text were instructed to read and recite the text. Ouya

explained to me after class that they had to do such mechanical exercises to prepare for both the intra-school and public examinations. Figure 8.1 shows how Teacher Ouya unfolded his task design and teaching plan, and showed the students how to use target language in their activities.

| Teacher's drawing, acting, modeling | → | Students' modeling through imitating | → | Students' pair work: script-based | → | Students' acting: script-based | → | Students' pair work: script-adapted | → | Students' pair work: scritp-free |
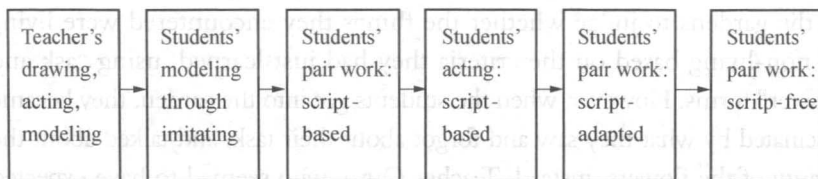
Figure 8.1 Flow Chart of Teacher Ouya's Classroom Activities

In the process of this teacher-student interaction, the students learned how to conduct their own activities when assigned tasks by the teacher. The procedures that Teacher Ouya showed the students for conducting the activity (procedural knowledge) led to their active participation and creative exploration, although Teacher Ouya omitted content knowledge from his task design. According to Andrews (2007), a teacher should have declarative knowledge, procedural knowledge, knowledge about the learners, and knowledge about how to critically use the teaching materials. Karpov (2005, pp.58-59) also stresses that symbolic means are a procedure for using means rather than signs themselves, echoing Leont'ev's claims about the mastery of procedure for the use of mediational means (Leont'ev, 1959). This implies that, in designing learning tasks, teachers need to include knowledge about content, about the performing skills, about the procedures for realizing task goals, about the students, and about critically selecting teaching materials (Andrews, 2007).

8.3.4.4   Ouya's Arrangement of Intervention in the Students' Activity

In task design, a teacher should understand well the learners' current level and their potential problems (Andrews, 2007). Ideally, the actual outcome of an activity should mesh well with the expected outcome of the task. In reality, the two may be quite different, owing to the impact of context and interplay among activity components. Thus, knowing about the students, speculating

how they might realize the tasks, predicting potential problems and arranging to intervene occasionally in the activity will ensure the attainment of the task goals. An example of this is the activity "Garden Exploration" (See Section 6.3.3.4 for the detailed analysis of the activity.)

When Teacher Ouya gave the lesson on living things, he sent the students to the gardens to judge whether the things they encountered were living or non-living based on the criteria they had just learned, using "ask and answer" forms. However, when the students got into the garden, they became fascinated by what they saw and forgot about their task, and talked about the beauty of the flowers, instead. Teacher Ouya, who seemed to have expected this, arranged for Xumeng to question the pairs/groups about living and non-living things. With this intervention, the students returned to their activity.

8.3.4.5   Students' Bending of Ouya's Rules in Performing the Task

When the teacher assigned a task, he expected the students to conduct it in a certain way, and towards an expected outcome. However, the students' actions and the actual outcome might be different from those expectations; in the process of conducting activities, the students may bend the task rules. An example of this occurred in the activity "What Is Wrong in the Picture?" (see Section 6.3.1.4 for the detailed analysis).

The assigned task was to "discuss what is wrong in the picture". According to Valcarcel (1995, p.154), a discussion is a "debate or other form of group discussion of specified topic, with or without specified sides/positions prearranged". As noted in Section 6.2, student activities were mainly role play, question-answer and conversation; although the teacher asked the students to "discuss", the students did not know how, nor did they know how to present their opinions. Not familiar with the discussion, they bent the task rules and fell back on "acting out the scene" to achieve their learning effects.

The teacher was pleased with the performance and language practice in the students' role play, and adapted the rule so that discussing now meant acting. When asked what he expected the students to do when he told them to discuss over a topic, he hesitated for a while then, with a smile, then said that young learners at this level could not understand the concept of discussion,

and would revert to acting out the scene. According to Ouya, the purpose of task was to offer the students chances for learning — if role play could achieve this effect, he would adjust his expectations accordingly, despite wanting the students to learn to use other genres[1].

As shown above, as the activities were being carried out, the teacher reshaped/reformulated his expectations of them and rules for the students, then adapted and adjusted his expectations to suit the needs of the students. This change in teacher expectations illustrates the students' bending of the rules in performing the task and the co-adaptation (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008) of expectations and rules in the activity. In sum, task, which defines the goals and orientation of activity, functions as a key mediational means. In designing a task, not only should task features be taken into consideration, so too should the procedures for bringing the task to completion, knowledge about the students, how to critically select teaching materials, AND the potential impact of context on the learners (Andrews, 2007).

8.3.5 Activity Type as Mediation

According to Wertsch (1998), the introduction of novel mediational means may transform human action. Activity type as mediation is discussed in Chapter 6 by analyzing the interrelationships between activity type and peer talk, which shows that activity type helps to shape students' peer talk. How the students used certain activity types to achieve their learning goals was intertwined with the teacher's modeling.

8.3.5.1 Ouya's Acting as a Model for the Students' Imitation

It was observed that Teacher Ouya did a lot of acting with the students. Teacher Ouya's acting enacted students' creativity and imagination to use

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1 On Oct. 24, the teacher assigned the students to talk about what was wrong in the five pictures again, but in a different genre — QA, or, in the teacher's words, "one asks and one answers".

the language through dramatizing the scene in their activities. He often used acting as the lead-in to his class, and was frequently imitated by the students. In giving his instructions, he usually invited some top student(s) to act with him and model the expected language use for the class. His actions seemed to foster close cooperation among students and create a rapport between teacher and students simultaneously.

Ouya told me (Interview on Nov. 19, 2008), that acting was a method he had employed in his teaching since he first came to this school, as he believed it could arouse students' interest in English, enhance their engagement, and ignite their passion for learning. When the students were in Grades 1 and 2, it was the teacher who led the students in their role play and acting. But by Grade 3, he began to let the students perform their own acting. When asked about acting as the clock, he said that that idea came from a TV show, and that it was also written in the "standard" teaching plan. According to him, no matter which grade they were in, the students needed passionate interaction.

The teacher's acting greatly influenced the students, to the point that the students regarded acting as part of their activities, and as an effective and enjoyable means of mediating their English language learning. In an interview[1] (Oct. 24, 2008), Peiqiong told me that "*Ouya de biao yan he shou shi hen gao xiao, hen you mo, hen kua zhang.* {Ouya's acting and body language such as gestures were very funny, and very humorous and very exaggerated}". Wenwen added that they were "*hen te bie, hen you qu.* {very special and very interesting}". Liuliu said that they "*hen xi huan biao yan, yin wei ta ke yi ti gao ying yu xue xi, bing qie neng ti yan biao yan de kuai le.* {like acting very much, because it can enhance (our) English language learning and allow us to experience the fun in the acting}". Yoyo said, "*ta neng kuo da ying yu ci hui liang, zeng jia dui she hui de liao jie.* {It can broaden our knowledge about vocabulary in English and about the society}". Changqing added that it could "*feng fu wo men de biao yan jing yan* {enrich our performing experience}".

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1 Also see Section 6.3.1.5 for reference.

8.3.5.2   Peer Acting as an Example of Activity Type

Section 6.3.1 rehearses students' role play, acting specifically. The activity "Acting Out: Being Helpful" is presented here to show how the students employed acting in their learning.

The activity "Acting Out: Being Helpful" came from the English language class. Teacher Ouya assigned the students the task of acting out the text they had learned the day before. The aim of the task (Interview with Ouya on Nov. 19, 2008) was to channel student interest and energy back to their English lesson and help them to get familiar with what they had just learned, and recite it if they could. The scripted text in the textbook is as follows:

Zip: Mother Goat is ill.

Monkey: We can help her.

Zip: What can you do?

Monkey: I can sweep the floor.

Zip: I can cook the meal.

Rabbit: I can wash the windows.

Zip: What can you do, Zoom?

Zoom: I can water the flowers.

Zip: OK, just do it.

Mother Goat: Thank you! You are helpful.

The following extract involves Yoyo, Nanhai and two other students (S1 and S2). As Yoyo was quite proficient, she took the lead in conducting the acting, trying to read and recite the text in the group work, and assisting the other group members.

Extract 8.24   by Group Yoyo, Nanhai and other students

1. Yoyo: I am a rabbit.
2. Nanhai: *wo shi* Zip. {I am Zip.}
3. Yoyo: S1, *ni yong ni de shui hu lai dang* Zoom. {S1, you take your water jar as Zoom.}
4.   *shui dang* Zip? {Who act as Zip?}

5.   *ni dang* Zip? {You will be Zip?}

6.   *ta dang.* {Let him (act as Zip).}

7.   Nanhai: *wo dang* Zip *la.* {I act as Zip.}

8.   Yoyo: *ai!* (sighing)

9.   *ta dang* Zoom. {He acts as Zoom.}

10.   *ni dang* Zip. {You act as Zip.}

11.   *ni dang* Monkey. {You act as Monkey.}

12.   *ni dang* Zip. {You act as Zip.}

13.   *wo dang* Rabbit. {I act as Rabbit.}

14.   *ni dang* Goat. {You act as Goat.}

15.   *ran hou tang zai na le.* {Then lie down there.}

16. S1: *di er ju hua zen me du de?*{How to read the second sentence?}

17. Yoyo: Help her, help her.

18.   Ill, ill, *you bing.* {Ill, ill, you are ill.}

19.   You are ill.

20.   Just do it.

21.   *zhun bei hao.* {Get ready.} (.)

22.   *kuai dian la,* Zip! {Quick! Zip!}

23. Nanhai: What can you do?

24. S1: We can sweep. (.)

25. Yoyo: We, we can help her, we can help her.

26.   *yao zuo you te se de shi.* {Must do something special.}

27.   *ai ya!*

28.   *ni gan ma ne?* {What are you doing?}

29.   *bie wan le.* {Don't be playing.} (laughing)

30. S1: *wo xian lai de a.* {I will begin first.}

31. Yoyo: *ni xian.* {You first.}

32. S1: Father Goat is ill.

33.   Father Goat...

34. Yoyo: *yao ba ta fang zai yi qi.* {Put them together.}

35.   *gei ni shui zai na li.* {Give you (the place) for lying down there.}

36. S1: *gai ni la,* Monkey *ya.* {Monkey, it's your turn!}

37. Yoyo: *wo du le.* {I have read it.}

38. S1: <u>What can you do?</u>
39. S2: <u>I can sweep the floor.</u>
40. Yoyo: *ni ya!* {Your turn!}
41. Nanhai: <u>I can cook the meals.</u>
42. Yoyo: <u>I can wash the windows.</u>
43.   *yao zuo dong zuo.* {Must do some action.}
44.   *dao shi hou ni yao na ge fan chu qu chao de.* {Then you will take the meal out to fry.}
45.   *ni jiu ba tuo ba na chu lai tuo.* {Then you get the mop here to sweep the floor.}
46.   *ni jiu yao cong na bian na yi pen hua guo lai.* {You will get a pot of flowers here.}
47.   *ji de a.* {Remember it.}
48. S1: *na shi shui de hua ya?* {Whose flowers are those?}
49. Yoyo: *na ni cong na bian na yi pen hua jin lai o.* {Then you will get some flowers from there and come in }
50. S1: *na hua bu gei wo?* {Then the flowers are not given to me?}
51. Yoyo: *you de shi hou yao dong man de cai xing la.* {It should be animating sometimes.} (0.7)
52.   *ni zui hao shi na zhang zi gei ni.* {You'd better get a piece of paper for yourself.}
(Nov. 19, 2008, Grade 5, from Activity "Acting Out: Being Helpful")

Yoyo's leading role can be seen in the following aspects:
1) allocating the roles (in lines 3, 4, 5, 6, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14)
2) designing the actions (in lines 3, 15, 34, 35, 44, 45, 46, 49, 51, 52)
3) assisting her peers (in lines 17, 18, 19, 25, 40)
4) monitoring the task through complaints and commands (in lines 8, 27; 21, 22, 29, 34, 47)

This extract shows how the students materialized their talk (Lantolf & Poehner, 2008; Wertsch, 1998) in the actions. In the acting, Yoyo suggested attending to the performance effects and language play through dramatization such as suggesting "doing something special" (in line 26), "putting them

together" (in line 34), "doing some action" (in line 43), and "being animating" (in line 51). In order to show "mother goat" was ill, Yoyo asked "Mother goat" to lie down (in lines 15 and 35). In order to show the help, Yoyo designed the actions for Zoom to take the water jar (in line 3), to fry the meal (in line 44), to sweep the floor (in line 45) and to get a pot of flowers (in line 46). Students' creativity also occurred in the acting, for example, S1 creatively changed the text "Mother goat" to "Father goat" (in line 32), because it was "he" who was acting rather than a female student.

Peer assistance emerged in the process of their planning and acting. Nanhai and Students 1 and 2 were less proficient than Yoyo, and when they sought assistance from group members, it was usually Yoyo who provided the answer, modeled pronouncing and reading, or repeated answers so that her interlocutors would clearly understand them. When S1 sought assistance from his group members (in line 16), Yoyo provided him with the answer, modeling him in pronouncing and reading the second sentence and repeating the answer for her interlocutors to clearly understand and uptake (in line 17). She went on further to explain the new word "ill", first modeling in the pronunciation, and then switching to L1 to explain the Chinese meaning of the word "ill" (in line 18). In addition to that, she gave an example of how to use the word "ill" (in line 19). When S1 showed his difficulty with a pause (in line 24), Yoyo came to his help again, repeating the sentence for emphasis and clarification (in line 25). When Nanhai got lost in the roles and did not take his turn where he was supposed to, Yoyo prompted him with his turntaking (in line 40).

As shown in the extract above, the students not only attended to the newly-learned scripts, but also to their performance effects, through the actions they designed according to their understanding of the scripts, social roles, and social relations. When acting out the scene, the students tried to materialize their speech (Lantolf & Poehner, 2008; Wertsch, 1998) in the actions, and to dramatize the scene through the use of props, voice volume and the actions. In addition, they helped familiarize each other with the text and the related social values.

8.3.6 Subject Contents as Mediation

According to Karpov (2005, p.118), children are fascinated about the world, about "the social roles and social relations" and are eager to become "a part of this world". Subject contents such as social science and living science provide them with knowledge about the world and nature, which satisfies their needs while maintaining their interest. In this English immersion school, the content subjects enhance the students' English language learning through the opportunities they provide to use the language and communicate meaning on a wide range of topics through the language. An example of this is the activity "Talking about Living Things and Non-living Things", featuring Hanfeng and Liuliu. Extracts from the peer talk are shown below.

As this was an English immersion school, Living Science was an immersion content subject. As described in Section 6.3.2.3, the teacher introduced the students to the concept of living and non-living things, and to the criteria with which to judge them. He then assigned the students the task of talking about living and non-living things in relation to eight textbook pictures on the theme of "growth and change" (on Mar. 13, 2008).

8.3.6.1 Commenting and Challenging

Extract 8. 25   Talk about electronic dog by Liuliu and Hanfeng
38. Hanfeng: *ji qi gou zen me shuo?* {How to say "electronic dog"?}
39. Liuliu: Is this the dog?
40. Hanfeng: *bu shi bu shi.* {No no.}
41.   *ji qi gou.* {Electronic dog.}
42. Liuliu: Is this the dog?
43.   No, it is the...
44. Hanfeng: Chocolate...
45. Liuliu: Chocolate... (giggling)
46.   It's the chocolate dog.
47.   It's cool.

48. Hanfeng: *en*, yes?

49.   Really?

50. Liuliu: Yes, it is.

(Mar. 13, 2008, Grade 4, from Activity "Living Things or Non-living Things?")

In this extract, Hanfeng sought help from Liuliu when he could not express "electronic dog" (in line 38). When Liuliu prompted him with only "the dog" (in lines 39, 42 and 43), Hanfeng emphasized in L1 that it was "electronic dog" (in lines 40 and 41). Then Hanfeng came up with the word "chocolate" (in line 44), which had some resemblance in pronunciation with "electronic", and they continued to co-construct the interaction which followed. Liuliu comments on chocolate dog "cool" (in line 47), but still there was uncertainty about the expression, which made Hanfeng inquire about it with "really?" (in line 49). The students were using language freely to give comments on objects around them.

8.3.6.2   Code-switching, Turn-taking and Transferring through Thinking

Extract 8.26   Expansion of talk by Pair Hanfeng and Liuliu

71. Liuliu: What, what is it?

72. Hanfeng: It's tree.[It is an artificial man-made tree.]

73. Liuliu: *en!* The *shu zhi* is very long. {The branch of the tree is very long.}

74. Hanfeng: Yes, it's very long.

75. Liuliu: Is this the living thing?

76. Hanfeng: *en*, no, not living thing.

77.   It's *shi jia de*. {It's artificial.}

78. Liuliu: It's non-living thing. (prompting in a very low voice)

79. Hanfeng: It's not living thing.

80. Liuliu: Oh?oh!

81.   What time is it now?

82. Hanfeng: It's seven thirty five.

83. Liuliu: Thank you.

84.   What is it?

85. Hanfeng: //It...

86. Liuliu: // It's very...

87.   *kong bu de zen me shuo?* {How to say "terrible"?} (asking for help)

88. Hanfeng: *zhi jie shuo zhong wen.* {Speak in Chinese directly.}

89. Liuliu: It is very *kong bu.* {It is very terrible.}

90. Hanfeng: Yes, me too.

91. Liuliu: Is this the living thing?

92. Hanfeng: *en,* yes, it's living thing.

93. Liuliu: *ni jiang.* {Your turn.} (in a very low voice)

94.   *hai you shen me* living thing *a*? {What else is the living thing?}

95. Hanfeng: //Tree.

96. Liuliu: // The tree.

97.   The=

98. Hanfeng: =Flower.

99. Liuliu: The flower.

100. Hanfeng: Grass.

101. Liuliu: YES, grass and the: animal.

102. Hanfeng: *en.*

103. Liuliu: And (..)

104. Hanfeng: And *ren.* {Human beings.}

105. Liuliu: Yes.

(Mar. 13, 2008, Grade 4, from Activity "Living Things or Non-living Things? continued)

In this extract, Liuliu and Hanfeng talked about trees (in lines 71 and 72). Liuliu and Hanfeng used code-switching (in lines 73 and 77) to express what they could not express in English in order to maintain their talk. Similarly, Liuliu sought help in L1 to express "terrible" in English (in line 87), and Hanfeng told her in L1 to code-switch (in line 88). Liuliu used code-switching (in line 89) as Hanfeng prompted. Hanfeng showed his affective support to Liuliu by echoing her statement (in line 90). Liuliu prompted (in line 78) in a low voice when she found that Hanfeng had some difficulty in expressing

himself, and Hanfeng picked up the prompt immediately (in line 79). The talk about the assigned topic appeared to be over. However, Hanfeng and Liuliu seized the opportunity to use English as much as possible, thus expanding their talk. Then Liuliu used "oh? oh!" as a transition (in line 80) to signal the change of the theme, and she asked about the time (in line 81), then they went on to talk about living things (in lines 84 to 92). They not only prompted each other about the language expressions to use, but also prompted each other to take turns. Liuliu reminded Hanfeng of the turn he should take (in line 93). What is exciting in this extract is that in the last part (in lines 94 to 105), Liuliu and Hanfeng co-constructed an exploration of what else is a living thing and expanded their talk from "trees, flowers, animals" to "humans", where they tried to connect what they had learned about living and non-living things to what they had not yet been taught; this shows their knowledge transfer: they applied abstract concepts in practice, and connected the remote to their intimate situation.

In these extracts, some skills emerged when peer assistance was employed — the use of L1, code-switching, and language play through their activities, and the transference of learned subject contents to related areas in their life through their thinking processes. The students told the author (Interview on Oct. 24, 2008) that they liked Ouya and his English lessons[1] very much. When the students were asked why they liked English, Liuliu said that *"ying yu ke wo men ke yi xue geng duo zhi shi bing qie ming bai zuo ren de dao li.* {In English lessons we can learn more knowledge and understand how to behave as a person }" and Yoyo said that *"wo men zai ying yu ke shang ke yi xue ke xue he she hui.* {We can learn science and social science in the English class}." When they were asked to pick their favorite activities, all of them chose the garden exploration activity on living and non-living things, because they were learning and could talk about other subjects in English and apply that knowledge in practice. The students were curious about the social and natural worlds, and eager to find out about both.

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1 English lessons refer to both English language lessons and English immersion lessons.

8.4 Constraints of Mediational Means

The above sections show multidimensional mediations in the enactment of mediational means in student activities. However, according to Wertsch (1998), mediational means may also constrain peer talk in activities, if not properly used.

The current study also shows this constraint. For example, Teacher Ouya felt very confident and comfortable with the textbook on Social Science and Moral Education, as all the topics and contents were common knowledge and closely reflected students' lives. However, Book 5 of Living Science frustrated and discouraged the students due to its difficult technical terms and a lack of language support for students, given that only keywords and pictures were supplied. Teacher Ouya told the author (Oct. 10, 2008) that he had reported his doubts about its usefulness to the principal, but financial considerations precluded its being replaced. The following extract is from a lesson about the structure and function of flowers. Although flowers were not alien to the students, their structure and functions were, and the technical terms involved were too difficult for them. (In Section 5.3.2, Teacher Ouya's difficulty in teaching this lesson was presented.) When, later in the class, he asked the students to talk about the subject content, they struggled greatly with both the subject content and the vocabulary.

Extract 8.27   by Changqing, Liuliu, and Teacher Ouya
1. Ouya: Talk with your partner what is a pistil, what is a sepal, etc.
2. Liuliu: What is this?
3. Changqing: sepal.
4. What is this?
5. Liuliu: This is pistil.
6. *shi* pisil *hai shi* petal? {Is it pisil [pitil] or petal?}
7. Changqing: Ouya! (calling the teacher)

8. Liuliu: Ouya! (calling the teacher)

9. *ji xu wen ba.* {Go on with the questions.}

10. *ji xu wen ba.* {Go on with the questions.}

11. *bie guan ta le.* {Neglect it.}

12. What is this?

13. Changqing: This is petal.

14. Liuliu: <u>Petal?</u>

15. <u>Petal.</u>

16. *ei!* (sighing)

(Nov. 18, 2008 Grade 5, from Activity "The Structure and Functions of Flowers")

In this activity, both Liuliu and Changqing were not sure about the new vocabulary (in lines 1, 4, 12, and 14). They called the teacher for help (in lines 7 and 8). With no response from the teacher, who had so many students to attend to, Liuliu recommended neglecting the difficult vocabulary (in lines 9, 10, and 11). However, they could not continue with their conversation without the linguistic support. Liuliu sighed (in line 16) and they stopped there.

The extract shows that, as an important mediational means, textbooks and teaching materials can prohibit students' learning activities if not appropriately used. In this case, the technical terms were too difficult for the students. The English immersion teachers enjoyed teaching subject contents that were based on common knowledge, but, as subject contents became more discipline-specific, they, as teachers, had difficulties and were uncertain as to how to incorporate the content into their classroom instruction. The teacher's difficulties and uncertainty may make it much harder for the students to acquire the content knowledge.

In short, task complexity, difficulty and condition, together with students' familiarity with the topic and task instructions either enabled or constrained the students' performance in their activities, depending on how appropriately they were applied. When the task difficulty/complexity was appropriate and task instruction was clear, students' activity created a collective ZPD (Donato

& McCormick, 1994). When the task difficulty was too great and the task instruction unclear, it inhibited students' activity.

8.5 Summary

This chapter has presented different forms of mediations in student activities in an English immersion context in China. The chapter first identified and categorized the multidimensional mediational means, based on Vygotsky's and Lantolf's classifications, as either symbolic or material.

As Wertsch (1998) notes, mediational means shape the action. Rather than dwelling on the list of mediational means, this chapter focused on how those means were enacted in the student activities, by examining how language play, peer assistance, the use of L1, code-switching, task, activity type and subject contents mediated peer talk in student activities. At the same time, the chapter also presented data that showed the "constraints" wrought by mediational means in peer talk (Wertsch, 1998, p.38). The next chapter is an overall discussion of the study.

CHAPTER NINE

DISCUSSION

9.1 Introduction

Grounded in sociocultural theories, particularly activity theory, this study has attempted to answer the following three research questions by investigating how activities mediate student peer talk in an English immersion context in China: 1) What is the nature of student activities? 2) How does the nature of the activity in which students are engaged mediate student peer talk? 3) What are the salient features of peer talk? This chapter summarizes the current study's findings and presents a discussion centered upon the research questions, with particular attention being paid to the interrelationships between activity type and peer talk, the multidimensional nature of mediations, students' agency and the role played by the teacher. Next, the school context will be addressed in order to gain a better understanding of English immersion in the study school. Finally, the study's conceptual framework is revisited and modified based on the findings, before the chapter concludes with a summary.

9.2 Main Findings of the Current Study

This section summarizes the findings of the current study in respect

to English immersion in the school context, and the mediation of student activities in peer talk in the English immersion context.

9.2.1 Findings on the School Context

The current study was set in a private primary English immersion school in Guangdong Province. The school had adopted its English immersion program in order to meet parents' needs and to increase its enrollment. English teaching and learning were emphasized, and English was integrated into music and other extracurricular activities. However, despite the program's initial high profile, the level of support it received decreased over time as the school administration bowed to pressure over public exams.

Public exams caused a dilemma for the school. On the one hand, Chinese school children's access to higher education is predicated on their public exam scores; on the other, English immersion students' progress in subject contents taught through English immersion was apt to trail that of their mainstream peers. As such, the school made changes to the immersion program to address this disparity. The same dilemma faced the English immersion teachers, especially Teacher Ouya, a participant in the study. Ouya had to deal with the pressure of the public tests and school exams, which focused on grammatical points, as his students' achievements on the public tests and school exams affected his salary and prospects for promotion. The constant changes to the English immersion curriculum, combined with limited resources and a lack of adequate support from the school board, increased this pressure. Ouya, who taught both English immersion classes and English language arts, was forced to alternate between two teaching methods, sometimes getting confused between them, teaching language arts through tasks and activities and using L1 to explain grammar in immersion classes, contrary to the English immersion model.

Tension also emerged when Teacher Ouya began to tackle more demanding discipline-specific content subjects, due to language-related teaching difficulties. Throughout his involvement in the English immersion

program, Ouya had integrated his teaching plan into the classroom activities, scaffolded students by modeling the activity, promoted the students' cooperative learning skills through peer communication and fostered "more equitable and socially respectful student relationships" (Fortune & Tedick, 2008, p.10) in the activities and the students showed high engagement in the activities. However, as the subject contents became more discipline-specific, the English immersion textbook included increasingly difficult technical terms, which Ouya had great difficulty in teaching. This impacted the students' acquisition of the subject contents, as shown in how he taught the structure and functions of flowers (see Section 5.3.2 for the description of this lesson).

9.2.2 Findings of the Mediations of Student Activities in Peer Talk

Regarding the mediations of activities in peer talk, this study has presented three important findings. The first relates to the interrelationships between student activity type and features of peer talk in the activities. The student activities in this study were categorized into four types, using Engestrom's (Engestrom, et al., 1999) activity system as the framework: individual communicative activities, individual non-communicative activities, collaborative communicative activities, and collaborative non-communicative activities[1]. The observed student activities were mostly of the collaborative non-communicative type (see Section 6.2 for the details), including role plays, question-answers and conversations and their script-based, script-adapted, keyword-supported and script-free variations, and moved along a continuum from controlled, contrived and closed to more open, contingent and free. Within this continuum, there was a great deal of authentic communicative language use, as shown in Chapter 6, which meshes with Ortega's concept of

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1 The classification of communicative activities and non-communicative activities were based on whether there were "real" needs and "authentic" context (Ellis, 2000, 2003; Nunan, 2004).

language "form-in-meaning" (Ortega, 2005, p.106).

Activity type, which was found to be an important mediational means in student activities, helped shape and evoke certain features of peer talk, consistent with Wertsch's (1998) statement that mediational means may transform the actions of participants. In the current study, activities involving role play, specifically acting in this case, were found to enhance students' creativity, participation, and cooperation (see Section 6.3.1 for the detailed analysis). This echoes the statement that role play, when it realizes the imagined situation and unrealizable desires (Karpov, 2005; Vygotsky, 1976), is a means of enhancing social skills and creativity in language learning (Hines, 1973; Stern, 1993). As shown in this study, by materializing peer talk (Lantolf and Poehner, 2008; Wertsch, 1998) in student actions, role play aroused students' interest, enhanced students' imagination, creativity and language use, and internalized social norms, values and relationships.

Next to role play (RP), question-answer (QA) is regarded as the most important intellectual means, as knowledge is acquired through posing and responding to questions (Postman, 1979, cited in McCormick & Donato, 2000, p.183). In the current study, QA was found to be an effective means of promoting the students' probing, reasoning and critical thinking; students exhibited active involvement in QA activities, constantly challenging, reasoning, disagreeing, playing with the language and assisting each other (see Section 6.3.2 for the detailed analysis). Conversation, which offers great flexibility in choosing topics (Nunan, 2004; Valcarcel, et al., 1995), was found to engage the students and extend their language use, especially when the topics were close to their real life situations (see Section 6.3.3 for the detailed analysis).

However, activity type is not the sole source of mediation and cannot bring about all the changes by itself (Skehan & Foster, 2005); rather, as shown in Sections 7.2 to 7.4, it is the dynamic and situated nature of activity displayed in the students' agency and the interaction among the activity components that effects change, specifically the interplay between social context, the object, the mediational means, and the agents and the community through the division of labor and regulated by the rule.

The second set of findings relates to the dynamic and situated nature of activity, which was revealed in three aspects: 1) different activities emerging within a single task as a result of different students employing different mediational means (see Section 7.2 for details); 2) students adopting different, often opposing, roles within a single activity, such as tutor/facilitator and learner, or proposer and defender (see Section 7.3 for details); and 3) potential learning opportunities emerging from side-task or even off-task activities when students are working at the motive level with on-task orientation (see Section 7.4 for details), which indicates the students' emerging learning autonomy (Benson, 2001). The students' agency was demonstrated in the dynamic and situated nature of the activities.

The third reported set of findings of the study involves the multidimensional nature of mediations. The mediational means identified in the current study were: 1) symbolic mediational means, consisting of teacher's input, acting and non-verbal language, peer talk, acting and non-verbal language, semiotic artifacts such as subject contents, tasks, activity type, pictures, textbooks, teaching materials, worksheets, maps, graphs diagrams, etc.; and 2) material mediational means, consisting of realia, computers, etc. Rather than elaborating on the list of mediational means, the current study examined instead the multidimensionality of the mediational means in the student activities, i.e., the mediational role played by language play, peer assistance, the use of L1 and code-switching, task, activity type, and subject contents. The study found that mediational means worked as a tool-kit (Wells, 1996), and as a whole interconnected "instrumentality" (Engestrom, 2007, p.380) rather than functioning individually, and either enacted or limited actions (Wertsch, 1998); students' difficulties with overly difficult teaching materials is an example of the latter.

The salient features of peer talk revealed in the activities were peer assistance, language play, the use of L1 and code-switching. Peer assistance took the form of language use as prompting, content clarification, task monitoring, behavior regulation and affective support in their activities. In conducting their activities, students played with pronunciation, lexis and sentence structure, and dramatized the subject content. The use of L1 helped the students plan their

activities, seek assistance, and provide assistance. But too much L1 use diverted the students from the object of English immersion and hindered their learning of the target language, as evidenced by Peiqiong and Wenwen's activity in Section 6.3.3.3.

In sum, the students took ownership of their activities, actively participating and closely cooperating with each other. The activities the students were engaged in mediated cognitive, executive, and affective aspects of student peer talk (Bedny & Meister, 1997). These study findings are discussed further in the following section, to provide a deeper understanding of their import.

9.3 Understanding the Mediations of Activities in Peer Talk

From a sociocultural perspective, learning lies in social interaction (Lantolf, 2000c; Lantolf & Appel, 1994b; Lantolf & Beckett, 2009; Lantolf & Poehner, 2008; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006; Leont'ev, 1981; Leont'ev, 1981; Vygotsky, 1978, 1981b). This section discusses how student activities mediate student peer talk, by reflecting on the interrelationships between activity type and peer talk, the multidimensional nature of mediations, students' agency, and the teacher's role in student activities.

9.3.1 Reflecting on the Interrelationships between Activity Type and Peer Talk

Activity type has been of interest to researchers for a long time, as described earlier (see Section 3.2), and researchers have tried to find out whether certain activities are associated with effective teaching and learning. As pointed out by Skehan and Foster (2005), certain activity type alone cannot solve all the problems in ELT. From a sociocultural perspective, activity theory

in particular, this study found that activity type is an important mediational means in student activities. According to Wertsch (1998), mediational means enact and shape the actions, and the current study supports Wertsch's claim in its findings of the interrelationships between activity type and peer talk. For example, role play, specifically acting, built the connection between students' creativity, affect and language learning in the activities, as shown in Section 6.3.1; question-answer promoted critical thinking and such communication skills as probing, disagreeing, challenging and reasoning, as shown in Section 6.3.2; conversation extended the students' talk, as shown in Section 6.3.3. In the garden exploration activity (see Section 6.3.3.4, Activity 12), conversation provided the students the opportunity to manipulate and play with the language they had learned to express their interest in living and non-living things. The variations of role play, question-answer and conversation formed a continuum, moving from closed, contrived, and controlled to open, contingent and free language practice, where authentic language use occurred. This continuum is of great importance to teachers in their task design, as the variations cater to students' needs at different stages by providing different degrees of language support. The teacher can be selective, utilizing certain types of tasks to enhance target language uses for certain groups of students at certain stages of their development.

Activity type is among the multidimensional mediational forms and serves as the basis for investigating the nature of the student activity. In the activity system, it is the dynamic and situated nature shown by student agency that accounts for transformations, where the mediational means interacted with other activity components such as the community, the rules, the division of labor and the object.

9.3.2　Reflecting on the Multidimensional Nature of Mediations

Students used peer assistance, language play, the use of L1 and code-switching, task, activity type, content subjects, teaching materials, etc., as

components of a multidimensional tool-kit (Wells, 1996), and as a whole interconnected "instrumentality (Engestom, 2007, p.380); they were not used individually, nor fell into the category of the more the better (Liang, 2010b).

Peer language play functioned as an important mediational means in the student activities. According to Vygotsky (1978, p.17), through play, children create, "usually in collaboration with other children, a zone of proximal development". Lantolf (2000a, 2000c) furthers Vygotsky's concepts by emphasizing the importance of students' language play. According to Pomerantz and Bell (2007), students expand their communication repertoires by creatively accessing linguistic practices usually ignored and devalued in classroom settings. Luk and Lin (2007) report that students had a sense of ownership over the expressions they created through interaction. This study extends these findings by revealing that the students played with content through dramatization, animation, and personification, and by varying pronunciation, lexis and sentence structure. The language play observed in the study reflected the students' affective experience in their language learning. Although the *NEC* identifies students' affective attitudes as a goal of English language teaching, ways of achieving this goal seem underemphasized in research studies. The common practice of teachers has been to focus their attention on "linguistic material", and to view students' emotional reactions and affective experience in learning as peripheral (Stevick, 1996, p.154). As Derewianka (2008, p.42) notes, expressing "interpersonal meanings" is an important aspect of "language competency". The current study reveals the affective aspects in the student activities, and that the students, who displayed a large amount of language play, were highly-engaged, and closely cooperated in their activities.

In addition, peers offered assistance when their interlocutors were struggling or making an error, or when asked for assistance. They would prompt answers in a low voice, ask for clarification, or suggest strategies for solving a particular problem. The current study confirms the findings of Ohta (1995, 1997, 2000, 2001), Donato (1994), Anton and DiCamilla (1998), and Brooks (1992): when students work collaboratively, they create a collective ZPD, where discrepancy in the interactions among peers offer more chances

for learning from their differentiated ZPDs. The current study also lends support to the study conducted by Foster and Ohta (2005), which shows that learners gained access to the language being learned through interactive peer assistance and repair, and echoes the finding of Watanabe and Swain (2007), who argue that both higher- and lower-proficiency students benefited from interaction and peer assistance. Furthermore, it is in line with studies by Kanagy (1999), Duff (1995) and Fassler (1998), in that it shows the reciprocity of peer assistance in student activities. (See Section 3.3.3 for the literature reviewed.)

Student opinions on peer assistance and peer talk in the activities can be seen in Section 8.3.2.2. In the activities, students not only assisted each other in language use, content understanding, task monitoring, and behavior discipline, but also in terms of emotional support (also see Section 6.3.1.3 Activity 3 for details). They learned to attend to their peer interlocutor's needs by carefully observing when assistance was needed. They prompted in a very low voice, reflecting aspects of the class culture, their desire to save their interlocutors' face (as Wenwen expressed in Section 8.3.2.2) and their willingness to offer their peer interlocutors the chance to think and respond on their own (Nanhai, Yoyo and Liuliu, see in the same section). The less-proficient students, (Peiqiong, for example) expressed frustration over having to be assisted, making "prompting in a low voice" even more important to the students' English language learning (see in the same section).

Students' use of L1 and code-switching has long been investigated in interaction. Macaro (1997a) states that L1 played an important role in peer collaboration and learner autonomy. Swain and Lapkin (2000) find that, when students used L1 in preparation for a task, they completed the task more successfully. Luk and Lin (2007, p.136) explore how the students had fun and used code-switching in creative ways to gain a sense of ownership over their speech and to assert agency. The current study enriches these studies by revealing how the students employed their L1 and code-switching for task planning, assisting each other, clarifying task goals, procedures and content, and having fun. Code-switching was also used as a task completion strategy when they had difficulties using the L2. However, conducting the whole of

an activity in L1 may defeat the task goal of learning the target language (e.g., Activity 11, in Section 6.3.3.3), and necessitate the teacher's redesigning the task.

Task is the key mediational means of activity, directing its orientation and setting its goals. Locating task in the activity system helps the teacher to have a holistic idea of how to enact other elements (e.g., the interaction between the agent and other mediational means, such as rules, community culture, and task object), and how to motivate the students to reach the assigned goals. It also allows room for a broader scope and more flexibility in perceiving and understanding the dynamics and situatedness of student activities; Ouya's misunderstanding about Hanfeng and criticism of Nanhai and Wenwen, for example, shows the necessity of locating task in the activity system (see Sections 7.2.2.2 and 7.2.2.3 for details). As revealed in Section 8.3.4, teachers should carefully consider task features and "task dimensions" (Ellis, 2003, p.96) when designing tasks (Ellis, 2003; Nunan, 2004; Skehan, 1996, 2003; Skehan and Foster, 2005a, 2005b). The teacher should not only have content knowledge, but also procedural knowledge, and knowledge of the learners and knowledge of how to select teaching materials critically (Andrews, 2007). Classroom tasks should be designed to "challenge the students both cognitively and linguistically" in the teaching process (Fortune & Tedick, 2008, p.10).

Activity type was identified as another important mediational means in the activity system. Variations of role play, question-answer and conversation cater to the students' need for linguistic support. These activity types were observed to be effective for the young learners in their activities, promoting their interest and engagement in the activities, and enhancing their creativity and understanding of social relations through dramatization. However, as stated earlier, activity type alone cannot bring about all the transformations needed and solve all the problems in ELT (Skehan and Foster, 2005); this study showed that it was the dynamic and dialectical interaction among activity components that brought about the effects (see the students' emerging agency in Sections 7.2 to 7.4).

As the study was conducted in an English immersion context, albeit a very

partial one, subject contents provided students rich topics for communication, and afforded opportunities to learn and employ communicative skills and critical thinking in their activities (see Section 8.3.6). However, in some activities, the students used L1 alone to complete the task, contrary to elementary principles of English immersion, which emphasize the need to use L2 to learn the target language, master the subject contents, and appreciate the culture embedded therein. Immersion teachers need to employ instructional strategies to "scaffold the students appropriately" in their activities, to elicit their frequent use of "the immersion language", and to build "cooperative learning techniques" in the student's relationship with his or her learning process (Fortune & Tedick, 2008, p.10). As Swain (1996) maintains, it is necessary to integrate content knowledge instruction with target language use i.e., "form-in-meaning" (Ortega, 2005, p.106).

Teaching materials, such as textbooks and worksheets, were also found to be important mediational means in the student activities. As shown in Section 8.4, when the textbook was rife with difficult technical terms the teacher could not teach effectively, and the students showed their difficulty through sighs and hesitations. At the surface level, it seemed that as an important mediational means, the textbooks and teaching materials might prohibit the students' activities in their learning if not appropriately used. However, considering this point further, this may reveal an issue in teachers' task design. Before his instruction, the teacher should design the tasks very carefully for his teaching (Ellis, 2003; Nunan, 2004; Skehan, 1996, 2003; Skehan and Foster, 2005). He should have not only the knowledge about the language, but also knowledge about the contents, about the procedures of acquiring the knowledge, about the students' current level, and about how to critically select the teaching materials (Andrews, 2007). Considering this point even further, this may indicate a problem of the English immersion programs in China: whether the immersion teachers, absent from adequate professional training or expert professional guidance, are qualified to teach content subjects, and whether training the English teachers in English language only for them to become content subject teachers is feasible, especially when the subject contents become more discipline-specific and need scientific conceptualizations. Li's

(2007) proposal of crossing boundaries between disciplines may provide one possible solution to this problem; another might be to train content subject teachers to be English immersion teachers.

9.3.3 Reflecting on the Students' Agency in the Activities

As discussed above, students' agency can be seen in the emergence of different activities in a single task; as Coughlan and Duff (1994, p.185) note, students may have different interpretations of even a single, relatively controlled task, as well as have different degrees of willingness to establish bonds with their interlocutor, and make different efforts to make their description interesting, such as "playing with language", "comparing personal experience", and "evaluating events". This study supports these findings, showing that, even when the students interpreted their task in the same way (e.g., being the best actor or actress), made the same effort to impress the audience (make their presentation interesting), and followed the same script, their activities differed, due to their different English language proficiency levels, the communities they were in, and the mediational means they employed in the activity. As such, teachers should take these sorts of differences into consideration when designing tasks, and provide students with appropriate scaffolding during their activities.

Students' agency was also shown by the emergence of different roles in the same activity. Storch (2002) identifies four peer interaction patterns based on degree of equality and mutuality — collaborative, dominant/dominant, dominant/passive, and expert/novice. In the current study, similar patterns of dominant/passive and expert/novice were noted in tutor/learner and proposer/ defender relationships; however, this study also finds that role relations in peer interaction were dynamic and developmental, fluid rather than static, with much room for change and development, echoing Luk and Lin's (2007) findings regarding students' identity formation.

Finally, students' agency was shown in their spontaneous development of learning activities during side-task or off-task activities to exploit potential learning opportunities. This suggests that focusing on task-completion and on

being on-task in classroom practice is not enough; when students working on the motive level (Leont'ev, 1981) or with multiple goals (Wertsch, 1998) are motivated to attain the objective of learning, the side-task or off-task activities they create can provide substantial potential learning opportunities, which indicates the students' emerging learning autonomy (Benson, 2001). Hence, in task design and task implementation (Ellis, 2003; Nunan, 2004; Skehan, 1996, 2003; Skehan and Foster, 2005), special attention should be paid to students' emerging agency (Ahearn, 2001; Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006) and the dynamic nature of activity.

9.3.4 Reflecting on the Teacher's Role in the Activities

The study data show the important role, direct or indirect, played by the teacher in student activities. He fostered the classroom culture, set class rules and rituals, gave topics and contents, and involved the students in decision-making (see Sections 5.3.6, 8.3.2.1, 8.3.4.3, 8.3.4.4 and 8.3.5.1). Ouya's modeling, gestures, efforts to let students apply what they had learned in practice, and willingness to base topics on students' real life experience are important elements for English teachers to consider in their English language teaching. Pedagogically, the relationship between teacher and students can create synergy between the students' motivation and their interest in learning (see Section 5.3). The findings from the current study suggest that the rapport the teacher built up through egalitarian discourse and by involving his students in decision-making (see Section 5.3.6) accounted for their positive attitudes towards both him and learning English (see Section 5.3.5).

Meanwhile, data analysis shows that Teacher Ouya based his teaching and improvisations on his professional and personal experiences, rather than on systematic good task design. Good task design should take into consideration task features such as format, linguistic support to the students, learning goals (as described in Section 8.3.4.1), and "task dimensions" such as "discourse domain", "cognitive complexity" etc. (Ellis, 2003, p.96). As shown in Section 8.3.4.2, Teacher Ouya's teaching plans were either brief or copied from the

teacher's reference book, and he could not articulate them well. As a result, students occasionally disregarded task rules, as in Section 8.3.4.5, when they ignored his instruction to "discussing what is wrong in the picture", choosing to act out the scene instead; Ouya later changed his task rules to reflect the students' actual activities. On the one hand, this episode shows co-adaptation of the rules (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008) in the activity system, and Ouya's flexibility in his teaching practice. On the other hand, it may indicate a lack of careful task design, which requires a thorough understanding of the students, the task goals, and the scaffolding that should be provided. This suggests the need for teachers to design their tasks clearly and systematically (Ellis, 2003; Nunan, 2004; Skehan, 1996, 2003; Skehan and Foster, 2005) and to have thorough knowledge of content, procedures, students and teaching materials (Andrews, 2007).

9.4 Understanding the English Immersion in the School Context

As discussed above, the school's susceptibility to the public testing and ranking system revealed its sensitivity to parents' opinions and the instability of its English immersion curriculum, which had a significant impact on teaching and learning practice (as shown in Section 5.2). In this section, the school context is redefined, followed by a discussion of emerging issues in the school English immersion context.

9.4.1 Redefining the Context: A Very Partial English Immersion

The school had a strong test-driven orientation, despite its early advocacy of English immersion. As a result, the program was only very partially implemented, with limited time allocated to English immersion, a constantly

changing curriculum for English immersion content subjects and few resources for teaching and teachers.

According to some researchers, defining this school context using the term "English immersion" may be problematic. For example, Fortune and Tedick (2008, p.10) maintain that, in immersion programs, the immersion language should be used to teach content subjects for at least 50 percent of the time during a school day, and that teachers should be "fully" proficient in the immersion language. As shown in Section 5.2.2.1, the time allocated to English immersion in this school was very limited, and teachers were not "fully" proficient in English, although they could use it as an instructional medium. Fortune and Tedick's (2008) stance notwithstanding, this study adopts Johnson and Swain's (1997) taxonomy of two types of immersion — full and partial (as reviewed in Section 2.1.3) — and redefines this school context as English immersion but a very partial one, for two reasons. Firstly, the program was a part of the CCUEI when adopted by the school, and was referred to as English immersion by the CCUEI program investigators, school administrators, teachers, students and parents alike. Secondly, with a few exceptions (included time allocation and teacher employment, both of which were constrained by the Chinese primary context) the program conformed to Fortune and Tedick's (2008) other immersion criteria; in particular, the classroom culture embraced peer interaction and peer cooperation "to build more equitable and socially respectful student relationships" (Fortune & Tedick, 2008, p.10).

This partial English immersion shares some similarities with that examined in Duff's (1997) study of English immersion programs in Hungary. Those programs, Duff (1997) reports, brought about generally positive results, although some schools were unsuccessful and had their immersion programs canceled; in these cases, the school, teachers and, especially, students paid a heavy price — high expectations but no results. Similarly, the teachers and students in the current study struggled a great deal during the immersion process, with the students perhaps suffering an implicit loss in content knowledge due to the teacher's difficulty in teaching subject contents (see Sections 5.3.2 and 8.4). The two studies differ, however,

in that, despite these difficulties, the teacher in this case tried to implement the English immersion in an exploratory and inquisitive manner according to his own understanding of the concept, while the students benefited by actively participating in their learning activities through the teacher's scaffolding, and took ownership over the activities by exerting agency and self-control, as shown in Sections 7.2 to 7.4. The reason may be, unlike in Hungary, English in this school is still highly-regarded in the teaching and learning, and the English immersion program was not completely dismantled. As the former principal described (see Section 5.2.2.7), the fact that English immersion remained a much-talked-about subject might have positively influenced the students' learning environment. Another reason may be that the teacher, who was in charge of teaching both English language arts and English immersion content subjects, brought English immersion teaching techniques to his teaching of the English language art whenever appropriate and possible (see Section 5.3.2), indicating the feasibility of using tasks and activities to teach young children at primary level in China, although some reports about task-based language teaching in China are less positive (e.g., Deng & Carless, 2009; Zhang, 2005).

9.4.2 Reflecting on the Emerging Issues in This English Immersion Context

A variety of issues that have emerged in immersion have been discussed by Duff (1997), Pei (1998), Zhao (2004), and Zhang and Pei (2005), including the lack of qualified bilingual teachers, instructional resources, and effective ways of assessing immersion students' English language proficiency. The following section discusses the issues and problems found through this research, some of which have not been discussed in previous studies on the CCUEI.

Firstly, an effective way of assessing not only students' English language proficiency, but also their mastery of content subject knowledge and scientific concepts, is needed. As revealed in the research, the mismatch between English immersion goals and public examination expectations put the school in a

dilemma, which led to attempts to change the English immersion curriculum. As a result, Teacher Ouya was forced to use L1 to address grammatical language points, even in English immersion classes, effectively limiting the time spent conveying subject content knowledge.

Secondly, all the English immersion teachers in this case study came from an English language arts teaching background. When the subject contents were based on more general knowledge, both the immersion teachers and their students enjoyed the teaching and learning processes. However, in Grade 5, the content became more discipline-specific, the students began to struggle with technical terms, and the teacher had great difficulty dealing with both (see Sections 5.3.2 and 8.4). This raises the issue of how to train English language teachers to teach more discipline-specific content within English immersion guidelines; as mentioned above, cross-disciplinary training (Li, 2007, p.21) of English language teachers and training teachers of content subject as English immersion teachers are two possible approaches.

Thirdly, some activities were conducted by the students entirely in L1, contrary to English immersion principles and objectives. Thus, how to integrate language use in the instruction of content subjects is an issue for teachers, educators and researchers in immersion education to resolve. This problem has been raised before by Swain (1996, p.531), in her description of the conflict "between good content teaching and good language teaching", and her proposal that content and language teaching be integrated through tasks. When a teacher designs a task, he should consider goals as well as teaching utility (Ellis, 2003; Nunan, 2004; Skehan, 1996, 2003; Skehan and Foster, 2005) — that is to say, the tasks he designs and assigns must integrate proper L2 language use into subject content instruction to promote students' L2 use when learning the subject contents.

Finally, teachers should collaborate, not only with immersion experts, but also with their peers. Under the former principal's policy, the school worked closely with experts, researchers and educators (see Section 5.3.2), and promoted collaboration among English immersion peer teachers (see Section 5.2.3), effectively supporting teachers in their teaching (see Section 5.3.2). The new principal, however, cancelled experts' visits to the school and, following

the resignation of six immersion teachers, eliminated the English immersion teachers' communal office, dispersing the few remaining immersion teachers among teachers of other subjects. Teacher Ouya felt isolated and helpless, and was left to implement the immersion program single-handedly, which he found stressful and which caused difficulties in his teaching. Hence, provisions for ongoing collaboration between schools and experts, researchers and educators, and among peer teachers should be given serious consideration in the implementation of English immersion programs.

Some recommendations can be made based on this study's findings on English immersion in the school context. Firstly, in English immersion, it is important that schools give teachers adequate and sustainable support, and create a favorable physical environment for teachers and students. Secondly, school policy on English immersion curriculum needs to be stable. Thirdly, collaboration between immersion experts and immersion teachers should be encouraged, with the latter getting sustainable guidance from the former. Fourthly, collaboration among peer teachers within the same subject should also be promoted, and cross-disciplinary cooperation (Li, 2007) among teachers taken into consideration. Fifthly, textbooks and teaching materials should align well with the program, and be carefully selected. Finally, egalitarian teacher-student discourse and the active involvement of students in the decision-making process should be promoted to build a rapport between teacher and students that can motivate the students in their English language learning, and give them a sense of ownership over their activities (see Sections 5.3.5 and 5.3.6 for examples).

9.5 Conceptual Framework Revisited

The conceptual framework was adapted from Engestrom's (1999) complex model of activity system based on the literature reviewed (see Section 3.4 for details). There was a discrepancy between what was assumed from the literature review and what was actually found in the data analysis.

Therefore, based on the findings in the study, the conceptual framework is revisited and modified. The activity system with its components — the subject, the object, the mediational means, the rule, the community, the division of labor and the outcome — is presented as follows.

The subject. In the original conceptual framework, the subject referred to the students. As this study only investigated the student activities, it was assumed that only the students were involved. After the investigation, the subject contained both the students and the teacher, as the data analysis showed that the teacher played a very important role in the student activities, directly or indirectly. It was the teacher who designed the tasks, assigned the tasks to the students, set the rules and ritual to the students, gave the topic and contents instruction to the students, involved the students in the decision-making and fostered the students' sense of responsibility and belonging (as described in Section 8.3.2.3).

The object. In the original conceptual framework, the object contained task-driven goals, the mastery of the L2 and subject content, and the understanding of culture. After the investigation, the object contained task-driven goals, task-related goals, the mastery of the L2 and subject content, and the understanding of culture. Based on the findings of the study, some side-task or even off-task activities may represent potential learning opportunities for the students. Although the object of the activity seems similar to the original framework, the task-related goals were included in the object, and these were new goals emergent and developed in the process of performing the task. Therefore, the object included both task goals and motive, which in this case refers to the use of L2, the mastery of the subject content, and the understanding of the cultures embedded in the language. The students' off-task activities showed that the students were creating their own activities, assuming ownership, trying to use the language, master what they had learned and internalize the embedded social norms. These showed the students' agency (Ahearn, 2001; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006; Littlewood, 1996, 1999, 2000; Nunan, 1996; Toohey, 2007; van Lier, 1996) and emerging autonomy (Benson, 2001) in their learning. Thus, the object contains the task-driven goals, task-related goals, the use of the L2, the mastery of the subject content and the

understanding of culture. The object is the expected and presumed outcome. It may be different from the actual outcome of the activity.

The mediational means. In the original conceptual framework, mediational means included task, genre, contents, peer talk, realia, textbook and teaching materials. After the investigation, it contains multidimensional mediational means from different sources: peer sources, teacher sources, semiotic sources, and material sources. As stated earlier, the current study followed Vygotsky's (1978) classification, and categorized the mediational means into two types: the symbolic mediational means and material mediational means (see Section 8.2 for details). Aside from peer assistance, language play and the use of L1 and code-switching in peer talk, the new mediational means identified in the student activities were task, subject contents, and activity types.

The community. In the original conceptual framework (see Section 3.4), the community was the pair or the group, the school. As shown in Section 5.2, although the immediate community was only the pair or the group, the school context was shown to have a great impact on the students' learning and teachers' teaching. The classroom culture fostered by the teacher, although functioning implicitly, formed an important base of this community. The role of the family was acknowledged in the community, although it was not investigated in this study due to the research focus and space constraints. (Interviews were also conducted with the parents to get supplementary data for a better understanding of the student activities.)

The rule. In the original design the rule included social norms, conventions, school regulations and teacher's expectations. The data analysis showed that the rules and the teacher's expectations were co-adapted and co-constructed in the process of performing the tasks.

The division of labor. In the research design, the division of labor was assumed to include the role relations among the students, and Storch's (2002) model was used as the reference. After the investigation, it included the emerging roles in the activities. The division of labor can be either explicit (i.e., students negotiating their roles or position) or implicit (i.e., naturally emerging roles or position). The data presentation showed that role relations

were not static but dynamic and developmental, changing in the interaction among activity components. The roles taken shows that there was some correlation with students' language proficiency level, but not always so, as the students from the intermediate level also took on leading roles in the activities.

The outcome. In the research design, the outcome contained the realization of the task-driven goals, and peer talk was chosen as the indicator of the achievement in the L2, subject content and culture understanding, which was uncertain at the design stage. After the investigation, through identifying the features revealed in the activities, it was found that aside from achieving the task-driven goals (L2 use, subject content mastery, and an understanding of embedded culture) what is impressive is that the students gained control of the activities by realizing on-task, side-task or even off-task activities, took ownership over their activities and demonstrated their creativity through language use and language play. In addition to language learning, the students also learned through their affective experience, both exploratory and interesting, about planning tasks, negotiating meaning, and appropriating mediational means in their activities, all of which are emphasized in the *NEC* (The Ministry of Education, 2001b). A comparison was made between the original conceptual framework and the modified conceptual framework based on the findings. Table 9.1 illustrates the differences, with the new findings highlighted in italics.

Table 9.1   The Comparison between the Original Conceptual
Framework and the Modified One

Activity components	Conceptual framework in research design	Conceptual framework after investigation
Subject	the students	the students, *the teacher*
Object	task-driven goals, L2, subject contents, cultural understanding	task-driven goals, *task-related goals*, motive (L2, content, culture)

(to be continued)

Activity components	Conceptual framework in research design	Conceptual framework after investigation
Mediational means	task, genre, contents, peer talk, realia, textbook and teaching materials	1) symbolic mediational means: *teacher's input, teacher's acting, teacher's non-verbal language*, peer talk, *peer acting, and peer non-verbal language*, semiotic artifacts such as *activity type*, task, subject contents, genre, *music*, pictures, maps, graphs, diagrams; textbooks, and teaching materials 2) material mediational means such as realia, computer, etc.
Community	the pair or the group, the class and the school	the pair or the group, *the classroom culture, the school* (the role of family)
Rule	norms, conventions, regulations and expectations	norms, conventions, regulations and expectations, *which is co-adapted and co-constructed*
Division of labor	the students, Storch's model of role relations	*emerging roles, dynamic role relations, both explicit and implicit*
Outcome	Task-driven goals achieved? Peer talk as indicator	Working to attain the task goals, *working at the motive level; affective experience in inquiry and exploration; self-control and ownership of the activity; creativity, cooperation and participation through peer assistance; exploring and interesting experience through language play and task plan; negotiating the meaning*

Note: The italicized parts are the new findings through the data analysis.

Figure 9.1 presents the modified conceptual framework based on the findings of the current study.

Rather than functioning individually, the activity components interact dialectically and function dynamically with its interplay among the social context, the object, the agents, the community and mediational means (Engetrom, et al, 1999; Lantolf, 1994, 2000; Lantolf & Beckett, 2009; Lantolf and Poehner, 2008; Lantolf and Thorne, 2007).

Mediational means:
Symbolic: teacher's input, teacher's acting,
teacher's non-verbal language; peer talk,
peer acting, peer non-verbal language;
semiotic artifacts such as activity type, task,
subject contents, genre, music, pictures, maps,
textbooks, teaching materials, diagrams etc.
Material: realia, computer etc.

Object: task-driven and task-related goals, the L2, contents and culture

Subject: the students and the teacher

Outcome: task goals and motive(L2, contents culture); ownership and self-control of the activity; active participations and cooperation; communicative skills; interesting and exploring learning experience

Rule: norms, conventions, school regulations, expectations and class rules

Community: the pair or the group, the class, the classroom culture and the school as well as family

Division of labor: among the students, emerging roles in the activities, dynamic role relations

Figure 9.1   The Modified Conceptual Framework Based on the Findings of the Study

9.6 Summary

This chapter has summarized the key findings presented in Chapters 5 to 8, and has provided a general discussion of those findings, organized around two themes. The first theme was how activities mediate student peer talk, with particular attention paid to the interrelationship between activity type and peer talk, the multidimensional nature of mediations, students' agency, and the role of the teacher in the activities. The second theme related to English immersion in the school context, including the issues that emerged in immersion within the redefined school context. After revisiting the original conceptual framework of the current study, this chapter suggests a modified conceptual framework that reflects the research findings. It highlights findings on the

multidimensional nature of mediations, the interrelationships between activity type and peer talk, and the dynamic and situated nature of activity, which show the students' emerging agency in their activities.

CHAPTER TEN

CONCLUSION

10.1 Introduction

This chapter rehearses the study for the purpose of understanding how activities mediate student peer talk in relation to the research questions. First, a summary of the study is presented, followed by a presentation of the study's contributions to the existing knowledge of the field. Next, the implications and limitations of the study, as well as some possible future directions for research, will be discussed.

10.2 Summary of the Study

This section summarizes the aim, methodology and findings of the study, which comprise the findings of the contexts and of the mediations of activities in peer talk, as well as the conclusions based on those findings.

10.2.1 Summary of the Aim and the Methodology

Drawing upon previous studies of student interaction from a sociocultural

perspective, the current study has investigated how activities mediate student peer talk in an English immersion context in China, by examining activity type and peer talk, the dynamic nature of activity and students' agency, and multidimensional mediations in student activities. The setting for this research was a private primary English immersion school in Guangdong Province. One class was selected as the case for the two-year study, which lasted from May, 2007 to May, 2009, during which time the students progressed from Grade 3 to Grade 5. A gender-balanced group of eight students with different language proficiency levels were selected for close observations. Four data collection visits to the school were made, during which student in-class and after-class activities were both audio-taped and video-taped, field notes were taken, and interviews were conducted. The recordings of student activities were transcribed in detail for later spoken discourse analysis. Teachers, students, parents, and the principals were interviewed to gain a thorough and holistic understanding of the context and participants both, by taking various aspects into consideration. Engestrom's (Engestrom, et al., 1999) activity system was adapted as the conceptual framework by which the student activities would be examined. Based on Engestrom's activity system, the student activities were categorized and analyzed to aid in understanding the nature of student activities. To identify the features of peer talk, a "focal elements in spoken discourse" analytical framework was adapted based on Duff's (2002, p.294) table of common foci for micro-level discourse analysis, Ohta's (2001, p.89) peer-assisted interaction framework, and Kumpulainen and Mutanen's (1999, p.457) framework for peer group interaction. The analytical process involved reiterative visiting and re-visiting of the data, categorizing patterns that emerged in the activities, refining those categories, and gaining an in-depth understanding of the data.

10.2.2 Summary of the Findings

Although English language teaching and learning enjoyed a very high status at the study school, tensions emerged due to conflicts between English

immersion program principles and the school's susceptibility to public tests and ranking, and were manifested in the school board's dissatisfaction with the English immersion project, which showed a high staff turnover rate, and constant changes to school policy on English immersion, as well as in the challenges facing the English immersion teachers. This tension is evident in Teacher Ouya's frustration when, despite his and his students' struggles with difficult content subjects, no support or guidance was forthcoming from either experts or the school. In spite of these challenges, however, Ouya still tried to implement English immersion and conduct activities in his teaching practice; his pedagogical and ideological beliefs and awareness about promoting students' interaction in teaching practice were evident in various aspects of his teaching practice, including his students' seating arrangement (see Section 5.3.3). The students liked Teacher Ouya and his teaching very much and held a very positive attitude towards him and English learning both.

The interrelationships between activity type and features of peer talk were examined in the study. Based on the complex activity system (Engestrom, et al., 1999), the student activities were categorized into four types: individual communicative activities, individual non-communicative activities, collaborative communicative activities and collaborative non-communicative activities — most of the observed student activities were of the collaborative non-communicative variety. The collaborative non-communicative activities were further sub-categorized as script-based, script-adapted, keyword-supported, and script-free, with their orientation towards communicative activities moving along a continuum from closed, contrived and controlled to open, contingent and free, as summarized in Section 9.2. By identifying the features of peer talk in each activity type, the current study reveals the interrelationships between activity type and peer talk: role play, specifically acting in this case, was found to arouse the students' interest, engage them in the activities, enhance their creativity and imagination, and promote their understanding and internalization of social relations (Karpov, 2005) (see Section 6.3.1); question-answer promoted students' reasoning and critical thinking (see Section 6.3.2); and conversation, especially when the topics were close to the student life experience, encouraged students to take risks with the language and to practice

their communicative skills (see Section 6.3.3). The salient features of peer talk identified in the current study were language play, peer assistance, the use of L1 and code-switching. Activity type helped shape the student peer talk (Wertsch,1998). However, it was the situated and dynamic nature of activity that effected in the student activities.

In the study, the dynamic and situated nature of activity showed students' agency (Ahearn, 2001; Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006) through the emergence of different activities emerging within a single task (i.e., students employing different mediational means and taking different paths to attain the same goals); the development of different roles in the same activity (showing dynamic role relations among the peers); and potential learning opportunities resulting from side-task and off-task activities as students worked at the motive level with new goals and tasks evolved (see Sections 7.2 to 7.4).

Mediations in student activities were found to be multidimensional in nature, taking the form of language play, peer assistance, the use of L1 and code-switching, task, subject contents, and activity type.

Students not only played with pronunciation phonologically, but also played with lexis. They played with sentence structure by chanting, repetition, parallelism, and with content by personifying, acting out and dramatizing the scene (see Section 8.3.1.2). Peer assistance was an important and commonly used mediational means; peers assisted each other cognitively, executively and affectively in language-, task-, affect- and behavior-related aspects on various occasions. Peer assistance was reciprocal (Donato & McCormick, 1994; Ohta, 2001), with less-proficient students assisting their more-proficient peers, to the benefit of both parties (van Lier, 1996; Watanabe & Swain, 2007). Students used L1 and code-switching for pre-activity planning, for clarifying and explaining complex concepts, and for challenging and assisting each other. While mediational means were found to empower students in their learning, the study also notes their ability to constrain learning if not appropriately employed (Wertsch, 1998), as shown in Section 8.4.

Activity type, task and subject content are new mediational means identified in the current study, and played critical roles in student activities. As the current study was conducted in an English immersion context, subject

contents were taught in English, and were important mediational means that actively engaged the students in the activities. Task, as the work plan, functioned as a central mediational means, while activity type helped to shape student peer talk through a variety of features (Wertsch, 1998).

10.2.3 Conclusions

Some conclusions can be drawn based on the study's findings.

First, task, activity type, subject contents, peer talk (peer assistance, language play, the use of L1 and code-switching) are multidimensional in the students' activities. As Liang (2010b) states, rather than functioning individually or falling into the categories of "the more, the better", mediational means work as a tool-kit (Wells, 1996), and as a whole nterconnected "instrumentality" (Engestrom, 2007, p.380). However, mediational means alone do not bring about the changes; the changes are accomplished by the dynamic and situated nature of activity. These are shown in the students' emerging agency in activities and the dynamic and dialectical interaction among activity components. Perceiving task, activity type, content subjects and peer talk from an activity system perspective may help teachers to remain aware of the dynamic nature of the activity, better understand student activities in their teaching practice, and anticipate what scaffoldings they may need to provide.

Second, the students assisted each other not only through language use, but also through task monitoring, content understanding, emotions support, and behavior discipline, through which their communication skills were further developed. They learned to involve their peer interlocutors by using conversational tones and employing such inclusive pronouns as "we"; to attend to their interlocutors' needs by observing when assistance was needed and care about their peer interlocutor's "face"; and to hand over the conversational turn using both verbal and non-verbal cues. Peers assisted each other cognitively, executively and affectively (Bedny & Meister, 1997). The communicative skills and strategies revealed in the study can be taught explicitly both to students in

English immersion and mainstream schools.

Third, the peer assistance culture did not emerge by itself. On the contrary, the teacher played a key role in its creation by fully involving himself in teaching practices, piquing students' interest through modeling and acting, including students in the decision-making process and establishing a rapport through egalitarian discourse; each of these efforts offers insights into possible avenues for teacher education.

Fourth, the students showed a positive affective learning experience due to the extent of language play in their activities. They played with pronunciation, lexis, and sentence structure, and adapted content through dramatization. Acting allowed students to develop their creativity through their language use, and to enhance their understanding of social roles and relations. Students' learning processes should emphasize affective aspects (Davison, 2007; Derewianka, 2008), which this study shows can be realized. Role play, which "restores the body emotions to language learning" (Stern, 1993, p.72), may be a way for young learners to materialize their talk (Lantolf & Poehner, 2008; Wertsch, 1998) through their actions and learn English effectively.

Last, while the use of L1 and code-switching was found to mediate student activities, in some cases it was used almost exclusively, thus defeating the object of the activity, which was to learn L2. As such, the integration of content and target language use should be carefully considered when designing tasks in immersion education, as Swain (1996) has pointed out.

In short, student activities mediate student peer talk in cognitive, executive and affective aspects (Bedny & Meister, 1997) and should be integrated in teacher's careful task design and classroom activities through appropriate scaffolding strategies.

In drawing these conclusions, it is important to insert a cautionary note. Given the author's background of learning, teaching and researching, it should be acknowledged that she may have embarked on this research with a favorable orientation toward English immersion. However, the author's awareness of this ensured that the data analysis and the findings were reflected critically throughout the whole research process in order to rule out any potential bias in the data analysis and the findings.

10.3 Contributions of the Study

The current study contributes to the field of interaction by examining the nature of student activities and peer talk. It contributes, as well, to immersion education by revealing the impact of the school context on teaching and learning practices.

One of the contributions relates to the context of the study. Few studies have investigated young learners' activities and peer talk in L2 and foreign language contexts, and fewer still have done so in China, although the situated and dynamic nature of activity has been documented extensively in the literature (e.g., Kozulin, 1986; Lantolf, 2000b; Robbins, 2003), and a great deal of research into the nature of activities in L1 and L2 settings has focused on student interaction (e.g., Cekaite & Aronsson, 2004; Coughlan & Duff, 1994; Donato, 1988; Foster & Ohta, 2005; Hall, 1995; Lantolf & Appel, 1994a; Ohta, 1995, 1997, 2000, 2001; Storch, 2002; Swain & Lapkin, 1998; Watanabe & Swain, 2007).

Another contribution is that the current study provides more of an emic perspective on student activities and peer talk by presenting the voices of young learners in an English immersion context. For example, the students learned to offer their peer interlocutors assistance in the activities by using very low voices; prompting in a low voice afforded the interlocutor the opportunity to think and respond on their own (as Nanhai, Yoyo and Liuliu state in Section 8.3.2.2). Less-proficient students expressed their frustrations and fears about having to be assisted, highlighting the importance of subtle, unobtrusive prompts to their learning process, as well as Chinese cultural concern over preserving one's face (as Wenwen states, in the same section).

In addition, the current study has filled a research gap by revealing affective aspects of students' language play in activities, an under-researched area, particularly in China. Although affective aspects in students' interaction in their learning process are emphasized by researchers such as Davison

(Cummins & Davison, 2007; Davison, 2007), Derewianka (2008) and Verplaetse (2000), and students' positive affective experience in the English language learning is required by the *NEC* (The Ministry of Education, 2001b), they have nonetheless been underemphasized in research studies into ELT in China (Pei, 2007) and into the CCUEI; more commonly, research has focused on linguistic material rather than on students' emotional reactions, with affective experience in learning seen as peripheral (Stevick, 1996, p.154). As shown in the study, the students gained a positive affective learning experience, not only due to their high level of engagement and close collaboration, but also through language play, such as anglicizing L1 intonations, playing with lexis through nicknaming and exaggerative vocabulary, using repetition and chanting to play with sentence structure, parallelism, and playing with content through dramatization (see Extracts 8.1, 8.7, 8.3, 8.4, 8.6 and 8.8, respectively).

Furthermore, the current study offers significant insights for ELT pedagogy and teacher education in China. By exploring the dynamic and situated nature of student activities in three dimensions, the study enables a deeper understanding of the complexity of the nature of activity and student agency in the young learners' learning process (see Sections 7.2 to 7.4). Its detailed analysis of student activity types, features of peer talk and forms of mediations provides important references for pedagogy and teacher education in both English immersion and ELT in China. It offers, for example, important references for teachers to use in designing tasks and conducting classroom activities in their teaching practice.

The study contributes to the field of interaction by investigating features of students' peer talk through rich data and revealing the interrelationships between student activities and peer talk (see Sections 6.3.1 to 6.3.3). It is one of the first studies to focus on the student learning process from the perspective of student peer interaction within the CCUEI, and is one of the first to examine immersion students' peer talk from an activity perspective. The identification of new mediational means, such as activity type, task, subject contents, contributes to activity theory, while locating these mediational means in the activity system helps teachers to perceive and analyze students' activity and to understand the dynamics of their activities.

10.4　Implications of the Study

The research findings from the present study have implications for both the theory and practice of ELT in general, and English immersion in particular, in China; these will be presented below.

10.4.1　Theoretical Implications

The examination of interrelationships between activity type and peer talk in the current study provides an in-depth understanding of student activities in both teaching and learning, and of perceptions about the nature of student activities. Just as Skehan and Foster (2005, p.193) have pointed out, a certain type of task or activity alone cannot solve the problems in ELT. The current study identifies activity type as a mediational means and locates subject contents, task and activity type in the activity system to advance understanding of the dynamic and situated nature of the interaction among activity components. This broadens the teachers' scope and flexibility in task design and task implementation, and enriches the students' learning opportunities by enabling their performance in the interaction among activity components.

Moreover, the multidimensional nature of mediations in the study show that mediational means do not function individually or fall into the category of "the more, the better" (Liang, 2010b), but work as a tool-kit (Wells, 1996), and as a whole interconnected "instrumentality" (Engestrom, 2007, p.380) to suit the dynamic relationship between social context, goals, and the agent and the community.

10.4.2　Practical Implications

The current study has revealed the dynamic and situated nature of student

agency (Ahearn, 2001; Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006) in three different aspects: the emergence of different activities from the same task; the emergence of different interlocutor roles in the same activity; and the potential learning opportunities created by side-task and off-task activities. This has implications for current general educational thinking by suggesting, for example, that focusing on task completion alone is not enough; teachers may better understand students' activities in the task implementation process by perceiving and analyzing the classroom activities through the activity system (see Section 7.3.2.3).

According to Vygotsky (1976, p.539, cited in Karpov, 2005, p.119), Hines (Hines, 1973, cited in Stern, 1993, p.70) and Yardley-Matwiejczuk (1997), role play fosters students' creativity and imagination, and promotes students' understanding of social roles and relations. The current study demonstrates that role play, specifically acting, aroused students' interest in learning English and enhanced creativity by materializing their talk (Lantolf & Poehner, 2008; Wertsch, 1998) through actions, dramatizing the scene in an imagined situation, and internalizing social relations and values through role play. As postulated by Postman (1979, p.140, cited in McCormick & Donato, 2000, p.183) and Nunan (2004) question-answer was found to encourage students' probing and reasoning through active participation, close collaboration and cooperation with student peers. Conversation, as Nunan (2004) and Valcarcel (1995) argue, offers the learners flexible topic choices. These activity types and their variations offer English teachers, especially at primary level, important references for task design.

Although the *NEC* lists students' affective attitudes among the goals of English language teaching, ways in which to achieve this goal have been under-researched. The current study reveals a great deal about students' language play in their activities. The students were not only amused by the language play itself, they also outperformed themselves in the ZPD the language play created (Cook, 2000; Lantolf, 1997; Vygotsky, 1976). Thus, the patterns of students' language play revealed in the current study can be explicitly promoted in instruction, as students need "to be encouraged to have an emotional involvement" in their learning (Derewianka, 2008, p.55). Role play, specifically acting in this case, effectively enabled students' affective

interpersonal expressions, arousing their interest in English learning and enhancing their understanding of social roles and relations. The possibilities and productiveness offered by role play can be explored further in English teaching for young learners.

The study shows that, through their activities, student peers learned to attend to each other's needs and to assist each other in the interaction in language-, task-, behavior- and affect-related ways. The students learned to involve the peer interlocutor(s) actively through conversational tones and the use of inclusive pronouns such as "we". The patterns of students' peer assistance can be introduced to the students explicitly as to how to attend to each other's needs, how to assist each other, how to employ certain language patterns, and how to actively involve their peer interlocutors in their activities.

Although task-based language teaching is officially advocated in China (The Ministry of Education, 2001b), many teachers were found to be still using the traditional teaching method of explaining grammar in L1 (e.g., Deng & Carless, 2009; Zhang, 2005). The current study shows how, in his struggle, Teacher Ouya tried to teach through tasks and activities in English immersion subjects and English language arts both (see Section 5.3.2). This means that, when the teacher knows how to design tasks (Ellis, 2003; Nunan, 2004; Skehan, 1996, 2003; Skehan and Foster, 2005), how to scaffold the students and how to select the teaching materials for the students critically (Andrews, 2007), activities can be conducted in English language classes as well, focusing on language use and communication skills.

Some of the subject contents provided rich and "authentic" topics that enabled the students to communicate meaning, to appropriate values and social relations, and to enhance their critical thinking, as shown in Section 6.3. When the content subjects were based on general knowledge, immersion teachers could integrate content knowledge and language teaching, with both the teacher and the students enjoying the learning and teaching process. This suggests that some subject contents can be built into English language teaching for mainstream schools.

The current study also shows, however, that when the content subjects became more discipline-specific and involved more complex scientific concepts

and technical terms, the teacher experienced great difficulty in carrying out his teaching practice, as the English immersion teachers were mostly from English language backgrounds and had not had adequate professional training to teach the content subjects. This suggests that: 1) Immersion teachers must be qualified to teach content subjects, or the students may suffer greatly in their learning of subject contents; and 2) The feasibility of English immersion in higher primary graders needs to be carefully considered, especially as contents become more discipline-specific and require higher levels of scientific knowledge. Providing adequate professional training (either for English teachers to become content subject teachers, or for content subject teachers to become English immersion teachers) is one possible solution to this problem; cross-disciplinary collaboration (Li, 2007) may be another. Still another solution may be to carefully and critically select teaching materials for English immersion subjects, in order to ensure they are appropriate for the students' academic level.

What is more, the observed negative consequences of cancelling experts' visits to the school suggest that collaboration between the school and immersion experts and among the immersion teaching peers is of vital importance to the implementation of innovative programs. Schools must take into account the potential challenges of English immersion and provide teachers and students with sustainable support and a stable immersion curriculum.

To conclude, examining student activities from a sociocultural perspective provides valuable insights into pedagogy and teacher education for ELT and English immersion, although it does not provide effective solutions for all ELT problems in China.

10.5 Limitations of the Study and Directions for Future Research

Although the current study may enrich the field of sociocultural research studies in the area of student interaction and immersion studies, and add to the

knowledge acquired through the previous studies, some research limitations exist, and further research needs to be conducted on these aspects.

The current study was carried out in a private boarding English immersion school setting, the salient features of which are described in Section 5.2.2. As the students left school only on weekends, they had more opportunities to learn from and interact with their teachers and peers than would be possible in a non-boarding school. Therefore, it is not representative of other CCUEI English immersion schools. However, as the current study did not focus on the effectiveness of English immersion *per se*, the school's features and the dilemma it experienced still reflect similar situations in mainstream schools. For example, the fact that the school was test-driven and allocated very limited time to English immersion can be interpreted not as limitations, but as indicators of the transferability of the research findings to mainstream schools. Further research needs to be carried out in public school settings to gain understanding of mainstream students' activities conducted in the Chinese context from the sociocultural perspective.

In addition, the current study dealt with the student learning process by focusing on student activities only; students' learning outcomes were not examined. If students' learning processes and learning outcomes could be examined together, an even deeper understanding would be gained of students' language learning process and language development both. Using mixed-methods (both qualitative and quantitative) to obtain data on English immersion outcomes would be an interesting and meaningful means of accomplishing this.

In addition, studies could be conducted to examine the various functions of role play, specifically acting, in mainstream primary schools. Activity variations, especially the continuum of collaborative non-communicative activities, could be used to guide teachers in task design and implementation. Non-verbal language could be investigated further to find its function in teachers' teaching and students' language learning. Peer assistance, peer collaboration, language play, code-switching, and silence also bear further investigation to determine their roles in students' language learning. New perspectives can be used to research students' English language learning in ELT in China; for example,

Christie and Derewianka's (2008, p.7) "functional model of language" can be employed (or adapted) to study students' discourse and examine the students' spoken language development, while Li's (2003, 2007) story approach to integrated learning can be used as an appropriate approach to young learners' English language learning. English poems and songs (Harfitt, 2009a, 2009b; Lam, 1997, 2001) can be integrated in the curriculum of English language learning.

While, as stated above, further research needs to be conducted with different foci in different settings using different approaches so as to gain multiple perspectives about students' learning processes and language development, the current study, by examining the interrelationships between activity type and peer talk, the nature of activity and students' agency in activities, and the multidimensionality of mediations, has shown that it is the dynamic and situated nature of activity demonstrated in the student agency that mediates student peer talk in cognitive, executive and affective aspects (Bedny & Meister, 1997), through the enactment of such mediational means as language play, peer assistance, the use of L1 and code-switching, task, activity type, content subjects and teaching materials. It is through the enactment of mediational means, teacher's appropriate scaffolding, and peer interaction in student activities that the students gain communicative skills, positive affective attitudes and experience in English language learning. Locating task, activity type and subject contents as mediational means in the activity system, and paying serious attention to the dynamic and situated nature of activity, student agency, and salient features of peer talk in task design and task implementation will afford teachers broader scope and flexibility to perceive, analyze and understand student activities.

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APPENDIX

Conventions of Transcription

Symbols	Meaning
Ss	Students
[ ]	Researcher's comments
(XX)	Uncertain hearing
(???)	Indecipherable utterances
.	Falling intonation followed by noticeable pause (as at the end of the declarative sentence)
(..)	Short pause
(…)	Medium pause of up to 5 seconds
(0.6/7/8…)	For waiting time longer than 5 seconds, the pause will be represented by figures showing the number of seconds involved. Waiting time longer than one minute will be (1.0) and so on
,	Continuing intonation
?	Rising intonation, usually in a question
!	High falling pitch showing exclamations

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Symbols	Meaning
:	Lengthened syllable (usually attached to vowels); extra colon indicates longer elongation
-	Self-halting, or abrupt cutoff
CAPS	Emphatic and strongly stressed utterances
=	Contiguous utterances or latching
//	Overlapping
< >	Utterances made with a greater voice volume compared with that of the preceding and following ones
A-B-C-D	Sounding out the letter names of a word
{....}	Untranscribed section of the excerpt
( )	Explanation of gestures or tone changes like smiling or laughing and so on
Italics	Putonghua (code-switching)
Bold	Cantonese (code-switching)
{ }	Translation of the code-switching
> <	Speech in a faster pace
___	Text provided (by the teacher or in the textbooks or other materials)

Note: This is based on Luk and Lin's (2007, p.219) "Conventions of Transcription"

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　　本书以"社会文化理论"，尤其是"活动理论"为框架，以广东省一所采取英语沉浸式教学的私立小学为个案，从学生的视角对我国英语沉浸式教学环境中活动对学生语言交流的介入作用进行研究。具体内容包括：学生活动类型和学生语言交流的特点；学生活动的多变性和灵活性以及学生在活动中表现出的主观能动性；学生活动介入的多层面性。研究结果可为中国的英语教学提供重要参考，并为任务型教学中教学活动的组织与参与提出有价值的建议。

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