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Negotiating Pedagogic Researcher Identity by Two College English Teachers in China: A Social Network Perspective

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Abstract
Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) or pedagogic research (PedR) has become an international movement that encourages academics to use research-informed approaches to understand and enhance their teaching. However, the definition and understanding of SoTL/ PedR have been ambiguous, impacting career progression, orientation of scholarship activities and academics' perception of undertaking such activities. This article adopts social network perspective to understand the SoTL/PedR experiences of two academics with a focus on teaching ---College English (CE) teachers working at a Chinese tertiary institution as they navigate their identities in a higher education (HE) context that attempts to promote SoTL/PedR. An integrated framework for understanding identity in individual social network of practice (INoP) is used to examine the complex nature of identity negotiation. Multiple networks and communities are identified. The juxtaposition of ties and communities reflects the complexity of PedR discourse, in which the stratification of knowledge and power relations sustain the boundaries of networks or communities. Two participants experienced complexity of subjectivities and negotiated a range of positions, e.g., CE teacher versus 'more professional' English Major (EM) teacher, pedagogic researcher versus 'real' researcher, educational researcher versus 'superb' disciplinary researcher. The article also discerns a collective subordination of CE teachers' joint endeavors of researching their teaching practice to dominant research discourse. The study contributes to our insights into cultivating practice-oriented, problem solving-focused, research-informed PedR communities and networks characterized by recognition, trust, and respect.

Keywords: Professional identity, Social network analysis, Pedagogic research, Scholarship of teaching and learning, Teaching-oriented academics

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Introduction

Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) has emerged as a global movement encouraging academics to employ research-informed approaches to enhance their teaching practices. This movement serves as a counterbalance to the prevailing emphasis on research productivity in higher education (HE) (Cotton, Miller, & Kneale, 2018; Tierney, 2020; Wint & Nyamapfene, 2022) . SoTL activities are often referred to as pedagogic research (PedR) (Tierney, 2020); therefore, in this study we employ the terms 'SoTL' and 'PedR' interchangeably.

The definition and understanding of SoTL/PedR are complex and multifaceted, a phenomenon Godbold, Matthews, and Gannaway (2024) term as 'supercomplexity.' This supercomplexity manifests in various ways, including differing perceptions and evaluations of scholarly work, particularly concerning the boundaries between SoTL/PedR and traditional research. More significantly, the ambiguous definition of SoTL/PedR has led to disparities in the recognition and valuation of diverse scholarly contributions (Smith & Walker, 2021), creating tensions between traditional and teaching-focused academics and impacting career progression, scholarly orientations, and perceptions of SoTL/PedR practitioners.

The supercomplexity of SoTL/PedR is partly rooted in power dynamics within academia and the differential valuation of different academic career paths. Several studies have sought to clarify this debate and promote a more equitable academic culture to enhance the value and quality of SoTL/PedR and encourage greater engagement from teaching-oriented academics. For example, Godbold et al. (2024) explored this issue in Australian universities, while Smith and Walker (2021) focused on the British context. Previous research has examined teaching-oriented academics in various disciplines, such as business schools (Nagy, 2011) and engineering education (Wint & Nyamapfene, 2022). This study contributes to the existing body of knowledge by focusing on teaching-oriented academics in the Chinese context, where the higher education is becoming a world powerhouse. We use an integrated framework for understanding identity within 'individual networks of practice' (INoP) (Zappa-Hollman & Duff, 2015) to illuminate power dynamics in the field of SoTL/PedR. Specifically, we conduct a case study of two College English (CE) teachers—Ruby and Lisa—examining their PedR practices within their social-interactional landscapes and how they construct and mobilize subject positions through their subjective interpretations of social relationships. Through social network analysis, we investigate how power relations in SoTL/PedR discourses are maintained and how Ruby and Nana utilize different positioning of the self to conform to the hierarchy of these discourses.

SoTL/PedR in the Knowledge Regime of HE Context

According to Boyer (1990), teaching scholarship is categorized as one among four forms of scholarship—discovery, integration, application, and teaching—which, despite their interconnections, has led to an enduring implicit hierarchy, particularly affecting the relationship between teaching scholarship and knowledge discovery scholarship. The scholarship of teaching is considered secondary to the scholarship of discovering knowledge. On the top of this hierarchy is the standardized excellence in the form of publications in influential journals and research content geared toward the priorities of funding bodies (Hamann, 2016; Lee, Pham, & Gu, 2013; Moed, 2008).

Seeking to enhance the status of SoTL/PedR, scholars often encounter a number of dilemmas. One such dilemma is the 'relevance gap,' which refers to the tension between scientific rigor and practical utility (McIntyre, 2005). On the one hand, to be impactful, research should be rigorous and theoretically informed; on the other hand, the theoretical nature of research can make it difficult to apply in the context of teaching, which is a fundamentally practical activity (Cochran-Smith, 2005; Evans, Howson, Forsythe, & Edwards, 2020). Therefore, SoTL research is perceived as undermining the credibility of disciplinary research, as Canning and Masika (2022) note that the SoTL encompasses studies lacking theoretical foundations and engagement with established scholarly work.

Another key challenge for promoting SoTL /PedR is the absence of a clear and widely accepted understanding of their definitions and scope. It can refer to a range of activities, such as personal exploration to acquire personal knowledge, collaborative efforts to acquire local knowledge to inform a group, or publishing findings to inform a wider audience (Ashwin & Trigwell, 2004). The lack of coherence has made it difficult to evaluate and assess PedR, as there are no established norms or standards for its evaluation (Bennett, Roberts, Ananthram, & Broughton, 2018). There is no consensus on what are appropriate outlets for sharing PedR, or how to enhance the credibility of this research from a methodological standpoint (Felten, 2013). The lack of consensus regarding the conceptualization and communication of PedR exacerbates its marginalization within the academy (Cotton et al., 2018), reinforces the hierarchy of knowledge and perpetuates the notion that PedR is somehow inferior to other forms of research (Smith & Walker, 2021).

The uncertainty in understanding SoTL/PedR leads to tensions in tertiary institutions' attitudes towards

SoTL/PedR. Despite the universal recognition of the benefits of SoTL/PedR, tertiary institutions are often found to provide limited support to such activities (Zeng & Fickel, 2021); In institutions where SoTL is explicitly integrated into the framework of institutional research plans, publications on impactful journals remain as the dominant measurement for assessing SoTL (Simmons, Eady, Scharff, & Gregory, 2021; Smith & Walker, 2021). As for academics with a focus on teaching who are engaged in SoTL, the two-tier system within the academy is actually reinforced by the incorporation of research-centric measurement, creating boundaried careers for education focused academics due to the lack of access to financial and collegial support for doing SoTL (Smith & Walker, 2021).

SoTL/PedR in China's HE Context

In 2020, the State Council of China (SCC, 2020) issued a policy aiming to transit the prevailing assessment methods that have prioritized research productivity to a model that recognizes teaching responsibilities as a fundamental component of academics' work. Since then, tertiary institutions have added SoTL/PedR into their evaluation framework of academics. By analyzing several tertiary institutions' teaching evaluation frameworks, it is found that there is a move away from a sole emphasis on accountable research performativity towards a more comprehensive effort to enhance the quality of teaching(Zhao, 2023). However, in practice, institutions continue to depend on traditional research performativity metrics, as teaching scholarship assessments often prove to be vague and superficial(Zhao, 2023). Furthermore, the inclusion of SoTL inadvertently reinforces research performativity as an underlying incentive, driving academics to maximize their research output (Su & Cai 2023).

Like other countries, the challenges in assessing teaching scholarship are largely due to the nuanced and multifaceted nature of teaching practice. The unequal power relations within the HE context of China also play a significant role. In China, universities as state-operated and government-managed are characterized by a strong administrative bureaucracy in which teachers are typically under the authority of various administrative departments. Consequently, the SoTL evaluation, despite its attempt to enhance teaching, often becomes instruments for rewarding or punishing academic staff (Su & Cai, 2023). Teachers seldom participated in teaching assessment activities. Negative emotions are commonly felt by academics in relation to the new evaluation policy such as indifference, confusion, and dissatisfaction. More surprisingly, they have never publicly expressed their discontent (Lu & Zhang, 2021), reflecting power relation's suppression and adaptation of individual emotions.

Therefore, the insights into the lived experiences of academics engaged in SoTL activities can elucidate the supercomplexity of SoTL and help identify strategies to enhance academics' SoTL engagement. Evans et al. (2020) propose that fostering interdisciplinary communities of practice that encompass research, teaching, and professional development teams is pivotal for the cultivation of high-quality SoTL/PedR. This approach is expected to encourage collaborative efforts and exchanges among various stakeholders. Embarking from this, this research uses identity as a lens to understand the complex dynamics at play within academic communities and networks.

Towards an Integrated Framework for Understanding Identity in Individual Social Network of Practice

Identity refers to 'our understanding of who we are and who we think other people Are' (Danielewicz, 2001, p. 10). To obtain a comprehensive understanding of identity, we need to pay attention to both 'identity-in-discourse' and 'identity-in-practice' (Varghese, 2017). As shown in Figure 1, 'identity-in-discourse' emphasizes the role of 'the context and the set of power relations as well as the discourses available to the individual teachers and a community or network of teachers in that particular context' in shaping teachers' identity (Varghese, 2017, p. 46). Discourses delineate the boundaries of knowledge and societal conduct within a specific community, determining what constitutes truth and actuality, and significantly shape an individual's sense of self. The knowledge and power inherent in these discourses provide individuals with a range of possible modes of subjectivity (Weedon, 1997). Weedon (1997) posits that the construction of identity is not uniformly impacted by all discourses, as some hold greater weight and power. It is through the identification with certain subject positions within these discourses that individuals shape their identities. Subject positioning enables individuals to embrace a specific identity and to establish relationships with themselves and others predicated on defined values (Foucault, 2003).

Interactional activities such as social networks are a place where discourse, power relations and identity are at play. Social networks, as networks of social relationships imbued with meaning, are dynamic structures of interpersonal expectations between the self (*ego*) and others (*alter*) (Fuhse, 2009). By defining ties as a specific type of

relationship, such as collaborating on research or designing a teaching plan together, individuals can delineate their networks with certain expectations. The individual's conception of the relationship makes the social dyad between the self and others a dynamic entity, a process that involves the construction of identities and positioning in relation to other actors (Fuhse, 2009; White, 1992).

From the poststructuralist perspective, identity is conceptualized as both an outcome of individuals' positioning within various discourses and a fluid process that emphasizes agency. Agency refers to the ability of individuals to perform actions that have an impact on the social dynamics within which they are imbedded (Layder, 2006, p. 4). In Figure 1, the arrow linking discourse and agency depicts the relationship between identity construction and imposition.

Figure 1. also suggests that the construction of identity is facilitated by practices that allow individuals to cultivate a feeling of affiliation with a specific community, one defined by mutual engagement, joint enterprise and shared repertoire (Wenger, 1998). Basing on Wenger's conceptualization, Zappa-Hollman and Duff (2015) propose the concept of individual networks of practice (INoPs). By replacing community with network, INoP makes it more inclusive of relationships that are either formal or informal, harmonious or conflicting top-down organized or bottom-up developed(Hodkinson & Hodkinson, 2004). Identity is a process of negotiating membership, a process depending on one's ability to contribute to and shape the meanings that are important to the group. The ability to participate is determined by one's access to social capital (Lave & Wenger, 1991) which, according to Lin (2001), refers to 'the resources, knowledge, and information embedded in social relations and social structure that an individual can mobilize when they wish to increase the likelihood of success in purposive action'(Lin, 2001, p. 24). This access is influenced by the structure of an individual's social networks (Curry & Lillis, 2010) and their social position within those networks (Bernstein, 2018) and the broader discursive framework (Fuhse, 2009).

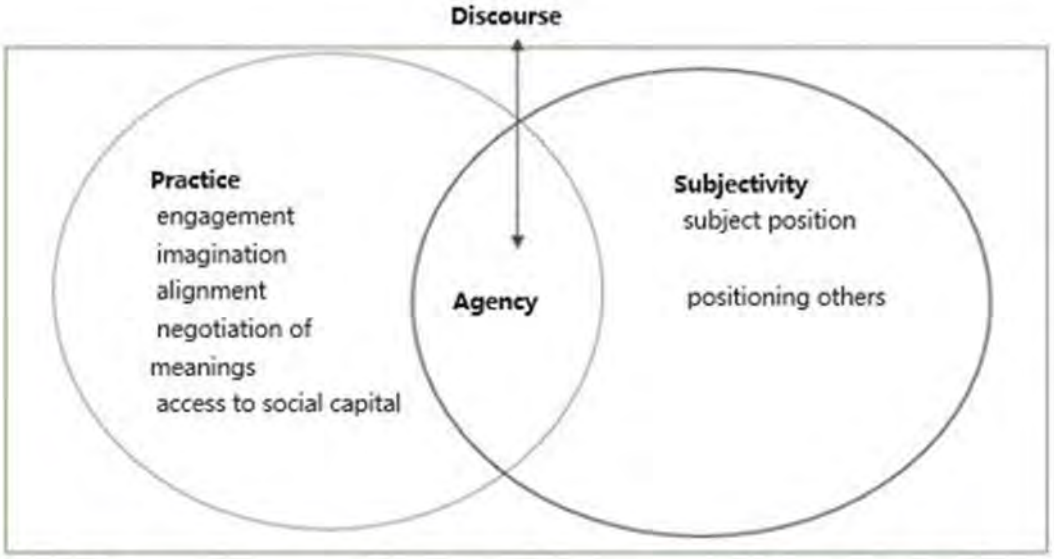

Figure 1. An integrated framework for understanding identity in INoP, adopted from Trent and Shroff (2012)

Informed by the theoretical framework, the study is guided by the research question:

How do teaching-oriented academics in China negotiate their identity as they engage in PedR networking practices within the PedR discourse?

Method

Cases of Ruby and Lisa: Two College English (CE) Teachers

The research is a single-site, multiple-case study, which allows us to delve into the lived experiences of teaching-oriented academics. Case study as a qualitative research method involves an in-depth exploration of a single entity or entities (like an individual, organization, or event) within the real-world context. The choice of case(s) can be based on *intrinsic* or *instrumental purpose* (Stake, 2005). In an intrinsic case study, the case is inherently interesting and significant. The goal is to explore and understand the complexities of the case itself. In this study, the two participants, Ruby and Lisa, are selected based on *intrinsic purpose* for following reasons:

1) they come from the largest group of teaching-oriented academics of China. Ruby and Lisa are CE teachers. CE teachers, also known as public English teachers, instruct undergraduate students on general English skills. CE is a two-year mandatory foundational course for non-English majors. Owing to the public service nature of CE and the high volume of university enrollments, estimated 60,000 CE teachers are engaged in teaching nearly 16 million students (Yang, Shu, & Yin, 2021).

2) CE teaching has been focused on English language training services (Cai, 2013) and CE teachers are typical teaching-oriented academics who are often found to struggle in research performance. Many of them entered the profession with a master's or bachelor's degree (Peng & Gao, 2019). Researchers have identified a number of factors for CE teachers' incompetence in research, such as heavy teaching workloads, lack of research interest, lack of confidence in conducting research, and lack of research skills and interdisciplinary knowledge (Bai & Hudson, 2011).

3) Ruby and Lisa are two participants from the larger study conducted at the field of the Foreign Languages School (FLS) of WX university (WXU) in China. FLS featured a standard organizational structure for foreign language education institutions in China (Peng & Gao, 2019). It comprised two departments focused on English education: Department of English Major (DEM) and Department of College English (DCE), designed to provide instruction to English majors and non-major undergraduates respectively. The DCE stood out as one of the largest CE departments in China, staffed by a workforce of ninety-one CE teachers.

4) Ruby and Lisa represent two types of CE teachers in the DCE: those without a doctorate and those with a doctorate. Ruby, entered the profession in the early 90s. Like most CE teachers, she did not have an advanced degree and had not received systematic research training. Lisa, on the other hand, was a younger CE teacher and was currently pursuing a PhD. As a doctoral degree is now a prerequisite for career progression, many CE teachers are simultaneously working on their doctorate degrees, and Lisa is one of them. These two teachers represent the two common types of CE teachers when it comes to conducting research.

Ruby and Lisa are also chosen based on *instrumental purpose*. According to Stake (2005), the instrumental case study is to choose specific case(s) to understand a broader phenomenon. The case is selected because it can illuminate a particular issue or concept. Ruby and Lisa are chosen for their lack of reciprocity in recognizing each other as PedR ties. Ruby included Lisa in her PedR network, while Lisa did not reciprocate (which means she did not include Ruby in her own network). This lack of reciprocity, according to social network theory, may shed light on the inconsistency in expectations between the two teachers and their conceptions of relational identity (Fuhse, 2009). In this sense, the networking experiences of Ruby and Lisa are instrumental for understanding the broader goal of the study: to understand how CE teachers experience complexity of SoTL/PedR discourse.

Researcher Positionality

As qualitative researchers adopting a poststructuralist perspective, we acknowledge the inherent value-laden nature of this study (Creswell, 2007). The first author, having previously worked as a CE teacher and having longstanding relationships with the participants, brought an insider perspective to the research. This insider position facilitated trust-building, rapport-building, and access to the participants' lives. By working as a team, we also incorporated an outsider perspective to enhance the study's rigor.

We recognize that the participants' experiences were intertwined with the first author's own experiences as a CE teacher and a doctoral student. This dual role created a complex and dynamic research relationship, characterized by both collaboration and power dynamics. As poststructuralist researchers, we view social networks as fluid and ever-changing, rather than static structures. The multiple roles assumed by the first author led to the formation of shifting, temporary research networks, influenced by power relations.

Aligning with the poststructuralist understanding of identity as dynamic, contextual, and relational, we strive to be transparent about our own positions and biases so that readers can make their own interpretations.

Data Collection

Working with the concept of INoP, the study employs social network analysis to collect data on PedR practices and interactions of participants. The participants, as *egos*, draw and report certain kinds of research ties regardless of formal, informal, organizational, or geographic boundaries (Benbow & Lee, 2019).

The participants were given a network mapping task a week before their interviews (see Appendix). According to their perception of the closeness of PedR relationships with different ties, the participants drew their social ties, or *'alters,'* on a concentric circle. After completing the mapping, they received semi-structured interviews with one of the researchers. These interviews delved into the participants' processes of establishing research connections with the individuals they had identified, their modes of interaction, and the reasons behind their placement of names on specific areas of the map. Additionally, the interviews explored the participants' understanding and involvement in PedR, considering that varying perspectives and behaviours could shape the characteristics and structure of their professional networks.

One of our researchers also took on the role of participant observer. she often had informal conversations with Ruby and Lisa, which eventually led to narrative interviews with each of them. These interviews were unstructured and lasted for two to three hours.

Ethical Approval

The study was conducted with full adherence to pertinent ethical considerations and received the approval (Number: 2024JY026) from the Southwest University's Human Research Ethics Committee.

Data Analysis

We began data analysis by sketching out the networks of each participant. The analysis was guided by an array of predefined codes, informed by scholarly literature on social networks. These codes cantered on aspects such as the alter's location (e.g., within a department, school, or extramural network), motivations for tie formation, the perceived significance or insignificance of specific relationships, interaction frequency, and the content of these interactions. Consequently, the analysis identified various networks and communities., such as the CE PedR network, DCE, DEM, and the PhD research community outside of the FLS.

Following this process, thematic analysis was applied to tease out participants' narratives around three overarching themes: 1) *negotiation of membership* within or through multiple networks and communities 2) *discourses* that shape their experiences of nexus of multimembership, which not only refer to 'institutional partitioning of knowledge' but also techniques and practices through which the partitioning of knowledge is formed (Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2007, p. 114). 3) *individuals' subjectivities* governed by the discourses, or Ruby's and Lisa's actions and words that reflect how they positioned themselves and constituted themselves as the subject within these discourses (Foucault, 2010).

We then compare and contrast Ruby and Lisa's narratives, focusing on these three thematic strands. Through this comparative analysis, we identify two dominant power relationships within their PedR research experiences: the tension between performance-driven research and PedR, and the conflict between disciplinary research (linguistics/literature) and educational research. We present identity negotiation of Ruby and Lisa in the form of stories as stories are the fundamental way we tell about our lives and configure who we are (Riessman, 2003). Aligning with our poststructuralist stance that aims to give voice to a group that is often silenced or marginalized by dominant discourses (Riessman, 2003), we craft the stories to highlight instances of silence, marginalization, conflict, alienation, and alignment within their narratives, revealing the complex interplay of power and discourse in shaping their PedR experiences.

Networking Stories of Ruby and Lisa

Networking Within Discourses of Performance-driven Research and PedR

Even before the interview, Ruby had constantly told the researcher of her fears that she might not be 'qualified' to be the participant, saying she has not done any research or even ask us to interview teachers in the DEM as EM teachers did 'real' research. After being told that the study was to understand her experience with no judgement of 'good or bad' participant, she then replied, 'Ok, I just hope you could have better data because I actually didn't do research.'

In contrast to her hesitant denial, Ruby drew a large network with dozens of ties (see Figure 2). Sixteen of them were CE colleagues with whom Ruby collaborated during a CE teaching reform. For example, a CE teacher shared the interest with her in teaching pronunciation, so they collaborated in joint-teaching; another CE teacher joined her innovative teaching to experiment with a teaching method. Their cooperations led to publishing two papers on a PedR journal and a speech at a national CE teaching reform conference. After finishing the interview, she said,

'it seems I have done a lot, but actually they are not real research.' Unsurprisingly, Ruby drew these CE colleagues in the secondary circle of her map.

In the closest circle, Ruby drew six alters. These alters, who worked in the other department, EMD, were professors of linguistics or literature. If Ruby had questions in her teaching, she would attend these alters' classes to 'learn their way of teaching.' In response to the question regarding the placement of CE colleagues in the secondary circle despite frequent interactions, Ruby said, 'EM teachers were more *zhuanye*. The research with CE teachers is not real research.' *Zhuanye* in Chinese means professional or disciplinary. By this, Ruby suggested that EM teachers who taught disciplinary courses to English majors and did research in linguistics and literature were more professional.

Ruby's map revealed two networks: a PedR group of CE teachers and a group of EM professors. In the PedR group, Ruby was a full participant: she heavily invested herself in innovative teaching, actively collaborated with colleagues, and the investment and interactions generated a shared repertoire of PedR publications and conference presentations. In contrast, in the group of EM professors, Ruby was an imagined participant. She drew an image of having close research ties with these EM professors, while in practice she had minimal interactions with them and the interactions remained limited to 'attending classes to learn his way of teaching' rather than engaging in collaborative research.

Ruby's hierarchical positioning of the two groups visually echoed the hierarchy of knowledge categorized by dominant research discourse and the distinguishing of individuals who are privileged to possess them (Clark, 1983). EM teachers, who worked in subject-based department and did research in alignment with the dominant research discourse, were positioned at a more important place despite having minimal practical interactions with Ruby. This suggests that Ruby perceived the linguistics/literature knowledge held by EM experts as the legitimate knowledge for solving practical problems in her language teaching, while the knowledge generated from PedR with CE colleagues was positioned as illegitimate or inferior because EM teachers were 'disciplinary and more professional.'

The apparent disparity between Ruby's active participation in the PedR network and the way she positioned the two networks reflects her subjectivation in compliance with the dominant discourses (Foucault, 1988). She constantly described herself as an improper participant in our research and even considered the group of CE teachers as an improper focus of our research. In this sense, the collective endeavors of CE teachers to improve teaching have been made invisible. The conventional discourses of performative knowledge and scientific research have promoted 'ideological subordination'(McIntosh, McKinley, Milligan, & Mikolajewska, 2019) with the individual over the collective. Research has found that the performative discourse of research has created a sharp divide between an elite group of researchers and the invisible rest (Griffiths, 2004), which highlights a small number of individual academics with 'the right stuff' (Stengers, 2018) and invisibilizes the collective PedR work oriented towards 'students, colleagues, or society more widely' (McIntosh et al., 2019, p. 7). This, as demonstrated by our study, divided CE teachers' workplace into a higher-status disciplinary department and a lower-status CE department.

The invisibilization of collective PedR work is also reflected in Lisa's network (see Figure 3). Although she was included in Ruby's network, Lisa did not include Ruby in her own network. As a PhD researcher in education, Lisa wrote her supervisor and other PhD students in the inner circle and a few CE colleagues on the outskirts. This reflects Lisa's full recognition of the dominant research discourse. When asked why she did not include Ruby in her network, Lisa explained in an ambiguous way,

> PhD research is real research and I'm heavily involved in it, so I put my supervisors at the center. As for the PedR done with my CE colleagues, it's also kind of research, although it's different. Therefore, I just randomly wrote a few names of CE colleagues.

The remark suggests that Lisa exhibited a casual attitude towards her PedR ties. The lack of reciprocal recognition reveals the unequal expectations for each other's research resources and reflects the hierarchical division between teaching and research, as well as those between PedR and conventionally recognized research (Fuhse, 2009). This hierarchical divide has had an impact on the relational identities of both Ruby and Lisa. Moreover, the absence of reciprocal recognition suggests that the PedR network of CE teachers lacks a shared understanding of their mutual practice, potentially leading to a lack of trust among themselves (Heinrich, 2017; Zeng & Fickel, 2021).

Both Lisa and Ruby, however, demonstrated resistance to dominant discourses. Lisa was vocal in her opposition to the perception that CE teachers are inferior to EM teachers, advocating strongly for the importance of engaging in PedR. For her, CE teaching, 'an easy job' as generally regarded, was not easy, because engaging CE students with a range of English learning motivation and proficiency levels was a big challenge for every CE teacher. Moreover, 'CE teaching benefits the overall social development', said Lisa, 'because it serves students from every discipline'. Compared with Lisa's explicit advocacy for CE teachers doing PedR, Ruby showed some hesitancy, asking the researcher whether contributing to a prestigious journal constituted the only outlet for PedR. She described her puzzle,

> I don't know how I can write for the high-level publication, but I do have constant reflection (of teaching) and sometimes write papers for pedagogic research journals, just ordinary journals ...I pursue the process of improving my teaching rather than the form.

Lisa's alignment with PedR highlights the social value of this type of research, specifically in regard to 'benefiting overall social development.' Ruby, on the other hand, took a more resigned approach and saw her pursuit of PedR as a personal interest in 'the process' itself. This difference in resistance may be due to the social capital they each had access to through their social networks. Lisa was part of a close-knit research network centered around her PhD study, allowing her to receive strong support and access knowledge favored by dominant research discourse. Ruby, on the other hand, only had a network composed of CE colleagues, and lacked the support or resources of 'real' researchers. Therefore, although both Lisa and Ruby positioned their PedR ties in the secondary circle, Lisa was able to confidently claim her dual researcher identities as a PhD researcher and a pedagogic researcher while Ruby positioned herself and her group as illegitimate researchers.

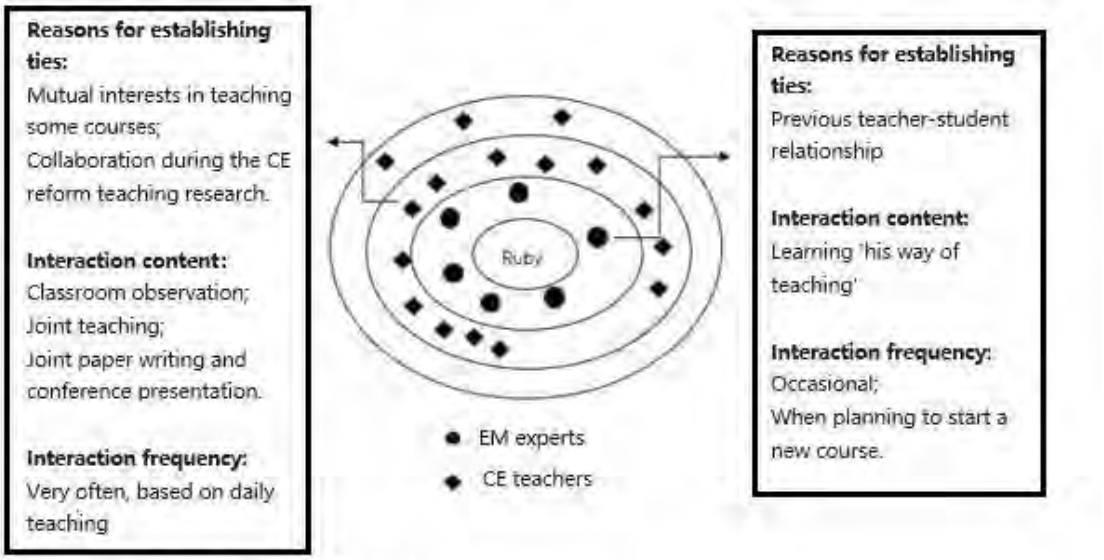

Figure 2. Ruby's individual PedR social network

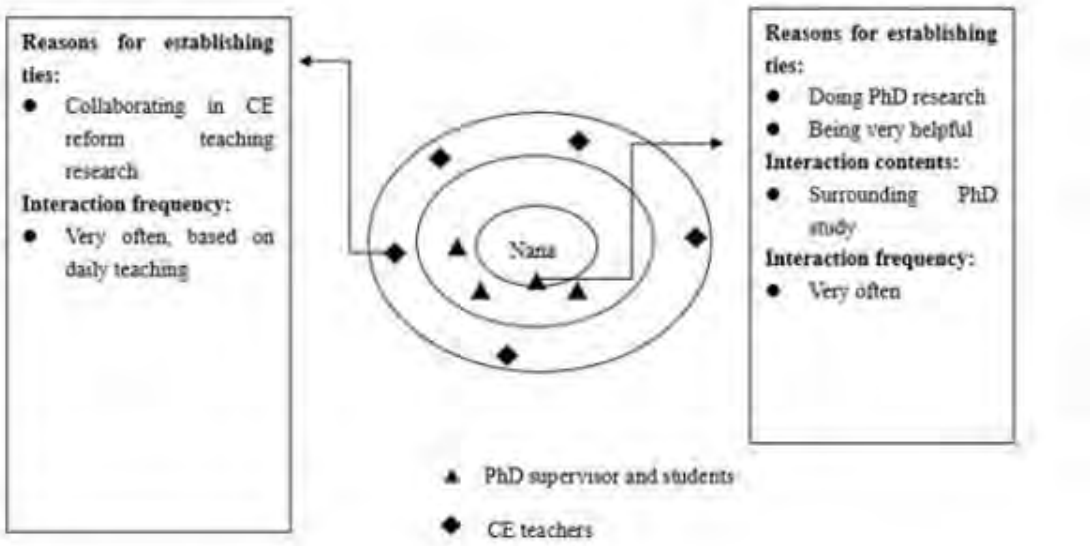

Figure 3. Lisa's individual PedR social network

Networking Within Discourses of Disciplinary Research of Linguistics/literature and Educational Research

Lisa was a PhD candidate at the School of Education (SE) of WXU. She seemed hesitant to go to the FLS for the interview, inviting the researcher to her office at the SE instead, explaining 'I don't feel I belong there. There is no office for us.' This was because the FLS did not provide offices for CE teachers, who typically worked in dispersed buildings across the campus as they taught students from different disciplines.

Lisa's alienation from the FLS was not only due to the spatial separation of CE teachers from the FLS, but also because she was not 'doing *gao da shang*, or superb linguistics research.' Lisa had studied linguistics for her master's degree, but gradually came to find that linguistic research was insufficient to make her a successful teacher. She began to see the importance of pedagogy and educational theory in improving her teaching and decided to pursue a PhD in education at the SE. Presumably, the individuals in her inner circle of research ties were all located at the SE, including her supervisor and other PhD students. Nonetheless, Lisa had severed all research ties with her colleagues at the FLS. Despite the existence of a language teacher education research group within the DEM, which aligned with Lisa's own field, she had never been invited to participate in their activities, because, as she claimed, 'I was doing education.' To illustrate this, Lisa gave additional examples,

> you see, the DEM only wants CE teachers who obtained their doctorate in linguistics or western literature to work there. Those who did their PhD in non-linguistics/literature areas, such as education, psychology, or anthropology, remained in the DCE. It seems that non-linguistics/literature research makes little contribution to them. I don't think it's right. It's not good for language education.

Lisa's networking experience illustrates the presence of various communities including the DCE, DEM, SE, PhD research network, and CE PedR network. Despite being a full participant in the PhD research community, she was denied access to the higher status DEM research group. Due to her failure to negotiate her beliefs on the value of educational research for enhancing teaching and the limitations of purely linguistic research, Lisa experienced alienation from the FLS workplace and found a sense of belonging in the SE community where her views on research were recognized and valued.

Lisa's subjectivity was disciplined by the discourse about the discipline of language education which involves the institutional partitioning of knowledge (Trowler, Saunders, & Bamber, 2012). In China, language education is divided into the disciplines of linguistics or literature according to the country's disciplinary classification scheme (MOE, 1997), and English language education is typically organized within these single disciplines (Han & Wu, 2015). The discourse is prevalent in most language teacher training that still focuses on conventional linguistics-

based discipline concepts (Freeman, 2018; Van Canh, 2018). Lisa's belief that her educational research was inferior to linguistic research reflects her subjection to this disciplinary classification. Similarly, when Ruby explained CE teachers' incompetence in doing research, she mentioned the lack of a specific disciplinary subject to research as a reason, indicating the dominance of linguistics/literature knowledge and its deep-seated effect on CE teachers' subjectivity.

The dominant discourse of linguistics research is not only reflected in disciplinary, curricular, and departmental levels, but also in the boundaries of social networks. The networks of both Ruby and Lisa revealed the closed interactions within CE teachers and the lack of research interactions between DCE and DEM. The fact that Lisa was excluded from the DEM research group illustrates the exclusivity of the higher-status, subject-focused department, which is typically protected by expertise in linguistics and literature. For instance, only individuals who have pursued doctoral studies in these fields are eligible for transfer to the DEM. Those who have not are often confined to the lower-status, public service-oriented department.

Discussion and Conclusion

The PedR networking experiences of Ruby and Lisa reiterate the complexity surrounding SoTL/PedR discourse. Tensions remain between the managerialism of institutions that tend to evaluate teaching scholarship by using a hierarchical structure of refereed journal publications and academics' commitment to improving students learning of which the forms range from reflexive self-evaluation, teaching inquiry, knowledge sharing that is not limited to high-level journal publications, to educational research and subject-based research.

The study shows such plurality does not necessarily lead to inclusivity. The institutional structures inherently incorporate the narrative that distinguishes pedagogic and other research (Cotton et al., 2018). Power relations permeate the various types of knowledge, which are sustained by techniques of membership of networks, communities and interaction among academics. By dividing staff into different departments and using certain knowledge as the gatekeeper of certain group as well as the boundary of interactions, the institution has ensured the production and the transfer of the 'right' knowledge (e.g. linguistics/literature knowledge) in such aspects as the knowledge base of language education research (e.g. linguistics/literature research is the superb research; PedR is not 'real' research), the processes governing language education curriculum design and the methods of language teaching and assessment (e.g. CE teachers as non-linguistics/literature researchers cannot transfer to DEM to teach EM students).

Academics often find themselves constrained within the boundaries of their networks, limiting their access to social capital that could enable them to conduct high quality PedR. High quality PedR requires disciplinary knowledge, pedagogical expertise, and research methodology expertise (Evans et al., 2020). However, the social capital that these academics have access to within their closed PedR network is often seen as inferior to other forms of research, preventing them from effectively negotiating their meaning at the workplace. This inability to negotiate meaning can lead to identity of marginalization (Wenger, 1998) and potentially even disengagement or alienation (Gao & Yuan, 2021), reinforcing the negative perceptions towards PedR and the lower status of the academics undertaking PedR.

Our findings have suggested that teachers were not merely have games of knowledge imposed on them; their words and actions reinforced the division of knowledge through a network of subject positions, ways of subjectivation, and inter-subjectivities. This resulted in a collective subordination of CE teachers' joint efforts of improving teaching to dominant discourses and a lack of recognition and trust within the PedR network due to their contradictory conceptions toward PedR. Despite the enthusiastic promotion of building collaborative PedR communities or transdisciplinary communities (Cotton et al., 2018; Evans et al., 2020; Tierney, 2020), power relations and resulting alignments and oppositions can divide the group and deny the joint efforts to improve teaching, which not only further invisibilizes these academics but also hinders their ability to emancipate themselves through learning from interactions with academics who have advanced knowledge of research theory and methodology.

To create dynamic spaces for professional development for CE teachers, it is important to transform both institutional and disciplinary structures and discourses. This transformation should prioritize dialogism (Han & Wu, 2015), diversity, and even uncertainty (Ellis, 2021) in exploring the knowledge base of language education. It is necessary to foster a collaborative, inclusive and caring environment that engages staff from different departments in dialogue and collaboration. Meanwhile, CE teachers should raise their consciousness of the imposed dominant discourses, develop the necessary critical counter-discourses and oppose subject positions. For example, they should be more assertive in claiming the value of PedR for the development of students and society.

Additionally, they should strive to walk out of their closed group and establish collaborations with disciplinary academics and research experts. By conducting high-quality PedR, CE teachers can gain social capital and claim their own meaning of teaching CE. It may also contribute to the formation of practice-oriented, problem solving-focused, research-informed communities and networks characterized by recognition, trust, and respect.

Our study reveals the potential of incorporating Foucauldian discourse analysis and social network analysis to enhance our understanding of social relationships as technologies for governance and self-subjectification. In this sense, this case study achieves theoretical generalizability and contributes to broader theoretical understanding (Creswell, 2007). However, as a single-site, multiple-case study, the findings may not be generalizable to a wider population of academics. The focus on two specific cases limits the scope of the study and may not capture the full range of experiences and perspectives of teachers engaged in SoTL/PedR. To further understand the issue, future research could consider employing a larger sample size, incorporating a mixed-methods approach, or conducting a longitudinal study to track changes in academics' practices and beliefs over time.

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Author (s) Contribution Rate
Both authors contributed equally to the completion of the study.

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The study was conducted with full adherence to pertinent ethical considerations and received the approval (Number: 2024JY026) from the Southwest University's Human Research Ethics Committee.

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Appendix

Imagine yourself positioned at the center of the map (see Figure 4), and please list the names based on the 'significance' of their relationship to your pedagogical research (PedR) work, placing them in the appropriate circle relative to the center.

Your connections may encompass, but are not restricted to, your professional colleagues (from your department, school, and university), as well as personal relationships such as family or friends.

Consider the following questions to assist in identifying these individuals:

- Who influences your approach or perspective towards PedR?
- Whom do you consult when encountering difficulties or when you have innovative ideas of PedR?
- With whom do you prefer to collaborate when submitting a proposal for a PedR research initiative?
- With whom do you share research materials?
- With whom do you prefer to discuss the successes and challenges you encounter in your PedR journey?

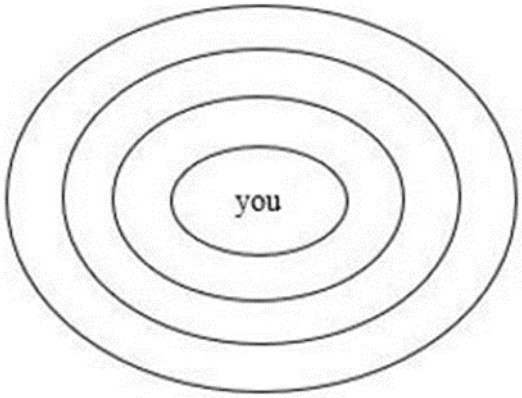

Figure 4. An individual social network map