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Teacher Cultures: In Search of their Contents and Forms

Chantarath Hongboontri[a*], Yiting Liao[b]

[a]chantarath.hon@mahidol.edu, Applied Linguistics Program, Mahidol University, Thailand
[b]yiting.lia@student.mahidol.edu, Applied Linguistics Program, Mahidol University, Thailand
[*]Corresponding author, chantarath.hon@mahidol.edu

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Abstract

This mixed-methods study aims to explore the patterns of teacher and their effects on teachers' lives and work. To do so, the researchers went into one international school in Thailand and requested participation from 25 foreign language (FL) teachers. All the participants completed and returned a questionnaire and participated in one-on-one interviews and observations. Calculation of the questionnaires with SPSS (version 20) demonstrated the participants' high favoritism of teachers' collegial relations. Nevertheless, the researchers' analysis of their descriptive data with open and axial coding techniques opposed the numeric data and strongly supported the existence of balkanization, individualism, and contrived collegiality

among these participants. The findings of the present study challenge (FL and other subject disciplines) teachers to consider the focus and the depth of teacher cultures. More importantly, they urge teachers, school administrators, and policy makers to anticipate the growing effects of teacher cultures on teachers' sense of professionalism related to their lives and work.

1. Introduction

In discussing the effects of teacher cultures on teachers' lives and work, Hargreaves (1994) defined teacher cultures as follows. They comprise "beliefs, habits, and assumed ways of doing things among communities of teachers who have had to deal with similar demands and constrains over many years" (Hargreaves, 1994, p. 165). Their effects on teachers are abundant. They shape and re-shape teachers, determine teachers' relationships with their colleagues, help teachers form their understandings of teaching, and select teaching strategies, to name only a few. In Hargreaves' own words;

> In this respect, teacher cultures, the relationships between teachers and their colleagues, are among the most educationally significant aspects of teachers' lives and work. They provide a vital context for teacher development and for the ways that teachers teach. What goes on inside the teacher's classroom cannot be divorced from the relations that are forged outside it. (p. 165)

Hargreaves and O'Connor (2017) further substantiated the reciprocal relationships between teacher cultures and teachers' lives and work. They wrote:

> [*Teacher cultures*] acknowledged that teaching was characterized by a distinctive culture in which adult relations were accorded great importance, and rivalry for success or students' affective was combined with a need for teachers to congregate and "talk shop". (Italics added, p. 74)

Given such the relationships, educational researchers and scholars have studied and clarified the reciprocal effects between teacher cultures and teachers' lives and work. Existing literature in the field of education has identified the intensification of teacher collaboration, teachers' instructional practices, and students' outcomes. Findings from Leana's (2011) study with 1,000 fourth and fifth grade mathematic teachers in New York assured the association between teacher collaboration and students' achievement. A three-year study of Day et al., (2007) with 300 teachers in 100 schools reached a similar conclusion. That is, there was an impact between teachers' strong collegial relations and students' outcomes. Ronfeldt et al. (2015) studied over 9,000 teachers in Miami Dade County public schools for more than two years and found the connection between teacher collaboration and student achievement. Results from Pella's (2020) study further validated the power dynamics between these two factors. That is, the more teachers worked together; the better in their instructional practices teachers could be; and the higher student outcome. Findings from Snyder and Bae's (2017) comparative study of four public schools in USA allowed them to conclude that through collaboration, teachers not only deepened their understandings about teaching and learning, but they also expanded their instructional repertoire. This contributed improvement in student learning. Findings from a more recent study of Villaviccencio etal (2021) that compared two schools in New York convincingly affirmed these relationships. Students in a school where teacher collaboration was promoted and sustained, could perform better than students from a school where fragmentation and isolation of teachers were dominant. These relationships, as some researchers claimed, were even more prevalent particularly in high-performing countries including Canada, Finland, Germany, and Singapore. (See, for example, Mora-Ruano et al., 2019; OECD, 2014; Quinter, 2017; Schleicher, 2016; Thomas et al., 2021.)

Research over the past decades has well documented the benefits of collaborative teacher cultures. Nonetheless, it has also portrayed the complexity of the induction of teacher collaboration especially in educational organizations where history of isolation and insulation of teachers has long existed, flourished, and prevailed (Gajda & Koliba, 2008; Hargreaves, 2010; Strong & Yoshida, 2014). With attempts to build and implement collaborative cultures, school administrators have opted

to the imposition of collaboration that requires teachers to meet and work together. Hence, this collegial cooperation (termed as contrived collegiality) could create more damages and disruptions to the implementation of true collaborative cultures in a school. At its worst, this collegial cooptation would overtime undermine elements needed for collaborative cultures and limit teachers' opportunities to learn and grow (Curry, 2008; Levine & Marcus, 2010; Little & Curry, 2009; Wood, 2007).

Because of their unique characteristics (Cambridge, 2004; Hayden & Thompson, 2011), the past decades have seen a flurry of interest among educational researchers in exploring the cultures of international schools and their effects on teachers. For example, Carter and McNulty's (2014) statistical data obtained from 20 teaching staff at one international school in Singapore correlated the relationships between teacher training and teachers' performances. They also called for administrators of international schools to offer trainings to their teachers to prepare teachers for classrooms with diverse cultures. Bailey and Gibson's (2020) interviews with 12 school principals of international schools in Malaysia not only narrated these principals' feelings of being unprepared for their principal role but also identified the difficulties of the job they had encountered. Roskell's (2013) study addressed and examined problems related to culture shock experienced by 12 teachers who moved to an international school in South East Asia. Findings reported in Lai et al. (2016)'s study with 14 Chinese language teachers highlighted the powerful roles of school cultures and structures. That is, they could enhance teacher efficacy which, in turn, led to an increase in teacher certainty as well as teacher professional development. A mixed-methods study of Blatti at al. (2019) with 100 expatriate teachers in one Shanghai international school regurgitated the association between teacher collaboration and students' outcomes. The more teachers collaborated, the more they shared their beliefs and their practices of teaching, and the better student achievement.

The complexity and interplay of teacher cultures and teachers' lives and work evident in the literature on education in the past decades has tempted a couple of Thai language education researchers to investigate teacher cultures and to document their effects on English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers in a Thai context. Findings of Hongboontri (2006), Hongboontri and Keawkhong (2014), Hongboontri and Jantayasakorn (2016), and Mongkolhutthi (2018) offered more or

less the same conclusions. That is, teacher cultures not only determined teacher interaction/communication with each other, but they also influenced what teachers decided to do or not to do in their classrooms. These research studies would have begun to scratch the surface of the relationships between teacher cultures and teachers' lives and work in Thailand. Nevertheless, these studies have been confined to the university EFL teachers and there is a dearth of research at the school level, let alone the international school sector. (The researchers' extensive review of previous research found one single study with a focus on teachers in an international school in Thailand. Deveney's (2007) conclusions drawn from a group of international teachers in one Thailand international school suggested that teachers could become more effective in their teaching providing that they received continuous supports from the school. In response to a trend toward the relationships between teacher cultures and teachers' lives and work that is globally pervasive, this current study aims at addressing this particular gap in research especially in a Thai context by examining factors that could facilitate or inhibit the creation of teacher cultures in the international school context in Thailand.

2. Conceptual Framework

Hargreaves' (1994) conceptual notions of teacher cultures helped frame the current study. Teacher cultures comprise two important dimensions: contents and forms. In fact, these two dimensions are closely interrelated. Contents revolve around shared beliefs and attitudes among teachers working in the same context. They basically determine the ways teachers interact and work with one another. Forms define patterns of relations and characteristics of interaction/communication among teachers in the same environment, and through forms, contents could then be delineated.

In essence, there are four forms of teacher cultures: (1) collaboration, (2) contrived collegiality, (3) balkanization, and (4) individualism. Over the years, collaboration has become one of the most focal points for researchers, educators, and practitioners whose interest aims toward school reform and teacher professional development. Collaboration provides teachers with great learning opportunities. Through collaboration, teachers could exchange expertise that would

lead to improved instructional skills and instructional quality, better students' outcomes, and ultimately successful school reform (Hargreaves, 2019; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2020; Fullan, 2001; Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996; Gore et al., 2017; Kelchtermans, 2006; Vangrieken et al., 2015). In collaborative cultures, teachers spontaneously and voluntarily cooperate; the nature of their cooperation is neither fixed nor deliberately designed or administrated. Teachers' purposes of working together are mainly to improve themselves and the outcomes are unpredictable. Contrived collegiality opposes collaboration in various aspects. It features the cooperative cultures that are administratively regulated to ensure interaction/communication among teachers (Hargreaves & Dawe, 1991). Cooperation among teachers, hence, is fixed in time and space and closely cooptated to assure the successful implementation of whatever mandated by the authorities. Outcomes are then foreseeable. Balkanization depicts the form of culture in which marginalization among teachers predominantly exists. Teachers form small groups and sub-groups in terms of personal identification (e. g., gender, ethnicity, social status, educational background, and subject disciplines, among many others). Membership to a group is rather permanent; mobility between groups is possible but rather rare. Groups and sub-groups are segregated from one another and could, under certain circumstances, compete against each other for limited resources and opportunities. Individualism describes insulated and isolated teachers who either value interdependency and solitude or seek their company within their students not only to assure their privacy but also to shield them from criticisms. Individualism could raise teachers' withdrawal from a context and lessen teachers' opportunities for professional development. With little (or no) development, teachers are forced to rely on traditional concepts and notions of teaching, authoritatively enforced doctrines, or their own past experience when forming their own teaching. (See Figure 1: The Relationships between Teacher Cultures and Teachers' Lives and Work for more details.)

3. Research Methodology

The researchers followed the notions of a mixed-methods paradigm. A mixed-methods paradigm is the combination of quantitative

and qualitative methods within a single study (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Maxwell, 2016; Teddlie & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Teddlie & Onwuegbuzie, 2011; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). In recent years, a mixed-methods paradigm has gained more popularity especially in language-related research studies. This is because by bringing together the two traditionally opposing research paradigms, researchers could more likely attain a more comprehensive understanding of and deeper knowledge into language-related issues (Riazi & Candlin, 2014).

3.1 The Research Context

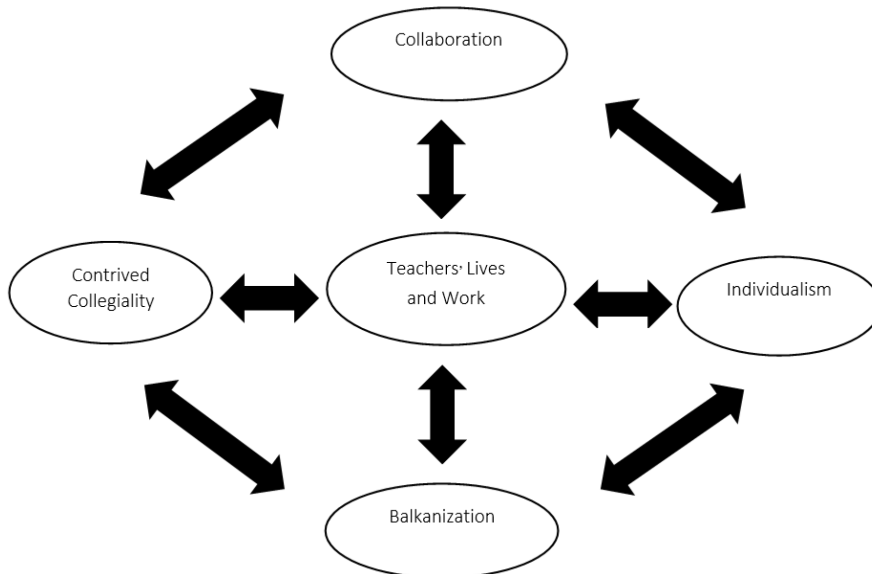
Peace International School (a pseudonym) was established in 2004 and located in Bangkok, Thailand. The school comprises four different sectors: nursery, kindergarten, primary, and secondary and its student population is 400. Five foreign languages are offered to its student including Arabic, Chinese, English, Thai, and Turkish.

3.2 Participants

In total, 25 foreign language (FL) teachers from *Peace International School* consented to participate in the study. 72% were female; 28% were male. The majority of them (56%) were between 40 - 60 years old; 32% were between 30 - 39 years old; and 12% were between 20 - 2 9 years old. The majority of the participants were expatriate (80%) whereas only 20% were Thai. In relation to their qualification, slightly more than half of the participants held a bachelor degree (60%); 40% held a master's degree. In addition, 52% had between 1 - 9 years of teaching experience; 20% had 10 - 1 4 years; and 28% had between 15 - 35 years. Most of the participants had less than 10 years of experience in their present school (76%); 24% had been teaching at *Peace International School* for more than 10 years. In terms of their teaching sector, 24% taught at the kindergarten level; 16% at the primary; 4% at the middle school; 8% at both kindergarten and primary; 8% at kindergarten, primary, and middle school; and 40% at both middle school and high school. The majority of the participants taught English (60%); 20% taught Thai; 12% taught Arabic; and 8% did Chinese. (See Table 1 for further details.)

Figure 1.

The Relationships Between Teacher Cultures and Teachers' Lives and Work



3.3 The Research Instruments

The researchers followed the notions of a mixed-methods paradigm and developed three data collection tools to gather data: (1) a questionnaire, (2) one-to-one interviews, and (3) observation.

3.3.1 A Questionnaire

The researchers borrowed the questionnaires of Kleinsasser (1993) and Hongboontri and Jantayasakorn (2016) and revised to create their own questionnaire to measure the teacher participants' perceptions of the teacher cultures in their workplace. The actual questionnaire consisted of two parts. Part one sought for the participants' demographic information including nationality, gender, educational background, and years of teaching experience. Part two contained 37 five-Likert scale items centralizing around four different forms of teacher cultures. Before its actual use, the questionnaire was piloted with 16 FL teachers in one

international school to measure its alpha co-efficiency. The questionnaire had a high alpha co-efficiency of .92. Hence, this meant that the questionnaire could well be used to measure teachers' perceptions of the forms of teacher cultures existed in their workplace (Bryman & Cramer, 1990).

Table 1

Teacher Participating in the Study: Demographic Characteristics

		N	%
Gender			
	Female	18	72
	Male	7	28
Age			
	(40 - 60)	14	56
	(30 - 39)	8	32
	(20 - 29)	3	12
Nationality			
	Expatriate	20	80
	Thai	5	20
Academic Degree			
	Bachelor	15	60
	Master's Degree	10	40
Years of Experience			
	(15 - 35)	7	28
	(10 - 14)	5	20
	(1 - 9)	13	52
Sectors of Teaching			
	Kindergarten	6	24
	Primary	4	16
	Middle School	1	4
	Kindergarten and Primary	2	8
	Kindergarten, Primary, and Middle	2	8
School		10	40
	Middle School and High School		
Language Taught		15	60
	English	5	20
	Thai	3	12
	Arabic	2	8
	Chinese		
		25	100

3.3.2 One-to-one Interviews

The one-to-one interview semi-structured protocol included questions related to teacher participants' descriptions regarding contents of teacher cultures within their workplace (Brown & Danaher, 2019; Roulston & Choi, 2018; Spradley, 1979; Tavory, 2020). Prior to the interviews, the researchers designed and developed a list of interview questions and tried it out with five FL teachers from one Thai international school. Based on their comments, the interview questions are reworded, reordered, and rearranged.

All actual interviews were conducted at *Peace International School*; 21 FL teachers agreed to be interviewed. Each interview lasted approximately between 30 and 45 minutes. With permission from the teacher participants, all interviews were audio-taped and notes were taken during the interviews. These recorded interviews and field-notes were later transcribed in verbatim for further analysis.

3.3.3 Observations

The researchers also observed departmental meetings and teachers' interaction/communication in the staffroom. These gathered data would allow the researchers to build a more complete understanding of issues under current investigation (Cohen & Goldhaber, 2016).

Of total, nine departmental meetings and 12 visits to the staffroom were conducted. During observations, field-notes were documented in the observational protocol borrowed from Hongboontri and Jantayasakorn (2016). These field-notes were transcribed for further analysis.

3.3.4 The Data Collection Procedures

After receiving signed consent forms from teachers, the researchers contacted the teachers who volunteered to participate in the study. The questionnaire was first administered and collected within two weeks. (All teacher participants agreed to complete a questionnaire.) Then, the researchers made appointments with 21 teacher participants

who consented for one-to-one interviews. Observations were conducted throughout the data collection process.

3.3.5 Data Analysis

All the completed and returned questionnaires were tallied, tabulated, and analyzed statistically with the use of SPSS (version 20). Statistical means ($\overline{x}$) and standard deviation (SD) of elements in each cluster were computed and then clustered in to groups.

Then, the process of qualitative data analysis was undertaken according to Strauss and Corbin's (1990) open and axial coding techniques. All transcribed interview data and field-notes from both one-to-one interviews and observations of departmental meetings and teachers' interaction/communication in the staffroom were read and re-read to look for both common themes as well as differences (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015). Key themes and sub-themes arising from the analyzed descriptive data were identified in terms of the teacher participants' descriptions of their daily routines, their relations with other colleagues within their workplace, and their classroom practices. Both of these themes were then labelled according to Hargreaves' (1994) four forms of teacher cultures. In order to avoid subjectivity, this process of data analysis was completed by both researchers.

Then, both analyzed quantitative and qualitative data were compared and contrasted in terms of consistency, inconsistency, and contrast. In doing so, these two data sets could better depict the existence of teacher cultures within the FL Department of *Peace International School* (Fielding, 2014; Kane et al., 2002; Mathison, 1988; Metz, 2000; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009).

3.3.6 Ethical Considerations

The researchers cautiously followed several procedures to protect their research participants. First, the researchers applied for an ethical clearance for their research from their home university. When the ethical clearance was approved and granted, the researchers contacted the principal of *Peace International School* and sought permission for data collection. All FL teachers at the school were requested to participate in the study. The teachers who consented to the study were

assured that their privacy and confidentiality were priority and would be protected at all cost (Eisner, 2017).

4. Findings

The findings from the present research are presented below according to the key themes of Hargreaves' (1994) four forms of teacher cultures. Importantly, the statistical data indicate the extent to which the teacher participants agreed or disagreed with the existence of activities relating to the teacher cultures within their workplace. Furthermore, the analyzed descriptive data depict the forms of the teacher cultures existed in this workplace as well as clarify the effects of such the cultures on the teacher participants' lives and work. Quotations used to illustrate the forms of teacher cultures and their effects are drawn from the one-to-one interviews with the teacher participants and the researchers' observational field-notes of these teacher participants' departmental meetings and their interaction/communication with each other in the staffroom.

4.1 Perceptions of Their Workplace Relations

The teacher participants were required to rate the frequency of their cooperation with other teachers within their department and their preference/favoritism of such these activities. (See Table 2 for more details.) The two highest rated activities were sharing of information with either other teachers or their coordinators ($\bar{x}$ = 4.16). These teacher participants mutually engaged in exchanging assistance and support as they agreed that they could learn more from one another ($\bar{x}$ = 4.05). Regularly the respondents shared not only problems but also failures and successes related to their teaching with their colleagues ($\bar{x}$ = 4.00). They preferred working in teams with other teachers ($\bar{x}$ = 3.95). Also they sought ways to improve their instructional practices from their colleagues ($\bar{x}$ = 3.89). (See Table 3 for more details.)

The computed responses also demonstrated some perspectives of teacher cooperation that these teacher participants least likely agreed with. They disagreed that they needed to conform with other teachers ($\bar{x}$ = 2.42). They rarely believed that teamwork would suppress their individuality ($\bar{x}$ = 2.58). Nor did they agree that their offering of assistance

to other teachers meant that they were more competent than other teachers ($\overline{x}$ = 2.63). Occasionally, they agreed that teacher cooperation could reduce teachers' workload ($\overline{x}$ = 2.95). From time to time, they shared instructional problems with their course coordinators as well as offered advice to other teachers about their teaching ($\overline{x}$ = 3.37). (See Table 4 for more details.)

4.2 Contents and Forms of Teacher Cultures

Subsequent analysis depicted the forms of teacher cultures that existed in *Peace International School*'s Department of Foreign Languages. Emerged from the researchers' analysis of their descriptive data (gathered from one-to-one interviews and observations) were three forms of teacher cultures; i.e., (1) balkanization, (2) individualism, and (3) contrived collegiality. These three forms of teacher cultures would be described through the researchers' exploration and comparison of their descriptive data.

4.2.1 Balkanization

When asked about the work relations among the teachers in this Department of Foreign Languages, three participants (*Ken*, *Flora*, and *Amy*) recurrently mentioned the friendliness of the teachers and the abilities to socialize and to interact with all the teachers in this specific workplace.

Ken highly valued the relationships among the teachers in the Department; he described the patterns of such the relationships in this manner.

> Teachers here are friendly, courteous, and helpful. We have a closer working relationship with one another. We have mutual respect of one another. We have a good opinion of one another. I never see anybody that's been really in any squabble with a colleague.

Suffice it to say, these three teacher participants had positive perceptions of their colleagues. However, the researchers' further analysis of their descriptive data yielded patterns of balkanization

instigated by the organizational structures of *Peace International School* and its Department of Foreign Languages and the participants' identification. In essence, these patterns of balkanization were built around: (1) teacher nationalities, (2) subject identification, and (3) sections of teaching.

Nationalities

Nationality differences of these teacher participants led these participants into forming sub-communities in terms of their nationalities and cultural beliefs. These participants were attached to their sub-communities within which most of their work relations and daily socialization were contained as well as defined. Accounts of three English language teachers were evocative of such the division.

Table 2

Teachers' Perceptions of their Work Relations

Items	$\bar{x}$	SD
When I think other teachers need some advice or information, I share it with them.	4.16	1.01
I learn more from other teachers.	4.05	0.71
The coordinator encourages me to talk about instructional skills.	3.63	1.07
I believe that collaborative ways of working are being used as an administrative strategy to achieve conformity amongst staff.	3.84	0.96
I work with other teachers in designing or evaluating materials, curriculum units, and other teaching activities.	3.79	1.08
I regularly do instructional problem solving with the coordinator.	3.37	0.83
I can get good help or advice from the coordinator when I have a teaching problem.	3.79	1.08
I feel more confident teaching in team.	3.79	0.79
I give help and support to other teachers when they are having problems in their teaching.	4.05	0.97
I work collaboratively in teams with other teachers.	3.95	0.97
I do not offer advice to others about their teaching unless I am asked.	3.37	0.90
The coordinator encourages me to try out new teaching ideas.	3.53	0.90
When I think the head of department needs some advice or information, I share it with him or her.	3.74	0.81
I regularly share teaching problems with other teachers.	4.00	0.82
I regularly do instructional problem solving with the head of department.	3.42	0.90

Other teachers seek my advice about professional issues and problems.	3.79	0.79
The coordinator encourages other teachers to talk about instructional skills.	3.53	1.02
I feel constrained as an individual by the group.	2.58	0.96
When I am uncertain about how best to proceed in teaching, I go to other teachers for assistance.	3.89	0.74
I regularly share teaching problems with the coordinator.	3.47	0.90
I feel safe to share successes and failures with other teachers.	4.00	0.75
I work more effectively in a team and feel more assertive with group support.	3.84	1.07
If another teacher asks me for advice, it implies that I am more competent than he or she is.	2.63	1.07
When I think the coordinator needs some advice or information, I share it with him or her.	4.16	0.83
In the school, teachers share successes and failures.	4.00	0.75
I provide and receive moral support from other teachers.	4.05	0.78
I can get good help or advice from the head of department when I have a teaching problem.	4.05	0.91
I reduce my workload by sharing jobs with other teachers.	2.95	0.62
Other teachers come to me for help or advice when they need it.	3.89	0.66
I regularly share teaching ideas or material with other teachers.	3.74	0.65
I feel pressured to conform with other teachers.	2.42	0.61
I regularly share teaching problems with the head of department.	3.47	1.02
I can get good help or advice from other teachers when I have a teaching problem.	3.79	0.71
The coordinator encourages other teachers to try out new teaching ideas.	3.58	1.07
I feel part of a "learning community" which values shared responsibility for opening learning.	3.89	0.81
I regularly do instructional problem solving with other teachers.	3.47	0.96
Teachers in my department/section participate in developing appropriate instructional methods and techniques in foreign language teaching.	3.74	0.87

(N = 25)

> Honestly, if you look at the cafeteria during lunchtime, maybe this is a sad thing. There's a Filipino table. There is a Chinese table. There is an American table. There is a Turkish table. I don't sit at the Filipino table. I don't sit at the Chinese table. I talk to the English teachers a whole lot more than I talked to other people. (*Roger*)
>
> I have very little contact with the Chinese or the Arabic Department. We never have anything in common. (*Daniel*)
>
> It is just very separate. For example, the Turkish teachers are a big group; Filipino teachers are another group. Teachers are in their own little groups and they tend to

stick together. These groups very rarely combine. You do what you do and we do what we do. (*Claire*)

Table 3

Five Most Favored Activities

Items	$\bar{x}$	SD
When I think other teachers need some advice or information, I share it with them.	4.16	1.01
When I think the coordinator needs some advice or information, I share it with him or her.	4.16	0.83
I learn more from other teachers.	4.05	0.71
I give help and support to other teachers when they are having problems in their teaching.	4.05	0.97
I provide and receive moral support from other teachers.	4.05	0.78
I can get good help or advice from the head of department when I have a teaching problem.	4.05	0.91
I regularly share teaching problems with other teachers.	4.00	0.82
I feel safe to share successes and failures with other teachers.	4.00	0.75
In the school, teachers share successes and failures.	4.00	0.75
I work collaboratively in teams with other teachers.	3.95	0.97
When I am uncertain about how best to proceed in teaching, I go to other teachers for assistance.	3.89	0.74
Other teachers come to me for help or advice when they need it.	3.89	0.66
I feel part of a "learning community" which values shared responsibility for opening learning.	3.89	0.61

(N = 25)

Table 4

Five Least Favored Activities

Items	$\bar{x}$	SD
I regularly do instructional problem solving with the coordinator.	3.37	0.83
I do not offer advice to others about their teaching unless I am asked.	3.37	0.90
I reduce my workload by sharing jobs with other teachers.	2.95	0.62
If another teacher asks me for advice, it implies that I am more competent than he or she is.	2.63	1.07
I feel constrained as an individual by the group.	2.58	0.96
I feel pressured to conform with other teachers.	2.42	0.61

(N = 25)

Interview responses from two Chinese language teachers and three Thai language teachers affirmed that the division among the FL teachers in this school was primarily owned to differences in teacher nationalities and cultural beliefs. These differences contained and defined teachers' work attitudes and ethics to some extent.

> I often interact with Eastern teachers. My contact with Western teachers is very little. (*Emily*, Chinese language teacher)
>
> Every country has its own culture. Cultural differences lead to different trust and understanding between people. For example, I trust Emily more because we are both Chinese. I also connect with other Asian teachers more and I also understand them more because our cultures are similar. Because of cultural differences, I have regular contact with neither European nor American teachers. We have different views and identity on individual issues. (*Tracey*, Chinese language teacher)
>
> Many groups - Turkish, Thai, English…So many groups of teachers. I think Asian groups are good to work with. (*Vera*, Thai language teacher)
>
> Sometimes you will see teachers sitting in groups like Chinese with Chinese, Turkish with Turkish, Arabian with Arabian, Thais with Thais, and English with English. (*Flora*, Thai language teacher)
>
> They gather in groups mostly according to their nationalities, natives, languages, cultures, and religions. (*Hannah*, Thai language teacher)

Subject Identification

Interestingly, most of the teacher participants admitted of their close identification with their subjects. Because of this, they excluded and distanced themselves from teachers outside of their subjects. Their work relations with other teachers were minimal as well as limited. Four English language teachers stressed strong work relations among the English language teachers. Among these teachers existed frequent

mutual engagement into sharing of classroom-related problems and exchanging if assistance and advice in addressing such the problems.

> Teachers in the English Department constantly and simultaneously talk and work together. We eat lunch together; we have a group line in which we use to keep contact with one another. We talk about problems within the classroom and problems with particular students, we talk about how to deal with school administrators and school administration. We observe each other in the classrooms. (*Roger*)

> We have our meetings. We are very kind to each other; we try to help each other sharing our suggestions. There are a couple things we do together, like the English week. We all bring in all our different ideas of what we want to do and combine them altogether for the English week. I never ever work with other teachers. (*Daniel*)
> Teachers in this English Department are very tight. They know everything about each other. And it is easy to talk with other teachers. I've learned a lot about my own students from talking with these teachers. This gives a sense of community. Also it makes me feel comfortable and week come as a part of the team. (*Bruce*)

> I feel that these English teachers are motivated and committed to their job. We are here because we actually care about the kids and really want them to have these experiences and learn new things, not just for a job or a work permit. Every day we talk about works; we discuss the direction and the management of the English program; we plan the program schedules and things to do during the class; and we discuss our tests and midterms. (*Claire*)

Surprisingly, quite more than a few teacher participants also spoke of good working relations between FL teachers and homeroom teachers, despite the difference in their subject identification. These teachers stressed that they had been sharing especially students' behavioral problems in their classrooms with the homeroom teachers. This was because these homeroom teachers knew more about the students as they spent more time with the students.

> I share students' behavioral problems and attitudes with this homeroom teacher. She knows more about the students. I have them one or two times a week while she is with them all the time. It's good to share with her what happens in my classes as she sometimes tells me how to discipline them. (*Olivia*, Arabic language teacher)

> I once had no idea what to do with this boy in my class. He was very active and couldn't sit still. So I went to a homeroom teacher and shared this problem with her. She then told me something about the student and gave me some suggestions on how to deal with him. She knew a lot about the student. (*Vera*, Thai language teacher)

> There's been an exchange of ideas between language teachers and homeroom teachers on students' problems. We've often checked with one another regarding students' performance issues. 'How do they perform?' 'What is going on in your class?' 'Why did this happen?' 'How could I help to make this better?' 'Do you want to set up a meeting?' 'How could we best approach these boys?' These are kinds of things that we do in order to help students with their learning. (*Ken*, English language teacher and homeroom teacher)

Sectors of Teaching

Further, the teacher participants were asked to describe the types of work relations they had with other FL teachers in the Department. Instead, most of them spoke of the lack of teacher collaboration across the Department. They stressed that the existing departmental structures had overridden teachers' opportunities for cooperation but widened the demarcation among the teachers.

> Kindergarten, Primary, and middle school are not dealing with each other at all. They are very different from each other. Different time, different schedule, different subjects, different sections. The types of students they are dealing with are different for example.0 They are primary; they are middle school. I don't think we ever have time to work with each other. (*Olivia*, Arabic language teacher)

> The school consists of kindergarten, primary, middle school, and high school. It's pretty segregated. I don't really talk to teachers from another sector. I never talk to Jack or Mika from the Kindergarten sector. There's also a bunch of teachers I haven't met. Yesterday, for example, was an International Day and it was the first time I met Lily – a primary teacher. (*Bruce*, English language teacher)

> And then there's a primary school. I don't know their names. I don't know who they are. I never talk to them. So, there's very little interaction. I spend most of my time with the teachers in my sector. I don't really work with teachers from different sectors. I don't think we're all the same page here. (*Claire*, English language teacher)

> After the school decided to divide us into separate sectors, we no longer have that strong teamwork. When we ask some primary teachers, they don't know any kindergarten or high school teachers. (*Flora*, Thai language teacher)

> Teachers from different sectors do not really know one another. They know teachers in their sectors but they don't really know teachers from different groups. (*Penny*, English language teacher)

As these quotations illustrated, there occurred very little (or almost no) collaboration between teachers from different sectors due mainly to the school's existing organizational structures. Interview responses from several English language teachers revealed the tensions they needed to cope with in their daily working lives as teachers in this specific Department of Foreign Languages. *Wendy*, a primary sector English language teacher, complained:

> We talk often but we are, I would say, totally divided in terms of working. There are groups of kindergarten teachers, primary teachers, and high school teachers. Hardly ever we discuss teaching. Nor we exchange things like teaching materials.

Bitter with the marginalization, *Bella*, a kindergarten sector English language teacher, vented:

> I don't know about the teamwork here. There's a lot of misalignment here. When the term first started, I actually wanted everyone to come together and planned what we wanted to do together. Then we would know the expectation of each other. But that didn't happen. I am doing one thing; that teacher is doing anything.

A little later, the same teacher continued:

> I only share things with the other two kindergarten English language teachers, *Alice* and *Joy*. I often ask for their help and advice.

The other three kindergarten English language teachers spoke of challenges they had to deal with in their Department to overcome such the marginalization.

> All the three kindergarten English teachers were close. We exchange a lot of things. I work a lot with Bella as the students in her class were with me last year. She often shares with me what she did and asks for my suggestions on how to approach these students. Also we share teaching resources and class activities. I cannot go to primary teachers and ask about some activities. This is mainly because those activities will not be applicable for my classroom. By the same token, they could not come to me either. (*Alice*)

> Sometimes I get invited to the secondary sector English teachers' meetings. I am in the primary sector so most of the issues have nothing to do with me. I don't really then go. Teachers in the kindergarten sector have their own things and issues. So it is like the kindergarten sector on one side, the secondary on another side, and primary on another side. (*Rick*)

> We need to help each other. Otherwise, the job would be harder. (*Joy*)

The researchers' observational data affirmed the common practice of balkanization within this particular school. On a typical daily basis, teachers were seen interacting and socializing. Nonetheless, their interaction and socialization were as well defined by other boundaries

that delineated territories for these teachers. They were such as nationalities, subject identification, and sectors of teaching. In the school refectory during lunch, these teachers were seen sitting in groups but at different tables tacitly demarcated by their nationalities. There were English tables, Chinese tables, and Thai tables. Especially for the English language teachers, these tables were also implicitly assigned in terms of sectors of teaching. Under no circumstances was there ever a mixture.

The records of the observed meetings of this Department of Foreign Languages showed that topics mentioned in the meetings oftentimes revolved around problems of the students and the management of students' behaviors in the classrooms. Hardly ever brought up in the meetings was discussion of either school or departmental goals or pedagogical knowledge or the quality and dedication of the teaching staff. In the observed meetings, issues dominated the discussions mostly centralized around students' behavioral problems in the classrooms and how to manage such the problems. In one meeting, *Vera* and *Emily* were complaining about the disruptive behaviors of several students in their classes. Their complaints triggered other teachers to voice their concerns of students' behavioral problems. Several options were proposed to address these complaints. Hardly were other issues relating to teaching and learning brought up in the meeting.

The descriptive data indicated three reasons for balkanization in the Department of Foreign Languages of *Peace International School*. They were teachers' nationalities, subject identification, and sectors of teaching. Marginalization among these teacher participants led to insufficient work relations. Abundant were teachers' daily interaction/communication for socialization purposes. However, what lacked was teachers' mutual engagement into sharing and exchanging ideas related to pedagogical knowledge or teaching materials. As a consequence, teachers' opportunities for professional development were not only limited, but they were also depleted.

Individualism

Three English language teachers from the primary sector (*Dora*, *Rick*, and *Lily*) spoke of their practices of individualism within this particular context. Their individualistic patterns of working, as the

explained, were a response to their daily work-routines. To some extent, endless work schedules that these three teachers had set for themselves and that others had planned (and sometimes delegated) for them pressured and obligated all the three teachers to seek their lone time to plan and prepare their teaching. As a consequence, they taught alone behind closed doors in their insulated environment of their own classrooms. *Lily* was the only English teacher for the first-grade primary sector. Hence, she could independently make any judgments for her own teaching. She explained:

> There's only one 1st grade; and I am the only first grade teacher. Dora is doing the second grade; and Ken is doing the third. We three are by ourselves; and we are independent. We each have our own plan to cover.

Another primary sector English language teacher, *Dora*, felt that teacher collaboration was rather a preference, not an obligation. She argued:

> If the teaches say something like, 'Let's work together,' I think it's just up to an individual. It's all about what teachers want to do. It's definitely about the teachers' time and their style to work with other people.

This particular teacher had been assigned to teach a new class; she had to design and develop a new curriculum for this new class. *Dora* felt pressured and needed much time to cope with these immediate demands. Hence, she considered her preparation time as valuable and precious. In her own words;

> I am now teaching Grade 2. There was nothing from the previous teacher. Then, there's a lot more work. I need to restructure and rewrite from what the school has.

Asked if she preferred to work with other teachers, *Dora* stopped to think for a few seconds and went on saying:

> If I've got everything done, then I would feel more comfortable and way better. Then I would find more time

> to work with other teachers. But now I am still running things and see how things work.

Rick allocated most of his time for teaching preparation. He valued and emphasized professional obligations which, in turn, led to improvements in his instruction. Such the obligations insofar as had ridden *Rick* of the opportunities to collaborate with other teachers.

> I'm usually busy like planning about writing unit plans, getting all the units for the whole semester, editing, preparing assessments, looking at the rubrics for assessment. I also teach literally all day, like six to seven teaching hours. Given all these, I kind of going over in my mind all the time what I'm going to teach them and what I'm going to say.

Rick's view of cooperating with other teachers corroborated that of *Dora*; he contended:

> I want to interact and to work with other teachers. But it's just hard to find the time. I am exhausted. So it's like, maybe tomorrow I find the time to say 'Hi,' or something.

So vigilant in the observational field-notes was these three teachers' recurrent isolation of themselves from their colleagues. During recess and lunch, they were frequently seen either in their offices or in their classrooms preparing for their teaching. Rarely did they spend time in the staffroom with other teachers.

These data sets pointed to teachers' practices of the culture of individualism within this particular context. In this international school, individuality did exist as a constrained response to professional demands as well as daily contingencies of the work environment. In response to the growing demands of their work, the three English language teachers strategically chose to work alone even though they were aware of the potential of working collaboratively with other teachers. More importantly, these data demanded a fresher look into teacher individuality. That is, under certain circumstances, teacher individuality was rather a preference or a choice that teachers made due to some obligations. Neither was it a social constraint, nor a social obligation, or lack of opportunity.

4.2.3 Contrived Collegiality

In this particular workplace, contrived collegiality could be seen in a school imposition on its FL teachers to participate in various activities the school administrators had organized. These activities were, for example, (1) mandated preparation time use, (2) peer observation/coaching, and (3) planned extra-curricular activities.

Mandated Preparation Time Use

At its best, mandated preparation time use enabled teachers to meet, exchange, discuss, and plan together. *Olivia* explained:

> The management of the middle school sector requires all language teachers to work together. So we meet and set our unit plans, topics, and exercises, basically everything.

The other two middle sector Arabic language teachers reverberated *Olivia*. *Amy* stated:

> The consultants of the middle school sector asked us to make all these languages into one unit including Chinese, Thai, Arabic, and Turkish. We are working together to write the unit plan.

Rose added:

> Teachers of Arabic, Turkish, Chinese, and Thai are working together on this one unit. We consider the main key concept and looking at our resources.

A Chinese language teacher, *Tracey*, concluded:

> The unit that we are creating, though different in terms of languages, have the same outlines, the same topics, and the same worksheet.

Nevertheless, these teachers further stated that such the preparation time was not the best time to plan. The time allocated to the preparation itself was inadequate; the time set for the meeting for the

preparation was rigid; the preparation was time consumption. Worst of all, the preparation was not voluntary, but rather administratively mandated. *Olivia* openly complained of the too short time given to the preparation.

> They told us about this a couple of days ago and wanted this done within one week. How could this be possible? I think this is a huge task and we couldn't accomplish this within the time frame.

A little later, the same teacher went on.

> The time that we could manage to allocate for each meeting is also not enough. We could do only an hour or an hour and a half a day; we also have other things to do like teaching our classes. Hence, preparation time was rather used more to put things together. Discussions are just few and far between.

Tracey's response attacked the rigidity of the time the school administrators had allocated for the preparation. With more vehemence than that of *Olivia*, *Tracey* vociferously criticized:

> This meeting is planned and set by the administrators; attending is mandatory for those teaching Chinese, Arabic, Thai, and Turkish. It is very clear that these administrators do not have any knowledge of our teaching schedules. All of us have very heavy schedules; I am teaching four hours a day; other teachers are doing more or less the same. Busy teaching schedules give many of us little opportunity to meet with other teachers at those pre-arranged times.

All these four teachers similarly complained about the mandated preparation time being time consuming and robbing their time for individual preparation for their own classes. Having been concerned with preparation for her own classes, *Amy* shared:

> The time that I could spend on my own preparation now needs to be given to that arranged meeting. I used to have at least one hour in between classes to prepare things for my next class such as photocopying, arranging work area for the students, or preparing some activities. Now that

> whole hour is gone, I only have 25 minutes left. It takes time to get things done.

Rose had similar concerns; she admitted:

> I would go to the meeting but only stay for a couple of minutes. Usually I say, 'I could do this job and that job, and then I leave. I need to get back to my own preparation.'

Olivia wanted more time for her own preparation. Nonetheless, her responsibility as the head of the Arabic Department required her presence and participation in a meeting. She needed to do her own planning at other times, perhaps during lunch, after school, or at home.

> There are times that I want to leave the meeting, so I can focus on my own work. But because I am the head of the Arabic sector; I have to stay. Now I find myself spend less time for lunch; I then could have time for my own planning. Nowadays, I am taking more work back home. Something likes marking.

Peer Observation/Coaching

Another school-arranged activity in which elements of contrived collegiality were evident was peer observation/coaching. Usually peer observation/coaching is a process that involves two or more teachers. Teachers would be working together either in pairs or in groups to help each other improve their teaching-related skills. The participating teachers spoke of their mandated practices of peer observation/coaching in this particular Department of Foreign Languages. *Allen* explained:

> The school is implementing it right now and it will be mandatory for us all. We will be given a form to fill in and the topics of observation are very specific such as teaching and learning objectives.

Daniel described the process:

> We observe each other three of four times a semester. We visit and observe each other classes. While observing, we

> would write comments of what we see, what we learn, and what we could share with the teachers we've observed.

Lily stressed:

> We are asked to observe each other. Then we could give each other some formal reflections and improvements, stuff like that. There is an evaluation sheet that we could tick off, like a checklist of good points about that teacher.

The majority of the sample teacher participants in the study voiced criticisms about this mandated peer observation/coaching in terms of lack of consultation in the selection of partners and lack of reflection from teacher partners. *Roger* reflected on the involuntary partnership he had encountered.

> I have been paired with a Chinese teacher from a primary sector. We are teaching different sectors. The ways she manages her classes are different from what I do. I don't think she would understand in how I choose to manage my classes in that way. I doubt whether her observations would be useful to me.

A response from the Chinese language teacher who was paired with *Roger*, *Tracey*, corroborated this view.

> I've been assigned to observe Roger's English classes. He's teaching a high school sector. I don't think we're a good match as we are quite different from each other.

The issues of the involuntary partnership were recurrent in the interview responses.

> The school comes up with the program that it hopes to create and promote collaboration among its teachers. However, the nature of the involuntary partnership diverges its primary goal. I don't think there is actual collaboration happening. (*Penny*)

> An image of collaboration has been created through this organized activity; it looks like we are working together and help each other become better teachers. However, the

> reflections that I receive from my partnered teacher are little useful for me. Her reflections are either 'good,' 'great,' or 'interesting.' We rarely sit down together and discuss and exchange our comments. (*Dora*)

> The school's pairing strategy actually increases ambiguity among its teachers. I am teaching Arabic but I am paired with an English teacher. I sat in her teaching once. I had no idea what went on in that two hours. What she did in her class was totally different from me. (*Rose*)

> I have been paired with one newly hired English teacher. I have no idea why the school decided to pair me with him in the first place. I don't really know him; we never talk. I don't know how this will play out. (*Vera*)

> I don't think I get anything out of this peer observation. Nor does the teacher who has been paired with me. It would have been more useful if you were paired with the teacher who is either teaching the same language or teaching the same sector. Then, the teachers would have got more out of this activity. (*Claire*)

> I think the partnering system needs to be better managed. There're some personality problems with quite a few partnered teachers there. The people responsible for this partnering need to be a bit more careful when putting teachers together. That's my personal feeling. (*Hannah*)

School's Planned Activities

The school's arrangements of its planned activities and its mandatory on its teachers to participate manifested the existence of contrived collegiality at *Peace International School*'s Department of Foreign Languages. These activities were another strategic plan the school administrators had invented to endorse and promote collaboration among its teachers as teachers were required to meet and to work together. However, interview responses showed that teacher collaboration was, in fact, at stake here. Meetings were obligated; and only few teachers were able to attend. *Roger* was happy when the school's International Day activity ended. Meetings to prepare the International Day often collided with teaching schedules. As a result, he needed to re-schedule the teaching schedules of some English language

teachers so they could represent the English Department in the meetings. *Roger* surmised:

> The school has an idea to promote the nature of working together among its teachers. For example, for its International Day activity, the school will put teachers from different subjects together so they could work together and create activities such as games or shows for the International Day. To do so, the school needs to, I think, give teachers time to meet. Then, they can get to know one another, and sit and plan together. But what the school does is to set meetings in particular places and at particular times. What I need to do as a Head of the English Program is to look at the teaching schedules of all the English teachers and then assign which teachers could attend and on what day. These meetings are mandatory. But it is impossible for all the teachers to attend the meetings.

Claire was against administrative contrivance to foster teacher collaboration within the school. The activities that the school had initiated and imposed were not only disrespectful of teachers' professionalism, but they also were a threat to practical collaborative cultures.

> Every year we are required to participate in team-building activities on the school's team-building day which is usually scheduled during the first week of the school's academic year. We are divided into teams. We play games, something like an ice-breaking activity, so we could get to know each other. It hopes that this could make teachers work together. But activities seem to widen the separation among the teachers and to stress the polarization. Segregation still pretty much exists here. There is a table of Chinese, a table of Turkish, a table of Thais, a table of English. Also, we do not see ourselves as teachers in general. We are kindergarten teachers, primary school teachers, high school teachers, English teachers, Chinese teachers. We smile to each other; we say 'Hi;' we nod. But we share nether ideas on teaching nor materials or activities regarding teaching.

Similarly, *Emily* did not approve of the school imposition that required absolute participation from all the teachers. Teacher

collaboration could rarely be inaugurated unless the school had addressed the issues involving its existing organizational structures and cultural diversities and distinctions among its teachers. She complained:

> The school has literally come up with lots of activities to make teachers work together and help each other. We attend the meetings whenever we're required to. But nothing ever happens in the meetings. Chinese teachers sit together; Thai teachers are in another corner; middle sector English teachers are together. I don't think we ever get anything from the peer observation/coaching. I myself never get any feedback from the Arabic teacher that I have been partnered with. After each observation, I've received a completed form from her, but there is nether feedback nor discussion whatsoever.

The researchers' observational data were in accordance with these interview responses. In the meetings about the preparation for a school event in which attending was mandatory, only few teachers had attended. This was because the time that these administratively facilitated and mandated meetings clashed with the teaching schedules of many of the teachers. The less the teachers attended, the shorter of the time were the meetings. Sharing and exchanging of ideas were little (almost never) witnessed. Mostly seen in the meetings were the dividing up of the work involved and the allocating of the responsibilities.

Drawn from these data was the existence of contrived collegiality. Because of the administrative cooptation, the teachers may be seen working together on the surface. However, these teachers rarely collaborated. Almost all the teacher participants vociferously criticized the school's organized activities for being centralized and mandated without being sensitive to the school's existing organizational structures and differences among the teachers.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

In general, the study reported in this paper not only defines contents and forms of teacher cultures, but it also stresses the complexities and tensions teacher cultures bring to teachers' lives and work. These complexities and tensions are portrayed through the lens of earlier studies in similar issues.

Findings from this study identify three types of Hargreaves' (1994) four forms of teacher cultures; they are (1) balkanization, (2) individualism, and (3) contrived collegiality. (Collaboration, however, is neither witnessed nor documented.) The majority of the teacher participants admitted that they balkanized into groups and sub-groups in terms of nationalities, subject identification, and sectors of teaching. Teachers' memberships to these groups and sub-groups were rather permanent. Their mobility might be possible, but rather atypical.

Moreover, the nature and dynamic of some participants' interaction/communication with other teachers also depicted the existence of individualized cultures. Drawn from the data were reasons for teacher individualization. They were issues of workplace conditions and teachers' preferred work strategies. In particular, a couple of these teacher participants highlighted the interplay of factors such as school's administrative plans, workload, job responsibilities and expectations, and personal preferences as key factors for their practice of individualism.

In addition, the school administrators of *Peace International School* instigated school's top-down policies with attempts to mandate teacher collaboration within the context. Under certain circumstances, the teachers were required to meet and to work together. However, this deliberately imposed professional collaboration literally backfired the school. Collaboration that was forced and imposed actually reduced teachers' motivation to work together. The participants showed little commitment to school's organized activities; participation was low; and the teachers tacitly made agreement with one another and delegated workload instead of working together in joint work as originally designed.

Findings from this study are in line with earlier research which has well argued the reciprocity between teacher cultures and teachers' lives and work. Recent years have therefore witnessed growing support and advocacy for the implementation of teacher collaborative cultures as benefits of teacher collaboration particularly on teacher professional development and better student outcome. Research on these topics has been extensively overwhelmed. However, despite much evidence, collaboration among teachers rarely exists. This is because "teaching has been rooted in a culture of individualism" (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2017, p. 82) and teachers usually work in isolation in their classrooms and insulate themselves in their egg-crate offices (Lortie, 1975). Vangrieken and Kyndt (2020) identify factors causing individualistic cultures. They

are: teachers' daily contingencies, school structures, time, and relations among colleagues. Drawing on a South African context, Bantwini (2019) identifies teachers' practice of individuality. He warns that the more teachers hinge on their own privacy, the less teachers would improve their instructional repertoire. Sutton and Knuth (2020) conclude from their data that teacher individualism hinders teacher professional development and immobilizes schools from moving forward. This is in line with earlier research which has described the effects of individualistic teacher cultures particularly on newly qualifies teachers. Williams, et al. (2001) conclude that individualism strips new teachers from their opportunities for development. In a similar vein, findings of Darling-Hammond et al.'s (2020) and Avalos-Bevan and Bascopé's (2017) echo those of William et al.; that is, individualism deprives teachers of improvement and professional growth.

Moreover, the data collected among FL teachers working in *Peace International School* also confirm and reinforce research about the causes and the effects of balkanization teacher cultures. Balkanization especially of subject identification could, as Berhanu (2019) warns, proliferate exclusion and segregation among teachers in the same workplace. Worse yet, such the feelings could trigger a lessening interest in teachers' own work, burn out, and an absence of school connection and sense of belongingness (Curry, 2008; Laureano et al., 2014; Liggett, 2010; Richards et al., 2018; Rosenholtz, 1991; Spicer & Robinson, 2021). In Rosenholtz's (1991) own words;

> Cohesiveness is relationship oriented. It involves the affective attachment of people to the organizational community, with fulfillment derived from membership involvement... Moreover, cohesiveness among faculty acts as social cement that strengthens the system of feedback to teachers and presses them to internalize goals. (p. 18)

Related to this, the issue of teacher professional development is also of concern. Balkanization comes to affect the performance of all teachers as it feeds on the idea of having belonged and attached to the sub-groups but restricts professional interaction/communication among communities of teachers. Members of these sub-groups inquire into their own practice but assume no responsibility for the learning of other teachers within the school setting. As a consequence, educational

individualism and conservatism are sustained and nourished but educational reform is demoted. Almost two decades ago, Hargreaves (1994) warns of the shortcomings of balkanization.

> In a postmodern world which is fast, compressed, uncertain, diverse and complex, balkanized secondary structures are poorly equipped to harness the human resources necessary to create flexible learning for students, continuous professional growth for staff and responsiveness to changing client needs in the community. (p. 235)

Jones' (2009) study similarly points to the impact of balkanization on all teachers.

> [*T*]his marginalization business in clearly contagious. It separates, breaks down, and weakens everyone in its path. (p. 12)

This study also illustrates school administrators' push toward creating a collaborative culture. To do so, the school administrators organized activities and school events that required teachers to work together. Teachers' working relationship was neither spontaneous nor voluntary. In fact, it was a matter of compulsion and the relationship was rather artificial. This relationship was coined as contrived collegiality and it, as Hargreaves (1994) argues:

> delays, distracts and demeans [*teachers*]. The inflexibility of mandated collegiality makes it difficult for programs to be adjusted to the purposes and practicalities of particular school and classroom settings. It overrides teachers' professionalism and the discretionary judgment which comprises it. And it diverts teachers' efforts and energies into simulated compliance with administrative demands that are inflexible and inappropriate for the settings in which they work. (Italics added, 208)

Recent research on contrived collegiality cultures has defied the myth of these particular cultures. Its criticisms reverberate that of Hargreaves. That is, it limits teachers' opportunities to learn and lessen

teachers' motivation to initiate collaborative cultures within their own community (Little & Curry, 2009; Ibrahim, 2020). Ibrahim writes:

> [*School*] requirements have imposed significant pressures on teachers. The response from most teachers has been to act as required, and this has created a form of forced collegiality or comfortable collaboration to improve their teaching repertoire or collaborative practices, which are built upon discussion, reflection, trust, and openness. (Italics added)

With present evidence, it, however, suffices to say that the argument regarding the effects of contrived collegiality on teachers is yet unsettled. The evidence in support of contrived collegiality as ways to drive development and improvement in teachers is mounting. Datnow (2011) accepts that administratively mandated activities could constrain and distort teachers' lives and work. However, if managed effectively, these same activities could, she argues further, induce and foster collaborative cultures in teachers. In a similar vein, Leonard and Leonard (2003) demand both policy makers and administrators to reallocate supports and resources in order to assure successful teacher collaborative cultures. Silva, Amante, and Morgado (2016) also conclude that true and strong collaborative cultures could be attributed to continuous support from school principals. (See also Polega et al., 2019; Owen, 2014; Schleifer et al., 2017; Vostal et al., 2019.)

Overall, the study reported in this paper took place in one international school in Thailand. The background of the teachers in this school was rather diverse in terms of nationalities, cultures, and teaching experience. The design of the study allows the researchers to bring together teachers' different perspectives on contents and forms of teacher cultures in the community of which teachers are members. In essence, findings of this study contribute to a better understanding of lives and work of international school teachers by contextualizing teachers' interaction/onversation with one another as a facet of teacher cultures. More importantly, they resonate with Hargreaves' (1994) explanation of the entangled relationships between workplace structures, teacher cultures, and teachers' lives and work. He explains:

> Cultures do not operate in vacuum. They are formed within and framed by particular structures. These structures are

> not neutral. They can be helpful or harmful. They can bring teachers together or keep them apart. They can facilitate opportunities for interaction and learning, or present barriers to such possibilities. (p. 256)

In addition, they also advance in the understanding of teacher cultures as an epitome to a clarification of teachers' lives and work. As Feiman-Nemser and Floden (1986) claim:

> teaching cultures are embedded in the work-related beliefs and knowledge that teachers share-beliefs about appropriate ways of acting on the job and rewarding aspects of teaching, and knowledge that enables teachers to do their work. (p. 580)

Given the pivotal influences of teacher cultures on teachers' lives and work, more studies that could generate a plural understanding of teacher cultures are needed. These studies could create space for teachers to reflect on their experience while interacting/communicating with other teachers in their contexts. In essence, this would help broaden and improve the understanding of teachers' lives and work in relation to their commitment to their job, their purposes, and their concepts of professional values. Such the understanding is urgently needed. Further inquiries in relation to contents and forms of teacher cultures and their effects on teachers' lives and work must be sought. These answers could best likely construct and foster some sense of wholeness and belongingness in teachers. As a consequence, teachers' commitment to school missions and goals would increase. Teachers would commit to their jobs and professional development which, in turn, lead to successful educational reform and an increase in student outcome.

> Strong professional communities within schools, composed of close collaborative relationships among teachers focused on student learning, foster sharing of experience to address core problems. "By engaging in reflective dialogue about teaching and learning, teachers deepen their understanding and expand their instructional repertoire" (Sebring et al., 2006, p. 13). (Snyder & Bae, 2017, p. 35)

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About the Authors

Chantarath Hongboontri is a professor in Applied Linguistics at Mahidol University, Bangkok, Thailand. His areas of research interests include sociology of education, workplace culture, teacher culture, teachers' and students' voices, and sexualities in language education. He could be contacted at chantarath.hon@mahidol.edu.

Yiting Liao is a student in Applied Linguistics at Mahidol University. Her areas of research interests include teacher education, educational reform, and cultural effects. She could be reached at yiting.lia@student.mahidol.ac.th.

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